The First Meeting with a Brand. Does the First Impression Matter?

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Abstract. The main questions that this research wants to answer is to find out the response to the question: "Does the first impression matter, when having a first meeting with a new brand?". This paper seeks to explore the imperatives of consumer understanding when it comes to two unknown brands. The first meeting we have with a brand is the most important one because it is implanting a feeling in us, an idea, a preference, a perception. In this paper we choose to talk about what are the unseen perceptions of our firsts meetings with new brands that appear on the market. The main objective is to show that there are significant differences between how two new brands are perceived because perception plays a very important role in the process of buying decision of the consumer. Based on important information about consumer behavior and what perception and attention are, we will be focusing on the visible differences between two new brands. A comparative analysis of the responses of the subjects exposed to the stimuli represented on the packaging, on the poster, respectively as a result of the tasting of the two types of Ice-Tea for an analysis on the ideal-factic-imaginary line from the point of view of the first impression created by marketing stimuli when showing a poster, the packaging and when tasting. We want to observe if the analysis between two types of Ice-Tea (the one that has just appeared on the market – Fuze Tea and an imaginary one - Homemade Ice-Tea) is showing that the brands are perceived differently even though is the same Ice-Tea.

Keywords: brand perception; attention; first impression; experiment; packaging/ poster/tasting stimuli comparison.

Introduction

Over the years we have developed and reshaped the way we perceive things. Nowadays, perception becomes even more sophisticated due to the development of technology and how we become to use it. But the most fascinating topic remains what triggers the senses of the consumers in the modern society, because is very important in the buying decision of the consumers. So perception is the one that can be influenced, giving a plus to producers (Ahmad, Billoo, & Lakhan, 2012, p.10).

Stimulus, which is a key concept in this paper, refers to different aspects of the external world and directly influences conscious behavior and experience. The name of the stimulus comes from stimulating the sensory organs. Virtually any aspect of the external world that can stimulate the receiving cells can be considered as a stimulus. Any sensation evokes others, including various previous impressions, resulting in a complex phenomenon called perception. Perception is about how we interpret and understand messages from sensory organs (Mutsikiwa & Marumbwa, 2013, p.66).

Marketers often use stimuli to attract attention to their brand (Javed & Javed, 2015, p.5). They also want to communicate something about their products (Agariya, et al., 2012, p.4). However, as there is much more

publicity than the consumer is able to look at, marketers often use attractive patterns, humor or other factors to gain the attention of the target market. Existing examples demonstrate that being used improperly, these factors can lead to what they will draw attention only to themselves, and not to the advertising message (Becker, et al., 2011, p.20). A good knowledge of perception is essential to avoid these and other problems encountered in communicating with different target audiences (Aslam, 2006, p.27). Perception is the urgent activity that unifies the individual consumer to a group, situation or influences of marketers (Nayyar, 2012, p.14). The essence of perception is that information processing is a series of activities through which the stimuli are perceived, transformed into information and kept (Raheem, Vishnu, & Ahmed, 2014, p.130).

But how important is the first impression? Is the first contact with a brand so important in order to have a favorable perception?

Lim, Benbasat, and Waard (2000) have said that we can speak about a first impression bias, as a limitation of human information processing. People are extremely influenced by the first information that they are exposed to, and, because of this, that they are biased in evaluating the next information according to the initial influence.

The first impression relies on the perceived stimuli, especially the visual ones. Harrison, Reinecke, and Chang (2015) showed that making visual representations of engaging and memorable data increases their value. The same conclusion come from another study (Shteingart, Neiman, & Loewenstein, 2013, p.476), which implies that first experience "has a disproportionately large effect on subsequent actions, similar to primacy effects in other fields of cognitive psychology. The mechanism of resetting of the initial conditions that underlies outcome primacy may thus also account for other forms of primacy".

Waroquier, Marchiori, Klein, & Cleeremans (2010) found that we make better decisions after a while, so not at the first impression. At least complex decisions are best made after a period of time assumed to elicit unconscious thought. "However, decisions made immediately were just as good as decisions made after distraction, which suggests (a) that people had already made their decision during information acquisition, (b) that deliberation without attention does not occur during distraction, and (c) that ruminating about one's first impression can deteriorate decision quality" (Waroquier et al., 2010, p.111). But the first impression can be positive or negative, so is important to comparative new information about a target brand (Muthukrishnan & Chattopadhyay, 2007, p.334). When evaluations are memory based rather than stimulus based and when the initial evaluation is negative, new information that is noncompetitive leads to a greater change in consumer attitudes.

