

Sensory factors for brand success

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Abstract

In a market, where the features and quality of many products are more or less equal, companies must overcome aesthetic, moral and emotional demands to stand out and be successful (Morsing, 2002). The visual sense has been the emphasized sense for branding and communication of identity (Lindstrom, 2005 a). Human beings, however, are creatures of five senses. Utilization of other sensory impulses than the visual may create a synergetic effect for communication of a company's identity. It may enhance emotional engagement and loyalty between a company or brand and their interested parties (ibid).

Finding or creating a distinct and evident identity is a complicated task. Several authors describe methods that can guide such a process. We suggest that systematic methods presented by e.g. Olins (2000) and Smith (1995) can be expanded, by implementing more experimental methods presented by e.g. Bernstein (1995), Dumaas (1994), Karjalainen (2001) and McGrory (2004).

To explore whether and how companies may implement multiple sensory elements in their brand-building activities, we executed a case study in November and December 2005. Due to time-limitations we made a choice to restrict the scope of senses to be explored to the haptic sense, in addition to the visual. The target of the analysis was the Norwegian dairy producer TINE. To find suitable haptic qualities for the company, we carried out a workshop and further test at the Department of Product Design at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Chosen haptic specimens were subsequently implemented in what we call experimental haptic metaphors. Through tactile, kinetic and visual traits these metaphors, taking the form of clothing articles, were meant to express TINE's identity in a new and clever way.

For a company, explicit sensory metaphors may be used as means to express identity-aspects in untraditional ways. They can work as inspiration for sensory stimuli in the concrete manifestations of the company. Moreover they will provide the company with a tool for communication and exploration around identity aspects internally.

Keywords: Brand, Company identity, Senses, Metaphors, Differentiation, Consistency

1. INTRODUCTION

The need for differentiation and distinctiveness is evident for companies operating in today's society. In a market, where the features and quality of many products are more or less equal, companies must meet aesthetic, moral and emotional demands to stand out and be successful (Morsing, 2002). Branding has evolved from being a discipline mainly focused on visually differentiating a company from its competitors, to becoming an act of extensive and multidisciplinary strategic communication of identity (Upshaw, 1997).

This article is the result of a theoretical study on the themes branding and senses, and a following case study exploring a suggested method based on the theoretical findings. We raise the question whether and how an enterprise can build stronger bonds with consumers in today's market. How can involving properties be found and effectively be utilized as means of communication?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For a company striving to succeed in a cramped market, constructing and maintaining a clear identity is vital. It is through integrity, consistency, and the right balance of variation and continuance in product-portfolio that companies can deliver successful brands (Karjalainen, 2004). Strong brands give the consumers something emotionally, something more than the generic properties of the products themselves (Linn, 1990).

The theoretical background presented below is divided into four sub-chapters. Firstly we present the elements that constitute a company's identity. We then propose the importance of trying to involve multiple senses in means of communication. The third sub-chapter deals with the task of finding and effectively communicating a company's identity. We round off the theoretical part by introducing the human sense that experiences i.e. forms, surfaces and weight, the haptic sense.

2.1 Construction of identity

A company's identity can be split in two, an abstract and a concrete part (Parr, 2005). The abstract identity deals with the intangible elements of a company. The company-culture, its vision, fundamental values and goals are characteristics of the abstract identity (Parr, 2005).

The abstract identity creates a base for the concrete manifestations of a company. These manifestations can be classified in four factors: communication, behavior, environment and product (Parr, 2005; Olins, 2000). The four factors may not have the same importance in all companies. It is helpful to decide which factor is the dominating one at an early stage in an identity-process (Olins, 2000). It is through all of these factors that a company's identity is materialized and experienced by consumers. Consistency of communicated properties across the factors creates an impression of credibility and unity (Parr, 2005).

2.2 Branding and human senses

The focus when dealing with company identity, branding and communication has traditionally been on the visual sense (Lindstrom, 2005 a; Tischler, 2005). Human beings, however, are creatures of five senses.

