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Orchestrating an experiential value proposition: the case of a Scandinavian automotive manufacturer

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Abstract

Purpose - This paper aims to advance the theoretical knowledge of how manufacturers develop a multisensory value proposition.

Design/methodology/approach - An exploratory case study with a global automotive manufacturer was conducted. Personal in-depth interviews with key informants within a manufacturer were performed to obtain in-depth knowledge and insights on how the manufacturer plans and designs a value proposition.

Findings - This paper reveals how a value proposition is created from a sensory marketing perspective, which includes orchestrating the sensory experience, harmonising sensory cues to ensure they provide a consistent experience, thereby providing a memorable experience.

Practical implications - Understanding how to offer value might assist managers in tailoring a unique experiential value proposition to position the brand.

Originality/value - This paper proposes a theoretical framework, enriching the understanding of the underlying mechanisms used to create an experiential value proposition. The framework illustrates that harmonising sensory cues based on brand-related stimuli fosters a memorable experience, which enables consumers to (sub)consciously infer value.

Keywords - Brand-related stimuli, Experiential marketing, Sensory cues, Sensory marketing, Service-dominant logic, Value proposition

Paper type - Research paper

Introduction

Sensory marketing portrays value co-creation as a service process that manufacturers use to create a multisensory brand experience (Hultén, 2011). Manufacturers can no longer merely rely on a traditional offering when presenting a product due to consumers' desire for memorable experiences (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020a). This means consumers must be provided a distinct economic offering by wrapping experiences around the traditional offering (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) and allowing flexibility, including attending to the servicescape. The servicescape contains a myriad of design elements (Orth *et al.*, 2012) to offer consumers a sensory experience of the automotive brand (Eklund, 2019; Sheller, 2004).

The need to investigate sensory cues to create value (and experiences) has been widely recognised (Hultén, 2011; von Wallpach *et al.*, 2020). Although sensory marketing is receiving more attention, abundant research opportunities remain to investigate brands as experiential entities (Chevtchouk *et al.*, 2021; Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017) and the role of consumers' senses in this process (Krishna *et al.*, 2017), specifically how manufacturers approach this task. Extant research suggests that brand meaning related to experiences is evolving in service-dominant (S-D) logic (Merz *et al.*, 2009). While extensive research has been undertaken using S-D logic, “remarkably little attention focuses on the brand” (Payne *et al.*, 2009, p. 379) and the recent extension of S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2016) encourages research to expand the discussion of value into experiences (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Thus, ample opportunities for exploring the value creation of experiences (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) to understand how brands become meaningful (Batra, 2019) have been provided, which serves as the focus of this paper.

Manufacturers create a value proposition, viewed as a concise statement of advantages consumers may receive from the brand (Starr and Brodie, 2016). However, “actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 10). Increasingly, value propositions are regarded not just as a “marketing

communication tool”, but as reflecting a manufacturer’s strategic perspective. Accordingly, manufacturers benefit from collaborating with consumers and other actors (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020b) to constitute a superior value proposition (Payne and Frow, 2014), which facilitates value co-creation and memorable experiences.

Inspired by the idea that S-D logic is “lending itself to direct testing, verification, and application” (Vargo and Lusch, 2017, p. 50) and supported by existing research (Chaney *et al.*, 2018; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019), this paper aims to advance the theoretical understanding of how a manufacturer develops a value proposition from a sensory marketing perspective. The following research question is proposed: how does a manufacturer plan and design a value proposition to enable a memorable experience? Therefore, this paper seeks to bridge sensory marketing with S-D logic to shed light on how an automotive manufacturer develops a value proposition to encourage memorable experiences for consumers.

The paper enriches the understanding of creating a value proposition from a sensory marketing perspective. Responding to the call from Payne and Frow (2014), this study employed a case study with a premium car manufacturer to illustrate the planning and design process of a value proposition. Exploring a premium brand was deemed appropriate, as these brands tend to be powerful in providing consumers with memorable experiences based on a consistent brand message appealing to the human senses (Spence, 2016), leading to experiential value (Akaka *et al.*, 2015). This paper proposes a theoretical framework, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms to constitute an experiential value proposition enabling a memorable experience.

The paper outlines sensory marketing and creating a value proposition from the manufacturer’s perspective. The methodology presents the selection and analysis of the particular case. Thereafter, the findings are presented and discussed, leading to a proposed

theoretical framework. The paper ends with the conclusions, implications, limitations, and future research avenues.

Theoretical background

Sensory marketing

Sensory marketing is “marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior” (Krishna, 2012, p. 333). Sensory cues play an important role in value creation. They impact how individuals react to organisational stimuli and are used to support customers’ purchase and consumption processes by creating experiences, value and the resulting brand image (Hultén, 2011, p. 259). Sensory cues are employed in isolation or in combination (Biswas and Szocs, 2019; Eklund and Helmfalk, 2018). Research has examined how sensory cues influence consumers in terms of attitude, behaviour, and judgement, positively fostering their experiences (Biswas, 2019; Stead *et al.*, 2020). By providing an experience, manufacturers may contribute to the value-generating process by satisfying the human senses (Achrol and Kotler, 2012).

