

## Original Research Article

# Sensory Branding Leading to Sensory Overload: A Survey Based Study

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### Article History

**Received:** 18.05.2022

**Accepted:** 11.06.2022

**Published:** 19.06.2022

### Journal homepage:

<https://www.easpublisher.com>

### Quick Response Code



**Abstract:** The study aimed to determine if the sensory branding strategy leads to sensory overload in the customers using a self-designed questionnaire. 100 people who were regular visitors to the shopping mall were selected to be a part of this research. A self-designed questionnaire was administered by each one of them. The questionnaire comprised of questions relating to the effects of sensory branding on their shopping experience. Results revealed that when a third sensory element was added to advertising, it led to an increase in perceived arousal and decrease in pleasantness/ attractiveness to the product. As the ROLs suggest, sensory branding establishes both a physical and a psychological connection between the customers and the product. But the store atmospherics can negatively or positively alter the perception and attention of mall customers. Though sensory branding is being used tremendously as a marketing strategy, but large amounts of it can lead to sensory overload & thus the customer's aversiveness to the product. The study concluded that limited use of sensory cues can be effective in attracting the customers to the product whereas adding more elements of sensory cues to the audio visual advertising can lead to sensory overload. Malls make people feel overwhelmed which is associated with the phenomena of sensory overload.

**Keywords:** Customer; product; sensory branding; sensory cues; sensory overload.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to a survey conducted in India, 7% of the population likes to spend more than 4 hours/week at a mall (Statista 2018). This data suggests that the mall takes in a generous amount of customers daily in India. The mall is considered a shopping center and a place to hang out for many people. Thus it becomes imperative for the shopping brands established in a mall to make their brand attract as many customers as possible. For this, a technique called sensory branding is adopted by the shopping brands.

As the experiential marketing industry has begun to take precedent over prior marketing methods, organizations learn to capitalize on customer immersion and relationship development through sensory marketing (Douce & Adams 2020). Sensory marketing leverages all five senses to influence perceptions, memories, and learning processes to manipulate consumers' motives, wants, and deportment. The aim is to design a sensory affair that strengthens the

connection with users through a process involving both the rational and emotional parts of the brain, although to varying degrees. As part of this process, the subconscious component facilitates automatic decision-making and behaviors based on lessons learned through past experiences (Insights 2019).

The senses play a crucial role in consumer acumen and bring into play a substantial impact on buying decisions. Sellers have long sought to integrate the senses into brand communications, albeit generally in a limited and partial way. Today, sensory marketing is an essential tool for strengthening the connection between brand and consumer by stimulating all the senses and generating emotions (Bielat 2020).

Creating the right shopping episode—either bodily or online—is an imperative purpose for brands. A catchy experience can forge a stronger connection to the product or service, increase satisfaction, and influence consumers' behavior and frame of mind. As a result, the consumer becomes more lay open to

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purchase a product, pass additional time in the store, has more exhibition to the various categories, and becomes more prone to make subsequent purchases. By initiating this process, the brand also improves its image (Malhotra 1984).

Sensory marketing influences consumers' behavior to give rise to events at each step of the buying exercise: activation of desire, awareness of the product or service, assessment of the product or service concerning other options, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation of use or consumption (Gallagher, Dowsett & Ferrè 2019).

The importance of the five senses in the transmission of perceptions and causation of experiences pivots on the essence of the product or service and the stage of buying behavior in question. However, a higher level of sensory stimulation implies more connections and a finer experience as a rule. As per few pieces of research, the complicity of many senses can have an increased effect on views when the senses in consideration communicate agreeing messages. Alternatively stated, each sensory stimulus reinforces the messages conveyed by all the others, giving rise to more robust, more congruous, and more comprehensive perceptions (Lindenmuth, Breu & Malooley 1980). This consolidated accumulation of sensory impacts improves the consumers' perception, lodging it deeper into their remembrance. Multisensory perceptions facilitate faster product recognition and attribution in response to stimuli and higher processing pace and, consequently, a better assessment of the message (Moreira, Fortes & Santiago 2017).

