

## Investigating the Sensorial Marketing Methods in UK Clothing Retail Sector

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### **Abstract**

*In this study, the leading fashion brand of the UK were investigated in terms of their use of sensorial marketing methods. The researcher used survey method in this research. The research was quantitative in nature; hence the quantitative data is collected by administering a questionnaire to the targeted population that is the customers of the leading brand store in the UK. The study's main purpose was to assess their concerns about sensorial marketing and also to evaluate the consumers' behaviour. The researcher has administered the questionnaire by a web link for Facebook and also by Google docs which is a free service to develop, gather, collect and analyse data. The findings provide significant and appropriate data which is supported by several theories in the literature. Based on the results of the primary research the following two findings are evident: (1) sensorial marketing is not much adoptive technique in the fashion retail sector as it does not use sensorial marketing techniques in order to attract consumers (2) the techniques of sensorial marketing are not only efficient for clothing sector, but also considered as a key success factor for this sector.*

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**Keywords:** *Sensorial marketing, UK retail sector, consumer behaviour*

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### **1. Introduction**

In this context, in the 1990s, the concept of 'sensorial marketing' was introduced. According to the definition of Krishna (2011b), "*sensorial marketing is marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgement and behaviour*" (p2). The objective of sensorial marketing is to know 'how five senses work as well as how these senses develop an intuitive trigger that not only appeals the senses of the customers, but also involve them. The brand can stimulate the customers' senses and make them emotional as well as build a strong connection by understanding the five senses of the buyers. It will ultimately help in achieving these objectives.

According to the authors, sensorial marketing creates a gap in the literature relevant to marketing because further research is required to fully recognise the impact of sensory inputs on the customers. In fact, about 81 research studies have been conducted which mainly

focused on the behaviours of consumers in term of touch, taste, hearing and smell, but only 28 out of 81 researches have been published during the last five years (Elder et al. 2010).

Currently, advertising is widely used in the society and it has become challenging for marketers to grasp the attention of the public. For forty years, various marketing techniques (in which both one-to-one marketing and mass marketing are included) have been used to attract people by fulfilling their choices. In this regard, the needs and wants of the customers are identified and satisfied in order to get their loyalty as customers' loyalty is considered a main source of profit for the company (Costabile, 2000). On the other hand, it can be noticed that number of unsatisfied customers has increased in every industry. Customers are now more confident and informed about their product choice, and therefore customer loyalty is decreasing (Fournier, 1998).

Hence, it is a time when it is not enough to use backward marketing techniques to attract customers. This motivated the researchers to identify and critically assess the current methods of sensorial marketing that are being practiced by clothing sector in the United Kingdom (UK) in order to grab the customers' attention and to attain long term marketing goals. This paper also investigates the effectiveness of the sensorial marketing and its effects on the brand awareness and the customers' purchasing behaviour.

## **2. Literature review**

Sensorial marketing is a way of marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their behaviour (Krishna, 2011a). After receiving positive response from sensorial marketing, the concept of multisensory brand experience was considered by the researchers. Lindström (2005) said that the brands have to transform from 2D model to 5D model. In 2D model, only two dimensions – sound and vision were considered while 5D model enables the customer to access all five dimensions (sound, vision, touch, smell and taste) of the brand.

The five senses, in which sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste are included, are considered in 5D model. But this classification has some limits and it considers only as an anatomic vision of perception: the eyes, the ear, the nose, the hand and the mouth. Moreover, these five senses can be classified in a large number of different psychological systems. However, consumer's behaviour regarding these senses is fixed and it always remains significant for the conception of test and for communication as well.

The literature shows that authors have studied the interaction of the senses or the impact of crossing different senses (Krishna, 2011a). For instance, Balaji et al (2011) stated that the attitudes of the customers towards a brand can be improved and increased when more than one sense (visual and tactile) is used to provide information about brand. Additionally, they also mentioned that multisensory evaluation of a brand prominently increased the purchase. However, according to Parsons (2011), the relationship between different sensory stimuli (that occur in different dimensions) has significant impact on both the brand and the fashion stores.

