

## **SENSORY MARKETING AND CUSTOMERS' DECISIONS ON THE FOOD MARKET**

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### **1. Introduction**

The concept of sensory marketing defines that it is the most effective marketing strategy tool influencing the customers' sensual experiences. This is a marketing strategy whose function is to lead the incentives to the recipient senses, involving the senses of sight, hearing, taste and touch, in fulfilling the purchasing process. The recipient's senses are being used to build the effective marketing strategies, especially on the food market. For many customers the perception, pleasures and emotions are a powerful incentive to shape attitudes and help people make impulsive decisions, in which the price is tangential. The sense of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell allow the purchaser to reminisce about the particular product.

Sensory marketing is a novel and useful concept integrating subareas at various levels of development such as visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative and tactile. Sensory marketing, also called the marketing of five sense, aims at enriching the perception process of the goods on the market so that the positive emotions arouse around the product and encourage the customer to purchase it. The most important factor in sensory marketing is to activate the largest number of receptors (preferably all five) of potential purchasers as well as use incentives to elicit positive associations and reactions, as it is a basis of sensory satisfaction, which plays an important role in purchase decisions [1, p.53; 2, p.77].

Olfactory incentives reach the brain directly and much faster than any other senses. Human organism reacts to these senses promptly and unconsciously. Not only does the smell influence a person's emotions but it also has a very evocative power of memories. Smell is so important for a human being that it can evoke certain behaviors and thus combining marketing with the sense of smell can create a new concept of marketing – scent marketing [3, p.44].

Mass marketing has been used for quite a long time in communicating messages and stressing the company's position and products, mainly in radio and television commercials. The role of the music is to strengthen and dramatize the communication. By means of the sound, corporations are trying to express their identity as well as strengthen their image. The sources of auditory experience can be various sensory impressions such as a jingle, a human voice, music, atmosphere, leitmotif, the ability of attracting attention, sound branding or a characteristic sound [4, p.74; 5, p.44].

Sight contributes to increasing the brand awareness and creating its image by means of visualizations. In order to make this process possible, there are different sensory impressions such as design, packaging, color, light, superficies and interior design. Those sensory impressions, individually or collectively, enable the visualization of the goods, services or business premises. Design, packaging or style are mainly associated with physical goods, whereas incentives such as color, light or a leitmotif can be both related to goods and services [6, p.18].

Touch is an important factor in customers' perception of products and their quality, especially in case of buying food products when the decision is often based on the physical contact with the product. Taste is perceived through taste buds concentrated on the tongue [7, p.55]. Taste buds recognize four basic tastes: sweetness, saltiness, sourness and bitterness. The ability to perceive tastes is decreasing with age and using stronger incentives to achieve the same goals is necessary.

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Gustatory perception is individual and depends majorly on the contents of an individual's saliva [5, p.44].

## **2. Substantive area of research**

The principal focus of the research was to present the influence of the sensory marketing tools on buyers' behavior on the food market. The main thesis of the research:

- sensory characteristics of food products such as taste, smell, color and texture decide about the consumer attractiveness of the unpacked goods;
- the packaging, color and well-known brand logos influence purchasing of packaged food products and have an impact on a better product evaluation declared by consumers.

The following research problems have been taken in consideration:

1. Specifying the influence and the importance of fragrance on consumers' mood and creating good atmosphere as well as eliciting positive emotions in the shop;
2. Specifying the influence of touch in the consumer decision-making process when purchasing a product;
3. Specifying the influence of gustatory experiences on the reception of a product and purchasing decisions among the interviewed consumers.

Direct survey without the pollster was the method used in the research. The questionnaire was used as the measurement tool. The research was conducted in the north-east Poland. 473 respondents participated in the research. Material for the research was collected in spring 2012.

The questionnaire was prepared after establishing the diversity of sensory incentives influencing the decision-making process (the criteria was individualized after studying reference books). After designing the questionnaire, the pilot study was carried out to verify the final version of the questionnaire.