Consumers are exposed to stimuli all the time and they often make judgments about service providers based solely on an image provided by them (e.g., on the packaging, on a poster, on a billboard, on the Internet) before interacting with them face-to-face (Naylor, 2007, p.165). This first impression is important for marketers to understand because it influences service provider selection and evaluation.

Research methodology

Purpose: A comparative analysis of the responses of the subjects exposed to the stimuli represented on the packaging, on the poster, respectively as a result of the tasting of the two types of Ice-Tea for an analysis on the ideal-factic-imaginary line from the point of view of the first impression created by marketing stimuli when showing a poster, the packaging and when tasting. We want to observe if the analysis between two types of Ice-Tea (the one that has just appeared on the market - Fuze Tea and an imaginary one - Homemade Ice-Tea) is showing that the brands are perceived differently even though is the same Ice-Tea.

Research problem: The sensorial reactions obtained by exposure to stimuli are not known for an ideal product, for a product that has just been launched on the market and an imaginary product.

Objectives

01. To identify the responses for an ideal Ice-Tea related to their perceptions (01.1: related to the best color association when asking about a poster for an ideal Ice-Tea/ 01.2: ideal package / 01.3: for an ideal Ice-Tea)

O2. To identify the responses (based on a visual representation, related to color, taste, flavor, buying decision) for an Ice-Tea that has just been launched on the market related to a poster, to packaging and tasting.

O3. To identify the responses (based on a visual representation, responses related to color, taste, flavor, and buying decision) for an imaginary Ice-Tea related to a poster, to packaging and tasting.

Methodology

The method used is an experiment. The units are going to be both experiment and control because they are going to take part directly in the experiment and there will be no observers. The independent variables are: the poster, the package and the taste. The independent variables are going to be the stimuli and they are related to Fuze Tea and Homemade Tea. When the respondents are showed the poster, this is what they saw.





Figure 1. The posters used in the experiment

In the images presented in Figure 1, left represents the poster for Fuze Tea and right picture represents the brand

Homemade 1

Ice-Tea. When the

respondents are showed the package, this is what they saw (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The products/ packaging used in the experiment

The dependent variables are the buying intention and all the sensorial responses, the responses related to the package, the responses related to the poster, the responses related to taste. There were 3 phases for the tasting of the 2 Ice-Teas. First phase was about the poster, and how the respondents feel the visual impact from it. Second phase was about the packaging and what catches the eye of the respondent and the third phase is about the tasting itself.

Instrument

The instrument used for gathering the data was the experiment grid. In order to avoid any understanding problem, this grid will be applied in Romanian for the native speakers. The grid consists of 3 major chapters: first chapter is about an ideal Ice-Tea, second chapter is about a product that has just been launched on the market being Fuze Tea and the third chapter is about the imaginary product meaning Homemade Ice-Tea. Then, the chapter about Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea are both divided in 3

subcategories: first one is dedicated to the poster, the second one is about the packaging and finally, the third one is the tasting phase. In each chapter there are open question that require an answer from the respondents and questions that have a scale. The scale questions are from 1 to 10 when respectively 1 is the lowest and 10 is highest.

Sample

The sample size consists of students from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, both bachelor and master. There is a sample size of 40 respondents of which 20 males and 20 females. The entry conditions are to be a current student in "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, to have never tasted Fuze Tea before and to accept to take part in the experiment. We choose to include students in our experiment because they are one of Fuze Tea's target market.

