

## Role of Sensory Brand Experience on Customer Brand Engagement: Testing the Moderating Effect of Brand Love Towards Fast Food Brands

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### Abstract

The applications of sensory branding to result brand performance and customer engagements could be noted as a tremendous trend in many industries, yet researchers argue on its effectiveness across the markets and product scopes. Accordingly, this study attempted analyze the impact of sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement based on the theory of embodied cognition and the triangular theory of brand love. The concept of brand love has been identified as the mediating effect on the relationship between sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement and, four hypotheses were developed based on the relationships with the purpose of finding answers for the four research questions. Survey strategy was used to collect data through a self-administered questionnaire which the reliability was assured with the pilot test conducted prior to collect data for the master study. 420 complete responses from the consumers in the Western province who had a recent experience with the franchised fast-food outlet were received for the study based on the quota sampling technique. SEM technique was used to test the hypotheses and all the hypotheses were supported. The results of the data analysis revealed a positive and significant impact made from the sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement, sensory brand experience of brand love and brand love on customer brand engagement. Further, it was reported a partial mediated effect of the brand love on the relationship between sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement.

**Keywords:** Sensory brand experience, Brand love, Customer brand engagement, Theory of embodied cognition

### 1. Introduction

Sensory branding has taken the front seat in today's hypercompetitive marketing world. This has been mainly caused due to the acceptance of sensory branding as an essential tool for creating and strengthening the association between the brand and the consumer by stimulating the human senses and generating emotions. Having a multi-sensory brand strategy is an incredible advantage for the brand since it helps to act as a point of differentiation to cut through the clutter and connect with the consumers effectively. As a top priority activity, sensory branding plays a key role in exerting a powerful influence on the consumer buying decisions by integrating the sensory stimulations in to the brand communications (Biswas, 2014). As depicted by Hulthen et al., (2009), the sensations in the human body are created with the simulation of five sensory organs namely eye, ear, nose, skin and tongue with the sensors of sight (visual), sound (auditory), smell (atmospheric), touch (tactile) and taste (gastronomic). This will ultimately create a sensory brand experience which strengthens the engagement of the consumers to the brand. The concept of sensory brand experience can be defined as the "sensations aroused by the brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design, identity, packaging, communications and the environment" (Brakus et al., 2009, p.72).

As depicted by Maya Angelou, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel" (Leitan, 2014, p.51). Traditional marketing strategies such as advertising, sales promotion and direct marketing that are used to attract and retain customers are no more

relevant for the fast-food industry in today's competitive era (Hussain, 2018; Hulten, 2009; Pine, 2000). Merely appealing visual sense and auditory sense may not be the only ways to attract customers as they are given a big bunch of options to switch from one to another under a zero cost. It is essential to understand and address the human senses as they are important elements in better understanding the consumption processes (Hulten, 2009). As a matter of fact, the concept of branding has evolved over time and brands have started creating memorable experiences through sensory marketing strategies (Wilson et al., 2012). Sensory branding is a revolutionary new trend in the discipline of marketing in which marketers stimulate the human five senses and create an emotional level of attachment in the consumer mindset towards the brand (Hussain, 2018).

Sensory marketing can be identified as one of the newest strategies that today's marketers utilize in order to attract and retain customers by providing them a holistic consumer dining experience within the outlet via stimulating the five senses that is engaging and memorable (sight, smell, touch, hear, and taste) (Pine, 2000). The research has shown that, the sensory elements create sensory expressions and influences positively on consumer behavior (Dissabandara & Dissanayake, 2019; Elangovan et al, 2017 ;Rajput et al, 2013), intentions to purchase the brand (Ave et al 2015; Moreira et al, 2017), customer loyalty (Fernando et al, 2018; Hussain, 2018; Nadanyiova et al,2019), consumer touching behavior (Hulten, 2011), brand differentiations (Galande, 2019; Hassan, 2016), sensory identity (Nandagopal et al, 2015), brand reputations (Ozyer, 2016), perceived likeability (Rifqiya et al, 2016), value co-creation (Rodrigues et al, 2011). However, it has been extensively studied by the different scholars that the sensory brand experience possess a positive influence on attracting a consumer to a particular brand of an organization. The attention which has been paid towards the consumer brand engagement, in the stream of marketing literature is rapidly increasing (Brodie et al, 2011; Hollbeek et al, 2016; Pansari and Kumar 2016). Further, customer brand engagement has been identified as a strategic imperative which directly influences on the firm performance (Pansari and Kumar 2016). In fact, the concept of consumer brand engagement is viewed as a key research priority. (Marketing Science Institute, 2014).

