

# The Impact of Sensory Branding on Consumer Behavior

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims at generating an insight on the study of unconventional advertising, meaning those techniques that are different from classic advertising by attractive images and persuasive messages and by 'exploring' the consumers' minds, experiences and senses. The theoretical basis will generate a review of the main concepts revolving around the phenomenon known as "sensory branding". The empirical data will be obtained by conducting a series of interviews with specialists in advertising and focus-groups that will target students. Both theoretical and empirical sections will answer to three research questions that will subsequently reveal the importance of sensory experiences in nowadays advertising.*

**Keywords:** *brand, sensory branding, senses, consumer behavior, perception.*

## Introduction

The field of advertising faces a constant challenge: to always bring something new and effective in order to keep the audience interested and the clients satisfied. In order to do so, advertisers must integrate new, interesting elements into the campaigns' strategies and pay attention to what converts an individual into a loyal consumer, engaged in a close relationship with brands. Thus, the current paper attempts to bring relevant arguments and collect data with regard to the importance of an unconventional advertising branch – sensory branding – on the way consumers behave when involved in the buying process.

Firstly, the need of such a study relies in the social-psychological and economic trends of the nowadays society. The fact that we live in a “consumer society”, like the French theorist Jean Baudrillard used to say, is a general truth and it is an inherent characteristic of the post-modern human being. Consumerism is more than a society phenomenon; it is an insertion in the collective mind of society. More than the people’s dependence on material goods and possessions, the world faces a more specific challenge, which is known as “hypermodernism”. Hypermodernism implies consumption not only for achieving a certain social status, but also for one’s own desires and benefit. Consequently, advertisers and marketers must focus all their attention on the consumer experience during the buying process, which implies the use of senses, emotions and unique experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, nowadays consumers have become more intelligent and more sophisticated, as far as consumption is concerned. The individual is constantly ‘attacked’ by thousands of commercials, which generated the phenomenon of oversaturation and made him less perceptive of the advertising images and messages around him. According to a study, an individual sees over one million ads throughout his life (which would actually mean around eight hours of ads per day, for six years)<sup>2</sup>. Once the consumer loses his interest, advertisers must search for new ways of attracting their target. In addition to this, the nowadays consumer takes certain product attributes – such as price or quality – for granted, which reflects the need for different brand associations, especially more emotional ones, in order to create a strong relationship between the individual and the brand, one that is based on trust and loyalty.

The third reason for the necessity of a research on sensory advertising refers to the evolution of new technologies, such as the Internet, in general, and e-commerce, on a more particular basis, which allows the home delivering of products and services. This way, the customer does not have to get actively involved in the buying process (he just needs to sit comfortably on his couch and click the confirmation button on his online shopping cart). As a consequence, stores and offline companies are forced to make more effort than they previously used to by simply exhibiting and promoting their products through classic ways. They need to make use of unusual methods in order to make the consumer give up the comfort of his own home and come to the store to buy what he needs.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Terhi Suhonen, Jenny Tengvall, “Branding in the air; a study about the impact of sensory marketing”, Bachelor Thesis within Business Administration at Jönköping International Business School, Jönköping, 2009, pp. 7-8.

2 Martin Lindstrom, “Broad sensory branding” in *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14/2, 2005, available at [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com), retrieved on 19.11.2012.

3 Terhi Suhonen, Jenny Tengvall, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Taking into consideration all the above arguments, it is my opinion that the use of human senses in advertising can be the solution in creating stronger images for brands in the consumer's mind.

Thus, it is my intention of find answers to the following research questions:

1. Which is the most important human sense in what regards a consumer's perception on a product?
2. What combinations of senses have a strong impact on the decision of buying?
3. Which elements keep the brand on one consumer's mind? Can the brand be recognized only through the association with one of its identity elements?

These questions will lead to the validity or the invalidity of the presumption according to which, at present, advertisers should not only resort to visual methods in the creation of brand identity and brand promotion; instead, they should consider all the sensory elements (olfactory, auditory, tactile or gustative) that could place the brand in the mind of consumers.

In order to bring arguments to the presumption and answer the three questions, the present paper will contain a comprehensive review of the most valuable studies on sensory branding, as well as the social-psychological impact that the human senses have on individuals.

As far as methodology is concerned, I intend to use two research methods. On one hand, I will conduct a series of interviews on specialists in advertising and communication. On the other hand, I will set up two focus-groups that will embody both discussions on subjects that are relevant to this research and a series of activities and experiments.

## **Literature review**

### *Defining concepts*

I will start this discussion by outlining the origins of the term "brand", which, according to Allen P. Adamson, derives from the old Norwegian word "brandr", meaning "to burn". Furthermore, Adamson claims that Vikings used to mark their animals by burning a certain pattern on them in order to identify them. Later on, during the Ancient times, in China, Greece and Rome, craftsmen used to mark their products in order to show who they belonged to, as well as to help people set various preferences regarding those products and the decision-making process. A few other centuries later, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, such marks and labels were used for legal protection.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Allen P. Adamson, *BrandSimple: How the Best Brands Keep it Simple and Succeed*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007 (1st Edition), p. 29.

Therefore, a “brand” can be defined as “a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors”.<sup>5</sup> In addition to this, any brand is truly complete when it achieves its purpose and becomes a successful brand, which actually means that it becomes that “identifiable product (consumer or industrial), service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant and unique added values, which match their needs closely”.<sup>6</sup> All things being considered, the brand can be perceived as an embodiment of values which the consumer integrates in his/her own system of values, thus perceiving the brand as a consumption benchmark.

If we look at the brand as if it were a “culture of a product” – due to the fact that, throughout its evolution, the product gathers certain meanings by the way it “circulates” within society<sup>7</sup> - we can define branding as the process through which the elements of such a culture reflect upon the social and personal cultures of the individual. We might even say that, in this way, the “culturalization” of the buying act, of consumption *per se*, takes place.