According to Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2011), each out of five senses can force marketers to build a stronger, better and durable brand. The main objective behind using all five senses is to trigger the touch points of the customers. These touch points can give a unique identity to the brand which cannot be reproduced by any opponent.

### *2.1 Consumer behaviour and sensorial marketing*

According to Pentz and Gerber (2013), now customers have become well aware about the quality of the product, therefore, they use their all the five senses to perceive the product's quality and attached with it emotionally. However, they are unfamiliar with technical terms

like 'sensory marketing' (Valenti and Riviere, 2008). Additionally, the perception of marketing stimuli is based on different cognitive and emotional processes which take place in the customers' minds. Hultén (2012) added that packaging and product such as pleasant smell, modern style, velvety texture, colours and packaging sounds not only derive sensory stimuli, but also influence customer's perception regarding brand which make a stronger association between the customer and the brand.

The behaviours of consumers can be understood completely by understanding sensory memory of the human being and its functions. There are different processes on which human memory is based upon, but sensorial memory is the most imperative as it gets activated when stimuli trigger the human sensory organs (Hoyer, MacInnis and Pieters, 2012). Philippe et al (2009) defined emotional memories as the memories of the past events or experiences which have triggered the senses emotionally and then being stored in mind as a memory. It is a fact that in the human memory, the experiences are registered for the entire life. In other words, it can be said that all the past experiences which have stored in the sensory memory can influence the future experiences and reactions (Philippe et al., 2009).

Stimulating senses have some special effects not only on the consumers' perception regarding product and brand, but also on the buying behaviour of the customers. Soars (2009) discussed the effects of sensorial marketing and stated that if sensorial marketing is applied correctly, it calms, energises, distresses and relaxes the customers as well as influences their decisions, improves their moods and thus motivates them to spend money. Additionally, it has positive impacts on the future time. Soars (2009) further added that stimuli can change consumers' behaviour unconsciously, improve the experience of buyers and affect environments. Indeed, the customers commonly use all of their senses at the same time in order to perceive a brand; therefore, they engage themselves towards a brand as much as they have sensory experiences for it.

However, it is estimated that the concept's life cycle has been reduced and existing components have been outdated either due to the acceleration of sensorial information or because of the increasing rates of organisation establishment. If the renovation cost of the concept is high, then the turnover also increases between 15-45 percent (Giboreau and Body, 2012). At last, the company allows its products to go beyond the surprising experiences by renovating its brand and also by transporting it to another world. Hence, it is a challenge for the sensorial marketing to recognise the behaviour of the consumer because it is an affective and emotional element which creates customers' preferences.

Now, it is a time for the marketers to pay attention on the sensory means (atmosphere of stores, texture sounds derive by their products and scents of products,) of marketing rather than on the traditional means (personal selling, public relations, sales promotion, and advertising). Sensorial marketing is a new and emerging concept in which creative synergy is involved between psychology, marketing, neuropsychology and neuroscience. Hence, according to Krishna, Elder and Caldara (2010), it is essential for the marketers to understand this emerging concept and must use knowledge about this topic in the related research studies in order to provide customers a unique buying behaviour which will ultimately enhance the profitability of the products.

## *2.2 Sensory marketing in clothing retail sector*

Clothing brands are willing to design sensorial marketing strategy as in the environment of the stores, it is considered as an emotion vector. According to Lindström (2010), the clothing sector has initially introduced the use of music in their stores to catch the customers' attention, and then changed the layout of stores. Nowadays, they are introducing the use of

pleasant scents in their store's atmosphere. Except New Look, all this recent progress in sensorial marketing is non-branded. Solomon (2010) affirmed that the customers will be willing to pay more when the brand identity will be stronger. In case of selected brands, it has a strong identity of the brand that is why; customers can easily pay £50 for a top.

Moreover, according to Parsons (2011), most of the clothing stores are still adopting traditional concepts and more importantly, are focusing on the typical flooring, lightings, adornment and ceilings while some stores in the fashion retail sector have adopted a thematic approach and increasingly focusing on their stores' environments. For products such as clothes, sensorial marketing favours emotional behaviour and stops rational behaviours as Lindström, (2008) disclosed that about 90% customers buy clothes unconsciously.

