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CHAPTER 2

Perception

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

When students finish this chapter, they should understand why:

2.1 Perception is a three-stage process that translates raw stimuli into meaning.

• Perception is the process by which physical sensations such as sights, sounds, and smells are selected, organized, and interpreted. The eventual interpretation of a stimulus allows it to be assigned meaning.

2.2 Sensory systems can provide a competitive advantage.

- Marketing stimuli have important sensory qualities. We rely on colours, odours, sounds, tastes, and the "feel" of products when evaluating them. Many stimuli compete for our attention and the majority are not noticed or accurately comprehended. People have different thresholds of perception. A stimulus must be presented at a certain level of intensity before it can be detected by an individual's sensory receptors. In addition, a consumer's ability to detect whether two stimuli are different (the differential threshold) is an important issue in many marketing contexts.
- In recent years, the sensory experiences we get from products and services have become even more important when choosing among competing options. Consumers increasingly want to buy things that will give them hedonic value in addition to functional value.

2.3 Exposure is important for marketing communication.

- Factors that determine which stimuli get perceived are the amount of exposure to the stimulus, how much attention it generates, and how it is interpreted.

 In an increasingly crowded stimulus environment, advertising clutter occurs when too
- many marketing related messages compete for attention.
- Controversy has been sparked by so-called subliminal persuasion and related techniques, by which people are exposed to visual and audio messages below the threshold of perception. Although evidence of subliminal persuasion's effectiveness is virtually non-existent, many consumers continue to believe that advertisers use this technique.

2.4 A variety of factors can influence what consumers pay attention to.

• Marketers are turning to new techniques like guerilla marketing to attract attention. It is also important to use all five senses to appeal to consumers. Stimuli also have to change over time, otherwise we become accustomed to it.

2.5 We interpret the stimuli we pay attention to according to learned patterns and expectations.

• A stimulus that is attended to is not perceived in isolation; it is classified and organized according to principles of perceptual organization. These principles are guided by a gestalt, or overall pattern. Specific grouping principles include closure, similarity, and figure—ground relationships. The final step in the process of perception is interpretation. Symbols help us make sense of the world by providing us with an interpretation of a stimulus that is often shared by others.

LECTURE/DISCUSSION IDEAS

I. THE PERCEPTUAL PROCESS

- Sensation sight, sound, smell, taste and touch
- Perception process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting

The inputs picked up by our five senses constitute the raw data that generate many types of responses. Sensory data emanating from the external environment can generate internal sensory experiences as when a song triggers a young man's memory of his first dance and brings to mind the smell of his date's perfume or the feel of her hair on his cheek.

II. SENSORY MARKETING: HARNESSING PERCEPTION FOR A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE – The impact of sensation on our product experiences to stand out from the competition

A. Sight - What we see

- 1. How perception can be 'coloured' symbolic value and cultural meanings
- The colour red is arousing, but this quality may be only in the eye of the beholder. A survey of colour preferences found that while men, particularly younger ones, prefer

to buy bright red and hot pink undergarments for women, the wearers themselves are more likely to choose white, beige, or pale pink.ⁱⁱ

- THE MALL, located about an hour outside of Firenze, Italy, uses a black brochure with crisp type (similar to the Arial font) to convey the upscale image of the 12 designer outlets located in the midst of the Tuscan countryside. The three-fold brochure is written in three languages: Italian, English, and Chinese.
- Visual imagery is an important mediator of advertising effectiveness. A number of recent studies have explored the impact of such variables as 'vividness of imagery' on reactions to advertising copy. iii

Class Interaction Opportunity: What colours are uniquely associated with a particular company or product? Give at least three illustrations. Have you noticed any confusing similarities with these companies or products?

Marketing Opportunity Box: Use this information to have students break out into groups and provide examples of products. Ask students to share their findings with their peers for similarity.

