

# ANALYSIS OF SENSORY MARKETING ON CONSUMERS AT RETAIL STORES

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**Abstract:** In order to be forever etched in the minds of customers, Retail Store owners use Sensory Marketing techniques to provide a holistic experience to them at stores. How much a product or service is perceived by a customer is referred to as a sensory experience. The experience of a customer in a store has a huge impact on their buying decision and the image that the customer has of the company. In order to provide an experience that stays with the customers, retailers use techniques to influence the sensory experience of customers in a store. These experiences are results of external stimuli to our senses of touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing. This paper aims to study the factors that impact the holistic experience of consumers at a store. It aims to understand which sensory experience is of utmost importance to a customer in terms of providing a holistic sensory experience. An effort is also done to identify and assess the holistic sensory experience of Indian retail industry customers, as well as to determine their understanding of sensory marketing strategies used in such retail shops.

**Keyword:** Retail Industry India, Sensory Marketing, Retail stores, Sensory experience.

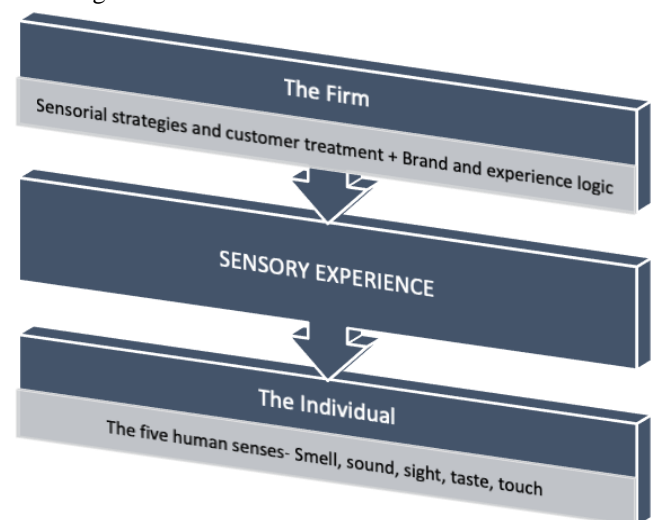
## Introduction

American Marketing Association describes sensory marketing as “marketing strategies aimed at seducing customers through the use of their senses to influence their feelings and actions.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, sense is “any of the senses, such as sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch, by which humans and animals experience stimuli from outside or inside the body.” The definition of sensory marketing can be described as “marketing which involves and affects the senses of consumer’s vision, judgement and behaviour.” (Krishna, 2012, p. 332)

Modern life today introduces us to different goods, services, concepts, images, brands and ads. Firms find it incredibly difficult to affirm customer interest and make their products or services unique from other firms. This is of the great importance that businesses create and establish a positive and beneficial presence in the eyes of their consumers. The latter’s choice for products and services isn’t just a rational judgement, rather it strongly depends on the knowledge component in that very decision. It is therefore important at a certain point to impact the decision of the client in interests of

the organization. Though it can be possible when the customer becomes naturally attracted and connected to the business or brand when there is such a stimulating sensory experience. It is also necessary to note, in addition, that a mere one sensory input is not always enough. Scent study focused primarily on the effectiveness of ambient scent in retail stores (Guéguen & Petr, 2006; Hirsch, 1992; Knasko, 1992; Mattila & Wirtz, 2001) and malls (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005).

In fact, the lack and limitations of empirical investigations have been noted to interrogate further studies in settings other than the retail stores and specifically on the compatibility of gender and scent differences. Full sensory experience must be provided to the consumer in order for a consumer to have a total sense experience. A visual representation of how firms use sensory experiences to impact the consumer’s senses is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Sensory marketing**

Source: An Illustrative representation of the process of Sensory marketing adopted by retail stores- Author’s representation of Hulten et al., model (2008)

One should always understand what the various types of sensory elements before are understanding what sensory marketing is. The five senses usually targeted in a campaign for marketing are: hearing, taste, smell, sight and touch. In Shabgou & Daryani's (2014) words, "Sensory marketing is an approach to customer experience, cognition, emotion, learning, desire, choice, or assessment of the understanding of sensation and perception within the marketing field."

