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## Sensory marketing as a new tool of supporting the marketing communication process in tourism services sector

### Summary

Marketing communication comprises the entirety of the activities undertaken to create and market an idea of a company and its product, as well as distributing the idea among various groups of people. Communication is a highly dynamic phenomenon, and we can observe the continuous development of new forms of marketing communication: internet communication, mobile communication, viral marketing, buzz marketing, guerrilla marketing, advergaming, and ambush marketing. The sensory impact on the customer's senses, defined as sensory marketing, is a relatively new tool of supporting the marketing communication process. Multi-sensory technologies are becoming more and more common in the sector of tourism services. Sensory marketing is a great add-on to the traditional forms of marketing communication and an integral part of a multisensory brand experience. The aim of this study is to describe the holistic concept of sensory marketing, identify the forms and ways of influencing people's senses in the process of selling consumer goods, as well as provide some examples from the tourism services sector. This is the review article.

**Key words:** sensory marketing, marketing communication, tourism services.

**JEL codes:** M31

### Introduction

The essence of sensory marketing is maximum impact on customers' senses and providing them with varied stimuli. Sensory marketing should precisely and comprehensively engage potential customers' senses, provoke specific emotional reactions and behaviours, which eventually translates into higher brand awareness, stronger affiliation with the brand, and increased sales.

The tourism services sector is one of the industries which, noticing the effectiveness of sensory marketing, have begun to successfully apply its tools which are a great add-on to the traditional forms of marketing communication and an integral part of multisensory brand image.

The study discusses the development of sensory marketing as a new form of supporting the marketing communication. The aim of this study is to describe the holistic concept of sensory marketing, identify the forms and ways of influencing people's senses in the process of selling consumer goods, as well as provide some examples from the tourism services sector. Based on written resources, the introduction outlines the trends in the development

of marketing communication and the specific character of the multi-sensory activities supplementing the traditional tools of marketing communication. The rest of the study is based on desk research and case studies of implementing the holistic concept of sensory marketing in the tourism services sector.

### The specific character of sensory marketing

Marketing communication is a form of social communication regarding the needs society addresses through the market. It is defined as the entirety of the activities undertaken to create and market an idea of a company and its product, as well as distributing the idea among various groups of people, e.g. the current and the potential clients, the company's stakeholders, and other wider-social groups which can be targeted (Szymoniuik 2006, p. 13).

Company-to-environment/environment-to-company communication is a dynamic phenomenon, and we have witnessed the continuous development of new forms of marketing communication from electronic communication (Internet and mobile devices<sup>1</sup> to the latest, often unorthodox, forms of communication such as: viral marketing<sup>2</sup>, buzz marketing<sup>3</sup>, guerrilla marketing<sup>4</sup>, and advergaming<sup>5</sup>. One of the latest interesting trends is supplementing marketing communication with influencing customers' senses, which is known as sensory marketing. Currently, more and more scientific publications are being devoted to sensory marketing, i.e. shaping consumer decisions by sensory stimuli (Krishna, Schwarz 2014, pp. 159-160). In contrast to traditional marketing strategies, sensory marketing takes into account more profound values of behavioral, emotional, cognitive, sensory, and symbolic nature. As numerous products tend to be promoted through both verbal and non-verbal means, it is advisable to analyse how the senses can help communicate with clients (Hultén 2011, pp. 256-273).

Sensory marketing is based on a holistic approach towards the five senses and its aim is to provide customers with specific stimuli. Sight allows us to perceive colours, light and its intensity, the design and the graphical properties of various objects, packaging, décor, messages meant for us, and other key motifs. Thanks to hearing, we recognize sound trademarks or theme songs, receive voice or musical messages, and focus on sounds. Smell helps us feel fragrances associated with brands, their type, intensity, or compliance with a product's character. Touch allows us to recognize shapes, textures, temperature changes, weight, and

<sup>1</sup> Mobile marketing is marketing done on or with mobile phones.

<sup>2</sup> Viral marketing is a type of Internet marketing strategy using social networks to distribute marketing messages among wide groups of recipients in relatively short time.

