

The Role of Sensory Marketing in Achieving Customer Patronage in Fast Food Restaurants in Awka



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Abstract

Sensory marketing is regarded as a new way of making an organizational profit. Less time and more school/work hours have made people pop into a fast food restaurant on a daily basis. More and more restaurants are employing stimuli of Scent, Sound, texture, vision, and taste to build stronger emotional connections with the customer and drive preference to their brand. A quick look at our environment gives one a clearer picture of these fast food restaurants and one begins to wonder why they spring up in great numbers, thus intensifying competition. This study aims at examining the relationship between human senses/ sensory cues and customer patronage. Also, it seeks to find out how fast food restaurants should apply sensory cues to enhance customer patronage. 150 regular customers of Nourisha fast food restaurant in Awka were used as respondents, and a structured questionnaire was administered to elicit the required information from the respondents. Multiple regression was used to test for the significance of the five hypothesis proposed for the study. Results showed the powerful and tremendous effect of the concept of sensory marketing which is inevitable for the success of a firm in this highly competitive market.

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1. Introduction

Sensory marketing is a new and emerging technologies that integrates the five senses of man to create a memorable experience for the consumer. Sensory marketing is a distinctive marketing communication tool. Its emergence and continued usage by firms owe to the fact that traditional advertising is no longer sufficient to sell a brand and as such, does not speak volumes to the consumer. Marketing researchers are beginning to realize how powerful responses to non-conscious stimuli is. This modern theory of sensory marketing is based on the fact that

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engaging the consumer's senses will affect their behaviour which will in turn affect their emotions, perceptions, memories, preferences and the purchase decision (Krishna, 2010).

In sensory marketing, a firm tries to redirect her efforts towards creating gratifying experiences that the consumer will be emotionally attached to and most times, these experiences last a lifetime. Surprisingly, a lot of these fast food restaurants are springing up by the day each competing for the same group of customers. In light of all these, this study seeks to find out what informs customers decision to patronize a particular restaurant and if possible stick with it. Empirical evidence from this study will help these streams and chains of restaurants in crafting a distinctive marketing strategy that will appeal more to the consumers in Awka. Ifeanyichukwu (2016) opined that globalization which is at its peak and has continued to grow, has also led to the rapid growth of international trade, global corporation, and e-commerce, thus, the advent of the internet has changed how businesses and customers do things which has led to the drive /urge by firms to want to outperform the other in product advertising by daring to be different in pursuing strategies designed to attract attention to their communication and differentiating their product from that of competitors while influencing purchase decision.

According to Hulten (2011), a multi-sensory brand-experience supports individual value creation and refers to how individuals react when a firm interacts and supports their purchase and consumption processes through the involvement of the five human senses in generating customer value, experiences, and brand as an image. This concept can be diagrammatically represented below in figure 1.

