

CONSUMER PERCEPTION

Perception is the process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensations, i.e. the immediate response of sensory receptors (such as the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and fingers) to such basic stimuli as light, colour, odour, texture, and sound. Anything that activates a receptor is called a *stimulus*. The study of perception focuses on what we *add* to raw sensations in order to give them meaning. Each individual interprets the meaning of a stimulus to be consistent with his or her own unique biases, needs, and experiences. As the Figure given below shows, the three stages of exposure, attention, and interpretation make up the process of perception.



The Perception Process

Overall, perception is simply the process of (i) selecting, (ii) organizing, and (iii) interpreting information inputs in order to produce meaning that would aid in consumption decision-making. At the exposure phase, information inputs are sensations received through our sense organs (i.e., sight, taste, hearing, smell, and touch). For example, when we see or hear an advertisement, smell or touch a product, we receive information inputs. These processes are collectively referred to as the process of perception.

PROCESS OF PERCEPTION

The following is the process of perception:

1. Exposure

Exposure occurs when a stimulus comes within the range of someone's sensory receptors— sight, smell or touch. Consumers may either tend to concentrate on certain stimuli while being completely unaware of others, or they may even go out of their way to ignore certain messages.

2. Attention

Attention refers to the extent to which processing activity is devoted to a particular stimulus. Consider, for example, the thought of having to sit through both interesting and “less interesting” lectures. This can vary depending on both the characteristics of the stimulus (i.e., the lecture itself) and the recipient (i.e., your mental state at that time). Consumers often are in a state of *sensory overload*, where they are exposed to far more information than they can process. Taken from a marketing perspective, we are often bombarded with marketing stimuli from commercial sources, thus making the competition for our attention an ever-increasing phenomenon.

3. Interpretation

Interpretation refers to the meaning that we assign to sensory stimuli. Just as people differ in terms of the stimuli that they perceive, the meanings we assign to these stimuli vary as well. Two people can see or hear the same event, but their interpretation of it can be as different as night and day, depending on what they had expected the stimulus to be. The meaning we assign to a stimulus depends on the *schema* (i.e., set of beliefs), to which we assign it. Identifying and evoking the correct schema is crucial to many marketing decisions because this determines what criteria consumers will use to evaluate the product, package, or message.

PERCEPTUAL ORGANIZATION

Our brains tend to relate incoming sensations to others already in memory, based on some fundamental organizational principles. These principles derive from *Gestalt psychology*, a school of thought that maintains that people interpret meaning from the *totality* of a set of stimuli rather than from any individual stimulus. In other words, the concept suggests that “*the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.*” By implication, a piecemeal perspective that analyses each component of the stimulus separately cannot capture the total effect. The *Gestalt* perspective provides several principles relating to the way our brains organize stimuli. Three principles are worth elaborating here:

1. The ***closure principle*** states that people tend to perceive an incomplete picture as complete. For example, when we hear only part of a jingle or theme. Marketing strategies that use the closure principle encourage audience participation, which increases the chance that people will attend to the message.
2. The ***principle of similarity*** tells us that consumers tend to group together objects that share similar physical characteristics. *Green Giant* relied on this principle when the company redesigned the packaging for its line of frozen vegetables. It created a “sea of green” look to unify all of its different offerings.
3. The ***figure-ground principle*** states that one part of a stimulus will dominate (the *figure*), and other parts recede into the background (the *ground*). The figure is dominant, and the eye goes straight to it. For example, 70% off could be the eye catcher for a pair of *ray ban* sunglasses but, on closer inspection, you might notice that the offer is subject to certain terms and conditions.