- 2. How your eyes make you eat more Visual illusions influence how much we eat and drink
- **D.** Smell Odours can both stir emotions or create a calming effect; scented advertising, products, and outlets.
- Fragrances can be classified into various types: floral, woodsy, green citrusy, spicy, and oriental. Experts create fragrances by combining a number of individual scents from as many as 200-300 ingredients. Like colour, our perception of fragrance has three components, known as the top, middle, and bottom notes. Top notes, perceived with the first sniff, provide only a fleeting sensation; middle notes carry the aromatic theme; and bottom notes retain the character of the fragrance.^{iv}
- In experimental studies students who smelled chocolate during a word memorization exercise were better able to recall the words the next day when they were again exposed to the smell.

Class Interaction Opportunity: Ask students to consider their favourite and least liked scents. Engage the class in a discussion about whether or not these scents affect product purchase or avoidance. The discussion can be directed to cross-cultural considerations as well.

- E. Hearing Sound can relax or stimulate consumers and workers
 - 1. The sound of Muzak increases the tempo of music during slack times

The "sound of music" is becoming an issue with consumers who increasingly find themselves "on hold" for telephone inquiries. Perhaps companies should consider the option of choosing your own music – or waiting in silence.

Class Interaction Opportunity: If you owned a store that sold audio equipment and highend speakers, what would you want customers to experience when they entered your store?

F. Touch – Richness, quality, and durability are assessed by touch

Class Interaction Opportunity: Why do car dealers want you to test drive their cars?

- **G.** Taste People form strong preferences for certain flavours
- **H.** Augmented and Virtual Reality Augmented reality, media that superimpose one or more digital layers of data, images, or video over a physical object
- Plain" vanilla has become a flavorful marketing concept. Vanilla flavored or scented products, from perfumes and colognes to cake frosting, coffees, and ice cream, are currently big sellers for the flavor industry. One industry executive explains that the flavor's popularity is because vanilla "evokes memories of home and hearth, warmth and cuddling."

Class Interaction Opportunity: What is your favourite new taste? How did you discover it? What stimulus influenced you the most to try this "new" taste? Is it season specific- if so why?

- **III. EXPOSURE** The degree to which a stimulus is noticed
 - **A. Sensory Thresholds** Psychophysics -- how the physical environment affects our personal experiences.
 - 1. The Absolute Threshold the lowest amount of stimulus that a person is able to detect

Class Interaction Opportunity: How is the absolute threshold important in designing marketing stimulation? Give illustrations related to each element of the marketing mix.

2. The Differential Threshold -- the ability to detect differences between two products

Class Interaction Opportunity: Ask the class to write down the price of the following goods: (a) litre of milk, (b) Big Mac, (c) 3-piece set of luggage. Then see if they can figure out the differential threshold they have for these goods. (How much would the price would have to change before they would actually know it?) Why is it different depending on the price of the product in question?

- Wanting customers to change e.g., a style of new model
- Not wanting customers to change e.g., price increase
- Just Noticeable Difference (JND) minimum change that is detectable
- © Campbell's soup has been gradually modifying its label for the last 140 years. In perhaps the most dramatic packaging change, Campbell's unveiled new cans in 1994 that featured a photograph of a bowl of soup in the center. The Campbell Kid has also been slimmed down in recent years. vii
- **B.** Subliminal Perception Stimulus below your level of awareness (can't prove it occurs)
- € An individual's perceptual threshold is usually defined as that stimulus value correctly detected 50 percent of the time. Many studies claiming to show subliminal effects present stimuli that may actually be noticed as much as 49 percent of the time. Responses may thus be due to weak but not subliminal stimulation. For example, when three of Pepsi's Cool Cans (introduced in 1990) were stacked vertically, the designs form the word "sex" in one of the four designs produced. A company spokesman insisted that the letters were randomly generated combinations of the letters in the word Pepsi, and the result was just a coincidence. In any case, the letters are clearly visible, and hence not subliminal at all. viii
 - 1. Subliminal techniques
 - Visual subliminals 'embeds' are hidden figures often of a sexual nature
 - Auditory subliminals hidden messages in sound recordings (self-help tapes)
- IV. ATTENTION The degree to which consumers focus on the stimulus

Class Interaction Opportunity: What do you think are the characteristics of the best banner ads (or best web/social media ads)? Give an illustration.