Lindstorm (2005) stated that, the sensory brand experience is all about building emotional ties between consumer and product, evaluating and incorporating the different sensory touch points. Rodrigues et.al (2011) defined the sensory brand experience as of how people response when a firm, in offering and delivering brands, goods or services, participates in the purchase and consumption processes through the involvement of the five human senses that appeal the consumers in a highly emotional manner. By looking at a different track, Bakman et al (2013) defined the sensory brand experience as a strong predictor of an individual's place, dependence, which will provide emotional benefits to the individual. Particularly, Hepola et al (2017) defined the sensory brand experience similarly as the mean by which the individuals experience their brands through the five senses and thereby creating a positive emotional attachment Research has shown that sensory brand experience evidenced a positive influence on the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions of customer brand engagement (Hepola et al., 2017).

Even though several studies have been conducted in the domain of sensory branding, because of its novelty this concept raises a lot of gaps to be filled by the academics (Krishna, 2012; Riza, & Wijayanti, 2018). Similarly, it is evidenced that, the marketing managers in the field of sensory marketing remains in its infancy (Dissabandara & Dissanayake, 2019; Hepola et al 2017; Hulten et al, 2009; Krishna, 2010). It has been argued that, the sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement dichotomy is particularly intriguing due to its controversial relationship (Calder et al, 2009; Hollebeek et al, 2014). Research has shown that the sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement still remains largely unconnected (Hepola et al, 2017) and the researchers are encouraged to study the experience-engagement dichotomy in a greater extent in the future. Apart from the knowledge gap, which is expected to address from the current study, it has been also noticed a performance gap related to the sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement dichotomy in the field of marketing in fast food industry. Even though a majority of companies in the fast-food industry have started utilizing the sensory brand techniques as a marketing tool (Hepola et al, 2017) the outcomes of these marketing efforts have not been measures to a larger extent (Suhonen & Tengvall 2009).

It is evidenced that, in the real-world scenario, the marketers are implementing sensory branding techniques within the store (tasty foods, attractive store arrangements, in-store and food aromas, background music, and temperature changes) in order to stimulate the consumers with the expectation of creating a strong emotional bond (brand love) which leads to create the customer brand engagement. Conclusively referring to empirical gaps, performance gaps and theoretical justifications referred in the aforesaid brief this study investigates impact made by sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement, reference to the fast-food industry in Sri Lanka. Thus, the problem centered for the study here is “What is the impact made by sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement?”. The current study intended to achieve four specific research objectives while achieving the key objective of the study namely, to determine the impact of sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement; to investigate the influence of sensory brand experience on brand love; to identify the influence of brand love on customer brand engagement; to analyze the mediating effect of brand love towards the relationship between sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement.

## 2. Theoretical Explanation

Since different scholars (Bakman et al., 2013, Brakus et.al, 2009, Hepola et al., 2017, Hulten., 2011) have defined the sensory brand experience in different ways, working definition has been developed for the study as, “the sensory brand experience is the stimulation of human five senses through brand related stimuli which ultimately make individuals feel their brands, which directs consumers in developing an emotional attachment towards the brand”.

Customer brand engagement is defined as “the level of a customer’s cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions” (Hollebeek et al, 2014; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Dwivedi, 2015; Hepola et al 2017; Brodie et al, 2011). The concept of customer brand engagement is viewed by different scholars as a multidimensional phenomenon (Brodie et al, 2011; Hollebeek et al, 2014; Dwivedi, 2015) which comprises cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions. Cognitive dimension revealed “a consumer’s level of brand related thought processing and elaboration in a particular customer-brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al, 2014). The Affective dimension is “a consumer’s degree of positive brand related affect in a particular consumer-brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al, 2011; Hepola et al, 2017). Behavioral dimension is defined as “a consumer’s level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction”(Hepola et al, 2017).

