

VOL 7
FALL/WINTER
2023

Design Behaviors

INTERNATIONAL DESIGN RESEARCH JOURNAL

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The Influence of Muji Sensory Brand Experience on Consumer Brand Loyalty in Beijing

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, brand experience has gained prominence in consumer research, with a focus on evoking sensory stimuli to differentiate brands. Brands use the five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) to create a cohesive sensory brand experience, aiming for a multi-dimensional consumer experience.

This paper examines the importance of senses in consumer impressions using MUJI as a case study. It investigates how sensory elements influence shopping experiences through literature review, questionnaires, and empirical analysis.

The study found that MUJI excels in visual, olfactory, and tactile senses but has limited impact on taste and auditory senses. Visual, olfactory, and tactile aspects strongly influence brand identification and consumer attraction, while aromatherapy in MUJI malls enhances the brand experience.

On the other hand, taste and auditory aspects have limited influence on brand identity. Consumers pay less attention to these senses, suggesting they lack distinct qualities.

This study underscores the significant role of sensory branding in building brand identity and awareness. When developing a sensory brand, it's crucial to balance the five senses while maintaining unique qualities, consistency, and consumer relevance.

KEYWORDS

Brand experience, Sensory branding, Five senses, Consumer

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The objective of this research is to delve into the profound influence of sensory brand experiences on consumers, thereby enhancing our comprehension of sensory branding in general. Through the examination of the Muji brand as a case study, we can explore the intricate dynamics that determine the impression consumers form in their minds when they engage with brands across various sensory channels. This study aims to shed light on the relative significance of the five senses in the sensory brand design of Indianapolis. Lastly, it offers valuable recommendations for similar brands to employ more targeted sensory branding strategies in their endeavors.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In a world teeming with diverse brands, numerous companies strive to captivate the attention of consumers, and it has become increasingly imperative to establish a brand experience that evokes emotions, perceptions, and cognitive responses associated with the brand (Brakus, 2009, p. 52). Brand experience is defined as the level of direct and indirect interaction between consumers' subjective internal responses, such as sensations, feelings, and perceptions, and their behavioral responses (Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Brakus et al., 2009). When individuals engage in brand seeking, purchasing, and consumption, they are exposed to a plethora of stimuli associated with these brands. Among the various brand stimuli, sensory stimuli hold utmost importance. Consequently, the five senses (i.e., sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) possess immense potential (Hulten, 2011). Sensory brand experiences are directly evoked by stimuli associated with sensory branding, primarily visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory stimuli (Zarotonero and Schmidt, 2010; Nysveen et al., 2013).

Numerous research studies have demonstrated that the five sensory cues - sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch - have the capacity to influence our preferences, memories, and choices, thereby playing a pivotal role in the establishment of emotional connections and the purchasing process (Krishna, 2010). Sensory branding aids companies in distinguishing their branded products from their competitors. The ultimate objective of sensory branding is to engage all five senses simultaneously to create a multi-dimensional experience for consumers.

1.3 METHOD

This is a quantitative case study. A questionnaire survey and empirical analysis were used to collect data to investigate the impact of “MUJI” on consumers’ sensory experience. SPSS (V23.0) software was used to analyze the data.

1.4 BRAND LOYALTY

Brand loyalty represents a strong and unwavering commitment from consumers to consistently patronize a preferred brand in the near future, resulting in repetitive purchases of that brand despite situational temptations and promotional efforts aimed at enticing alternative behavior (Oliver, cited in 1999). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) have proposed that the concept of brand loyalty should encompass both purchase loyalty, which entails consumers’ inclination to repeatedly purchase a brand, and attitude loyalty, which signifies the degree of commitment exhibited by consumers towards the brand.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF SENSORY BRANDING

The human senses are considered to be pivotal factors in consumer behavior, as they serve as potent cues that profoundly influence our emotions, perceptions, and behaviors. According to Lindstrom (2005), brands that successfully engage multiple senses are more deserving of success compared to brands that solely focus on one or two senses. Lindstrom is widely attributed with coining the term “sensory branding”. Today, leading companies are prioritizing consumer sensory stimulation to build robust brands. They are transitioning from traditional branding (2D branding) to sensory branding (5D branding), which encompasses the integration of all human senses in order to respond to the multidimensional desires of consumers (Lindström, 2005). Sensory branding is based on the interplay of the five human senses - sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch - during the purchase process, aiming to forge an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand (Lindström, 2005).

