TOUCH IT AND LET THE STORY BE TOLD
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INTRODUCTION

It would not be possible to understand, feel, learn, or think without the senses. The five human senses give invaluable information about different things through smell, sound, sight, taste, and touch (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). The sense of touch is the most primitive but also the most complex of all human senses. From all senses it is the only one that is present constantly and that cannot be turned off, as the skin covers every inch of our bodies. It is either active or passive, but it is always there to perceive signals from the environment.

The information is received by receptors that are placed on a human's skin and that transfer the signal to the brain. The impulses coming from the environment are different, therefore every receptor has its specific task – one is responsible for temperature reception, one for perception of pain but another for information of the surface skin gets in contact. But all together it creates one unity of sensory touch experience. The information coming from the world is neutral and static, thus people give this information a personal meaning. This process of giving meaning to the sensory signals is called perception. Every individual's perception of happenings is different, as it is influenced by our physique, economical and social status, as well as cultural differences. Nevertheless, there are properties that every human perceives, which are hardness and texture, weight, and temperature.

Consumers have different needs of experiencing brands, retail environment, products, and service. Some consumers are eager to touch things more than others, and overall it is a very individual matter, but researchers Peck and Childers (2003) have constructed the 'Need for Touch' scale, which allows to see what is the actual reason why consumers touch products. The 'Need for Touch' scale includes two dimensions: instrumental and autotelic sense of touch. The instrumental touch obtains practical product features and is with a certain purchase goal, but the autotelic touch is more for consumer's pleasure.

Each individual shops differently. People, who are higher in autotelic Need for Touch use haptic information for decision-making, while people higher in instrumental Need for Touch are searching for sensory information that is relevant to the product, and any extra information creates a frustration (Wiggins & Peck, 2006).

As the market is overcrowded of products and services, the retail environment is becoming a landscape where brands are building images and experiences rather than only selling goods and services (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). The five human senses have been widely recognized as influencing factors on people's emotions, perception and consumer behavior (Wiggins & Peck, 2006). Using sensory marketing, brands can appeal to deeper levels and create personal experiences. As Morris Holbrook defines experience, “value resides not in the product purchased, not in the brand chosen, not in the object processes, but rather in the consumption experience(s) derived therefrom” (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009), which could explain why people like to go to one coffee place instead of another. In most of the cases it is not about the coffee, but about the whole experience the brand offers.

The idea behind sensory marketing is that a brand triggers all five human senses to reach for deeper and more intrinsic relationship with the customer, which eventually can affect individual's emotions, memories and consumption preferences.
As discussed above, marketplace has changed and it is crucial to understand what really influences customers and their shopping behavior. With a focus on a sensory marketing, where the five human senses are in the center of attention, I initiate a further research on the sense of touch and its influence in consumer perception by promoting the following research goal:

Find out if there is a link between tactile surfaces and brand concepts

This thesis sets out to explore to what extent the sense of touch is able to influence people's perception of brands. With better understanding the phenomenon of the sense of touch in sensory marketing and its affect on consumer's perception of a brand, I set research sub-questions to reach the goal:

How is the sense of touch constructed and to what extent tactile sensory cues has an influence on consumer behavior?

What is sensory marketing and to what extent retail environment has an impact on consumers?

As for the research, I used quantitative methods as in this case it offers more objective data. I gathered the information from the literature available on this topic and conducted an experiment. The experiment was of my own design, where four concepts and ten materials were tested. It was a blind-experience test, where participants had no possibilities to use sense of vision, which could affect the results of a study. As a result, after obtaining data from 46 participants, it was possible to see a pattern, which showed several materials that were linked to each concept more than others. There are certain limitations of the research conducted in this thesis. The experiment was constructed only to see if there is any subconscious link between tactile surfaces and concepts, therefore only 10 materials and 4 concepts were chosen. This data gives general results, and is not specific for any kind of fashion brand. The results can rather be used as an insight and inspiration of how different brands can use materials to translate their values through tactile experiences. This experiment did not use any existing brands, but used particularly vague concept descriptions, in order not to make any connections to any brands in the fashion industry.
Summarizing all information, the structure of the report is following:

**Main research question:**
To what extent tactile experience can influence people's mental associations with the brand?

**Research sub-questions:**
- How is the sense of touch constructed and to what extent tactile sensory cues have an influence on human's consumer behavior?
- What is sensory marketing and to what extent retail environment has an impact on consumers?

**Theoretical framework:**
- The sense of touch
- The sense of touch in retail
- Human senses and the brand

**Empirical findings:**
The quasi-experiment testing material linkage to fashion brands

**Analysis:**
Theoretical framework and empirical findings

**Conclusion and Discussion**

This research paper was a result of personal interests in the topic. As a consumer myself, I am paying attention to the experiences I receive, and have noticed that I prefer one place over another because of the way the brand made me feel. I realized that human's senses have a vital importance in our existence and without the senses no impression could ever be made. Thus it would not be possible to feel, think, understand or learn without it.

After a thorough research I could not find a study where people tested tactile material linkage with brands, thus the experiment idea originated at this point. This experiment was one-of-a-kind, which provides unique results.

Any retailers that want to create a sensory retail environment, where material usage is well-thought-through process, where materials communicate with customers and tell the story of a brand, can use the results of this particular research paper.
1. THE SENSE OF TOUCH

Touch is the most complex and the most undifferentiated of all senses (Sander, 1993). The richness of touch allows humans to interact with the world directly (Fulkerson, 2013) and lets the environment to communicate with each one of us every day. It is the only human sense, which is not limited to a specific location. While vision, smell, and hearing act through some medium, and the taste activates only if the wetness of saliva is present (Peck, 2009), the sense of touch exists passively on all parts of our bodies (Krishna, 2003). Lederman and Klatzky (1987) described the sense of touch as the intelligent sense, saying that it allows us to communicate not only with other humans, but also with the surrounding. It is a continuous communication with the world and the sense of touch is often called the proximal or the near sense (Krishna, 2003).

1.1. How the sense of touch is constructed?

In biological terms, the sense of touch is known as somatosensory system. It is constructed of two parts— proprioception or kinesthesis, and cutaneous system, and each is responsible for certain tactile information we receive from the world (Krishna, 2003). The kinesthetic system (proprioception) responds to signals from muscles, tendons, and joints, as well as vision and vestibular system, and sends the information about the position of human limbs in the space. Proprioceptors give information about the body position and overall movement. It also helps humans to determine the properties of objects, such as size, weight and temperature from afar (Klatzky, 2009). Both systems have receptors that comprehend and transport the information to human brains. Receptors refer to neural fibers or neurons, and translate the information into brain language, which then underlies our conscious response to objects and events (Klatzky, 2009). See Figure 1 on how the kinesthetic system is built.