SENSORY SYSTEMS

Talking of the process of perception, you may recall that we are first exposed to stimuli before any serious attention may be given. Such exposure is obviously to our sensory receptors and the processing occurs within our sensory systems. For example, we can receive external stimuli, or *sensory inputs*, on a number of channels. We may see a billboard, hear a jingle, feel the silkiness of a quality *saree* (traditional South Asian dress), taste a new flavour of Turkish coffee, or smell of the Arabian musk. The inputs our five senses detect are the raw data that begin the perceptual process. For example, sensory data emanating from the external environment (e.g., hearing a music clip on the radio) can generate internal sensory experiences when the song triggers a young man’s memory of his encounter with his bride and brings to mind the smell of her perfume as they finally get to meet in her court. The unique sensory quality of a product can play an important role in helping it stand out from competition, especially if the brand creates a unique association with the sensation. In recent years, the sensory experiences we receive from products and services have become an even larger priority when we choose among competing products and/or brands. Table 7.1 provides an illustration of the five senses and how these impact upon our perceptual processing.

Perception and the Use of Senses

Sense	Illustration
Smell	Aroma—sweet smelling scents of deodorants and/or coffee
Sound	Music soundtracks in TV commercials can affect message interpretation (pleasant music tends to arouse positive emotions)
Taste	Blind tests tend to show the importance of brand image (Coca Cola blind tests are a classic in this regard). See also Madichie (2011a) on the taste attributes of the Nigerian Guinness
Touch	This is particularly important for bricks-and-mortar retailing and can be problematic for online retailers. Marketers have now started inserting samples of fabrics in magazines
Vision/Sight	The use of colour in packaging has an impact on our senses—think about the red and yellow representing speed, e.g. Kodak, DHL and McDonalds

1. Smell

Smell, good or bad (i.e. aroma or odour), can stir up emotions or create a calming effect – especially in the case of aromas. They can also invoke memories or relieve stress, as in the case of aromatherapy (where scents are used for healing). One study found that consumers who viewed ads for either flowers or chocolate and who also were exposed to flowery or chocolatey odours spent more time processing the product information and were more likely to try out different alternatives within each product category. Many consumers control the odours in their environments and this growing interest has created and/or re-created a lot of new products in recent years. Overall, the sense of smell is related to pleasure and well-being and is closely connected to emotions and memories.

2. Sound

The sense of sound is linked to emotions and feelings and the sense impacts brand experiences and interpretations. It is by no coincidence that we are bombarded with the sound of music all the time. Obviously, our senses and especially vision (sight) cannot seem to work in isolation in today's consumerist world. Think about how Radio advertisements tend to trail their TV counterparts in marketers' ad spend. Better still think about how you would feel watching a movie while the volume control is on mute. Could it be pure accident that electronics manufacturers launched the "home theatre" surround system for our enjoyment of movies?

3. Taste

Our taste receptors obviously contribute to our experience of many products. So-called "*flavour houses*" keep busy developing new concoctions to please the changing palates of consumers. Scientists are right behind them as they develop new devices to test these flavours. Coca-Cola and PepsiCo use the tongue to test the quality of corn syrups, whereas drugs manufacturers such as Roche have been known to use the device to devise medicines that do not taste bitter.¹ Changes in our culture also determine the tastes we find desirable. For example, consumers' greater appreciation of different ethnic dishes has contributed to increased desires for spicy foods. For example, Nandos, the Portuguese/South African restaurant chain, is popular for its *peri-peri* chicken and dishes.

4. Touch

Although scientists have done relatively little research on the effects of tactile stimulation on consumer behaviour, common observation tells us that this sensory channel is important. Consider the classic, contoured Coca-Cola bottle, which was designed to satisfy the request of a US bottler for a soft-drink container that people could identify even in the dark. Indeed, sensations that reach the skin, whether from a luxurious massage or the chill of a winter wind, stimulate or relax us. Researchers even have shown that touch can influence sales interactions. Britain's Asda supermarket (a part of the Walmart Group) is reported to have removed the wrapping from several brands of toilet tissue in its stores so that shoppers could feel and compare textures—an experiment that resulted in soaring sales for its own in-store brand by up to 50% increase in shelf space.