Sensory cues are utilised to foster an experience, which becomes meaningful and valuable for consumers (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020; Zha *et al.*, 2022). The obtained sensory information comes from sensory cues exerting momentum with prior remembered experiences stored and retrieved in the memory (Elder *et al.*, 2017). This is an inner process that entices consumers’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Eklund and Helmfalk, 2021; Stead *et al.*, 2020). It suggests that multiple actors create brand value (Merz *et al.*, 2009), where the manufacturer deliberately sets the stage to offer consumers a positive and memorable experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

With this in mind, a distinct economic offering in sensory marketing stems from sensory cues, employed by manufacturers to foster a positive multisensory brand experience

(Hultén, 2011). However, consumers hold the power to determine the outcome of the experience, showing that consumers' situated value is based on their perceptions and responses from exposure to sensory cues (Krishna, 2012).

Service-dominant logic

S-D logic development has an exploratory impact on the advancement of marketing research (Vargo and Lusch, 2017), allowing for the investigation of the experiential nature of offering value (Han *et al.*, 2017). This is achieved through continuous interaction between actors, where consumers determine brand meaning and value (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, S-D logic corresponds with an experience-based perspective for constituting a value proposition, bridging the concept with the characteristics of sensory marketing.

A fundamental premise in S-D logic is a value proposition (Nenonen *et al.*, 2020; Payne and Frow, 2014). Since manufacturers possess different operant resources, the intention is to create a superior value proposition to facilitate a service exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). However, a single actor cannot deliver value, rather various actors participate in creating a value proposition (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), where the beneficiary is always included (Vargo *et al.*, 2008). This suggests that value is formed through service interactions between multiple actors who are driven to exchange resources to prosper (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Consequently, "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p. 7). Value is contextual, experiential, idiosyncratic, and meaning-laden, suggesting that a value proposition is an essential component of the manufacturer's strategy, where the brand is the foundation (Starr and Brodie, 2016).

The suggested advancement of the experiential nature of S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2017) viewing value as an experience (Helkkula *et al.*, 2012) by nuance emotional value (Hansen, 2017) has skyrocketed (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2020a; Troccoli and Felizardo Jr, 2020; von

Wallpach *et al.*, 2020). The increased attention is driven by the need to involve multiple actors in constituting a value proposition to understand the beneficiary's situated value (e.g., a "customer") (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). Furthermore, considering customer preferences of experiences as a source of input increases the chance of interaction between the manufacturer and the end consumer (Rashid *et al.*, 2019).

Methodology

The car interior as a site for embedding sensory cues

The experience economy has changed the competitive landscape for brands requiring embedded sensory cues to convey brand meaning (Batra, 2019). Experiential design has become a compelling marketing tool (Krishna *et al.*, 2017), where sensory cues are essential for providing an experience to situate brand meaning and value (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020).

Manufacturers in the automotive industry face fierce competition from other brands. As cars have complex and engineered interiors and exteriors, manufacturers are encouraged to be creative in positioning their brands (Kirca *et al.*, 2020). Historically, car manufacturers have utilised advertisements and promotions for the brand, but in the experience economy, they must provide an experience that embodies what the brand stands for to make it stick in consumers' minds (Sheller, 2004). One such opportunity is the car's interior, which can be seen, heard, touched, and **smelled** every time consumers are inside the vehicle. This reasoning follows Swaminathan *et al.* (2020), who emphasised that car brands are not static, but constantly updated.

Case selection

The research consisted of a single case study (Yin, 2014) in which the context was important. According to Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534), a case study is a "research strategy which focuses on

understanding the dynamics present within single settings”. To understand the setting, the case study included 14 in-depth interviews with informants from various departments. A case study is a suitable method for exploratory studies on **contrary phenomena**, which cannot be manipulated (Yin, 2014). The advantage of a single case is that one can generalise from the individual case and contribute to scientific and theoretical developments (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Siggelkow, 2007). **Single cases tend to be criticised in terms of generalisation (Evers and Wu, 2006), but as Gioia (2021) suggests, single case generalisation is possible with rich enough material – which was gathered through 14 in-depth interviews (Informant A – N) – and also, single cases are valuable in terms of transferability; that “even a single observation can represent a principle that applies to many different contexts” (p. 21).**

Considering this, an exploratory case study was employed to move beyond the observed phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989) – offer value – to account for and capture in-depth understanding and obtain this knowledge. An information-rich case was selected that can be learnt from the phenomenon the most. The case was made into a subject to understand the uniqueness and complexity of the problem through an in-depth analysis (Stake, 1994). The case company was a Scandinavian automotive manufacturer in the premium segment that uses the luxury characteristics and sells cars worldwide. Studying all the manufacturer’s car models would be complex, as each model has unique features. One model was of particular interest to this study due to it recently receiving a new design interface to appeal to the human senses, foster an experience, and elicit affection. The case study was conducted with the car manufacturer on the development of that particular model’s interior.