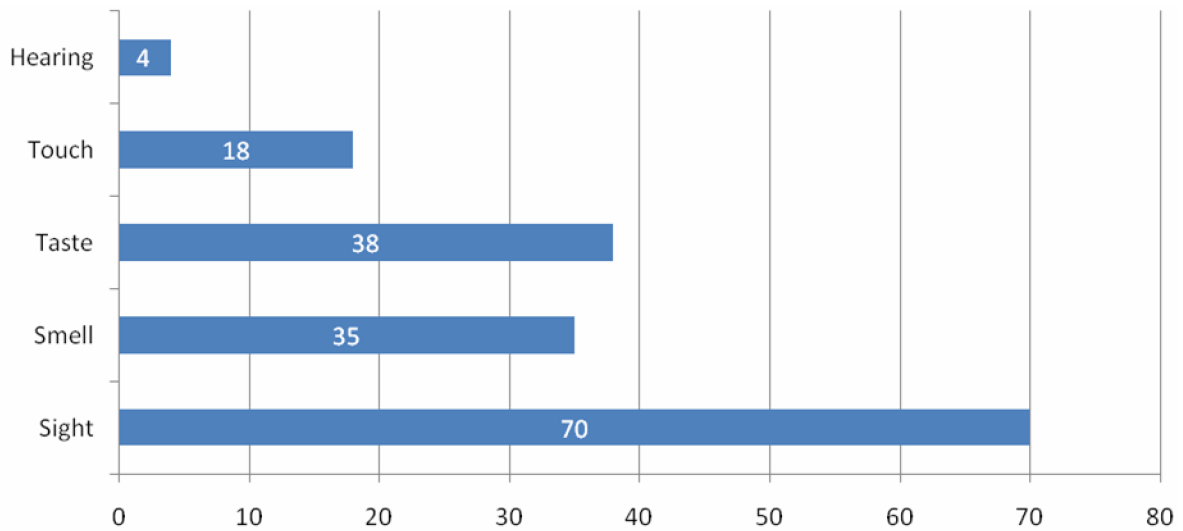
Women comprised 55% and men 45% of all the respondents. The age pyramid indicates that most of the respondents are young people between 19 to 25 and they comprise 55,1%, and people between 36 and 45 comprise 14,5% of the people surveyed. The respondents are the people with secondary (35,4%) and higher education (25,9%), and among them are city dwellers (49%).

## **3. Research results**

Sensory marketing instruments use the product and surroundings, in which it is presented, effectively, to such an extent that customer's senses are activated and participate in creating the perception and attitudes towards the product. In the process of purchasing, customers use the senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste or touch, and their participation depends on the incentives which are sent to the customer.

The effectiveness of the sensory marketing instruments increases when the adequate incentives are directed at customers with active senses which are used when buying products. The choice of food products is made with the involvement of all the senses, however, consumers' experiences are different, and the activeness of the senses depends on personal attributes or the form of the assessed product (a packed and non-packed products).

At the initial stage of the research, all the respondents were asked to specify which sense they use when choosing food products. In the opinion of the respondents, they choose food products by judging the look and feel of the products, as it has been indicated by 70%, and a quarter considers sight as a decisive sense in consumers' behavior on the market.