5. Vision

Marketers rely heavily on visual elements in advertising, store design, and packaging. They communicate meanings on the *visual channel* through a product's colour, size, and styling. Philips gives its electronics a younger feel by making them thinner and more colourful. Colours may even influence our emotions more directly. Evidence suggests that some colours (particularly red) create feelings of arousal and stimulate appetite, and others (such as blue) create more relaxing feelings. Yet others such as golden may suggest luxury, etc.

Some reactions to colour come from learned associations. In Western countries, black is the colour of mourning, whereas in most Arab countries, white plays this role. In addition, while the colour black may be associated with power in western world (think of the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team), the same may not be the case in the Arab world in which the black colour is worn by women of decency in the traditional Abaya. Other reactions are a result of biological and cultural differences. Women are drawn toward brighter tones and they are more sensitive to subtle shades and patterns. Some scientists have argued that age influences our responsiveness to colour—as we get older, our eyes mature and our vision blurs. Consequently, colours tend to look duller to older people, so they prefer white and other bright tones. This helps to explain why mature consumers are much more likely to choose a white car—Lexus, which sells heavily in this market, makes 60% of its vehicles in white. Coincidentally, most consumers in the Arab world tend to opt for white cars as being

very good heat conductors (arguably white cars tend to be cooler especially in the hot summer months). Meanwhile, there have been muted perceptions about white coloured cars having very marginal second-hand value in countries such as the UK.

PERCEPTUAL DISTORTION

People can form different perceptions of the same stimulus due to three perceptual processes—notably *selective attention*, *selective distortion*, and *selective retention*. The first of the three—*selective attention* is the tendency of people to screen out most of the information to which they are exposed. This means that marketers would need to strive or work hard in order to attract the attention of consumers. *Selective or perception distortion* simply means the lack of correspondence between the way a stimulus is commonly perceived and the way an individual perceives under the given conditions or circumstances. In other words, it describes the tendency of people to interpret information in a way that will support what they already believe. For example, if a consumer distrusts a particular bank, he might perceive the even honest offers of credit cards, savings rates or even insurance deals as questionable. What this, then, means for marketers is that they must try very hard to understand the mindsets of consumers and how these will affect their interpretations of any sales information or advertisements by the firm. However, as we discussed in Chapter 6, people are also bound to forget much of what they learn. Under such circumstances, consumers tend to retain information that supports their attitudes and beliefs (see Chapter 4). As a result of *selective retention*, therefore, consumers are likely to remember good points made about competing brands. Interestingly, although most marketers worry about whether their products, services or ideas will be perceived at all, some consumers worry that they will be affected by marketing messages without even realizing it—through *subliminal advertising*.

Halo Effect

The Halo Effect was first identified in 1920 by American psychologist, Edward Thorndike. The concept describes how an overall impression shapes specific judgment. In business, a company's overall performance, which is usually defined by tangible financial results, shapes our evaluation of other less tangible things. As highlighted by Rosenweig³ the example of Cisco Systems, which was admired for its customer focus, efficient organization and charismatic CEO, but when performance slipped, it was criticized for the exact same thing. Indeed, it seems rather obvious that in the business world, companies that have been successful in terms of financial performance have tended to arouse our general positive perception towards every other aspect of the company such as innovation, social responsibility and product quality as was conferred upon the coffee giant—Starbucks (exaggerating our perception of the company as the most admired). Other examples have included Apple and Wal-Mart.

