



THE GROWING FOCUS  
ON SENSORY BRANDING

## Introduction

In the face of growing competition and declining consumer loyalty, brands today are continuously on the outlook for new means of survival. Sensory Branding, a tool that has been around for years but has only been noticed fairly recently, has emerged as a key differentiator.


This paper outlines the benefits of Sensory Branding, citing successful brands as examples, and encouraging brands, particularly home-grown brands in the MENA region, to adopt it as part of their brand strategies. Delving further into best practices for implementation, the paper also sets the stage for marketers to consider, and potentially incorporate, Sensory Branding in their 2014 Marketing Strategies.



Over the past couple of years, the Apple vs. Samsung lawsuits have drawn attention from all over the world, with each company claiming ownership over their smart phone and tablet designs. Although Apple was declared winner, the battle between these two tech giants highlights a very apparent concern amongst brands today - customer retention and loyalty in the face of ever-increasing competition.

Consumers too have evolved significantly. Due to the abundance of choices available, people have grown from conscious decision-makers to emotional, self-indulgent individuals who constantly seek things that best fit their requirements. People no longer only look for products that meet their needs; products must now also meet their desires.

In the face of these momentous challenges, companies are continuously looking for new ways to stand out. Among these efforts, Sensory Branding is one tool that has recently gained recognition. Sensory Branding is a type of marketing that appeals to all five human senses.



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Three reasons why more marketers are realising the significance of Sensory Branding.

1. Sensory Branding creates emotional and experiential associations with brands.
2. Sensory Branding helps influence and control brand perception.
3. Sensory Branding arouses curiosity and interest.





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## Sensory Branding creates emotional and experiential associations with a brand

Sensory Branding is when a brand is able to appeal to all 5 human senses of sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. Enabling people to “experience” a brand ultimately leads to an emotional association and attachment to the brand.

Originally, brands focused solely on visual appeal. The Coca Cola red and white, McDonald’s giant M, Disney’s D, the Michelin Man, and the Pillsbury Doughboy are a few examples of brands that are instantly recognized. As TV advertisements rose in popularity, marketers began incorporating sounds, and companies like 21st Century Fox, and Intel, remain amongst the most popular.

Sensory Branding extends beyond sound. A classic example is Starbucks. Paying \$4 for a cup of coffee is by no means conventional, but it is the experience that people are willing to pay for. An aroma of freshly ground coffee beans, soft music, comfortable seating, unique beverages (that may not always be on the menu<sup>1</sup>) and friendly baristas are what one expects when entering a Starbucks. Starbucks touches people across all 5 senses and leaves them with a pleasant memory, enhancing their brand experience and building affinity.



The round table at Starbucks was created so that the solo coffee drinker didn't feel alone.

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Starbucks actively invests in creating such an atmosphere of sensory experience. For example, music that plays across Starbucks outlets worldwide is selected and released by Hear Music – Starbucks' record label <sup>2</sup>. Beyond that, Starbucks even stopped serving eggs as it interfered with the aroma of their coffee <sup>3</sup>. The round table at Starbucks was created so that the solo coffee drinker didn't feel alone and there are up to 87,000 drink possibilities available at Starbucks.

Starbucks, goes well beyond traditional brand strategy of perfecting identity and colors. It does not stop at just mastering the perfect coffee; its core product offering, but encompasses other stimulants into its brand to create an environment that truly engages customers and differentiates it from competitors.



The Rolls Royce Ghost "Six Senses" takes sensory indulgence to a new level. Elegant exteriors, premium interiors, a powerful audio system, and the rich aroma of leather and woody spice are elements that have been carefully incorporated into this highly bespoke model - strengthening the perception of "luxury" and "affluence" associated with the Rolls Royce brand.



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## Sensory Branding helps influence and control brand perception

Branding is all about how a product or service is positioned or perceived in the mind of the consumer. This can be achieved through strategy, positioning, naming, and identity - all of which tie together to create one consistent brand image. By affecting multiple senses, Sensory Branding allows further reinforcement of the brand "perception".

An example is the Kellogg's cereal brand. Recognizing that people's perception of freshness largely depends on the "crunchiness" of the cereal, Kellogg's created and patented a "crunch" that is unique and distinctive to the brand<sup>4</sup>, to the extent that most people can recognize Kellogg's in glass jars without any brand element present. Nissan is another example that recently launched a unique fragrance that was modern, exciting and vibrant, in an attempt to pay homage to the company's Japanese origins<sup>5</sup>. The automaker's goal was to drive positive consumer perception, as Japanese cars are usually considered reliable and durable.







## Sensory Branding arouses curiosity and interest

A product or service that appeals to two or more human senses is more likely to arouse curiosity and encourage trial- as in the case of American retailer, Abercrombie & Fitch. A&F is known for its strong but unique fragrance that many a times can be detected from a distance. Its stores are dimly light and it is common to see attractive models in and around the store. Music playing in-store is upbeat and popular. It isn't uncommon for onlookers and passerbys to visit the store and form a memory of their experience.

A 16-story candy billboard, chocolate aroma wafting in and out of the store, colorful, vibrant interiors, and the chance to see your name on Broadway - the Hershey's NYC store is not one to be overlooked.

The chocolate you smell in-store is a fragrance that is artificially created and induced.

**HERSHEY'S**





## How do marketers implement effective Sensory Branding?

Having understood the extent to which humans utilize their senses to understand their environment, even with routine tasks such as grocery shopping where it's common to see people sniff a fruit, feel it etc. to gauge ripeness, it is essential for brands to invest in Sensory Branding.

The first step in implementation is to understand which emotions are most important for consumers while considering a product or service.

The Fashion Avenue at Dubai Mall, for instance, sprays a fragrance that hints Arabic scents fused with international flavors. The smell is pleasing, caters to international audiences and is likely to get shoppers in the mood to discover and shop.

The next step is to unify and amplify your core message to support your key drivers. For example, when considering technology, consumers like to test products for themselves, utilizing their sense of touch, sight, and sound to the maximum. Recognizing this, Apple unifies all its efforts towards this need. Apple stores are spacious and inviting, and customers are allowed to touch and use all products. Store attendants are knowledgeable and resourceful and the familiar 'Mac' sound is regularly heard throughout, fostering a sense of familiarity and reliability. Integrating all these elements, Apple successfully creates a unique brand experience desired for by its customers.



## Conclusion

By appealing to at least two or more senses, a brand increases its memorability and helps nurture long-term relationships with consumers, which is likely to stand the test of time and competitors. The time is now, particularly for growing MENA brands, to embrace Sensory Branding and truly create a well-rounded brand that can differentiate and survive an increasingly competitive marketplace.



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