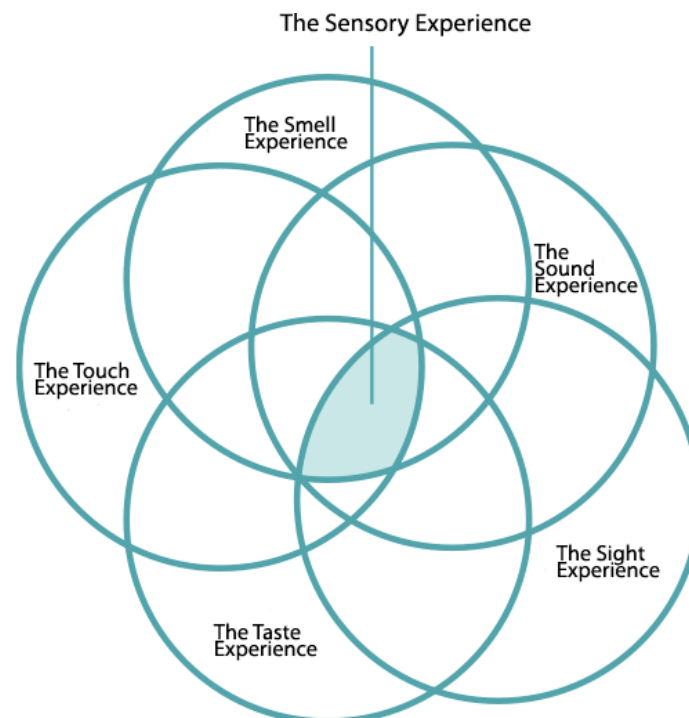


Figure 1 The Multi-Sensory Brand-Experience

Source: Hulten, B (2011). Sensory Marketing: The Multi-Sensory Brand Experience Concept

2. Research Methods

Literature Review

Sensory Marketing

Krishna (2010) defines sensory marketing as marketing that engages the consumer's senses and affects their behaviors. Nowadays, some fast food restaurants in Nigeria have started employing some aspects of sensory marketing. You would see them talking about some 'freshly baked bread cake' as against the conventional '*Ifeoma bread*.' This is basically because they feel those organized names will make the product sell ten times more than normal. Hotels employ the power of scent to create long-lasting scent that the consumer will remember even after leaving the hotel. Have you ever heard comments like "*this place smells like....*" Over the years, researchers have

focused mainly on the power of sight/vision (e.g Houston, Childers and Heckler, 1987) in customer retention while neglecting other elements of the senses (sound, scent, touch and taste).

The sensation is when the stimuli impinge upon the receptor cells of a sensory organ- it is biochemical and neurological while perception is the awareness or understanding of sensory information (Krishna, 2010). Perception is also the process by which people select, organize and interpret these sensations.

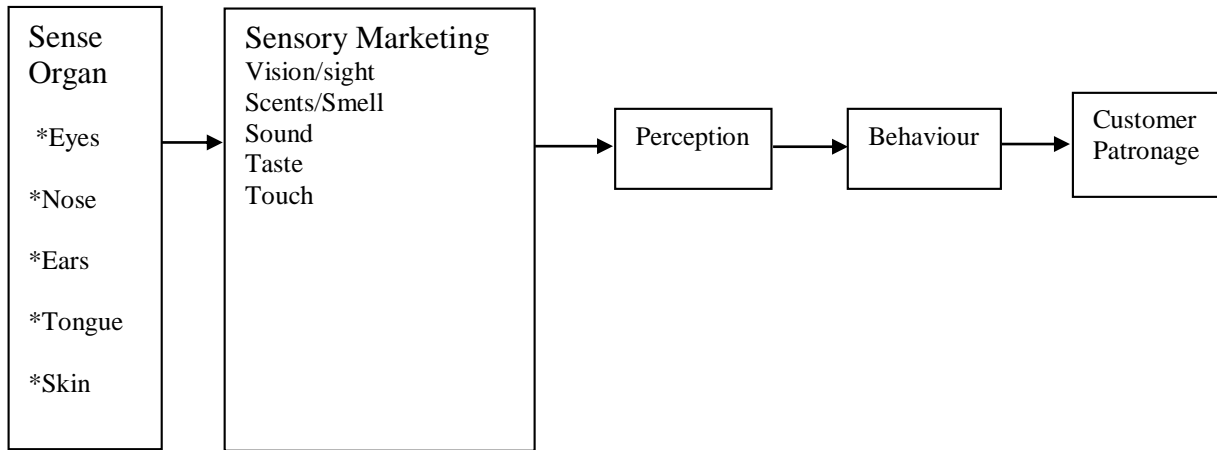


Figure 2. The Researchers Proposed Model

Source: Researchers conceptualization

The Research framework (figure 2) above describes the relationship between the sensory receptors /five sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin) and perception. Eyes for vision, ears for sound, nose for scent or smell, tongue for taste and skin for touch. Perception has been earlier defined as the way by which people select, organize and interpret sensations. Perception, in turn, informs behavior. Solomon (2010) defined consumer behavior as the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experience to satisfy needs and desires. Behaviour also, in turn, influences customer Patronage. Customer patronage leads to repeat purchase (a situation where the customer buys again and again), customer referrals (a situation where the customer refer other people to try a particular product, also called word-of-mouth advertising) and finally customer retention(a situation where the customer is loyal to a particular brand, sticks with it and never thinks of leaving). It is only when a brand has created a memorable experience that a customer retains it.