CONCEPTS UNDERLYING PERCEPTION

Sensory Thresholds

Sensory thresholds are the lowest intensity of a stimulus that can be registered on a sensory channel (whether sight or sound). There are two popular kinds—absolute and differential. On the one hand, *absolute threshold* refers to the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a given sensory channel. Research has shown that the sound emitted by a dog whistle is too high to be detected by human ears, so this stimulus is beyond our auditory absolute threshold. The absolute threshold is an important consideration in designing marketing stimuli. Consider this—a highway billboard might have the most entertaining copy ever written, but this genius is wasted if the print is too small for passing motorists to see it. *Differential threshold*, on the other hand, refers to the ability of a sensory system to detect changes or differences between two stimuli. The minimum difference we can detect between two stimuli is the just noticeable difference or JND (see the discussion of Weber's Law). The issue of when and if consumers will notice a difference between two stimuli is relevant to many marketing situations. Sometimes, a marketer may want to ensure that consumers notice a change, as when a retailer offers merchandise at a discount. In other situations, the marketer may want to

downplay the fact that it has made a change, such as when a store raises a price or a manufacturer reduces the size of a package. A consumer's ability to detect a difference between two stimuli is relative. A whispered conversation that might be unintelligible on a noisy street can suddenly become public and embarrassingly loud in a quiet library. It is the *relative difference* between the decibel level of the conversation and its surroundings, rather than the absolute loudness of the conversation itself, that determines whether the stimulus will register.

Weber's Law

Ernst Weber, a nineteenth century psychophysicist, found that the amount of change required for the perceiver to notice a change is systematically related to the intensity of the original stimulus. In other words, the stronger the initial stimulus, the greater a change must be, for us to notice it. For example, some retailers have been known to markdown prices in order to boost sales. But the argument is not whether you mark down but by how much. Research has shown that the markdown should be at least 20 percent for the reduction to make an impact on shoppers. If this is the case, a pack of washing up liquid that retails for Rs. 10 should be put on sale for Rs. 8 (a Rs. 2 discount) for shoppers to realize a difference. However, a pair of *Ray Ban* sunglasses selling for Rs. 1000 would not benefit from a "mere" Rs. 2 discount. A retailer would have to mark it down to Rs. 800 to achieve the same impact. Because the brain's capacity to process information is limited, consumers are very selective about what they pay attention to. The process of *perceptual selection* means that people attend to only a small portion of the stimuli to which they are exposed. Consumers practice a form of "psychic economy," picking and choosing among stimuli to avoid being overwhelmed. How do they choose? Both personal and stimulus factors should help to decide.

Subliminal Perceptions

Subliminal perception refers to the ability to perceive a stimulus that is below the level of conscious awareness. The concept holds that a brief exposure of a message would cause people to experience a sudden mysterious desire to act. In other words, the theory holds that such messages would flash (appear and disappear in a matter of seconds) to the extent that they would slip through or bypass the normal perceptual safeguards and thereby register on the individual's consciousness unedited, e.g. flashing messages unto these claims were so powerful that subliminal advertising was banned in some countries and regulated in others. For more on this, see Aspan4 and Nelson.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTION

There are numerous factors influencing perception—both internal and external. From the internal perspective, we have a series of personal factors such as experience (which is the result of acquiring and processing stimulation over time) as one factor that determines how much exposure to a particular stimulus a person accepts. Three other factors are linked to our perceptual filters, perception vigilance and perceptual defense discussed below. *Perceptual filters*, based on our past experiences, influence whatever stimuli we decide to process. *Perceptual vigilance* relates to the chosen stimuli that make it through our perceptual filters. Consumers are more likely to be aware of stimuli that relate to their current needs—for example watching the Cricket World Cup might not be of interest to some fans until their country qualifies for the semi-finals. Perceptual vigilance is a form of *perceptual defense*. In other words, consumers see only what they want to see—and effectively blocking out what they do not want to see (this is discussed later). This is often the case when a stimulus seems to threaten us in some way, and we consequently either completely refuse to process it, or decide to 'distort' its meaning so that it becomes more acceptable to us. For example, a heavy smoker may block out images of cancer-scarred lungs because these images may be too dramatic to take in.

Adaptation

Adaptation simply refers to the degree to which consumers continue to notice a stimulus over time. The process of adaptation occurs when consumers no longer pay attention to a stimulus because it is so familiar. A consumer can "habituate" and require increasingly stronger "doses" of a stimulus in order to notice it. A commuter on his way to work might read a billboard message when it is first installed, but after a few days, it simply becomes part of everyday living. Several factors lead to adaptation.