Figure 1 (Motion Center, 2013)
The cutaneous system responds to stimulation of the skin and processes the information about surface skin gets in contact (Klatzky, 2009). Cutaneous mechanoreceptors give human response to mechanical stimuli that result from physical interaction with the world (Wikipedia). They are touch, pressure and vibration sensitive. See Figure 2 for graphical drawing on a piece of a human's skin and receptors in it.

Receptors can be described by two characteristics – how fast or slow they react on the outer signal, which is called adaption rate, and how dense they are located on the skin, also called as receptive field.

1.1.1. Adaption rate

There are two types of mechanoreceptors that are responsible for adaption rate. Some mechanoreceptors fire up only when the stimulus is perceived or stops being perceived (Johnsson & Valibo, 1978) and responds only when the mechanical source has been applied, removed and reapplied (Klatzky, 2009), therefore these are called fast adapting receptors. The other type fires up the entire time a stimulus is present (Johnsson & Valibo, 1978) and respond when the pressure is longer lasting and steady.

1.1.2. Receptive field

A receptive field is the area of skin to which receptor is sensitive. The smaller their receptive fields, the more capable a neural population is of resolving pressure on the skin into distinct points, in other words, these receptors are more sensitive to any pressure applied to skin. On the other hand, a large receptive field means that a single receptor fires when a stimulus is applied anywhere over a relatively large region on the skin, which makes it harder to identify the location of stimuli (Klatzky, 2009).

1.2. Perception

Similarly to the difference between hearing and listening, there is a great contrast between sensing and perceiving information from the outside world. Perception, from the Latin perceptio, percipio, is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment (Schacter, 2011). The information firstly travels to the central station of the brain, which is called thalamus. When the information reaches the thalamus, it produces a sensation. Then this information gets passed to the cortex that processes the sensation into perception (Krishna, 2003). Perception is more than just a passive information reception; it is an active process in human brain. It is an interaction between the world and the human. Simply saying, the world gives people information of happenings around them, and then they give those events meaning by interpreting and acting upon them (Boeree, 2002, 2009). Perception differs from individual to individual due to variety of cultural, socio-economical and personal differences. For example, in South East Asia beading is a big part of culture and different beads by its size and texture can represent diverse meanings, but for a Westerner - might not tell any story at all.
Perception is strongly connected to the background information humans receive through family and culture, as well as the context around it (Boeree, 2002, 2009). Humans perceive different properties of objects. The primary properties are hardness and texture, temperature and weight. See Figure 3 for a scheme on how the perception is constructed.

The perception of texture results from the vibration created between the skin and the surface. It is impossible to determine the qualities of the surface with no relative motion (Katz, 1989). Katz explains that horizontal motion is required for the perception of roughness and smoothness, and vertical motion for hardness and softness. Whilst Lederman, Reed and Klatzky (1987) assert that people get to know the surface texture by rubbing, which they also call exploratory procedure. This procedure is done by touching the object and moving the hand, which is a “participated, stereotyped action pattern that is linked to an object property, in this case surface texture” (Klatzky, 2009, p. 37). Rubbing is also defined as lateral motion, which is part of exploratory procedure; and it is performed by hands, toes, and tongue.

Regarding hardness, humans always explore it by using pressure - pressing or twisting the object (Klatzky, 2009). If the object is on the surface, for instance, people tend to use vertical hardness exploration, but when the object can be held in hands, they tend to use squeezing motions in or-

### 1.2.1. Hardness and Texture

It is in human’s nature to touch things around them. We all reach out to feel the softness of cashmere, roughness of sandpaper, smoothness of freshly cut lawn and hardness of stone. These and many more examples tell us about our perception of the world through touching texture of objects. Texture perception tells us information about the object qualities, such as roughness, hardness, smoothness, stickiness, oiliness, graininess, coarseness and slipperiness. (Lederman, 1982) Neisser (1976) defines texture perception as an “ecologically valid” judgment, which gives us information about the surroundings and makes us feel comfortable.

In order to find out the weight, individuals have to lift the object from the surface. It is almost impossible to determine the weight of an unfamiliar object by just looking at it. Physician Augustine Charpentier developed the idea of the size-weight illusion, or otherwise called Charpentier illusion. It states that individuals underestimate the weight of larger objects when compared to smaller objects with the same mass. Interestingly that people develop different perceptions of weight when the color or material is being changed. For instance, wooden containers feel heavier than metal containers and lighter objects feel heavier than darker objects holding the same mass and size objects (Seashore, 1899).
Weight has a subconscious link to the quality and price. Research shows that heavy objects symbolize quality (Lindstrom, 2005), whereas plastic objects are perceived as cheap and low in quality (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). In his book Lindstrom (2005) mentions an experiment, where it was tested how people perceive wine quality by drinking it from wine or plastic glasses. Research showed that people gave a greater value to the wines that were served in a glasses, and undervalued those served in plastic cups.

1.2.3. Temperature

When people are asked to determine temperature for surfaces, they have a static contact with the surface by placing skin on the object and holding it steadily (Lederman, Klatzky, & Reed, 1987). The ability to feel thermal changes around us depends on two receptors found in our skin – one recognizes warmth and the other cold.

If the temperature changes very slowly and gradually at a rate less than 0.5°C/minute, humans can be unaware of temperature change of up to 5-6°C (Berris & Jones, 2002).

It is not just a physical perception of temperature, but also a psychological one. Different materials can make people feel cold or warm, the same as diverse colors. For example, natural materials, such as wood and leather, can make people feel warm and in harmony; brick material can make people feel warm because it is associated with fire-place, whereas unnatural materials, such as metal and plastic, are mostly perceived as cold and hard (Schmitt & Simonson, 2009).