The Power of Touch

Touch they say is the first sense to develop in the womb and the last to lose with age. Neuroscientists and medical practitioners have overtime agreed with the fact that a human embryo still in the womb responds to touch and even learns to touch itself as early as two weeks (Krishna, 2010). In recent years, researchers have shown that babies desire to be touched by their mothers at all times. Thus, one will see a child crying and running towards the mother to carry him/her. This is the power of touch. You will also notice that once the mother touches (holding, cuddling, massaging, caressing) the infant, tears dry up instantly. This shows you the power of touch for humans. What about older adults? What happens when your spouse or the opposite sex touch you? How do you feel?

According to Peck and Childers (2003), the only way to ensure that a product is worth buying is actually to touch it. Bringing this home to the fast food restaurants, Can services be touched? No wonder Kotler and Armstrong (2010) emphasized the need for physical and tangible evidence /cues surrounding the service, e.g. environment, waiter/waitress, etc.

Crusco and Wetzel (1984) have shown that when a waitress in the USA physically touches a customer, her tip increases. Also, Homik (1992) opined that a person is more willing to taste a new snack in the supermarket if touched by the requester. No wonder, the proverbial Igbo story where a group of people touch different parts of an elephant with their eyes closed. They all described it differently based on the part they touched. Research has established that consumers like to assess products and collect information about them through touch. Peck and Childers (2010) opined that touch increases impulse and unplanned purchases. Research has also shown that consumers desire store atmosphere that allow them to examine products tangibly (Krishna and Morris, 2008).

In a restaurant, the weight of the cutleries, the softness of the napkins, the comfort of the chair and table can affect the perception that customers have. It is important to note that touch between two products, two humans or a product and a human impacts consumers behavior greatly. We, therefore, hypothesize that;

H₁: There is a significant relationship between touch and customer patronage of fast food restaurants.

The Power of Smell/Scent

Some researchers have identified with the power of smell (Buck, 2005). Research carried out by Bucks and Axel (1991) has shown that humans can recognize as many as 10,000 different scent combination, but they may experience difficulty identifying the scent by name (Lawless and Engen, 1977). Thus, humans recognize scents previously smelled even after long periods of time. It is important to note that pleasant scents at restaurants can enhance evaluation of the restaurant and bring about a positive behavior towards the restaurant. Chebat and Michon (2003) added that scents affect customers intention to visit and return to a store. Consumers want the scent in the environment of the restaurant inviting and delicious even before tasting the meal. Nevertheless, a study by Latasha, Tooraiven, Monishan, and Randhir (2016) revealed a weak correlation between scent/smell and motivation to choose KFC restaurant. We, therefore, hypothesize that;

H₂: There is a significant relationship between Scent and customer patronage of fast food restaurants.

The Power of Sound

How do you rate the sound or background music from a fast food restaurant? The sound is a particular auditory effect produced by a given cause. Also, the effect of sound symbolism (sound produced by objects) cannot be neglected because even as one reads a word, one hears that word as well. Yorkston and Menon (2004) and Klink (2000) opined that frosh brand ice cream sounds creamier than fresh brand ice cream. A brand name should sound congruent with the expectation of consumers for brand evaluation to be positive. Therefore, restaurant names that appeal to the ear should be used, e.g., “*Turkilicious restaurant.*”

Closely related to sound symbolism is language perceptions. Krishna and Ahluwalia (2008) opined that there are some generalizable language related associations in bilingual cultures that use English as their second language. In Nigeria, we embrace western cultures a lot, so it is eminent to see fast food restaurant with English names accepted than local languages. This is because it is said to show a symbol of modernity, progress, and sophistication (Piller, 2003). For example, consumers will prefer to patronize Turkilicious eatery more than *Iyabo restaurant* or *Ejima restaurant*. Music also enhances mood and sways buying habit – the sound of the voice of the waitress, etc. Associating music with a message is a good way to make the consumer remember the ads. Sound no doubt is important to consumers behavior. The sound is a perception of one pure sense which influences our mood and sways buying habit.

