

Application of Sensory Marketing in Physical Stores

-- A Case Study of MUJI and NOME

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Abstract

Under the tremendous impact brought by the rapid development of the e-commerce economy, recent years have witnessed the offline physical retail industry gradually exploring and forming a new marketing model centered on sensory marketing. MUJI and NOME, two typical retail stores in China that adopt sensory marketing, are thus comparatively analyzed and researched in this paper. With their advantages, disadvantages, and differences in the application methods of sensory marketing discussed and compared, this paper intends to propose new ideas for the domestic physical retail industry to innovate marketing models. Meanwhile, reasonable suggestions are put forward for a series of current deficiencies, and predictive suggestions are made for the wide application of sensory marketing models in the future.

Keywords

Sensory Marketing; Consumer Behavior; Present Situation Research; Countermeasures and Suggestions.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of e-commerce platforms, the development of the physical business economy has been impacted to a certain extent. Finding the core advantages that are different from the e-commerce economy thus becomes the focus of exploration and research of real economy and scholars. From the past research, we can find that sensory marketing exists as a marketing method with five senses experience integrated to influence consumers' perception, judgment, and behaviors, which has been a rapidly developing research field in marketing in recent years [1].

Martin Lindstorm, a famous American marketing scholar, first put forward the concept of "sensory marketing." He pointed out that the five senses, namely, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, were used by the retail industry in its business marketing to carry out experiential, emotional marketing, so as to shape consumers' sensory experience and emotional resonance, creating a new experiential marketing model. Such a new marketing model can endow consumers with a new experience different from the past and stimulate consumers' desires to buy, thereby leading to buying behaviors.

However, the research on how to apply sensory marketing techniques to the physical retail industry has rarely been included in the current related research. Therefore, to further understand the current situation of sensory marketing applications, and find solutions to the problems, comparative research, centered on "visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile, and taste senses," is conducted on MUJI and NOME, respectively a domestic and foreign brand, through literature search and field research. Recent years have witnessed the emergence of many new retail formats, among which the most popular and research-oriented one lies in "grocery store." As an internationally renowned grocery brand, MUJI has entered the Chinese market for about 16 years and remained at a high position in the grocery brand market. While NOME, an

emerging domestic grocery brand, has attracted many consumers with its unique style. Therefore, these two typical brands are selected as the analysis objects of this comparative research.

2. Five Dimensions of Sensory Marketing

2.1. Visual Marketing

Visual marketing symbolizes the impact on consumers' shopping behaviors through the spatial characteristics, color, and lighting brightness captured by the environment [2]. Among the information received by consumers, 80% of the information is captured through vision. Visual information not only has a greater impact on consumers' perception of the attributes of objective things and the judgment of nature but also exerts a huge influence on consumers' perception of the abstract attributes (such as store image and brand culture). Therefore, visual marketing plays a critical role in the branding of offline retail stores.

2.2. Olfactory Marketing

Olfaction is the second most important sense (only after the vision) for people to receive information. Some unique smells are used in olfactory marketing to impress consumers, thus generating brand perception. In addition, olfaction shares a close relationship with memory. Martin Lindstrom once pointed out that "75% of human emotions are generated by olfaction. While people's memory of photos will reduce to 50% after three months, the accuracy of recalling smells can be as high as 65%."

2.3. Auditory Marketing

Auditory marketing mainly refers to the looping of melody or music that meets the brand's characteristics in the store, forming a unique voice image in customers' hearts. According to surveys and research, the voice in the physical business space can promote sales performance, create a unique atmosphere, and enhance brand footprint and competitiveness to a certain extent. The background music played in stores with different positioning also differs, but different music all psychologically stimulates consumers to generate consumption or re-consumption behavior.

2.4. Tactile Marketing

The tactile sense is the most essential and direct one within the five senses. In terms of meeting consumer demands, tactile sense proves to be an important dimension of brand sensory experience, whether it is the product itself, or the retail space, consumption environment, and interior decoration [3]. And from the perspective of physical characteristics, the tactile sense can provide more information for customers to make decisions [4]. Through comprehensive and in-depth research, Peck (2006) and other scholars learned that for customers with less tactile demands, tactile information is more likely to be accepted and trusted by people when tactile information and text information are equal; while for customers with higher tactile demands, tactile information is more likely to be accepted and recognized regardless of whether the tactile information is the same as the text information.