## Sensory Elements and their Role in Sensory Marketing

Vision or hearing is among sensory marketing's most researched domains (Rajain et al., 2017). According to Bradford (2017), "It is a dynamic mechanism to see or experience things through the eyes." Over the course of the day, people are subjected to a thousand external stimuli and the brain functions. Color research has shown that some shades in advertising contribute to optimistic attitudes, but shades and colors are still unexplored facets of vision. (Elder et al., 2010).

Hearing is one that needs negligible effort to function, that is, Humans have zero command over the noise they hear, the sounds reach their ears. They do, indeed, also have impact on the stimuli they choose to take part in. Though we may not have the power of what we hear, we have the power of what we hear (Rajain et al., 2017). When selecting the music to be played in a store, consideration must be given to the appropriate fitting and suitability. "If popular music is to be played in separate parts, the various themes of music will most definitely not be associated with each other" (Elder et al., 2010).

It is assumed that Olfaction or sense of smell is indeed an exceptionally important and efficient sensory marketing element. It's assumed that our nose has a really good memory. Most of the time, Fragrance has a very powerful impact on customer behaviours and perceptions in a shop, in all ways directly, with respect to those saturated with the products available in the shop itself. (Rajain et al., 2017).

As research, the sense of touch or tactile is yet in an embryonic phase. In comparison to the sense of smell or hearing, the customer should take every opportunity to experience the haptic stimuli in this element. In Peck and Childers' (2003) words, "the need for touch arises for two reasons, first as an instrumental necessity and second as an autotelic or fun touch." Such component is often not accessible or achievable, although in the internet marketing domain, for example, contact is one element that the organisation cannot provide.

In the sensory marketing domain this aspect too has not been well researched. Previous literature on this cognitive aspect indicates that "many taste sensations are primarily effective, with cognitive or informative components mutating enjoyment during consumption" (Rajain et al., 2017).

Sensory marketing plays a significant role when it comes to making buying decisions and therefore offers a strong opportunity for the company to increase its profitability. This concept can be defined as a "marketing technique that involves consumers' senses and affects their perceptions, judgments,

behaviours and decisions.". (Krishna, 2012, p.322) Consumer choice is, consciously and unconsciously, believed to depend primarily on processes, with the influence of unconsciousness being particularly significant. The interest of businesses in sensory marketing has increased in recent years. When examining the impact emotions have on consumers, Schmitt differentiated the senses as essential variables for businesses to help differentiate itself from the others and generate demand for their products and services. A concept focused on customer experience was developed covering "sense experiences" (senses), "affective experiences" (feelings), "creative cognitive experiences" (thinking), "physical experience," "experiences of action and lifestyle" ("experiences of social identity" arising from reference groups or cultures (relating). (Schmitt 2002)

Various researches have been pursued in the past to examine efficacy of sensory sensations in particular in the form of ads, in terms of a specific consumer approach. (Krishna et al., 2016). Evidence has been presented for the effect that contact salience, (Peck and Childers, 2006) in-store fragrance (Spangenberg et al., 2006) and background music (Milliman, 1986) has on customer behaviour.

## Literature Review

### 3.1 Sensory Marketing and the five sensory elements

While talking about retail outlets, retail service outlets are also of utmost importance. Service outlets like restaurants, salons etc show great potential to employ sensory marketing techniques that can help retailers to lure, capture and retain their customers. A diagrammatic representation of the impact of sensory marketing on customers is shown in Figure 2. Elangovan, Padma (2017) in their paper mentioned the importance and impact of the image of the retail store on the whole customer experience. Referencing the longevity of the coffee shop industry, following its former rapid growth, it's been observed that the food and coffee shop industry, in particular, has reached its point of saturation. Not only globally renowned chains, but also those belonging to famous individual brands were facing heat. (Jang and Lee, 2019). Many scholars have studied marketing strategies for these coffee houses, emphasising strategies focused on consumer relationships (Chiang, 2018), strengthening brand awareness (Rahmah et al., 2018), and social responsibility of the businesses. Customers nowadays demand the vast array of consuming the purchase experiences (Kuczamer-Klopotowska, 2017). Kim and Jung (2018), stated that "modern consumers tend to focus more on sensory experiences that are unique in nature". (Yoon et al., 2018).

