

## CHAPTER VI

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### SENSES IN EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

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#### 1. Introduction

People remember the product/service they purchase with their feelings they have at that moment, when they are happy or unhappy at a sales or service delivery point. The music they listen to, the sounds they hear, the smells, tastes, images they have etc. during the presentation of the product/service are effective in the formation of these feelings and experiences. A person who leaves with pleasant experiences when they go to a restaurant may be willing to go back to that restaurant. Although he does not remember the taste of the food, the positive feelings he experienced at the restaurant can make the customer think positively about the quality of the food served. Conversely, a person who has negative experiences about the restaurant may also be hesitant to go back to the same restaurant. In fact, it is likely that he remembers his negative feelings at that moment and feels unhappy when he thinks about the experience at the restaurant. Some people connect with their experience in a store, restaurant, destination etc. and may even describe a product, service or place as “auspicious” or “inauspicious” depending on whether the experience is positive or negative. All these make it an important goal for businesses to focus on the consumption-related experiences of individuals and to provide positive customer experiences.

In this study, in which experiential marketing focusing on the concept of customer experience, which is included in the mission definition of many businesses (Verhoef et al, 2009, 31), first, the concept of experiential marketing, key features of experiential marketing, and then the sensory experience issues are discussed.

#### 2. The Concept of Experiential Marketing

The rapid evolution of marketing focused on product-to-service and experience has forced marketing researchers to put an experiential marketing approach in place when designing marketing strategies by involving customers (Maghnati, Ling, Nasermodeli, 2012, 169). Pine and

Gilmore, who set a ground for the emergence of experiential marketing by deriving the concept of experience economy, in a long-term perspective, divided the advancement of economic value into four stages referring to commodities, goods, services and experiences (Tsaur, Chiu, Wang, 2007, 48). They provided a framework to explain the transition from service-based marketing to experience-based marketing. According to the authors, as service-based marketing offerings become more and more commoditized, the transition must be made to providing customers with unforgettable experiences in order to gain competitive advantage and customer satisfaction (Pine, Gilmore, 1998; Petkus Jr, 2004, 50).

Schmitt (1999, 53), in his article comparing traditional marketing with experiential marketing, states that traditional marketing sees customers as rational decision makers who care about functional features and benefits. According to the author, in experiential marketing, it is discussed to see customers as rational and emotional people interested in gaining pleasurable experiences (Schmitt, 1999, 53; Tsaur, Chiu, Wang, 2007, 48). One of the main ideas of experiential marketing is that value is not only found in purchasing objects (products and services) and their functional benefits. Value also takes part in the hedonic and experiential elements surrounding the product and service and in the consumption experience itself (Schmitt, Zarantonello, 2013, 26). Thus, experiential marketing addresses the customer's self-image, social goals, emotions, and desires (Srinivasan, Srivastava, 2010, 194).

Experiential marketing constitutes the next reasonable stage in customer demands beyond goods or services (Srinivasan, Srivastava, 2010, 193). Here, experience is the main component of experiential marketing. Businesses often create special stages with different motivational elements such as environments, atmospheres and settings for customers to experience. As a result of these experiences, customers have different perceptions and response according to these perceptions. These perceptions of customers are the result of the marketing activities exhibited by businesses (Yuan, Wu, 2008, 388).

The experiences provided to customers may be similar to those provided to other customers. However, the assimilation of experience is personal (Srinivasan, Srivastava, 2010, 193). In other words, two people cannot have the same experience; because every experience stems from the interaction between the staged event (like a theater play) and the individual's state of mind (Pine, Gillmore, 1998). Thus, experiential marketing creates unforgettable experiences (Yuan, Wu, 2008, 388; Srinivasan, Srivastava, 2010, 194). It offers a great framework for combining experience and entertainment elements in a product or service (Zena, Hadisumarto, 2012, 37). Creating unforgettable experiences is critical to retain old customers and attract new ones (Yuan, Wu, 2008, 388).

It is aimed here to ensure that customers remember these experiences fondly and even share them with their environment to increase sales with the power of word of mouth and customer loyalty (Srinivasan, Srivastava, 2010, 194).

The concept is defined as “the process of engaging customers through two-way communication, which is based on determining and meeting customer needs and requests profitably, realizing brand personalities and adding value to the target audience” (Smilansky, 2009, 5). Another definition is “customers’ recognition or purchasing of a business’s or brand’s goods or services after they have experienced the activities and have perceived arousals”. Experiential marketing motivates customers to make faster and more positive purchasing decisions (de Farias, Aguiar, Melo, 2014, 93). It positively affects the brand image and is effective in creating brand value (Cleff, Lin, Walter, 2014, 7).

### **3. Key Characteristics of Experiential Marketing**

Experiential marketing presents a different approach from traditional marketing with the features of “focusing on customer experiences”, “focusing on consumption as a holistic experience”, “accepting both the rational and emotional drivers of consumption” and “using eclectic methodologies” (Schmitt, 1999, 57-59; Tsaor, Chiu, Wang, 2007, 48; Datta, 2017, 27).