2.2 SENSORY STIMULATION OF CONSUMERS BY BRANDSSAMPLE

Human sensory research has consistently demonstrated the influential role played by sensory cues such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch in shaping our preferences, memories, and decision-making processes (Krishna, 2010). Moreover, sensory cues create an emotional bond between brands and consumers, fostering a lasting impact (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmidt,

2003). After experiencing a brand, consumers develop specific brand perceptions as a result of sensory branding stimuli. Among these stimuli, sensory cues hold the utmost significance. As stated by Onderhill (1999), almost all unplanned purchases are prompted by touch, auditory, olfactory, or gustatory experiences encountered within the confines of the retail store.

Within the realm of brand management, incorporating sensory elements into branding strategies holds immense potential for crafting powerful and distinctive impressions within the minds of consumers (Hulten, 2011). Sensory branding experiences are directly triggered by stimuli associated with sensory branding (2010; Nysveen et al., 2013). Dewey (1963) contended that sensory branding stimuli exhibiting uniqueness can effectively distinguish one brand from the multitude of competitors. Furthermore, the brand stimulus should align with the intended purpose of consumption by the consumer.

2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SENSES IN BRANDING

2.3.1 SIGHT

Sight is the most influential of the human senses (Lindstrom, 2005). sight plays a crucial role in the perception of a brand. Visual stimuli can enhance brand perception and perceived quality. The visual factors that influence a brand include logo, design, and color. The brand mark itself has the power to create brand perception, brand association, and consumer preference, thereby influencing the brand image. Secondly, color plays a pivotal role in reinforcing and conveying the desired image of a brand (Gobe, 2001).

2.3.2 SOUND

Sound holds equal importance in branding. Sound can trigger desired responses from consumers when they establish an emotional connection to a brand (Lindstrom, 2005). Additionally, sound influences consumers' brand choices. A distinct sound element aids in differentiating a brand from its competitors, as a brand's unique sound enhances its differentiation from the competition (Lindstrom, 2005).

2.3.3 TOUCH

In addition to sight and sound, touch is the most crucial sense for identifying objects (Wolfe, 2006). Peck and Shu (2009) found that touching an object increases the perceived sense of possession. They stated, "We found that

simply touching an object enhanced the non-owner's perceived sense of ownership, thus increasing the valuation of the object." For goods, the touch element involves more engagement than any other sense. Through touch, consumers can identify the product and recognize the brand. Brands enhance the customer's brand experience by leveraging this one sensory information (Gobe, 2001). When consumers touch the merchandise, they can tangibly experience its unique nature or consistency.

2.3.4 SMELL

The sense of smell is an essential part of our overall experience. Seventy-five percent of our emotions are generated by the odors we encounter.

2.3.5 TASTE

Taste is closely associated with happy, positive memories, which is one reason why the taste element should not be overlooked (Gobe 2001). Taste elements establish strong emotional connections for consumers. Adding a taste element to a brand can increase the perceived value and benefits of the brand in consumers' minds (Gobe 2001).

3.ANALYSIS OF SENSORY ELEMENTS OF MUJI

3.1 SIGHT

Color, as a prominent visual communication medium, profoundly drives the transformation of consumers' conscious perception of their lives. The pared-down and refined color palette employed by MUJI fulfills individuals' psychological yearnings for serenity and tranquility. Simple hues evince a novel sentiment of lightness and refinement within individuals. The utilization of mild colors, low tones, and meager contrast engenders an atmosphere of romance, serenity, and gentility among consumers. The simplistic logo design fortifies the consumers' brand memory point, thus ensuring its prolonged retention.

3.2 SOUND

MUJI's motto encapsulates the essence of "a simple, pleasurable and rewarding life". In order to establish such an atmosphere, MUJI has conducted extensive research across 16 countries and regions globally, seeking out musical performances by local musicians. This endeavor has culminated in the release of 24 CDs, comprising a total of over 300 original compositions. The underlying

ing objective is to provide customers with the opportunity to engage with local culture through music.

3.3 SMELL

The sense of smell plays a pivotal role in our overall perception. A remarkable 75% of our emotions are directly influenced by the scents we encounter (Lindstrom, 2005). Retail outlets consistently prioritize the placement of scented merchandise, such as fragrances, at the entrance of malls. This strategic placement allows consumers to experience the brand message firsthand, thereby enhancing their overall shopping experience.