“..the more sensory points of contact utilized when building brands, the higher is the amount of sensory memory being activated. The higher the amount of sensory memory being activated, the stronger the attachment will be between brand and consumer.” (Lindstrom, 2005 a, p. 83, our translation).

In his book *Brandsense* Lindstrom (2005 a) presents a number of enterprises that have successfully expanded their scope of senses, and others that have lost market-share by not seizing their chance to do so. Lindstrom claims that creating convincing brand-experiences can be done in discrete and intelligent ways by implementing other senses as means of communication. Humans experience sensory stimulus differently (Stompff, 2003). The distinctness and combined action of properties addressing several senses, is more than the sum of the impact of each one of them (Lindstrom, 2005 a). By exploiting the synergy of sensory experiences one can utilize their complementary influence and maximize a brands differentiation (ibid).

Sight is important when it comes to creating expectations (Lindstrom, 2005 a). When a consumer seeks to confirm these anticipations, other senses may dominate. 83% of all commercial activity is visual (Lindstrom, 2005 b). Abundance of visual stimuli has made the eye listless for impression. Taste, touch, and smell are the essential elements to create emotional involvement. These senses are also deeply involved in maintaining brand-experience and loyalty (Lindstrom, 2005 a).

A one-dimensional focus on the visual also reduces the natural interaction between impulses (Pallasmaa, 1996). The human radius of sensation and action gets limited to a single domain. The human body, however, exists in a three dimensional room. Without haptic memory, for instance, no apprehension of materiality or spatial distance would be possible. Our perception of the world is experienced by the whole body simultaneously. The senses can be segregated only in theory (ibid).

2.3 Communicating aspects of identity

Finding or creating an identity is a complicated task. Several authors describe methods that can guide such a process. One can find both systematic and more experimental ones. Authors within the systematic school are among others Olins (2000), Phillips (1995) and Smith (1995). Their methods are structural and analytical. More experimental methods, presented by i.e. Bernstein (1995), Dumas (1994), Karjalainen (2001) and McGrory (2004) let implicit understandings become explicit by forms of associations and playful tasks.

We claim that experimental methods may successfully be implemented in those of the systematic school. Letting a combination of methods complement each other may provide a creative and constructive approach in a search for an evident and differentiated identity. In this way i.e. personality-statements, totems and metaphors, presented in the experimental models, may work redeemingly as sources of inspiration for implementing multiple sensory elements in a company's contact surfaces.

We suggest working further with metaphors as a means to explore whether one can transfer properties of a company's identity to a larger scope of senses. All senses should be explicitly approached through constructions of suitable metaphors. The visual sense may be the one that is most easily comprehended, and can therefore be the basis for exploring other sensory

properties. As a trite example: If a company believes that it represents soft values, they may find that a picture of clouds represents their soft vision visually. Our challenge then, is not to settle the case at this, but explore what the softness would indicate for the taste, smell, sound and tactile properties of the company. Is the enterprise soft like an eiderdown and warm milk with honey, or soft like a shawl of silk and the smell of vanilla? These two metaphors address haptic, olfactory and gustatory properties, but express soft values quite differently.

For an enterprise the metaphors themselves may not be the goal of the process. We believe they can be used successfully in the search for new sensory properties of a brand. They may work as inspiration for the development of sensory qualities in the concrete manifestations of a company. The main point of the metaphors however, may be that they will be used as tools for communication and exploration around aspects of identity internally in a company or brand. They may trigger questions like; “Are these sensory impulses representing who we are? Why? Are these the ones we would like to be experienced by? Why are we perceived like this, and how may we possibly alter it?”

2.4 Haptic impulses

Due to our restricted time scope we chose to limit the sensory stimulus to be metaphorically explored. Our background in the field of industrial design, and therefore capabilities more on visual and tactual qualities, than auditory, gustatory and olfactory ones, made the haptic sense a natural choice.