<sup>3</sup> Buzz marketing or word of mouth marketing is based on help from 'ordinary people' in distributing information about a brand or a company through voluntary, spontaneous and independent conversations among consumers, both in person and through social media (Percy 2008, p. 142).

<sup>4</sup> Guerrilla marketing describes all the unorthodox, alternative, commercial, concept-based marketing activities carried out to maximise gains with the smallest budget possible (Richards 2009, p. 8).

<sup>5</sup> Advergaming is promoting advertising messages through interactive games available online or sent via e-mails (Kaznowski 2008, p. 144).

softness. Last but not least – taste. In sensory marketing, it should be for a message recipient be tantamount to the pleasure of using a product or a service (Krishna 2012, pp. 332-351).

### Forms of sensory influence in consumer goods sale

The sense of sight is considered to be the most important and powerful of the senses. Most people trust what they can see, and they base their daily decisions on visual sensations (Møler 2003, pp. 374-376). As Lindstrom puts it, the efficiency and the precision of the eyes and the brain go beyond what is possible for any device designed so far (Lindstrom 2009, p. 133).

Sight is often considered the most important sense in marketing communication. Consumers's perceptions are influenced to a large extent by general shapes, colours, design, and aesthetics, as well as shapes and compositions of specific visual aspects – which has comprehensively been discussed in the published literature on the subject.

Due to the dynamic development of various forms of marketing communication and ways of conveying advertising messages, the impact of sensations lessens. The more stimulation we receive, the harder it is to call customers' attention to specific messages (Lindstrom 2009, p. 133). The current market situation forces consumers to continuously filter information and skip the non-essential data. It is estimated that products have only 0.06 second to grab potential customers' attention in a supermarket. It is packaging designers' task to make the best use of the moment, appealing to consumers' sight and touch (Hill 2010, p. 184).

The second most important sense for marketing messages is hearing, which receives music and other sounds affecting our emotions. The sound used in such communications is to project its emotional value on customers and highlight important messages. If used consistently, sounds permeate our consciousness and bring back even the most distant memories. Through hearing, consumers receive lots of information, and its influence can be compared with that of sight. The research carried out by Millward Brown found that 65% of mood changes can be attributed to sounds we receive (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk 2009, pp. 69-71).

We must not forget that there is a world of difference between hearing and listening. The former is passive, and it consists in receiving sound sensations from the environment. Listening, on the other hand, is an activity, and it is based on selecting the data received and replying to them. You hear with your ears; you listen with your brain (Møler 2003, p. 427-437). It is important then for a marketing message of carefully selected sounds to appeal to the ability of active listening, as this is how we can influence customers' choices (Lindstrom 2005, pp. 72-73).

The human race had developed the sense of smell long before the ability to communicate verbally. Smell is then one of the oldest senses<sup>6</sup>. The scientific studies of smell are a relatively recent trend which originated from the research and the analyses which demonstrated links between the olfactory areas and the parts of the brain responsible for emotions and mo-

<sup>6</sup> The human rhinencephalon – area of the brain involved in olfaction.

tivation. It has been confirmed in numerous studies that olfactory stimuli not only improve memory and mood but also may impact our behaviours and decision making.

Olfactory memory plays a crucial role in encoding scents. It collects information regarding smells to record it in a specific part of the brain. Olfactory memory develops with us throughout our whole life. It is responsible for identifying an aroma based on memories and emotions experienced, for example, the smell of Christmas at one's parents' house, or the smell of freshly cut grass, recalling the memories of summertime spent in the country (Krishna 2012, pp. 332-351; Andruszkiewicz 2011, p. 256).

Olfactory memory is characterised by persistence and high resistance to interference. A man can remember over ten thousand different smells. The crucial fact is that each person perceives smells differently, depending on gender, age, or ethnicity. Research shows that 80% of males and 90% of females associate specific smells with specific past experiences. An experience can be recalled even because of the faintest whiff of an aroma we are not even aware of (Andruszkiewicz 2011, p. 256).