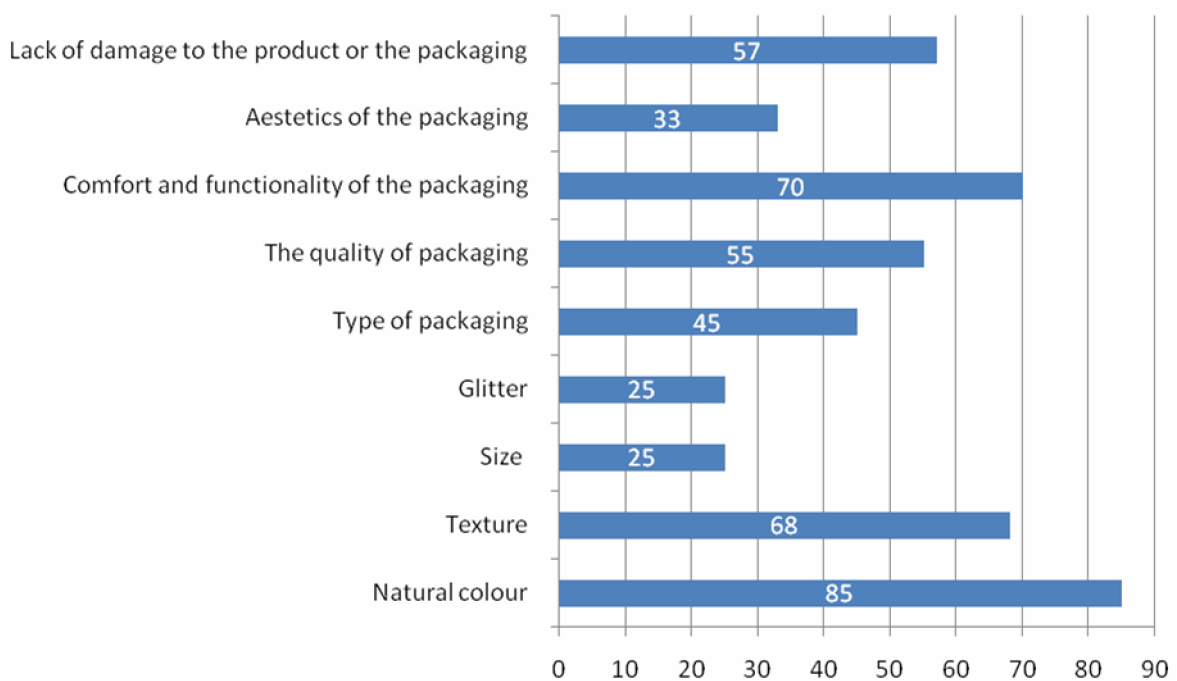


**Fig. 1. Senses used in the process of decision-making when buying food products according to respondents (%)**

Source: own survey

The people surveyed also use the sense of taste when judging food products. 38% of people indicate this sense as important. According to 35% of the respondents, smell is also very important, and in case of 18% of interviewees, touch is also used to confirm the quality of products. As stated by the respondents, the sense of hearing is not used when evaluating food products although they indicate music is an important factor in creating the attractive atmosphere of the place.

The features of the food products, which the respondents evaluate using sight are usually the presentation of the product or packaging. In respect of the presentation of the product, 85% of the respondents appraise color, and its intensity accounts for tastiness, freshness and attractiveness of the product. For the large group of respondents, texture (turgidity, mellowness, lucidity, density etc.) is the characteristic feature of food products as an indicator of freshness and naturalness.



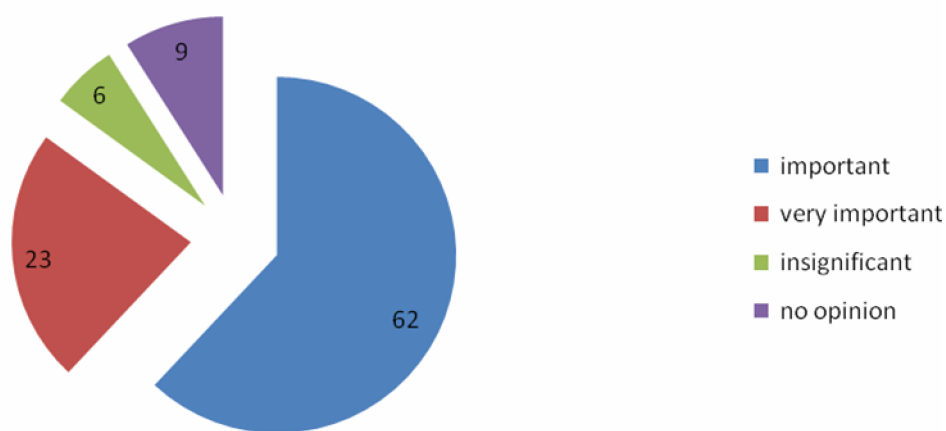
**Fig. 2. Physical attributes of food judged by respondents (%)**

