

The growing significance of multisensory perception

In the current fast-paced and constantly evolving commercial landscape, an ecosystem has emerged requiring businesses to go beyond key points of difference to remain competitive. To truly thrive in this modern environment, brands are no longer relying solely on basic consumer behaviour studies and instead exploring the far-reaching applications of multisensory perception.

Multisensory perception examines how the brain integrates the information from different sensory modalities into one coherent perception. It explores multisensory integration from various aspects including how different sensory modalities interact; what brain mechanisms are involved, and what computational principles govern the interactions.

“Today we’re learning how the brain processes sensory information concurrently and how this

multisensory processing and interactions among the senses determines how we experience and interact with the world around us. Until recently it wasn't known just how much collaboration takes place within the brain and how these constant interactions impact our conscious and subconscious perceptions. We can see now just how vast the interactions of the modalities are and how they are so much more than just the sum of their parts.” – Ladan Shams, Ph.D. Professor at UCLA Department of Psychology

Here are three areas of business most influenced by multisensory perception.

1. Marketing

As human attention spans continue to shrink, multisensory perception marketing has become a revolutionary means to better captivate consumers. Where traditional methods of marketing strategies sought to engage with consumers across multiple platforms and touchpoints, multisensory marketing engages numerous senses concurrently and eliminates the potential for advertorial overload and brand fatigue.

Marketing often utilizes linguistic synaesthesia, a metaphorical process by which one sense modality is described or characterized in terms of another to generate multisensory responses from consumers. Toblerone's "Music to your mouth" or Skittles' "Taste the rainbow" are quintessential examples of linguistic synaesthesia at work.

2. Product design

Multisensory perception plays a key role in product design and relies primarily on an interplay of visual, acoustic and haptic modalities (although these can vary depending on the product category i.e. food/beauty products would

include further senses). The combination of these senses is paramount in constructing the consumer's overall assessment of perceived quality, level of innovation and product complexity. It is important that designers not only take into consideration the functionality of a product but the sensory response and feedback it will establish.

3. Experiential activations

Where previously there have been stand-alone pop-up shops and then virtual reality activations, multisensory perception has given rise to what is known as mixed reality. Mixed reality is the merging of real and virtual worlds to produce physical and digital environments co-existing and interacting in real-time. MR activations are extremely effective as they stimulate multiple senses creating lasting engagement and strengthened brand recognition, recall and emotional attachment.

Implications for business leaders

In summary, today's consumers are as complex as the world around them. They are not merely living in a digital existence, but rather a multi-dimensional one. Business leaders must appeal to all the senses and understand how the consumer brain is wired to win their short attention spans — and ultimately their wallets.

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