SENSORY MARKETING AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS IN FASHION APPAREL RETAILING

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ABSTRACT

Marketers employ sensory marketing, which engages customers via their five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste), to reach out to them on an emotional rather than cerebral level, providing them with satisfaction and loyalty and influencing their decisions. The goal of this paper is to look at the impact of sensory marketing on customer behavioral intentions in Fashion Apparel Retailing. Data was collected through a well-structured questionnaire. A PLS-SEM modelling research found that sights, sound, touch, and scent had substantial influence on the customers' behavior intentions.

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Keywords: *Sensory Marketing, Visuals, Touch, Smell, Music, Behavioral Intentions.*

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Introduction

Sensory marketing in fashion apparel retailing refers to the strategic use of sensory elements to create immersive and memorable experiences for customers in a retail environment. It involves stimulating customers' senses such as sight, sound, touch, smell, and sometimes even taste to engage them emotionally and enhance their perception of a brand or product. The strategy is thus employed by marketing professionals to enhance business performance and achieve significant outcomes. Examples of these outcomes include increased exploration at retail stores, higher spending, and repeat visits to the same location (Amorntatkul and Pahome, 2011). When positive and satisfying sensations are activated, an emotional response is generated, which is then stored in the consumer's mind both cognitively and emotionally (Oliver, 1999). Numerous studies have affirmed that customers' senses are more influenced by tangible products compared to intangible services, such as those offered in hotels, hospitals, and banks (Furst et al., 2021; Gillani et al., 2021). Research by Shabgou and Daryani (2014) and Erenkol and Merve (2015) suggests that human senses are influenced by the surrounding environment, whether physical or service-oriented. In the context of fashion apparel retailing, sensory marketing aims to create a multi-sensory experience that enhances the brand's identity, emotionally engages customers, and ultimately boosts sales by delivering a memorable and enjoyable shopping experience. Consequently, the present study seeks to address the following question: Can the five factors of sensory marketing improve customers' behavioral intentions. The key aspects of sensory marketing in fashion apparel retailing are:

- **Visuals:** Visual merchandising plays a crucial role in sensory marketing. Retailers use attractive window displays, well-designed store layouts, and aesthetically pleasing product arrangements to catch customers' attention and create a visually appealing environment. Appropriate lighting and color schemes are employed to create the desired ambiance and evoke specific emotions. For instance, warm and soft lighting can create a cozy and intimate atmosphere, while bright and vibrant lighting can convey energy and excitement.

- **Smell:** Scented environments are increasingly used in retail settings to create specific associations and trigger emotional responses. Retailers may use pleasant fragrances that align with the brand's image or evoke positive emotions to create a lasting impression

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- **Touch and Texture:** Textures and tactile elements are utilized to engage customers' sense of touch. Retailers may incorporate different fabric samples, unique garment textures, or interactive displays that encourage customers to physically interact with the merchandise. In fashion apparel retailing, sensory marketing can include offering product samples for customers to try on. Allowing customers to physically experience the fit, comfort, and quality of the clothing can enhance their connection with the brand and increase purchase intent.

- **Music and Sound:** Background music and carefully chosen soundscapes are used to influence customers' moods and perceptions. The tempo, genre, and volume of the music can be adjusted to match the target audience and the brand image. The right sound can create a pleasant and memorable shopping experience.

Sensory Marketing in fashion apparel retailing aims to create a multisensory experience that enhances the brand's identity, engages customers emotionally, and ultimately drives sales by creating a memorable and enjoyable shopping.

Literature Review

Sensory Marketing ideas have been offered by several scholars (Lindstrom, 2005; Hultén, 2011; Krishna, 2012). Sensory marketing, according to Krishna (2012), is "marketing that engages consumers' senses and influences their perception, judgement, and behaviour." According to Krishna (2012), sensory marketing may be utilised to build triggers at subliminal level that define customer views of abstract product concepts. Sensory Marketing, as defined by Heitzler C. D. Asbury L. D. and Kusner S. L. (2008), is one of the unique solutions that allows consumers to perceive and feel products and services. Rieunier (2009) described sensory marketing as the use of environment elements on a retail point (five senses) to elicit emotive, cognitive, and behavioural reactions in the customer's thinking. According to Dauce (2006), sensory marketing is a marketing component that aims to stimulate purchase and create a link between a company and its clients by activating the five senses: visual, auditory, olfaction, tactile, and gastronomic.

The marketers thus play with environmental stimuli to provide sensory signals that alter consumer behaviour by activating the senses of sight (colour, form, and size), hearing (music), smell (odour), touch (softness, warmth), and taste (de Farias, S. A., Aguiar, E. C., & Melo, F. V. S. 2014).