Smell is an 'associative sense', as with it, you can influence neural connections responsible for associations. That is why reactions to aromas are connected to events and situations recorded in memory with smells. The phenomenon, known as Proust effect<sup>7</sup>, is used to influence customers with olfactory stimuli (Krishna 2012, pp. 332-351, Andruszkiewicz 2011, p. 256).

Smell is more and more often being considered in the literature on marketing as the most important sense to affect consumers' behaviours, as it evokes strong and detailed memories which are more persistent and emotionally charged than any memories stimulated by the other senses. Olfactory stimuli enhance remembering and recognizing brands, help memorize the information accompanying products, and increase the subjective quality of services, goods, and brands. Smell influences our mood and our intention to purchase (Krishna, Morrin, Lwin 2010, pp. 1-41; Krishna, Morrin, Sayin 2014, pp. 18-34).

Another sense – gustative stimuli are received by taste buds located on the tongue, in the throat, and on the palate (Møler 2003, p. 429). Our gustative sensitivity changes with age. Adults have around ten thousand taste buds, with women being more sensitive to tastes. With age, the number of taste buds decreases, and our gustative preferences may change. Around the age of fifty, our bodies stop producing taste buds, and we become less sensitive to taste. Taste is sometimes called a 'close sense', as you cannot use it from a distance. It is as personal and unique as fingerprints. Recognizing tastes and appetite are affected by moods (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk 2009, p. 113).

Taste is a powerful faculty, and various gustative stimuli may support brand identity and put it ahead of the pack. Taste can be also a great ice-breaker with potential clients. However, little is still known about how to combine tastes and create taste compositions to build brand image. It is difficult to match a taste with the identity of a company and to present the former

<sup>7</sup> Proust effect – thanks to connections between olfactory system and the areas in the brain responsible for emotions (limbic system), aromas are able to quickly and radically change our mood and bring back certain memories.

to customers, especially if the company does not operate in food sector, and it is tricky to find a link between an industry and a taste.

Touch is as important a sense as the ones described above. Tactile stimuli make it possible for us to maintain physical links with the world around us, and to experience three-dimensional objects. Tactile marketing is based on interaction and it allows transferring information or emotions through physical (or virtual) contact with objects (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk 2009, p. 131). The tactile sense can be used in the process of communicating with customers (Dahl, Morales 2013, s. 81-94). Tactile sensations may build and strengthen emotional attachment to a brand on a personal level. Touch is detected by the tactile receptors in the skin and recorded in our brains. It is thanks to them that we can feel temperature (cold and hot), surfaces (rough or smooth), shapes, weight, or softness of objects (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk 2009, p. 131).

### **The exemplification of sensory marketing activities in the sector of tourism services**

Sensory stimuli and their influence on consumers' behaviours and their intention to purchase are especially important in the service sector. Due to the specific nature of services (e.g. their insubstantiality), customers subconsciously look for any evidence as to their high quality. The evidence can be the feelings evoked by activities affecting their senses. As clients do declare they are attracted not to the information about services but to the place where they are sold, the application of sensory strategies in service sales seems necessary – which was already discussed in the literature in the 1970s and the 1980s (Levitt 1981, p. 94-103).

The feelings evoked by sensory stimuli significantly affect customers' attitudes towards services and brands. They influence both memory and purchase decisions, so they may result in increasing customer loyalty. Therefore, it is only logical to invest money in well-devised sensory marketing activities and create emotionally-charged places where services are sold. Sensory stimuli contribute heavily to the atmosphere in such places. Research shows that consumers may even require the places to have that sensory quality (Hamrouni, Touzi 2011, pp. 304-323).

The holistic concept of sensory marketing is applied in many interesting ways in the sector of tourism services. Sensory marketing is a great add-on to the traditional forms of marketing communication and an integral part of a multisensory brand image for a hotel. Hotel managers try to affect their customers' senses in any way possible, adjusting their approaches to their target groups. All the positive, multisensory factors stimulating guests' senses build a precise sensory strategy for a brand and create emotional ties between customers and a hotel, supporting customers' loyalty and affinity towards the brand (Potrykus-Wincza 2014).