2.5. Scent Marketing

As an essential sense in people's daily life, taste buds, like olfaction, can trigger consumers' emotions and memories in specific scenes and boast the characteristics of high memory accuracy. At present, some international brands have established cross-border food and beverage stores to provide added value for their brand products and increase consumer loyalty through the product services provided by the food and beverage stores.

3. Typical Cases of Sensory Marketing Used by Grocery Store

As a Japanese grocery brand, MUJI was set up amidst the sluggish world economic growth in 1980 when Japan suffered from the energy crisis. Under the concept of “no-brand,” it advocated “simplified packaging, natural and environmentally friendly.” With the expansion of popularity, the design of MUJI has gradually risen from the product to the cultural level. Proficient in the application of sensory marketing, it is committed to establishing itself as a grocery brand leader with a unique style through Japanese design styles, natural scent extraction, slow-tuned music surrounds, independent design and purchase, and selection of fresh and natural ingredients.

Although domestic grocery brands started relatively late, in recent years, with the development of new retail formats have many grocery brands featuring diversified products and practicability with low prices emerged, such as MINISO, NOME, and USUSPO. The object researched in this paper falls on NOME, a domestic grocery store established in 2017. As NOME shares similarities but differences with MUJI in the application methods of sensory marketing, what are the specific differences? How much influence do the differences have on the market positioning and consumer positioning of these two brands? These are all the questions needed to be discussed and researched thoroughly.

3.1. Visual Marketing: The Art of Spatial Layout and Lightening Design

3.1.1. Visual Marketing of Muji

The design of the visual marketing of MUJI is mainly reflected in three aspects:

The first one lies in the store and packaging design. All offline MUJI stores are designed in a Japanese style, all product packaging is simplified, and the product description is explained in a simple sentence, echoing the brand’s pursuit of simplicity and environmental protection. The moment consumers enter the store, they feel the power of its cultural concept.

Secondly, MUJI sets unified and strict standard requirements on product display that all products must be placed in a particular order, arranged according to the colors from light to dark, and shape from large to small. Standardized display not only requires orderliness but also considers the habits of consumers [5]. This also explains why many consumers buy more and more after entering the store, because the display is designed according to consumers' shopping habits. When consumers buy their favorite items, the complementary products on the next shelves, often accompanied by discounts for combined purchases, attract consumers to purchase from a psychological perspective.

The third one is color selection. The whole store, with warm-toned lighting, mainly adopts the colors of gray, white and beige to create a “warm home” atmosphere, better-integrating consumers into the shopping environment to enjoy the fun of shopping. At the same time, independent lights are placed on the top of each shelf to highlight product information, emphasizing the texture of the product itself.

3.1.2. Visual Marketing of NOME

The first one lies in the store and product packaging design. Different from the environmental protection and Japanese design of MUJI, NOME focuses on the Nordic style. It boasts rich and diverse product and characteristic packaging and design. For example, the sports kettles, pillows, and other products most favored by the youth are primarily presented in high saturation and multi-color options. While the household goods, such as tableware and toiletries, adopt low-saturation petrol blue and other Morandi colors. Walking into the store, the spacious, bright, and avant-garde sense of design overwhelms, allowing consumers to instantly capture the brand concept of “exploring a new life and enjoying a better life.”

Secondly, in terms of product display, unlike the strict display requirements of MUJI, the product display of NOME creates a sense of relaxed and casual shopping that consumers can

buy at will with sufficient supply. For products with time nodes, themed displays are designed accordingly to suit the product sales activities with different themes, such as co-branded limited-edition activities, and seasonal promotions. At the same time, the overall display will be carried out in light of the consumers' shopping habits. With the consumers considered comprehensively, their purchases are facilitated.

The third one is color selection. The main colors of white and "Tiffany Blue" lay the trendy tone for the entire brand. Through lighting design in the store, consumers can also feel the warmth of home, the source of which, however, differs from MUJI. Most of the lighting in NOME's stores uses white spotlights. And under the joint design of multiple designers, scattered small light sources are skillfully used to achieve key lighting, functional lighting and effect lighting. Such a three-dimensional lighting arrangement can not only endow the store with a sense of refinement and high-end but also immerse consumers in shopping.

