

# 3

## CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS & SENSORY MARKETING

*The Only Brand Reality that Matters*

### Drink Liquid Death.

A Bold New Experiment in the Art of Watering Our Bodies!

Liquid Death was created in June 2019 by Michael Cessario, former creative director of Netflix and also a promoter of punk and heavy metal bands. The brand of water is described as 100% mountain water from the Austrian Alps, served in ice-cold sustainable cans.



Yes, the water is packaged in a tallboy aluminum can, embracing the pro-environmental anti-plastic movement. The can's label is gold color with an image of a skull drawn in line art. An associated video (:60) shows a demon with an ax, violently smacking a slew of people drinking from the can, causing blood to spew out, thus symbolically murdering your thirst. A longer (1:31) video shows a satanic queen of an underground world (hell?) lamenting the fact that plastic bottles have polluted the earth above and are now seeping into her world, and she is on a crusade to torch them out of their plastic bodies. It calls out to help the demons bring #DeathToPlastic by getting involved at [keeptheunderworldbeautiful.org](http://keeptheunderworldbeautiful.org).



The brand invites us to join the Liquid Death Country Club (which is supposedly located somewhere in hell) and to join it, you have to "sell your soul."

On its Web page, the brand explains itself:

**Lets be clear.** Liquid Death is a completely unnecessary approach to bottled water. Because unnecessary things tend to be far more interesting, fun, hilarious, captivating, memorable, exciting, and cult-worthy than "necessary" things.

**Necessary Things:** Breathing, colonoscopy.

**Unnecessary Things:** Smashing a guitar on stage and lighting it on fire or jumping over 14 Greyhound buses on a vintage motorcycle.

We started Liquid Death with the totally evil plan to make people laugh and get more of them to drink more water more often. How? By taking the world's healthiest beverage and making it unnecessarily entertaining.

**100% Stone-cold Mountain Water, Death to Plastic. Murder Your thirst.**

*I see it, therefore it is.*

The Three-Step Model of the Consumer Perception Process

1

TO UNDERSTAND

Dynamics of Voluntary vs. Involuntary Consumer Attention

2

Three Factors that Shape Consumer Perceptions

3

Perceptual Biases and Frames and Consumer Viewing of Reality

4

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Uses of Perceptual Maps and Brand Positioning/ Repositioning

5

Consumers' Five Senses and How Sensory Marketing Lures Them

6

## INTRODUCTION

Will you sign up to join the Liquid Death Country Club and help the satanic queen in her crusade? Will you seek out Liquid Death and will you make it your water of choice. Wait, before you decide, you do have the choice of a few other waters.

Consider Just Water.

Just was conceived by then 10-year-old Jaden Smith (born 1998), an American actor and son of renowned actor Will Smith. The water is packaged in a carton made from renewable materials. The body of the carton is made from paper; to keep the carton hold shape, the carton's neck uses plastic, but this plastic is not the kind that is made from petroleum; instead it is the one that is made from sugarcane. The cap is made from sugarcane too. On the brand's website, Jaden explains the sourcing of water thus:



"We don't pump water and go. We only use 100% spring water. We only bottle excess water our community doesn't need. We pay fairly for the water we use."



Another notable new brand is Flow. It was launched in Canada in 2015 and introduced in the US in 2016. Entrepreneur Nicholas Reichenbach sourced it from a piece of land on his ancestors' property near Lake Huron in Toronto, Canada. The brand's website informs us: "It has heavy mineral count: potassium, magnesium, calcium, bicarbonate, and is naturally alkaline with pH 8.1." The water is packaged in a 100% cardboard wrap capped by a lid made from sugarcane fiber. Its Facebook page features the brand on a table amidst flowers and cut fruit. In June 2019, Gwyneth Paltrow's wellness company GOOP adopted Flow as its exclusive water.



