

Research Note

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Integrating the Five Senses in University Curricula

Introduction

How can one integrate the five senses into teaching? This question occurred to us after we had discussed Lindstrom's (2005) comments about branding in which he shied away from the usual chapters in branding textbooks and instead focused on "sensory branding" in his book *Brand Sense: Build Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, and Sound*. In the book he demonstrates how to integrate the five senses for successful branding.

About 75% of our emotions are triggered by smell. Smell is second only in importance to sight. Emphasizing the power of smell, Lindstrom (2005) reveals that manufacturers spray new-car aroma into each car before it leaves the factory. Singapore Airlines' hot towels contain a patented scent that is used as perfume by its flight attendants. A brand is a sensory experience beyond the basic sight of the traditional paradigm. A brand integrates all five senses, covering the whole breadth of sensory branding. It is as if one started with a dusty clay model and built into it the five senses. It introduces the Genesis to branding. The five senses create a distinct personality, breathing life into it (Bonnici, 2006).

Study-Abroad Program

One may think of each course taught by a professor as a brand in itself. Students have preferences for certain courses and for certain professors. A course is thus a brand in itself even if as a service it lacks the tangibility of a material product.

We decided to take a close look at our annual study-abroad program in international marketing, which we organize for 10 days in Germany. We created a matrix in which we examined the salient daily events in the program under the five senses. In other words, to what extent did each event contribute to the students experiencing touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound?

We found that each event contributed to sight. Because each location was new to the students, every street, town, or museum held some surprise for them, a feast for the eye. The major way to improve the program under the *Sight* column was to select the best possible sights for the students. Hence instead of just taking them to the Black Forest, we decided to take them to the

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most picturesque spot in it. Instead of going to the quaint French town of Neuf-Brisach, we traveled half an hour farther to the town of Colmar, a medieval gem.

A bigger challenge was to incorporate the other four senses. Smell and taste could best be taken care of by means of food. In our attempt to reduce the price of the study-abroad program, we had originally left the food out of the official budget. We now decided to increase the price to include a variety of foods during the entire program. We organized a welcome dinner on our first day in Germany. Coffee and fresh cakes came first, followed by a leisurely stroll through the narrow streets snaking through an ancient town overlooking the Rhine and its boats for an appreciation of sights and sounds. Dinner followed at an ex-stagecoach restaurant. The students could order what they liked as long as they included something that they had never tried before. We planned a different cuisine almost every day, ranging from traditional Alsace brioche and bread rolls coated with pork fat (instead of butter), to yufkas and falafel in a Turkish eatery. Students pondered in their reports to what extent these exotic foods would fit in on a United States menu. Before leaving for Germany, each student was handed a plastic bag with packaged food that the professors had cooked the day before. Not only was this food a blessing during the long flight and ride to Germany, it also established an immediate personal touch. At the small German guesthouse, the chef-owner was asked to teach our students how to cook *flammekueche* (a traditional German pizza that uses double cream instead of tomato sauce) and prepare exquisite salads in contribution to touch, smell, and taste.

We cut down on rented buses and opted for more public transport and walking. We taught our students basic German phrases. This enhanced the level of conversation with the Germans, especially on the trains and buses. Our itinerary included village festivals for a mixture of conversations and music (i.e., hearing) and food. In the Schwarzwald we rented small boats that the students navigated and handled themselves (i.e., touch) rather than taking the usual large boat for passive tourists.

As one student wrote later, "All five of my senses were titillated ... For many of us, our main purpose was to study ... However we got much more ... We interacted with the locals, and immersed ourselves in their culture and way of life."

Conclusion

The success of directly infusing the five senses carried over to our experience on campus in the US. Instead of a mere lecture during the faculty brown-bag series, we added fruit drinks and wholesome food for a congenial atmosphere. Instead of just bringing outside speakers to class, one could first convert the class into a student club, secure funding for it through the student activities office, and buy pizza and drinks for the speaker sessions. In our marketing classes, instead of just comparing Coke and Pepsi in a blind taste test, we added comparisons of creams and lotions (i.e., touch and smell) and various versions of the same song (i.e., hearing) such as the *Numa Numa Dance* videos on the Internet.

The five senses are addressed in elementary education curricula, but somehow get lost in subsequent curricula. As the above experience shows, they can breathe life and new dimensions even into a university curriculum.

References

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