As according to Townsend (2015), it is essential for the marketers to keep in their minds that most of the customers, especially women, spend most of their spare time in shopping. Townsend (2015) estimated that women spend about three hours in a week in buying clothes for their children, for their husband and for themselves.

While discussing the store's atmosphere and fashion, recent studies refer to idea of fashion-impulse and fashion involvement behaviour as well as how these behaviours can affect the atmosphere of the fashion stores (Dhurup, 2014). The writer further stated that the behavioural variables relevant to clothing/fashion products (e.g. buying behaviour, product involvement and consumer characteristics) are predicted in fashion involvement. However, Khuong and Tran (2015) added that there is a positive and strong relationship between sensory stimulation and fashion involvement and this relationship can enhance the emotional experience of the customers during shopping.

Additionally, according to Vazifehdooost, Rahnama and Mousavian (2006), there is direct and positive link between fashion-oriented impulse, buying behaviour and positive emotions. They affirmed that spending, purchase intentions and perceptions of satisfaction, value and quality can be affected by in-store emotions. Vazifehdooost, Rahnama and Mousavian (2006) further stated that to predict such behaviour in fashion retail stores, emotional factors, for example, positive feelings are considered an important source.

According to Hultén (2011), nowadays, one of the most competitive weapons is sensorial marketing in the clothing retail sector and a large number of fashion companies have adopted this concept into their business strategies. According to Lorraine (2015) the most visited places for shopping in Paris are Le Printemps (9 millions of visitors) and the Galeries Lafayette (about twenty-six million visitors). By these figures, the author got the customers' viewpoint and makes a sense that shopping is not only a useful activity, but emotions and sensations of customers are also attached with it. Moreover, shopping is considered an authentic activity and it can be educative, favourable to pass the time, funny and aesthetic.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research strategy*

The survey research method was used as it is considered as the most suitable method in management and business research and relates to the deductive approach. The deductive research approach helps the investigator to find answers where, how much, what, who and how many questions. Additionally, survey research method permitted the researcher to gather data in an economical way. In this regard, the information collected from the sample by administering a questionnaire. Furthermore, by using this method, the researcher controls the entire process of the research effectively. In addition to this, Rubin and Babbie (2009) mentioned that in the survey research method, questionnaire is not the only data collection

tool, but the structured interviews and structures observations are also used as data collection tools in this method.

### *3.2 Sampling process*

According to Levy and Lemeshow (2013), in order to get useful and efficient results, it is essential to administer the questionnaire to the relevant sample. Additionally, Levy and Lemeshow (2013) defined sample as a part of a larger population. The researchers planned to collect data by sending 800 questionnaires either via web link or distributed by using social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter). 300 questionnaires were hand distributed in various high street stores including H&M, House of Fraser, JD sports, Next, New Look, Matalan, Mark & Spencer, and Topman. Some questionnaires were also distributed at ASDA and Tesco fashion points. Moreover, 500 web-based questionnaire were sent to customers through their Facebook and Twitter pages in order to maximise the response rate. By using these social sites, the researcher did not only access the diverse market segment, but it also opened a channel for communication where respondents could ask questions and gave their feedbacks about the subject. This method was preferred due to its low cost as well as to avoid the possibility that the email could be treated as spam. Using Facebook can be considered as an impersonal approach, therefore, to avoid such risks, the researcher described the objectives of researcher in the introduction of questionnaire.

### *3.3 Data collection*

The researchers administered a questionnaire to the customers who buy at various clothing stores in UK to collect data. The main objectives were to: identify and assess the current methods of sensorial marketing that are being practiced in the UK to grab the customers' attention. Second aim was to investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of the sensorial marketing critically and to assess the customers' purchasing behaviour.

The researcher administered the questionnaire by a web link for Facebook and also by Google.docs which are the free services to develop, gather, collect and analyse data. Facebook was also used to access the researcher's own previous colleagues and friends. It was self-administered questionnaire as explained by Babbie (2013) where the participants answered the questions without the presence of an interviewer and submitted their responses/answers in a predetermined order.