In their case study of KFC, Randhir et al. (2016), they concluded, upon

the basis of qualitative and quantitative study, which states that the sense of smell has the utmost importance in the target market of KFC. About 75 percent of the emotions which customers experience happen due to the smell. (S. Bell and C.P Bell, 2007). Smell creates a linear relationship linking directly to the feelings of pleasure, hunger and affection. We

cannot toggle off these sensory signals. (Willkie, 1995 and Vlahos, 2007). People are expected to have the ability to effectively recall scents coupled with prolonged, old, forgotten incidents. (Feldman, 2009). Thus, whenever a consumer does not have a pleasant experience in a retail store, they will remember every time they feel a scent close to what they felt in a retail store.



**Figure 2: Experiences and Customer Value**

Source: Author’s representation of Elangovan, Padma model (2017)- Conceptual framework of relationship between 5 senses and consumer behaviour

of a commodity at the point of sale (Spangenberg and Henderson, 1996). Females are thought to be more sensitive to smell than men. (Gay and Hirsch, 1991).

Visual marketing (sight) is claimed to be the most effective way of delivering sensory marketing messages to consumers (Lindstorm, 2005). For instance, people mostly connect red to Coca-Cola as well as McDonalds, yellow to Kodak, KFC is red and white. As per Randhir et al., ( 2016), many iconic brands are acknowledged for their primary colour.

It is said in the auditory marketing (sound) case, "the efficacy of a selling environment depends on the ability it has to help control the customer's subjectivity". (Celier, 2004). Whichever firm strives to create a jingle so recognizable that it automatically reminds the consumer of the product or company when the jingle is played. Music has quite a tremendous capacity to contextualise various articles and support various emotional states and behaviours. (Gumperz, 1977, DeNora, 1986) This can act as a significant force throughout the buying process when music is linked to a product. High-volume music in bars and clubs has been shown to increase customers' alcohol intake. (North and Hargreaves, 1996).

Another very important aspect of sensory marketing is **Olfactory Marketing** (smell). It is said that the ability to smell is the only one out of all our senses which provides the link immediately to the mind. As per Dr. John Medina (2008), "The most famous olfactory marketing strategy, especially in the food business, would be to use fake odours to cater to customers on the highways, markets and subway stations."

Tactile marketing (touch) believes that the package of the product can have a substantial effect on brand awareness. The drive to select, check, feel, experience stuff is huge, and to drive it forward, companies are trying to position their products strategically. In restaurants, the firmness of the tissues on the table, the weight and reliability of cutlery, the warmth of seats all have an effect on the customer's perception of the atmosphere because, contact becomes a very important

deter  
minant of a feeling of well-being. (Rieunier et al. (2002)

### 3.2 Building brand value towards Sensory Marketing

Nadanyiova et al. (2018) provides a comprehensive relevant literature in this field of sensory experiences, its marketing and the integral role not just for igniting the brand recall or recognition but also building consumer loyalty. A brand can be defined as a product specification that enables it to distinguish it from other products. Hulten et al, (2009), wrote about the change from mass marketing to sensual marketing within the consumer scenario. Rajain et al. ,(2014) offered a context to influence senses and have expectations of consumers. The Danish researcher Lindstrom (2010) clarified the five market senses of business response. Derval & Diana (2010) has helped us to understand and reveal consumer behaviours and preferences in the senses domain, to fine-tune the position and to select different markets.

Rybanska et.al. (2014), stressed that the modernization of the individual marketplace treats sensory marketing mostly as newly developed marketing scheme focused on the interaction between brands and customers utilising human senses. Sensory marketing has a lasting influence on consumers, influencing consumers through images , sounds or other sensory marketing aspects (Vysekalova et al., 2014).

#### Objectives

Reviewing various papers of researchers who have studied Sensory marketing in retail stores, has revealed certain gaps in research which this paper aims to fill. While framing the objectives for this paper, these research gaps were taken into consideration. It was noticed that no such research about a holistic experience in a retail store in India has been conducted. The existing researchers talk about only specific senses being targeted by researchers but none considering all five senses. All the senses involved and their impact on the retail industry in India, not a single study was conducted. Research papers were also noted to include respondents who were split into various age group showing a trend the way respondents reacted to stimulus of various senses. Although, there wasn't any particular study which was focussed on the age factor.

The following targets were determined for this research paper, taking into account the differences in the current studies performed on the Indian retail industry:

1. To assess whether age is correlated with the receipt of sensory experiences and sensory marketing awareness, thus helping to define the sensory marketing target audience.