As humans, we can't live without water. And for millennia, all we have wanted is water. Clean, safe, plain water. But now, we want much more: we want minerals, and we want electrolytes. And we want water with good karma—that it be produced, and consumed, with minimal environmental damage.

Marketers are vying to offer us all that and more. Liquid Death is going for our souls, promising to rescue it from whatever we want it to be rescued from. A Facebook fan (Anthony F.) found that promise in Liquid Death: "So deadly it killed the cancer in my liver. And also me as well. Hell isn't so bad, we have wi fi down here." Just Water focuses on sourcing the water from a non-depleting source and on paying a fair price for it to pump up the local economy. Finally, Flow, with its imagery of nature and soft colors aesthetic, and with Ms. Paltrow's endorsement, invokes in us feelings of harmony in nature, physical activity, meditation, tranquility.

Which of these brands will we choose? That depends on how we as consumers come to think of these brands. And any other brands. It depends on our perceptions, that is.

## PERCEPTION DEFINED

*Perception* is a basic, fundamental, and inescapable process of the human mind. “Basic” in that any time we encounter anything—absolutely anything whatsoever—our minds must first perceive it before they can do anything else with it. “Fundamental” in that the perception we form of a thing plays a central role in whatever we do with that thing subsequently. “Inescapable” or inevitable in that we can’t stop it and we can’t control it. Just how do our minds do that?<sup>1</sup> Let us define our terms first.

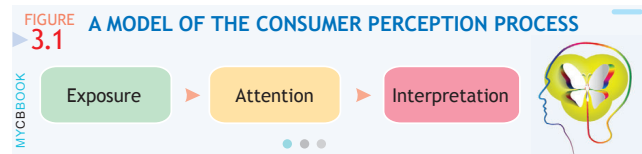
**Perception** is the process by which the human mind becomes aware of and interprets a stimulus. The process has three steps: *exposure*, *attention*, and *interpretation*.



## THE PERCEPTION PROCESS

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### EXPOSURE

#### The Face-off with the Consumer

**Exposure** means that a stimulus has come within the reach of one or more of our five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting. A **stimulus** is any object or event in the external environment. Exposure determines whether a stimulus even has the opportunity to be sensed by the consumer.

#### Biology of Our Senses

When exposed to a stimulus, our senses sense it. What physical characteristics must a stimulus have in order for our senses to be able to detect it (e.g., how loud, how near)? This requires an understanding of the biology of our senses. A brief primer on human senses is presented later in this chapter (see *Choice Reading*).

Marketers have five means of exposing their product or service to consumers.

**1. Product Display.** If you wanted to see a product, where would you go? Right, to stores. Physical stores and online stores. Shelf space in stores is a scarce resource and brands vie to get prominent display space (e.g., eye level). Small brands and entrepreneurs take their brands to consumer events such as art fairs, farmer’s markets, etc. Brands big and small are able to display their products on the Web—on the brand’s own website, on commerce sites such as Amazon, and on social media. Some brands launch as Web only, called *digital natives*: Warby Parker (eyeglasses), Dollar Shave Club (razor subscription); Casper (mattress), Revelry (custom-fitted bridesmaids dresses). On social media, Instagram and Pinterest are becoming the prime sources for fashion-forward consumers to discover new beauty and apparel brands. Some recent launches: Paris 99 (founded by Paris Starn, a 24-year-old student), I.am.Gia, Réalisation Par.

**2. Product Sampling.** Some products need exposure not only to consumers’ eyes but to other senses as well, such as the sense of taste (food and beverages), hearing (music), smell (colognes), and touch (skin products). Brands attain such exposure by *product sampling*, a small quantity of the product given away to consumers free of cost. Free samples can be given away in stores, at public events, and also sent in mail.

