

Sensory and Aroma Marketing

The sense of touch


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INTRODUCTION

Touch is a perception resulting from activation of neural receptors, generally in the skin including hair follicles, but also in the tongue, throat, and mucosa. A variety of pressure receptors respond to variations in pressure (firm, brushing, sustained, etc.).

Touch is also the first sense to develop in the womb and the last sense one loses with age. Even before we are born, we start responding to touch and also start touching ourselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Touch is a fundamental form of non-visual perception, one that plays a crucial role in nearly all of our sensory experiences. It is, unlike many of the other senses, more plausibly taken to be inherently multisensory, given the diversity of its constituent systems and forms of experience .

Without touch, it would be difficult to be alive in our world. Many of our feelings would not exist: feet hitting the floor when walking, no sensation when something sharp cut us, etc. Furthermore, any movement requires a fine awareness of our body. This is possible through proprioception, an internal form of tactile sense.

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INTRODUCTION

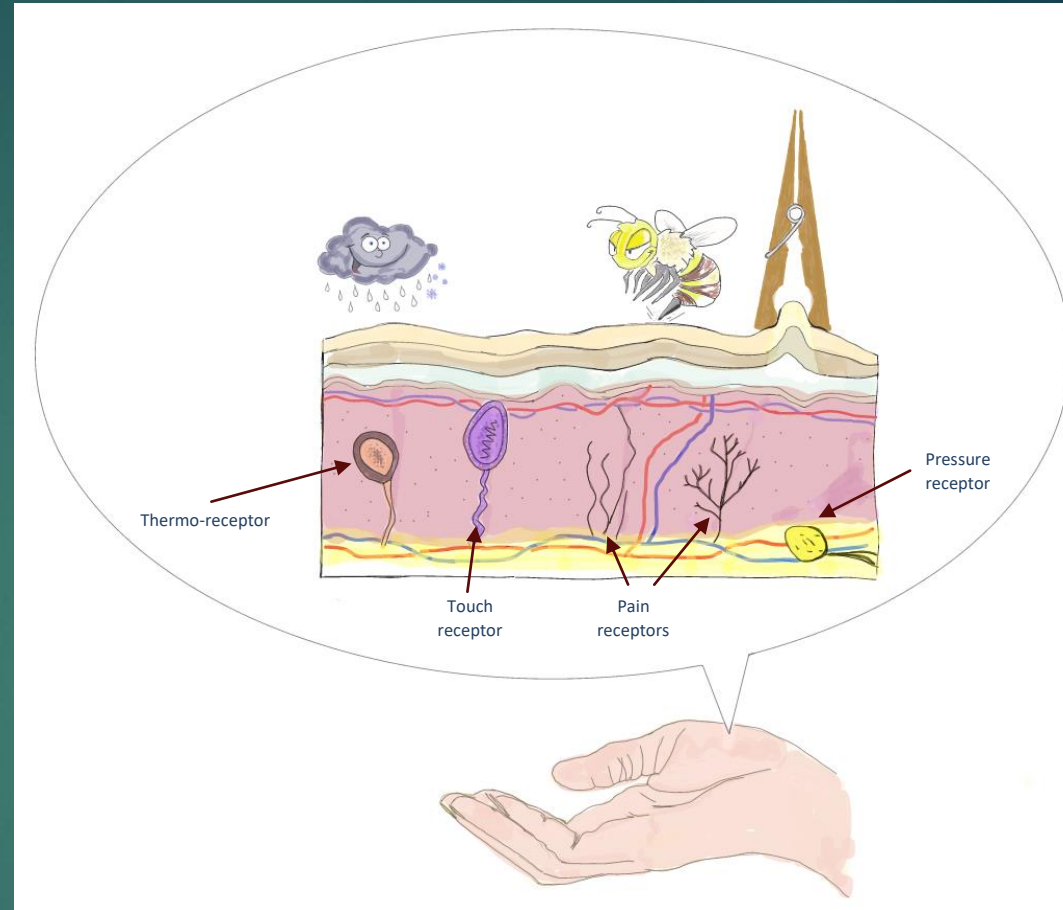


Figure 1. Our skin is packed with many sense receptors. Each type responds to different sensations.

