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## A Study on the Consumption of Brand Experience by Visual Information Processing

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### Abstract

*It is understood that 80% of the amount of information accepted by humans corresponds to visual information. In the modern society, competition between brands is accelerating day by day due to the overheating of product supply, and consumers are leading the era of purchasing gems and services to satisfy their needs. In addition, in a competitive market where the quality of competitive products is leveled with technological advances, brand experience through consumers' total experience is a decisive factor in purchasing.*

*Most brands use a variety of visual components to effectively communicate information for the purpose of consumers' cognition, memory, and purchase decisions.*

*In order to meet changes in competitive markets and consumer needs, companies must not only think about what products and services to provide, but also what kind of relationship they will have with customers. It is necessary to choose whether it will be recognized as a brand for a temporary transaction that simply sells and buys goods, or whether to form lasting bonds by providing the total and sensuous experience that consumers want. In order for a brand to be remembered as an experience rather than a transaction, it is necessary to change its perspective on the customer experience. Products or services are, after all, part of the customer experience that customers prefer. Since consumption begins with visual information processing, cognitive and memory structures and visual information characteristics must be understood and utilized from the perspective of emotional memory. If a design is developed so that memory stimulation factors act as a brand experience (BX) factor to form a friendly image by facilitating brand recognition and memory, this can serve to reinforce customer brand loyalty. Therefore, the brand experience (BX) design should be a strategic design that can provide an impressive visual experience tailored to the needs of consumers and eye level.*

**Keywords:** Visual Information Processing, Memory Information, Brand Experience (BX), Consumption Experience

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Questioning and Research Background**

In order to buy Nike's new products, enthusiasts don't mind staying up all night in front of the store or waiting in line for a long time. Starbucks is always popular, even though many people think that coffee tastes similar or not superior, or despite its high price. Consumers not only own some of Nike's various products, but also receive free customized running programs through the Nike Run Club app and have an ongoing brand experience, directly or indirectly. Starbucks' Starbucks Reserve attracts consumers who want a variety of in-depth coffee experiences that can satisfy not only taste but also taste through luxurious interiors and differentiated coffee.

Considering that 80% of the information is visual, this study aims to examine the impact of memory information processing and brand experience on purchases through visual cognition.

In the modern competitive market, where consumption changes from meeting needs to meeting needs, and competition between brands is more intense than ever due to technology leveling and overheating of product supply, consumers' overall experience has a decisive impact on brand experience and purchase. The MZ generation, which is currently leading the consumer market through a rich environment and free growth period, pursues more diverse and detailed services and experiences. In addition, as consumer convenience increases due to the combination of e-commerce and mobile, which have established themselves as the main consumer market through the pandemic, online brand exposure, recognition, and imprinting are of paramount importance. Therefore, companies should focus on building relationships with customers beyond just providing products and services, and maintain relationships by providing continuous experiences that can satisfy customer needs.

It should be noted that brands need to change their perspectives on customer experience, and consumers are increasingly inclined to pursue happiness through experience rather than material possession. Despite high prices and economic recession, the outdoor market grew 16.6% year-on-year in 2021, and sales of major brands are also increasing. This trend shows that consumers value empirical consumption. Consumption experience includes the process of accepting stimuli through the five senses in the process of purchase and use, and forming a sensory image based on them. This is found in almost all consumption areas, including theater viewing, coffee consumption, and clothing purchase (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982)[1]. As the importance of empirical consumption increases, the term 'experiential marketing' is used in marketing research, and research on ways that consumers can maximize satisfaction through experience is being actively conducted (Jeongyoon Kwon, 2017)[2].

Research on visual information processing is mainly dealt with in advertising and psychology, and in the marketing field, it is used as one of the criteria for consumer characteristics and market classification. This topic is also widely studied in the humanities and social sciences (Davis and Rigaux, 1974)[3]. The core of this paper is to reveal that consumption begins in the process of processing visual information first through experience.

#### **1.1.1 Case Study 1 - Nike Run Club**

A great example of customer experience is Nike. Nike leads running trends by offering various online and offline services that provide enjoyable running experiences, with the 'Nike Run Club' being a prime example.

