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SENSORY VOCABULARY IN MULTIMODAL DIGITAL BRAND
STORYTELLING (BASED ON THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE WEBSITES
AND SOCIAL MEDIA)

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This article investigates the use of sensory vocabulary within multimodal digital brand storytelling, analysing how linguistic choices, in conjunction with visual, auditory, and interactive elements, contribute to brand perception and consumer engagement. Employing a mixed-methods approach, we combine multimodal and contextual discourse analysis with quantitative data and empirical observations of brand websites and social media content. We have analysed how leading brands across industries, including spheres such as technology, cosmetics, and food and beverage, utilise sensory language, in conjunction with visual, auditory, and interactive modes, to construct compelling digital narratives. Findings reveal that the effective integration of sensory vocabulary significantly enhances brand perception by creating immersive and emotionally resonant experiences, tailored to specific product offerings and brand identities. The article reveals usage of distinct sensory strategies, demonstrating the importance of contextual factors and the complex interplay of multimodal elements. Furthermore, the study underscores the emotional impact of sensory language, particularly in fostering brand loyalty and consumer engagement, highlighting the

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connection between tactile descriptions and emotional narratives. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of digital brand communication, offering insights for strategic sensory storytelling and digital branding, and provides a framework for future research into the evolving landscape of digital sensory marketing.

Key words: sensory vocabulary, sensory marketing, multimodality, storytelling, digital communication, narrative, social media, marketing.

СЕНСОРНА ЛЕКСИКА В МУЛЬТИМОДАЛЬНОМУ ЦИФРОВОМУ СТОРІТЕЛІНГУ БРЕНДІВ (НА МАТЕРІАЛІ АНГЛОМОВНИХ ВЕБ-САЙТІВ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ)

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У цій статті досліджується використання сенсорної лексики в мультимодальному цифровому сторітелінгу брендів, аналізується, як лінгвістичний вибір у поєднанні з візуальними, аудіо та інтерактивними елементами сприяє сприйняттю бренду та залученню споживачів. Використовуючи змішаний підхід, ми проаналізували, як провідні бренди в різних галузях використовують сенсорну мову в поєднанні з візуальними, аудіо та інтерактивними елементами для побудови переконливих цифрових наративів. Результати дослідження показують, що ефективна інтеграція сенсорної лексики значно покращує сприйняття бренду, створюючи захоплюючий та емоційно резонансний досвід, адаптований до конкретних продуктових пропозицій та ідентичності бренду. Це дослідження сприяє глибшому розумінню цифрової бренд-комунікації, пропонує ідеї для стратегічного сенсорного сторітелінгу та цифрового брендингу, а також створює основу для майбутніх досліджень у сфері цифрового сенсорного маркетингу, що еволюціонує.

Ключові слова: сенсорна лексика, сенсорний маркетинг, мультимодальність, сторітелінг, цифрова комунікація, наратив, соціальні медіа, маркетинг.

Introduction. In the contemporary digital landscape, brands are increasingly leveraging multimodal storytelling to forge deeper connections with consumers.

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Сенсорна лексика в мультимодальному цифровому сторітелінгу брендів (на матеріалі англomовних веб-сайтів та соціальних мереж) (Англійською) [Sensorna leksyka v multymodal'nomu tsyfrovomu storitelinhu brendiv (na materialih anhlomovnykh veb-saytiv ta sotsial'nykh merezh)]

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PROBLEMS OF SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Businesses rely heavily on multisensorial marketing, which emphasizes the engagement of multiple senses, in order to create a powerful image serving as a catalyst for purchase-making decisions. However, the digital landscape offers only limited opportunities for multisensorial marketing. That is where sensory vocabulary comes forward, as it encompasses words and phrases that appeal to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) and can be adapted to specifics of e-marketing.

Relevance of the research topic. Digital platforms' inherent multimodality creates new challenges for the traditional branding, and researching how sensory language integrates with these modes is crucial for effective communication. This research contributes to the field of multimodal discourse analysis by examining how language interacts with other modes in digital communication.

As a result multimodal digital brand storytelling constitutes **the object** of this article; encompassing digital marketing content, the ways in which brands use various digital platforms to tell stories and the combination of different modes (text, visuals, audio, interactive elements) within those digital stories, as well as digital artifacts produced by brands to communicate with consumers and vice versa. The **subject** of this research, we identify as sensory vocabulary, the language used in digital brand storytelling that appeals to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch), and how this sensory vocabulary interacts with other modes to create meaning.