DOES TOUCH MATTER?

The sense of touch is one of the central forms of perceptual experience. A hug from a loved one can lower our blood pressure and make us feel valued and important. A firm handshake with a friend can create a connection. How we perceive the hug or handshake, along with how our touch receptors receive the pressure, is rooted in our brain.

Positive touch from others is necessary for an individual's healthy development. Often ignored when we talk about our fundamental senses, the sensation of touch is a fundamental part of our daily experience, influencing what we buy, who we love and even how we heal. We use this sense to gather information about our surroundings and as a means of establishing trust and social bonds with other people.

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DOES TOUCH MATTER?

Touch is, in several ways, seemingly different from the other senses. For one thing, touch does not seem to have a single sense organ. The skin, of course, is the most plausible candidate sensory organ, but the skin itself is not sensory. Instead, the skin contains many different sensory systems. Many of them, like those that code for pain and itch, do not seem to be tied directly to the sense of touch.

For instance, we do not, at least in most contexts, seem to treat cutaneous pains as part of the touch sense. The same seems true for itch, tingles, and twinges, though perhaps these seem closely tied with touch.

At any rate, they are not paradigm instances of tactual perception, and if they seem more closely tied to touch, then, this is something in need of explanation

DOES TOUCH MATTER?

Even if we focus only on those systems usually associated with touch, we find a number of distinct sensory channels. Some of these have proven incredibly difficult to isolate and study. Indeed, we are just now starting to understand the role and function of the most basic receptor types involved in touch.

Another methodological challenge concerns the deep connection between touch and exploratory activities. For touch, many of the historically important empirical investigations have focused on cutaneous touch, especially on mapping the two-point threshold over the extent of the body. This threshold is the minimal distance at which a subject can discriminate two distinct stimuli .

Its study requires subjects to remain completely still, while very small probes (like horse hair) are used to generate stimuli. It is much more difficult to measure touch in ecologically salient contexts where there are unconstrained movements using the whole body.

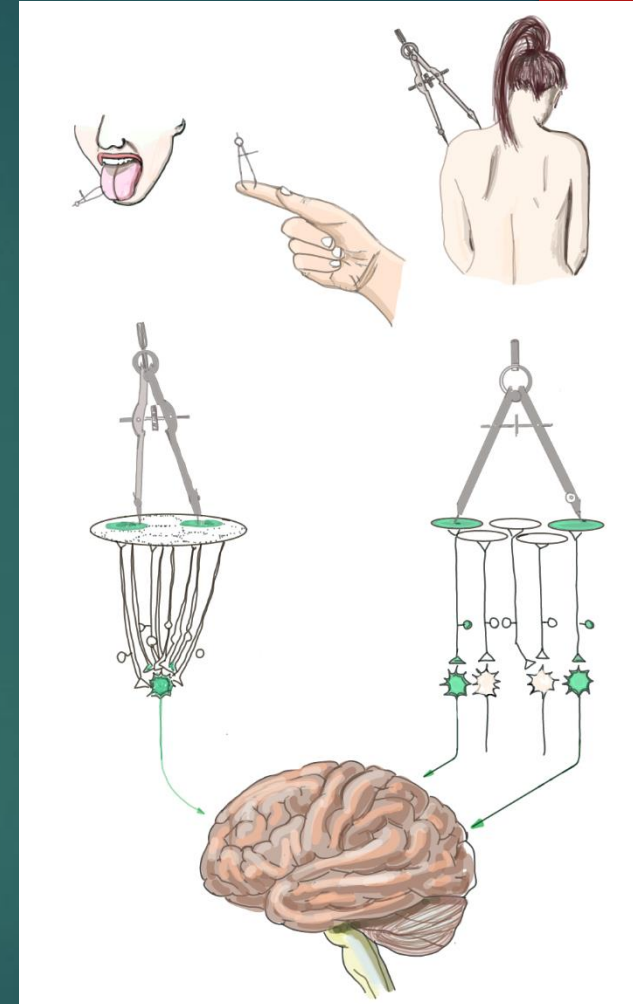
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DOES TOUCH MATTER?