This service offers tailored running programs for runners of all levels through a user-friendly UX (User Experience). Anyone can make a reservation on the website, and group runs are held at major stores in Seoul. Designed to complete Nike's slogan 'JUST DO IT,' the Nike Run Club provides various elements to make jogging enjoyable. Users can check their speed and distance, and the 'Running Guide' enhances their experience. Beginners can participate in the 'First Run' program, which offers an indirect experience guided by professional coaches. This is a representative case of how continuous brand experiences, based on visual information elements and brand design, strengthen consumer brand loyalty.

### **1.1.2 Case Study 2 - Starbucks Reserve**

The second experience case is 'Starbucks Reserve.' This store provides a personalized experience that satisfies all five senses of consumers. Starbucks operates both regular stores and Reserve stores, with the Reserve locations offering high-quality, special coffee beans that are limited in number, creating a sense of exclusivity. The demand from coffee enthusiasts who want to deeply explore coffee flavors has been steadily increasing.

The term 'reserve' suggests the idea of booking or stockpiling, inspired by the concept of 'Reserve Wine,' which typically denotes high-quality wines. In Reserve stores, leather menus are used, and staff kindly guide customers through the coffee selection and assist with aroma sampling. Through conversations with expert baristas, customers enjoy a unique experience as if they have their own dedicated barista. In this way, Starbucks actively utilizes experiential marketing through interactions that create a holistic experience.

## **2. Theoretical Consideration**

### **2.1 Characteristics of Visual Information**

Visual information can be classified into three main characteristics:

- ① **Dominance:** Visual information is quantitatively superior to other forms of information, with approximately 80% of the information humans receive being conveyed through sight. This dominance is due to biological traits and the ease of transmitting visual information. Visual information can be easily replicated and recognized over long distances, allowing for efficient utilization. Additionally, visual information organizes and conveys emotions together (Lee et al., 2013)[4].
- ② **Imagery:** Visual information communicates imagery at all touchpoints of brand experience, such as advertising, products, and packaging. It is often challenging to combine visual information with other senses.
- ③ **Simultaneity:** Visual information allows for scanning, enabling the simultaneous comparison and understanding of multiple pieces of information (Wickens et al., 2012)[5]. This characteristic facilitates both internal and external comparisons in the process of brand image formation.

Apple products have a clean and sophisticated image, thanks to management principles centered around 'minimalism.' Steve Jobs emphasized simplicity in product design and marketing based on his philosophy that "simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." This consistent brand philosophy helps form high levels of recognition and trust among consumers, while the simultaneity of visual information plays a favorable role in consumers' product comparison and selection. Brand image formation occurs primarily through experiential

acceptance perceived via visual expression, rather than through verbal explanations.

There are various definitions of visual stimulus information processing, and the study by Kwon Seok-man et al. (1996) identified the stages of processing visual stimulus information over time[6]. In the research by Kim Hyun-taek et al. (1996), visual information processing is described as the process through which stimuli are transmitted to and reconstructed by the brain[7]. This includes the process of visual information being reconstructed into images.

## 2.2. Visual Information Processing

Hong Sun-hee (2005) defines the process of perceiving and processing information obtained from the environment as information processing, which encompasses all mental activities related to information received through the senses[8]. Cognitive activities through visual perception begin with purposeful thinking, and perception occurs according to the goals set by the information receiver (Kim Kyung-hee, 2000)[9]. This process includes not just the simple reception of stimuli but also higher-level mental processes.

Definitions of visual information processing are explained by Kwon Seok-man et al. (1996) in terms of the different methods applied at each specific processing stage. The series of processes in which light reflected or emitted from objects enters the eye and is processed in the brain has been studied in fields such as neurophysiology, cognitive psychology, and perception psychology (Shim Hye-kyung, Jung In-cheol, 2007)[10]. When light reaches the retina, it is encoded into color, contour, and shape and then transmitted to the visual cortex. The rods and cones in the retina detect brightness and color, respectively, sending information to the brain. The perceived information passes through the optic chiasm and reaches the occipital lobe of the cerebral cortex, where form and color are combined to reconstruct complete visual information (Kim Suk-hyun, 1990; Kim Suk-hyun, Choi Kyung-sook, 1999; Treisman et al., 1992)[11].

Chalfant and Scheffelin (1969) summarized the process of processing visual stimuli in eight stages, as shown in Table 1 (Chalfant and Scheffelin, 1969; Lee Seung-wook, 2015, cited again).