The chapter conclusion

In conclusion, Human’s skin is a tool that allows people to interact with the world directly. It is designed to receive information from the environment and produce an individual reaction to the happenings. The sense of touch is constructed of receptors built in a human’s skin that perceive different signals, like the information about the surface and movement of the limbs. Some parts of the skin are more sensitive than others, as receptors are responding to signals faster or slower, and are situated in a diverse density on the body. Haptic sense is an active sense, as it not only gets in contact with the world, but also translates it into individual understanding or perception. Humans perceive several object properties, from which the primary are texture and hardness, temperature, and weight.
2. THE SENSE OF TOUCH IN RETAIL

There are products that require more information than vision alone can provide. Often consumers want to touch products to acquire specific product information that only touch can provide (Peck, 2009). The sense of touch gives us information about the texture, hardness, weight and temperature, and with certain products it is crucial. For instance, most of the fashion pieces require touch, which tells consumers about the feel of the textile, and most probably about the quality of the product. In these cases people investigate the product more carefully and this can lead to an encouraged purchase at the end.

2.1. Need for touch

Some consumers touch products only to put them in their shopping cart, while others need to spend time exploring the product before making a purchase decision (Peck & Childers, 2003). People who need more exploration time are likely getting frustrated if they don’t have a chance to touch the product before buying it, for instance, doing online purchases (Peck & Childers, 2003). These individuals are in higher need for touch, evaluation and/or cognition of products and are the ones, who pick up every product and try to get to know it through touching it before making any decisions. There are several scales out there that are looking at consumers in the retail environment, assessing their individual needs, such as Need for Cognition (NFC) scale constructed by Cacioppo and Petty (1982), and Need to Evaluate (NTE) scale done by Jarvis and Petty (1996), but none of them look at touch as a driving force in consumer’s buying behavior.

Researcher Joanna Peck has studied different aspects of individual differences in the preference in touch information. Her notion was that not all material properties create the same type of response in consumers (Peck, 2009). People experience different sensations when touching pleasant, soft surfaces, compared to a more functional material properties such as weight. Taking an example from the fashion industry, people experience more pleasure sensing the soft texture of a leather bag than lifting it and realizing its weight. Every person is individual and prefers different touch information. As a result, Peck and Childers (2003) developed the ‘need for touch’ (NFT) scale. According to Peck and Childers (Peck, 2009) NFT is defined as a “preference for the extraction and use of information obtained through touch” and “it is conceptually defined as a preference for the extraction and utilization of information obtained through the haptic system” (Peck & Childers, 2003, p. 25). It is also defined as “a preference for the extraction and utilization of information obtained through the haptic system” (Peck & Childers, 2003, p. 431). The NFT scale includes two dimensions: instrumental and autotelic sense of touch. The instrumental touch is a touch experience with a certain purchase goal. It is rather problem solving with a goal to seek information and making a final judgment. In contrast, autotelic touch is more for a consumer’s pleasure – seeking fun and enjoyment with no necessary purchase made at the end. As they state in their research paper, autotelic touch is more automatic and spontaneous, but instrumental touch is more controlled and conscious process (Peck & Childers, 2003). Whereas Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) describes it in terms of consumers as problem solvers or consumers searching for fun, fantasy, arousal, sensory stimulation and enjoyment.
The NFT scale is determined by asking 12 questions that need to be answered with a 5-point Likeart scale with “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” as the very extremes. Note: “A” indicates autotelic scale item, but “I” -instrumental scale item.

1. When walking through the stores, I can't help touching all kinds of products. (A)
2. Touching products can be fun. (A)
3. I place more trust in products that can be touched before purchase. (I)
4. I feel more comfortable purchasing a product after physically examining it. (I)
5. When browsing in stores, it is important for me to handle all kinds of products. (A)
6. If I can't touch a product in the stores, I am reluctant to purchase the product. (I)
7. I like to touch products even if I have no intention of buying them. (A)
8. I feel more confident making a purchase after touching a product. (I)
9. When browsing in stores, I like to touch lots of products. (A)
10. The only way to make sure a product is worth buying is to actually touch it. (I)
11. There are many products that I would only buy if I could handle them before purchase. (I)
12. I find myself touching all kinds of products in

None of the people are truly autotelic or instrumental in their touch behavior, but incorporate a combination of both. For example, customers tend to approach household products with a more instrumental touch, but products that are displayed for a physical touch experience, like fashion products, ask for more autotelic touch.

After completing the 12 NFT questions, it is possible to tell whether a person is with high or low Need for touch, while doing buying decisions. It is divided in two dimensions – six questions are asked to find out if the person is with high or low Instrumental touch necessity, and the other six – to discover the degree of Autotelic touch necessity. Every question is asked to range from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

2.1.1. The Instrumental touch

The classification of instrumental touch is used to indicate that consumers are touching products as a means to an end purchase (Peck, 2009) and “this form of touch are goal-driven evaluative outcomes related to the consumer (e.g. comfort and certainty in their judgment) as well as the target product (e.g. quality or worth)” (Peck & Childers, 2003, p. 431). This type of touch deals with very practical product features such as product's texture, weight, hardness and temperature. Customers who are high in instrumental NFT use touch to gather relevant product information, which provides them with necessary information they cannot receive by using other mean, like investigating visually or by information provided in a written format (Peck & Childers, 2003). These people touch products to make sure of their practical qualities.

There are four levels of instrumental touch. The first three types of touch assume a consumer is engaged in a goal-directed, problem-solving, pre-purchase behavior (Peck, 2009). First, touch to purchase, which main goal is to purchase the product with no intention to explore it by using senses. These type of purchases we do every day, by buying products we are familiar with, such as groceries, household products etc. Second, touch to obtain non-haptic product information, which includes product discovery by visual, olfactory, auditory and gustatory inspection. In this level haptic evaluation is not necessarily needed and product evaluation can be done mostly by vision. Third, touch to obtain haptic product information, which goal is to extract specific material
properties, such as texture, hardness, weight and temperature. The fourth and most sensual type of touch – *hedonic or also known as autotelic touch* – is with an aim for a pleasant sensory experience and fun (Peck, 2009).

Although the instrumental touch is more for gathering practical information about the product, it can be made fun as well. For example, Britain’s supermarket chain ASDA allowed customers to feel and compare the texture of their toilet paper by providing unwrapped toilet paper rolls in a point-of-sales display (Lindstrom, 2005). Normally, customers make up their mind about the product quality and suitability to their needs by visual inspection, but this brand gave people opportunity to touch and feel the product that people usually have no access before and actual purchase. As a result, this campaign positively influenced the sales of this exact toilet paper.

### 2.1.2. The Autotelic touch

In contrast with instrumental touch, the autotelic factor of NFT “relates to touch as an end in and of itself” (Peck & Childers, 2003, p. 431). This is seen as hedonic type of touch, which not necessarily gives information and seeks for fun, arousal, sensory stimulation, and enjoyment (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The main idea behind the autotelic touch aspect is that touch is hedonic and irresistible need to engage with products; and most importantly – with no purchase goal necessary salient (Peck & Childers, 2003). Within the fashion industry it is a widely recognized behavior, when people explore the products with no purchase action at the end. People high in autotelic need for touch tend to cognize products and their quality leaded by their curiosity, even though they are not able to afford it.

