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 Case Study

**McDonald's** VS **BURGER KING**

The Integrated Sensory Experience at Fast Food Restaurants

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Presented by

**GCCRM**

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I remember when I was a kid; during my daily route to school I passed by McDonald's – the tempting smell of French fries seduced me, compelling me to walk into the shop. Thirty-something years later, I still recall my school days and my mouth waters whenever I smell fries.

## Smell, Sight, Touch, Hearing, Taste

Smell triggers memory, sound changes mood, and touch builds trust. We feel happy when we hear happy music. We almost never buy anything without touching it, think of yourself in the supermarket and how you evaluate (hold, weigh, shake, etc) fruits and snacks. Senses are strongly correlated to one another. In the study by Martin Lindstrom and Millward Brown on McDonald's consumers, either they like both the smell and taste, or they hate both. Rarely do they hate the smell but love the taste of the food, or vice versa.

Individually, each sense is powerful; and together, all five senses dictate our emotions. Our five senses transmit the sensory inputs generated by our experiences at touch points into our brain. I **smell** the French fries outside McDonald's, **look** at their bright yellow rectangular shape, **put** them into my mouth and **hear** the slight crispy sound when I **bite** them. This integrated sensory experience, mixed with my emotions and surrounding scene, are recorded in my memory.

These days, I rarely smell that French-fry-smell; I don't know why. I still regard McDonald's French fries as the best of all, but I seem to lack the sensory drive to resume my childhood passion. Contemporary marketing communications overload consumers' sight (think of the 3,000+ advertisements you see each day). Despite early efforts to align various touch points to deliver consistent brand promises, most senses are neglected, leaving the opportunity to create an integrated sensory experience untapped. I miss that French-fry smell, or perhaps, subconsciously, my school days.

## Emotion Curves at McDonald's and Burger King

Fast food outlets can interact with consumers using all five senses. In reality, most fast food chains focus on only two senses: taste and sight. The operations department focuses on preparing food efficiently; the marketing department focuses on designing colorful advertising and promotion materials. Last year, Burger King opened its first outlet in China in Shanghai with the Whopper, and recently McDonald's launched Quarter Pounder in China. Since I am a beef lover, I visited both chains to experience them for myself. Figure one and two are my end-to-end (from entering to exiting the restaurant) experiences. I can sum my emotions at each sub-process to constitute the Emotion Curves for McDonald's and Burger King. Below are my findings (please remember this is my personal (and biased) experience, without any statistical significance):

- **Different brand values.** McDonald's delivered the brand values: clean, convenient and efficient. While these values remain important, they may not match the most critical needs of today's consumers. McDonald's lags behind Burger King at psychological identification, food customization and all sensory experiences. Burger King also lacks the sensory experiences, but does better with "Have it your way" as a value with which target consumers identify.
- **Different sensory experiences.** Both outlets ignored the sense of smell – outside and inside the restaurant. Burger King was a bit quieter than McDonald's which echoed with kids' noise and the beeping sound of the kitchen machines. At McDonald's, the pre-packaged Quarter Pounder did not look like the advertising, the burger seemed to shrink after packaging. On the other hand, although I had to wait longer to get my made-on-the-spot Whopper, the beef had almost the same look and thickness as the burger in the marketing collateral. Expectation meets experience. Also, the size and shape of the burger does affect perceptions, making it taste better.
- **Different shapes of Emotion Curves.** The McDonald's emotion curve is gentler than the Burger King curve. What does this mean? Consumers love and hate Burger King more dramatically than McDonald's. Is this good? Well, if you ask your friends where to eat lunch, rarely does anyone suggest McDonald's as their top choice, unless there is an outlet nearby and you are looking for a fast lunch. The experiences at McDonald's are too flat and no one has an outstanding experience there. Most consumers want more variety, a local menu, and healthier food. By trying to please everyone, a restaurant pleases no one. It's quite difficult to please everyone.