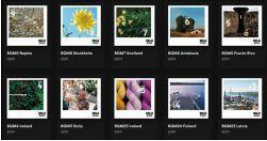



3.4 TOUCH

MUJI's products have consistently maintained the exceptional quality and intrinsic beauty of the original material, seamlessly showcased through minimalist and uniform packaging, which further accentuates their unique characteristics and aligns seamlessly with the brand image. Peck and Shu (2009) have conducted studies revealing that direct contact with an object enhances the perception of ownership and consequently elevates the perceived value of the object (p. 435). To ensure that each consumer can fully experience and appreciate the products, MUJI offers a core program titled "yourself F. MUJI" that empowers consumers to freely engage with and explore the vast range of offerings. The program effectively facilitates consumers' touch engagement with the products, ultimately fulfilling the goal of personal experience.

3.5 TASTE

Taste holds a profound association with joyful and positive memories, highlighting the significance of this element when it comes to crafting effective marketing strategies (Gobe, 2001). Taste marketing, in particular, is highly applicable to the restaurant or food category, where businesses continually innovate their products, experimenting with various flavors and sensations to leave a lasting impact on consumers and trigger memorable brand impressions. One such example can be observed at MUJI's coffee shop, which exclusively incorporates traditional ingredients sourced from local suppliers into its menus, ensuring an authentic culinary experience for consumers. Through the utilization of locally sourced foods, MUJI effectively stimulates consumers' taste buds, enhancing the perceived value and benefits of the brand in their minds.

Table 1 The sensory elements of MUJI

Sensory	Element	Sensory expressions
Sight		LOGO, Signage, Design style
Sound		Background music, Album
Smell		Aromatherapy
Touch		Trial experience, Product material
Taste		Coffee shop, Tasting, Food

4.ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

This comprehensive survey presents the empirical findings derived from data collected through comprehensive questionnaires and meticulous experi-

ments. The empirical research analysis was conducted utilizing the renowned statistical software package SPSS (V23.0). The specific research methodologies employed include user portrait analysis and rigorous frequency analysis, aiming to provide a compelling link between the data and the study.

4.1 USER PROFILE ANALYSIS

A survey interview was conducted with 203 consumers using a questionnaire. Participants were first asked to select a relatively strong sensory aspect of the Muji brand, and secondly, to select the impression these senses gave them. Then, their sensory experience was described.

Table 2 User Profile Analysis

Users		Number	%
Gender	Male	104	51.23
	Female	99	48.76
Age	Under 18	20	9.85
	18-25	42	20.69
	26-30	85	41.87
	Over 30	56	27.58

4.2 FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

First and foremost, in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the unique sensory brand stimuli of the Muji brand and their consistency with the sensory brand stimuli, a comprehensive questionnaire was developed, specifically focusing on the sensory elements that consumers perceive as being closely associated with Muji's brand perception and products.