“Delight has a texture”, Oprah Winfrey has stated (Lindstrom, 2005 a, p.102, our translation). We believe that other emotions may also have tactual and kinetic qualities. We claim that implicit and symbolic characteristics may be apprehended more integratively, and build lasting bonds with consumers by consciously implementing haptic qualities in a company’s contact surfaces. Our assertion owes to the arguments that haptic qualities have shown to influence emotional engagement (Pallasmaa, 1996), emotional engagement is said to be a premise for successful products (Lindstrom, 2005 a), and successful products are elements of evident identity-communication (Karjalainen, 2004). We believe that on this basis it follows that explicitly seeking and utilizing a brand’s haptic qualities may help strengthen a brand’s position.

The haptic system interprets i.e. forms, dimensions, surfaces, weight and temperature. An innate wish lies within the human to touch products to verify their quality, condition, age and wear-resistance (Shetelig, 2005). However, sensory stimulus do not merely send information to the human intellect, it feeds fantasy and specify emotional thought (Pallasmaa, 1996). Intuitive, behavioral, and reflective experiences will affect a person's apprehension of a product (Norman, 2004). Accordingly this will affect the emotional belongings that evolve between the individual and the enterprise or brand behind the product. The focus of today is shifting to symbolic aspects of a product, and more implicit characters and design-language is being utilized (Karjalainen, 2004). Touch, through tactile impressions and movement, invite interaction and emotional experiences (Palasmaa, 1996). Touch is an active and inviting sense and perceives implicit messages intuitively. In a state of emotion the focus of sensory stimulus shifts from the sophisticated senses, like sight and hearing, to the more archaic, like touch and smell (ibid).

We have seen that implementing various sensory stimuli in the four factors communicating a company's identity may help triggering consumers' emotional engagement. The haptic sense is a sense of emotional importance, an inviting sense that intuitively perceives implicit messages. We believe that suitable sensory properties can be found through creative experimentation and use of metaphores. The case study explores this further.

3. CASE STUDY

The basis of the case study was a wish to explore whether one can extract core-qualities concerning an enterprise's identity and create meaningful metaphors for this, explicitly addressing the haptic sense. The visual was not excluded due to the fact that a synergetic effect was strived for, not just another isolation of senses.

Below we state the means of analysis used to explore the Norwegian dairy producer TINE. The whole analysis itself is not presented, but a part of the outcome, an alleged TINE-personality, is described. We present our way of finding haptic specimens, and subsequently describe the progress of the executed workshop and tests. We round off the empiric part of this article by reporting the implementation of haptic qualities in metaphors expressing TINE's identity.

3.1 Analysis

The executed case study concerned the Norwegian dairy producer TINE. The analysis was done using some of the systematic methods stated above. This included an analysis of the properties of TINE's concrete manifestations, together with interviews and mail-correspondence with TINE-employees. More experimental methods were also used, i.e. on the analysis of TINE's products and external communication. Here, amongst others, McGrory's four product dimensions¹ was used as a means to systematize products and characteristics. Bernstein's personality-statement was also turned to account to get to know and understand TINE better.

TINE follows a relatively clear labeling structure, utilizing both what Olins (2000) calls monolithic and endorsed brands. An example of the first is TineMelk (TineMilk, figure 1) and TineYoghurt (figure 2), and of the other Jarlsberg (figure 3) and Biola (figure 4). TINE currently owns more than 40 brands. All products are systematically and strategically positioned in their brand portfolio (Gloppen, 2005).



Figure 1: TineMilk



Figure 2: TineYoghurt



Figure 3: Jarlsberg



Figure 4: Biola

¹ McGrory's (2004) first dimension deals with the one-dimensional properties of product-identity; form, colour, texture and finish. The second discusses two-dimensional elements such as pattern, graphics, contour and silhouette. The third dimension treats a product's form, function, feel and fit, and the fourth a company's spiritual character, it's overall mission or philosophy, conceptual scheme, systematic programme and design-technology.