Vision and touch are acknowledged as the principal senses intricated in the discernment of most products, but they are routinely connected with the more practical purposes and with a mainly responsive process. The normally marginal valued senses of taste, smell, and hearing contribute a more emotional component in the generation of experiences and have a greater impact on loyalty.

A crucial part of sensory branding is expanding a brand's sensory signature—the prevailing opinion of a product, brand, or service. The sensory signature points out and differentiates the product and conveys the main message that the marketers wish to communicate to the market (Petit, Velasco & Spence 2019).

The sensory signature sums up a product's place and foremost competitive edge. Choosing this signature is consequently an important decision for any brand name. There are few requisites for a sensory signature: the sense chosen must be appropriate for conveying the category to a particular consumer group, and, essentially, the signature must convey the brand's distinctive value manifesto. Considering those two

requirements are met, any sense can become a sensory signature.

A brand's sensory design is made through varied marketing pursuits, together with the details of the product as such (name of the product, brand/company, packaging strategy used, formula, and others), how it is conveyed through advertising, promotions, sales arguments, and actions associated with the point of sale like location, and merchandising.

However, different industries show different expectations. While multiple-sense ads for unhealthy food were shown to be more effective than single-sense ads, for healthy food, single-sense ads increase taste perceptions and advertising effectiveness compared to multiple-sense ads. Single-sense ads evoke fewer negative thoughts than multiple-sense ads, which mediate the effect of single-sense versus multiple-sense ads on taste perceptions and advertising effectiveness. Moreover, these effects occur not only for verbal ads but also for visual ads, which are omnipresent today (Roose & Mulier 2020).

However, introducing cues into a store environment may also trigger sensory overload due to too much stimulation (Douce & Adams, 2020). This can lead to sensory overload. Sensory overload is a marked increase in the intensity of stimuli over the average level. This overload disrupts the cerebral processing of information and decreases the meaningfulness of the environment (Lindenmuth, Breu & Malooley 1980). This can promote a rise in perceived arousal and a decrease in perceived pleasantness (Douce & Adams, 2020).

So in this research paper, we aim to find out the perception of people about sensory branding & the strategies used by various brands, specifically at a mall. We try to find out how many senses appear appealing to the customer and how many senses cause an overload.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: Sensory Branding leads to sensory Overload in the Customers going to the mall.

H0: Sensory Branding does not affect the sensory system of the customers going to the mall.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

100 Indian people aged 18-60 years from Delhi, India, with no history of sensory processing Disorders, who were regular visitors to the shopping malls, were selected to participate in this research. A questionnaire was designed comprising of questions relating to the effects of sensory branding on their shopping experience like 'how often do you see sensory cues being used in the branding of a product?', 'Which sensory cue attracts you as a customer?', 'What product with the use of sensory branding seems approachable for you?' and similar questions.

The questionnaire was provided to all the participants in the form of Google Forms. It took 10 minutes to administer the questionnaire. The questions were supposed to be answered by choosing the most appropriate choice from the options available. The responses were scrutinized thoroughly, and data analysis was conducted to find out the results.

**Questionnaire**

Rating: 5: Every time; 4: most of the time; 3: Enough to notice; 2: Rarely; 1: almost never

1. How often do you visit the mall?

- >1 hour/week
- >2 hours/week
- >3 hours/week
- >4 hours/week

2. How often do you see sensory cues being used in the branding of a product?

- 5
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1

3. Which sensory cue attracts you as a customer?

- Audio-visual
- Tactile (Sense of touch)
- Gustatory (sense of taste)
- Olfactory (sense of smell)

- Vestibular (sense of movement)