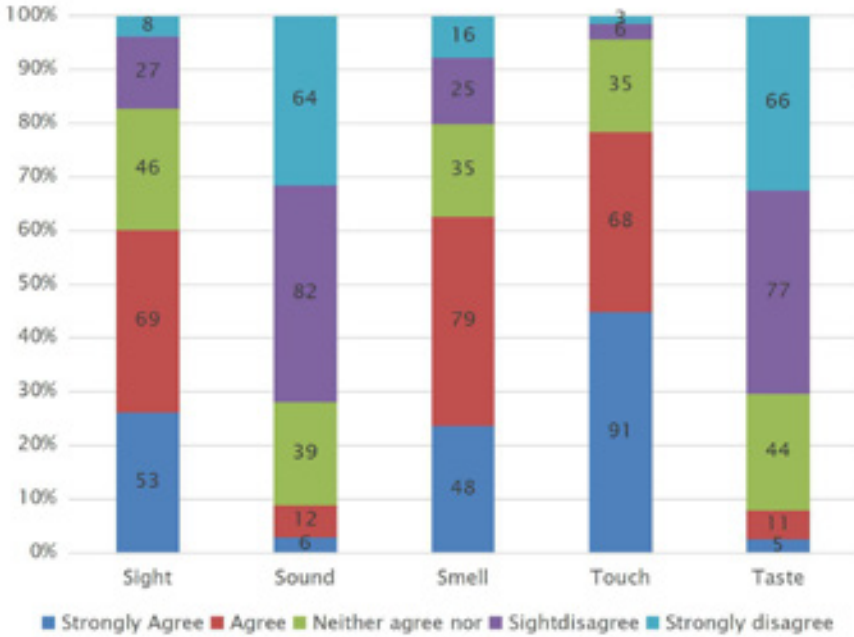


Figure 1 The relevance of sensory elements of MUJI to its brand image

The bar chart depicted in Figure 1 presents the findings of a survey investigating the perception of respondents regarding the relevance of MUJI’s sensory elements to its brand image and products, with specific emphasis on the five senses. As per the survey results, it can be observed that approximately 60% of the respondents deem that MUJI’s product packaging and display effectively resonate with its established brand image through visual elements. Similarly, it can be inferred that approximately 62% of the respondents perceive that the fragrances utilized by MUJI align harmoniously with its brand image and products. Furthermore, it can be surmised that a substantial 78% of the majority of respondents believe that the texture of MUJI’s products effectively aligns with its brand image. This highlights the commendable performance of MUJI’s sensory branding in terms of sight, smell, and touch. Conversely, it can be observed that approximately 72% of the respondents hold a contrasting viewpoint with respect to the auditory elements of MUJI, opining that they do not align seamlessly with its brand image. Additionally, approximately 70% of the respondents also express dissatisfaction with the taste aspect of MUJI, asserting that it deviates from its established brand image. This serves as an evidence

that the auditory and gustatory aspects of MUJI's sensory branding have little impact on its overall brand image.

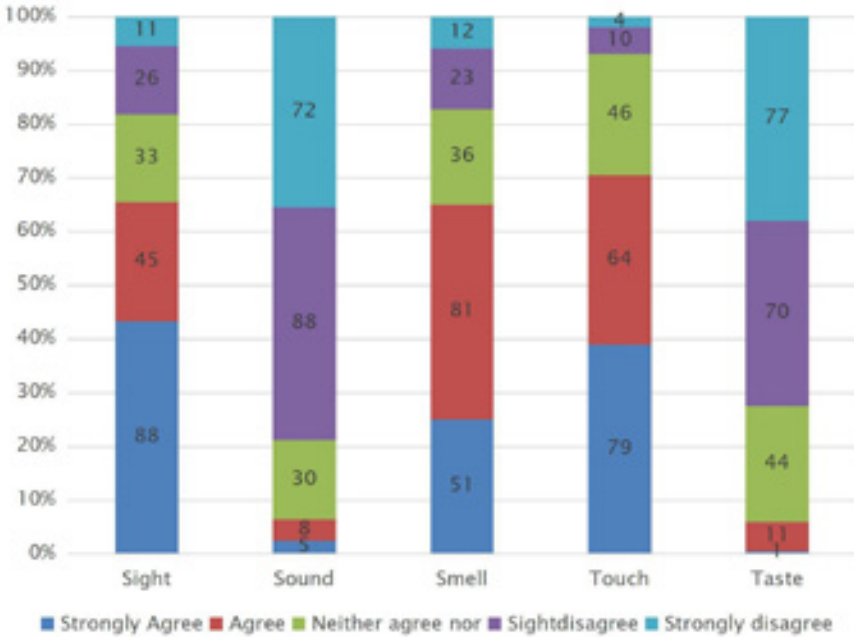


Figure 2 The impact of sensory stimulation of MUJI on consumers

The bar chart depicted in Figure 2 presents the findings of a survey conducted to ascertain the extent to which respondents are influenced by the sensory elements of Indigos. According to the survey results, approximately 66% of respondents perceive MUJI as a distinctive or readily recognizable brand. Furthermore, approximately 65% of respondents expressed a favorable response to the in-store fragrance scent emitted by MUJI. Similarly, about 70% of respondents reported a positive perception of the touch feel of MUJI's products. This implies that Indigo products possess visual, olfactory, and touch attributes that evoke stimulating responses in consumers. Additionally, approximately 79% of respondents opined that MUJI's advertising jingles are not particularly memorable. Furthermore, approximately 72% of respondents have yet to visit an Indigo offline coffee shop. This evidence suggests that Indigo offers relatively limited auditory and gustatory sensory stimulation to consumers.