A systematic approach analysis

To reveal in-depth findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and avoid criticism raised by theorising weak evidence, a systematic approach analysis was employed (Gioia, 2021; Gioia *et al.*, 2013).

Such analysis allows for a dynamic interrelationship between concepts, dimensions, and themes, leading to a theoretical model. Following this logic, first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions were distilled from the case study, as seen in Kumar and Noble (2016). The first-order constructs (*informant-centred*) were based on seeking similarities and differences in the informants' narratives, *thus they were derived directly from the quotations stated by the informants*. The second-order themes (*theory-centred*) thereafter *moved the first-order constructs* into the theoretical domain. At this point, the first-order constructs became more comprehensible by thinking “what is going on here?” to explore how sensory marketing can be used to offer value to consumers through themes. This allowed, *in the next step*, for the aggregate dimensions to advance the understanding of engendering a value proposition with sensory marketing. Aside from ensuring rigour in the analysis and discussion (Tracy, 2010), *by reporting the informants' and researchers' voices in line with Ki et al. (2020) a multifaceted view is given (Gioia, 2021) – here illustrated in a graphical representation of the systematic approach analysis. Note that additional illustrative quotes are added in the table.*

[INSERT TABLE I]

Issues of trustworthiness

Numerous steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness. Initially, the purpose was explicitly to acquire relevant data and to recognise (ir)relevant material to produce trustworthy findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015; Morse, 2017). Furthermore, the four techniques from Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used. To ensure credibility, 14 personal in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants at the car manufacturer. Each interview lasted 35–61 minutes, *during which the experiences of the informants were captured, being the valuable starting point of the*

Table I. Data structure

First-order concepts	Additional illustrative quotes	Second-order/ derived themes	Aggregated dimensions
Position the brand as premium with a luxurious car's interior	Informant G: "We just got a new owner; we shall now become a proper premium brand". Informant H: "The corporate board together with the president of design selected the main design theme. It is a top-down decision".	Corporate motivation	Orchestrate an experience
Exploring consumer desire for premium and luxury	Informant A: "We have had pragmatic good cars, but they lacked character and feeling. We noticed that the world wants premium, that's where we are today, and focus more on delivering an aesthetic product". Informant H: "Based on consumers' need and desire for luxury, we created an interior design with a calm and sober feeling, as well as a beautiful environment without disturbing the consumer with additional attributes".	Consumer preference	
Suppliers crucial for product development	Informant B: "We have suppliers of strategic importance. It is a close collaboration, and we provide them with information on what we want so they can utilize their knowledge and provide a solution". Informant C: "We never develop a physical interior component. That is the supplier's role for the car's interior".	Suppliers' operant resources	
Resemble the Scandinavian landscape	Informant H: "It's about having a clean architecture that has a lot to do with just creating true Scandinavian design surfaces that are clean and intelligent while we resolve making the best of the material". Informant N: "The Scandinavian design becomes something exclusive. It's about finding a balance between what the consumers want and what the brand stands for".	Brand heritage	Harmonise sensory cues
Everything the consumer can see and touch	Informant M: "The seats are unique and developed in a way, so they feel luxurious and premium, which was the message with the little flag in the seat". Informant I: "The tactile response from leather should feel good and not plastic. Also, when you touch a knob, it should feel robust and not loosen too much".	Sensory appealing	

Design elements, such as colour, material, and shape	<p>Informant E: “Leather provides additional value. It is a material that symbolize luxury and quality”.</p> <p>Informant H: “It sets a scene in terms of the ambience of the material that’s often used in products design here and fashion. And the products that are available, I mean we take kind of birch wood, we take the colour taints of the coast, we experience a lot of lights with big roof, so a lot of light gets into the cabin. They are all the kind of elements that come together to create the right environment”.</p>	Sensory impressions
Accurate balance of architecture, design, and technology	<p>Informant H: “You know if you get into an old van that’s 20 years old or something with interior your experience going into this car will be completely different. And that’s also reflected in the balance of these elements in the design, the architecture and the technology, the details comfort of the seats. That’s bit creates that environment of premium feel”.</p> <p>Informant J: “Inside the car, we want to imbue the consumer with an experience of calmness, warmth, and pleasantness. This without having to dominant interior components. We just want the consumer to feel good when they sit in the car”.</p>	Customer experience
Like going inside a nicely decorated living room	<p>Informant G: “Entering the car is like entering a well-designed living room. It is bright, it is spacious. The back of the seats has a slim design, which provides a slim impression. You perceive it as slim but not narrow and dark, more like bright and aerial”.</p> <p>Informant H: “Specifically in the interiors when you sit in it you feel like you are in a special environment, you know this is an expensive place to be, it’s like a very nice restaurant, it’s like being in a very nice house a piece of architecture or a nice boutique shop”.</p>	Experiential component
Feelings like calmness, harmony, silence, and simplicity	<p>Informant H: “We, I look at the data as one identity so the design language must merge and marry between the whole different components. And that’s the responsibility, I have to make sure as an interior it works and have the same fundamental quality to it in terms of design language and materials how it all works together and balance with each other”.</p>	Sentiments and feelings

