



SENSORIAL MARKETING APPLIED TO THE SUPERMARKET RETAIL: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

New research suggests that we are about to enter an era in which many more companies will explore meaning-based marketing (WATCH, 2015). Therefore, it is believed that knowing the strategies applied at points of sale (POS) makes it possible to discuss the applicability of the sensory marketing topics covered in the literature. The importance of this research is justified by previous studies (LINDSTROM, 2005; SCHMITT, 2011; Krishna, 2012) that affirm the influence on consumer choice through the stimuli experienced during the purchase decision at a POS. The choice of the sector was based on its representativeness for the Brazilian economy. According to the Brazilian Supermarket Association (ABRAS), the sector's turnover totaled R \$ 355.7 billion in 2018 and accounted for 5.2% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this context, the following research problem arises: which sensory stimulus strategy can be applied in a supermarket retailer? This work sought to understand which sensory stimuli are worked by supermarket retail managers at the POS, addressing the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. This study is based on qualitative research. As a result, we highlight the convergence between managers' perceptions of sensory stimulus strategies.

Key words: sensory stimuli, purchase decision, supermarket management, strategy.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, the consumer experience has been considered a key concept in marketing management, consumer behavior, service marketing and retail (TYNAN; MCKECHNIE, 2009). As elucidated by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), the recognition of the experiential aspects of consumption occurred throughout the evolution of the study of consumer behavior. The consumer's perspective as a logical thinker who solves problems in making purchasing decisions was then expanded by a phenomenological conception, focusing on the symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic nature of consumption, which the authors called "experiential view".

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The physical environment of the store has been identified as one of several inputs in the formation of the attitude towards the store (FEIJÓ; BOTELHO, 2012). According to Giraldi, Ikeda and Carvalho (2008), “the fact that the attitude is a learned predisposition means that it is formed as a result of a direct experience with the product, information acquired from other people or exposure to advertisements”.

Schmitt (1999) distinguishes five different types of experiences that marketers can create for customers: sensory experiences (sense); affective experiences (feel); creative cognitive experiences (think); physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (act); and experiences of social identity, resulting from the relationship with a reference group or culture (report).

According to Lindstrom (2006) building brands requires building perceptions. Interest in the influence exerted on consumer behavior is justified through sensory stimuli. When associated with a brand, they can also be called brand sensations.

For this reason, this article aims to answer the following research problem: which sensory stimulus strategy can be applied in a supermarket retailer? Thus, understanding what are the sensory stimuli present in a supermarket retailer, as well as the strategies adopted by managers in POS, was the objective of this research.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

According to Kotler and Keller (2012), a brand is a name, term, symbol, design - or a combination of these elements - that must identify the goods or services of a company or group of companies and differentiate them from the competition.

Accordingly, the American Marketing Association defines a brand by a name, term, design, symbol or any other characteristic that identifies a good or service from a seller as distinct from other sellers. The world organization of industrial property defines it as a sign that serves to distinguish the products or services of a company from other companies.

According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), brands can simplify their choice, promise a certain level of quality, reduce risk and / or generate trust. Kapferer (2012) points out that the brand exists when it acquires the power to influence the market, which takes some time. In the same vein, Keller (2002) involves the term a certain amount of awareness, reputation and prominence.

According to Schmitt (2011), brands can provide multisensory stimuli through the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Martin (2015) states that consumers do not perceive such sensory influences as marketing messages and, therefore, do not react with the

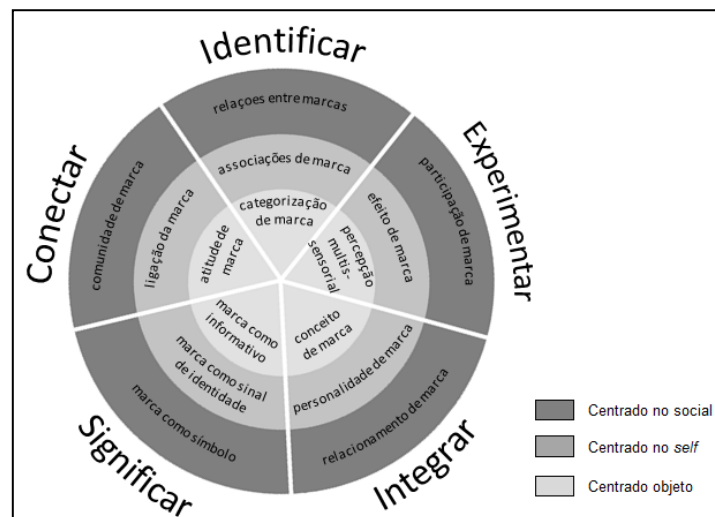
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same usual resistance to advertisements and other promotions. More than being incorporated into long-term memory, according to Lindstrom (2012), sensory stimuli become part of the decision-making process.