The current study used the M-R model as its theoretical foundation to investigate the impacts of the physical environment on emotions and the consequent influence of emotions on behavioural intentions. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed the first theoretical model for the influence of the environment on human behaviour. There are three aspects to this model: environmental cues, emotional states, and approach or avoidance reactions. Individuals' emotional responses are influenced by their surroundings, which leads to either approach or avoidance behaviour. Empirical investigations in various settings, such as retail stores, shopping malls, and hotels, have consistently supported this paradigm (Baker & Cameron, 1996; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Sayed, Farrag, & Belk, 2003).

The conceptual model underlying our research is exhibited in Figure 1 showing whether sensory cues give significant influence to behavioural intentions.
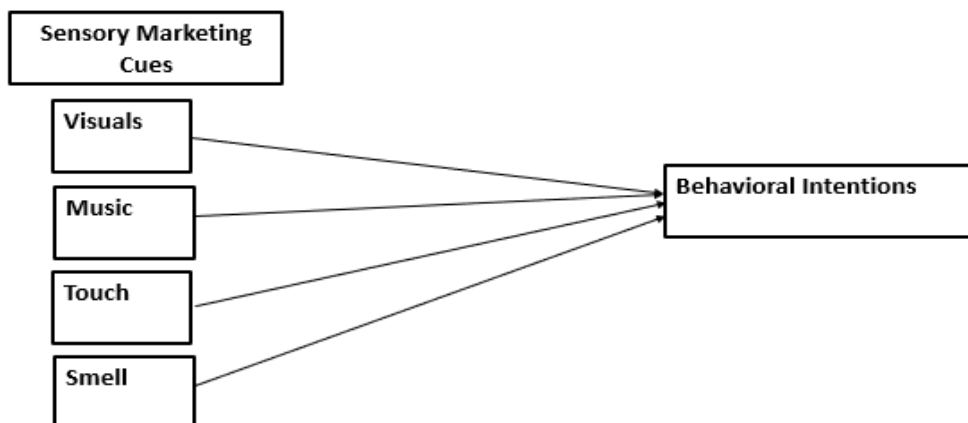

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Objective

- To investigate the effects of sensory factors (Visuals, Music, Touch and Smell) on Behavioural Intentions.

Hypothesis

The study focuses on several Sensory Marketing qualities that have a beneficial influence on buyers. Considering this, the following hypothesis statements were developed in accordance with the literature research.

H₁: Customers are affected by the sense of sound in the store while buying

H₂: Customers are affected by the visuals of the store while buying.

H₃: Customers are affected by the sense of smell in the store while buying

H₄: Customers are affected by the touch in the store while buying.

Research Methodology

The paper is based on quantitative research and the research type is descriptive in nature. The primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire from fashion apparels retail stores in Delhi NCR. The sample size was 300. People were selected based on judgment and convenience. Data collection was done by visiting these stores multiple times in different timings incorporating more and less crowded situations. The reliability of the survey instrument is tested with the help of Cronbach's alpha method. The reliability test checks whether the respondents' score on each attributes tend to be related to their scores on the other attributes (Bryman and Bell, 2007). As a rule, an alpha coefficient greater than or equal to 0.75 is considered acceptable and a good indication of construct reliability (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's alpha for survey questions of this study is 0.82 which proves that the survey instrument is valid and reliable indicating excellent overall internal consistency.

Measurements

The scales and measuring items utilized in this study were validated based on the literature review. Every item was assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 indicating strong agreement to 1 indicating significant disagreement. The independent variables' items (Sensory marketing factors Measures) depended on (Kotler, 1973 and Zhao et al., 2019). scale. This revised scale consisted of sixteen-items, divided into four dimensions. All the dimensions (Sight; Smell; sound; touch) consisted of four-items. While the dependent variables' (Behavioural Intentions) items consisted 5 items adapted from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996).

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the two-step technique (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), in which the measurement was first validated and then the structural model was evaluated. The researcher performed, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to identify whether the measurement items reliably reflected the a priori latent constructs (visuals, smell, music, touch, and behavioural intention) using the covariance matrix. Cronbach's alphas, item reliabilities, composite reliabilities, were checked to determine thereliability each construct in measuring each construct. Furthermore, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the model were tested by using AVE. The AVE value should exceed .50 to meet convergent validity (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) discriminant validity test was also conducted. In the second step, using PLS-SEM the latent variables were tested to determine the adequacy of the conceptual model by representing the constructs of the model and testing the hypotheses.