Peck and Wiggins (2006) did a study, where they added a touch element to an informational pamphlet. They found out that attaching a touch element that gave a good feeling (e.g. a donation pamphlet with feather attached to it) increases persuasion, measured as attitude toward the ad, and willingness donating time and money to the organization. Another research done by Peck and Shu (2009) showed, that touching an object, compared to inability to touch, resulted in greater feelings of psychological ownership and also a greater willingness to pay (Peck, 2009).

### 2.2. NFT and consumer behavior

Several researchers (Wiggins & Peck 2006, Peck & Childers 2000, Peck 1999, Fisher & Rook 1995) have done studies to show that individual’s Need for Touch has an impact on their attitude towards brands and products, as well as their purchase behavior. These studies present different aspects on how it affects the way people behave in retail environment.

Peck’s study illustrates that people with higher NFT are more likely to seek for haptic information and use it for decision-making. It shows that touch with a positive sensory feedback increase attitude more for consumers with high NFT. It was observed that individuals with high autotelic NFT experienced positive attitude change when touching a pleasant and soft material, compared to rough and unpleasant material (Peck, 1999). It has also been researched that positive response to products influence customer attitude and buying behavior (Wiggins & Peck, 2006).

Whilst people with low-NFT are in need to receive information that is valuable, therefore the tactile information always need to help them to interpret the message behind it (Wiggins & Peck, 2006). If the information is irrelevant and hard to connect the information with the message, it may make these people frustrated. They are processing the touch message and information all together and irrelevant touch element creates a great amount of confusion (Wiggins & Peck, 2006).
It is advised to think about these aspects when creating a product or a retail environment. Therefore, if the brand and its products are entirely based on practical qualities, it is not necessary to overload customers with tactile experience/information. But if the brand and its products are with a high tactile value, it is more advisable to think of sensory touch experience around the product and brand's retail environment.

Moreover, studies show that individuals with high autotelic need for touch make purchases more impulsively than people low in autotelic NFT. Childers and Peck (2006) state that there is a link between hedonic shopping motives and impulse-buying behavior.

Further Rook and Fisher (1995, p. 306) research illustrates that “highly impulsive buyers are more likely to experience spontaneous buying; their shopping lists are more “open” and receptive to sudden, unexpected buying ideas”. Research appears to acknowledge that impulsive buying involves hedonic component (Fisher & Rook, 1995), as consumers report that they tend to feel uplifted (Hoyer & Cobb, 1986) and experience fun and novelty being fulfilled (Hausman, 2000). Furthermore, various studies report that not only individual aspects increase impulse purchasing, but also the retail environment by increasing the salience of touch (Wiggins & Peck, 2006). Tactile aspect of retail environment may capture consumer's attention and increase their interest (Richins & Bloch, 1983).

The chapter conclusion

To sum up, the sense of touch is entirely individual, and the person’s need for touch also highly differs. Although there are different scales, which deal with grouping people by their sensitivity and need to explore surfaces and materials, the ‘Need for Touch’ (NFT) scale is the only one looking at touch as a driving force in consumer’s buying behavior. This scale contemplates two types of touch – instrumental and autotelic, from which instrumental is responsible for obtaining practical information about the product and is rather goal driven, and autotelic touch is more for seeking fun, arousal and enjoyment. It also looks at how customer’s with high or low NFT differ in their consumer behavior, and how retailers can use this information to find the best approach.
3. HUMAN SENSES AND THE BRAND

Retail environment is highly overwhelming with the number of products to choose from and it takes more time making decisions about what to buy, making it harder and more time-consuming process than ever. Brands have to find their own ways to approach their loyal consumers and how to drag the new one's attention to their product. Consumers make assumptions about product quality and performance based on both extrinsic cues such as brand name, reputation, and price, and intrinsic cues such as appearance, taste, texture, and shape (Citrin, Stem, Spangenberg, & Clark, 2003); therefore it is important to work on both aspects. The five human senses have been acknowledged as crucial factors in consumer behavior, and they are seen as powerful cues influencing individual's emotions, perception and behavior (Peck & Childers, 2008). To bring this approach in the company, it is important to understand how sensory experience is constructed, how sensory marketing can bring an extra attention from customers and how overall retail environment influences people perception of the brand.

3.1. The touch experience

Word sensory means relating to the senses or the power of sensation, and sensual has a similar meaning – relating to the gratification of the senses, as in the word sensuous (Krishna, 2009). Researchers Hulten, Broweus and van Dijk (2009) have defined this phenomenon as the experience logic. This logic is a result of how the information of human senses is perceived, interpreted and experienced, either singly or together. The experience logic is entirely individual, as every human being perceives and translates the signals and messages from their own personal perspective. Humans use their senses for communication, self-expression and the perception of happenings around them. They use ears for the perception of sound, mouth for the taste, eyes for the sight, nose for the smell, and skin for the sense of touch. Getting to know the human's sensory development, it is proven that the sense of smell is the first that emerges in the embryo; the sense of touch is crucial for exploring the world even in the early stages, but human's dominant sense – vision – develops gradually only after the child's birth (Latvala, 2012).

The importance of the senses has been recognized for centuries. Ancient Greeks strictly distinguished the five senses and the mind. As early as the 4th century BC, Aristotle proposed his theory of aesthesis or sensation, which suggests that our five senses are ordered hierarchically, with the sense of touch on the top, and the other senses increasing the acuity of the touch sensation. Per Aristotle, touch provided a true picture of the intrinsic nature of the object, so that the soft coat of a kitten would be indicative of its innate softness of character (Krishna, 2009). Aristotle supposed the sense of touch was the superior human sense, mediating all senses, even vision. Aristotle argued that the sense of touch was the basest, primary sense and involved direct physical contact (Smith & Palmer, 2008). In early 1700s visitors were allowed to touch and hold artifacts in Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum. At that time the museum indicated that they couldn’t “forbid such handlings due to the notion that touch provided essential – and expected – means of acquiring knowledge. Seeing alone was assumed to be limiting because the sight could read only the surface of the artifact. The touch was a way to access the truth (Classen, 2007). Bertil Hulten, Niklas Broweus and Marcus van Dijk agree with this statement, saying...
that touch allows humans to access the information that is not possible to grasp with the sense of vision (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). It is surprising to see, how the need for touching certain products just does not get away, for instance, printed materials such as books. Although the digital technology would allow people to access all possible information digitally, libraries and bookstores still exist. There is something about the physical touch of the book that keeps people purchasing printed books instead of digital copies (Krishna, 2003).