- **A. Personal Selection Factors** We are selective about what we pay attention to; perceptual vigilance; perceptual defense.
 - Selective exposure the degree to which we pay attention to what our senses tell us; we "hear, see, etc., "what we want to "hear, see, etc."
 - Perceptual filters consumer decisions are based on experience

- Perceptual vigilance awareness of stimuli that meet our current needs
- Perceptual defence people see what they want to see
- Adaptation over time, consumers stop noticing a stimulus. Factors leading to adaptation – intensity, duration, discrimination, exposure, relevance.

Class Interaction Opportunity: Ask students when they have used perceptual vigilance or perceptual defense. Think of examples and circumstances when advertisers consciously are able to overcome these effects in consumers. How can these barriers be broken?

B. Stimulus Selection Factors – Size, colour, position, novelty

Class Interaction Opportunity: Bring a magazine illustration of each of the four contrast methods demonstrated in the chapter and discuss in class.

- V. INTERPRETATION Deciding what things mean
 - 1. Schemas Organized collection of beliefs and feelings
 - **A. Stimulus Organization** People tend to categorize stimuli based on their experiences
 - The Gestalt "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts"
 - Closure tendency to finish an established but incomplete pattern
 - Similarity grouping on the basis of similar physical characteristics
 - Figure-Ground act of focusing on either the object or its background
 - € The Matex Corporation was experiencing sluggish results with a rust-proofing compound called Thixo-Tex because consumers could not perceive product qualities from this meaningless name. When the product's name was changed to Rusty Jones, sales grew from \$2 million to more than \$100 million in four years.*

B. Perceptual Positioning

- Positioning strategy the place a brand occupies in the consumer's mind with regard to important attributes and competitive offerings
- Repositioning changing the place a brand occupies in the consumer's mind to make it more competitive with other brands or to change its image
- Positioning dimensions may include price leadership, attributes, product class, occasions, users, or quality

Class Interaction Opportunity: Ask students to think of a product or service that has been positioned or re-positioned recently. What new market was pursued? How did you find out about the positioning or re-positioning?

- To counteract market fragmentation and aggressive competition from bottled water brands such as Dasani (Coca-Cola) and Aquafina (PepsiCo), Evian (bottled by Groupe Danone and distributed by Coca-Cola) was repositioned as a health and beauty aid − a wider appeal, rather than as a premium thirst-quencher − with a \$10 m. ad campaign. xiii → 10 m. ad campaign. Xiiii → 10

END-OF-CHAPTER SUPPORT MATERIAL

Review Questions

- 1. What is the difference between sensation and perception? How are these constructs related? Sensation is the immediate response of our sensory receptors to such basic stimuli as light, colour, and sound. Perception is the process by which such physical sensations are selected, organized, and interpreted.
- 2. Does the size of a package influence how much of the contents we eat? How? When pouring or eating foods from larger boxes, these boxes suggest it is appropriate or "acceptable" to eat more than smaller ones—and we do!
- 3. How does the sense of touch influence consumers' reactions to products? *Moods* are stimulated or relaxed on the basis of sensations reaching the skin, whether from a luxurious massage or the bite of a winter wind. Touch has even been shown to be
 - a factor in sales interactions. We are more sure about what we perceive when we can touch it.
- 4. Identify and describe the three stages of perception. How can these provide a competitive advantage for the firm? Exposure occurs when a stimulus comes within the range of someone's sensory receptors. Attention refers to the extent to which processing activity is devoted to a particular stimulus. Interpretation refers to the meaning that we assign to sensory stimuli. The new era of sensory marketing, in which companies pay extra attention to the impact of sensation on our product experiences, some smart marketers use our sensory systems and new immersive consumption experiences to create a competitive advantage. From hotels to carmakers to brewers, companies recognize that our senses help us decide which products appeal to us—and which ones stand out from a host of similar offerings in the marketplace.
- 5. What is the difference between an absolute threshold and a differential threshold? The absolute threshold refers to the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a given sensory channel. The differential threshold refers to the ability of a sensory system to detect changes or differences between two stimuli.