**Table 1: Eight Stages of Visual Information Processing by Chalfant and Scheffelin (1969) [12]**

Stage	Description of Information Processing at Each Stage
1	The stage of receiving visual stimulus information.
2	The stage where the head or eyes orient toward the source of light.
3	The stage of exploring the object.
4	The stage of identifying key visual cues.
5	The stage of integrating visual cues.
6	The stage of temporarily categorizing visual stimulus information based on visual perception categories.
7	The stage of verifying whether the criteria of the temporary category can also be applied to the visual information through comparison.

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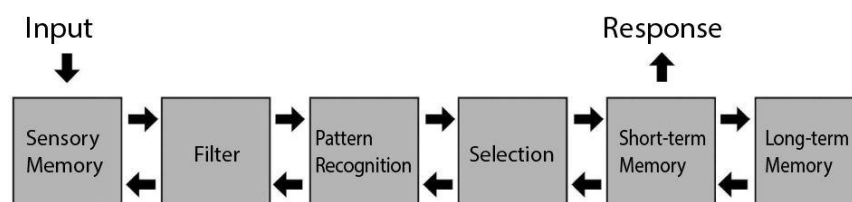
**8** The stage of confirming or revising the category.
 

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The summary by Chalfant and Scheffelin (1969) includes the stages of receiving visual stimulus information, exploring it, and identifying key cues (Lee Seung-wook, 2015, cited again)[12][13]. Visual information processing is addressed in various fields such as biology, optometry, and psychology, with psychology focusing on perception and cognitive activities (Kim Jeong-eun, 2017)[14].

Stephan (2007) constructed a model of visual information processing, stating that information is momentarily retained through sensory memory and is recognized as a form after passing through a filter[15]. This process varies depending on individual innate characteristics, culture, and training, and the way visual stimulus information is processed can differ from person to person (Shin Hyeon-jeong and Yoo Sang-wook, 2000)[16]. This study aims to understand the process of visual information processing, including perception and cognition.

**Table 2: Stages of Stephan's Information Processing Model [15]**



### 2.3 Memory Information and Memory

Consumers do not make immediate judgments about products when exposed to advertisements; most decisions are made at the point of purchase. Thus, consumer memory in advertising is crucial, and the memory process plays a significant role in determining advertising effectiveness (Keller, 1987; Stayman & Batra, 1991)[17][18]. Research examining the psychological processes that lead to the formation of attitudes towards brands after consumers are exposed to advertisements emphasizes that the initial messages in advertisements are processed to form attitudes, which are temporally separated from the point of purchase (Lee Jong-min, 2000)[19]. Nevertheless, traditional marketing and advertising research has often overlooked the role of memory in consumer decision-making (Sawyer and Ward, 1979). Recent studies have demonstrated that memory significantly influences judgments and choices regarding advertisements or products, clarifying the direct relationship between memory and judgment (Baker, 2001; Hastie and Park, 1986; Keller, 1987)[17][21][22].

In the memory information processing process, past considerations primarily focused on the encoding process; however, recent attention has shifted to the retrieval process. This shift indicates the importance of understanding how information is stored and retrieved (Baker and Lutz, 1987; Keller, 1991)[23][24]. Understanding the structural processes related to individual memory is essential for measuring the comprehensive advertising effects on consumer behavior.

Moreover, consumers tend to extract only useful information when making memory-based judgments. This tendency arises from a lack of motivation or ability to access information. Therefore, to understand how

memory information is retrieved and its impact on judgment, it is necessary to consider not only the encoding and retrieval processes but also individual motivation and ability factors.

### **2.3.1 Visual Information and Memory**

The memory process of visual information can be summarized as follows. The human eye is merely an organ that receives light and focus, while the perception of color, shape, and expressions occurs in the brain (Pradeep, 2010)[25]. In this process, existing memories influence the attention allocation during perception, allowing the selection of information among various visual stimuli. Key factors in this process are effort and salience (Wickens et al., 2012)[26].

**Effort:** This refers to the cognitive resources allocated for visual recognition. Information that can be easily chunked and has a lower cognitive load is prioritized for cognitive resource allocation. Therefore, the more consistently brand touchpoints are organized, the less effort is required for cognitive tasks, which benefits consumer memory.