The questions in the questionnaire were forced-choice (giving a set of different options) and closed (giving a set of different options) (deVaus, 2002). Different types of questions were asked in close ended questions, for example, in contrast category questions, offering a list of responses to the participants and list questions. The questions were categorised so that the responses of participants can perfectly fit in one category only. Additionally, Likert-style rating questions were also added to the questionnaire in order to gather respondents' opinion and to know how she/he agrees with a given statement (Saunders et al, 2012).

## **4. Results and discussion**

Total 573 respondents participated in the survey. According to the research findings of Krishna (2011a), in shaping sensory perceptions, age plays an imperative role because the past experiences of the people are strongly connected to their senses. The findings of this study disclosed that about half of the participants (48%) mentioned their ages between 18 and 25, 44% participants were aged between 26 and 35. While a small group of respondents (8%) were aged between 36 and 50.

### *4.1 Awareness of sensory marketing*

The results also reveal that about 74% respondents were not aware of sensory marketing as they never heard about it while only a small group of respondents (26%) had its knowhow. The results show that the customers were either unaware of those methods which different brands are using to attract them or their favourite brands are not using such methods. This finding is contrasted to the finding of Hultén (2012) as he reported that within the same culture, sensory preferences usually shift from one generation to the other generation. However, the research findings of Valenti and Riviere (2008) disclosed that sensory marketing is still a scientific term for the consumers. Although, they are very much familiar and concerned with the atmosphere of the place and give it higher importance, ~~but~~ they do not know this may possibly lead towards the sensory marketing. This question did not only help to know the awareness of the customers in relation to sensory marketing, but also helped to know that the companies should use sensory marketing in their strategies because it has positive impacts on a customer's perception about the brand.

#### *4.2 Associating clothing brand*

A majority of the consumers about 41% were unable to relate clothing brands to the sensory reminders; this means that the brands only appeal the hearing and sight senses of the customers (Bruner, 1990). On the other hand, it can be seen in the figure that about 40% participants reported that they can associate a brand with a certain visual elements such as with colours, designs, etc. In addition, a small group of respondents (12%) could associate a brand with specific sounds and music. The findings show that the brands do not implement 5-D sensorial marketing strategy; hence, there is an opportunity for the brands to create their sensorial identity in order to attract customers and to leave long lasting effects on their senses (Lindström, 2005).

#### *4.3 Impact of smell on shopping*

Whatever the degree of sensibility the customers have chosen (not sensible, very sensible, somewhat sensible), a scent in the environment of a store equally attracted the customers. A majority of the respondents (56%) reported that they were somewhat sensible with the smell during the shopping. In other words; the respondents can become sensible in identifying the pleasant smell of a brand. Hence, according to the analysis results, it is a big chance for the companies to attract customers by developing their own scents in the stores' environment.

Additionally, half of the respondents (42%) were 'very sensible'. This finding ensures that a smell diffused in the atmosphere of the stores is a key opportunity for the companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors by a certain scent.

According to Howes and Classen (2013), scent marketing is becoming an important tool for all the brands/companies which are searching for some innovative ways to differentiate them from their opponents. In addition, Lindström (2005) stated that customers are more sensible to a smell as compared to the visual cues because a smell is not only directly linked with their memories, but to the limbic system of the brain as well. Moreover, out of five senses, smell is the one that powerfully triggers the memories that ultimately enhance the brand recognition ability of the customers (Solomon, 2010).

#### *4.4 Impact of music on shopping*

Implementing a sound strategy might be a good chance for the companies to attract customers. Moreover, the music branding can add value not only for the stakeholders, but it also can enhance the loyalty of the customers and customer experience by a better brand image. In addition, it is proved as a powerful tool because it has content which encourages

social interaction that ultimately results in customers' loyalty and brand awareness (Costabile, 2000).

During the survey, a majority of the respondents (55%) were 'very sensible' to the music during shopping. However, 40% respondents were 'somewhat sensible', this is a group of respondents who do not remember what type of sound or music is diffused in stores, but they can become very sensible if an identified and prominent sound strategy is used in the stores. On the other hand only 5% respondents were those who were 'not sensible' with the music diffused in the stores. Hence, it can be said that customers want to enjoy their own music during shopping according to their own moods via earphones or headphones.