Enable a memorable experience

Informant J: "We work a lot with harmony in the door clothing and that the panels should unify with those. Also, align with the design interface in the ceiling and so forth".

systematic approach analysis (Gioia, 2021). The informants had rich information and substantial knowledge of how the manufacturer plans and designs a value proposition intended to situate consumer value. Purposeful sampling was employed with informants who possessed the right knowledge (Patton, 2014). To ensure transferability, interviews were conducted until a pattern emerged from the informants' answers, thus no new themes arose and saturation was reached, following Miles *et al.* (2014) and implying trustworthiness. Extant research obtained data saturation with a similar number of interviews (Diffley and McCole, 2019).

To ensure dependability, all interviews were recorded – with the participants' consent – and transcribed. The transcriptions were sent to the informants to ensure dependability in material and trustworthiness in capturing and reproducing the narrative. To ensure confirmability, a semi-structured template guide (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015) – developed to capture how value is planned and designed regarding sensory marketing – was used.

Empirical findings

The findings of the study are presented following the logic of the data structure (Table I). Each subheading tells the informants' narrative based on the aggregated dimensions.

Orchestrate an experience

The corporate board wanted to position the brand in the premium segment. Therefore, the manufacturer decided to update the car model in terms of luxury, which commenced years ahead of the vehicle entering the market. The update included changes to the chassis size, desired customer segment, competitive analysis, and main markets. Once this was decided by the corporate board, the product development of the car's interior started. According to one informant, "The decision to position the brand [was] decided by the corporate board and executed at the operative level".

The brand's prior car model possessed strengths that had to be maintained and improved in the updated model. Areas of improvement were identified by scanning consumer complaints and feedback from owners regarding the quality and warranty of the previous model's different interior components, such as the dashboard, seating, steering wheel, and trim panels. With a new customer segment desiring and demanding luxury, these consumer preferences were investigated further.

The manufacturer explored consumer preference by visiting consumers' homes to gain insight into their living rooms and interiors. To obtain a deeper understanding and knowledge of consumer preference for luxury, focus groups were conducted with consumers with a high income and social status. Suppliers provided insights on the latest interior trends in the automotive industry. One informant stated:

The inside of the car is where we care the most about the human. Just as luxury is the grease in a consumer's life, such as wearing the right watch or shoes, we developed a machine with a premium interior, which has the right kind of material to convey that feeling.

The manufacturer's design offices worldwide were assigned the task of developing sketches for the interior design. The proposals were evaluated, and the most preferred option was selected to be developed. The decision was based on the input from the design, customer experience, engineering, product development, and purchase departments. Subsequently, the preferred design went from a digital model into a physical claim to illustrate the design interface for suppliers.

Suppliers' operant resources were crucial for the product development of the interior but were limited in influencing the design. To develop a high-quality interior, the manufacturer approached suppliers with specifications regarding the design interface and the technical

function underneath the surface, such as heating in the seat and steering wheel. One informant stated:

The suppliers had limited influence on the design. The manufacturer decided on the design. The suppliers' role was to manufacture the interior with the right quality and ensure technology below the surface layer fitted.

The suppliers provided feedback and knowledge on how to make the interior design feasible by focusing on the underlying mechanisms. However, while some suppliers (e.g., trim panel) were contracted on a build-to-print basis, others (e.g., leather) were of strategic importance. The leather supplier was X-marked, meaning all suppliers of parts with leather components purchased the material from one sub-supplier.

Harmonise sensory cues

The car's interior consists of approximately 284 details. With a new vehicle platform, fitting all interiors with another while simultaneously targeting premium consumers desiring luxury was challenging. The manufacturer created an attractive interior with a modern and appealing human-centric design inspired by Scandinavia's brand heritage. This includes everything the consumers see and touch. The foundation was a visually appealing interior that portrayed a Scandinavian aesthetic. As highlighted by an informant below, the manufacturer used design elements, such as colours, materials, and shapes:

Calm and cool colours in combination with materials, such as birch, crystal, and leather, were employed in the interior to resemble the Scandinavian landscape in terms of archipelagos, fauna, lake, nature, and sky. The seats were designed in a heart shape – inspired by the Oslo Opera house – and the dashboard with sweeping horizontal lines without interruption alike an open landscape.

