

Perception and interpretation

Perception defined

Perception is the process by which physical sensations such as sights, sounds, and smells are selected, organised, and interpreted. The eventual interpretation of the stimulus allows it to be assigned meaning.

Slide 2.3

The perceptual process

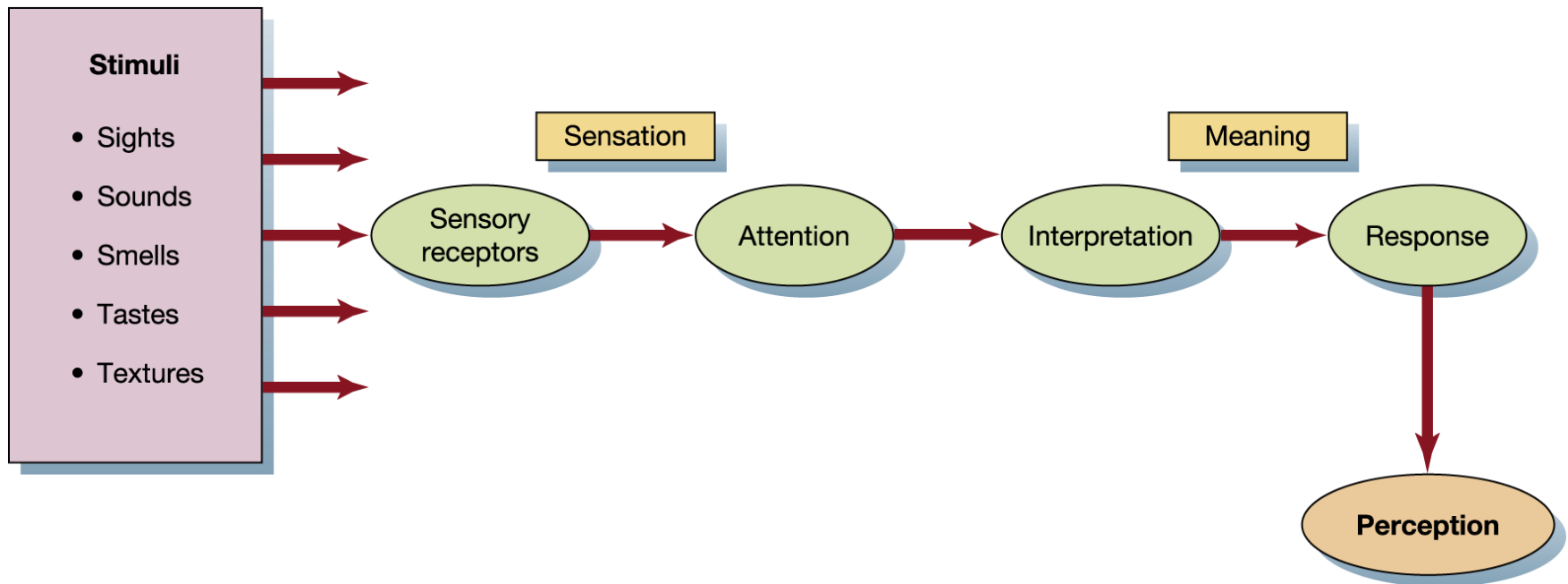


Figure 2.1

The stages of a perceptual process

- Primitive categorization – in which the basic characteristics of a stimulus are isolated.
- Cue check – the characteristics are analysed in preparation for the selection of a schema.
- Confirmation check – in which the schema is selected.
- Confirmation completion – in which a decision is made as to what the stimulus is.

Impact of the different stimuli

- *Vision* – marketers rely heavily on visual elements in advertising, store design and packaging. Colours are rich in symbolic value and cultural meanings and can be critical spurs to sales.
- *Smell* – odours can stir the emotions or have a calming effect, they can invoke memories or relieve stress.
- *Sound* – can affect people's feelings and behaviours.
- *Touch* – tactile cues can have symbolic meaning.
- *Taste* – can contribute to our experiences of many products.

The different sensory thresholds

- *Absolute threshold* - the minimum amount of stimulation that can be detected on a sensory channel.
- *Differential threshold* - the ability of a sensory system to detect changes or differences between two stimuli. The issue of when or if a change will be noticed is relevant to many marketing situations.
- The minimum change in a stimulus that can be detected is known as the JND – Just Noticeable Difference.
- Weber's Law states that the amount of change that is necessary to be noticed is related to the original intensity of the stimulus.

Perceptual selection

Consumers are often in a state of sensory overload, exposed to too much information and are unable or unwilling to process all of the information at their disposal.

Perceptual selectivity occurs when people attend to only a small portion of the stimuli that they are exposed to.

Perceptual principles for organising stimuli

- *Gestalt psychology* – people derive meaning from the totality of a set of stimuli rather than from any one individual stimuli.
- *Principle of closure* – consumers tend to perceive an incomplete picture as complete, filling in the blanks based on previous experience.
- *Principle of similarity* – consumers tend to group together objects that share similar physical characteristics.
- *Figure ground principle* – where one part of the stimulus will dominate while others recede into the background.

Interpreting meaning

Interpretation refers to the meaning that people assign to phenomena, whether from stimuli from the outside world or the ideas and concepts from the person's own mind.

- *Priming* – where consumers assign meaning based on the set of beliefs held.
- *Symbolic consumption* – where the meanings attached to the act of consuming the goods, for example trendiness, wealth, femininity, etc.
- *Stimulus Ambiguity* – where consumers project their own experiences and aspirations to assign meaning.
- Stimulus organisation – where people relate incoming sensations to imagery of other sensations already in memory based on fundamental organisation principles.

The role of symbolism in interpretation

Some marketers are turning to semiotics to understand how consumers interpret the meanings of symbols.

- Semiotics examines the correspondence between signs and symbols and their role in the assignment of meaning.
- Products are given meanings by their producers and we rely on advertising to work out what those meanings are. Advertising serves as a kind of culture/consumption dictionary.
- Hyperreality – refers to the becoming real of what is initially ‘hype’

Semiotic principles

Every message has three basic components:

- Lowest level – the object or the product that is the focus of the message.
- Middle level – the sign or the sensory image that represents the unintended meanings of the object.
- Top level – the interpretant or the meaning derived.

Positioning strategy

A positional strategy is a fundamental part of a company's marketing efforts as it uses the different elements of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotions, etc) to influence consumers' interpretation of its meaning.

Brand positioning dimensions

- Lifestyle.
- Price leadership.
- Attributes.
- Product class.
- Competitors.
- Occasions.
- Users.
- Quality.

Perceptual map

- A perceptual map is a useful positioning tool that identifies the important dimensions and then asks consumers to place competitors in this space.
- Marketers can then analyse similarities and differences between products and the opportunities for new products possessing attributes not represented by current brands.