Source: own survey

The sense of touch allows the physical contact with the surroundings we live in. We receive the information about products' freshness and mellowness through touch. In case of packed products, the features that people judge are the packaging, robustness, convenience and attractiveness.

Packaging features as well as aesthetics may decide about sensory judgments consumers make or define its destination. Wrapping the product may emphasize its functionality and therefore it can be used as a present. This idea is absolutely essential in tourism when we promote the particular region and regional food, then the attractiveness of the packaging and its originality increases the functions of the product.

During the research the attempt was made to prove how important the decor is when choosing the retailer (Fig. 3). The vast majority of consumers participating in the research indicated that the decor was important (62%), whereas 23% of the respondents said that the interior design was very important. Only 6% of the people interviewed claimed that it was insignificant.



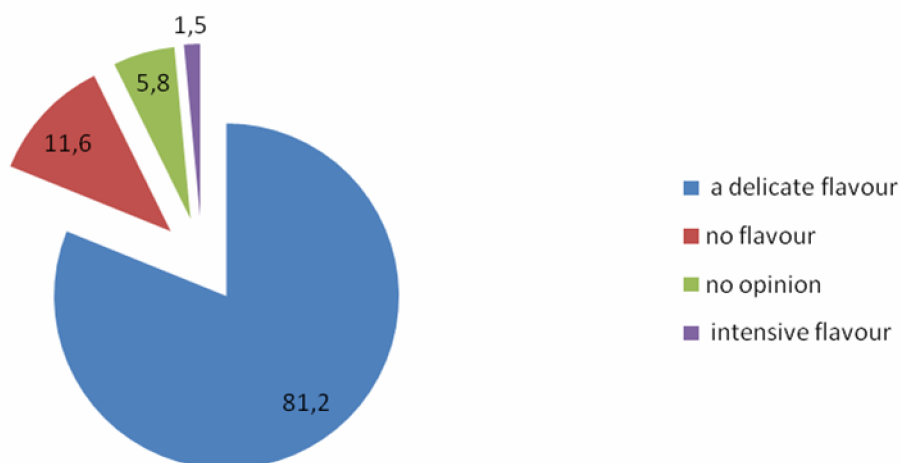
**Fig. 3. Importance of decor and purchasing decisions concerning food in the opinion of the respondents (%)**

Source: own survey

The decor of the shop, and especially light, is the most important factor in the opinion of the majority of the respondents as it creates the friendly atmosphere, exposes the attractive products and gives the place a really individual character.

The respondents gave their opinions on the tasting of food products and to what extent it is a convincing instrument to trial the product. More than 63% of the respondents would opt for purchasing the products they had tested which indicates the need to familiarize with the product before buying it. Approximately 11% of the respondents would try a product, but they would need to verify their opinions and would not buy the product directly after degustation, and almost 25% of the people interviewed were incapable of choosing the right answer to this question.

Smell is mainly used to judge the freshness and tastiness of food, especially in case of lack of packaging (meat, fruit and vegetables, bakery products etc.). In sensory marketing, the consumer's senses are activated to judge the place in which the food is sold. The main focus of the research was the smell and its influence on the decisions the customers make when choosing the shop. The people surveyed were asked about their preferences concerning the intensity of smell in the place where they buy products and more than 80% choose places in which the fragrance is delicate. No more than 1,5% tolerate the intensive flavor and more than 11% of respondents are satisfied with the lack of any fragrance.