Studies have been carried out to show the kind of music that fits different kinds of places. E.g., classical music will increase sensation in a wine bar (Areni and Kim, 1993) while fast tempo music was seen to push the consumers to leave earlier than planned and slow music played at low volume will increase the time and the money a consumer spends (Milliman, 1986). A study by Latasha, Tooraiven, Monishan, and Randhir (2016) revealed that more than 80% of the respondents found music played at KFC to be relaxing, exciting and enjoying. According to Kellaris and Kent (2001), music has the reputation to be the “shorthand of emotions” and have been used to provoke emotional responses in the consumer. We, therefore, hypothesize that;

H₃: There is a significant relationship between sound and customer patronage of fast food restaurants.

The Power of Taste

Taste can be sweet, bitter, sour, salty or savory and the sense organ for taste is the tongue. As little as that organ is, yet so powerful. Hoch and Ha (1986) argued that taste is susceptible to external influences– physical attributes, brand name, product information, nutritional information, etc. Brand names also affect perceived taste. In the fast food restaurants, the taste of the food to a very large extent determines customer retention. Habituation as defined by (Epstein, Temple, Roemmich and Bouton, 2009) refers to reduced psychological and behavioral responses after extended or repeated exposure to a stimulus. This is to say; one likes the taste of the first bite of food more than the ninth bite, thus, diminishing returns sets in. We, therefore, hypothesize as follows;

H₄: There is a significant relationship between taste and customer patronage of fast food restaurant.

The Power of Vision

A very popular Nigerian adage will say “eyes will eat first before the mouth.” This sums up all there is to the five senses. Colours and shapes are the first way of differentiation and identification of a product. Vision is powerful as it creates attention, awareness, and image. A visual stimulus builds strong store brands. Further, visual sense has been shown to be of great significance when the verbal material is absent, creating a perception of quality which has a direct impact on the building of a strong brand. This is also emphasized by Messaris (1997) who argues that the sense of sight, besides the purpose of receiving attention, can elicit an emotional response towards a product and other things. Different colors say different things about a product. See Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Colour Psychology in Marketing

Colour	Meaning	Use
Red	Highest stimulation cue, Strong excitation power. Red increases the pulse and heartbeat as it raises blood pressure and stimulates appetite.	Popular in restaurants as it increases appetite. However, due to its exciting properties, red is more likely to be used in bars.
Orange	Orange is friendlier than red, but still, stimulate appetite and attract attention, especially among kids and teenagers.	Companies like burger king use orange as the main color.
Pink	Sweet and appealing. The perfect color for sweets.	Mainly used by candies producers and sweet shops.
Green	Meaning of refreshment and nature. Connected to vegetables, it means healthiness for the consumer.	Green is a delicate color, if not used in the right environment loses the appealing nature and becomes repelling.
Blue	Blue associated with sea and sky calmness, suggests trust and serenity.	As icy blue hues refer to purity and coolness, this is the ideal color for products.
White	Sign of purity, cleanness, and coolness. White is the basic color as it brings out everything else.	In a restaurant, white is used everywhere the customer expects as a sign of cleanliness (plates, kitchen...).
Black	On a packaging, black is a symbol of top-of-range, quality, and sobriety.	As it is the darkest color, black is exclusively used to create a very specific environment.

Source: Valenti. C and Riviere, J “*The concept of sensory marketing,*” marketing dissertation (2008).