As people experience the world through their senses, sensory information and the subjective experiences that accompany them play a key role in human action and cognition, even in domains that seem abstract and distant from immediate sensory information (KRISHNA; SCHWARZ, 2014). According to Moreira, Fortes and Santiago (2017), adequate multisensory stimulation produces an increase in the customers' brand experience and brand equity, which in turn reinforces the purchase intention.

According to a model created by Schmitt (2012), consumers have different levels of psychological involvement with brands due to needs, motives and objectives. In this model, five processes related to the brand are distinguished: identifying, experimenting, integrating, signifying and connecting, shown in figure 1 below. According to this author, the experimental module starts at the level of sensory perception. As it is the first level of the model, engagement with the brand is functional. That is, through sensory perception, the consumer acquires information aiming at the utilitarian benefits of the brand.

Figure 1 - Model of the Five Brand-Related Processes



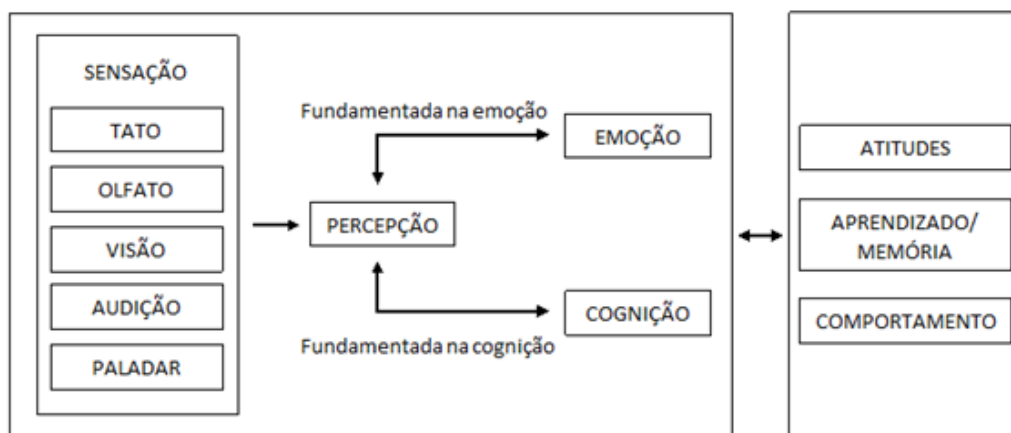
Source: Schmitt (2012)

Accordingly, Krishna (2012) notes that sensory marketing involves consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior. The author conceptualizes the sensory appeal to the relationship between sensation and perception - while sensation is when the stimulus invades the receiving cells of a sensory organ (biochemical and neurological in nature), perception is the awareness or understanding of sensory information. Each of the sensations is

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susceptible to the consumers' perception and, therefore, to the cognitive or emotional association, as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Relationship between sensation and perception



Source: Krishna (2012)

In a project called brandsense, a multicultural team led focus groups in 13 countries to investigate the role of each of the five senses in the relationship between a consumer and a brand. According to results, “the more positive the synergy established between the senses, the stronger the connection made between the emitter and the receiver” (LINDSTROM, 2012).

According to Blessa (2008), we learn 83% by sight; 11% by hearing; 3.5% by smell; 1.5% by touch; and 1% by taste. According to Vásquez (2007), visual identity is a system that provides unity and identity to a company, a group or an institution, as well as its products or services - it identifies, differentiates, associates and reinforces.

Milliman (1982) demonstrated how music can affect the shopping behavior of customers at a supermarket. According to the study, while a fast pace of music tends to influence customers to make their purchases quickly, a slower pace tends to leave them in retail longer. The authors stressed the need for the rhythm of the music to orient itself to the intended objective. Therefore, for fast food, for example, it can be more profitable for customers to finish their meals quickly, promoting turnover. Although the study points out correlations, the authors affirm the inability to establish a generalization, restricting the result to the conditions of the study and the need for future research.