3.2. Olfactory Marketing: Associative Memory Points Triggered by Smell

3.2.1. Olfactory Marketing of MUJI

Walking into MUJI's offline store, the greatest impression is its unique aromatherapy product besides the visual impact of the orderly product display and consistent specifications. The scents in MUJI stores mainly come from scented candles and essential oils. And the essential oil is matched with a MUJI ultrasonic aroma diffuser, which can spread the aroma throughout the store in just a few minutes. Different stores use different types of aromatherapies every day, divided explicitly into sweet orange, lemon, red grapefruit, red-orange, bergamot, and lime. Although the main notes of different types of scents are different, the main effects focus on relaxing the mood, body, and mind. Thus, it can be concluded that MUJI's application methods of olfactory marketing are mainly focused on the following three aspects:

Firstly, due to the uniqueness and strong diffusibility of MUJI's scent, consumers tend to be attracted by the first when passing through MUJI's stores, arousing their curiosity. Because of its unique characteristics, consumers can generate lasting memory points, more likely to trigger consumption touchpoints.

Secondly, the fresh and elegant aromatherapy extracted from the forest allows consumers to let down their defenses, relax their minds and bodies, produce a sense of pleasure, and induce consumption behavior. Besides, it also enables them to perceive MUJI's brand tonality that focuses only on nature and restoring authenticity and deepens their psychological awareness.

Thirdly, the use of aromatherapy is often combined with the ultrasonic aromatherapy machine or humidifier aromatherapy machine designed by MUJI, sharing a complementary relationship. Firstly, attracted by the scent, consumers will also naturally pay attention to the aromatherapy machine, resulting in combined purchase behavior.

3.2.2. Olfactory Marketing of NOME

Compared with MUJI's multiple applications in olfactory marketing, NOME's approach is relatively immature. The aromatherapy used is mainly rattan aromatherapy, and all kinds of toiletries in the store have not yet formed the scent characteristics with memory points like MUJI and Starbucks. The fields where NOME's olfactory marketing at this stage need to be improved are as follows:

The first one is that the limited diffusion range of rattan aromatherapy prevents it from permeating the entire store. Only when consumers reach a specific area will they have the flow experience caused by the scent.

The second one is the similarity of the odor of rattan aromatherapy to that of toiletries fails to form a fixed scent perception for the customers, which is not conducive to positioning the brand's tonality and exerting the advantages of olfactory marketing.

3.3. Auditory Marketing: Immersive Experience Brought by Background Music

3.3.1. Auditory Marketing of MUJI

In terms of background music selection, MUJI mainly chooses soft and relaxing Japanese slow-tuned music and Irish folk songs, which makes consumers feel cordial and relaxed without burden. Shopping in front of the shelf symbolizes a way of enjoying life, getting close to nature, and finding the true self. This immersive shopping sense can not only make consumers experience “quietness” and obtain pleasure, but also strengthen their willingness to stay in such an atmosphere to a certain extent. With the time for consumers to choose and purchase products extended, consumption desires and behaviors can be stimulated.

3.3.2. Auditory Marketing of NOME

NOME’s choice of background music mainly focuses on electronic music with popular tunes and timbre. For example, *In Flames*, a song with a cold female voice played in a loop in many stores, provides an intoxicating atmosphere, catering to the consumers targeted by NOME, young people who are pursuing a new life and releasing pressure. At the same time, the tune atmosphere of the song complements the fashionable and sophisticated design of the store. Instead of being limited to highlighting fashion trends with Korean group style and hit songs as background music, NOME adopts music with unique styles, prominent themes and an intense atmosphere, so that consumers can perceive the brand tonality behind the music and immerse themselves in the shopping scene.

3.4. Tactile Marketing: Consumption Experience with “Level” Grasped

3.4.1. Tactile Marketing of MUJI

There are four main tactile attributes of objects: texture, hardness, temperature and weight. As the basic expression forms of tactile sense, they all influence people's perception and experience. In this regard, it can be concluded through summary and field research that MUJI’s tactile marketing models are mainly demonstrated as the following two types:

First of all, in MUJI’s offline stores, almost all products provide trial services. Special trial kits are provided for cosmetics with makeup removers, cotton swabs, tissues, mirrors and other trial makeup aids to prepare consumers to make purchases decisions fully. Home furnishing products, such as lazy chairs and four-piece bed sets, will be presented in the open experience scene built by each store-OPEN MUJI. The scene area is usually set close to daily necessities such as scents, and the product materials are all from the store shelves. The open product display and experience space invisibly encourage consumers to touch and perceive products and provide usage scenarios for the products originally placed on the shelf to have an immersive sense of reality with consumption demands generated. This, in turn, stimulates new consumption desires and consumption behaviors.