Multisensory hospitality has a relatively long history in the US. Las Vegas hotels attract customers, luring their senses with a vast array of strategies. For instance, The Mirage hotel (a casino at the same time) has an artificial volcano inside which erupts hourly from 8 p.m.

to midnight. The fumes coming from the volcano are piña colada-scented, which provides customers with a unique olfactory experience. The eruptions are accompanied by a specially recorded soundtrack simulating a volcano eruption. Apart from the volcano, in the hotel's lobby, numerous tropical plants are displayed along with artificial waterfalls and a sixteen-metre aquarium with around 10 thousand species of sea animals. In the hotel, there is a dolphin habitat, a zoo with a white tiger, a treasure island with a sea battles display and a sinking ship, and various themed restaurants: tropical jungle Kokomos, Caribbean Caribe Café, and Picasso-themed restaurants (Potrykus-Wincza 2014).

The Luxor is yet another casino/hotel in Las Vegas applying the concept of holistic sensory approach, even if somewhat differently. The idea behind the facility is that the hotel should imitate the world of ancient Egypt. The building itself is a thirty-storey pyramid with an obelisk and a Sphinx replica in front of it. The replica, however, is bigger than the original Sphinx and is ten-storey high. The hotel was built in such a way that on each of the levels, the rooms are smaller, and at the top of the hotel, there is only one room. The walls in the rooms need, therefore, to be slanted, and the lifts in the hotel move at the angle of forty degrees relative to the vertical axis of the building (Potrykus-Wincza 2014). Guests can choose a sea-themed room with frescos, mosaics, and hieroglyphs on the walls picturing the depths of the sea. They can visit shops selling Egyptian souvenirs, which help to preserve the experience of 'Egyptian' Las Vegas.

Multisensory marketing is successfully applied in other hotels across the US, as well as in other countries. The Library Hotel in New York has a different approach known as 'a thought-provoking experience' focusing on book-lovers, who can rent themed rooms dedicated to various fields of science: history, mathematics, social science, literature, technology, philosophy, religion, or art.

Traditionally, international hotel chains providing high standard services make use of the time-honoured sensory marketing strategy which involves delicate scents sprayed in the doorway, and low-key classical music in the lobby, in the bar, and even in the rooms. In some hotels, the scent of water is distributed via the air-conditioning to discretely remind guests of the swimming-pool and spa facilities available.

Luxurious cruise ships offering high-standard tourism services have successfully used sensory marketing. For example, the Voyager of the Seas operated by Royal Caribbean International has numerous multisensory facilities for the guests. There is a large casino, five-storey theatre, an actual basketball field, a golf course, a rock climbing wall, ice-skating rink, a few million pounds worth collection of art, a promenade designed after the Burlington Arcade (famous covered shopping arcade in London), numerous themed restaurants including an Italian-style Portofino, which evokes the atmosphere of restaurants from the 60s. The wealth of the amenities and sensory stimuli makes a voyage an actual show, a festival which may never end. Even though you can take a boat trip outside the ship, more than half of her passengers never leave the vessel, as the comprehensive and sophisticated experience creates a sort of a hyper-reality (Skowronek 2014, p. 76). It should be noted that the concept is

used not only by large enterprises or hotel chains but also by smaller entities which are too familiar with the holistic sensory approach (Potrykus-Wincza 2013).

It seems that a lot can be done also in the field of sensory marketing by travel agencies, which are rarely applying sensory stimuli in their market operations, which translates into low sales. Customers walk in, take a look at the catalogues, talk to an agent, sign where indicated, and pay an advance. They most often activate only sight and hearing, and the stimuli received are not much different from what they find in other places. Still, it is possible to make use of the multisensory approach, especially while promoting exotic destinations. For instance, we can present videos from the places (sight) with an audio description and sounds characteristic of the part of the world (hearing). Carefully selected aromas can be sprayed in the office from special stands, which will provoke certain emotions (smell). Customers can be received in offices with specially selected furniture, e.g. original chairs (touch), and complementary exotic snacks (taste) (Pabian 2011).