2. To define which sensory experiences in retail stores have the biggest effect on the overall experience.

#### Methodology

The primary study approach was focused on questionnaires. The questions were framed, and the assumption of past research was referenced through following papers. (Cherish and Jony,(2011), Spangenberg et al.,(1996), Jang & Lee(2019), Randir et al.,(2016), Elangovan & Padma (2017)

There were 15 questions in the questionnaire, differentiated in two separate parts wherein the first had general questions about demographic, whereas the next section had the questions related to the different senses experiences in a retail store. Challenging questions were included in the effort to know the perception, awareness and rating of the different sensory elements that constitute a holistic experience of the respondents with sensory marketing. The study can be compared to the technique used by (Erenkol & Merve(2015), Franziska et al., (2018), Jang & Lee(2019)

The questionnaire was based on all the sensory sensations that customers are exposed to at retail stores. Based on the perception of the music played at the retail stores that the respondents had, the auditory experience (sound) was checked. The tactile perception (touch) was tested by knowing the shopping aisles' texture, walls, billing counters, etc. The experience with Olfactory (smell) depended on the scents/fragrance the owners used in their stores. The visual experience was based on the infrastructure, the display, and the presentation of the product. The taste experience was assessed directly on the retail services of the restaurant by the real effect on the respondents of the taste of the food. A basic question was posed to evaluate the degree of awareness of sensory marketing techniques among all ages. The questions helped to clarify and describe a rise in age awareness.

There were 433 respondents, mainly from the Indian cities of Kolkata, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Delhi and Hyderabad, aged between 16 and 60 years. The collected responses were then translated to pointers for analysing. The responses were converted to numerical data which will help in the research. SPSS and MS excel was conducted once the data was cleaned and encoded in a way that was understandable for the SPSS.

The correlation was used in MS excel between age and sensory perception and age and sensory marketing knowledge was conducted following the Cherish and Jony (2011), Jang & Lee(2019), Randhir et al.,(2016), Spangenberg et al. (1996), approach. A logistic regression analysis has been used and a hypothesis test was carried out to help establish associations between variables of the study. (Cherish and Jony,(2011), Spangenberg et al.

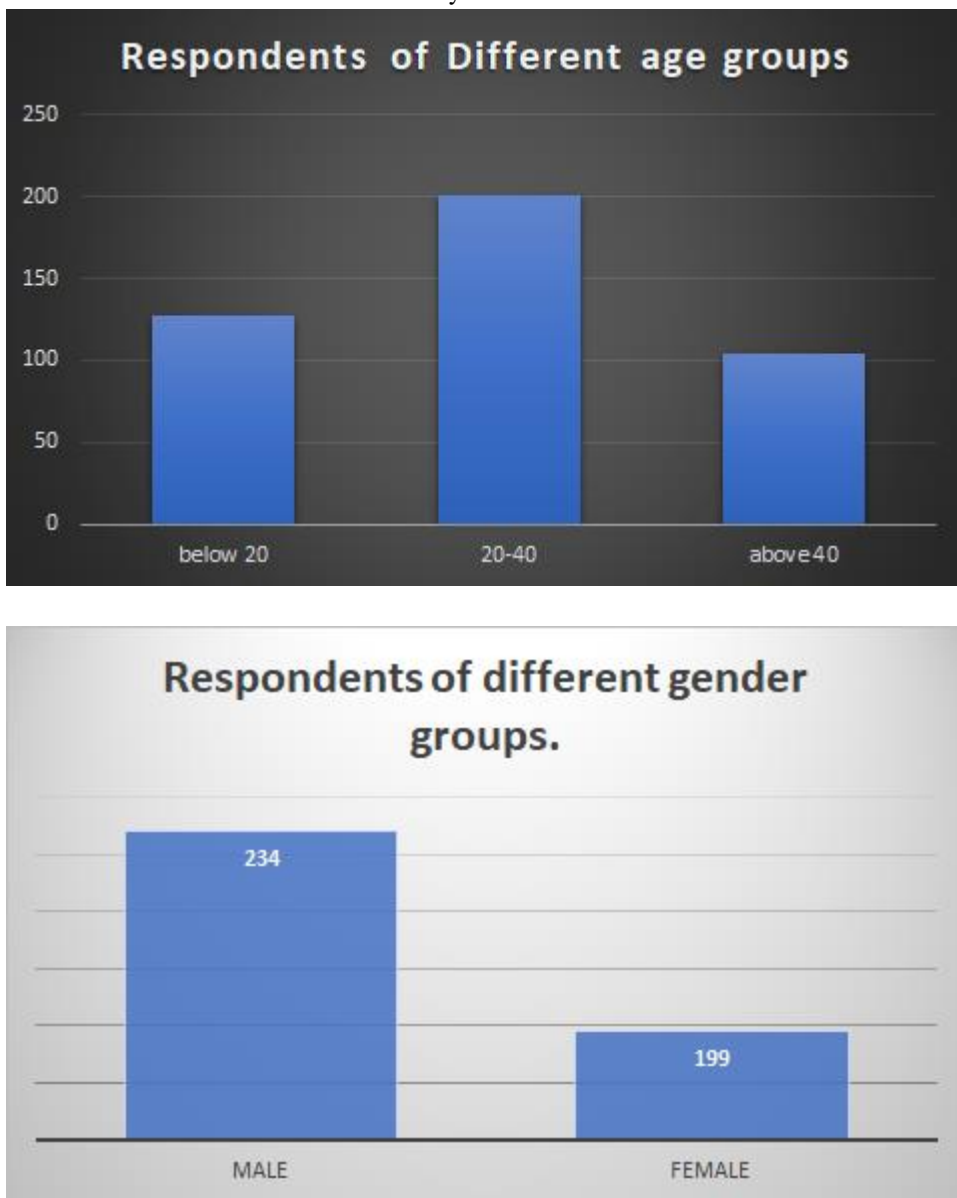
6), Randhir et al.,(2016), Elangovan and Padma (2017)).