Operationalization

We started by thinking how we can highlight the way perception influences the buying decision and we came out with the idea that this can be measured by making a test on a product that has just been launched on the market. The product that we were thinking is Fuze Tea which is an Ice-Tea, new on the market that is entering as a rebranding of Nestea. It was launched on 16th of January 2018. We choose this one, because we can observe a direct reaction to a new brand, even if it's rebranding, this will have a completely different attraction to the public. As the title of our paper supports the idea of meeting with a new brand, behind it are actually the unseen effects of the influences it has on us. So that's why Fuze Tea was a choice, because it entered the market quite early and the perception and impact is still measurable. Moreover, we were thinking as the procedures goes, to ask about an ideal Ice-Tea because then we can make a comparison between them (ideal Ice-Tea, Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea). Beside the ideal Ice-Tea and the actual product, Fuze Tea, the third Ice-Tea is going to be an imaginary one which was presented as Homemade Ice-Tea. For the new Ice-Tea we created a poster and a packaging/labeling that is presented to the respondents as a new brand that wants to be launched on the market. But in fact, the Homemade Ice-Tea will be Fuze Tea in another appearance, because here is where we can actually observe some differences on how perception influences the buying intention. Fuze Tea is new on the market but Homemade Tea it was the one that obtained a first reaction because it is not really on the market.

First we asked the respondent about his/her ideal Ice-Tea. Secondly, we pull out the poster for Fuze Tea and start asking the questions regarding this, then we pull out a bottle of Fuze Tea, which represents the packaging and ask the related questions. In the end, we open up the bottle, pour Fuze Tea in a transparent glass and let the respondent taste. The same will happen with Homemade Ice-Tea, after the respondent has drunk some water.

Data analysis: We have received 48 responses, 20 males and 28 females and we selected the first 20 female responses because we wanted an equal number of respondents. Further analyzes are using Excel and SPSS. In SPSS we used One-way ANOVA testing, Independent samples t-test and Cross tabulation (Chi-Square).

Findings related to taste

For this part, we had several questions on the interview that are related to taste from which we divided the taste in 3 categories: sour, sweet and bitter.

The sour taste: The respondents like their ideal Ice-Tea to be sour and we can say that women prefer it the most. We observed that Fuze Tea's values are smaller than Homemades' and we believe that is because on the second one's poster there is a lemon, and the lemon is the one that makes you believe that what you are going to taste is more sour. The proportions of sourness are a bit higher for Homemade when males and females are exposed to the poster stimuli. After seeing the packages, the respondents think that Homemade is still sourer than Fuze Tea, but the interesting part here is that the females changed their opinion, meaning that the package made the females believe that the Ice-Tea is sourer than the poster did. The proportion is observable for both Ice-Tea. After tasting the Ice-Teas, there is almost no difference between the two charts and that is because Fuze Tea obtained only few hundredths more than Homemade. So, the people had no idea that they are tasting the same Ice-Tea but, subconscious they gave the same numbers for the sour taste. If we have to compare it with the ideal, Fuze Tea and Homemade are close to

that, if we speak about females, they are approaching their ideal, while men ranked them higher than what they want in an ideal Ice-Tea.

The sweet taste: we observe that men want to have sweeter Ice-Teas than women. The data sustaining sweetness when presenting the poster, show that there are small differences between Fuze Tea and Homemade, but the interesting thing is that they ranked Homemade as being less sweet than Fuze Tea. The men were the ones who perceived Homemade as less sweet. After seeing the products, for Fuze Tea, men and women had the exact same amount for sweetness. For Homemade there is a difference, men ranked it as being less sweet. When tasting, the roles have been reversed, Fuze Tea came out as being less sweet than Homemade. This is a very interesting outcome because, the respondents build in their mind a certain taste when looking at the poster and packaging and we believe that this twist happened because the taste was different from the picture they had in their minds. If we compare the tasting with the ideal of the respondents, the ideal is far by being met because both Ice-Teas are way sweeter than they thought.

The bitter taste: The bitter taste for the ideal Ice-Tea is telling us that the males want their Ice-Tea to be bitterer than females do. Homemade is again perceived as being bitterer than Fuze Tea. We believe that the name "homemade" is building in the respondents' mind a healthy beverage and so, this one will be more sour, bitter and less sweet. When showed the package we have the same perception of the bitterness of the Ice-Teas. Homemade is again bitterer than Fuze Tea. Only the females believe that Fuze Tea is bitterer than Homemade. When tasting, the respondents said that Fuze Tea is bitterer than Homemade, here is again a twist. More men said that Homemade is way bitter than Fuze Tea. When comparing the ideal with the actual tasting, both of them came out as being bitterer than the ideal.