The **aim** of this research is to analyse the strategic use of sensory vocabulary within multimodal digital brand storytelling, and to understand its impact on consumer perception and engagement across various digital platforms.

Nowadays, brands increasingly communicate and engage with consumers through digital channels which makes understanding of how to optimize these interactions crucial. Herein lies the scientific novelty of this article. Although sensory vocabulary and multimodal analysis are considered to be truly well established spheres of research, their combined application specifically to digital brand storytelling is novel and offers fresh insights into the new areas for research.

This research uses the following **methods**: multimodal and contextual analysis, elements of discourse analysis, quantitative analysis and empirical observations; in order to analyse multimodal elements in digital storytelling, as well as to study the

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effectiveness of specific business cases (specifically branding of the websites and social media accounts of English-speaking businesses).

This article examines the strategic use of sensory vocabulary within multimodal digital brand storytelling, exploring its potential to enhance brand engagement, build brand loyalty, and drive consumer behavior; as well as opens the perspectives of further studies combining linguistic and multimodal analysis in the sphere of digital marketing.

Analysis of recent publications. As the overview of the latest publications reveals, for at least twenty years Multimodality Studies have encouraged blooming academic research in multiple fields, of which Sensory Linguistics is one [2, p. 7]. The multisensorial marketing came into view of many prominent researchers (Kotler and Lindstrom, 2005; Booth, 2014; Lindstrom, 2006; Malhotra, 1984) contributing to the development of the Sensory Marketing Theory. Multi-Sensory Marketing was discovered to be tightly bound to consumers' behaviour by Pareek et al. (2024) and Nguyen Le et al. (2024) in their respective scientific works. As for digital storytelling, it has been separately investigated on the scientific scene, since Dana Atchley's definition of the said phenomenon [8], by B. Robin (2006), Meadows, D. (2003), O'Halloran, K. (2008), Robin and McNeil (2024).

Presenting the main material. In today's competitive digital marketplace, brands must transcend traditional marketing strategies in order to cultivate meaningful connections with their audiences. As a result sensory marketing, which emphasizes the engagement of multiple senses, has emerged as a powerful approach.

The American Marketing Association defines sensory marketing as “the marketing techniques that aim to seduce the consumer by using senses to influence the consumer's feelings and behaviors” [4, p. 2]. So we can say that sensory marketing, within the framework of consumer behavior and neuromarketing, represents a strategic approach that leverages stimuli across the five primary sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile – to elicit specific cognitive and affective responses. Sensory marketing attempts to ensure lasting product success by identifying, measuring, and understanding consumers' emotions; capitalizing on new markets; ensuring first and repeated purchases (brand loyalty) [7]. The consumer's mind and senses are approached from both a cognitive and an emotional point of view in the sensory tactics, which distinguish the products and services [9, p. 205].

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PROBLEMS OF SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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According to Martin Lindstrom in the retail environment, customers' three primary senses are called into action, when visual (80 %), olfactory (45 %), and auditory (41 %) stimuli are named to be the most impactful [6]. In addition, Lindstrom claims that harmonious combinations of multiple senses influence customers' buying decisions way more effectively.

Among visual elements that are being used in sensory marketing we can count textual elements, images, videos (without sound), which makes them the most effective tools for digital branding, as their implementation does not necessitate physical presence. Colors and figures play a crucial role in describing and identifying a brand. As a result, customers associate brands with specific colors (*Coca-Cola*, *Kit-Kat* – red; *Milka*, *FedEx* – purple, *Starbucks*, *Land Rover* – green, etc). Despite the fact that visual modality has multiple ways of representation in digital landscape (and, in fact, being heavily represented in the form of various digital artifacts such as short- and long-form content videos, photos, infographics, illustrations, etc. featured across multiple digital platforms), sensory vocabulary (as a key element of sensory marketing) is being used in crafting the story of the brand in order “to shape the customers' perception” [5, p. 1765]. Adjectives such as *gleaming*, *dazzling*, *shimmering*, *vibrant*, *shadowy*, *blurred*, *radiant* [17; 20], etc. with the purpose of evoking particular emotion involving a customer in the brand's story and guiding them toward particular buying behaviour.