3.2. Sensory marketing

We live in an ever-changing world and innovative marketing is a part of it. Marketing has undergone a vast change in the past centuries. Until the late 18th century market was defined by trading goods harvested by hand in limited supply. When industrial revolution hit the world, mass production took over craftsmanship and increased the product availability in the market. Since the 20th century, market and marketing are gradually changing every decade. There is and always will be the mass market, but every decade brings new vibes in the marketing industry. To some extent, marketing has moved from selling and promoting products and services to alluring individual’s sensual experience (Sherry & Joy, 2003).

For the past ten years, sensory marketing has received increased attention from both researchers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt, 1999; Hultén et al. 2008; Krishna, 2010) and practitioners (Gobé, 2001; Lindstrom 2005, 2008; Underhill, 2009) (Larsson & Eriksson, 2011).

The five human senses are a crucial part of individual’s experience of different purchases and services. Sensory marketing recognizes how firms can create brand awareness and establish brand image through different sense expressions and sensorial strategies (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). The basic idea behind sensory marketing is that companies should reach all five human senses at a deeper level, which neither relationship nor mass marketing does. In order to create a brand awareness and sustainable image of the brand, companies are advised to approach their customers based on logic and rationality as well as emotions and values. It is essential that human senses are in the center of the sensory marketing (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009). Sensory marketing can be also defined as a group of main levers which are “pulled” by the producers and/or distributor, in order to create a sensory atmosphere around the product or service, focusing on retail environment and the communication or features of the product (Filser, 2003).

Moreover, the sensory aspects of a brand experience can affect individual’s emotions, memories, perceptions, preferences, choices, and even consumptions of the products or services (Krishna, 2009). Therefore brand’s sensory marketing should be strategically based on the five human senses to relate to customer’s identity, lifestyle and personality (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009).

Krishna (2012, p. 333) suggests that from the managerial point of view, sensory marketing can be practiced to construct subconscious triggers that can eventually define individual’s “perception of abstract notions of the product (e.g. sophistication, quality, elegance, innovativeness, modernity, interactivity).

Using materials that are highly matching to the overall brand concept in the retail environment can draw people’s attention and can communicate with the customer in a different level. For instance, Ready to Fish store in Amsterdam used hundreds of little stones as the store flooring for the Spring/Summer 2014 collection to create the right atmosphere and translate the idea behind the concept of this particular collection. First of all, it creates incredible sensations and, second, is something extremely unique that stays is people’s mind.
3.3. Environment influence on consumer behavior

Retail environment has to be seen as one unity, which throws clear and well-thought brand messages to the customer throughout the shopping process. It has to be carefully designed to communicate the brand's personality and image. In order to stimulate consumer's purchasing activity in their store, each element of the brand's retail environment needs to be in a harmony with their values and create a distinctive atmosphere possible comparing to competitors (Ishwar, Ruchi, & Zillur, 2010). The retail environment not only represents the identity of the brand, but also gives signals of quality and value to the customers (Baker & Grewal, 1994). Customer behavior does depend on atmospheric features in the retail environment, especially for those, who are with higher stimulus seeking hedonic shopping experience (Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan, & Lapidus, 1990).

The tactile factors create “aesthetically sensitive environment that potentially increase customers’ value due to personal comfort and environmental control” (Ishwar, Ruchi, & Zillur, 2010, p. 6).

It is stated that touch can give a tactile stimulation and feeling of pleasure that activates people's brain, influencing feelings and behavior (Rolls, 1999). Therefore, it is “important to stimulate the skin in more profound ways, creating a more versatile surface that activates and stimulates the sense of touch connecting with the individual's feelings” (Schiffman, 2001, p. 46).

The physical environment is highly influential factor on how customers behave, both in regards to avoidance and approach (Zeitman, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). It is entirely individual, which sensory cues create pleasure and arousal to every person; therefore it is every brand's responsibility to be aware of who are their customers and what kind of experience they want deliver, in order to approach the right people.

The chapter conclusion

To conclude, humans use their senses for communication, self-expression and the perception of happenings around them. The five human senses are acknowledged as a powerful influencing factor in consumer behavior, as well as people's emotions and perception. The marketing and market space is constantly changing, and sensory marketing has become more recognized in the industry. It looks at human senses as being a center of customer shopping experience creator that can affect individual's emotions, memories, perceptions, and even consumer buying behavior. Retail environment is a crucial place, where brands can express their brand values through sensory customer experiences. The entire retail environment influences how consumers perceive the brand, and it is in the brand's interest to find the best ways how to deliver the messages, approaching individual's senses.
4. THE STUDY “TOUCH THE BRAND

It is generally known that it is important to deliver symbolic, abstract, or identity-boosting benefits of a brand beyond the functional benefits of products and services (D’Astous & Le, vesque, 2003). One way of doing it by using the right sensory elements in the presentation of the brand and communication with the customer. Using the sense of touch is one way of approaching to customer’s sensory experience. At first historians overlooked haptics as more “carnal, lewd, primitive, emotional and less intellectual than sight” (Smith, Sensory History, 2007), but then it led to understanding that touch is a human’s communication with the outer environment and it can be a way of communicating brand’s values as well. As previously stated, human senses play a crucial role in individual’s buying experience and can establish a steady brand image, as well as create brand awareness (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009).

Based on this theory, I wanted to find out if there is any link between tactile sensory experience and brand concepts. Therefore I built up an actual experiment, where I tested if my four non-existing vague fashion concepts have any mental associations with the ten materials presented in the experiment booth.

4.1. Research methods

This study implies quantitative research methods, which consists of two parts – quasi-experiment and survey, as well as data analysis. This approach seemed the most appropriate as the topic is linked to humans sensory experiences, in this case the sense of touch. In order to generalize results and make them valid externally, it was important to stay as objective as possible, which is why this quantitative method was chosen. The experiment was in a set-up environment with a random sample. Individuals expressed their findings verbally and it was noted down in writing. This study did not include pre-post test design and a control group, as it was not necessary for the final results. In this case it was important to understand if there is a link between the materials and concepts presented in the study. The quasi-experiment was designed to discover the link between materials and different concepts, knowing that the design of physical surroundings affects customer behavior and purchase intention (Bitner, 1992).