As a conclusion for taste, there are some interesting outcomes, for example Homemade Ice-Tea is perceived as being more sour and bitter and less sweet.

Findings related to sight

For this part, we had several questions on the interview that are related to sight, to be more specific, on color from which we will compare them for Fuze Tea, Homemade and Ideal. The first comparison was when showing the poster, for Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea and what they believe is the best color representation for an ideal Ice-Tea.

Green is on the first position for both Ice-Teas and the ideal, this means that the ideal has been met by both. Yellow is still found in Fuze Tea and ideal, but the color that stands out is garnet, we believe that they choose this one because it resembled the color of the Ice-Tea.

The second comparison was when showing the package, for Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea and what they believe is the best color representation for an ideal Ice-Tea. We observe the fact that Fuze Tea had only two colors, the yellow color is the warmest, the most expansive and perhaps the most colorful. Yellow is intense, ample and dazzling like a melt of molten metal, it is hard to quench, it always flows and is a masculine color. The green color represents nature and it is a symbol of freshness and health. So Fuze Tea is perceived as masculine and healthy. The yellow color was a strong association because it can be found on the bottle. Up to 85% of the decisions made, are made having as an influencer exclusively color, depending, of course, on product category at which is reported.

The ideal came with an interesting outcome, "transparent" seems to be the way they see an ideal package, then this is followed by green and yellow. For Fuze Tea, the females had the same answers as the males except for brown which creates a neutral atmosphere, comfortable and welcoming. Brown states strength and maturity. This is uncommon because brown is also a color that is most chosen by men.

As a conclusion, we have more diverse answers for Fuze Tea, because their poster had different colors on it, but for Homemade the answers were pretty similar. The most used colors are green and yellow and they represent nature, healthiness, warmness and intensity.

Findings related to smell

For this part, we had several questions on the interview that are related to smell, to be more specific, on how strong should be the smell of an Ice-Tea. All the points given are going to be analyzed for Ideal, Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea only for the part where they actually taste them.

For example, if we are talking about the Ideal, we observe the fact that females would like an Ice-Tea that doesn't have a strong smell in comparison with males which want a stronger smell in an Ice-Tea. Between Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea, we observe the fact that Homemade is perceived as having a stronger smell than Fuze Tea and that is the general idea for both males and females. The interesting thing is that, the Ice-Teas are the same so how can one Ice-Tea have a stronger smell than the other if they are, in fact, the same Ice-Tea? One answer could be perception! Why perception? Because the two Ice-Teas have a total different aspect, they have different poster, different package, different label and all of these creates in peoples' minds what taste the Ice-Tea should have, how sour it should be, how sweet, because the green color sets a trigger that in ones' mind means healthy and in another one means sour. And so, we build in our minds how everything should taste based on the stimuli that we receive and when the product doesn't taste the way we imagine it would, then we tend not to buy.

Finding related to flavor

One very interesting outcome is from the following question: *How much do you think you can feel another flavor (other than Tea) in Fuze Tea/Homemade Ice-Tea?* and *Which one is it?* These questions show exactly how the labeling changes the image one perceives. For example, everyone said when showed the Fuze Tea poster that the Ice-Tea's flavor will be peach (because that's what it was written on the label).

The females had a high score, maybe because the poster influenced them more. As a comparison between Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea, we believe the differences between them are because "homemade" implies nature, made bio and for this, adding another flavor would ruin the homemade image created in the respondent minds. When showing the Fuze Tea poster, the dominant flavor was peach, the same as the one on the poster. There are not so many differences between males and females. Nectarine appears extra for the females and that is because it is related with peach. The Homemade poster had a glass of Ice-Tea with mint leaves and Ice cubes. For this one, we had more interesting responses for males, beside lemon and mint, they replied peach and soda water. Peach is strange, but maybe they remained focused on Fuze Tea's poster. Soda water is an interesting response because a homemade Ice-Tea could be made out of soda.