Smell is believed to be the most powerfully linked to emotion (over 75 % of our feelings being generated by odors (depending on the research data) [7]. Various fragrances may create different impact on human senses (e.g. cinnamon and lavender possess calming properties, while peppermint and rosemary can stir excitement). However, this mighty tool is unavailable due to the limitations of the digital landscape. Instead, brands successfully utilise olfactory adjectives to express olfaction with it being an essential sensory sensation [2, p. 15]. Some of the examples of olfactory adjectives provided by Online Writing Resources are: *aromatic*, *foul*, *fragrant*, *fresh*, *clean*, *zesty*, *tantalizing*, *sweet*, *stinky* (with taste and smell adjectives usually being quite closely related) [17; 20]. Most often these adjectives act as substitutes for the words giving positive or negative assessment of the odor.

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According to the research conducted by *Statista*, “in the initial quarter of 2023, over three-quarters of global internet users turned to social media as their primary avenue for accessing brand-related information” [10]. The form of the content transmitted through social networks (as well as other digital means) in most cases involves short-form video content which can be consumed both with and without sound track. Therefore, the cohesiveness of the written text (for example, captions or transcript) and video clip plays a crucial role in customers’ perception of the brand. As such videos shot by the international companies within marketing strategies attract attention due to stories they tell and, thus, contribute to the legend and the image of the brand [1, p. 23]. Sensory adjectives such as crashing, thumping, deafening, piercing, loud, tingling, squeaky, etc. are often used to evoke the feel of the sound when physical perception is not available or as a commentary or an intensifier of the soundtrack, which quite often may include onomatopoeic words to mimic sounds.

Taste and touch are also difficult senses to represent in the digital landscape. Unlike the in-store the tactile experience of interacting with a product, digital sensory marketing has to rely on sensory vocabulary (usually combined with appealing visuals or auditory elements) in order to evoke feelings and describe textures and specific shapes as abstract concepts (e.g. *gritty*, *creepy*, *fruity*, *luscious*, *slimy*, *savory*, *fluffy*, *moist*, *sticky* [17; 20], etc.)

Findings and discussion. Employing a comprehensive methodological approach, we investigated how brands leverage sensory language, in conjunction with visual, auditory, and interactive modes, to cultivate immersive and persuasive online narratives. Having conducted multimodal and contextual analysis with elements of discourse analysis, quantitative data, and empirical observations of brand websites and social media accounts, we aimed to illuminate how brands leverage sensory language, in conjunction with visual, auditory, and interactive modes, to cultivate immersive and persuasive online narratives.

The *Coca-Cola* website, and particularly its approach to online content, is a significant example of brand storytelling. Unlike other global corporations, *Coca-Cola* doesn't just use its website to list products. It crafts narratives around its brand, emphasizing its history, values, and global impact. They focus on creating emotional connections, and telling stories of how *Coca-Cola* has been a part of people's lives.

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The website employs strong visuals and emotional cues to engage visitors. This reinforces the brand's association with happiness, connection, and shared experiences.

The brand marketing specialists actively employ sensory vocabulary in *Coca-Cola's* brand storytelling creating a strong association with beverage's *refreshing* qualities: "*138+ years of refreshing the world*", "*Our purpose is to refresh the world and make a difference*", "*Ready for a burst of refreshment with a twist?*", "*the refreshment of Coca-Cola with zero sugar*".

The company relies heavily on the cohesive branding as the social media account serves the extension of the website (and vice versa), creating the cross referencing of imagery and textual elements. The textual representation of "*freshness*" is reinforced by the visuals (videos and photos) featured on both – website and their social media account, depicting people thirstily drinking the beverage, bottles or cans covered in sparkling dew drops in various settings (mostly in public settings (at the stadium and on the train) or at home with friends and family when reinforcing the image of "happiness"). In addition the feeling of freshness and crispness is supported by videos containing auditory effects (snap of the lid, music with catchy bits).

To create the feeling of actual taste of the beverage the following vocabulary is used: "*a delicious taste of Coca-Cola*", "*the alluring taste of new Coca-Cola*", "*a delicious duo*" (describing *Coca-Cola® Zero Sugar OREO™ Limited Edition Creations®*), "*the crisp and refreshing taste of Coca-Cola Original*"; "*sweet, smooth cherry flavor*", "*specially crafted flavors*", "*dash of unique flavors*" [14].

