



# FACTORS INFLUENCING SENSORY EXPERIENCES IN RESTAURANTS

**Ms. Gracia. A<sup>1</sup>**

Ph.D. Research Scholar, (Reg.no: 19213161012003)  
Scott Christian College, Nagercoil  
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar, university,  
Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamil Nadu

**and**

**Dr. R. Seleena M.com, M.Phil, B.Ed. Ph.D.,<sup>2</sup>**  
Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce  
Scott Christian College, Nagercoil  
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar, university,  
Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli – 627012, Tamil Nadu

## ABSTRACT

The growing trend of consumers seeking immersive experiences rather than just purchasing products. Brands are emphasizing individuality and creating immersive environments to enhance the overall brand experience. The study conducted by the researcher identified the predominant factors that influence customers' sensory experiences in restaurants, including Tactile Experience, Visual Experience, Smell Experience, Hearing Experience, and Taste Experience. The study found that Tactile Experience, Visual Experience, and Taste Experience are the most critical factors, with the attractive atmosphere for dining, the overall color of the restaurants, and enjoyment of the taste of the dishes being of utmost importance. The findings of the study suggest that creating appealing atmospheres and delightful culinary experiences can significantly impact the diners' decision-making process. Therefore, retailers in the restaurant industry can focus on creating unique themes, impressive coloring, lighting effects, and interior designs to make the dining experience memorable. Furthermore, prioritizing the taste, quality, and quantity of the dishes, along with good and fresh aromas and appropriate music, can enhance the overall dining experience. By considering these factors, retailers in the restaurant industry can attract more customers and improve their business.

**Keywords:** Restaurant, Sensory experience, Five senses, Tactile experience, Visual experience, Smell experience, Hearing experience, Taste experience.

**DOI Number:** 10.48047/nq.2022.20.19.nq99518

**Neuroquantology 2022; 20(19):5384-5390**

## INTRODUCTION

Consumers are no longer content with simply purchasing products; they now desire experiences that create lasting memories. Brands are scrambling to provide immersive experiences that engage all five senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch – to take

customer engagement to the next level. While some experts attribute this trend to younger generations, studies have shown that people of all ages now place greater value on experiences than on products or services. This shift is evident in the design of new retail spaces, where brands are emphasizing individuality and

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creating immersive environments to enhance the overall brand experience. Creating a remarkable experience for customers requires a significant amount of effort, particularly for restaurant and retail brands. To achieve this, it is essential to appeal to each of the five senses. While restaurateurs tend to focus on the visual and taste aspects of their establishments, it is important to recognize that the overall environment encompasses much more than just the appearance and flavor of the food. To create a truly exceptional sensory experience, it is crucial to pay attention to the space itself and appeal to customers' sense of sound, smell, and touch, as well. Because restaurant operators cater to a diverse range of customers with varying backgrounds and motivations, it is essential to incorporate enough factors to create a memorable experience.

The results of an empirical study conducted by the researcher identified the predominant factors that influence customers' sensory experiences in restaurants. Understanding these factors could help retailers design their establishments in a unique way that caters to customers' preferences and expectations, ultimately creating a memorable dining experience.

#### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Clarke, D.W., Perry, P., & Denson, H. (2012).** in their paper titled, "The sensory retail environment of small fashion boutiques", seeks to explore the sensory experience of patrons of a small boutique. The researchers used photo-elicitation to examine the experience of the sensory retail environment of patrons of a small fashion boutique in the North West of England. Participants were asked to "show me how it feels to shop here" by taking photographs to depict their sensory in-store experiences. Follow-up interviews were carried out to explore the participants' sensory experiences and then qualitative content analysis was used to identify the typical "likes" and "dislikes" regarding aspects of the sensory environment. The findings of the study reveal that it is not just tangible things that can affect a shopper's experience, but store traits such as smell,

lighting, and presence of owner-manager can also influence a consumer's experience. The identification of sensory touch points in small fashion boutiques helps owner-managers to understand female shoppers and provides a handrail for thinking up new ways of improving shopping experiences.

**Krishna, A., & Schwarz, N. (2014).** their research titled "Sensory Marketing, embodiment, and grounded cognition: A Review and Introduction" explores the role of the senses in consumer behavior. In this study, the authors have discussed some of the key conceptual challenges posed by the research generally appearing under the titles of embodiment, grounded cognition, or sensory marketing. Then they have also addressed the use of bodily feelings as a source of information; next, we turn to the role of context-sensitive perception, imagery, and simulation in consumer behavior, and finally discuss the role of metaphors.

**Stăncioiu, A., Dițoiu, M., Teodorescu, N., Onișor, L., & Pargaru, I. (2014).** in their study titled "Sensory marketing strategies. Case study: Oltenia" explains from the perspective of the tourist, sensory marketing strategies may result in an experience improvement which leads, in time, to acquiring a positive destination image, and, from the perspective of the destination to furthering its harmonious development. Even though it appears that sensory marketing strategies can be considered as alternatives for marketing strategies, they are complementary, and their objective (increasing product quality by "turning to the beginning", where perception and consumer knowledge start), aims to handle the senses of the consumer by starting from the identification of his/her needs.