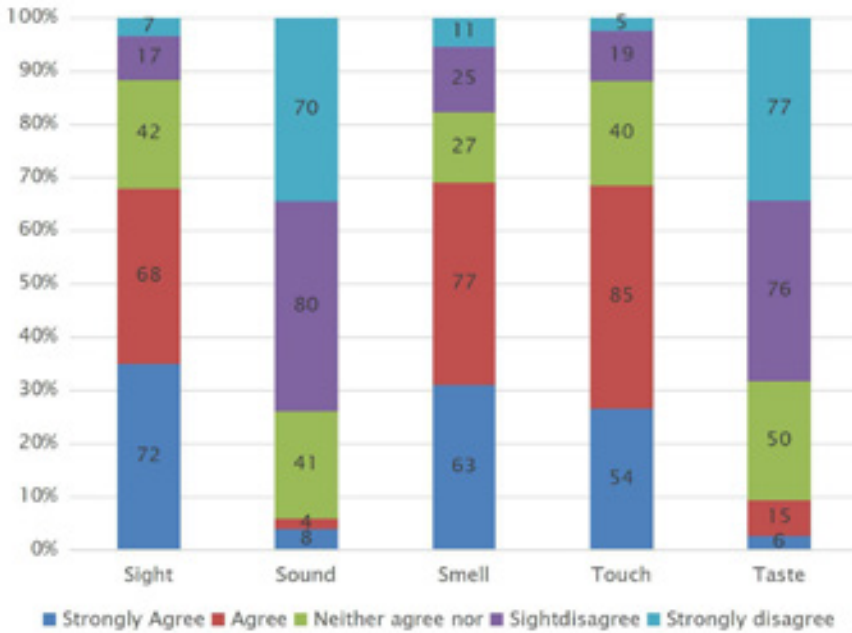


Figure 3 The impact of MUJI's five senses marketing on consumers' shopping experience

The bar chart depicted in Figure 3 displays the findings of a survey conducted on the impact of MUJI's Five Senses marketing strategy on consumers' shopping experience. According to the survey findings, it can be observed that approximately 68% of respondents acknowledge the substantial influence exerted by MUJI's visual imagery and design on their purchase decisions. Similarly, approximately 69% of respondents attribute MUJI's fragrance as having a profound impact on their purchase decision-making process. Furthermore, it can be observed that approximately 68% of respondents accord MUJI's products with a strong influence in terms of materiality and touch sensation.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that approximately 73% of respondents express the sentiment that Muji's music selection and sound ambience have a minimal impact on the shopping experience. Moreover, approximately 65% of respondents express the belief that the flavor elements incorporated in Muji have a marginal impact on the shopping experience.

This implies that consumers are more inclined to be influenced by Muji's visual, olfactory, and touch aspects of sensory marketing, while auditory and

taste aspects have comparatively lesser impact on their purchase decisions.

Finally, based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the visual, olfactory, and touch aspects of MUJI's sensory marketing strategy play a pivotal role in cultivating consumers' brand identity. Conversely, auditory and taste aspects have relatively little influence on the establishment of MUJI's brand identity.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of sensory aspects of the Muji brand from a consumer perspective, with a specific focus on establishing brand identity and building brand awareness. The findings of this study indicate that the Muji brand excels in terms of visual, olfactory, and touch perception, while the taste and auditory senses appear to be relatively less impressive. In terms of building brand identity, the visual, olfactory, and touch aspects of the MUJI brand have a strong influence on consumers. This suggests that consumers can easily recognize the MUJI brand based on factors such as its logo, packaging, and overall visual appearance. By strategically integrating aromatherapy into MUJI malls, the brand effectively captures and maintains the attention of its customers, reinforcing the consumer brand experience and enhancing brand memory through the process of sensory engagement and product exposure. On the other hand, the taste and auditory aspects of the MUJI brand have a relatively minimal impact on establishing consumers' brand identity. The survey results highlight the fact that consumers tend to exhibit limited attention towards the auditory and taste aspects of the MUJI brand. This suggests that these stimulation aspects of the MUJI brand are less distinct and unique. Therefore, it is evident that the impact of sensory brand experience on the construction of brand identity and brand awareness among consumers is substantial. When developing a sensory brand, careful consideration should be given to balancing the five senses while considering the uniqueness of the sensory brand and maintaining consistency in sensory stimulation and consumer purpose.

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