Wally Olins, one of the specialists in corporate identity and branding, provides a wider definition of branding. According to him, branding represents a “marketing, design, communication and human resources instrument”, “a coordinating resource because it gives more coherence to the organization’s activities”, a process that “makes the organization’s strategy more visible and clearer to all audiences” by, implicitly, influencing every component and every target group of the organization.<sup>8</sup>

As far as consumer behavior is concerned, such concept is defined as “the totality of consumers’ decisions with respect to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods, services, activities, experiences, people, and ideas by (human) decision-making units [over time]”.<sup>9</sup> Since the term “behavior” can be understood as “the totality of an individual’s objective manifestations through which his psyche life is externalized”<sup>10</sup>, we understand that the buying decision is actually a reaction of the human psyche to

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5 D. A. Aaker, *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*, New York, The Free Press, 1991, p. 7.

6 Pekka Tuominen, „Managing Brand Equity” in *LTA*, 1/99, p. 66.

7 Douglas B. Holt “Brands and Branding”, used as teaching resources at Harvard Business School, 11.03.2003, p. 2.

8 Wally Olins, *Manual de branding*, București, Vellant, 2009, p. 21.

9 Jacob Jacoby, “Consumer Psychology: An Octennium” in ed. Paul Mussen, Mark Rosenzweig, *Annual Review of Psychology*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Annual Reviews, 1976, pp. 331–358 *apud* Wayne D. Hoyer, Deborah J. MacInnis, *Consumer Behaviour*, Mason Ohio, Cengage Learning, 2009, p. 3.

10 According to the definition in “Marele Dicționar de Neologisme”, 2000.

advertising's elements, specifically to the ways in which a product is presented or associated with the individual's various experiences.

Perception means the *"the act of using only one's own sense organs to gain knowledge about, interact with, and experience the environment"*.<sup>11</sup> In the field of advertising, perception is an important factor in shaping the process of getting to know the brand. The way in which the consumer perceives a brand – its image, identity or its differentiating elements – leads, in fact, to the decision whether to buy the brand and whether to trust it.

An empirical definition of "human sense" is *"the capacity of humans and animals to perceive impressions from the outside world by using certain organs; the body function through which it receives and processes a specific category of external or internal stimuli"*.<sup>12</sup> When used in advertising, senses become the instruments that link the brand to the consumer. Senses can generate emotions, positive moods (or even negative ones, in some cases), as well as send a message behind the actual promoting text of a commercial. Due to the fact that such message appeals to the human mind, it is, in most cases, much stronger.

Sensory branding implies the establishment of an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand, by means of the five human senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch), in the context of the buying process.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon has been defined as *"an emerging business discipline that applies analytical techniques to amalgamate the use of sensory stimuli such as scent, sound and texture in order to develop strong brands that are more memorable for customers than conventional visual branding techniques alone"*<sup>14</sup>.

In the following pages, I will go deeper into the analysis of some of these concepts, in order to have a better understanding of how they intertwine, as well as of the relations and processes they generate.

### ***Sensory branding. Characteristics and implications***

The necessity of the consumer's sensory experience is one of the fundamental ideas at the basis of the concept of "Marketing 3.0". It has been defined as the process characterized by *"ongoing globalization, with harsh and increased competition*

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11 R. G. Boothe, *Perception of the visual environment* (2nd ed.), New York, Springer Verlag, 2002, p. 2 *apud* Suhonen, Tengvall, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

12 According to the definition in "Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române", 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1998.

13 Martin Lindstrom, *Brand Sense: Building Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight & Sound*, New York, Free Press, 2005 *apud* Suhonen, Tengvall, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

14 Peter Dixon, Randall Stone, Jana Zednickova, „Engaging Customers through Sensory Branding”, available at <http://www.lippincott.com/files/documents/news/SensoryBranding.pdf>, retrieved on 19.11.2012.

among brands in nearly all consumer markets around the world".<sup>15</sup> The existence of an increasing number of similar products on the market, as well as the tendency of oversaturation, makes it harder for companies to be different from the competition. In this context, Bernd Schmitt and Alex Simonson state that, in order to achieve success, companies must take into consideration "the aesthetic, emotional and sensory needs" of the consumers:

*"In this world of heavy communication flow through a large number of media vehicles, through interactive and sensory-laden multimedia, product attributes and benefits, brand names and brand associations are no longer sufficient to catch attention, to draw consumers. Businesses that engage consumers are those that afford them a memorable sensory experience that ties in with the positioning of the company, product, or service. For all these reasons, the branding phase is losing its vitality and is being replaced by the marketing of sensory experiences".<sup>16</sup>*

In order to engage a full marketing experience, Schmitt and Simonson group the consumers' experience according to five aspects: "sense, feel, thing, act, relate". By applying them to marketing campaigns, they strengthen the relationship between the individual and the product or service. Moreover, the authors identify three strategic purposes that the senses have in brands' promotion and selling. Thus, senses are perceived as "differentiators", "stimulators" and "value creators". These functions allow a better positioning and differentiation in relation to rival brands, by creating a strong brand identity that is based on experiences and interaction.<sup>17</sup>

The role of sensory experience in building and strengthening brands is clearly underlined by Hultén, Broweus and van Dijk, who claim that the difference between a normal experience and a sensory one is given by "a brand's ability to penetrate the inner core of customers". What is more, a sensory experience represents the deconstruction of a simple experience, while a company's marketing activities are absorbed through the five senses.<sup>18</sup>

The process of understanding human senses is strongly related to the Ancient times, when, for the first time, the great Greek philosopher Aristotle made public the traditional classification of the five senses we know today: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. A few centuries later, in the second half of the eighteenth century, German philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed the theory according to which the

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15 Bertil Hultén, Niklas Broweus, Marcus van Dijk, *Sensory Marketing*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 31.

16 Bernd Schmitt, Alex Simonson, *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity, and Image*, New York, Free Press, 1997, p. 18.

17 *Ibidem*, p. 64; Hultén, Broweus, van Dijk, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

18 Hultén, Broweus, van Dijk, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

individual's knowledge with regard to the outside world depends on the existence of perceptions.<sup>19</sup>

Senses have been used in advertising from the beginning. However, in those times, their utility was not considered to be an advertising strategy, like it is considered nowadays. When approaching more recent works and studies, we can notice that special attention was given to the way in which the use of senses is associated with an individual's mental activity, such as memory or the emotional process. Danish author Martin Lindstrom says that "*a total sensory experience would at least double, if not triple, the consumer's ability to memorize the brand*"<sup>20</sup>.