- 6. How is guerilla marketing used as a tactic to attract attention? Marketers use techniques such as guerrilla marketing to get noticed. This involves using communications that are unexpected and unconventional in ways that target consumers in unexpected places. For example, in New York City, one guerilla marketing campaign saw manhole covers with steam coming out into a steaming cup of Folgers coffee.
- 7. Describe two factors that can lead to stimulus adaptation. *There are five factors that can lead to stimulus adaptation*.
 - Intensity: Less-intense stimuli (e.g., soft sounds or dim colours) habituate because they have less sensory impact.
 - Duration: Stimuli that require relatively lengthy exposure in order to be processed tend to habituate because they require a long attention span.
 - Discrimination: Simple stimuli tend to habituate because they do not require attention to detail.
 - Exposure: Frequently encountered stimuli tend to habituate as the rate of exposure increases.
 - Relevance: Stimuli that are irrelevant or unimportant will habituate because they fail to attract attention.
- 8. Define a "schema" and provide an example of how this concept is relevant to marketing. Consumers assign meaning to stimuli based on the schema, or set of beliefs, to which the stimulus is assigned.
- 9. What marketing opportunities are presented with the changes in technology that affect consumers lives? Marketers are constantly searching for ways to break through the clutter and grab people's attention. For example, marketers are coming up with innovative ways to get consumers' attention in ways that go viral (i.e., the marketing message gets passed along from consumer to consumer). AR apps open new worlds of information (and marketing communications).
- 10. What is a positioning strategy? What are some ways marketers can position their products? A positioning strategy is a fundamental part of a company's marketing efforts as it uses elements of the marketing mix (i.e., product design, price, distribution, and marketing communications) to influence the consumer's interpretation of its meaning. Marketers can use many dimensions to carve out a brand's position in the marketplace. These include:
 - Price leadership: Lancôme cosmetics are sold in upscale beauty shops for a higher price, while L'Oréal (which owns Lancôme, by the way) products are available for much lower prices in lower-end stores.
 - Attributes: Bounty paper towels are "the quicker picker upper."
 - Product class: The Porsche Boxter is a sporty convertible.
 - Occasions: Kit Kat is positioned as a snack for when it is time to "Have a Break."
 - Users: Wiser's positions its Canadian whisky as a drink for men.

• *Design*. Apple products like the iPad and iPhone are renowned for their innovative design.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR CHALLENGE

Discussion Questions

1. Many studies have shown that our sensory detection abilities decline as we grow older. Discuss the implications of the absolute threshold for marketers attempting to appeal to seniors.

You could begin this exercise by identifying the particular senses and the ways in which they decline as the consumer gets older. Once this has been done, students should brainstorm to develop a list of the ways that a message may not be received or interpreted correctly. Students might be encouraged to develop a matrix, placing the senses down the left-hand side and forms of communication across the top. The matrix then could be filled in with descriptions of how communications may fail and how these failures could be avoided. For example, print advertisements aimed at an older audience could use larger type, or radio and television ads could decrease the pace of information presented and slightly increase the volume to allow older recipients to more fully process the information. Retail store and restaurants can increase lighting.

- 2. Do you agree that online retailers are at a disadvantage with respect to sensory marketing? How can online businesses meet the sensory needs of the consumer? Many important sensory qualities like sight (particularly colour and design elements) and sound can still be experienced online. Businesses can meet sensory needs by paying careful attention to colour and design detail and communicating design elements descriptively to consumer (e.g., clothing sites like Banana Republic that describe the fabrics in detail and provide close ups of details). Certainly though, online retailers have less ability to manipulate the sensory experience, or control it (e.g., you might be smelling or hearing something other than what they would ideally like you to when shopping from home).
- 3. Do you believe that marketers have the right to use any or all public spaces to deliver product messages? Where would you draw the line in terms of places and products that should be restricted?

This question needs to split into two parts: (1) whether marketers have the right to use any public spaces, and (2) whether they have the right to use all public spaces. These are the two extremes on the issue, and the students will most likely find themselves somewhere between complete and unlimited access for marketers on one hand, and complete and total ban on the other. A key concept in this discussion is the definition of "public spaces" and, therefore, a common definition should be adopted early in the discussion. To develop their position on this issue, students should be encouraged to list both appropriate and inappropriate places for product messages and offer reasons why each place should be categorized in a particular

way. See if they think signs on the highway should be eliminated. If they agree, ask them how they would ever find McDonald's!

