

November 18, 2013

Marketing professor explores the senses, pioneers new field

By Erika Nestor

The University Record

Faculty/Staff Spotlight

Topic: Campus News

[Print Email](#)

Picture two chocolate chip cookies. They are identical in size, but one is labeled “large” and the other is labeled “medium.” These labels are completely arbitrary, but they are effective. Consumers will, without fail, eat more “medium” cookies than “large” ones, Aradhna Krishna says.

This tasty example illustrates the powerful effect of sensory marketing on consumer choice, says Krishna, the Dwight F. Benton Professor of Marketing at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business.

Today, Krishna is known as the pioneer in the field of sensory marketing. Her research studies the ways in which touch, taste, smell, sight and sound enhance a product’s consumer appeal.

In 2008, she hosted the first-ever academic conference on sensory perception, bringing together thinkers from disparate fields including consumer psychology, arts, biology and the advertising industry. Her innovative work has been recognized in media outlets including The New York Times, NPR, Huffington Post, and Los Angeles Times.



Aradhna Krishna studies the effect of sensory marketing on consumer choice. Photo by Scott Stewart.

Krishna recalls the moment that inspired her groundbreaking research in sensory marketing.

In 1990, Krishna was working in New York City as an assistant professor of marketing at Columbia University. One day, she had a cold and was walking back to her office from a visit to health services. While on her way, Krishna says, she had an “aha” moment.

“I realized I always took the same path back to the office even though there were two paths — and I couldn’t understand why,” she says.

Her curiosity piqued, Krishna drew a map of the two routes and asked a bunch of colleagues which one they would choose. As she watched, they systematically chose one route over the other. This inspired Krishna to begin conducting research on spatial perception biases, “how visual perception biases influence our choices.”

Krishna’s research has proven that a product’s sensory details have unbelievable, often unconscious impacts on our perception of it. Smell and memory, for example, are intimately linked.

“When a product like a pencil has a distinct smell, this affects long-term memory for other aspects of the pencil, such as its brand name, whether it’s made of recycled wood, what sizes it comes in, whether it is easy to grip, etcetera,” Krishna says.

Krishna received her Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Delhi University in 1979, her Master of Business Administration from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, in 1984, and her

Ph.D. from New York University in 1989. Before joining U-M in 1998, Krishna spent time at Columbia University and at New York University.

In 2009, Krishna was named one of the top 50 most prolific marketing researchers by the Journal of Marketing. In the same year, she edited and contributed to an overview of sensory marketing research, "Sensory Marketing: Research on the Sensuality of Products."

Most recently, Krishna is the author of "Customer Sense: How the 5 Senses Influence Buying Behavior" (2013). In 2013, Krishna was named a fellow of the Society of Consumer Psychology.

When she isn't conducting research or is in the classroom, Krishna enjoys the sensory hobbies of trekking, listening to jazz and Hindustani classical music, traveling, gardening and cooking.

Q and A

What moment in the classroom stands out as the most memorable?

Any time when I think that I have changed the way a student looks at a particular problem, or when I have helped the student get an "aha" moment.

What can't you live without?

Good quality tea.

What is your favorite spot on campus?

It had better be my office, since I seem to spend such a large part of my life here.

What inspires you?

The world around me.

What are you currently reading?

"Claire of the Sea Light" by Edwidge Danticat, "The Signature of All Things" by Elizabeth Gilbert, and "David and Goliath" by Malcolm Gladwell.

Who had the greatest influence on your career path?

Me, my husband and destiny. I always choose what I want to work on, my husband encourages me to aim higher, and destiny brings opportunities I had not planned for.

Tags: spotlight

Source URL: <http://record.umich.edu/articles/marketing-professor-explores-senses-pioneers-new-field>