In advertising, smell is usually used in generating various moods and in evoking memories. According to some previous studies, it has been proven that our state of mind improves by 40% when we are exposed to a pleasant fragrance, especially if that fragrance takes us back to certain moments in which we were happy.<sup>21</sup>

Doctor Alan Hirsch made an experiment that is extremely relevant for the role the olfactory sense plays in the branding process. Two identical pairs of Nike sports shoes were placed in two identical rooms. The only difference was that one of the rooms contained a slight floral fragrance, while the other one had no additional smell. After a few volunteers have examined the two rooms they filled a questionnaire which revealed that 84% of the participants to the experiment preferred the shoes from the room with the floral scent. They even thought that the pair of sports shoes was more expensive, by ten dollars, than the one in the scentless room.<sup>22</sup>

The human being is able to distinguish over 10.000 scents, therefore we understand how important it is to explore this sense. What is more, the olfactory sense is "*the most direct sense*", due to the fact that there is no process of stimuli analysis conducted by the human brain, like in the case of the rest of the senses.<sup>23</sup>

Taste is strongly related to smell, which is also confirmed by studies that claim that "*we often eat with our nose - if food passes the smell test, it will most likely pass the taste test*"<sup>24</sup>. Although the sense of taste is not as versatile as the olfactory sense, from a psychological point of view, it plays a very important role in the food industry or in the catering business, for instance. Moreover, when used in connection with

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19 <http://www.scientificpsychic.com/workbook/chapter2.htm>, retrieved on 25.11.2012.

20 Martin Lindstrom, *Brand Sense: Building Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight & Sound*, New York, Free Press, 2005, p. 23.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 92.

22 Martin Lindstrom, *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy*, New York, Doubleday, 2008, p. 150.

23 Hultén, Broweus, van Dijk, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

24 Lindstrom, *Brand Sense ...*, pp. 95-96.

other senses, its value in reaching marketing objectives increases. In addition to this, specialists claim that the sense of taste is primarily a “social sense”. “We prefer to eat with others, and food facilitates social exchanges among people”.<sup>25</sup>

Let us take an example of a brand that counted on its tasting experience in advertising and was very successful. The American coffee chain Starbucks is globally known for the taste of its wide variety of coffee:

*“Starbucks aims to convey a taste experience and lifestyle that many individuals want to identify with. Not only the taste of coffee but the whole concept, with its focus on pleasure and well-being, contributes to the product and the image of Starbucks”.*<sup>26</sup>

When used in marketing and advertising, the tactile sense links the consumers with the brands at a more personal level. This can also be an extremely intense experience when other senses cannot be present. For instance, in the dark, “the touch sense augments the visual sense and is essential for the perception of deep contours and three-dimensional objects”.<sup>27</sup>

Scandinavian furniture chain Ikea is known for the tactile experience it provides for its customers. In the summer of 2007, in Norway, clients were allowed to spend their night inside the store, in order to experience the attributes of the store’s beds. People were able to choose whether to sleep in a classic bedroom, a family room or a marriage chamber. In the next morning, the Ikea employees served breakfast for free for their guests and clients were allowed to take “the bedclothes and a feeling of Ikea home”.<sup>28</sup>

The auditory sense is frequently used in promoting brands. According to specialists, “Sound is fundamental to building the mood and creating the atmosphere of whatever celluloid story’s being told. Sound is hard-wired into our emotional circuits. The muscles in the middle ear of a newborn infant reflexively tighten in preparation for the pitch of the human voice”.<sup>29</sup> Brands use sounds in order to “say what they are”, just like people, who define their identity by means of sounds, as they express arguments, opinions and emotions.

Music plays an essential role in advertising, by building a brand’s “packaging”. For example, a study that was made on wine consumers in a vineyard showed that, when French music was played in the room, 77% of the participants chose French wines, while German music made them chose German wines. What is more,

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25 Hultén, Broweus, van Dijk, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

26 *Ibidem*, p. 113.

27 *Ibidem*, p. 136.

28 *Ibidem*, p. 135.

29 Lindstrom, *Brand Sense ...*,p 72.

although all the consumers heard the music in both cases, only 2% stated that this was a factor in their buying decision.<sup>30</sup>

“Sonic branding” contributes to the creation of a connection between the brand and the consumer, by using sound as “call-to-action”. Companies like Intel, Nokia or McDonald’s use this technique in order to capture one’s attention and, subsequently, to associate a certain sound or song with the brand itself, without searching for more connections. It has also been demonstrated that music and sonic stimuli make us react much faster than visual stimuli do.<sup>31</sup>

As far as sight is concerned, one might claim that it is the most powerful and the most utilized sense among the five. What is more, two thirds of the human sensory cells are located in the eye. “*Through visualization as an experience trigger, can contribute to creating brand awareness and brand image*”. At the same time, a brand’s image is primarily reflected by its visual elements, such as logo, design, colors, light etc. Colors and shapes are very important, as they outline brands’ main attributes and the associations of a brand.<sup>32</sup>

However, over-exposure to TV or outdoor commercials has generated a decrease in commercials’ efficiency. People see so many visual representations of brands that they stop paying attention to them, after a while. For instance, in fashion industry, only 19% of the global number of consumers thinks that the way a clothing item looks is more important than the way they feel while wearing it. As a consequence, more than half of these consumers focus on “feel” instead of “appearance”.<sup>33</sup>

In the last decades, we could notice a tendency towards the study of consumer behavior, which is emerging as one of the main aspects in creating marketing or branding strategies. Wayne Hoyer and Deborah MacInnis define consumer behavior as “*the study of the processes involved when consumers acquire, consume and dispose of goods, services, activities, ideas in order to satisfy their needs and desires*”<sup>34</sup> Researcher Jacob Jacoby claims that “*consumer behavior reflects the totality of consumers’ decisions with respect to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of goods, services, activities, experiences, people, and ideas by (human) decision-making units [over time]*”<sup>35</sup>. Thus, by

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30 A.C. North, D.J. Hargreaves, J. McKendrick, “The influence of in-store music on wine Selections”, in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84, 1999, pp. 271-276 *apud* Suhonen, Tengvall, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

31 Daniel Jackson, *Sonic Branding. An Introduction*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 31-32.

32 Lindstrom, *Brand Sense ...*, pp. 82-86; Hultén, Broweus, van Dijk, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91.