The visually appealing design was maintained by other sensory impressions – specifically pressing buttons, holding the steering wheel, and touching surfaces. The view was that if the design element looks premium, it should feel premium; thus, high-quality leather was used in the interior to engender the same feeling from looking as when sitting in the seat or holding the steering wheel. Moreover, the interior (e.g., seating and steering wheel) was designed to be comfortable and ergonomic. For example, consumers should sit comfortably in their seats when driving long distances and feel soft leather against their skin when steering the vehicle, rather than being in pain from a hard, wooden chair. Similar logic is applied to all the car's buttons and regulators, which are metal and provide a metal sensation when touched. However, the car's control tablet has light beams, which means the screen does not have to be touched when selecting a setting. As one informant pointed out:

It's about having a clean architecture that has a lot to do with just creating true Scandinavian design surfaces that are clean and intelligent while we resolve to make the best of the material.

The car's design incorporated glass to block outside noise during normal driving conditions, enabling the driver to hear and communicate with other passengers in the vehicle. However, although the engine has a beautiful tone, it is responsive to a higher tone when accelerating. Moreover, the buttons are designed to operate silently, as noises or squeaks are associated with low quality. In contrast, some components of the interior were deliberately designed with sounds. For instance, the sound system is high quality, no matter the volume. The tablet, operating as a control panel for most functions in the car, has a confirmation sound that was carefully developed to be associated with mobile phones and tablets used in consumers' daily lives.

Regarding the scent, the manufacturer's focus was to avoid unpleasant smells in the interior, which was achieved by ensuring an odour-free interior. However, consumer

expectation of scent was considered. Material, such as leather, is fragrance-free, but the supplier processed the material with a scent to meet consumer expectations of a leather smell.

Enable a memorable experience

Cars are a major part of consumers' lives in terms of their daily commutes and weekend enjoyment. After a house, a car is a person's most expensive purchase. However, a vehicle is also a representation of who someone is as an individual, what he/she wants to achieve, and a statement of character. The car's interior was created to reflect these facets and provide a customer experience while driving. Compared with a 20-year-old van, the interior is completely different. A visually appealing and comfortable environment was created, which moves beyond the transportation mode and focuses on the fun aspect and pleasure of driving. This is reflected in having an accurate balance between architecture, design, and technology, combined with comfortable seats to create a premium environment in which everything is included. Consequently, there is more than meets the eye regarding Scandinavia and everything needs to come together harmoniously. During the interview, one informant explained:

Entering the car is like going inside a nicely decorated living room. The inside is designed to be bright and spacious. It is illustrated by the sunroof in glass allowing light from the outside to enter and seats with a slimmer design.

Moreover, the car has seats typical of a sport utility vehicle to allow consumers to feel in control with a good view of the inside and outside. In this regard, consumers can identify the characteristics of Scandinavia when they sit in the car. The philosophy behind this is a visually clean and simplistic design using materials like birch, crystal, and leather. This material invokes feelings of calmness, harmony, silence, and simplicity in the consumers, which are all Scandinavian characteristics the manufacturer wanted to embed in the car's interior. One

informant summed it up: “It’s based on how everything is unified without announcing its presence. It is all there in a simplistic way, but still feels expensive”.

The manufacturer created an environment for consumers to feel special and relaxed when they are inside the vehicle. Another automotive brand may emphasise the driver experience more, which builds on that manufacturer’s core value. However, the manufacturer highlighted in this study focuses on the interior design to create an environment to instil the consumers with a tranquil feeling as part of positioning the brand as premium.

Discussion

The study aimed to advance the theoretical understanding of how a manufacturer creates a value proposition and the use of sensory marketing in this process. The informants’ narrative revealed interesting knowledge on designing and planning to offer value. The findings revealed that if the organisation orchestrates an experience, harmonises sensory cues, and enables a memorable experience, it can develop the foundation for constituting an experiential value proposition. Although the manufacturer possessed knowledge on how the brand should be reflected in the vehicle, suppliers’ operant resources were imperative to make the car’s interior feasible. Notably, the manufacturer is the conductor who sets the stage with sensory cues based on consumer preference to enable a memorable experience. Consumers’ intended situated value arises from being a passive audience who (sub)consciously interacts with the orchestrated experience.