**Findings and Analysis**

A survey with 433 questionnaire respondents was conducted to examine the human understanding of the subject and their perception about sensory marketing knowledge. All the respondents at a retail store were divided into three categories based on their age group, <20 years, 20-40 and >40 years, and questions were asked about their different sensory

experiences. The idea behind this exercise was to identify which age group responds better to sensory marketing and is most influenced by it.

Out of the total respondents, 234 were male respondents and 195 were female respondents, of which 128 were under 20, 201 were between 20 and 40 years of age, and the remaining 104 were above 40 years of age. The following figure shows the distribution of respondents across different categories.



**Figure 3: Sample Characteristics**

A correlation analysis was performed to clarify whether there was a significant association between age of the participant

and their holistic sensory experience. The outcome of the correlation study is outlined in the following table.

	Sensitivity towards sensory experiences	Age
Sensitivity towards sensory experiences	1	
Age	0.7149568948	1

**Age and Sensory Experiences**

Based on the results of the analysis it can be said that there exists a direct positive relation between respondents' age and sensitivity to sensory marketing. A respondent is better able to understand and register the sensory experiences they're going through with an increase in age.

This phenomenon is possible as customers are exposed to a greater range of stimuli at a younger age (under 20 years), on the internet or through physical interactions as till this age, it's really hard for mind to identify a specific experience with a brand or product. Repeated exposure over a period of time is required for stimuli to be recognised by human to relate it with a specific brand. As sensitivity for understanding various types of stimuli is still emerging at a younger age, it becomes difficult to associate a certain scent, taste, sound, or sight with a certain brand. With age, the brain unconsciously associates sensory experiences to a better location, brand, or product, gaining better sensitivity.

Logistic regression is run to determine the relationship between the dependent variable (Y) and the independent variable. The dependent variable (Y) represents Holistic sensory experience in retail stores and the independent variables are five sensory experiences, namely visual experience, olfactory experience, auditory experience, tactile experience and taste experience.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{sight}) + \beta_2 (\text{smell}) + \beta_3 (\text{touch}) + \beta_4 (\text{hearing}) + \beta_5 (\text{taste}).$$

Here,  $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2...$  etc are coefficients of the respective independent variables.

Following are the null and alternate hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: Each and every factor of sensory marketing has the equal impact on the customer experience in the retail stores.

H<sub>a</sub>: Different factors of sensory marketing have different impacts on the customer experience in the retail stores.