The second element of the quantitative research was a survey. It clarified each participant’s level of Need for Touch according to Childers and Peck (2003) 12-item NFT scale. This survey allowed doing the correlation analysis as it presented the relationship between two variables – the level of NFT and the time taken during the experiment. All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, anchored by ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘strongly agree’.

4.2. Sample

The quasi-experiment and survey was distributed to forty-six International and Dutch university students, who are studying Fashion Management, Branding or Design in the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. From all participants 34 were women, and 12 - men. The average age of all participants was 20 years old.
4.3. Procedure

This study took place at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute and was divided into two parts. The first part was performed at the experiment booth, where people were asked to listen to four concepts of non-existing brands, examine 10 materials by using sense of touch and identify, which three are the most suited to the each of the four suggested. At this stage people were not allowed to see the materials to make sure that their decision-making process is made entirely based on their sense of touch. It was important to eliminate vision as people have great visual imagery. Humans are able to imagine how something feels by only looking at it (Krishna, 2003), and this aspect could have influenced the results of the study.

The second part took place behind the computer, where people had to answer some questions. Questionnaire was designed to gather basic information about the participants, such as age, gender, and their level of NFT (see Appendix 3 for a full questionnaire).

4.3.1. The experiment

This experiment was based on the experiment booth and four fashion brand concepts. The concepts were constructed very vague.

None of the concepts intended to replicate any of the brand existing in the fashion industry, thus the descriptions of the brands stayed objective, not going into details (see Appendix 2 for concept descriptions).

The booth was of my own design and consisted of a black box with 10 rounded holes in it and 10 samples of materials.

Within the box there was a smooth platform with 10 same size holes, in which the materials were placed. Participants were not able to distinguish each material’s shape (as it differed too much and might have impacted their decision) and were not able to lift/weight the material to keep the evaluation neutral to these material features. In this way it was assured that the decision was made based on the material’s tactile features. See Figure 5 for a detailed technical drawing of the experiment booth. It shows the box with 10 holes in it and 10 materials within the box (see Appendix 1 for material property descriptions and page 14 for pictures of materials). Participants were asked to put their hand in each hole and feel the material without looking at it.
4.3.2. Materials used in the experiment

1. Rounded plastic

2. Fur

3. Cork

4. Metal

5. Glass

6. Rubber

7. Play-dough

8. Leather

9. Rough plastic

10. Wood
Materials were designed to activate different perceptions humans can distinguish – in this case perception of texture, temperature and hardness. Regarding texture, there were materials with a smooth surface (metal, wood, neoprene, glass, melted plastic), soft/fluffy surface (fur), rough surface (cork, braided leather, rough plastic), and rubbery surface (latex). Temperature-wise there were cold materials (metal, glass), and neutral materials (the rest of materials). Variety in terms of hardness was achieved by having hard materials (plastic, glass, metal, wood, rough plastic), and soft material (play-dough covered with neoprene).

First, it was explained for each participant what this experiment is for and the overall procedure. Then they were asked to listen to one fashion concept and after that examine all 10 materials by using two motions – horizontal (feeling the vibrations of the surface) and vertical (press motion). They were asked not to guess what kind of material it was but to focus only on the feeling of the surface gives and it's suitability to the brand concept. Each material could be applied to more than one concept, if desired. Participants were allowed to touch the materials more than once by going back and forth and using both hands to find the best match. They were asked to take their time needed in order to answer each question. When the task was finished, the same procedure followed with all the other concepts until the experiment was completed. During the examination participants were allowed and encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts that were noted down immediately.

Each participant was timed during the entire process of the experiment.

### 4.4. Results

The research was accomplished without any major problems, and the data were summarized and analyzed at the end of the study. The results confirmed small personal predictions such as play-dough might be linked to the kid's brand, wood and cork – to the sustainable fashion brand, metal and glass – to the young fashion brand, and metal and leather material to the high fashion brand. But it also showed surprising and unexpected results with certain materials like with rounded plastic or with the play-dough.

#### 4.4.1. The relation between haptics and brand concepts

During the experiment participants were asked to choose three materials per concept that best reflected the brand's values. These materials could be part of any brand's communication, such as retail environment, marketing and any other branding activities. It was allowed to apply any material more than once, so there was a chance of overlapping, which took place very often. Although the materials were very different, participants applied the same material to two and even three concepts at a time. There was not one material that was applied to all four concepts.

#### 4.4.2. Concept nr.1 – Sustainable fashion brand

The sustainable brand concept was most likely linked to naturally sourced materials such as cork, wood, leather and fur, but also to some more experimental ones – melted plastic and rough plastic. Participants chose cork surface (chosen 28 times) as the most corresponding to the brand values. Many participants mentioned that it is very rough, which gives it a very natural and uneven feel. Some participants mentioned that it gives a feeling of small stones laid over the surface, therefore fitting the natural and sustainable concept idea. The second most common was wood surface that was mentioned 21 times. It was described as natural, organic, slightly polished surface with light, small ridges, which gave
the material feeling of nature and organic texture. As the third most fitting material to the sustainable brand concept was braided leather (19 times) which created a deep interest in participants. They spent more time exploring this surface and explained that it gives a raw material feeling with its texture. Although, very many participants guessed the origin of this material by touching it, they kept on saying that it feels handcrafted and organic. Some participants found this sample difficult and confusing. There were two more materials that earned people's recognition concerning this concept – fur (17 times) and rough plastic (18 times) sample. Fur was told to give very pleasant feeling, while touching it, but it was also described as cliché to the sustainable concept, as it brings into conceptual contradiction (sustainability vs. fur usage). It was mentioned that the rounded plastic sample firstly feels like big smooth rocks, but after longer examination gave an understanding of a plastic/man-made material. People found it interesting to explore and constantly tried to guess the material's origin. Participants considered that rubber material reflects the idea behind this brand and could fit into the brand concept. It was said that this surface feels sticky and funny and might incorporate both, natural and artificial components. It was also mentioned that this material feels like not being manipulated to become better but left just raw.

In addition to these three materials, metal (16 times), play-dough (13 times) and leather (11 times) were also chosen to be applicable to the young fashion brand concept. Metal and leather material was mentioned to represent the urban part of this particular concept, and play-dough was seen as fun and special for such a conceptual brand.