**Shabgou, M., & Daryani, S.M. (2014).** their paper titled, "Towards the Sensory Marketing: Stimulating the Five Senses (Sight, Hearing, Smell, Touch, and Taste) and Its Impact on Consumer Behavior" introduces sensory marketing as a new paradigm in the field of marketing; attention to the five senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch) and the effect of

these senses on consumer behavior are studied. Findings indicated that the five senses simultaneously affect consumer behavior. Stimulating the senses of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste also affect consumer behavior. Thus, the results indicate that strategic stimulation of the senses of the consumer in the marketing process can be one of the practical methods of companies and retailers to attract customers and increase their loyalty.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To identify the key factors influencing consumers’ sensory experiences in restaurants.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Sample Size**

The sample size for this study comprises 145 participants from a selection of popular restaurants in Nagercoil Town.

**Sampling Technique**

In this research, non-probability sampling was employed. The specific type of non-probability sampling used was convenience sampling, where participants were chosen based on research convenience.

**Data Sources**

The data for this study was collected through a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was gathered through a structured survey questionnaire, while secondary data was obtained from sources such as books, journals, magazines, and websites.

**Research Instrument**

The primary data for this study was collected using a well-structured questionnaire with multiple-choice questions. These questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants in popular restaurants in Nagercoil Town by the researcher.

**Tools Used for this Study**

- Descriptive Statistics
- Rank Analysis

**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

To analyze the major factor responsible for the sensory experience of consumers in restaurants, under each sensory cue (touch, sight, hear, smell, and taste) descriptive mean statistics and rank analysis were carried out.

**Table 1**  
**Tactile experience of consumers in the Restaurants**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
It has an attractive atmosphere for dining	3.33	1.31	I
It has a bright and pleasant atmosphere for dining	3.27	1.21	II
It has a huge variety of dishes	3.26	1.31	III
Has an organized and hygienic environment	3.26	1.31	IV
I like the layout of the restaurant	3.20	1.21	V
It has a Very spacious atmosphere for dining	3.16	1.20	VI
Service is neat, quick, and fast	3.07	1.27	VII
I like their hospitality and services	3.04	1.21	VIII
Have many other facilities like car parking, kids play area, Restroom, etc...	3.02	1.14	IX



Gets the opportunity to interact with suppliers and get to know about the new dishes in the restaurants	2.96	1.28	X
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**Source:** Primary Data

Based on the mean scores, The highest mean score (3.33) is associated with an attractive dining atmosphere. Consumers are drawn to restaurants that offer visually appealing surroundings. Following closely is the factor of a bright and pleasant dining environment (mean score: 3.27). Consumers appreciate well-lit and welcoming spaces. Having a wide variety of dishes (mean score: 3.26) positively influences consumers' tactile experiences. Options and choices matter. Consumers value an organized and hygienic restaurant environment (mean score: 3.26). Cleanliness and orderliness play a role. The

layout of the restaurant (mean score: 3.20) also contributes to tactile satisfaction.

However, the lowest mean score (2.96) is associated with the opportunity to interact with suppliers and learn about new dishes. Consumers seem less engaged with this aspect. Additionally, facilities like car parking, kids' play areas, and restrooms (mean score: 3.02) play a moderate role.

In summary, an attractive atmosphere significantly influences consumers' dining choices, while interactions with suppliers and awareness of new dishes have room for improvement

**Table 2**  
**The visual experience of consumers in the restaurants**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I like the overall color of the restaurants	3.28	1.22	I
I like the lighting effects of the restaurants	3.27	1.24	II
I like the interior design of the restaurants	3.16	1.28	III
The interior design (color, layout, lighting effects) is an important factor that influences my ordering decision in restaurants	3.13	1.27	IV
I like the visual screening of dishes inside the restaurants which are very attractive and informative	3.07	1.28	V
The interior design (color, layout, lighting effects) is an important factor that influences my dining experience in the restaurants	3.01	1.23	VI
I like the video clips/movies played inside the restaurants for customers to relax between ordering and serving time	2.82	1.21	VII

**Source:** Primary Data

Based on the mean scores, The highest mean score (3.28) is associated with liking the overall color of the restaurants. Consumers appreciate visually appealing color schemes. Following closely is the factor of liking the lighting effects (mean score: 3.27). Proper

lighting enhances the dining ambiance. Consumers also value the interior design (mean score: 3.16). Well-designed spaces contribute to a positive dining experience. The interior design (color, layout, lighting effects) significantly



influences consumers' ordering decisions (mean score: 3.13).

However, the lowest mean score (2.82) is associated with video clips or movies played inside restaurants for relaxation during ordering and serving time. Additionally, the visual screening of dishes (mean score: 3.07) is

moderately appreciated, while its impact on the overall dining experience (mean score: 3.01) is less pronounced.