The company puts special effort into crafting *Limited Editions* narratives, binding the multimodal promo materials into a common cohesive story, which in addition usually corresponds to the brand's image ("happiness", "friends", "freshness", etc). For example, when marketing *Coca-Cola® Zero Sugar OREO™ Limited Edition Creations®*, company featured black and white photos with friends holding the products redirecting customers to the website [13], where they can find more about product (described using sensory vocabulary as stated above), interactive activities and textual encouragements such as "*Taste it while it lasts!*" [14], creating a sense of urgency, and offerings to subscribe for further limited editions.

The digital presence of another beverage company, *Starbucks*, focuses on creating a sensory experience, modelling their physical stores. Their website and

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social media often feature visuals and descriptions that evoke the aroma and taste of their products. Sensory vocabulary used in product descriptions creates the perception of taste (“*fresh flavors*”, “*subtle floral accents*”, “*sweet blackberry flavors*”, “*savory fillings*”, “*spicy herb sauce*”) and touch/texture (“*creamy cold foam*”, “*smoothest, brightest coffee*”) [24] combined with visuals on depicting beverages and linking them with their Instagram account [23], where the brand features the stories of people sharing their experience consuming the products or the preparation process of the product, reinforcing the circuitous narrative of the brand experience.

In addition to taste and touch modalities, *Starbucks* uses sensory vocabulary expressing motion (active words, words describing movement), mostly describing cooking and serving process: “*Hand-folded, toasted lavash flatbreads*”, “*Three ristretto shots of Starbucks® Blonde Espresso combined with steamed whole milk and served in an 8 fl oz short cup.*”, “*Sweet blackberry flavors and notes of sage are shaken with real blackberry pieces*”, “*a crunchy topping meets our signature chai tea latte*”, “*finished with lavender cream cold foam*” [24]. Combined with the short-form video content featured on the brand’s Instagram page about the preparation process of the product, sensory marketing creates a feeling of “mystique” and “uniqueness” of the brand’s recipes, as they are not featured directly either on the website or social media account.

As it may seem, sensory vocabulary is inherently pervasive in Food and Beverage Brands, where digital landscape precludes the physical demonstration of the key modality of this sphere – olfactaction). However, the specifics of the digital artifacts created for branding purposes creates new challenges for most of the businesses catering physical products (and even some of the services, e.g. Travel and Hospitality, Entertainment, etc.).

For instance, technology giants such as *Apple* and *Samsung* actively craft their brand narratives with the aid of multisensory marketing. *Apple* is known for their minimalist aesthetic and emphasis on user experience. Their product launch videos and website content are highly multimodal, focusing on visual appeal and sensory language related to touch and interaction: “*Super Retina XDR display. Everything looks stunning.*” (describing the iPhone display), “*Feels amazing. Looks even better.*” (describing the Apple Watch), “*The smooth unified design of the Macbook air.*” (describing the Macbook) [12], etc. The brand image is supported by seamless build–

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in animations depicting products in use featured on their website and Instagram account short-form video content containing visual representation of effortless usage and audio effects (camera snaps, demonstration of the sound heard in earphones, etc.) [11].

Samsung, while also focusing on aesthetics, often emphasizes their “cutting-edge” and “powerful” technology. Their sensory vocabulary is often more focused on the visual and auditory modalities: “it guarantees ultra-smooth visuals”, “revel in bright highlights, impeccable blacks, and incredible depth”, “vivid, lifelike colors” (describing the TVs); “powerful, cinematic sound”, “rich sound from the deep bass”, “cutting-edge computer modelling to give you perfectly balanced, space-filling sound” (describing their audio products) [22]. The product descriptions are accompanied by clear visuals, depicting the products. *Samsung*’s Instagram account [21] features short-form video content created in collaboration with influencers showing the products being used in real life. The promo videos created by the company use futuristic music and sound effects, which creates a cohesive image of the “cutting-edge” and “innovative” brand. In order to create an immersive experience, *Samsung* website also offers *Buying Guide* [22] for various products traveling through website pages getting answers to the questions using smooth animated transitions and visualisation in the form of photos, creating a strong narrative.