**4.4.4. Concept nr.3 – High fashion brand**

The classical high fashion brand concept resulted in very different material choices. It was seen as the most serious brands of all four, therefore metal and wood didn't come out as a surprise, but the last – play-dough – did. Metal (30 times) and wood (29 times) was acknowledged as the two most representing materials because of its clean and smooth surfaces. These materials were translated as sophisticated and industrial, representing tailored and sleek design. For some participants metal felt cold and a little masculine, as well as perfectly polished, but wood – more warmer and organic. The third material that participants chose as suitable to this concept was material.
play-dough covered with neoprene (22 times). They explained that neoprene feels soft and reflects a sense of luxury. It was mentioned that the texture gave a feeling of a sandbag, which would be interesting to explore.

Besides these three materials, there were a few more surfaces that, by people’s mind, could be applied to this concept. Participants mentioned rubber (16 times), leather (13 times) and fur (12 times) as fitting to this brand idea. Leather and fur were reported as more luxury materials, thus could be part of this brand’s communication. This was the only concept, where one of the materials was not applied even once, which was the cork surface. The surface was described as too rough for such a simple and classical brand as this.

4.4.5. Concept nr.4 – Kid’s fashion brand

Participants found it very easy to distinguish materials for the kid’s brand concept. They all mentioned that for this concept they would go for materials with high-sensuality and interesting to explore, therefore play-dough covered with neoprene got the highest participant recognition (31 times) for this particular brand. They explained that this material was very pleasant and that they liked touching and exploring it. It created nice feelings touching it horizontally (soft surface) and vertically (doughy texture with ability to use press motion). It was also said that this material could be perceived as both natural and artificial, as it could be a bag filled with fine sand and covered with synthetic material. The other sensory material that was chosen for kid’s brand was a fur (27 times). One participant said that it brought out the inner child and willingness to play around. The third material applied for this concept was glass (22 times). Although it was found hard by its substance, participants thought it was playful and interactive enough to incorporate it into a kid’s brand concept. Apart from these three materials, people found interesting the rounded plastic (15 times), as it was with rounded edges and something between the natural and

4.4.6. Correlation between the time of the experiment and NFT

In this part of the research there was designed a questionnaire according to Childers and Peck (2003) 12-item NFT scale. This scale allowed discovering whether individuals are high or low in autotelic and informative NFT. During the experiment people were timed on their performance. Participants were not informed about the timing, which might have influenced their decision-making. These two research components then were put together to see if there is a correlation between time taken on exploring materials and results in autotelic NFT.

In average individuals took 6 minutes to complete the experiment with 13 minutes as the longest and 4 minutes as the shortest period of time.
Regards the NFT scale, there were 22 (48%) individuals, who were high in autotelic NFT, 17 (37%) – high in informative NFT and 7 (15%) participants, who had identical level for both. As a result, there was no real connection between the time taken and individual's level of autotelic NFT (See Appendix 4 for questionnaire results).

4.5. Discussion

With regard to the first concept – Sustainable fashion brand – the study showed that it was mainly associated with natural materials such as cork, wood and leather, followed by fur and artificial rough plastic. All of the materials mentioned had feel of nature – raw, rough and organic texture, and mostly with highly sensory surfaces. These materials can be easily embodied in the retail environment, which would translate the brand values through the tactile sensory experience. Both of the plastic surfaces chosen for this brand were linked to the feeling of natural stones; the rough plastic was connected to the feeling of small stones, but the rounded plastic – to smooth pebbles. The same idea continues in the choice of play-dough for this exact concept, as the feeling was described to recall walking and touching sand on the beach. From this it can be concluded that fashion brands with environmentally friendly focus not necessarily need to communicate their message through natural materials; it can be successfully done by using synthetic components to create a feeling of natural surface. For instance, if a brand is using upcycling as their brand focus, this particular material can be used in the retail environment to, first, present the material, from which the product is made, and second, to promote the idea of no waste production.

As already mentioned previously, Amsterdam based Ready to Fish brand store used small stones to cover the floor and create a certain sensation about the brand and the collection. In this case they used decorative stones, but the sensation could be created also using other source material, such as recycled elements from used construction materials.

With regard to the second concept – Young fashion brand – the experiment results show that glass, rounded plastic and rubber were the most common materials chosen. As this concept was the most diverse in material choice, it is worth to mention metal, play-dough and leather as well. The results represent participant’s willingness to be more creative with brand material choice. For example, the glass with reverse bubble texture is sophisticated and in some sense very classical for retail environment, but the special texture gives a little twist to it. Although rubber doesn’t have extremely special appearance, the texture allows individuals to stop and explore it for longer period of time. The rubber material represents sporty yet innovative surface that can give an interesting twist to young fashion brand stores. But rounded plastic surface appears quite experimental, as the texture reminds of rocks coated in plastic, therefore unites the natural with artificial. This kind of material fulfills this brand concept's both aspects: it's distinct texture in combination with experimental design-focus, and natural along with unnatural to the urban touch. Further, metal and leather can be very easily connected to the city hint of this particular concept. Both are raw and textural material that could add a feel of seriousness and deepness to the retail environment. Although the materials like wood, metal and glass are commonly
associated with the furniture in the retail environment; the materials could be used in much broader perspective, like flooring or wall finishing. These materials can give not only the right atmosphere but also add another sensory experience, like activate the audition.

With regard to the third concept – Classical high fashion brand – the study indicates that there are three very distinctively compatible materials – metal, wood, and play-dough, followed by rubber, leather and fur. Materials such as metal and wood were with very smooth surface texture and were linked to the brand’s design value – clean and sleek fashion focus, but leather to the quality and craftsmanship value. It was expressed that fur gives a feeling of luxury, therefore was chosen for this particular concept. Although rubber can appear to be synthetic and in some ways cheap, it was linked to this brand concept, which was indicated to be in a higher price range. This material could give a little change to glossy and perfect surfaces and could create an interest from customers. The biggest surprise came with the third most popular material – play dough covered in neoprene. This material appears very exploratory and sensual from the texture point of view, and luxury soft from the surface perspective. It was the material that created the biggest participant’s interest and confusion. This experiment shows that materials that are considered childish and young-spirited can be applied to more classic fashion brands in some certain ways. Especially with the most conservative and plain brands it is hard to think outside the box and use more experimental materials for retail settings, but even minimal changes can make a difference. For example, if the brand wants to stay clean in their furnishing, it is possible to add a small texture change to surfaces that is hardly noticeable by vision but can be felt by human’s skin. This type of approach helps people to be focused on the products, but still remember some little details about the shopping experience.