#### *4.5 Perception of offering snacks*

More than half (60%) respondents appreciated the free offer of snack or drink in the stores during the shopping. In addition, it can be seen as the positive point and can also be considered as a caring behaviour of the stores for their customers because they may need to drink or eat something while shopping and the stores offer them to have some snack or drink for free (Einstein, 2008). This is again another chance for the companies to define their identity and distinguish them from their rivals as the customers will like to collect a gift, a drink or a snack from the company. On the other hand, 38% respondents moderately appreciated this offer. They may think that offering a coffee can become risky in the clothing stores because it may not only spoil the clothes, but also affects the cleanliness of the stores (Lindström, 2010).

#### *4.6 Influence of snacks on buying behaviour*

According to Paulo et al. (2013), there is nothing indifferent in the purchasing behaviour of the young consumers about free snacks or drinks offered in the stores. Although, many researchers have conducted research in this area, ~~but~~ they neglected retail stores and only focused on the supermarket environment.

The results reveal that it is insignificant to offer a snack or a drink in the store to the customers as 49% respondents believed that it may influence their opinions regarding brand. On the other hand 51% respondents affirmed that to get something free from the brand can be a positive point and the majority of the participants appreciated such offers. Hence, it is proved that customers feel good while getting something free from the stores. This result demonstrates a chance for the companies to enhance their brand identity among customers (Ghodeswar, 2008).

#### *4.7 Impact of visual effects on shopping*

A majority of the participants (58) liked to enter in the stores for visual cues or due to attractive colours, lighting and designs. While 34 participants entered because of the music diffused and only 28 participants came into the stores due to the smell. In addition, 12 respondents reported that they entered in the stores because of tactile elements. According to Hultén (2012), there is a positive impact of tactile and visual sensory cues on the purchase intention, touching behaviour of the customers as well as on the total sale. Additionally, it was also confirmed by Wedel and Pieters (2012) that visual marketing exerts a positive influence on customers' wish to touch. Also, other sensory elements such as smell and music catch customer's attention for effective buying behaviour and decision making.

#### *4.8 Receptive sense during shopping*

More than half respondents (75) reported 'sight' as the most receptive sense during shopping. It has been proved that it is the most imperative sense as the companies mostly concentrate on this sense of customers and attract the customers by attracting their sights (Parsons, 2011). On the other hand, the results reveal that touch, hear and smell senses were equally receptive senses. This result can be because of those brands which do not implement sensory cues in order to appeal these three senses. In addition, none of the respondent select taste as the receptive sense because it is the weakest sense and also because the stores rarely appeal this sense of customers (Einstein, 2008).

#### *4.9 Shopping appeal based on senses*

A large number of survey participants (97%) agreed that they will shop again in any store that appeals their senses. This finding indicates that the atmosphere has an impact on the consumers and attract them towards the stores (Parsons, 2011), but it is quite difficult for the marketers to attract customers with a pleasant environment and increase their stay in the stores (Howes and Classen (2013).

The large number of responses in favour of statement asked also confirmed the finding of Vazifehdoost et al. (2014) that customers are usually attracted and inspired by the unique shopping atmospheres. Brand experience of the customers becomes memorable and their buying behaviour is motivated by emotions and storytelling. Thus, the main aim of the sensory analysis in the retail sector should be to identify the major problems which are directly related to the multi-sensory experiences of the customers during shopping, marketing, entertaining, services and sales (Soars, 2009).

#### *4.10 Impact of sensorial marketing on consumer buying behaviour*

The results of this question reveal that the majority of the respondents (56) thought that the methods of sensory marketing not only add value to their shopping behaviour, but also enhance it to some extent. However, 39 participants believed that this method will definitely change their perception regarding a specific brand and this change in perception has a positive impact on a brand. On the other hand, some respondents (37) reported that they felt manipulated while experiencing such methods and the rest of the respondents (13) believed that sensorial marketing is an intrusive technique.

The sensory impressions have direct impacts on the customer's perception regarding services and good and also on the behaviour of the customers. The impact of sensory marketing in the context of brand identity was empirically analysed by Ghodeswar (2008) that adds value to shopping. Hulten (2011) also mentioned that such type of experiences of the customers becomes an image and then form perceptions of inputs in the service process and finally improve the multi-sensory experience in a brand perspective.