Sounds can also influence the choice of a product. That's what researchers at the University of Leicester pointed out in a survey conducted in the wine section of a supermarket in England. In that study, French and German wines, of the same type and price, were placed on the supermarket shelf. On the days when French music played on the speaker, 77% of the wines

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purchased were French; on the days when German songs played, 73% of the wines purchased were German. As much as music has been identified as influencing consumers' purchasing decisions, when asked about it, only one in seven agreed with the statement (NORTH; HARGREAVES; MCKENDRICK, 1997). The refusal of consumers regarding the influence of music on their buying behavior reinforces Martin's statement (2015),

Smell provides an important means of sensory stimulation. According to Lindstrom (2009), the sense of smell is the most primitive of all - the odor receptors present in the nose draw a direct line to the limbic system, which controls emotions, memories and feelings of well-being. According to the author, this is the reason for supermarkets to position their bakeries towards the entrance of the store. The fragrance exhaled from freshly baked bread not only incites hunger - to the point of encouraging the purchase of food that the customer had not planned to buy, but also provokes feelings of comfort and warmth.

The sense of touch is assimilated by the largest organ in the human body - the skin, which is also responsible for perceiving the climatic and physical reactions in the environments we are in (OLIVEIRA; BRAGA, 2013). A series of five field and laboratory studies carried out by Zwebner, Lee and Goldenberg (2014) reveal a premium effect in relation to temperature: high temperatures increase the individual perception of the value of products. Studies suggest that exposure to active physical heat the concept of emotional heat, causing positive reactions.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is characterized by qualitative research. According to Neves (1996), for the most part, qualitative studies are done at the place of origin of the data, starting from the assumption that it is more appropriate to use the perspective under the phenomenological analysis. Still, according to the author, the development of the study supposes a temporal-spatial cut of a certain phenomenon on the part of the researcher. According to Moita Lopes (1994), in the field of social sciences, meanings are constructed by man, who interprets and reinterprets the world around him. Still, according to him, it is not possible to ignore the participants' view of the object to be investigated, since it is what determines it. Thus, according to the author, the multiple meanings that constitute a reality are only subject to interpretation. Therefore,

At first, a bibliographic search allowed the authors to better understand the proposed theme. According to Vergara (1990), this method consists of a systematic study developed from materials published in newspapers, books, magazines, theses, among others.

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After construction of the theoretical framework, participant observation made it possible to understand the case itself. At that time, the adoption of sensory stimuli to the POS of a retail chain was evaluated. According to Serva and Junior (1995), participant observation constitutes a research situation where the observer and the observed are in a face-to-face relationship and the data collection process takes place in the observed environment. Two medium-sized supermarkets were visited by the researchers for 1 (one) week in the city of Jacareí-SP. Located in the Paraíba Valley, on the banks of the Presidente Dutra highway (BR-116), the city is located between the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It has about 231 thousand inhabitants (IBGE, 2018), and HDI Income of 0.749 (high), according to Atlas Brasil (2019).

In the last stage, unstructured interviews were conducted with the managers of the supermarket retailers. According to Malhotra (2001), unstructured interviews "are open questions in which the interviewee answers in his own words". The questions asked are shown in Table 1, below. Adapted from the model proposed by Krishna (2012), the objective was to identify the perception of managers regarding the sensory appeals present in the POS.

Table 1 - Interview with managers

Question 1	Which strategy of sensory vision stimulus is applied in the POS?
Question 2	Which olfactory sensory stimulus strategy is applied in the POS?
Question 3	Which sensory sensory stimulus strategy is applied in the POS?
Question 4	Which sensory stimulus strategy is used at the POS?
Question 5	Which sensory stimulus strategy for hearing is applied at the POS?

Source: Adapted Krishna, 2012

Before asking the questions set out in Chart 1, managers were made aware of the presentation of Chart 2, prepared by Ditoiu and Caruntu (2013), which describes what elements of possible sensory marketing strategies for retailers would be.

Table 2 - Elements of sensory marketing strategies

Eyesight	Form, physical space, color, dimension, lighting, transparency, design, visual symbols, image and style
Hearing	Sound, music, tone, rhythm and melody
Smell	Odor, smell (natural and artificial) and aroma
Palate	Taste and taste
Touch	Texture, elasticity, temperature, pressure and comfort

Source: Ditoiu and Caruntu (2013)

RESULTS ANALYSIS

In this topic, the results obtained through participant observation and interviews with supermarket retail managers will be presented, as well as the implications from a managerial perspective.