33 Lindstrom, *Brand Sense ...*, p. 83.

34 Wayne D. Hoyer, Deborah J. MacInnis, *Consumer Behavior*, (4 ed), Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2007 *apud* Noel Hayden, *Basics Marketing 01: Consumer Behaviour*, Lausanne, Ava Publishing, 2009, p. 12.

35 Jacob Jacoby, “Consumer Psychology: An Octennium” in ed. Paul Mussen, Mark Rosenzweig, *Annual Review of Psychology*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Annual Reviews, 1976, pp. 331-358 *apud* Hoyer, MacInnis, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

analyzing a consumer's behavior we can understand which are the brands that he uses, why he makes certain choices and how does he integrate those brands in his lifestyle.

Author Noel Hayden identifies three categories of factors that impact consumer's behavior in its decision-making process: external influences, internal processes - which include the decision-making process - and post-decision processes. External influences come forward when the consumer acknowledges his needs and realizes what products and services can help him satisfy those needs. Consumer's culture is perceived as one of the most important external influences.<sup>36</sup>

Internal processes are represented by the "*psychological factors inherent in each individual*". Hayden refers to the importance of memory, which is seen as a "*store for knowledge*", and it helps the individual make connections between his need and the actions that lead to their fulfillment.<sup>37</sup>

Post-decision processes emerge once the decision has been made, having the role of evaluating the level of consumer satisfaction. Consumer behavior varies according to how happy or how unhappy he is with his decision.<sup>38</sup> For instance, he might become a loyal user or he might promote a negative image for the brand because his expectations have not been fulfilled etc.

Why do we buy - this is the questions that many researchers have been attempting to answer in order to understand the shopping habit or even the shopping addiction. According to Paco Underhill, shopping can represent "*therapy, reward, bribery, pastime, an excuse to get out of the house, a way to troll for potential loved ones, entertainment, a form of education or even worship, a way to kill time*"<sup>39</sup>. In the context of nowadays society, we can claim that the actual action of going shopping has become an ordinary part of our daily lives, an inherent activity of the way we live.

According to Underhill, two of the main reasons why we buy are the need for touching and the desire to discover things. On one hand, the fact that we live in a "*tactile-deprived society*" (due to the tendency of shopping online, without touching or feeling the products anymore) pushes us to go shopping, in order to regain the direct contact with the product. This could also be applied in the case of the other senses, since the strongest interaction takes place inside the store. On the other hand, the joy of discovering a certain fragrance, a specific texture or sound broadens the desire to buy. "*The aroma of warm bread can be enough to lead supermarket shoppers to the bakery aisle; a big beautiful photograph of a James Bondian stud in a creamy din-*

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36 Hayden, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

37 *Ibidem*, pp. 18-21.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 23.

39 Paco Underhill, *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping*, New York, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2009, p. 99.

ner jacket carries more levels of information than the clearest FORMALWEAR sign can ever convey".<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the need to go shopping comes from the desire of having sensory experiences that make us feel better and indulge us with being involved in our own decisions.

In the recent years, many studies and researches were conducted in order to analyze the way brands and senses are connected to consumers' actions and decisions. The experiments that were undertaken in this field revealed the fact that each sense makes brands become stronger.

A study conducted by a few German researchers underlines the importance of "brand heritage" in creating the relationship between the brand and the consumer. According to their findings, "a brand that is infused with a heritage stands for authenticity, credibility and trust". This eventually fulfils the promise made by the brand to the consumer's expectations. The study results show that brand heritage has a positive effect on the perceived economic value, functional value, affective value and social value of a brand.<sup>41</sup>

With regard to the tactile sense, a 2010 research analyzed how important is a product's tactile experience, as compared to the visual one. The main conclusion of the study was that people can very well describe what they touch, by using the same categories of adjectives as they would use in the case of seeing the items. What is more, there is an interdependence among senses, which means that the involvement of one sense imposes certain expectations upon another one. In other words, in order to process information, the individual must filter it by using one sense, yet full knowledge of an object emerges only when all information has been processed separately by the according sense.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, researchers do not exclude the importance of the visual sense in the branding process. A 2012 study on the importance of colors in marketing shows that "color attracts consumers and can shape their perception". The study also mentions a series of brands that have shaped a strong visual identity at a global level: Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Concorde, Victoria's Secret, Breast Cancer Foundation, Dell, Apple or Nike.<sup>43</sup>

The importance of taste in a total sensory experience was outlined by a research on coffee. In the process of tasting coffee, one goes through the following stages:

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40 *Ibidem*, p. 168.

41 Thomas Wuestefeld, Nadine Hennigs, Steffen Schmidt, Klaus-Peter Wiedmann, "The impact of brand heritage on customer perceived value", in *International Journal of Marketing*, March 2012, pp. 52-54.

42 Jessica Dagman, MariAnne Karlsson, Li Wikström, "Investigating the Haptic Aspects of Verbalised Product Experiences", in *International Journal of Design*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2010, pp. 25-26.

43 Lauren I. Labrecque, George R. Milne, "Exciting red and competent blue: the importance of color in marketing", in *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, (2012) 40, p. 711.

visual analysis (of color, texture and persistence), olfactory analysis (of smell and aroma) and gustatory analysis (of flavor and aftertaste). The results of the study showed that all three types of perceptions intertwine; however, the highest level of uncertainty was given by the gustatory analysis, while the olfactory one was the most relevant.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the auditory sense, one study presents the concept of “BrandSound”, which is defined as the “*intentional sound that communicates and reinforces the qualities, tones and values that are best aligned with the brand promise and brand experience*”. The research model designed for this concept includes elements such as a well-defined brand voice, brand music, a sonic logo, product sound, soundscapes in spaces, sound in advertising, sound on the telephone.<sup>45</sup>

Several studies were conducted on ambient scent and its impact on consumer behavior. Denise Maiwald, Aaron Ahuvia, Björn S. Ivens and Philipp A. Rauschnabel invented the concept of “hijacking effect” of ambient scent. Through a series of experiments made on German students in Germany, researchers set up the goal of observing the effects of two competing hand-creams on the German market – Nivea and Balea. They started from the presumption that Balea would “hijack positive mental associations” by using Nivea’s characteristic scent. At the end, the presumption turned out to be valid. Moreover, the results showed that smell had a similar effect on the perception of both brands, as it generated trust and a positive image.<sup>46</sup>

### **Methodological design**

In the first pages of this paper I have stated the three research questions that will be answered throughout the study:

1. Which is the most important human sense in what regards a consumer’s perception on a product?
2. What combinations of senses have a strong impact on the decision of buying?
3. Which elements keep the brand on one consumer’s mind? Can the brand be recognized only through the association with one of its identity elements?