It was claimed that the relationship between experience and engagement is controversial thus it is fascinating (Hollebeek et al, 2014; Calder et al, 2009). Therefore, due to its important application in the modern marketing context, and the dearth of studies remaining in the existing literature (Hepola et al, 2017), researchers are encouraged to examine the sensory brand experience- engagement dichotomy to a greater extent in the future. According to Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) brand love is defined as an enthusiastic and powerful connection created in between a satisfied customer and a brand. Though, the concept of brand love appears in recent research studies as a newest phenomenon, the same brand-consumer relationship has been tested since the 90’s through the general constructs such as brand commitment, brand loyalty and brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Fournier, 1998; Fournier and Yao, 1997; Samuelsen and Sandvik, 1998). Therefore, there is a dearth of studying the application of brand love as a phenomenon which depicts non-interpersonal love.

Recent years, two notions of the marketing literature have fascinated the interest of the scholars in the field of marketing namely the brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra et al, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson et al, 2005) and the brand engagement (Brodie et al, 2011; Hollebeek et al, 2014) as they are directly linked with the psychological state of the humans (Suarez et al, 2016). Though, there can be seen a plenty of research studies which have been conducted separately, the theories stem those two constructs are different and remain largely unconnected. (Suarez et al, 2016). Moreover, in order to bridge the gap between the concept of brand love and customer brand engagement, Long- Tolbert and Gammoh (2012) developed a model of brand love for intangible assets. Even though few studies have come out, due to the novelty of this area, still there is a dearth of research studies which are different relationships including antecedents and

consequences (Suarez et al, 2016). Thus, it became worth studying the relationship between brand love and the customer brand engagement.

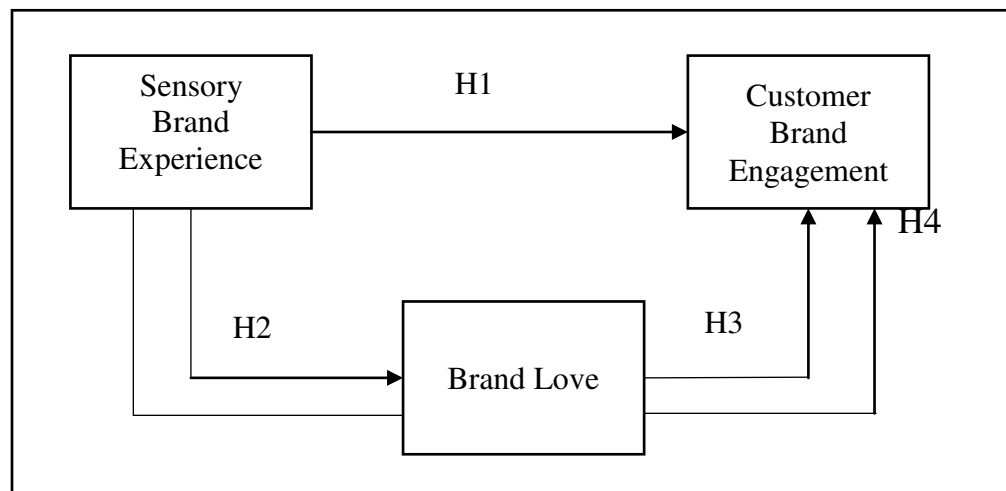
In recent past, the majority of the marketers in variety of industries have been started developing their expertise in reaching the target consumers through the five senses (sight, music, aroma, taste and touch). As marketing researchers started realizing the power of responses to non-conscious stimuli, much of the new research studies in the field of marketing centered on the theory of embodied cognition which implies the idea that, without consumers' conscious awareness, their bodily sensations help them to determine the decisions they make. The majority of the research scholars have discussed in their studies how the sensory experience in one domain can impact on the consumers' cognition, emotion and behavior aspects (Harvard Business Review, 2015). Krishna (2011), in his study predicted how the sensory attributes of products, advertisements and retail spaces influence thoughts, feelings, and the decisions. Elder and Krishna (2012) studied the practical implications of the embodied sensory simulations for consumer behavior and advertising. The study found that, the higher purchase intentions can be observed when the visual orientation of objects in an advertisement facilitated mental simulation of interacting with the object. Extending this body of work, Krishna et al., (2013), in their review on sensory marketing, embodiment and grounded cognition highlighted that, the sensory experience and the cognition are interconnected with the predicted consequences for the thoughts, feelings, judgments and the behavior of the consumers. Xiao-qing& Xi-xiang, (2015) in their study claims that multisensory perceptions have indirect positive influence on the online purchase intention and that is backed by the embodied cognition perspective.