**Salience:** This refers to the property of being noticeable, indicating novelty and differentiation compared to existing products or services. When exposed to the same stimuli continuously, there is a tendency to respond less to accumulated stimuli (Lee Hak-sik, 2013)[27], so salience is needed to capture attention.

From a design branding perspective based on Brand Experience (BX), there is a need for efforts to maintain a differentiated identity from other brands due to the incompatibility between new perceptions that easily stimulate memory and elements that capture immediate attention. In the case of Apple, all products consistently express the simplicity and clarity the brand seeks through their exterior, UI elements, and finishes. This allows consumers to organize and process the brand image quickly while reducing cognitive effort, leading to the formation of working memory and long-term memory with a differentiated identity.

Apple stimulates consumer attention by expressing diversity and novelty within a certain formal order of the brand, adapting to the characteristics or functional changes of new products. This consistency in brand experience helps recall past favorable experiences with minimal effort and strategically secures salience, thereby maintaining brand image and identity. This strategy is upheld across various touchpoints such as stores, exhibitions, and packaging, allowing consumers to unconsciously experience the value Apple has built. This impression and emotional memory influence human attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Pradeep, 2010)[25], becoming a factor that helps consumers remember the values the brand pursues and guides their choices in the consumption process.

### **2.4 Memory Stimuli Factors - Experience**

Among the various activities undertaken by companies to maintain brand personality, there are examples of olfactory utilization, such as Singapore Airlines. Generally, due to the characteristics of visual information, sight is predominantly used; however, consistent designs like Apple's design language system, BMW's double kidney grille, and Tiffany's blue box are observed to evoke emotional memories related to the brand.

These factors help maintain the brand's personality and values through a consistent image, inducing brand recognition and recall, while preventing the risks associated with designs that seek one-time novelty or differentiation from undermining brand consistency. In BX-based branding, design plays a role in forming

visual memory by understanding these factors at the strategic level of branding and developing organized formality.

To avoid conflicts between design diversity and branding consistency, it is essential to strike a balance between a consistent formal order and novelty to maintain brand image. This balance requires specific memory stimuli factors that consider visual information and the cognitive characteristics of the brain. As catalysts for conveying and recalling a brand's consistent image and personality, the core elements of memory stimuli that can be repeatedly utilized for visually comparing brand differentiation in a competitive market include: 1) consistent design language, 2) specific colors, and 3) layout. Continuous stimulation through these elements is expected to function as symbols and systems that remind consumers of the brand's emotional experiences and contribute to long-term memory formation.

#### Meaning of Experience and Consumer Examples

The dictionary definition of experience includes:

- The act of doing or undergoing something oneself, or the knowledge or skills gained from it.
- The content realized through sensory or perceptual actions concerning an objective subject.

The first meaning is predominantly used and encompasses all past experiences that an individual can remember. Experience can also be expressed as "experiential," indicating "one's own personal involvement." In psychology, it refers to the mental processes directly experienced by an organism, encompassing the fundamental aspects that do not mix with constructions from intellect, language, or habits, unlike experience (Lee Seo-jin, 2017)[28]. Philosophically, it refers to the vivid conscious processes or contents of an individual before distinguishing between the subjective and objective. Therefore, experience is a broader concept that includes not only experiential contact in real life but also recognition derived from sensory or perceptual actions (Kim Chan-sook, 2014)[29].

#### **2.5 Case Study: Nike and Starbucks**

In the cases of Nike and Starbucks, consumers experience greater happiness when they consume material goods through experiences that enhance their relationships with those around them. Satisfaction derived from relationships with others is a significant element of happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2000)[30], and people are more likely to consume experiences, such as dining out or attending performances, and share those experiences with others. Using post-consumption experiences as conversation topics can contribute to strengthening relationships (Kumar & Gilovich, 2015)[31].

The enhancement of relationships has been directly measured through items such as, "This consumption has strengthened my relationships or allowed me to make new friends" (Guevarra & Howell, 2015; Howell & Hill, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014)[32][33][34]. Experiments have shown that people value experiential consumption—things they can share with others—more highly than material possessions they may desire but cannot discuss with others (Kumar & Gilovich, 2015)[35].

#### **3. Brand and Experience**

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA, 1980), a brand is defined as a name, symbol, design, or a combination of these elements that gives identity to a seller or a group of sellers' products or services and differentiates them from competitors' products or services. A brand must maintain consistency and continuity to effectively convey its identity with a differentiated purpose. However, this process tends to be unilaterally

communicated by the company's brand strategy rather than based on an understanding and engagement with the emotional needs of consumers.