Cosmetics brands also actively incorporate multisensory vocabulary in their digital narratives. For example, *L'Oréal's* approach is heavily focused on the transformative power of their products, emphasizing both the visual and tactile results, as well as the olfactory experience, particularly with fragrances of their products: “vibrant color with a single swipe”, “For a luminous, radiant glow and a smooth, even finish.”, “leaves hair soft, silky, and with a delicate scent” [19]. *L'Oréal's* website uses holistic approach incorporating multisensory approach and catering to all types of audiences with their detailed and engaging descriptions, AI assistance and interactive elements. Their Instagram page follows the trend emphasising “transformative”, “luxurious”, “indulgent” and “sensual” image of the brand with the help of short form video content (including animations with smooth shapes) and photos visually demonstrating the textures of products [18].

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Another famous cosmetics brand, *Dove*, intertwines sensory language with their emotional narratives. They focus on the tactile sensations of their products and the feeling of care and comfort they provide: “*your skin feeling soft, smooth, and nourished*”, “*reveal instantly soft skin*”, “*rich, creamy hydration for soothing comfort*” [16], etc.. *Dove* often uses more natural lighting in their visuals (on both website and their Instagram page), and less makeup, to convey a realistic look. They also use influencer-generated content on their social media [15] sharing experiences of the product usage, as well as promotional video content, where visual emphasis is made on the smooth texture of the products; in addition, they may include auditory elements such as chirping of birds or the sounds of water. As a result of the cohesive branding, the image of the comforting and caring aspects emphasises the gentle and nourishing tactile sensations and the emotional well-being associated with the products.

The **results** presented here offer insights into the interplay of the multisensory elements, revealing the impact of sensory vocabulary on brand perception and consumer engagement within the dynamic digital landscape. Brands across industries utilise sensory language tailored to their specific products and brand identities. Brands specialising in the Food and Beverage industry pay more attention to visual and olfactory modalities when creating their brand narratives. Technology brands like *Apple* and *Samsung* emphasise visual and implied tactile/auditory experiences, while beauty brands like *L'Oréal* focus on visual, tactile, and olfactory cues, or prioritise tactile and emotional connections. Among the examples of the sensory vocabulary we identified usage of various parts of speech. As shown in this article, sensory words are not limited with adjectives, but also can include nouns and verbs. In some cases we can even note the usage of derivative chains in order to create the repetitive pattern and reinforce the idea in customers mind, without seeming redundant or repetitive (as in Coca-Cola's case “*refresh–refreshing–refreshment*” contributes to brand image of “freshness”). Although research on sensory marketing has examined traditional advertising outcomes, less attention has been paid to the process of sensory marketing influencing consumer engagement with online posts [3]. However, we consider content engagement to be a reasonable indicator of positive emotional response (lacking though in more defined outcomes). While conducting this research, we analysed websites and social media accounts (Instagram) of 6 brands. As a result, we can conclude that posts with close-up imagery of a product and personalised narrative

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PROBLEMS OF SEMANTICS, PRAGMATICS AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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<http://semantics.knu.ua/index.php/prblmsemanitics>

gain more public engagement, gaining in average twice more likes and comments on social media platform Instagram. In addition, video content (reels) containing auditory elements, in average, generates more engagement than traditional posts.

Conclusions. The conducted research allowed us to determine that sensory vocabulary is strategically interwoven with visual, auditory, and interactive modes to create immersive experiences. Visuals amplify textual sensory descriptions, and implied or stated audio and haptic experiences enhance product perception. It plays a crucial role in eliciting emotional responses and fostering brand loyalty, which utilise emotional narratives alongside tactile descriptions. The cohesiveness of the brand storytelling becomes one of the key elements in sensory marketing as the effectiveness of sensory vocabulary is significantly influenced by contextual factors, including target audience, brand positioning and accessibility. Furthermore, brands try to craft seamless narratives cross-referenced on various platforms using sensory vocabulary as a mediator between the dominant modalities of the communicative means in question and general specifics of the digital sphere. In conclusion, distinct sensory language patterns contribute to unique brand narratives, allowing brands to differentiate themselves in the competitive digital landscape. This research opens new opportunities for creating well-structured thesauruses that can be helpful for finding synonyms and related words that evoke sensory experiences, as currently this sphere is sadly underdeveloped, but provides new challenges for further studies of the subject.

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(Current issues in linguistic semantics [Aktual'ni pytannja lingvistychnoi' semantyky])

Sensory Vocabulary in Multimodal Digital Brand Storytelling (Based on the English-Language Websites and Social Media) (in English) [Sensorna leksyka v multymodal'nomu tsyfrovomu storitelinhu brendiv (na materiali anhlovnykh veb-saytiv ta sotsial'nykh merezh)]

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