**A focus on customer experiences:** Customer experiences are at the focus of experiential marketing. It is seen that the thought of "what people really want is not products, but satisfactory experiences" is put forward in the 1950s, when looking at the development of the concept of customer experience. Experiential theorists who promoted this thinking in the 1980s supported a broader view of human behavior, especially recognizing the importance of emotional aspects of decision-making and experience (Lemon, Verhoef, 2016, 70). When it comes to the 1990s, it is seen that the studies of Pine and Gilmore (1998) and Schmitt (1999) brought experiential marketing to the agenda.

Customer experience includes the internal and subjective reactions of customers who have any direct or indirect contact with a business. Direct contact usually takes place at the time of purchase, use and service purchase and is often initiated by the customer. Indirect contacts, on the other hand, include unplanned encounters about the presentation of products, services and brands belonging to an enterprise and applications such as word of mouth suggestions, criticism, advertisements, news, etc. Indirect contacts include unplanned encounters and practices such as word of mouth suggestions, criticism, advertisements, news etc. regarding the presentation of products, services and brands belonging to a business (Meyer, Schwager, 2007, 2). Subjective experience, on the other hand,

refers to the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensory, physical and spiritual) (Gentile, Spiller, Noci, 2007, 397).

As the first step towards managing the total customer experience, a business should recognize the tips it sends to customers. Businesses should ensure the meticulousness, which they have in managing product and service functionality, also in managing the emotional component of experiences (Berry, Carbone, Haeckel, 2002, 2).

**A focus on consumption as a holistic experience:** Schmitt (1999, 58) stated that in consumption, consumption should not be evaluated on the basis of a single good or service, but it should be approached to consumption holistically. For example, a cinema ticket, a popcorn, a fizzy drink offers a “cinema night” experience when evaluated together rather than alone. Listening to classical music while visiting a museum can be exemplified as services that are considered to be consumed together (Smith, Redden, 2020, 1). Experiential marketing suggests marketing campaigns to be prepared by considering consumption within the framework of a holistic experience.

Starbucks is a business example based on an experiential marketing paradigm. This example shows how a café has been successfully transformed into a meeting place for customers and, moreover, a Starbucks lifestyle experience. Starbucks is not just a gourmet cup of coffee; it is also a socializing and intellectual discussion center especially for students and young urban professionals. Customers find comfortable seats, wireless internet connection and even downloadable music options here. Moreover, it is a pleasant experience for a wide range of customers through an endless product innovation cycle (Tsai, 2005, 433-434).

**To accept both the rational and emotional drivers of consumption:** It is known that customers do not only follow the functional features of the products or services in their purchasing decisions and satisfaction evaluations. For example, it is suggested to approach the subject in a holistic framework such as physical comfort, psychological comfort, physical product evaluation and sensory product evaluation for a store experience. Experience creates a subjective part in creating or converting customers by emphasizing the emotions and senses experienced in promoting a product or service. Both rational and emotional elements provided during store visits offer shopping experiences that can provide high levels of satisfaction, pleasure and emotional response. Thus, experiential marketers can influence customers' emotional and behavioral responses (Dalmoro et al, 2019, 2054-2058). Here, Schmitt (1999, 58) states that the consumption experience generally pursues “fantasies, emotions and entertainment”.

**To use eclectic methodologies:** While methodologies in traditional marketing are analytical, quantitative and verbal, a wide variety and versatile methodology is mentioned in experiential marketing. It is stated that experiential marketing is not dependent on a single methodological ideology and is eclectic. Studies conducted are not in a way that provides the same standard format for all participants; it usually includes formats customized to the situation at hand (Schmitt, 1999, 59).

#### 4. Senses

Schmitt (1999) mentions the importance of creating “sensory experiences (sense)”, “emotional experiences (feel)”, “creative cognitive experiences (think)”, “physical experiences with behaviors and lifestyles (act)” and “social identity experiences resulting from relating to a reference group or culture (relate)” for customers within the context of experiential marketing. In this study, sensory experiences (sense) are discussed.

People perceive the world through their senses (Krishna, Schwarz, 2014, 162). Human senses are important for individuals' experiences regarding different purchasing and consumption processes. Individuals become aware of businesses, products/services and brands through the senses (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk, 2009, 1) and customers' perceptions, judgments and behaviors are influenced through senses (Krishna, Schwarz, 2014, 159). Therefore, having knowledge about the senses can make it possible for the marketing activities of a business to be more successful and the sensory experience of an individual to be more personal (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk, 2009, 1). Lindstrom and Seybold (2003, 97) mentioned the importance of sight, smell, sound, taste and touch for success in brand creation. The limbic brain system affects emotions based on sensory observations of the instinctive brain (Den Bergh, Behrer, 2016, 314). Each of these senses, which also affect the emotions of the customers, are explained one by one below.