Through participant observation, the authors identified which stimuli were present in the supermarket visited in the Vale do Paraíba region. Relating them to each of the aforementioned sensations, Chart 3 was created below.

Table 3 - Analysis of participant observation

Tact	Availability and willingness to handle products by consumers, predominantly in the fruit and vegetable area
	Retail temperature and products that need refrigeration, to be tested by hand perception
Smell	Guarantee of good odors, especially in the area of meat and fish so as not to alter the perception of product and retail quality
Palate	Marketing actions for product consumption in retail (example: food for tasting)
Eyesight	Newsletters in vibrant colors (yellow and red)
	Organization made by visual plates (corridors / gondolas)
	Lighting (general and in the gondolas under the product - mainly fruit and vegetables)
	Shelf supply
Hearing	Advertisements, Music and Newsletters through radio / loudspeaker in retail

In a second step, after conducting participant observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers. According to the managers, the sensory elements of the vision applied in supermarket retailing is the standardization of the store layout. The distribution of products, the layout of the sectors, as well as advertisements, is made available by the central administrative store. Promotions that are advertised on posters are sent by e-mail from the center to all retailers. The posters are made by local poster artists hired by local retailers and follow a reproduction pattern (letters, colors and sizes). Products that are close to expiration

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are left at eye level, “these are the ones that have the greatest output, due to the ease of visualization”, says the manager.

Also, speaking about the visual appeal in supermarket retailing, according to the manager (1), sales promoters from product manufacturers have access to the store to work on merchandising products from manufacturers. According to the manager, the frequency of these promoters is two to three times a week.

The store seeks to illuminate the environment only with white lamps - some of them LED. According to the manager (2) “a well-lit environment gives the consumer a perception of cleanliness”. Cleanliness was a criterion emphasized in the interview. The attribute in the “cleaning” choice process is important for retail consumers (Silva et al., 2017). Retailers take care to clean the butcher shop every 15 minutes and the store floor constantly throughout the day. In addition to the perception of cleanliness suggested to the consumer to view such actions, the manager highlights the importance of the store's odor. For this, there is an exhaust fan in the fishmonger to avoid the strong smell.

The positioning of the bakery area is a strategy used to stimulate smell and taste. According to the manager, there are times when the door that separates the bakery from the bakery area is left open on purpose for the customers' olfactory stimulation.

According to the manager (1), the tastings offered at the store also contribute to the olfactory stimulus. Some tastings are offered by retailers, however, most of them are promoted in partnership with suppliers. Of these tastings, according to the manager (1) there is a predominance of offering products from the butcher and cafes, and on Saturdays they offer pizza. The option of offering pizza can be through the easy manufacturing process, requiring only an oven already present in the bakery, and perishable products such as pasta, ham and cheese, which can be made available before the expiration date, generating revenue from pizza and not generating discard of expired products. The same manager said that this strategy is important for the consumer to know the product. This strategy, in marketing, refers to turning a latent consumer experience into a real one. When asked about the sensory stimulus of touch, the manager (2) emphasized the height of the gondolas. According to the manager, all supermarket shelves are designed with an ideal height that facilitates the access to products by the customer. The idea of shelf height for visualization and touch was reinforced again.

The two managers interviewed said that the retailer has its own radio, playing in its store a schedule standardized by the headquarters, with music, social news and promotions. During busy times, the manager (2) stated that the best retail offers are played on the radio. At certain

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times of the day, there is also an announcer who reads the promotions that are in the supermarket's newspapers.

CONCLUSION

This work investigated which sensory marketing strategies can be applied in a supermarket. Through participant observation and unstructured interviews with supermarket retail managers, they were identified as sensory stimuli applied at the POS: standardization of the store layout; merchandising; correct disposition of products on the shelves; information in vibrant colors (yellow and red); lighting; cleaning; environmental odors (bakery as a promoter of good odors); tastings; own radio.

Still, it was identified through this research that there is a convergence between the perceptions of managers regarding the strategies of sensory stimuli used in supermarket retailing. In addition, in the supermarkets visited, the functional and informative orientation of managers is perceived when implementing sensory marketing tools.

This work presented several tools that can be explored in the sensory marketing of supermarket retailers, there are indications that such tools are already used by the biggest players in this sector.

Future interviews with consumers are proposed in order to deepen the discussion of brand sensations present in a supermarket retailer.

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