As stated by Krishna, et al.,(2017), there can be observed a bulk of research studies conducted in the domain of sensory experience (Dissabandara et al, 2019; Elangovan et al, 2017; Fernando et al, 2018; Galande, 2019; Hulten, 2011; Hassan, 2016; Hussain, 2018; Krishna et al., 2013; Nandagopal et al, 2014; Nadanyiova et al, 2018; Ozyer et al, 2016; Pine,2000; Rajput et al, 2013; Rifqiya et al, 2016; Rodrigues et al, 2011) but paid a limited attention on the underlying processes and a very few of them utilized the theory of embodied cognition in their studies as for the base of their study. Moreover, they have depicted that, the existing body of knowledge is not provides sound literature on how unconscious bodily simulations directed the consumers in making judgment and decision making regarding a particular product, brand or a company (Krishna et al.,2014; Dissabandara& Dissanayake, 2019; Xiao-qing& Xi-xiang, 2015). Therefore, the proposed study will provide a new formation for the study by adopting the basic argument of the theory into more structured framework which include an extension of the theory with the mediation element of brand love as an antecedent of emotional experience. Thus, the current study will serve to fill the theoretical gap which is remaining in the existing body of knowledge.

Grounded on the research problem of the study, the researcher conducted a detailed literature survey, and the theory of embodied cognition was identified as the base theory for the research study. According to this theory, it is assumed that the people in the general world acquire information from various sources through the five human senses namely sense of vision, sense of smell, sense of sound, sense of taste and sense of touch and that information will be undertaken to a process which will ultimately directs people into specific behaviors (Lachman et al, 1979; Wyer, 1974). This theory argues that, the human mind set works as an information processor where the inputs from different external stimulus which are available in the external environment takes through human five senses without conscious awareness and those inputs will entered in to information processes and then it will directed to the specific human actions and cognitions regarding a particular phenomenon (Krishna et al., 2013; Barsalou, 1999; Clark 1997; Damasio 1994; Glenberg, 1997; Johnson, 1987; Paivo, 2006; Krishna et al, 2014). Since marketers started realizing the power of unconscious stimuli on bodily sensations in determining the decisions they make, the attention towards delivering a sensory brand experience for the customers was emerged (Pine,2000; Dissabandara& Dissanayake, 2019;Rajput et al, 2013; Elangovan et al, 2017; Hussain, 2018; Nadanyiova M.et al,2018; Fernando H.S.M.et al, 2018; Hulten, 2011; Galande, 2019; Hassan, 2016; Nandagopal et al, 2014; (Ozyer .Y et al, 2016; Rifqiya .A et al, 2016; Rodrigues.C et al, 2011;Krishna et al., 2013).

Along with the basic argument presented by the Theory of embodied cognition above, the external stimulus presented in the external environment will direct the people to make decisions or certain behaviors on a phenomenon. However, the unconscious bodily stimulation which is happening through the external stimulus can be identified as the sensory brand experience and the behavior or the cognition occurred as a result of sensory brand experience can be identified as the customer engagement. Since that engagement or the behavior is related to a phenomenon that can be identified as a brand related engagement behavior and that will be identified as the customer brand engagement (Hapsari et al., 2016; Vivek et al, 2012).