- **Duration**—Stimuli that require relatively lengthy exposure in order to be processed habituate (i.e. decrease in response to a stimulus after repeated presentations) because they require a long attention span
- **Relevance**—Stimuli that are irrelevant or unimportant tend to habituate because they fail to attract attention
- **Intensity**—Less-intense stimuli (e.g., soft sounds or dim colours) habituate because they have less sensory impact
- **Exposure**—Frequently encountered stimuli habituate as the rate of exposure increases
- **Discrimination**—Simple stimuli habituate because they do not require attention to detail.

In addition to the receiver's mindset, the characteristics of the stimulus itself play an important role in determining what gets noticed and what gets ignored. Marketers need to understand these factors so they can create messages and packages that will have a better chance of cutting through the clutter. A message can create *contrast* in several ways:

- **Novelty**—Stimuli that appear in unexpected ways or places tend to grab our attention. One solution is to put ads in unconventional places, where there will be less competition for attention, e.g. on tunnel walls, floors of sports stadiums, and even public toilets (Solomon6; McCarthy7).
- **Position**—We stand a better chance of noticing stimuli that are in places we are more likely to look (sounds like the opposite of novelty if you think about it properly). That is why the competition is so heated among suppliers to have their products displayed in stores at eye level.
- **Size**—The size of the stimulus itself in contrast to the competition helps to determine if it will command attention. Readership of a magazine ad increases in proportion to the size of the advertisement.
- **Colour**—It is a powerful way to draw attention to a product or to give it a distinct identity. For example, what do DHL, Kodak and McDonalds have in common? The answer is Red and Yellow—which are perceived with speedy service (in their respective sectors of logistics, photography and fast-food).

CONSUMER IMAGE AND MARKETING PERCEPTION

How can a sports celebrity such as the Indian Cricketer, Sachin Tendulkar, enhance the image of a fast-food restaurant? While you are still thinking, *semiotics* may just be the gateway to understanding the point here. Other key attributes may include *perceptual mapping* and *product positioning*, *perception of price and quality* and their relationship to *corporate* and *self-image*. We will now discuss these in turn.

Semiotics

Many researchers have come to the conclusion that, on the surface, many marketing images have virtually no literal connection to actual products. Therefore, in their attempt to better understand how consumers interpret the meanings of symbols, some marketers have turned to a field of study called *semiotics*, which is the study of the correspondence between signs and symbols and their roles in how we assign meanings. Semiotics is important to the understanding of consumer behaviour because consumers use products to express their social identities. Products have learned meanings, and we rely on marketers to help us figure out what those meanings are. From a semiotic perspective, every marketing message has three basic components: an *object*, a *sign* (or symbol), and an *interpretant*. The *object* is the product that is the focus of the message (e.g., Marlboro cigarettes). The *sign* is the sensory image that represents the intended meanings of the object (e.g., the Marlboro cowboy). The *interpretant* is the meaning derived (e.g., rugged, individualistic, American). Signs are related to objects in one of three ways—(i) they can resemble objects; (ii) be connected to them; or (iii) be conventionally tied to them.⁸ Consider the interactions between icons, index and symbols