Orchestrate an experience

Positioning the brand as premium was a corporate decision, but various departments and actors were involved in this process. The manufacturer employed its competence, knowledge, and skills to engender an experiential value proposition, which is in line with S-D logic (Vargo and

Lusch, 2004; 2008; 2016). Although the manufacturer had experience in planning and designing a car's interior, targeting consumers in the premium segment was an unknown area. To design a premium interior, the manufacturer sought out consumers' luxury preferences, indicating the necessity to involve the beneficiary actor in planning and designing the value proposition. Thus, the manufacturer gained knowledge of what is considered luxury from the consumers' daily lives, designing the interior to provide a value proposition based on the Scandinavian brand heritage.

Since brands are associated with the value they offer (Starr and Brodie, 2016) and due to the experiential value proposition, consumers' perceptions were explored by visiting their homes and through focus groups, consumer complaints, and automotive trends. Following S-D logic, manufacturers can offer value and increase the likelihood to enable a memorable experience by considering the end consumers in the planning and design process. Consumers hold the power to interpret the interior as luxurious and provide meaning to the value proposition. This allows the manufacturer to explore what consumers think and their interpretations of a luxurious interior. Therefore, the value proposition can be tailored to meet consumers' expectations and desires for premium products to ensure a positive brand outcome.

Based on the accumulated consumer knowledge about what is premium, suppliers were involved in constructing the value proposition in the interior. Thus, both the manufacturer and suppliers contributed to engendering a value proposition, following the logic of Vargo and Lusch (2017). The manufacturer contributed with knowledge on how to gestalt Scandinavia in the design regarding colours, shapes, and materials, while the suppliers aided with their production skills to manufacture and make the brand tangible in the interior. Consequently, the manufacturer controls the process and assigns various responsibilities to the suppliers, such as using the same sub-supplier for leather to ensure a consistent and holistic interior. From a sensory marketing perspective (Hultén, 2011), the findings posit that the manufacturer

orchestrates an experience based on consumer preference, and suppliers' operant resources to engender an experiential value proposition. This is achieved by harmonising sensory cues (Spence *et al.*, 2014) to appeal to the human senses (Krishna, 2012) and providing consumers with a value proposition in the interior that resembles the Scandinavian landscape in terms of its archipelagos, fauna, lake, nature, and sky.

Harmonise sensory cues

To develop a positive brand outcome, the manufacturer orchestrates a memorable experience using sensory cues (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). To bring Scandinavia to life in the car, the manufacturer employed sensory cues that balance one another. The findings reveal that it all starts with visual cues to portray an exclusive Scandinavian environment. Thereafter, the other sensory cues interplay with the visual cues, which leads to a multisensory experience (Spence *et al.*, 2014). This was achieved specifically by embedding visual cues that foster consumer perceptions of what is premium with other sensory cues that support or maintain that impression – for example, with tactile cues like high-quality leather supported by olfactory and auditory cues when consumers are seated in the car, holding the steering wheel, or pressing buttons. This reveals that sensory cues are not treated as isolated mechanisms, but rather seen as various pieces harmonised based on a consistent theme to provide consumers a balanced experience. These cues are employed to offer consumers an orchestrated experience of Scandinavia, which arises from brand-related stimuli embedded in the car's interior.

It is evident that the manufacturer tells consumers the story of Scandinavia through sensory cues embedded in the interior. This is achieved by brand-related stimuli based on the senses, resulting in a car interior resembling Scandinavia from a sensory marketing perspective. It posits that the manufacturer uses colour, material, and shapes in the vehicle's interior to represent the landscape's archipelagos, fauna, lake, nature, and sky. The manufacturer

incorporates the Scandinavian brand heritage by harmonising sensory cues in the value proposition (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; 2016) to engender an experiential offering.

Enable a memorable experience

In the findings, cars play an important role in consumers' lives as they are part of their daily commute, and the interior serves as an arena to convey an experience and furnish consumers with cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Krishna, 2012). The manufacturer offers consumers a memorable experience based on sensory cues that implant Scandinavia in the interior inside the car resembling their living room. For instance, sitting comfortably in the car seats without wriggling around, feeling the soft leather against the body and underneath the hands, smelling the leather, and not hearing disturbing noises. Consequently, the manufacturer enables a memorable experience through the interior, allowing consumers to experience the brand in a multisensory way.

It is logical to assume that the manufacturer seeks to satisfy the senses by fostering a memorable experience, which creates value and meaning for consumers (Ramaswamy, 2008; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Servicescape elements in the interior, such as the seating and steering wheel, are needed for driving the vehicle, while its material (e.g., birch, crystal, and leather) aims to leave an imprint of the brand's experiential theme in the consumers' minds. Hence, consumers are supposed to experience sentiments and feelings like calmness, harmony, silence, and simplicity.