Accordingly, the concept of sensory brand experience becomes the predictor variable of the study, and the customer brand engagement becomes the dependent variable of the study. The relationship between the sensory brand experience and the customer brand engagement has established in the existing body of knowledge through direct and indirect relationships (Hepola et al., 2017; Prentice et al., 2019; Farhat et al., 2020; Kumar 2020). The present study proposed to bring in a new variable namely brand love as a mediating variable for the relationship between sensory brand experience and customer brand engagement. There it finds less evidences of research studies found in the existing body of knowledge which has tested the sensory brand experience impact on customer brand engagement through the mediation of brand love. The relationship between sensory brand experience and brand love has been strongly predicted by Rodrigues (2020) in his seminal book on Multisensory Brand Experiences and Brand Love: Myth or Reality. Even though there are no adequate evidence of quantitative research studies to establish the relationship between sensory brand experience and brand love, it was found few research studies which have tested the relationship between brand experience and brand love (Bicakcioglu et al., 2018; Garg et al., 2016; Huang, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2011; Garg et al., 2015; Sarkar et al., 2019). The relationship between the concepts of brand love and customer brand engagement have already established in the recent studies (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Suarez et al., 2018; Pandir& Yasin, 2017; Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012). Thus, the proposed conceptual model for the study is depicted as follows.



**Figure 1: Conceptualization of the Variable Links**

The relationship between the sensory brand experience and the customer brand engagement have been established in recent research studies (Hepola et al., 2017; Prentice et al., 2019; Farhat et al., 2020; Kumar 2020). Based on the study done by Hepola et al. (2017), it has found that sensory brand experience exhibits a positive impact on the cognitive, affection and behavioral dimensions of the customer brand engagement. In this study they have used the customer brand engagement as a mediating variable which directs the brand

equity, but they are further suggesting the research community to seek the direct or indirect relationships between the sensory brand experience and the customer brand engagement. Consistent with the above discussion, the following hypothesis is developed.

**H1:** There is a significant impact of sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement.

Majority of the scholars who have undertaken studies have claimed that the external stimulus provided by the marketing practitioners to be unconsciously stimulated by the consumers will eventually create a strong emotional bond with the brand itself (Brakus et al., 2009; Delgado-Ballester&Sabiote, 2015). The relationship between the sensory brand experience and the brand love has been strongly predicted by Rodrigues (2020) in his seminal book on Multisensory Brand Experiences and Brand Love: Myth or Reality. In this book, as a means of making brands stand out in a competitive environment and inducing feelings of love towards a brand has been discussed widely. Accordingly, it has been proven from that, the sensory brand experience has identified as central to express the sensory brand values to a customer that direct to create an emotional engagement with the brand (love) over the time (Rodrigues, 2020). However, there are few studies found in the literature, which have already established the link between the brand experience and the brand love (Bicakcioglu et al., 2018; Garg et al., 2016; Huang, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2011; Garg et al., 2015; Sarkar et al., 2019). This discussion informs the following hypothesis.

**H2:** There is a significant impact of sensory brand experience on brand love.

The concept of brand love and customer brand engagement was identified as the two concepts which captivated the interest of scholars in the marketing (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra et al, 2012; Caroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson et al, 2005; Brodie et al, 2011; Hollebeek et al, 2014). By bridging these two concepts, Suarez et al., (2016) in his study established a link between brand love and customer brand engagement through a qualitative approach. Few research scholars conducted their studies to establish the link between the brand love and customer brand engagement (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Suarez et al., 2018; Pandir& Yasin, 2017; Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012). Consistent with this view, the following hypothesis is developed.

**H3:** There is a significant impact of brand love on customer brand engagement.

Engagement implies the connection between two phenomenon (Vivek et al., 2014; Dessart et al., 2016) and this connection is strengthen purely based on the interactivity (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). This connection or the interactivity is not purely based on the casual relationships but based on the long-term relationships and there, in order to maintain such a long-term relationship, both parties have to play an active role (Hollebeek, 2011; Resnick, 2001). When the individuals are trying to make a long-term relationship between themselves and the brand, it becomes customer brand engagement and this connection leads to repeat patronage behaviors (Hapsari et al., 2016; Vivek et al., 2012). The customer experience with a brand will always tend to create emotional bonds and connections with the brand (Cleff et al., 2018) and enhances the emotional attachment (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018). Such types of emotional attachments created between brand and the consumer will eventually lead to cause continuous purchases, brand recommendations, developing relationships with brand and becoming a loyalty customer (Kumar et al., 2017). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is developed.