Figure 2. Two-point discrimination test: many primary sensory neurons converging onto a single secondary neuron creates a very large receptive field. When fewer neurons converge, secondary receptive field are much smaller and the stimuli are perceived as distinct stimuli.



REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BUSINESS

The sense of **sight** is considered the most important sensory channel for perceiving a commercial environment, and research confirms the impact of visual cues on consumer behaviour in terms of consumption, purchase quantity or sale. The sense of **smell** is another important sensory channel, and a number of studies have shown that olfactory cues have a significant impact on consumer behaviour in retail settings.

However, vision and smell alone are not always enough for consumers to evaluate products or to make purchase decisions, and omit other important information, such as on the form, robustness, texture or weight of a product, that the sense of **touch** (or tactile sense) might communicate. Visual and tactile senses can be identified as the most active of our five senses.

In retail management practice, it is obvious that the tactile sense, as a sensory channel, is significant in purchase and consumption processes for goods such as cars, computers, clothing, home equipment, mobile phones, shoes or for restaurant services.

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BUSINESS

There are significant differences between shoppers' touching behaviour in a manipulated point-of-purchase compared to a conventional one. These findings show that visual and olfactory sensory cues have a positive impact on shoppers' touching behaviour, purchase intentions and total sale. Sensory cues exert a positive impact on consumers' desire to touch. Sensory cues frame consumers' affective responses and decision making through involving the sense of touch .

Merely touching an object results in an increase in perceived ownership of that object. For non-owners, or buyers, perceived ownership can be increased with either mere touch or with imagery encouraging to touch. The perceived ownership can also be increased through touch for legal owners, or sellers of an object. Valuation of an object is jointly influenced by both the perceived ownership and by the valence of the touch experience.

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Let's have a look, in the following sections, into two questions, and an opportunity:

- How does touch affect retail and selling?
- How could touch affect the value of products? and
- Touch opportunities for branding.

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Touch and retailing

In retailing, store atmospherics emphasise the sensory qualities of a service scape, often designed and formulated to attract customer interest and response, as well as to generate a positive retail experience in a B2C (business to consumer) or B2B (business to business) context.

As with sensory stimuli, displays, colours, employees, lighting, music, or scents, atmospheric cues are intended to create positive emotions and increase sales through appealing human senses.

Moreover, atmospheric cues are significant for a hedonic retail experience in terms of attractive stimuli and facilitating stimuli.

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The term “atmospherics” is a way of describing a commercial environment and its physical factors, distinguishing among the aural, olfactory, tactile, and visual dimensions of a store. In the definition of an atmosphere, the human senses play a major role, and the store atmosphere is described in sensory terms.

In this regard, sight, sound, scent, and touch are the major sensory channels. A general assumption from research is that ambient stimuli with background elements should appeal to the five human senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste), thus being appealing to and attracting customers. Various studies have also demonstrated the impact of retail atmospherics on consumer behaviour.

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Figure 3. Consumer choosing vegetables in a local market based her choice on tactile sensations.

Haptic information, or information attained through touch by the hands, is important for the evaluation of products that vary in terms of material properties related to texture, hardness, temperature, and weight



REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BUSINESS

The sense of touch excels at obtaining texture, hardness, temperature, and weight information.

In-store temperature has prompted relatively little research. In one study, though, researchers measured the temperature in a cross-section of Manhattan stores. Temperatures varied as a function of the price of the merchandise: the higher the price point, the colder the air conditioning in the store.