The following table showcases the results that were generated after running the mentioned statistical model in SPSS version 23

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Sight	.467	.209	5.020	1	.025	1.596
smell	.378	.209	3.267	1	.071	.685
taste	.036	.070	.258	1	.611	.965
touch	.030	.069	.185	1	.667	.971
hearing	.140	.170	.678	1	.410	.869
Constant	.613	.913	.451	1	.502	1.846

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing.

**Figure 6: Representation of the output of Logistic Regression in SPSS**

We can write the equation as:

$$Y (\text{Holistic sensory experience in a retail store}) = 0.613 + 0.140 (\text{hear}) + 0.467 (\text{sight}) + 0.378 (\text{smell}) + 0.036 (\text{taste}) + 0.030 (\text{touch})$$

The findings tell us that all the sensory components have a positive effect on the overall sensory experience in retail stores. Customers are exposed to every sensory input when they're in a retail outlet. Considering the level of significance, it is observed that at 95% confidence level, sight is significant and at 90% significance smell is significant. One plausible reason could be that people capture the visual of the place as soon as they enter it. The study explains the prevalence of the Olfactory and the Visual senses in the store and the retail industry.

**Conclusion**

This study offers valuable insights, it indicates us that as the person ages, when customers don't really know much about sensory marketing strategies, it is observed that they respond

better to such strategies, thus illustrating the popular assumption that the few novel marketing techniques (such as reverse psychology and sensory marketing) suits the best wherein the consumer is unaware about the technique used. The respondents belonging to age of 40-60 had less understanding of sensory ads, and the association study found that this age group was more sensitive to sensory interactions at the same time. This offers a clear insight into how it is not possible to neglect consumers in marketing in the higher age groups as focusing on them will produce the best results. On the other hand, since this community is knowledgeable and more enthusiastic about experimenting with new sensory experiences, a greater awareness of sensory marketing among younger participants can also be experimented by marketers.

In addition, each and every sense has a beneficial effect on the overall retail stores experience. This suggests that businesses in this area would do well to incorporate the elements of all sensory elements into their offerings. This really is similar to the findings of

Wiedmann et al. (2018), a multi-sensory brand experience that highlights the importance of multi-sensory marketing in the scope of luxury resorts and hotels. The significance of all specific attributes in branding, attracting and keeping the customer is often seen by Nandanyiova et al., (2018) through analysis on sensory marketing's literature review.

In their KFC case study, Randhir et al (2016) found that sound and smell were important, showing the olfactory senses value in restaurants, which was also highlighted in this research. The fragrance of the food and the sounds in the place have a significant effect on the whole experience in any restaurant (Jang and Lee, 2019). In a coffee shop, the scent we smell is very different from the scent we experience in any Mexican restaurant or a bakery. Likewise, in a family retail store, the music we hear is somewhat different from the music we hear in a nightclub. In the study conducted by Laimona and Jurgita (2019), music and sound have had a high impact. Though our research has shown similar conclusions, however, according to our analysis, sight has the maximum impact, followed by smell and hearing in a retail store.

To conclude, we may assume that sensory marketing has grown and is of great importance to companies in modern times. The studies showed a strong pattern and it can be inferred that over time the target market gets stronger and more prone and thus the respondents of age more than 60 are more favoured for a sensory marketing strategy to be carried out. Studies have also shown that sight, smell, and hearing have the highest effect on retail shops. This awareness would allow marketers to concentrate their marketing efforts on areas that matter most, make the marketing process more efficient and reach the right consumer audience as well.

Unless it stimulates our senses, a retail store is just another shop for a person. The sensory experience that it gives us is what makes a place special. Thus it is an interesting and beneficial exercise that can be used by companies to increase sensory experiences and, in turn, by the retail stores to understand which sensory factors affect the most and which have the least effect.

### Future Research Scope

While this analysis offered new insights into customer's attitudes towards a novel concept of marketing, the study had some limitations. The research only included India's respondents. The research was focused on people's ability to remember their experiences while visiting a branded retail shop, which might not be fully correct every time. The focus of this research was limited to Indian retail stores. However, the retail market consists of e-commerce portals, small non-branded stores and other similar types.

Undoubtedly, sensory marketing is a new trend in advertising which has been focussed by various studies on its importance, there is still significant scope to better understand the field and Enable marketers to understand the full strength of their brand value through it. Our analysis of the retail industry in India will be a successful starting point for many more such sensory marketing studies in food and other sectors.

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