4. What product with the use of sensory branding seems approachable for you?

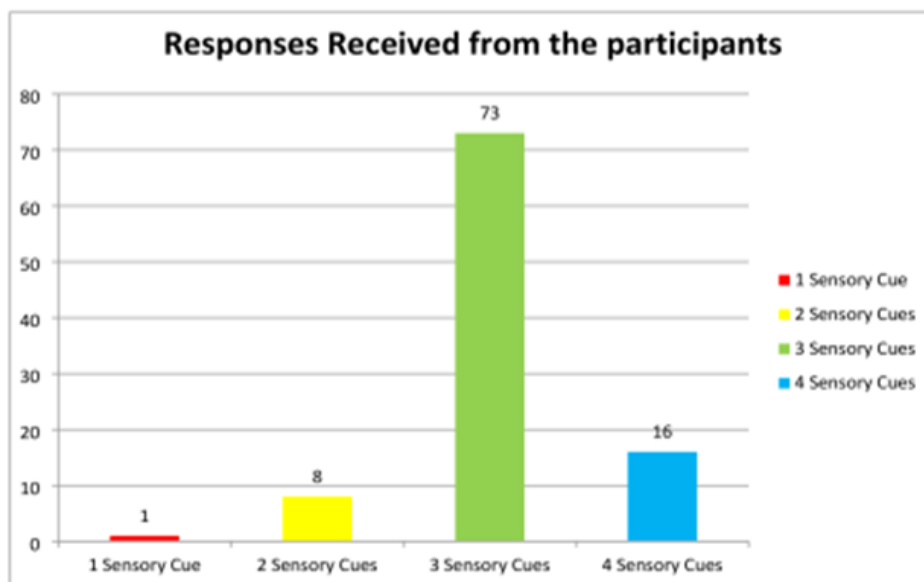
- Food items
- Electronic gadgets
- Motor Vehicle
- Facial products/ Cosmetics
- Clothing

5. How many Sensory cues lead to sensory overload?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- >4

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Data Analysis points out that 73% of the customers felt that when a third sensory element was added to an advertisement, it made them feel overwhelmed, leading to an increase in perceived arousal and decreased pleasantness/ attractiveness to the product, thus leading to Sensory Overload (Figure 1). Responses reveal that Audio-Visual was the most common form of Sensory Cue used for Sensory Branding in the malls, followed by Tactile, Vestibular, Olfactory and Gustatory Sense (Figure 2).



**Figure 1: Bar diagram showing Comparison of the number of Sensory cues Leading to sensory overload as per the responses from the participants**

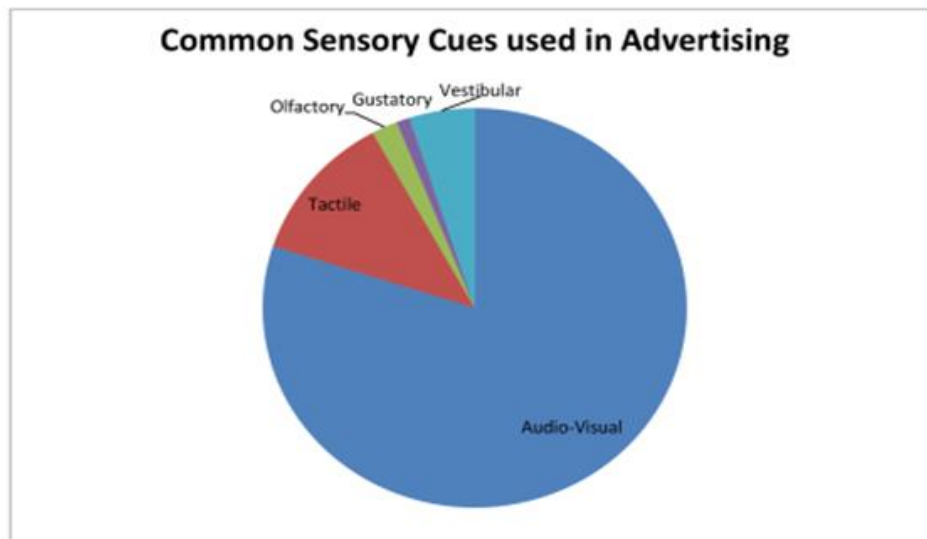


Figure 2: Pie chart Showing Common Sensory cues used in advertising by the participants

The shopping brands most commonly used Audio-Visual mode of sensory advertising at the mall as per the customers' responses. The data also revealed that the Gustatory sense was the least used sensory cue for sensory branding.

It was also found that the customers were more attracted to the food items when sensory branding was used to grab the customers' attention.