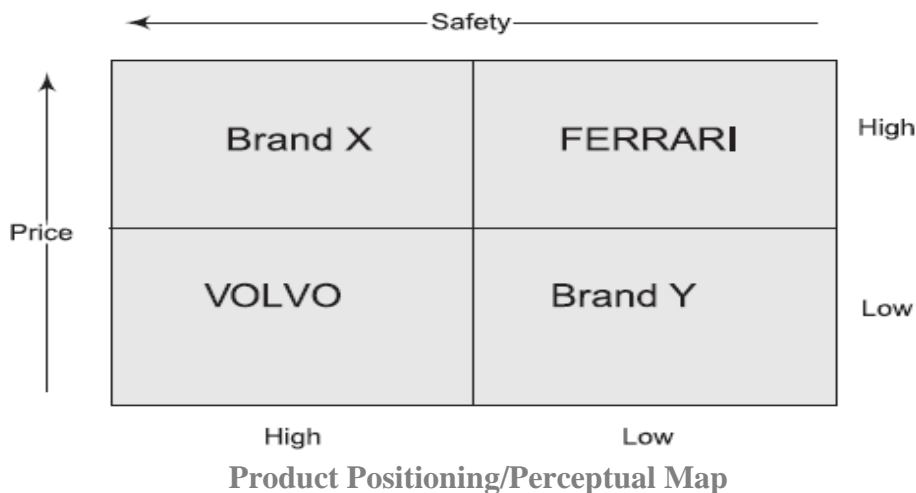
thus:

- **Icon**—A sign that resembles the product in some way (e.g., the Ford Mustang has a galloping horse on the hood).

- *Index*—A sign that is connected to a product because they share some property (e.g., the pine tree on some of Procter & Gamble’s Spic and Span cleanser products conveys the shared property of fresh scent).
- *Symbol*—A sign that relates to a product by either conventional or agreed-on associations. The *Nissan Xterra* combines the word *terrain* with the letter *X*, which many young people associate with extreme sports, to give the brand name a cutting-edge, off-road feel.

Perceptual Mapping and Product Positioning

Our perception of a brand comprises both its functional attributes (e.g., its features, price, etc.) and its symbolic attributes (its image and what we think it says about us when we use it). Our evaluation of a product typically is the result of what it means rather than what it does. This meaning—as consumers perceive it—constitutes the product’s market position, and it may have more to do with our expectations of product performance as communicated by its colour, packaging, or styling than with the product itself. How does a marketer determine where a product actually stands in the minds of consumers? One technique is to ask them what attributes are important to them and how they feel competitors rate on these attributes. We can use this information to construct a *perceptual map*, a vivid way to paint a picture of where products or brands are “located” in consumers’ minds (see Figure for an illustration).



Brand Image

Why do burgers, French fries, chicken nuggets, and even milk and carrots all taste better to children if they think they came from McDonald’s? In taste tests with 63 children aged between three and five years⁹, there was only a slight preference for the McDonald’s-branded hamburger over one wrapped in plain paper, not enough to be statistically significant. But for all the other foods, the McDonald’s brand made all the difference. Almost 77%, for example, thought that McDonald’s French fries served in a McDonald’s bag tasted better, compared with 13 percent who liked the fries in a plain white bag. Apparently, carrots, too, taste better if they are served on paper with the McDonald’s name on it.

Perception of Risk

Although many marketers view their products or services as bundles of attributes, consumers tend to think about them in terms of consequences (or risks), i.e. those outcomes that consumers experience when they consume products. Two broad types of consequences have been identified in the literature—functional and psychosocial.¹⁰ *Functional risks* are concrete outcomes of product/ service usage that are tangible and directly experienced by consumers, e.g. the acceleration or fuel consumption of a car. *Psychosocial risks*, on the other hand, are abstract outcomes that are of an intangible nature and therefore more subjective—e.g. what does it feel like to be a Jaguar (the car) owner. Indeed, evaluative criteria can be objective or subjective. In buying an automobile, consumers use objective attributes such as price, warranty and fuel economy as well as subjective factors such as image, styling and performance.¹¹ The five basic kinds of risk include both objective (e.g.,

physical danger) and subjective factors (e.g., social embarrassment). Consumers with greater 'risk capital' are less affected by perceived risks associated with purchases. The five basic kinds of risk include:

1. *Monetary or financial risk* – This is mostly related to money and property. Those with relatively little income and wealth are most vulnerable. Common for high-ticket items that require a substantial expenditure such as cars and houses.

2. *Functional risk* – It relates to alternative means of performing the function or meeting the need. Practical consumers are the most sensitive. More applicable to purchases requiring the buyer's exclusive commitment.