Experiential Exercises

4. Go online and find three examples of guerilla marketing. Were these campaigns effective? Why or why not?

Answers will vary as will examples. Students should be able to identify the elements of a successful or non –successful campaign.

5. Using magazines archived at the library, track the packaging of a specific brand over time. Find an example of gradual changes in package design that may have been below the JND.

You might give a few hints here. For example, Aunt Jemima, and Betty Crocker are trademarks that have changed over time and can be found in ads. Package changes include Ivory Soap, Kellogg's Rice Krispies, and Campbell Soup. Students can simply examine automobile ads to see how styles of a particular car have changed over the years; the body is the car's package. (Possible Field Project)

6. Visit a set of websites for one type of product (e.g., personal computers, perfumes, laundry detergents, or athletic shoes) and analyze the colours and other design principles employed. Which sites 'work' and which don't? Why?

See if the students will notice how similar many of the products and brands are in terms of shape, weight, colour, and size. (Possible Field Project)

CASE STUDY TEACHING NOTES

1. Why did General Mills elect to make changes to its original packaging? How did those changes target consumers' perceptions or consumers' sensations?

Sensation is the immediate response of our sensory receptors in our eyes, ears, nose and mouth to basic stimuli such as light, colour and sound. In contrast, perception is the process by which these sensations are selected, organized and interpreted. As we recall, perception can be more influential than sensation in determining consumer preferences. In some cases, two products identical in taste, smell or chemical composition may yield different consumer preferences. This is often the result of consumer perception. Based on sensation alone, it is difficult to distinguish between two products identical in taste, smell or chemical composition. However, when explicitly told the brand name or given the brand packaging, consumers rely on culturally learned meanings about the brand to organize, interpret and, ultimately, form preferences about the brand. In the Honey Nut Cheerios case, the disconnect between consumers' taste perceptions and the actual taste of the product is an example of the difference between perception and sensation. Despite the sensation - or more specifically, the taste - of the cereal as pleasant, expectations were based on consumer perceptions of the cereal as "twig-like" influenced by the old packaging.

2. Thinking back to Chapter 1, how did General Mills tap into trends for consumer activism with this campaign?

Most marketers would argue that perception can be more influential than sensation in determining consumer preferences. As noted in Chapter 2, despite the identical taste in cola beverages, the brand names, Coca-Cola and Pepsi, and their associated perceptions can create different consumer preferences. The old packaging for General Mills cereal created negative consumer perceptions. In addition, the multiple variations of packaging posed a challenge to the original brand identity of Honey Nut Cheerios.

The decline of the bee population in the news across North America, with its bee mascot on the front of the box, had such a natural connection with the cause, General Mills focused on what to add or take away from these raw initial perceptions and assign meanings to them.

3. Paying particular attention to the visual elements of branding including logos, colour, package design, etc., do you feel that the packaging changes the company has made will be successful? Why or why not?

As noted in Chapter 2, meanings are communicated on the visual channel through a product's colouring, size, styling, brightness and distinctiveness from competitors' products. These visual elements must enhance both the exposure of Honey Nut Cheerios products and the attention given to them by consumers. First, in order to enhance exposure, General Mills must rely on visual elements such as a product's packaging to ensure that consumer's have the potential to notice the product. For example, suitable-size and colour of font are required to ensure that a stimulus can be registered on a sensory channel. In this regard, the absolute threshold, the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a sensory channel, is important in designing marketing stimuli.

Second, in order to enhance attention, General Mills must implement a positioning strategy that includes product and packaging design to influence customers' interpretations of the brand's meaning. Given that Kashi and Cascadian Farms have both strengthened their position in the market by branding and packaging cereals in a way that is health and wellness-oriented, Honey Nut Cheerios had to differentiate itself based on its "triple-bottom line" brand image. For example, the colours chosen in the new packaging are rich in symbolic value and cultural meanings. By using Honey Nut Cheerios trade dress green in product packaging, consumers' will associate the colour with the brand's "Earthiness" and "environmental-friendliness." In contrast, the old packaging used a variety of colours in product packaging and gave consumers the wrong impression about the product type and undermined Honey Nut Cheerios brand identity. By using a signature colour to convey its overall "corporate social responsibility," Honey Nut Cheerios can now convey a clear brand identity throughout its various product lines in order to capture attention, enable effective search and motivate purchase.