Some of the data of the analysis can not be cited due to confidentiality reasons. In general however one can say that the products and means of communication obviously have in common soft lines in graphics, mild colours and an honest approach in looks and feel. The emotional approach of TINE's marketing can be seen as addressing woman more than men. The traditional milkmaid and everyday-cook is female, and the soft, playful TINE-tune is sweet and innocent. It is like a lighthearted daydream-humming of a dairymaid. Some of the questions asked to TINE-employees concerned the gender and age of TINE. The answers given generally stated a mother-figure. Substantiated in tradition, Managing Director Ole Wæhre stated, this female character also has an ability and potential to look forward into a new era. The name TINE is the Norwegian description of a special bowl for making cheese, and at the same time a female name in Norway.

The facts stated above were some of the arguments laid as ground to our ultimately conclusion of a feminine TINE-character. TINE has a confident personality and a substantial fundament in traditional values. This position simultaneously makes her able to be novel and innovative, without losing her reliability or profundity. The innovative side of her personality is modern, urban and sporty, while the traditional is persistent, steady and reliable. As an example one can see the modern, urban character mirrored in the new main office of TINE in Oslo, while the traditional dairies in general have a more down-to-earth and solid look (fig 5-6). We believe the conclusion of a two-dimensional TINE-character does not necessarily imply a conflicting personality. The two sides are dissimilar, but at the same time combinable. Just like human beings a company may have one personality, but express different sides of it at various times. It all depends on who is around and what tasks are at hand in the given situation. TINE's fundament in tradition may actually be the premise for her ability to be innovative without losing integrity.



Figure 5: Tine main office in Oslo



Figure 6: A traditional TINE-factory (Tromsø, Northern-Norway)

3.2 Collecting haptic qualities

The next step was exploring the range of suitable haptic qualities expressing the argued TINE-identity. We started the process by collecting samples of tactual qualities. The samples made up a range of proximately 30 textile-specimens and 5 paper-specimens, in addition to specimens of natural materials such as different types of wood, plastics, metal and glass. The format of the specimens was deliberately held as constant as possible, both in size and shape, and with textile and paper-cuts preferably in white so that random color would not influence the apprehension of the materials. A overall summary of the materials is given in figure 7.

We did not want our perception of what would be suitable haptic properties for TINE to influence the outcome of the tests. About two thirds were chosen because we subjectively believed them to be coherent with the TINE-characters, and the remaining third chosen for the opposite reason. Our subjective opinions would therefore not necessarily influence the test-outcome, but would presumably be represented within the chosen specimens. As an example obvious traditional Norwegian samples would be woven wool and carved wood. The mix of the fabrics and other tactile specimens we presented however consisted of a range of materials from wool and tin-plates, to latex and plexi-glass.

Chenille
 Cotton; fine-woven, coarse-woven, knitted, plastic coated (laminated), ingrained
 Corduroy; fine, coarse
 Glass/plastic; glass, lexan, plexi, pvc, plastic with bubbles
 Hairy fake textiles; short-haired, long-haired
 Lacework; fine and coarse
 Latex
 Linen; fine woven, coarse woven
 Metal; rough surfaced and smooth-surfaced (aluminum, steel, tin)
 Nylon; stretch (fine), semi-stretch (more coarse)
 Organsa
 Papersamples; plane, with flower stalks or leaves, coarse with fibres, wobbly
 cardboard
 Polyester; rip-stop, ingrained, stretch, semi-stretch, plastic coated (laminated)
 Silke; fake and real
 Skins; without hair, with hair (sheep, elk)
 Tulle; fine and coarse
 Velvet
 Wood; lark, oak, teak, white birch
 Wool; fine-woven, coarse-woven, knitted, raw, chafed

Figure 7: Overall summary of tactile specimens

3.3 Workshop and subsequent testing

A workshop was executed with a committee of 10 potential consumers of TINE-products. At this stage we dealt with four potential characters representing TINE. These were an exclusive/sophisticated character and a childlike/playful character, in addition to the two-dimensional TINE-character stated above. The two first were later believed to be constituents of TINE's market-approach more than vital sides of TINE's identity itself. In the subsequent summary of the tests we will only give account to the two characters believed to actually be part of the TINE-personality.