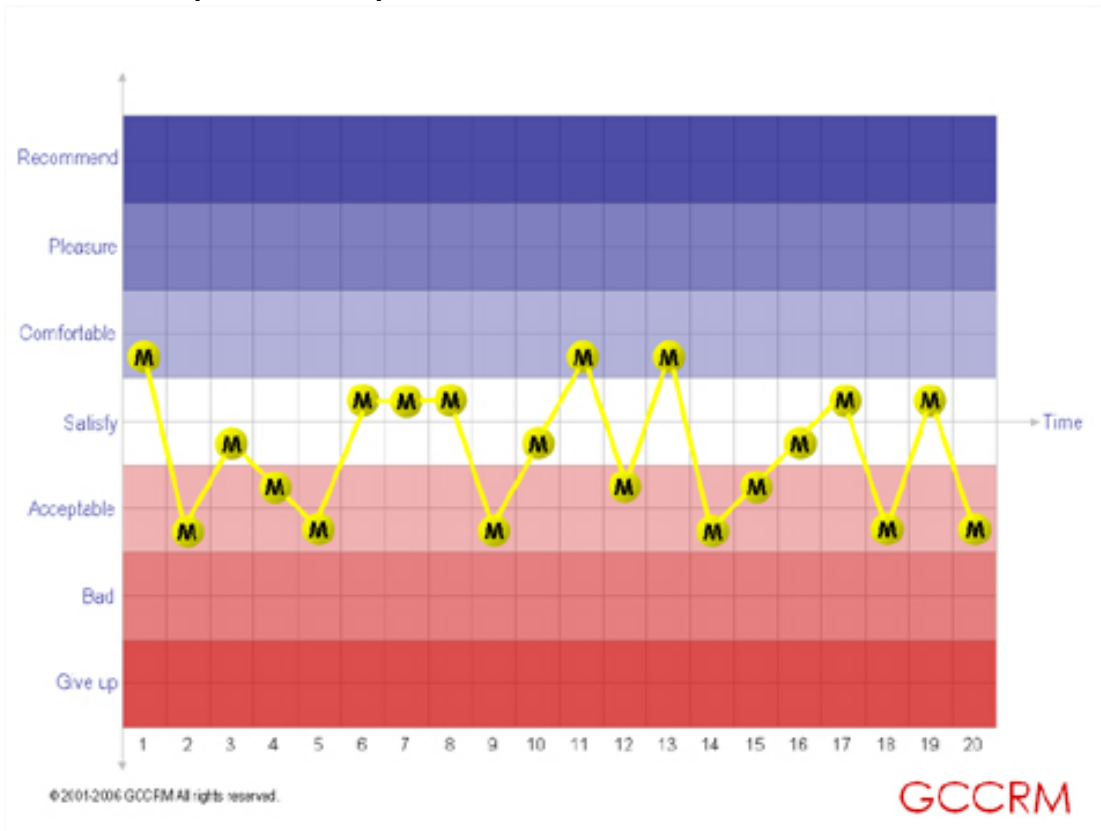
## Intra-experience Anchoring

People are comparison animals. Whether we feel good or bad is largely the result of comparing with others. When you go to a luxury store, where everything is expensive, a T-shirt selling for \$50 seems like a bargain. The same T-shirt selling elsewhere at same price does not. After spending three weeks as a volunteer in a poor country, most people feel that their own life is much better. Why? Because our experiences cause us to set our anchors differently. We benchmark against experiences (inter-experience). We also benchmark within an experience (intra-experience). Queuing up at Starbucks, DIY service at Ikea and flights without meals on Southwest, these are all examples of "pain" within an experience. But without those pains, the greatness of the pleasures they generated would not be as evident. Yes, I am suggesting that we need some pain within experiences and you may need to create some pain if there is none currently. People need pain to contrast with pleasure. The same pleasure feels like more pleasure once we go through some pain. Pain is a necessary 'Angel' when designing the customer experience. Not only does it help contrast with the pleasures of the experience, it can free up resources and release constraints.