Going further, we analyze the responses when showing the package. Here, the roles are reversed, when they saw the bottles of each Ice-Tea, they perceived Fuze Tea as having less flavor than Homemade Ice-Tea. Males perceive Fuze Tea as being more flavored than Homemade. Females have the opposite reaction. When showing the package of Fuze Tea, the flavor most mentioned is lemon, unlike the one most mentioned when showed the poster (peach). Lemongrass is an interesting response, because it can be found on the label and that is what influenced the person to say it. Sugar is not a flavor, but it appeared so, to make a correlation with the sweet taste score which are pretty high, this one can be explained too. Black Tea also appears on the label of Fuze Tea.

The most interesting thing is happening while tasting, we can see how different the responses are. Homemade is perceived entirely as having lemon and mint as others flavors while Fuze Tea also has bad associations. This is where the trick happens, because it is the same Ice-Tea, only the poster and the packaging differs. Look how a single word "homemade" can influence our perception. For Fuze Tea we had "lemongrass" as a response, for Homemade there is no lemongrass and that appears for Fuze Tea only because it was found on the label.

Findings related to buying decision

After each big set of questions (for poster, for packaging and tasting) we asked the respondents how much they are willing to buy the Ice Tea. We can notice that the willingness to buy Fuze Tea is lower than Homemade Ice-Tea for both male and female. We believe this is happening because Fuze Tea is perceived

as less healthy than Homemade, because as the name says it is prepared in the house, even though that is not correct.

We discover that when showing the package, Fuze Tea image improved while Homemade's worsen. This can be happening because Homemade's packaging is improvised and tries to look the best as possible, but it cannot be like one that is made in a factory and has a marketing Team which makes the design. Even though this is happening, Homemade still remains more desirable.

Conclusions

From the first set of analysis made, we tell how the taste was influenced first by a poster, then by package and then tasting. The poster and package parts revealed the same results, Homemade is perceived as being sourer than Fuze Tea for both men and women. When tasting, the results were almost the same, Fuze Tea classified as perceived more sour only by a few hundredths. For the sweet taste, Homemade Ice-Tea is perceived as being less sweet than Fuze Tea when the respondents were exposed to the poster and package and the responses shift when they tasted them. Meaning, Fuze Tea is the one considered less sweet than Homemade Ice-Tea. The same things are happening for the bitter taste: Homemade is perceived as bitterer than Fuze Tea when showing the poster and package and when tasting, Fuze Tea is the one bitterer.

In conclusion, when exposed to the poster and package the respondents said that Homemade Ice-Tea is perceived as being more sour, sweet and bitter and the tasting shifted to the exact opposite: Fuze Tea is the one which is more sour, sweet and bitter.

As a conclusion for the colors, the most mentioned ones are green and yellow which represent nature, health, warmness and intensity. For Fuze Tea the responses were diverse because the poster was more colorful than Homemade's one.

Smell revealed the fact that Homemade Ice-Tea had an intensified smell than Fuze Tea. This is interesting because they are in fact, the same Ice-Tea so here we can observe a big difference.

As a conclusion for flavors, the responses are different from poster to package and tasting. In the end, the answers from tasting were different between Fuze Tea and Homemade Ice-Tea.

When discussing buying decision, this one is more favorable for Homemade Ice-Tea when showing the poster but it worsens when the respondents are exposed to the package.

As a conclusion, we found out that the perception for colors is different for bitter and sweet taste, meaning that the respondents had various interpretations.

In another train of thoughts, Fuze Tea is perceived completely different from Homemade Ice-Tea. Perception exists everywhere around us and we should be careful how are we going to let it influence us. Fuze Tea is perceived as being worse for the health and it involves chemicals and sugar in its production. Homemade Ice-Tea is perceived as being an Ice-Tea made in home, completely bio, which is perfect for a hot summer day, refreshing and cooling. And all this brand image is build up on some beliefs.

The limitations of our research are due mainly to the fact that the poster and the package for Homemade Tea were not so eye-catching. Also, even if we have selected the respondents among those who have never tasted Fuze Tea, we couldn't verify that. And also, the previous exposure to Fuze Tea stimuli could affect our respondents.

The implications of our study may suggest that visual stimuli as presented on a poster or on the packaging of a product can create a strong first impression that leads the subjects to buy something. Also, the taste can be influenced by the sight, so the visual stimuli can induce a taste perception or another.

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