Introductorily our classification of the TINE-character was presented roughly. For all sides of the identity a product believed to express the main characteristics of it was presented to the group. The product-samples were subsequently removed, and the more involving part of the workshop started.

The group was given a selection of 40 pictures. The collection of pictures was primarily done by the same guidelines as that of sensory samples; keeping the same format and including pictures that we did not necessarily find to be adequate. The group was asked to separate the pictures into four piles, each representing a different side of TINE's personality. Subsequently the group was asked to cut the selection down to four pictures per pile. Quite a bit of discussion arose in this exercise, especially when the group was asked to cut down the number of pictures. This was also the intention of the assignment. We wanted to stimulate the group-members' individual associative competence, and make the group as a whole involve in a discussion to find an agreement of their conceptual understanding of the presented characters. This phase was meant as a warm-up for the next step of the workshop. The chosen pictures for the two essential sides of TINE's personality are presented in figure 8 and 9.

Figure 8: Chosen pictures for the traditional character (*Figures removed*)

For the following phase the 16 chosen pictures were removed and the group was introduced the little over 40 haptic specimens. Once more they were asked to sort the samples into piles based on the presented identity-characteristics. In this exercise the discussions was even livelier than in the first phase. Some specimens quickly found their place, while others triggered greater disagreement. Some specimens were eliminated as not suitable for any of the piles. The group was subsequently asked to cut the assembly down to four specimens per pile.

Figure 9: Chosen pictures for the modern/urban/sporty character (*Figures removed*)

The advantage of carrying through this process in a group is the fact that the we could observe the process, noting the argumentation for why each specimen did, or did not, fit in the individual piles. A weak point was the fact that the group-members were allowed to see the specimens. This might have influenced their understanding of them. It would however not be suitable to blindfold every individual in the group, as a part of the purpose was to create a discussion around the aspects of what each haptic specimen signaled. Collaboration and

discussion call for eye contact. This infirmity was somehow bypassed with a subsequent blind-test done with a smaller range of individuals. These individuals had not participated in the workshop. The range of haptic specimen for this test was cut down to 20, and the individuals were asked to separate these into two piles, one representing a traditional and solid character, and one representing a more modern, urban and sporty character.

The workshop and further testing implied some general guidelines as to what haptic properties would correspond with the chosen characters. Generally it seems that a certain amount of roughness and texture is seen as traditional. Specimens of some weight and thickness were placed in this category. Samples of raw material, and samples of which one could easily trace the origin, were also categorized as traditional. The four final samples in this category were a rough-surfaced tin-plate, a material of chafed raw wool, a coarsely woven cutting of linen, and a thin sample of oak. The smell of the materials were here commented, especially on the oak and the wool, as adding to the traditional feel. Lightweight and slim, but at the same time durable materials were placed in the modern/urban/sporty pile. Specimens given qualities in a more complex fabrication-process, and smooth, cold surfaced samples, were perceived as urban. The four final samples in this category were a lightweight rip-stop polyester textile, another light-weight polyester textile with semi-stretch properties, a sample of plexi-glass, and a smooth-surface aluminum plate.

Indeed the workshop and following test did not deliver any directly surprising discoveries. They did however testify some general conventions of traditional and modern/urban/sporty characteristics, which could be utilized in the haptic metaphors developed to express TINE's personality.

A weak point of the case study is the fact that the participating individuals may have constituted of too narrow a segment of TINE's potential consumers. A larger group, or preferably more groups of the same size, would have been creditable for the validity of the outcome of the test. This was not practicable in this case, due to time- and resource-related grounds.