Results

To test the reliability of the constructs, the study used Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). All the CRs were higher than the recommended value of 0.700 (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). A Cronbach's Alpha with value higher than 0.7 is considered as reliable in comparison with values lower than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978, George and Mallery, 1995). Cronbach's alpha of each construct exceeds the .700 threshold. In our model all our Cronbach Alpha is above .700 and Composite Reliability is above the threshold level. The minimum acceptable AVE is 0.50 – an AVE of 0.50 or higher indicates the construct explains 50 percent or more of the indicators' variance that make up the construct (Hair et al., 2022). In our model for all the AVE are found to be greater than .5 hence the Convergent Validity is established.

Table 1: Reliability, Composite Reliability and AVE

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
BI	0.900	0.926	0.715
Music	0.871	0.912	0.722
Sight	0.863	0.908	0.712
Smell	0.759	0.847	0.581
Touch	0.878	0.917	0.735

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	BI	Music	Sight	Smell	Touch
BI					
Music	0.837				
Sight	0.787	0.950			
Smell	0.767	0.795	0.894		
Touch	0.790	0.560	0.888	0.626	

Model Fit

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is an index of the average of standardized residuals between the observed and the hypothesized covariance. The acceptable range for the SRMR index is between 0 and 0.08, see Hu and Bentler (1999). As reflected in Table 3, In our model the SRMR is below the threshold level.NFI is an incremental measure of goodness of fit for a statistical model, which is not affected by the number of parameters/variables in the model.For factor models, NFI values above 0.80 are considered as acceptable (Byrne, 1998). In our model the NFI is close to 1 hence acceptable.

Table 3: Model Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.502	0.525
NFI	0.867	0.867

Table 4 reflects, there is a significant effect of the independent variables, sight, music smell and touch on Behavioural Intentions of the customers. Since the p- value of all direct relations in H4, H2, H3, and H4is less than 0.005 significant level, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the effect of Music, Smell, Sight and Touch on Behavioural Intentions is significant and all the proposed hypothesis are supported.

Table 4: Path Analysis

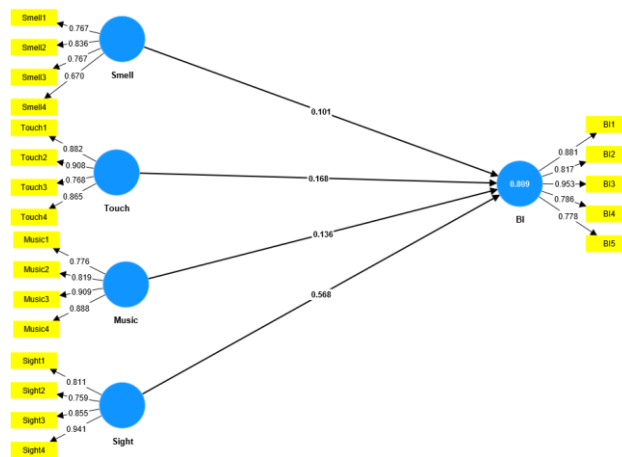|	Original Sample (O)	T statistics	P values	Hypothesis Supported
H1: Music -> BI	0.136	2.743	0.006	Supported
H2: Sight -> BI	0.568	6.265	0.000	Supported
H3: Smell -> BI	0.101	2.018	0.044	Supported
H4: Touch -> BI	0.168	3.521	0.000	Supported

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are made based on the findings. The study's findings revealed that sensory marketing components (Sight, Smell, Sound, Taste, and Touch) had a beneficial influence on customers' behavioural intentions as an independent variable. Which demonstrated the validity of hypothesis H1, H2, H3, and H4. Thus, sensory marketing plays an important part in current marketing since research shows that organisations that maximise the technique impact client behaviour intents to achieve favourable results. Exposing them to sensory stimuli causes them to feel good, which influences their actions and behaviour. This is supported by the publication of Hultén et al.,2013 in which corporations have embraced sensory marketing to take product sales to the next level. The Delhi NCR Fashion Apparel Retail Industry has grown very competitive. Furthermore, the market is becoming more competitive due to internet rivalry. As a result, it is critical to employ new strategies in order to acquire a competitive advantage over competitors and provide customers with unique experiences. The dimensions of sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste may all be influenced to meet commercial objectives. Based on this research, managers and retail chain outlet owners are advised to evaluate the cleanliness, scent, lighting, and colour of their stores in order to fit the customer's attitudes and views. The scent utilised in retail establishments must be appealing. Customers should be able to easily investigate and handle the things shown.Managers must take into consideration the touch and feel aspect of the store so that consumers are encouraged and motivated to explore more, trust and visit again. It is recommended to play music for creating a soothing environment.

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