The second one is the provision of additional services-MUJI YOURSELF. MUJI provides hundreds of self-made seals to consumers for free. After purchasing stationery and handbags, consumers can design unique products according to their ideas and creativity, which not only improves the added value of the product to some extent but also increase consumers’ sense of experience and fun of creation.

3.4.2. Tactile Marketing of NOME

In terms of tactile marketing, NOME has grasped the core of “quality.” Compared with MUJI's pursuit of simplicity, NOME boasts an artistic sense of design. While pursuing the new trend, not a detail has been missed. It intends to perfect its products and bring consumer satisfaction through the texture of the materials, achieving a combination of beauty and quality. In addition, NOME’s general lower pricing than that of similar products of MUJI, combined with its characteristics of “sense of design,” “cheap,” and “quality,” will produce surprises for consumers, targeting their hearts.

3.5. Scent Marketing: Supplementary Interpretation of Brand Spirit

3.5.1. Scent Marketing of MUJI

MUJI's scent marketing mainly focuses on two aspects:

One is Café & Meal MUJI, though limited to a few offline flagship stores. The official interpretation of “Café & Meal MUJI” is the deliciousness of vegetarian food. The name suggests using the most primitive and simple materials to make simple and delicious dishes with no preservatives used and reduced chemical seasonings. Among them, “the most primitive and simple materials” usually refer to natural raw materials collected from areas with abundant sunlight and water resources. This also shares a supplementary effect on the interpretation of the brand concept of MUJI, which can strengthen consumers' memory of the brand image of MUJI and enhance brand stickiness through taste perception.

The other is MUJI snacks. Characterized by “low-calorie,” “delicious,” and “ready-to-eat,” these products capture consumers' truth-seeking psychology. And with free tasting services provided, consumers are allowed to perceive the products through taste.

3.5.2. Scent Marketing of NOME

Table 1. Comparison of Sensory Marketing Application of MUJI and NOME

Sensory Application	Cases of Brands	
	MUJI	NOME
Visual Sense	<p>The stores are designed in a Japanese style. Product packaging design pursues simplicity with a simple and direct introduction.</p> <p>A strict standard is set on the product display to be unified with consumer habits considered.</p> <p>The stores adopt beige, white, and gray as their main colors, with warm lighting to create a warm and comfortable atmosphere.</p>	<p>The stores are designed in a Nordic style, and the product packaging design varies from product, pursuing a sense of fashion design.</p> <p>The product display is categorized by themes, in line with consumers' shopping habits.</p> <p>The stores adopt the main colors of white and Tiffany blue, with white spotlights to create a fashionable and high-end shopping environment.</p>
Olfactory Sense	<p>The stores have a unique scent with memory points.</p> <p>Extracted from natural plants, the scent has the effect of relaxing the body and mind.</p> <p>Aromatherapy is matched with various types of aromatherapy machines. Combined sales are possible for these two complementary products.</p>	<p>The main form is rattan aromatherapy. The field of scent diffusion effect is too small to attract consumers.</p> <p>Without memory points, consumers fail to form a fixed perception of scent.</p>
Auditory Sense	<p>Soft and relaxed Japanese slow-tuned music and folk songs are mainly played to make consumers feel cordial and relaxed.</p>	<p>Electronic music with popular tunes and voices is mainly played, following the fashion trends.</p>
Tactile Sense	<p>Trial service and open experience area are provided.</p> <p>MUJI YOURSELF provides self-service product design services.</p>	<p>“Quality” design is emphasized.</p> <p>Even a product as small as a toothbrush can have both “beauty” and “texture.”</p>
Taste Sense	<p>Café & Meal MUJI provides gourmet cuisine with natural ingredients and no additives.</p> <p>The MUJI snacks featuring “low-calorie and convenience” provide consumers with taste enjoyment.</p>	<p>Cost-effective popular snacks are provided.</p> <p>But snack products with their own characteristics have not yet been formed.</p>

NOME's application in scent marketing remains at the level of brand snacks, providing consumers with current popular snacks cost-effectively. This application method is reflected in home furnishing stores at home and abroad, so NOME's current olfactory marketing situation needs improvement. How to highlight the characteristics of its brand snacks, or find other levels of scent marketing modes are the focused points for NOME.