These questions will lead to the validity or the invalidity of the presumption according to which, at present, advertisers should not only resort to visual methods in

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44 Maria Iannario, Marica Manisera, Domenico Piccolo, Paola Zuccolotto, “Sensory analysis in the food industry as a tool for marketing decisions”, 2012, available at [www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com), retrieved on 13.06.2013.

45 Aural Advertising: Sound – the uncharted territory” in *Brand Strategy*, 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2007, available at [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com), retrieved on 13.06.2013.

46 Denise Maiwald, Aaron Ahuvia, Björn S. Ivens, Philipp A. Rauschnabel, “The Hijacking Effect of Ambient Scent”, in *Marketing Review*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 55-57.

the creation of brand identity and brand promotion; instead, they should consider all the sensory elements (olfactory, auditory, tactile or gustative) that could place the brand in the mind of consumers.

In order to bring arguments to all of the above, I have conducted interviews and focus-groups. With regard to the first method, I have interviewed the following advertising and marketing specialists: Milena Giț, Marketing Manager within „Mediatica” web agency in Cluj-*napoca*; journalist, producer and TV host Andi Moisescu, who is also the founder of „Red Spike” production company; Gabriel Brănescu, Managing Partner and Creative Director at “Bad Cat” advertising agency, as well as Ph.D. at the National School of Political and Administrative Sciences in Bucharest. In addition to this, due to objective reasons, I have received partial answers from sociologist Dan Petre, who is also Managing Partner at D&D Research and Ph.D. at the same university in Bucharest as Gabriel Brănescu.

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that there were both previously established questions and spontaneous additional ones, according to the discussion flow. The interviewing model consisted of a series of general and more specific questions, the latter category being directed towards the respondents who were actually involved in sensory branding campaigns.

In the second part of the research, I invited 14 students aged between 20 and 23 to take part in two focus-groups (8 students in the first one and 6 students in the second one). I have selected this category for my study not only because it was more accessible than other target groups, but also because young people are constantly and significantly influenced by advertising, as they are exposed to all of its forms – especially on the Internet.

Several variables when taken into consideration while conducting the two focus-groups. On one hand, the dependent variable is represented by the level of brand knowledge and, more specifically, by how much the participants know about brands’ identity elements (such as colors, logos, jingles etc.). On the other hand, the independent variable refers at the existence of two control groups within the focus-groups. Both groups were made of male and female students, but the difference between them lied in the level of specialization in the field of advertising. Thus, one group consisted of students in Advertising at the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, while the other group was made of students in other fields, such as law, environmental sciences, art, engineering or journalism.

Both focus-groups took place as follows: after getting to know each other, the participants were simply asked to watch a short film that showed various sequences from famous movies, such as “James Bond”, “Spider-Man”, “Superman”, or “Sex and the City”. After that, they received a questionnaire where they were supposed to write all the brands that they were able to identify in the film.

The second part of the focus-group involved a series of association exercises. Participants had to associate 15 colors (grey, pink, red, several shades of blue, several shades of green, brown, yellow, orange, purple, black, white) with a certain brand or brand category, then 10 words, written in both Romanian and English („masculin”, „feminin”, „natură”, „smile”, „fantasy”, „românesc”, „absolut”, „enjoy”, „fericire”, „connecting”) with a certain brand or brand category. After that, they heard a mix of brand sounds and commercial jingles and were asked to identify the brands in question. At the end of the association activity, participants had to make associations between senses, for instance between colors and tastes or between smell and feelings. For each association exercise, the subjects received a different questionnaire to fill.

The third part consisted of a tasting experiment, where subjects were asked to try 4 types of products and correctly identify them. The products were Coke and Pepsi, Lay’s and Chio Chips, yoghurts Napolact, Activia and Zuzu and beer brands Ursus, Timișoreana and Carlsberg.

Both focus-groups ended with a discussion on the subject of sensory branding and its impact on consumer behavior, with a focus on what does this process imply and what are the main concepts involved. Participants debated on aspects such as: what is the difference between “product” and “brand”, which are the methods that nowadays advertising uses to thrill the consumer and to get to his/her emotions, how much do we use our senses in the buying process, which is the strongest and the most frequently used sense in advertising etc. Final remarks were stated at the end and all the participants received a symbolic reward for their contribution.

## **Results and discussion**

### ***Interview results***

When it comes to the advertising methods that advertisers use nowadays in order to arrest consumers’ attention and to engage them in a relationship of loyalty to a brand, Milena Gîț speaks about new forms of connecting the consumer with the brand. The creation of these forms is due to constant evolution of society, especially with regard to new technologies and to the Internet. The ongoing tendency of digitalizing all communication channels involving organizations and agencies, on one hand, and the audience, on the other hand, generates significant transformations. Advertisers have become more aware of the fact that consumers have changed, as well – they are not easily influenced by brands, which leads to a decrease on the market for brands’ value and power. Such a thing generates the need to create the brand’s identity at the same time as the consumer does. In other words, the branding process develops as the consumer discovers the product or service: *„the brand is starting to be more and more built together with the consumer and it develops from one day to another”*. What is more, any agency should keep in mind the following essential

elements in the creation of a brand's identity: „*relevance, authenticity, differentiation, consistency, presence, understanding and quality of services*”.

In Andi Moisescu's opinion, advertising has always tried to “*get under the consumer's skin*” in any possible way, which underlines the constant need in advertising to create something different and unique, to impress the consumer and eventually make him loyal to the product. “*The safest way*” to make this happen is through emotions, which are considered by the TV host “*the essence of communication*”, since what matters in advertising is “*transferring the emotions from the sender to the receiver, and not transferring the information, like some would foolishly claim*”.

The answers to another question showed that the sensory experience that a brand can provide to a consumer is very important, especially in day-to-day reality. Milena Giț claims that such an experience „*broadens the consumer's perception over a certain aspect of a product and it influences the way in which consumers process information*”. What is more, senses are particularly used in the food industry or in the case of children products.