3.4 Implementation and discussion on relevance

The task now was finding how to present the haptic qualities in clever and evident metaphors. Clothes were proposed as the right means. Clothes are products that most people consciously have considered through haptic qualities. In haptic and visual traits the clothing articles should express TINE’s identity. Variations of garments were outlined and presented to a range of individuals. The individuals all got to pick two sets of clothes per TINE-character. The decision fell on two variations of a national-costume-inspired dress, and two variations of a street-smart sportswear jacket. The chosen sketches of garments for each category are presented in figure 10-11 and 12-13.

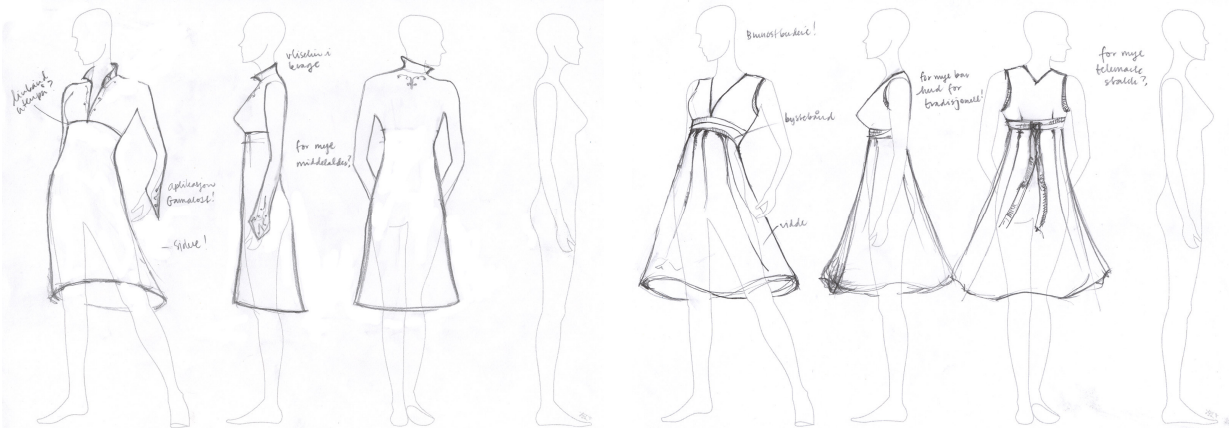


Figure 10-11: Sketches of garments for Traditional TINE

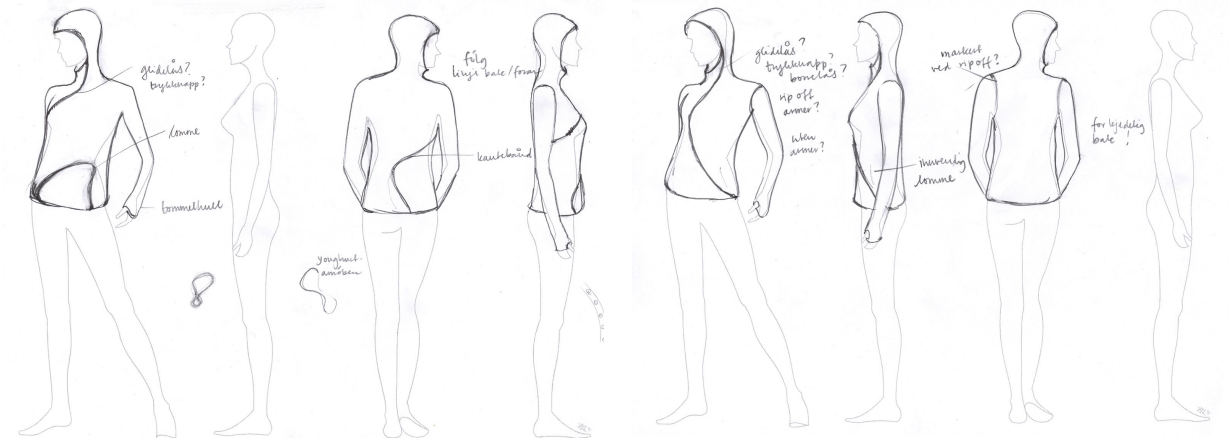


Figure 12-13: Sketches of garments for Modern/Urban/Sporty TINE

The process of finding a TINE-character, and implementing this in haptic metaphors, was run partly in parallel. This was mainly due to time-limitations. The variation of the tasks however felt fertile, like a dialog between wishes and suitable implementations of them. Figure 14 shows a schematic disposition of the process.

Textiles are “living” materials. The concrete design and detailed style of the clothes accordingly was partly developed during the making of them. Variations and combinations of suggested elements were done. The finished clothes are presented in figures 15-17 and 18-20. Haptic qualities found in the workshop were pursued for both characters. Some materials however had to be replaced due to economical or time-related factors.



Figure 15-17: Finished clothes Traditional TINE



Figure 18-20: Finished clothes Modern/Urban/Sporty TINE

The traditional outfit mostly communicates implicit values of TINE. It pursues few denotative elements from the products constituting the basis for the character. The consistency of visual design-elements used on products in this category varies, but some overall lines do exist. The materials used on the outfit are thick wool (dress and appliqué), linen-imitation (lining), and cast metal (buttons and jewelry). The overall lines are classic and clean, with decorative

elements of more intricate and delicate forms. The fabrics are unprocessed and genuine. This corresponds well with our perception of the traditional part of the TINE-identity. For the garments communicating the modern, urban and sporty character, explicit elements are more obvious. Here consistency of lines and forms are more evident on the products substantiating the character's existence. This part of the TINE-identity includes a health-based and functional attitude. The clothes are designed for ease of use. The contours of functional surfaces are emphasized by color matching the palette of the modern character. They are meant to report how and why elements are to be utilized. Lines are rounded and continual creating a cool, sleek feel. This combines well with the chosen textiles, lightweight smooth-surfaced rip-stop polyester, and small metal snap fasteners.