The analysis of the sensory marketing of MUJI and NOME in five dimensions can be summarized in Table 1. It can be seen from it that visual marketing, auditory marketing and tactile marketing are both emphasized and applied skillfully by both brands. In contrast, the emerging brand NOME lacks innovation in olfactory marketing and scent marketing. The application methods are relatively immature, indicating that it has not yet formed a marketing method that conforms to its own brand style. While the advantages of five senses are exerted in all directions in MUJI, a grocery store established earlier. Seemingly deliberate on the visual and tactile senses, it invisibly conveys the exclusive style concept of MUJI to consumers in terms of hearing, smell and taste, subtly establishing consumers' brand awareness of MUJI. Given the loss of customers with the domination of e-commerce in the market, MUJI's sensory marketing method is worth learning for most physical stores. But at the same time, we also need to pay attention to avoid copying in the reference process. As different brands are bred from different cultures, consumers have their own preferences, and different brands target different consumer groups, brands must prepare comprehensive research in the initial stage of establishing physical stores.

4. Strategic Suggestions for Using Sensory Marketing in Physical Stores

4.1. Formulation of Marketing Strategies for Personalized Olfaction and Taste

It can be found from our comparative research and data collection that domestic physical stores prove to be deficient in olfactory and scent marketing. Many brands tend to neglect this aspect, either subject to cost and practicality or other objective factors. But from a long-term perspective, the impact of olfactory and taste senses on brand revenue is far more significant than its initial investment cost. Marketers need to predictably formulate reasonable olfactory and scent marketing plans and finally propose olfactory and taste marketing in line with their brand's tonality.

4.2. Detailed Consumer Surveys

With the acceleration of globalization, international brands have launched stores in many countries, but the same marketing method is not necessarily suitable for all brands. As scholar Krishna said in "Sensory Marketing," when olfactory marketing was applied to the automotive industry, European and American consumers favored the "new car taste," establishing it as one factor that stimulates consumption. On the contrary, the "new car taste" failed to stimulate consumers' desire to buy in China. The reason mainly lies in that the cultural differences in different regions will lead to different shopping habits and the shopping tastes of consumers. Therefore, in the early stage of formulating a plan, marketers need to conduct detailed market research and consumer profile analysis. With the market positioning of the brand and targeted consumers determined first, the most appropriate sensory marketing method can then be selected based on such consumers.

Meanwhile, according to the "Matthew Effect," when consumers consume in their shopping environment, they may also browse, sightsee or consume in nearby places, and may have purchase behaviors, that is, the scale of the business environment effect. The location of brand stores predominantly affects the level of consumers the brand targets; conversely, the characteristics of the consumers also impact the city where the brand is launched. Therefore, detailed consumer surveys have a strong impact on the early brand positioning analysis and the later scale sales.

4.3. Emphasis on Emotional Design and Experience

Emotional marketing can be regarded as the deepening and sublimation of sensory marketing to a certain extent; it extends sensory stimulation and experience to a more personalized and differentiated emotional and psychological level. As we mentioned before, sensory marketing can deepen consumers' impression of a brand, among which 75% of human emotions are produced by the olfactory sense, and olfactory memory is more impressive than other forms of memory. And this impression can be either good or bad. Just imagine, if a unique scent that can make consumers feel happy, comfortable and relaxing is chosen by the marketer when designing a brand scent, is it better than those who choose an impressive scent but brings forth averse and disgusting emotions?

When two similar brands are compared by consumers, if one of them can satisfy customers from product quality to consumer needs, or even create demand for consumers with an unexpected sense of experience generated, then consumers will naturally prefer this brand. Therefore, when marketers are designing plans, it is necessary for them to, in addition to grasping the level of sensory marketing, further think about how to go deep into emotional marketing, strengthen in-depth communication with consumers, and keenly grasp consumers' emotional differences and psychological appeals, so as to be more precisely adapt to consumer demands.

5. Conclusion

At present, the development of the e-commerce economy in China is facing transformation, under which new retail formats continue to rise, and the consumption market will be more closely integrated with consumer needs. Only through sensory marketing to research and interpret consumer psychology and behavior will companies play a positive role in having a deeper grasp of consumer preferences and needs, providing better and more humanized services for creation demands, and forming a good market environment. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the research on the application of sensory marketing in the retail industry, improve the deficiencies, and innovate marketing methods based on existing examples, so as to consolidate the position of retail formats in economic development.

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