The study contributes to our understanding of the use of sensory branding strategy in a mall and its perception of it. Notably, the present study extends the literature by examining the common perception of customers explicitly relating to the sensory cues used, which is currently part of minor literature compared to the research on sensory branding.

The study investigated if sensory branding leads to sensory overload in customers going to a mall. A sample of 100 customers was identified and asked to fill the survey questionnaire. Audio-Visual was the most commonly used sensory cue in the sensory branding strategy. Moreover, adding >2 sensory cues can lead to sensory overload. Hence, the experimental hypothesis is proved by rejecting the null hypothesis.

In the earlier times, conversations with customers were essentially monologues—companies just talked at consumers. Then they evolved into dialogues, with customers providing feedback about their shopping experience. Now they're becoming multidimensional conversations, with products finding their voices and consumers responding viscerally and subconsciously to them (Harvard Business review 2015).

Three chief dimensions of activity have developed in the field of sensory marketing. The first

area mainly focuses on creating buyer and user experiences through what is known as 360° sensory marketing, intending to influence every stage of the buyer's behavior. The second area involves harnessing all five senses integrated, aligning the entire sensory experience towards a single objective. Furthermore, finally, the third area involves using the senses to consolidate the brand, emphasizing one predominant, identity-shaping sense—that is, a sensory signature (Insights 2019).

For almost 20 years, sellers in various industries have been developing proficiency in connecting to consumers through five senses—learning to utilize cues. Few pieces of research focus on the concept of embodied cognition—the scheme that even without our conscious awareness, we can use our bodily sensations in helping to determine the choices we can make. Like, people who hold warm beverages for a brief period were more likely to think that a stranger was friendly than people who had held a cold beverage, as demonstrated by the experiment of Lawrence E. Williams and John A. Bargh. According to findings of researchers led by Xun (Irene) Huang, of Sun Yat-sen University, warm atmospheric temperatures elicit people to conform to a crowd.

Responses about the nonconscious stimuli can be compelling, according to S. Adam Brasel. This statement can be explained with a variety of examples. Wine tastes better in a wine glass than in a water glass; an ad showing a piece of cake is more engaging when the fork is placed to the right of the cake; the smell of cinnamon makes a heating pad seem to work better. The senses amplify the effect of one another when they are compatible in some way. Cinnamon is suggestive of warmth. Therefore it is believed that it can improve a heating pad's attractiveness and seeming efficacy. Such influences are of smaller grade but are powerful.

Customers don't consider them as marketing messages and therefore don't react with the usual resistance to ads and other promotions.

Imagining sensory environments is commonly used in some industries, such as the food industry, the cosmetics industry, and the hospitality industry. This can be shown with an example. Hershey's, a famous chocolate brand, shows that people's tactile pleasure from unwrapping the foil around a Kiss chocolate can transform any piece of chocolate into an extraordinary experience together. Nevertheless, many companies are thinking much beyond. A similar concept can be observed in the case of Dunkin' Donuts in South Korea: When a company jingle played on municipal buses, an atomizer released a coffee aroma. The campaign increased visits to Dunkin' Donuts outlets near bus stops by 16% and sales at those outlets by 29%.

According to Lieve Douce & Carmen Adams, when a third high arousal cue is added, sensory overload happens under the condition that this third cue is processed by a higher sense (i.e., visual or auditory sense). The findings and results of this study were consistent with the existing literature. The current study is the first to analyze the same in customers belonging to Delhi, India.

The results were consistent with the information gathered from the referenced ROLs. Sensory branding establishes both a physical and a psychological connection between the customers and the product. But the store atmospherics can negatively or positively alter the perception and attention of mall customers.

Though sensory branding is being used tremendously as a marketing strategy, large amounts of it can lead to sensory overload & thus the customer's aversiveness to the product.

Every company should be thinking about their marketing designs holistically, using the bodily senses to help create and intensify a brand image that consumers will adore and will never forget.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that limited use of sensory cues could effectively attract the customers to the product, whereas adding more sensory cues to the audio-visual advertising can lead to sensory overload. Malls make people feel overwhelmed, which is associated with the phenomenon of sensory overload.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

**Ethical clearance:** Verbal consent and written consent were taken from each participant who participated in the study.

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