Sometimes, we also see the way these foods are arranged and displayed with lots of veggies and colorful fruits on top. Even though we have not tasted yet, but with what we have seen, we have the assurance that it would taste great. Therefore we hypothesize that;

H₅: There is a significant relationship between color and customer patronage of fast food restaurants.

This study is based mainly on a survey conducted through a questionnaire administered to 150 respondents who are regular or frequent customers of Nourisha fast food Awka. The respondents were chosen conveniently by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed to gain maximum perceptions from customers on how sensory marketing affects their consumption level. The responses were analyzed, and the hypothesis tested using multiple regression with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

3. Results and Analysis

In table 2 below, the Male gender was seen to have the highest frequency with 62% while female respondents recorded 38%. More so, the educational qualification shows that more respondents are B.sc/HND and M.sc/ Ph.D. holders with percentages of 35.3% and 28% respectively. This shows that majority of the respondents are learned and can rightly interpret the questions. However, FSLC recorded 6.7%, O’Level recorded 16.7%, and OND/NCE recorded 13.3%. The age distribution of the respondents revealed more respondents to be between the ages of 18-40 years as this age group recorded 58.7%. Respondents below 18years were 8% while above 40 years was 33.3%.

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The marital statuses of the respondents revealed that majority of the respondents are married as it recorded 51.3% while the single respondents totaled 38.7%. However, the divorced/separated are only 10%.

Table 2
Demographic Profile of the respondents

Variable	Description	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender	Male	93	62
	Female	57	38
	Total	150	100
Age	Below 18 years	12	8
	18 - 40 years	88	58.7
	41 years - above	50	33.3
	Total	150	100
Educational Qualification	FSLC	10	6.7
	O ² Level	25	16.7
	OND/NCE	20	13.3
	HND/B.Sc	53	35.3
	M.Sc/ Ph.D. and others	42	28
	Total	150	100
Marital Status	Single	58	38.7
	Married	77	51.3
	Divorced/ Separated	15	10
	Total	150	100

Source: Primary data, 2016.

Discussion of Findings

The five hypothesis generated for the study were tested using multiple regression. Table 3 below shows the summary of the regression model. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 was used to generate this table.

Table 3
Coefficients ^a

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	.411	.357		1.161	.000
Touch	.174	.037	.269	7.407	.000
Sound	.810	.109	.906	4.701	.001
Smell	.718	.104	.948	6.912	.000
Taste	.059	.022	.113	8.921	.000
Sight	.272	.045	.325	7.407	.000

Source: SPSS version 20

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Patronage

Table 3 above shows that all the five variables are significant, therefore, the five hypothesis was accepted. Taste ($t=8.921$, $P=0.000<0.05$), Touch ($t=7.407$, $P=0.000<0.05$), Sight ($t=7.407$, $P=0.000<0.05$), Smell/Scent ($t=6.912$, $P=0.000<0.05$) showed a strong positive and significant relationship between taste and customer patronage of fast food restaurants. However, Sound ($t=4.701$, $P=0.000<0.05$) recorded a low but positive significant relationship with the patronage of fast food restaurant. These findings agree with the works of previous researchers as can be seen from the literature review above.

4. Conclusion

The five senses (Smell, Touch, Taste, Sight, and Sound) have a tremendous and powerful effect on customer retention with respect to fast food restaurants. No doubt, marketers have moved from mass marketing to relationship marketing and most recently to sensory marketing. Sensory marketing can go far beyond used for advertising. It creates a full experience of what it is like to interact with a product or brand. When the senses are reached, customers can effectively have personal experience with the brand. As a result, they buy more of the product and recommend it to others. This leads to the creation of emotional ties with the consumers.

It is a known fact that the actual personality of a brand only exists in the mind of the consumer. In other words, everyone has their own experience that makes up their impression of a brand, and no two impressions are exactly alike. Therefore, to make a profound impression, the senses have to be incorporated. This is because relying on packaging and labeling to make an impact is no longer enough.



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