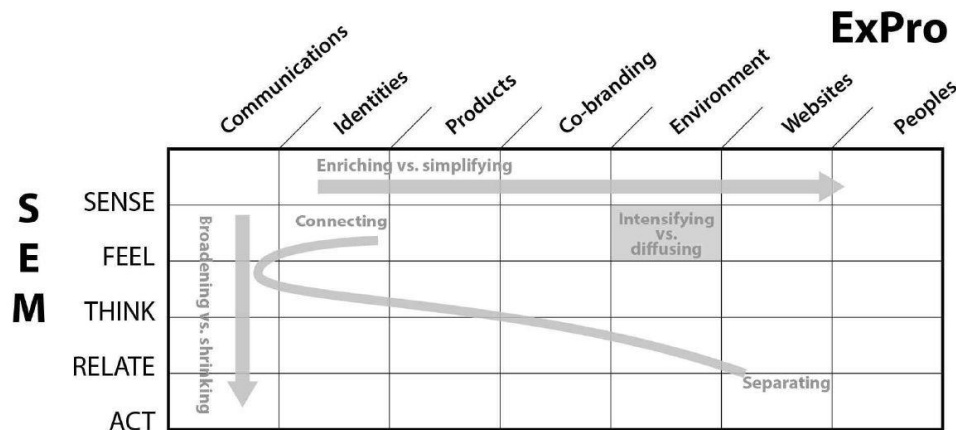
Bernd H. Schmitt (1999) began to focus on customer experience, contributing to the provision of various types of experiences for consumers by linking experiences to tangible economic activities. He argues that the types of experiences are not limited to a single dimension but form a higher-level concept called "Holistic Experience," which is created through the synthesis of two or more dimensions [Table 3][36].

**Table 3: Strategic Experience Modules (Schmitt, 1999)[36]**

Holistic Experience				
Personal Experiential Mix			Shared Experiential Mix	
Sense	Feel	Sense	Act	Relate

Schmitt classifies experiences into senses, feelings, cognition, actions, and relationships, establishing these as means of experience provision (ExPros) [Figure 1]. This "Experiential Grid Model" includes all branding activities of a company, such as co-branding, identity, products, communication, websites, environments, and human elements.

Schmitt emphasizes the concept of brands not merely as symbols but as experience providers, highlighting the importance of "brand experience." This means that the various experiences provided to consumers play a crucial role in shaping the brand's value.



**Figure 1. Experiential Grid Model (Schmitt, 1999)[36]**

Holland (2013) explained brand experience through the "Experience Cycle." This cycle expands from User Experience (UX) to Customer Experience (CX) to Brand Experience (BX). Brand Experience (BX) is the result of accumulated consumer experiences that simultaneously encompass User Experience (UX) and Customer Experience (CX), allowing for the definition of brand value.

In [Figure 2], the areas of User Experience, Customer Experience, and Service Experience are interconnected



and show a direct and indirect causal relationship. This process establishes a foundation for providing optimal service and being recognized as a positive brand preferred by customers.

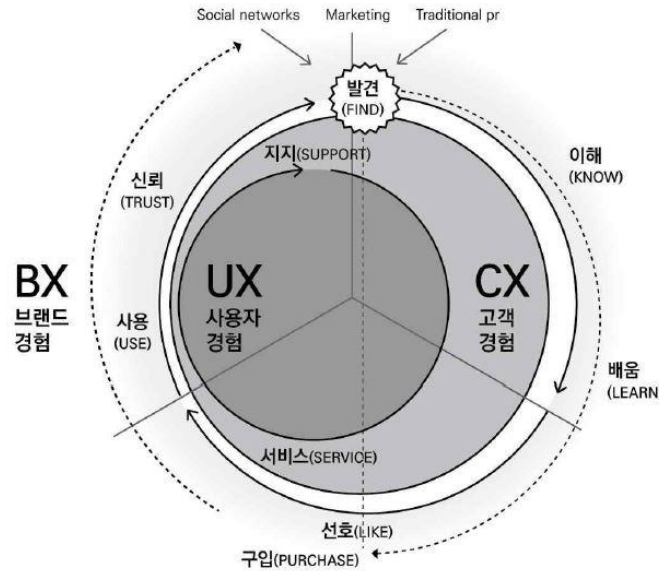


Figure 2. Holland's Experience Cycle (Holland, 2013)[38]

Brand Experience (BX) is an important concept in marketing and consumer behavior psychology, emphasizing the role of the brand in Schmitt's experiential marketing theory. In 2009, Brakus et al. defined the concept of BX by comparing product, shopping, service, and consumption experiences. Previously, brands were interpreted merely as symbols; however, there is now a demand for user-centered, interactive marketing.