3. *Social risk* – It is closely linked to self-esteem and confidence. Those who are insecure and uncertain are most sensitive. Typical for socially visible or symbolic products such as clothes, jewellery, homes, or sports equipment.

4. *Psychological risk* – It is similar to social risk, but consists of affiliations and status. Those lacking respect or attractiveness to peers are most sensitive. Common with expensive personal luxuries that may engender guilt, durables, and services whose use demands self-discipline or sacrifice.

5. *Physical risk* – This is concerned with the aspect of physical vigour, health, and vitality. Those who are elderly, frail, or in ill health are most vulnerable. Applicable to mechanical or electrical goods (e.g. flammables), drugs and medical treatment, as well as food and beverages, e.g. wine.

Risk Reduction Strategies Adopted by Consumers

Seeking information, continuing with the same brand, going by brand image, store image, buying most expensive product, seeking reassurance are some of the ways which consumers adopt to reduce their risk perception. Indeed the demographic, economic and psychographic features of the consumer influence both the perceptions of risk and the *risk reduction strategies* adopted accordingly.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication plays an important role in reducing consumer risk perceptions of product performance to a greater extent than any other information sources in e-commerce.¹⁷ With respect to reducing consumer perceived risk and uncertainty, word-of-mouth is more relied on by consumers than any other information, because it is based on consumer experience and is especially vivid information, which tends to have a stronger influence on product judgment and risk reduction. For example, eBay's Cafe, a chat room, posts a daily mix of remarks, user tips, sociable banter or complaints, good experiences, and even advice for the lovelorn. Moreover, the site is most active when consumers purchase products while in a situation of high involvement. In various other online shopping platforms also, customers post their reviews of the product purchase and use which are readily sought by potential consumers in making the purchase decision. Consequently, marketers must participate actively in creating positive word-of-mouth, because dissatisfied customers will disseminate news of their bad experiences with the retailer. That is, dissatisfied customers participate in negative word-of-mouth communication, and this means that new and existing customers become aware of a perceived risk or uncertainty for future purchase opportunities. Thus, marketers must effectively maintain and develop their website communities, forums, and feedback sites in order to retain satisfied customers and reduce their perceived risk.

MAKING SENSE OF YOUR SENSES

The stimuli we perceive are often ambiguous—perhaps due to our interpretational biases. It is up to us to determine the meaning based on our past experiences, expectations, and needs. A classic experiment demonstrated the process of "*seeing what you want to see*." For example, Algerian and Egyptian students separately viewed a clip of a particularly rough football game between these two rival Arabic-speaking North African sides in the run-up to the 2010 FIFA World Cup.¹⁹ Although everyone was exposed to the same stimulus, the degree to which students from these countries assigned blame for poor officiating, rough tackles, and red cards, was quite different depending on what nation's team they supported. As this experiment demonstrates, consumers tend to project their own desires or assumptions onto products and advertisements. Some researchers have begun sharing their findings on the important role the *haptic* (touch) sense plays in consumer behaviour. Haptic senses appear to moderate the relationship between product experience and judgment confidence, confirming the common sense notion that we are surer about what we perceive when we

can touch it (a major problem for online marketers). Talking about subliminal perception, some fragrance and cosmetics containers in particular tend to speak to consumers via their tactile appeal. Most modern perfume bottles still are made of glass because when women handle an elegantly sculpted glass container, they experience a sense of luxury that more modern materials cannot provide. For example, we can link the perceived richness or quality of the material in clothing, bedding, or upholstery to its “feel,” whether rough or smooth, flexible or inflexible. We equate a smooth fabric, such as silk, with luxury, whereas we consider denim to be considered practical and durable. Fabrics composed of scarce materials or that require a high degree of processing to achieve their smoothness or fineness tend to be more expensive and thus we assume they are of a higher class. Similarly, we assume lighter, more delicate textures are feminine.