However, Milena Giț believes that the sensory experience does not influence too much the buying decision. This belief is shared by Gabriel Brănescu, who claims that the question „*when does the buying decision start*” is fundamental within the branding process. According to the creative director, there is not a fixed initial moment that makes a consumer buy a certain brand. Instead, the process follows a „*projective technique*”, which embodies all the moments of the encounter between the consumer and the brand, that have more or less influence upon the consumer's buying decision. If an individual interacts with a brand, it does not imply that he/she wishes to buy it. However, in some cases, repeated interaction with the respective brand can influence him/her on the long term, by acting as a reminder and, thus, lead him/her towards a future buy.

In order to have a sociological perspective upon this aspect, I addressed the same question - regarding the moment when the buying decision starts – to Dan Petre. According to him, the buying decision starts at the first contact with the brand, which can only be proven through research. During the first encounter between the consumer and the brand, lasting memories are formed, as they play a part in leading the individual towards a future intention of buying the brand.

Andi Moisescu sees the sensory experience that a brand creates for an individual from a more human perspective – like the sensory experience between two people. Just like when building a relationship of trust between two individuals, when creating the connection between consumer and brand we must allow the consumer to interact with the brand at the most personal level, by integrating the brand into the individual's values and habits.

What is more, Gabriel Brănescu states that sensory experience is valuable because the brand and the branding process are sensory by means of the product. Also,

the appeal to senses makes the brand memorable, which is essential to its identity. Like Andi Moisescu, Brănescu believes that advertising focuses on emotion, but he makes the connection between advertising and art. Like various forms of art that used senses and emotions in a unique way throughout the time (he takes the installation art as an example), advertising must find the most unusual and original ways to get to the consumer.

According to Brănescu, the best sensory experience is obtained through sampling activities, special offers or direct contact. Any branding campaign should embody the „AIDA” concept, which implies the existence of four elements that must come from the consumer’s part: attention, interest, desire and action<sup>47</sup>.

With regard to how important is the visual sense in a branding campaign, all the three respondents agreed on the fact that it plays an essential role in transmitting the message and place it into the consumer’s mind. According to Milena Giț, the visual sense is the most important sensory instrument that an advertising strategy should use in the making of their campaigns. Any advertising strategy is based on „choosing strong and significant visual images for the consumer”. Such images have the greatest effect when the consumer sees the brand for the first time – in a store, on the street, on TV or on the Internet.

However, when strong images are accompanied by other sensory elements, the brand becomes even more efficient. Thus, the general image of the brand is „memorable” and consumers are „fully emotionally involved”.

Andi Moisescu claims that the primary attribute of the visual sense is that it is the first sense that arrests one’s attention over a brand. „If you do not like the package of a soft drink and you know nothing about it, I doubt that you would ever try it”, he says.

From a creative director’s perspective, 90% of the Romanian advertising campaigns use the visual sense, while the last part of the budget is left for the music. Why is that? Because, as Brănescu says, in our nowadays society, what we see is more important than what we hear.

When it comes to the companies that make use of all the five senses in their communication strategy, only Moisescu thinks that such companies exist. Consequently, he takes the example of the big perfume companies and that of bakeries, which combine the sense of smell, with the visual and tactile senses in an extremely efficient way.

Regarding this matter, Gabriel Brănescu underlines that there are some brands that generates a powerful sensory experience for the consumer in their market segment. Thus, he mentions the following: Apple with its tactile and visual experience (the texture of the products and their simple white, grey or black shades); the big

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47 “AIDA” is a concept that was formulated in the American literature.

car brands with their tactile and olfactory impact (the texture of the tapestry or the smell of leather inside the car), which are more effective when it comes to certain categories, such as men.

Brănescu also identifies the stages of a sensory branding campaign: first, a teasing campaign, then the brand discovery and internal promotion of its TV commercial and, lastly, a series of special offers and actions that involve all the five senses and direct interaction with the consumer.

Moreover, the three respondents are aware of the fact that the evolution of advertising will take place online. They state that the Internet is a constant source of alternatives for advertisers, and the use of senses is one of these alternatives. Nevertheless, Andi Moisescu sticks to the original idea: *"no matter what will come, emotion will continue to be the most important element when communicating in advertising"*.

Gabriel Brănescu holds a different, yet interesting hypothesis. He believes there is a huge limitation in using and combining senses online, due to the fact that data input takes longer than data output. Therefore, the level of input should increase in order to generate a higher number of sensory activities on the Internet. In addition to this, Brănescu states that a future trend in advertising could be the creation of neural inferences, which make connections between the human brain and an external device, such as a computer. At present, such experiments are made only for scientific purposes, but it is believed that, in the future, they could be useful for advertisers in the direct stimulation of senses and emotions.

Taking into consideration the conclusions that resulted from the specialists' answers, we can state that we have answered the first two research questions. On one hand, it was proven that the visual sense is dominant in the advertising and branding campaigns, due to the strong and quick impact of visual exposure. The visual experience is strengthened by colors, brand's appearance, packaging, light or the physical position in a store or on a store shelf. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that advertisers pay great attention to the other senses, as well, especially to the olfactory and tactile senses.

On the other hand, when it comes to the most powerful combination of senses in the buying process, specialists claim that the combination sight-hearing has a strong effect by means of TV commercials or online clips. In day-to-day reality, other combinations are more and more frequently used, such as sight-smell or smell-touch.

### ***Focus-group results***

After watching the movie at the beginning of the focus-groups, participants were asked to write which brands they identified in the selected films. The films were "Sex and the City", "Super Man", "Casino Royale", "Spiderman", "I am Legend", "Transformers", "Bad Boys II", "Iron Man", while the 34 brands that were present under product placement were: Louis Vuitton, Bag Borrow or Steal, Netflix, Chanel,

Starbucks, Sprint, LG, Marlboro, Coca-Cola, Sony Vaio, Sony Bravia, Sony Ericsson, Ford Mondeo, Omega, Rolex, Dr Pepper, Carlsberg, X Cingular, TDK, Prudential, Samsung, Suntory Whisky, Ford Mustang, Ford Taxi, iPod, HP, Porsche, eBay, Panasonic, Burger King, Chevrolet, Apple, Miller (MGD), Ferrari.