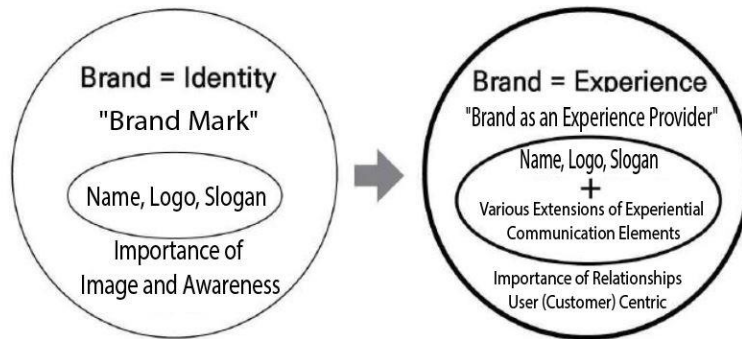


Figure 3. Expansion from Brand to BX[36]

BX includes both direct experiences when customers purchase or consume a product and indirect experiences through advertising, website access, and other touchpoints. These experiences are influenced by various elements provided by the company. The concept of BX is explained as a holistic experiential response driven by experience provision means (ExPros), where impressions of brand touchpoints accumulate through experiences and are connected to internalized values[Figure 3].

#### **4. Consumer Experience**

Consumer experience is multidimensional and includes a hedonic dimension (Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982; Brakus et al., 2009)[39][40]. The hedonic elements encompass fun, imagination, entertainment, and more. Hong Seong-tae proposed seven elements for effective brand experience during the process of consumers purchasing and using products: ① Extrinsic elements, ② Emotion, ③ Empathy, ④ Esthetics, ⑤ Story elements, ⑥ Entertainment, and ⑦ Ego. The author argues that brands must possess "meaning and fun" to impress consumers.

Based on the research of Kwan-Rye (2013), customer experience is defined as interactions through various direct and indirect contacts between customers and companies, encompassing emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and material responses[41]. Customer experience is described as "the internal and subjective reaction to interactions with a company." [42] Consumer experience requires a different perspective from customer experience, and David A. Aker (1991) and Scott M. Davis (2000) explain consumer experience in three stages: pre-purchase, during purchase, and post-purchase, categorizing brand touchpoints into four aspects[43][44]. It can be seen that visual recognition and experiences of brand touchpoints indirectly influence the purchasing decisions of potential customers at the pre-purchase touchpoint.

#### **5. Conclusion**

##### **5.1 Conclusion and Recommendations of the Study**

Consumption occurs through the memory and cognition of visual experiences. Scholars often equate experience with visual experience (Reed, S., 1996)[45]. This can be explained by comparing sensory experiences with semantic information processing. In other words, memory arises from currently activated sensory memory structures, making it possible for past experiences related to emotions or thoughts to be vividly and concretely re-expressed. Generally, the information processing of verbal recall is less detailed than that of experiences through visual information. The processing of visual information related to brand image occurs at all touchpoints represented in products, advertisements, exhibitions, etc., and the brand's experiences and interactions are based on this holistic memory. Companies should develop design strategies that provide visual experiences capable of stimulating consumers' memories more easily and intensely, alongside integrated efforts to form a favorable brand image. To achieve this, design must go beyond mere aesthetics and also propose the innovation of the product.

Brand design is a process that expresses and completes brand identity through diverse and consistent design identities, where the elements of Brand Experience (BX) play a crucial role in stimulating consumers' memories and establishing stable customer loyalty. Consumption resulting from this process begins with visual information; thus, to create successful brand experience design, it is essential to understand and utilize the characteristics of visual information and cognitive/memory structures from an emotional memory perspective. Therefore, Brand Experience (BX) design should be a strategic design that provides impressive visual experiences tailored to consumers' needs and expectations.

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