**Sight:** Sight is the strongest sense used in marketing. It is stated that more than 80% of commercial communication is done through the sense of sight (Shabgou, Daryani, 2014, 574-575). Brand logos, colors, graphics, names, packages and product design are visual stimuli that can be part of any brand strategy. Moreover, visual stimuli become more important in the absence of verbal material about a product (Hulten, 2013, 19). In addition, customers can be influenced more easily with visuals than texts (Den Bergh, Behrer, 2016, 317). Many visual elements such as curvature, flatness, complexity, simplicity, mobility, stability, pictorial, being digital, informative, persuasive, aesthetic, placed side by side, separated from each other, colorful, illuminated, large-sized, small-sized are used to influence customer experiences and become an experiential marketing element (Raghubir, 2010, 202).

**Smell:** As the emphasis is on consumption as a holistic experience in experiential marketing, ambient scent is as important as the smell of the products. While the existing artificial smell of Play-Doh brings childhood memories to the minds of adults (Den Bergh, Behrer, 2016, 314) and also reminds children of their fun experiences. Ambient scents are another factor that is emphasized as they have the potential to create a positive mood. It is predicted that this will translate into positive store/sales point and product evaluations, desire to spend longer time in the ambient, revisit intentions and positive customer experiences (Morrin, 2010, 75-76).

**Sound:** Sound is agreed as a human sense that has positive effects on customers' moods, preferences and behaviors (Hulten, 2013, 20; Shabgou, Daryani, 2014, 575). The sound of products/services and their sales/presentation environments is important in terms of evaluating customer experiences and creating a positive customer experience. It is suggested that sound should be applied consistently throughout a firm's sensory marketing in order to obtain a distinctive, catchy and flexible sound (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk, 2009, 71). For example, sound is also taken into account in creating a "multi-sensory taste perception" in the experiential marketing activities to be carried out for a food product. The sound of opening a package or bottle, the sound of cooking, the sound in the environment where customers are eating, the sound heard when chewing food all affect experiences. Perception of crunchiness etc. related to the food is supported by sound. Noise or music elements in the environment are effective on experiences. Successful retail outlets or restaurants improve the consumption experience by carefully creating the right sound environment (Haas, 2017, 93).

**Taste:** Another element used by experiential marketers to influence customer experiences is taste. The taste, which forms the chemical senses with the smell, can contain thousands of chemical reactions and is affected by the sense of smell. Smell is critical in distinguishing tastes and it is stated that the perceived taste experience decreases by up to 80% when the smell is not detected (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk, 2009, 117-118). The fact that using marketing on the palate can be persuasive and impressive to the customer is one of the reasons why the sense of taste is important for businesses (Shabgou, Daryani, 2014, 576). Toys wrapped in chocolate, strawberry-flavored lipsticks, popping candy, strawberry erasers etc. can be given as the examples of products offered to customers, taking into account the taste element. A nice Turkish coffee served to and a pleasant conversation offered to a woman, who goes to the hairdresser in Turkey, are extremely important. Almost coffee is an integral part of the hairdressing service. Moreover, the pleasant smell of Turkish coffee will support the positive emotions that will be created in the customers.

**Touch:** Tactile cues can be used in product selection and evaluation (Brasel, Gips, 2014, 227). Tactile stimuli are taken from the nerve endings in the human skin. Customers use the sense of touch to learn about the structure, temperature, and shape of an object's surface (Vietoris, 2017, 18). In other words, touching objects, people or products enables the sense of touch, the largest sensory organ of the body, to include physical contact through the skin in the shopping experience (Hulten, 2013, 21). It is stated that most of the research on touch focuses on touch-imagery, interpersonal touch or touching products. It is stated that touch, which is a relatively new research area for customer behavior, can be used to provide both haptic and non-haptic information (Brasel, Gips, 2014, 226-227). Consequently, this is another sensory element that is important for experiential marketers.

In summary, Starbucks succeeds by creating sensory stimulation through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, which stimulate positive emotions and moods that positively affect the brand image (Cleff, Lin, Walter, 2014, 20). Sensory experiences are strategically important to clarify the identity and values of a business with the goal of creating long-term brand awareness and sustainable brand image. Therefore, it becomes more important for businesses to influence customers in new and creative ways in addressing human senses (Hulten, Broweus, van Dijk, 2009, 2).

## **5. Conclusion**

Creating positive customer experiences is extremely important in today's digital world, where people can share their thoughts about their experiences with each other much more easily. Customers transfer their thoughts and experiences about products and services without any difficulties to each other. When they have a positive experience, they reward the brands with their sharing on the internet, but they sometimes deliberately punish brands if they have negative experiences. Brands that provide memorable experiences, with satisfied customers, both contribute to brand loyalty and enable new customers to be created through word of mouth marketing activities. Focusing on the holistic consumption experiences of customers who are confronted with a large number of products and services, can easily access information, and can evaluate many aspects between products/services/brands is an inevitable issue for the success of businesses. It is mentioned to provide customers with an experience beyond just offering a product or service and to create categories for this.

It is extremely important to capture customers emotionally and to appeal to their senses, as well as impressing them with the functional features of the products. Experiences supported by the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste are the elements that are used to influence customers. Memorable scents, delicious tastes, impressive visuals or

physical environments, music, sounds and so on, they are all used to attract customers as part of the holistic customer experience. As a result, experiential marketing activities are recommended for businesses that want to create positive brand image and brand value in addition to creating positive feelings in customers.

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