In summary, aesthetics plays a crucial role in consumers' visual experiences, but certain aspects like video clips and dish screening have varying levels of impact.

**Table 4.7**  
**Smell experience of consumers in the restaurants**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
The aroma or smell of the restaurant is an important factor that influences me to visit the restaurants	3.22	1.21	I
The aroma or smell of the restaurant is an important factor that influences my dining experience in the restaurants	3.22	1.25	II
I like the Fragrance inside the restaurants	3.03	1.24	III

Source: Primary Data

Based on the mean scores, the aroma or smell of dishes significantly influences both consumers' decision to visit restaurants and their overall dining experience (mean score: 3.22). It is the highest-rated factor concerning smell experience in restaurants.

However, the lowest mean score (3.03) is associated with liking the fragrance inside the restaurants. Despite this, it remains clear that the aroma and smell emanating from restaurants play a crucial role in attracting consumers and enhancing their dining experience.

**Table 4.8**  
**Hearing the experience of consumers in restaurants**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I like the music playing inside the restaurants	3.19	1.27	I
Music is an important factor that influences you to visit restaurants	2.95	1.23	II
Music is an important factor that influences my dining experience in restaurants	2.93	1.30	III

Source: Primary Data

Based on the mean scores, The highest mean score (3.19) is associated with consumers liking the music played inside restaurants. Music significantly contributes to their hearing experience. Following closely is the factor that music influences consumers to visit restaurants (mean score: 2.95). It plays a role in attracting patrons.

However, the lowest mean score (2.93) pertains to music's impact on the overall dining experience. While consumers enjoy the music, it doesn't necessarily create a memorable dining atmosphere.

In summary, music enhances the hearing experience in restaurants, but its effect on the overall dining memory varies.



**Table 4.9**  
**Taste experience of consumers in the restaurants**

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
I enjoy the taste of the dishes	3.53	1.32	I
I like the quality and quantity of the dishes	3.49	1.28	II
The taste and quality of the dish is an important factor that influences to visit the restaurants	3.44	1.25	III
Taste and quality of the dishes is an important factor that influences the dining experience in the restaurants	3.44	1.25	IV
Prices of the dishes are reasonable to their taste	3.21	1.22	V

**Source:** Primary Data

Based on the mean scores, The highest mean score (3.53) is associated with consumers enjoying the taste of dishes. Flavor matters significantly to them. Following closely is the factor of liking the quality and quantity of dishes (mean score: 3.49). Consumers appreciate well-prepared and satisfying meals. The taste and quality of dishes significantly influence consumers' decisions to visit restaurants (mean score: 3.44).

However, the lowest mean score (3.21) pertains to the affordability of dishes. Consumers seem less concerned about price when it comes to taste.

In summary, flavor takes precedence over cost for consumers, emphasizing the importance of a delightful dining experience.

#### **FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The findings of the study indicate that several sensory factors significantly impact consumer choices when dining out. These include Tactile Experience: Attractive atmosphere for dining (mean score: 3.33), Bright and pleasant atmosphere for dining

(mean score: 3.27), Huge varieties of dishes (mean score: 3.26), Organized and hygienic environment (mean score: 3.26), and Layout of the restaurant (mean score: 3.20). The Visual Experience also plays a crucial role, with the overall color of the restaurants (mean score: 3.28), Lighting effects of the restaurants (mean score: 3.27), and Interior design of the restaurants (mean score: 3.16) all impacting consumer choices.

The Smell Experience is another significant factor, with the aroma or smell of the dishes (mean score: 3.22) being considered important. The Hearing Experience also plays a role, with the music playing inside the restaurants (mean score: 3.19) affecting diners' choices. Lastly, Taste Experience is the most critical factor, with both enjoyment of the taste of the dishes (mean score: 3.53) and liking the quality and quantity of the dishes (mean score: 3.49) being of utmost importance.

Overall, these sensory factors have a significant impact on consumers' dining choices, highlighting the importance of creating appealing atmospheres and delightful culinary experiences. Therefore, retailers in the



restaurant industry can consider unique themes like underwater or cave restaurants to transport customers to a different world. Themed atmospheres create memorable experiences and set the tone for the dining journey. Avoid visual screening of dishes and video clips inside the restaurant and focus on impressive coloring, lighting effects, and interior designs. Select music and songs that match the restaurant's theme and create positive feelings. Infuse the restaurant with good and fresh aromas to attract consumers. Pleasant scents enhance the overall dining experience. Prioritize tasty, healthy, and well-prepared dishes to improve taste experiences.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of sensory factors in influencing consumer dining choices. The study suggests that creating appealing atmospheres and delightful culinary experiences can significantly impact the diners' decision-making process. Therefore, retailers in the restaurant industry can focus on creating unique themes, impressive coloring, lighting effects, and interior designs to make the dining experience memorable. Furthermore, prioritizing the taste, quality, and quantity of the dishes, along with good and fresh aromas and appropriate music, can enhance the overall dining experience. By considering these factors, retailers in the restaurant industry can attract more customers and improve their business.

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