**3. Advertising.** Advertising is the prime means of exposing the product to masses or niche segments alike. However, advertising does not come cheap and there is so much of it surrounding the consumer that most consumers tend to ignore most of it. To break through this clutter, ads have to be creative and relevant. Important though these elements of ad design are, they come into play at the next stage in the perception process (discussed

later). At the current stage—*exposure*—what matters the most is the right choice of media—where the ad is placed. If you were marketing *Pocket God* on a country music station, and if your target consumers—mostly teenagers—didn’t listen to country music stations, then the commercial would not gain exposure with your target audience. If you advertised *Ghost of Tsushima* (launched on July 17, 2020) in *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*, then again you would most likely miss your target audience. Thus, proper choice of message delivery media is the most crucial and first step. A wrong choice can cause the first step itself to fail. No face-off with the consumer occurs, and, consequently, no perception is created.

Advertising media descend on consumers in two modes, *intrusive* and *non-intrusive*. **Intrusive media** disturb us in whatever we are doing at the moment. **Non-intrusive media** don’t demand our attention away from our work of the moment; instead they just hang out there, so to speak, for us to attend or not attend to them. TV is a prime example of the former. Magazine or billboards are examples of the latter. On social media, not only do the ads appear non-intrusively but also, in style, they match well with the main content—“‘instagrammable’ product photos” is a popular expression.

On TV, consumers often avoid commercials, sometimes by attending to other tasks and sometimes by switching channels, a process called **zapping**. And when consumers watch prerecorded programs (such as via Tivo), they fast-forward through the commercials, a process called **zipping**. To get past these commercial-avoidance habits of consumers, marketers must make their ads vivid and uniquely engaging. On American TV, Super Bowl commercials have attained a rare reputation of “must see.” You need a big budget, of course (the average cost of running a 30-second commercial in Super Bowl LIV, on February 2, 2020, was \$5.6 million), but you also get mega audience (Super Bowl LIV was watched by 102 million people).<sup>2</sup>

**4. Product Placement.** **Product placement** is the tactic of embedding the product in media content, such as featuring a product being used naturally by actors in a TV movie.

Product placement, if done adroitly, works wonders. In the James Bond films, Jaguar XKR is featured, and in the American film that spoofs James Bond, *Austin Powers*, actor Mike Myers endorses Shaguar (Jaguar). In the year 2002, when Austin Powers was playing in theaters, sales of Jaguar rose sharply in America.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the most memorable instance of product placement is in the 1982 film *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, featuring Reese’s Pieces. In the 2020 Oscar winning movie *Parasite*, Apple laptop (with its iconic logo facing the camera) appeared prominently; in *Ford v Ferrari*, Matt Damon was seen gulping Coke; and Lincoln, Chevrolet, and Cadillac makes of cars appeared in four movies: *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, *The Irish Man*, *Marriage Story*, and *Joker*!

Product placements such as these benefit the brand by:

- Increasing brand awareness** This benefit would accrue, naturally, more for new and niche brands (e.g., Tempo, the newest hotel for millennials by Hilton; Reverb.com, an online marketplace for new, used, and vintage music gear).
- Improving brand likeability** If a brand is shown being used by actors who serve as aspirational models of behavior for some segments of viewers. (In *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, Brad Pitt sports a shirt with the logo of Champion, an auto-parts brand; curiously, this was not a placement, as the brand did not even know of it. For that reason, this “natural” brand appearance was even more powerful!)

**5. Ambient Advertising.** There is one kind of advertising that is *intrusive* in the extreme. It is actually in our face. Yet, it is welcomed by whoever happens to come face to face with it. And it is so different in its makeup that it should not even be called advertising. (That is why we gave it its own category.) An **ambient advertisement** is an artifact—a physical prop that resembles whole or part of the product and/or visually captures and presents its function or distinction in a manner that it blends with the natural surroundings of a public place. A wall across the track at an underground station reads, “Come closer. We need you.” It was signed by a local funeral services company!<sup>4</sup>

**SAVVY  
MARKETER**



Rimmel Nail Polish (Quick Dry?)  
(Seen in London a few years ago)