To work effectively in real-life, suitable haptic properties need to be distinct, and be used consistently within an enterprise's concrete manifestations. They must correspond intuitively with the overall expressed identity, and cannot be picked randomly. The presented metaphors are, by way of experiment, small steps on the way to finding suitable haptic qualities for TINE. We do not present the garments or chosen haptic specimens themselves as concrete materials to pursue. However we do believe that they depose relevant characteristics that would match TINE's identity.

Because TINE uses Tetra-Pak packaging, and food-articles themselves have certain given qualities, haptic qualities may not be so easily implemented in TINE's actual products. For ways of communication and promotion-material, however, haptic qualities may help TINE strengthen its potential of differentiation. Campaigns with extra-layers of packaging-material of certain haptic qualities may also be a possibility. Double packaging however is not generally a means to pursue. As a trigger for communication on identity-aspect internally in TINE, and as visualization (haptification!) of a personality, we believe metaphors may be very useful.

4. CONCLUSION

We have argued that an enterprise can build stronger emotional bonds with its customers by actively exploiting other sensory stimulus than the visual. Our suggested method, to develop metaphors explicitly addressing each human sense, may be a step on the way to finding what would be suitable and distinct properties of a company's identity. Our postulation that the

human being as a whole can be stimulated, and experience that interaction with a brand's products gives them substantial emotional value, will gain both companies and consumers.

Marketing and other factors of design have the motive to influence consumers to make certain choices. When attempting to influence other people's actions, one needs to tread gently. Further research on how sensory impressions influence human emotional engagement and loyalty needs to be done. The question at hand is where the limit lies between stimuli that gain perceived value for the consumers, and stimuli that are so subtle that they are actually triggering instincts that we are not yet familiar enough with. Do we know enough about the potential influence of certain factors to justify that we are tampering with them? Whatever the answer given to this question, it will be discussible.

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