With regard to the last concept – kid’s fashion brand – participants chose materials in a quick manner and didn’t have almost any hesitation. This concepts shows that there were four materials that were considered to be very matching (play-dough, fur, glass and rounded plastic) and all the others were applied only a few times. Many participants mentioned that they would link kid’s fashion brand with very sensual materials, therefore chose the two biggest extremes – play-dough and fur. The play dough is a very exploratory material that would create a lot of interest from kids. It is possible to create shapes out of it, gives a good feeling when touched and has a soft texture from the neoprene fabric on top. It was stated that it gives a feeling of touching/pressing sand and combines the sense of natural and artificial. The fur is also very sensory material that brought a lot of smiles in the experiment. One of the participants mentioned that this material brings back her inner child, which makes feel good. Both of the materials are soft, safe and interesting to explore. The next sample that was chosen for this concept was glass with reverse bubble texture. It created a high curiosity from most of the participants and asked for longer material exploration. It was applied for this concept because of the overall texture and could be used in all sorts of placements in the retail environment. This brand concept was linked to the rounded melted plastic that is also highly sensual material. It is smooth and safe for kids to be around and could replicate the real-life rocks and its surfaces. There was one participant that mentioned cork as a matching material for this concept by explaining that it is very rough and interesting material but still feels safe to fall on. After the experiment it was concluded that kid’s fashion brands would ask for high-sensory and safe materials.
These brands can be the most creative and experimental in their material use, as retail stores for little ones can include any unusual elements, for example floor made of pay-dough and covered with soft flooring material.

**The chapter conclusion**

Overall, all the materials can be implemented in the retail environment in a very creative fashion. By changing thinking of materials and objects in the retail environment, it is possible to draw customer’s attention and most probably stay in their memories for such a creative approach. Even the smallest changes from ordinary approaches, such as using wood for flooring, metal for clothing racks, plastic for seating and glass for doors, to something more experimental and most definitely individual, such as using wood for clothing racks, metal for seating, plastic for doors and glass for flooring, can mean a higher customer loyalty, higher turnovers and general people’s interest. Here in this experiment there were four different concepts that were vague but also very one-way approach. Most of the brands present in the industry incorporate more than one conceptual idea, like combining sustainable with young fashion brand. Therefore, every brand can come up with their own way of using materials in their retail environment that would represent their very own brand.
CONCLUSION

The five human senses are a crucial tool, which allows us communicate with the world. We receive signals, process this information and follow up with a reaction. This process does not ask for individual’s attention, as most of the happenings are automatic. It is a process that takes place in our subconscious mind and works by itself.

But what happens if a brand finds a way to communicate with a person in a subconscious level? It is a powerful tool indeed that can do both harm and please the person. Sensory marketing looks at this from a very healthy point of view – it shows how brands can create a subconscious and pleasant interaction with a customer and creates a whole new shopping experience. The sensory marketing puts five human senses in the center of attention and shows how using sense of vision, audition, touch, taste and smell can form an ultimate enjoyment of the shopping process.

The sense of touch is the broadest sense, as it exists passively on all parts of our bodies. It is the only sense that people would not be able to survive without, as it is so closely related to everything we do on a daily basis.

The information is floating around us in a neutral position and people have a tendency to give a meaning to every bit of it. It works the same with senses and the information people receive from them. The sense of touch gives information about the surfaces, pain, temperature and much more, and the way people perceive it is very individual. Perceptions depend on the way people are, where they live and what they have experienced. People perceive a few different properties of objects, such as hardness and texture, temperature and weight. For instance, as all the other properties temperature is perceived entirely individually – people, who live close to Equator don’t think that +25 C is a high temperature, but for a person, who is in North that is a mid-summer temperature.

This phenomenon is not restricted to the product properties only, it can be observed also in other situations, such as willingness to touch things. There are people, who like to touch things because it gives pleasant feelings, but there are also those, who are not interested in touching objects, unless it gives some necessary information. Peck and Childers (2003) constructed a Need for Touch scale, which helps place people in two groups – people who are high in instrumental and people who are high in autotelic sense of touch. This theory of people being part of one of the groups helps marketers analyze their customers and figure out, what sort of sensory experience they should provide.

The sense of touch has been used in communication already for centuries, but sensory marketing has received increased interest from researchers and practitioners only in the past decade. This type of marketing looks at shopping experience as a whole and believes that it helps to create brand awareness and sustainable image of the brand. Moreover, it is discovered that sensory aspects of a brand experience can affect personal emotions, perceptions, memories and even consumption behavior (Hulten, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009).
This research paper includes an overview of a study that was conducted to test the research question: To what extent tactile experience can influence people’s mental associations with the brand? It implied quantitative research methods that seemed the most appropriate and objective for such a research topic. It took place in Amsterdam Fashion Institute and was of its own design. The experiment was distributed to forty-six participants.

The experiment consisted of an experiment booth, where 10 tactile materials were placed, and 4 non-existing fashion brand concepts that were presented verbally to the participants. The materials ought to activate different object properties that people perceive, such as texture, temperature and hardness. The concepts were designed to embody broad and vague ideas of fashion brands that are present in the market – sustainable fashion brand, young fashion brand, high fashion brand and kid’s fashion brand.

As a result, there were several materials that got linked to certain concepts. Sustainable fashion brand was mainly linked to more natural materials like cork, wood and leather, but also surprisingly was associated with fur and rough plastic. Whereas Young fashion brand was linked to glass, rounded plastic and rubber materials that are a little more experimental in their tactile sensation. Although High fashion brand was associated with more sleek materials as metal and wood, it had some surprising results, when the concept was linked to play-dough, which is very sensual material. Last but not least, Kid’s fashion brand was mainly associated with highly sensory and interactive materials like play-dough, fur and glass surfaces.

To conclude, the experiment was a great success and presented some interesting and valuable results. It showed that some materials do remind of certain concepts, but also that creativity can be a way to approach sensory marketing. Even the smallest changes can make a difference. By just changing some parts of the surfaces of brand’s retail environment can make a shopping experience more fun and enjoyable. Every brand can find certain materials that tell their story and can incorporate these materials everywhere in retail environment – floors, walls, furniture and other places. Moreover, if a brand creates a special material that is one of a kind, it most probably can create new associations and memories to customers that can lead to higher loyalty and turnover.

This research paper is a base of a workshop that will be made for small fashion retailers. It will include the information about the senses, sensory marketing and its influence on customer behavior, results of the study and interactive part, where retailers will unite in discussion.