The results of this question reveal that a prominent number of respondents felt manipulated while experiencing sensory methods, thus, it is essential for the UK fashion brands to carefully use this method to the customers (Kenneth, 2007). In this regard, the marketers have to concentrate on communicating sensory expressions and sensations which can strengthen multi-sensory brand experience for the consumers. Additionally, according to Krishna et al. (2010), the main aim of sensation is to express the identity of the brand in order to facilitate customers with multi-sensory brand experience.

Hence, the retailers may lose some of its customers and its reputation may be influenced, but it can be seen clearly in the results that the majority of respondents appreciated such methods/ techniques; therefore the selected brands should continue this strategy in order to attract the customers.



## **5. Conclusion**

The current study proves that the clothing retail sector is still focusing on 2D sensory strategy including hearing and visual senses which have been always used in the traditional marketing. The findings of this study allow the researchers to conclude that (1) sensorial marketing is not much adoptive technique in the fashion retail sector as it does not use sensorial marketing techniques in order to attract consumers. However, it has been seen that the majority of the respondents were not aware of sensorial marketing.

The researchers evaluated the number of consumers who were open and sensible to the techniques of sensorial marketing, the results revealed that: most of the participants were sensible to all the five senses; taste, hearing, smell, and touch and sight senses. They reported that they would like to enter in those stores which appeal their senses and it would increase their stay in that store. In addition, they mentioned that such stores would affect their choices regarding brand. Additionally, the majority of the respondents verified that sensorial marketing would add value and improve their shopping. These findings allow the researchers to conclude that(2) the techniques of sensorial marketing are not only efficient for clothing sector, but also considered as a key success factor for the clothing brand.

The researcher has reached the conclusion that usefulness of sensory cues has confirmed in the stores of this company. In addition, the significance of sensory strategy has also been highlighted in the previous literature. The observed brands have verified that sensory strategy helped it not only in attracting customers, but also in developing awareness among them. In addition to this, the literature also affirmed that there is a positive impact on the buying behaviour of customers as they like to spend more time and money in such stores that implement sensory strategy as well as such store changes their moods and opinions on the brands.

Additionally, the literature demonstrated that sensory strategy further enhances the product and brand awareness, loyalty of the customers by a stronger brand identity and establishes a strong relationship between brand and the customers. The customers have confirmed by giving information in the questionnaire that they are sensible to the sensory cues that appeal to their senses. In the results, a surprising interest in taste experience has also discovered in the clothing retail sector. Generally, the customers highly appreciated and welcomed the implementation of sensory techniques in the stores as it has positive impacts on the perceptions of customers regarding brand.

## **6. Recommendations**

Although sensorial marketing is a successful strategy, but its success mainly depends upon the congruent themes of the stores which appeal customers' senses, well defined concept of the store and also on the regular revitalisation of the store's environment. In addition, it is also essential for the retailers to consider the feedbacks and suggestions of the employees and customers in order to improve its store's atmosphere.

Indeed, it is very hard to implement sensory marketing and there is a risk of losing customers if it is not implemented properly. Additionally, it is also important to familiarise the brand to the target group because if store environment can attract customers, it can also make them to avoid the store. Thus, the marketers should consider sensorial marketing as the icing on the cakes since the presentation of the products in the stores mainly attracts the customers and convince them to enter in the stores. The fashion retailers like can implement two differentiation strategies (1) sensory-symbolic differentiation and (2) Sensory-hedonistic differentiation; both strategies are based on sensorial marketing.

Sensory-symbolic differentiation is the strategy which focuses on the brand positioning. The sensory symbols are used in order to support that positioning. These symbols create a strong association in the minds of the customers and then they refused all other related symbols. On the other hand, sensory-hedonistic differentiation is the strategy that aims to concentrate on the sensations of the customers. In this strategy, symbolic attributes are developed according to the customer's sensations in order to make a strong association between the brand and the customers; as a result, the customers get attached to the brand (Giboreau and Body, 2012).

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