## Conclusions

In the course of the development of marketing communication, especially notable are the phenomena supporting the process, for example sensory marketing. It is defined as all the forms of influencing people's senses and providing them with various stimuli. The concept of sensory stimulation is based on the premise that customers' senses should be treated holistically, and that customers should be provided with specific experiences with a view to stimulating all their five senses. In the era of rapid development of various forms of marketing communication – which translates into an overload of stimuli, data, and messages – the philosophy of holistic sensory marketing appears to be an effective way of supplementing other forms of marketing communication, attracting customers' attention, and ensuring positive interactions with them

In the tourism sector, a significant growth of sensory marketing application can be observed, even though only some of the activities are undertaken, and a lot can be done to further improve the situation. The holistic approach is the future of the industry, and it will effectively support other marketing communication tools in the process of winning clients in the tourism sector. Wider application of the sensory approach may help develop the sector.

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## Marketing sensoryczny jako nowe narzędzie wspierania procesu komunikacji marketingowej w sektorze usług turystycznych

### Streszczenie

Komunikacja marketingowa obejmuje całokształt działań podejmowanych w celu stworzenia i wprowadzenia na rynek idei firmy i jej produktu, jak również upowszechnienia idei wśród różnych grup ludzi. Komunikacja jest zjawiskiem wysoce dynamicznym; możemy obserwować ciągle rozwój nowych form komunikacji marketingowej: komunikacji internetowej, komunikacji mobilnej, mar-



ketingu wirusowego, marketingu szeptanego, marketingu partyzanckiego, marketingu zwanego *advergaming* i marketingu (reklamy) z zasadzki (ang. *ambush marketing*). Sensoryczne oddziaływanie na zmysły klienta, określane mianem marketingu sensorycznego, jest stosunkowo nowym narzędziem wspierania procesu komunikacji marketingowej. Technologie multisensoryczne coraz bardziej się upowszechniają w sektorze usług turystycznych. Marketing sensoryczny jest świetnym dodatkiem do tradycyjnych form komunikacji marketingowej i integralną częścią multisensorycznego doświadczania marki. Celem badania jest opisanie holistycznej koncepcji marketingu sensorycznego, zidentyfikowanie form i sposobów oddziaływania na zmysły ludzkie w procesie sprzedaży dóbr konsumpcyjnych oraz podanie przykładów z sektora usług turystycznych. Artykuł ma charakter przeglądowy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** marketing sensoryczny, komunikacja marketingowa, usługi turystyczne.

**Kody JEL:** M31

## Сенсорный маркетинг в качестве нового инструмента поддержки процесса маркетинговой коммуникации в секторе услуг туризма

### Резюме

Маркетинговая коммуникация включает в себя весь круг действий, принимаемых для создания и реализации идеи фирмы и ее продукта, а также распространения идеи среди разных групп людей. Коммуникация – весьма динамичное явление, и мы можем наблюдать постоянное развитие новых форм маркетинговой коммуникации: интернет-коммуникацию, мобильную коммуникацию, вирусный маркетинг, маркетинг из уст в уста (сарафанное радио), партизанский маркетинг, адвергейминг и засадной маркетинг (эмбуш-маркетинг). Сенсорное влияние на органы чувств клиента, определяемое как сенсорный маркетинг – относительно новый инструмент поддержки процесса маркетинговой коммуникации. Многосенсорные технологии становятся все более популярными в секторе услуг туризма. Сенсорный маркетинг – великолепное дополнение к традиционным формам маркетинговой коммуникации и неотъемлемая часть многосенсорного опыта, связанного с брендом. Цель разработки – описать холистическую концепцию сенсорного маркетинга, выявить формы и способы воздействия на органы чувств человека в процессе продажи потребительских благ, а также привести примеры из сектора услуг туризма. Статья имеет характер обзора.

**Ключевые слова:** сенсорный маркетинг, маркетинговая коммуникация, услуги туризма.

**Коды JEL:** M31

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