4. What are some potential alternative courses of action for General Mills? As a marketing consultant, what other actions that might influence consumer perceptions would you recommend to Emma Eriksson?

Emma could utilize other aspects of sensory marketing, the process by which consumer perception can be changed by changing raw perceptions and assigning meanings to them, in order to change consumers' perceptions. For example, she could utilize in-store sampling to provide consumers with an initial sensory exposure to the brand that would potentially change their perceptions. Further, she might consider utilizing other promotional methods (e.g., store signage, couponing, etc.) that could be aligned to the new brand identity. Using promotional methods that convey the same visual elements will reinforce the brand identity and enhance the perceptions of the new branded packaging.

FIELD PROJECT IDEAS

Individual Assignments

- 1. Have students find examples of scent strips in magazines and then interview a few people to determine their reactions to scent strips. Are they positive or negative? Do the people who were interviewed think that this type of advertising will have any effect on what products a person will buy? Record their remarks.
- 2. Have students bring to class several brands of well-known products and their "look-a-like" counterparts. Then have students compare the shared physical attributes of these products. What are some of the psychological attributes of pricing and packaging? Are there any legal or ethical implications for the producers of these products?
- 3. Ask students to visit a toy store and take note of the various types of toys that are displayed. Then have students categorize these toys based on age, gender, socioeconomic class, and educational level. Have them discuss how manufacturers and retailers use these attributes to appeal to potential customers.
- 4. Have students visit two different types of restaurants and make a note of how each establishment appeals to the five senses. How are they the same? How are they different?
- 5. Ask students to bring in three ads from a favourite magazine. Have students identify examples of the stimulus factors that the advertiser used to capture attention. What are some of the other stimuli that could have been chosen to accomplish the same thing?
- 6. Ask students to spend an afternoon watching a popular soap opera or an evening watching a favourite television show. Ask them to be particularly observant of the

- various products and services that are used as props during the show. Do these products or services have any symbolic value? Are they used to help develop the plot? How?
- 7. Instruct students to find one ad that is rich in symbolism and perform a semiotic analysis of it. Have students identify each type of sign used in the ad and the product qualities being communicated by it. Then have them comment on the effectiveness of the signs that are used to communicate the intended message.

Team Assignments

- 8. Have three or four students develop ten brand names for a new (a) hamburger, (b) hair care centre, (c) car, or (d) a product of their choice. Then test these names on the class to capture their reaction. Have the project leaders describe the process they went through to choose the names.
- 9. Have students bring in three food products ads which present the products in a particular scene or setting. Ask them to report on the symbols used in the setting and how they believe the marketers intended them to be interpreted relative to the food product. Do they think the ads are effective?

Individual or Team Assignments

- 10. Ask students to bring in a collection of sexually-oriented ads to stimulate discussion of the different techniques and types of products that use sexual themes in their ads. Did they find more nudity magazines targeted toward men or women? See if they think these ads are effective. What are the ethical issues?
- 11. Have your students look for several examples of magazine advertisements that use sexual themes or illustrations which seem to capture the reader's attention or in some way influence their perceptual process. Are these methods appropriate for the target market the advertiser is trying to reach?
- 12. Ask students to choose any two restaurants or pubs that are frequented by friends. Have them measure their image profiles by asking ten fellow students or friends to write a list of descriptive words that apply to each restaurant or pub. It will be easier for the subjects if the students provide the subjects with a list of potential descriptions. What conclusions can be drawn from these data?
- 13. Ask students to select two websites that contrast effective and ineffective application of techniques that attract the attention of web browsers.
- 14. Ask students to speak with international students about the meaning of specific colours and numbers in their culture. How do these meanings contrast with those of Canadians?

ENDNOTES

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