**Fig. 4. The preferable intensity of flavor in the shop in the opinion of the respondents (%)**

Source: own survey

Music is an important issue influencing the choice of the shop. The people surveyed defined the basis concerning music in shopping centers and almost a half of them (46,4%) indicated that music is a crucial element creating the atmosphere of the place and evoking good mood in customers, which as a result, made the shopping more pleasant. Approximately 28% of the respondents acknowledged that they did not pay the attention to the music in grocery shops.

#### 4. Conclusions

Sensory marketing aims at providing clients with the highest possible sensational experiences. Human senses, which are the source of providing necessary information about objects and actions, are the carriers of incentives conditioning the perception, attitudes, preferences and choices. The main problem with the effective usage of sensory marketing tools is the individualization of consumers' perception. As a result, it determines the companies' operations in the area of precise choice and specificity of tools comprising incentives.

A consumer choosing a product, which looks interesting in the sense of color, shape, exuding pleasant aroma and is exposed in an interesting way in the shop window, will certainly return to the same product ignoring the competitive product. The price change is becoming a less activating mechanism.

As to food products, consumers are very sensitive to sensory incentives under the influence of various sensory impressions they decide, or not, to buy particular products. A well-associated brand contributes to acquiring and sustaining close, anonymous and long-term relationships, which are characterized by trust and commitment.

Fragrance in shopping centers and the smell of a product have an influence on consumers' well-being and create a positive atmosphere. The aroma may have a positive impact on the customers' loyalty to the company. Certain smells refer to certain associations and consequently consumers' habits, which judge the product and its attributes and verify the repeatability of standards. Smell intensifies the recognition of the brand. However, the company applying the sensory marketing ought to take into consideration the intensity of smell because customers definitely prefer delicate fragrance and avoid places with strong aroma.

Sight is claimed to be the most important of all the senses. Color, light and leitmotifs attract the customers' attention, who notices all the visual alterations very quickly. The vast majority of customers are of the opinion that the decor has an impact on the purchasing process. A display in a shop window and the interior design are the first encounter of a customer with a product or a brand, and therefore, the display should include all the attributes and strengths of the company.

Taste makes a valuable addition to food products and their brands as well as strengthens their identity. It is often a lasting competitive advantage. Sensory impressions strengthen the way the product is served, its packaging, visual side and name. Food tasting is a crucial issue when making a decision which food to buy and thanks to the previous possibility of tasting the product, the customers decide to buy it. Evaluation of food products is made through judging the color, and the visual side is one of the main criteria when choosing food. Smell and taste are significant senses when judging the freshness and tastiness of food products and the tactile evaluation of texture strengthens the product credibility. Touch is also a crucial sense in creating emotions in the choice of packaged products.

Sounds stimulate different emotional relations in customers. They declare the importance of music which is played in the shop. The people interviewed cannot indicate any characteristic tunes associated with a particular shop. That is why, music should be chosen carefully to suit the particular shop as well as create associations with the venue and product, soothe the customers and create a pleasant atmosphere. All these factors can prolong the time spent in the shop.

Sensory marketing influences the buyers' behavior on the market, making the purchasing process more interesting and creating positive and long-lasting relations between the customer and the product or brand or a customer with a shopping venue.

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## Summary

The main purpose of this paper is to make an attempt to present the influence of sensory marketing on buyer's buying behavior. The paper covers the topic regarding the theory of influence of individual senses on buyer's behavior. Sight is the most used sense in sensory marketing. The first way of brand's identification is through colors, shapes, and lights. When the light is natural or softened customers spend more time in one place, but when light is an intensive customer become more dynamic. Sound is also important for sensory marketing users. Taste is often used when companies offer free-tasting promotional operations. Companies take emotions spared off by touch during the conditioning of the product or its conception. Sensory marketing is a deep and effective concept.

**Key words:** sensory marketing, consumers' behavior, food product.

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