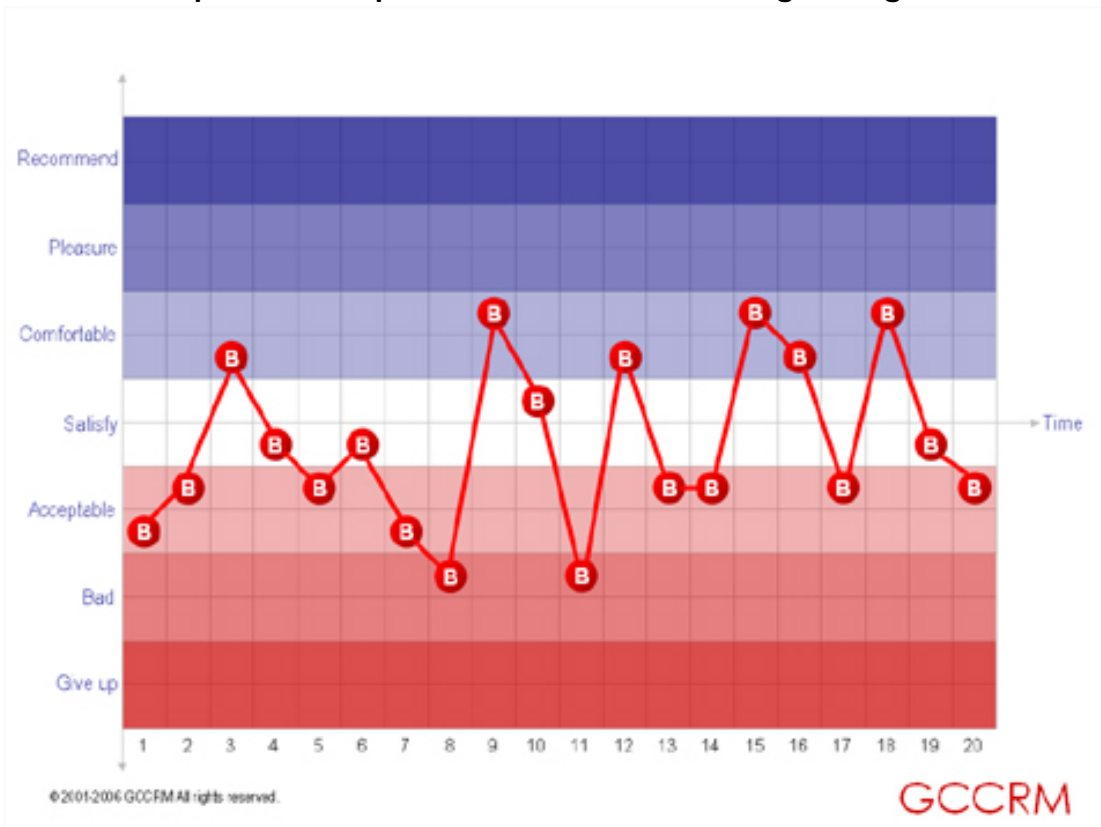
It's a tough competitive environment for fast food chains. Why don't they create unique branded experience by reallocating their resources to the much less crowded area of sensory experiences? Why not re-create the smell of beef grilling over charcoal or fries sizzling in oil in the in-store air and on the food wrapper? This is probably done at the bakery at your supermarket and with artificial "new car" smell. Why not create a branded McDonald's or Burger King sound or music? How about aligning the size, shape and packaging of the food with the photos in the advertising? In addition, both chains can actively explore the bottom-line of pain – what is the maximum level target consumers tolerate? How long will they wait in line? Will they wait for a clean table?

Via intra-experience anchoring, companies can maximize the gap between the enhanced integrated sensory experiences and the pains. Work out a healthy branded Emotion Curve, and create your own integrated sensory experience.

Customer Experience Map and Emotion Curve - McDonald's



Customer Experience Map and Emotion Curve – Burger King



## Customer Experience Sub-processes – Fast Food Restaurant

1. Shop Location and Outlook
2. Smell Outside Shop
3. In-store Decoration
4. Music and Sound
5. In-store Smell
6. Queue-up Time
7. Price
8. Food Variety
9. Food Customization
10. Staff Service
11. Transaction Efficiency
12. Seat
13. Cleanliness
14. Smell of Food
15. Package and Shape of Food
16. Taste of Food
17. Healthiness of Food
18. Psychological Identification
19. Washroom
20. Exit (Goodbye)

## About the Author



**Sampson Lee** founded GCCRM in 2001 and also co-founded The 3C Method (China Customer Care) in 2002. GCCRM is an independent CRM evaluation organization. Through evaluation, enhancement and benchmark with best practices, GCCRM helps to roadmap organizations' CRM - where they are, where to go and how to get there. GCCRM preaches the belief of "CRM Success Beyond Software™" via awards, methodology, research & portal.




A sought-after speaker, Sampson has delivered public speeches in many recognized forum and events including The Economist Forum, Customer Contact World, China DMA, Suzhou TV Station, China CRM Forum, ideasAsia! in Singapore, CRM Association of Japan etc., on CRM Evaluation and Benchmarking and also Best CRM Practice in China. He was recently interviewed by CNBC on the topic of "How Far Away Is China from Global CRM Standards".

Sampson contributes articles and writes regularly to leading CRM portals and business publications including CRMGuru.com, GCCRM.com, insightexec.com, MRI Research and leading local newspaper and magazines in China. He also sits on the guru panel of CRMGuru.com - the world's largest CRM Community with 200,000 members.

Sampson graduated with a Business Administration degree, majoring in Economics.

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GCCRM International Partners are formed by 14 world famous CRM gurus from North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia Pacific and Greater China. They contribute to the development of CRM evaluation method - CRMBodyCheck, and conduct CRM training programs on evaluation and enhancement for the enterprises in Asia Pacific region.

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