Moreover, the manufacturer deliberately constructed an experiential value proposition based on brand-related stimuli (Starr and Brodie, 2016) to enable consumer interaction. A possible explanation for addressing consumers' senses (sub)consciously may be related to the product category. It is reasonable to believe that consumers' senses focus on driving safely – for example, by observing the traffic and road signs. The evidence presented thus far supports

the idea that the manufacturer utilises the car as an arena that enables a memorable experience. Similar to a conductor who organises, ensures, and leads all the instruments playing a harmonious melody for an audience, the manufacturer employs various bits and pieces of the brand in the interior to “play” the Scandinavian “tune” for consumers, leading to a balance of the consumers’ senses, which consumers are exposed to (sub)consciously every time they drive the vehicle.

Theoretical framework

Using S-D logic as a theoretical departure point, the manufacturer creates a value proposition for consumers and various linkages with sensory marketing. Based on the findings in the discussion, the theoretical sequential process of how a manufacturer creates a value proposition from a sensory marketing perspective was developed and the proposed theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 1.

The discussion revealed that a manufacturer orchestrates, harmonises, and enables a memorable experience. These are done using a range of sensory cues (e.g., appeals, impressions, and experiences), which are harmonised and expressed as brand-related stimuli. These aspects become feasible based on the manufacturer’s operant resources. However, the manufacturer is not solely responsible since the suppliers’ manufacturing knowledge and skills are essential for its realisation. Thus, the manufacturer acts as the conductor who orchestrates and harmonises the components associated with the memorable experience. Additionally, the experiential value proposition aims to offer the customer value as a result of the exposure and interaction. To ensure a successful offer, customer experience is inserted as a moderator, following the logic of Mishra *et al.* (2015). Therefore, the nature of the experiential value proposition is moderated by the customer experience. Since ultimately consumers hold the power to determine the outcome of the experiential value proposition, their experiential

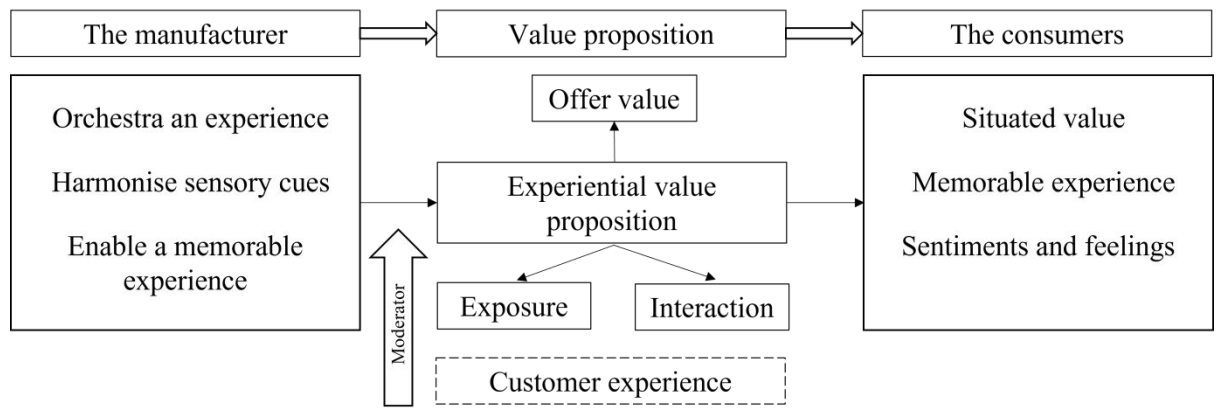


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

preferences need to be investigated and considered in the sequential process. This will increase the continuation of the manufacturer's intended value for the consumers, as it provides situated value, memorable experiences, and sentiments and feelings. Consequently, the consumers are the audience who (sub)consciously participate with the manufacturer's orchestrated experience from exposure and interaction with the offered experiential value proposition.

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Conclusions

This paper set out to advance the theoretical understanding of how a manufacturer creates and offers value from a sensory marketing perspective, as suggested in the proposed theoretical framework (see Figure 1). Prior sensory marketing research has suggested theoretically that sensory cues facilitate experiential value (Hultén, 2011; Krishna, 2012; Spence *et al.*, 2014). This paper reveals that manufacturers utilise sensory cues – based on brand-related stimuli – to constitute an experiential value proposition fostering a memorable experience.

Value is unique and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary actor (Vargo and Lusch, 2008) and, while the manufacturer constructs an experiential value proposition, the consumers situate the value of the offer. The paper reveals the importance of including the end consumer in the process of creating an experiential value proposition to enable a memorable experience for the audience.

No actor is solely responsible for value creation, as it results from the interaction between diverse actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; 2008; 2016). This study reveals that while the manufacturer is the driving force in constituting an experiential value proposition, consumer preference of experiences and suppliers' operant resources, such as manufacturing knowledge and skills, are essential for its realisation. Accordingly, the actors contribute differently to value

co-creation in the planning and design process so the manufacturer can provide a distinct economic offering to consumers.