Results show that 25 out of the 34 brands (73.5%) were more or less identified by the subjects. The most frequently mentioned brands were:

- *Coca-Cola* - 12 out of 14 people noticed the brand in the movie (85.7%).
- *Carlsberg* – 11 out of 14 people noticed the brand in the movie (78.5%).
- *Marlboro* and *Samsung* – 10 out of 14 people noticed the brand in the movie (71.4%).
- *Burger King* – 9 out of 14 noticed the brand in the movie (64.2%).

The 5 brands above are some of the most popular brands on both Romanian and international markets. Moreover, the companies that own these brands are known for the huge budgets they have for advertising worldwide. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that all 5 brands had their name and the colours, package or shape showed in the movie.

The 9 brands that have not been noticed by any participant were: Bag Borrow or Steal, Netflix, Sprint, LG, Sony Vaio, X Cingular, TDK, Suntory Whisky, Ford Taxi. This could be due to a lower popularity on the Romanian market and to a smaller exposure of the brands in the movie.

As a conclusion for this part, there were no significant differences between the 2 groups. However, it should be mentioned that the students in Advertising recognized more brands than the ones that are not specialized in this field. The former group noticed 25 out of the 34 brands (73.5%), while the latter noticed only 19 out of 34 (55.5%).

As a second exercise, the participants were asked to match a color with a brand or a product category. As a result, 4 out of the 6 specialized students mentioned the exact name of the brand, whereas only 4 out of the 8 unspecialized students did so.

There were some colors that were easily associated with brands in both groups. This was the case of red (which was mostly matched with Coca-Cola) and grey (which was attributed to car brands). Moreover, most students associated the pink color with women products, dark blue with Pepsi or with men products, orange with the food industry or Orange mobile company and black with the undertaking service or clothing and footwear brands.

By analyzing the results, we can see that Coca-Cola was highly identifiable due to the red color on the package and on the logo. Orange was also extremely powerful for the students, as it was mostly associated with the mobile company. However, an important conclusion of this exercise was that there are few brands that can actually be identified only through one of their identity colors. In most situations, one needs

at least the combination of colors from the logo or the label, if not other identity elements, such as shape, texture sound or smell, in order to recognize a certain brand.

Nevertheless, studies show that some brands can be identified by one distinctive color, but the brand culture should be well-integrated into the consumers' culture. Such an example is the jewelry brand Tiffany & Co., which is widely associated with a certain shade of blue, also known as „Tiffany Blue“. However, in this particular research, none of the students who participated to the focus-groups attributed this color to the jewelry brand, mostly because Tiffany & Co. Does not have a strong presence on the Romanian market.

The connection between brands and words was also analyzed during the focus groups. The results showed both similarities and differences between the two categories of students. The main resemblance was that all participants associated the word „absolut“ with Absolut Vodka, which outlines that a brand has higher chances to be recognized when it uses a word from its name in the identification process. But if a representative brand word is not strong enough to the consumer, he will need additional „hints“ to know what is it all about. For example, the word „fantasy“ is a trademark word for Disney, while „smile“ is officially attributed to Colgate. However, the focus-groups revealed that none of the 14 participants wrote Disney when „fantasy“ appeared on the screen, while only 1 out of 14 associated „smile“ with Colgate.

Another brand that was highly recognized was Nokia, due to its association with the word „connecting“, as part of the brand's slogan - „Nokia – Connecting People“. The specialized group made a unanimous association, while the unspecialized one reached a recognition level of 62.5%.

I encountered another difference in the case of the word „românesc“, which most students in Advertising attribute to the chocolate brand ROM. This coincides with the general opinion in advertising that ROM is one of the strongest representatives of the Romanian image on the market. On the other hand, only one of the students from the other group made this association, as the rest attributed brands such as Napolact, Aro or BitDefender to the word „românesc“.

The official Coca-Cola word „enjoy“ did not have as many associations with the brand as expected. Only 2 persons (from the specialized group) attributed it to the most popular soft drink in the world.

Taking into consideration the data that could be collected from this exercise, we can say that young people that are directly connected to the field of Advertising tend to recognize the brand by means of identity words more easily than those that study different fields. However, like in the case of colors, the number of brands that can be identified thanks to a combination of specific words is higher than that of the brands defined by one word.

With regard to the link between sounds and brands, the 2 focus-groups showed that ringtones and jingles are the easiest to identify, while background music is not really noticeable. Out of the 10 sounds that participants had to listen to, Nokia showed in the first place, followed by Orange and the voices of mascots Millidge and Doig, Coca-Cola and its Christmas jingles, and Stella Artois.

An interesting case is that of the Samsung ringtone, which which was recognized by 4 out of 6 students from the specialized group, but not recognized at all from the participants of the other group.

What is more, all specialized students missed the third sound, as they stated it represented the brand Pampers when it was actually the jingle for the baby shampoo Dalin. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that they have correctly identified the product category. Another brand that was not recognized at all was the fabric softener Lenor, which was mistaken by Raffaello, Jacobs, Ariel or Märgäritar.

To conclude, the auditory sense can be extremely useful in the identification process of a brand, since most of the brands that were included in this association exercise have been recognized at least once by the subjects. This also implies that there is a rather high exposure to TV commercials and that, subsequently, music and jingles, in particular, can be used by advertisers in order to stick the brand to the consumer's mind and to make it as memorable as possible.

Sense association allows the creation of a unique sensory relationship, which advertisers might use as guidance in their "quest" for loyal consumers. When attributing colors to the four human tastes, both groups stated that the sweet taste is connected to pink, red and brown, the salty taste to white and the sour taste to various shades of yellow or green. There were small differences with regard to the bitter taste, which was attributed to green, from the unspecialized students' perspective, or dark shades, even black, from the specialized group's perspective.

When it comes to the combination between smell and sensation, the exercise proved that negative sensations, such as fear, frustration or anger, are attributed to unpleasant smells, such as the smells of sweat, drainage or mould. On the contrary, positive feelings such as love, security or freedom are closely related to pleasant, aromatic and fresh scents. In this case, some examples are the smells of roses, freshly cut grass, fresh bread from the oven, forest or the smell that comes after the rain.

The day-to-day sounds also play a great part in influencing our mood. Thus, on one hand, clock ticking is mostly perceived as a negative sound, because it is seen as a source of boredom, anxiety, stress, frustration, ageing or insomnia. On the other hand, sounds like bird chatter or smoking fire generate warmer, nicer feelings like calm, relaxation, freedom, silence, security or fun. Violin music sends mixed signals: on one hand, the specialized group associates it with pleasure, love and triumph, but also sadness; on the other hand, the unspecialized group links it only to positive feelings, such as romance, happiness, pleasure and relaxation.

