

Part 1: FOOD

[excerpt]

The Five Senses and Stuffing our Faces

Campaigns that appeal to our base senses are nothing new, but the body of research supporting their efficacy continues to grow. Aradhna Krishna, director of the Sensory Marketing Laboratory at the University of Michigan, is considered a top expert in the field and is building a storehouse of data linking sensory perceptions with emotional associations. In her 2013 book, *Customer Sense: How the 5 Senses Influence Buying Behavior*, she posits that human senses amplify each other when they are somehow congruent. For instance, Krishna observed that people believed the scent of cinnamon made a heating pad more effective and concluded that since cinnamon suggests warmth, it pairs naturally with actual, physical heat.

When it comes to sensory marketing, *Harvard Business Review* points out, “Such influences are subtle—and that’s exactly why they are so powerful. Consumers don’t perceive them as marketing messages and therefore don’t react with the usual resistance to ads and other promotions.”ⁱ

An unexpected purveyor of subtle sensory manipulation? *Cheesemongers*.

You likely knew that absolutely no cheese created by earthlings is naturally orange in color. What you might *not* know is that experts believe cheesemakers have been adding artificial color to their delicious dairy products for nearly 500 years.ⁱⁱ There are three conflicting theories on their motivations:

Cheese-coloring theory 1: Sometime in the 16th century, English farmers realized they could skim fat from the milk they used to make cheese and transform it into butter. However, low-fat cheese was both paler in color and less rich-tasting. When consumers made this mental connection and started passing up fallow-looking cheeses, farmers compensated by adding artificial coloring, making it hard to tell a full-fat cheese from a skimmed one.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cheese-coloring theory 2: Back then, cheese made in spring and summer was naturally more yellowish since the cows were eating fresh grass instead of dried grains. (Grass has lots of beta-carotene, a naturally occurring orange pigment that ends up in the milk, then the cheese.) Farmers might not have been skimming fat, but began adding colorant, so their cheeses looked identical year-round.^{iv}

Cheese-coloring theory 3: Since all cheese was white, adding color made certain varieties stand out. In the 17th century, British farmers started adding a vegetable dye called annatto to Red Leicester cheese, so it looked distinct from its cheesy competition.^v

Whatever the reason, the choices these farmers made five centuries ago still influence consumers today. Although some have gotten used to white cheddars, many others insist on orange cheese; pale cheese just doesn't taste as good.

This notion is supported by the evolution of margarine starting in the late 1800s. This butter-substitute is naturally white, but consumers were so used to seeing *yellow* butter that spreading *white* goo on their morning toast felt deeply wrong. For margarine to convince people it *tasted* like butter, it needed to *look* more like butter^{vi} ... and thus, we have the shockingly-yellow-butter-wannabes of the 21st century. The dyes used are completely tasteless, yet essential to the sensory experience. As science journalist Sara Chodosh points out, "Our perception of a food affects how we think it tastes, and thus orange cheeses and yellow butters [sic] seem different than pale products."^{vii} The visual is linked to the gustatory, thanks to years of farmer-driven subversive marketing.

To this day, food manufacturers and ad agencies continue to cross-pollinate our various senses to make us want, buy, and scarf down their products.

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ⁱ Hilton, Kyle. "The Science of Sensory Marketing." *Harvard Business Review*, March 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/03/the-science-of-sensory-marketing>.

ⁱⁱ Chodosh, Sara. "There's No Such Thing as Naturally Orange Cheese." *Popular Science*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.popsci.com/why-is-some-cheese-orange>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chodosh, Sara. "There's No Such Thing as Naturally Orange Cheese." *Popular Science*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.popsci.com/why-is-some-cheese-orange>.

^{iv} Chodosh, Sara. "There's No Such Thing as Naturally Orange Cheese." *Popular Science*, February 16, 2018, <https://www.popsci.com/why-is-some-cheese-orange>.

^v"Red Leicester." *Cheese.com - World's Greatest Cheese Resource*, <https://www.cheese.com/red-leicester>.

^{vi}Rhodes, Jesse. "Food Dye Origins: When Margarine Was Pink." *Smithsonian.com*, April 7, 2011, www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/food-dye-origins-when-margarine-was-pink-175950936.

^{vii} Chodosh, Sara. "There's No Such Thing as Naturally Orange Cheese." *Popular Science*, February 16, 2018, www.popsci.com/why-is-some-cheese-orange.