This might be a sensible strategy given recent research showing that colder ambient temperatures tend to lead to more emotional decision making and greater preference for hedonic options while warmer stores lead to more cognitive decision making and greater preference for utilitarian options. Moreover, this research finds that customers use these models of decision making to achieve an optimal temperature, or what we might think of as an optimal level of thermal stimulation.

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Increase in the value of products by touching

Research on retailing reveals a paucity of knowledge on how visual and olfactory sensory cues impact on consumer touch behaviour. Touch behaviour has been overlooked in research, despite the fact that consumers use this sense to obtain information about products and become frustrated if they are unable to touch them.

Moreover, research has shown that touch has a positive impact on consumer attitudes, behaviour and purchase intentions. However, the knowledge of its role in consumer decision making remains limited; thus, there is a real need to investigate touch behaviour in greater depth.

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Haptic information has been demonstrated to impact persuasion in several ways. The ability to touch a product has been shown to increase positive attitudes and purchase intentions toward products that possess instrumental touch attributes such as the material properties of texture and softness.

Touch does affect perceived ownership, and the object valuation literature, by introducing new measures that operate as mediators. While ownership is considered to be critical to the endowment effect, it has generally been manipulated in prior endowment studies through legal ownership with sellers, who own the object, and buyers, who do not.

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BUSINESS

Touch Opportunities for Branding

Touch is likely to offer numerous opportunities for innovative branding and marketing in the years to come. Some companies are even going further and considering the practicalities associated with trademarking the signature feel of their brands to help distinguish them from the competition at a more emotional and/or affective level.

Most firms tried to create an identity image around a product in terms of tactile marketing. Companies are trying to give their product and packages a surface feel that is multisensory congruent with the overall brand image.

For example, a few years ago, the manufacturers of “Velvet” toilet tissue packaged their product in a protective plastic wrapping that had been specially treated to give it something of the feel of real velvet; thus, ensuring that the tactile feel of the product packaging was semantically congruent with the overall brand.

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REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE BUSINESS

The touch experience is of a lot of importance in purchasing and consuming services. This fact is often recognized; for example, through the soft chairs for comfort at a travel company and through the hard chairs and tables at a fast food restaurant.

The hardness of the floor has been shown to be determinant on product valuation and retail brand perception.

Customer experiences play an important role in retail brand management. This research investigated how bodily experiences in retail environments influence customers' perceptions of retail brand personalities.

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CONCLUSIONS

The sense of touch is one of the central forms of perceptual experience. Positive touch from others is necessary for an individual's healthy development.

Often ignored when we talk about our fundamental senses, the sensation of touch is a fundamental part of our daily experience, influencing what we buy, who we love and even how we heal.

We use this sense to gather information about our surroundings and as a means of establishing trust and social bonds with other people.

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CONCLUSIONS

Vision and smell alone are not always enough for consumers to evaluate products or to make purchase decisions, and omit other important information, such as on the form, robustness, texture or weight of a product that the sense of touch (or tactile sense) might convey.

Visual and tactile senses can be identified as the most active of our five senses.

In retail management practice, it is obvious that the tactile sense, as a sensory channel, is significant in purchase and consumption processes for goods such as cars, computers, clothing, home equipment, mobile phones, shoes or for restaurant services.

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CONCLUSIONS

Touching an object influences a consumer's perception of ownership and the amount they are willing to pay for an object.

Touch means acquiring knowledge about the product and its characteristics, such as form, hardness, texture or weight.

It has potentially significant implications for store atmospherics, in the form of in-store and point-of-purchase displays.

Displays should encourage touch and result in an interaction with products that customers would otherwise have ignored. This could increase impulse and unplanned purchases.

CONCLUSIONS

Touch behaviour has been overlooked in research, despite the fact that consumers use this sense to obtain information about products and become frustrated if they are unable to touch them.

Touch is likely to offer numerous opportunities for innovative branding and marketing in the years to come.

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