After the association exercises, an experiment took place in order to analyze the level of brand recognition by taste. The results showed that Pepsi and Coca-Cola were the most recognized brands, as 10 out of 14 participants identified them correctly. What is more important is that the entire specialized group guessed the two brands, even though only one of them declared he is a loyal consumer as he was able to identify Coca-Cola by smell. The other five stated that Pepsi is sweeter, which makes it have a different smell from Coca-Cola, indeed.

The brands Lay's and Chio Chips generated different results. Only 6 out of 14 identified them correctly. In this case, there was a significant difference between the two groups: 5 out of the 6 members of the specialized group guessed the brands; the other guess was, evidently, from the unspecialized group. The reason for their choice was always the same and was based on the better taste of Lay's chips.

With regard to yoghurts, all participants from the unspecialized group guessed Zuzu, while only 2 of them identified Napolact, respectively Activia. In the other group, Napolact was guessed every time (the reason for this was that it has a different – more yellow – color, compared to the other two brands). The other two products got 3 correct answers and 2 wrong ones.

Beer brands – Ursus, Timișoreana și Carlsberg – were identified correctly only by men (2 from each group), which strengthens the fact that men are the main beer consumers.

The experiment revealed that the specialized group recognized more brands than the unspecialized one and that participants from the former group gave more justifications for their choices than the latter.

At the end of the focus-group, participants were involved in a debate on sensory branding and the use of senses in Romanian advertising. Both groups were able to make the difference between “product” and “brand”, as follows: *“the brand implies a higher recognition level and it is more known than an ordinary product”; “brands have additional notoriety”; “the product is something physical, while the brand is a perception of the communication between product and consumer”*.

When it comes to the methods that advertising uses in order to reach the audience, the specialized group talked about product placement, the commercials where consumers manage to identify themselves to the characters and the situations, appeal to memories, music or smell. The unspecialized group also underlined the importance of music in TV commercials.

With regard to the importance of senses on the buying decision, most participants declared that they use their five senses when they go shopping. A student in the unspecialized group stated that *„senses can be intensified by certain moods we have. For example, when you are hungry, you tend to buy more food than you would normally need”*. As far as clothing is concerned, *„you use the tactile sense in order to check the quality of the items you are interested in”*.

However, one participant did not agree with the majority by saying that *„we don't use our senses when we actually buy something, we rather use them after buying a certain product. And according to how much we liked the product, we come back to it or not"*. One female student reacted to his argument and said that this is not a general truth, as *„you may be tempted to buy a certain product even if you haven't bought it before. It might happen if you are attracted by a smell or if you like the way it looks, without necessarily needing that product at that moment. Take, for instance, when you go across a Fornetti shop, a begel stand, when you feel the smell of wine with cinnamon or hot chocolate"*.

Furthermore, the students stated their opinion on which is the most important sense in advertising. At the beginning, the specialized students were tempted to say that the auditory sense (represented by music, in particular) takes the first place, but they realized that the visual sense is actually the strongest. With regard to the tactile sense, one participant stated that *„you must have a direct connection to the product"* in order to use it in interaction. Moreover, this sense *„manifests itself when the consumer shows more interest for the product or when you are a loyal customer"*.

In the unspecialized group, most students considered the visual sense to be the most powerful sense in advertising. Nevertheless, two persons claimed that *„the combination sight-hearing is stronger than the visual sense taken separately, as it creates synaesthesias"*.

In conclusion, the focus-groups revealed relevant results. In the first place, there was a significant difference between the specialized and the unspecialized group, as the former one recognized more brands during all sections of the focus-groups. This shows that constant interaction with advertising from an academic point of view makes young people more aware of the influence of brands on their day-to-day lives and on their consumer behaviour.

In the second place, association exercises showed that it is rather difficult for a consumer to identify a brand by using only one of its identity elements. Both groups declared that they needed more information in order to recognize the brands.

This brings us to the third and final research question. Thus, the results of the focus-groups showed that an increasing number of identity elements of a brand shown to a consumer leads to a higher level of brand identification. Therefore, it is not enough to use a color, a sound or a sensation in order for a brand to be recognized by an individual. Total sensory experience is required so that the branding process could take place accordingly.

However, there are certain elements that might cause a stronger impression on the consumer. Sounds, for example, are extremely relevant for young people, as well as some colors that are representative for international brands at a global level. What is more, Coca-Cola was the only brand that was identified in all stages of the focus-groups, which shows that brands can generate a complex and powerful sensory experience for the consumer.

## Conclusions

According to the findings of this research, the three research questions have been answered and, thus, the research presumption is partially valid. On one hand, it is not supported by the fact that both categories of individuals that took part in the study – specialists in advertising and communication and students – stated that the visual sense is still the most frequently used sense in advertising, which means that the visual aspect can represent the success of a branding campaign and is able to place the brand into the consumer's mind. On the other hand, there was a unanimous opinion with regard to the importance of a total sensory experience. Both categories believe that combinations between senses strengthen the brand and generate even more emotions on the consumer's part, thus creating a relationship of loyalty, trust and affection between a brand and a consumer.

Furthermore, the research encountered a series of limitations. Firstly, there is a very small number of Romanian publications and studies on this subjects, therefore the theoretical data I used was found in the international literature. Nevertheless, all information is relevant and brings solid arguments to the research questions that were stated at the beginning of the paper.

Secondly, many specialists refused to answer to the interview, which made it harder to collect plenty of data. This is a social limitation and is motivated by: lack of time for answering the questions, lack of experience in this particular field, denial of participation to the interview etc. However, I strongly believe that this problem would be easily solved if the reasearch took place on a longer period of time.

As a last conclusion, this study is valuable to the field of advertising because it embodies valid and relevant data on the role of senses in the Romanian advertising and their impact on Romanian consumers. Therefore, advertisers and marketers should use this research as guidance in the creation of communication strategies. Taking into consideration the great influence of the sensory experiences on consumer behaviour, companies and advertising agencies should pay more attention to the five senses and find ways that could easily bring success to their branding campaigns. In addition to this, the present paper could be a valuable starting point for a much complex study, aimed to take place at national or even international level.

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