This paper highlights the importance of orchestrating and harmonising sensory cues. Similar to a conductor, a manufacturer can set the stage to offer consumers a memorable experience. A manufacturer is an organiser, orchestrating the various components in the car's interior and playing a coherent melody by harmonising sensory cues to balance the audience's senses.

Theoretical implications

This paper advances and contributes to extant research in several ways. **First**, the paper advances the theoretical knowledge on a value proposition from a sensory marketing perspective. Sensory marketing research has been related to value co-creation (Krishna and Schwarz, 2014) and posits that sensory cues create and facilitate value to position the brand (Hultén, 2011). However, little is known about how manufacturers create and offer experiential value using sensory cues. This paper specifically links these cues to the overall brand experience, which is both presented to and experienced by customers, thereby reflecting the role of customer senses (Krishna *et al.*, 2017). An experiential value proposition does not automatically become a memorable experience, as sensory cues need to be harmonised in an orchestrated experience to appeal to the senses (Krishna, 2012), for them to become memorable, as indicated in Figure 1.

Second, the impact of operant resources of other actors (e.g., suppliers) on the creation of experience provides insights into the actions of these actors and others within the organisation (Chevtchouk *et al.*, 2021). The theoretical framework highlights the need for manufacturers to involve consumers (and other functional areas) in the planning and design process to engender an experiential value proposition, which will arouse situated value by

being filtered by the senses and that sensory cues are not randomly employed. Instead, sensory cues are carefully and strategically embedded in the car's interior as operant resources supported by suppliers to enable interaction between the manufacturer and the consumers, thereby being involved in the value proposition (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Therefore, this study advances and contributes to research by illustrating that sensory cues are based on manufacturers' possessed brand knowledge and suppliers' expertise to make consumers' desire for experiences feasible.

Third, this paper contributes to the extension of S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2017). The proposed theoretical framework (see Figure 1) builds on planning and designing a value proposition to engender experiential brand value, in which brand-related attributes are embedded (Payne *et al.*, 2009). The proposed theoretical framework shows a novel view of anchoring sensory marketing within S-D logic.

Managerial implications

First, this paper gives manufacturers insight into providing consumers with a memorable experience in positioning the brand and its brand-related attributes. Since manufacturers tend to differ, the point of departure is their competence, knowledge, and skills of the brand and the sensory cues associated with the brand. Based on this, manufacturers can tailor their own unique experiential value proposition, applying appropriate sensory cues. However, it should be noted that manufacturers cannot directly control consumer value. They can only carefully plan and design the interior components with which consumers interact or to which they are exposed, highlighting the importance of harmonising the cues.

Second, manufacturers can indirectly enable memorable experiences by involving consumers in the development process. This can be achieved by getting acquainted with consumers to gain a deeper understanding of their experiential needs and desires by

implementing widespread marketing research activities among product consumers. This research is not limited to how consumers use the product, but also changing cues used in sensory experiences. This leaves an imprint of uniqueness and exclusivity in the human mind and senses.

Third, manufacturers are dependent on other actors, such as suppliers, to develop a distinct experiential offering. Thus, manufacturers need to ensure that everything that touches the consumers is aligned holistically and harmoniously. This requires all actors to share information with other actors involved to ensure that, for example, suppliers use the same colour to guarantee symmetry. Furthermore, manufacturers are advised to consider the suppliers' operant resources, which assist in embedding the brand in the experiential value proposition.

Limitations and future research

Similar to all research, the current paper has its limitations. First, a single car manufacturer was explored to obtain rich and in-depth knowledge of the empirical context, following the logic of Flyvbjerg (2006) and Siggelkow (2007). This case was selected to shed light on how a manufacturer strategically employs sensory cues to engender a memorable experience. Although the case study of creating an experiential value proposition may not provide reliable information in a broader sense, other car manufacturers could learn from this case and follow a similar logic in positioning their brands. Second, the case study was conducted with a premium manufacturer that has unique features not shared by all vehicles or brands. This implies that the findings are equally relevant to all automotive manufacturers. Third, the study sought out the manufacturer's perspective and did not capture the consumers' perspectives on the situated value or the value actually received.

Considering value is unique and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary actor, pursuing consumers' and suppliers' perspectives warrants attention to gain a deeper understanding of how included actors contribute to value co-creation individually and collectively. Future research is suggested to study other brand and product categories (physical and digital). Exploring and examining various brands and product categories, such as watches and toothpaste, could provide insights on various sensory cues necessary from the manufacturer's perspective in the development of the value proposition. Moreover, research into the role of customer experience as a moderator, in line with Mishra *et al.* (2015), requires attention, together with the associated exposure and interaction with the value proposition. In addition, consumer aspects, such as brand experience and value, require further research as an outcome of the proposition. Lastly, the ethical ramification deserves attention – that is, relating to the use of sensory marketing and S-D logic with consumer free will and marketing ethics.

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