**H4:** Brand love mediates the impact of Sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement.

### 3. Research Methodology

As per the nature of the objectives of the present study, it falls under the positivist paradigm. This is because the researcher is working with observable social realities and the end result can be generalized to similar circumstances (Remenyi, 2002). The researcher sees the examination of the research problem as an objective reality which is separated from the convictions of people. Moreover, the researcher is not a part of the issue being examined; rather she watches the circumstance freely, being out of the specific situation, so as to maintain a strategic distance from individual bias in portraying the issue (Firestone 1987, p.17). Thus, the researcher is part of the objectivist ontology. According to Hitchcock & Hughes (1995), in some cases, epistemology influences data collection methods as well as research methodology. Thus, the current research

methodology is influenced by the researcher's empiricist epistemological interpretation. According to the ontological and epistemological views, the current study followed a quantitative methodology (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The population for the study was identified as the consumers (in the age group of 20-49) who consume fast food from franchised fast-food outlets in western province, Sri Lanka. Since there are number of franchised fast-food companies available in Western province, this study focused on three major franchised fast-food chains namely KFC, Pizza hut and McDonalds. Since lack of formal database and sampling framework was found in the fast-food chain sector for consumer penetration levels, the present study has developed the quota as based on the usage rate and the age groups population in Western Province. Three main age categories have identified from the information retrieved by Census and Statistics Department of Sri Lanka (2012) as 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49 respectively. Based on the population density for each group, the quota has been decided and in the second stage of quota sampling, the sample respondents were selected based on the convenience sampling method.

Since the questionnaire has thirty-three (33) questions based on Hare's model (2014) 32 items  $X 5 = 160$  minimum of sample should be taken. In order to fulfill the analysis from AMOS at least 150 sample size should be incorporated. Based on the Cochran's formula (1977) developed to derive the sample size when the population is large or unknown, the study will focus on a minimum sample of 384 participants for the study. It is important for the sample to have a minimum of 95% confidence whereas the sample should represent the majority of the sample frame for the findings to be generalized whereas such should need to select a sample with a minimum confidence level of 95% which indicates that the selected sample representing 95% of the ideas of the focused sample frame (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Since the current sample frame for the study is not identified the target population was considered as the whole population of the country whereas to have a confidence level of 95% the study minimally should consider 384 participants for the study which the number was decided as the sample of the study. A minimum of 384 sample size was taken into this study. It was initially distributed to 465 questionnaires including Google forms as predetermined base, but finally received only 447 as completed forms.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Demographic Analysis

The demographic profile of the sample respondents was analyzed through frequency distribution analysis. As detailed above, the researcher has purposefully selected a representative quota (35%, 35%, and 30%) from each of the age group (20-29, 30-39, and 40-49) based on the population density of Western province. Nearly an equal proportion of the sample respondents represented by both male and female which is 50.2% and 49.8% respectively. The majority of the sample respondents selected for the sample were postgraduate degree holders which is about 68.1%. 36% of the sample respondents of the sample represented in the income group of 200,001-250,000. The majority of the sample respondents were professionals, which is about 60% of the entire sample respondents. Thus, the respondents who selected for the sample of the current study can be identified as a representative sample which is appropriate for the study purpose.

### 4.2 Pre- Structural Equation Modeling Technical Analysis

As per the necessity of approximating the number of assumptions hold by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis (Kline, 2011) in order to ensure a trustworthy result, Missing data analysis, Identification of outliers, Test of multivariate assumptions namely, Normality, Linearity, Homoscedasticity, Multi collinearity, Common Method Variance, Test of adequacy of sample and Unidimensionality of the data were performed.

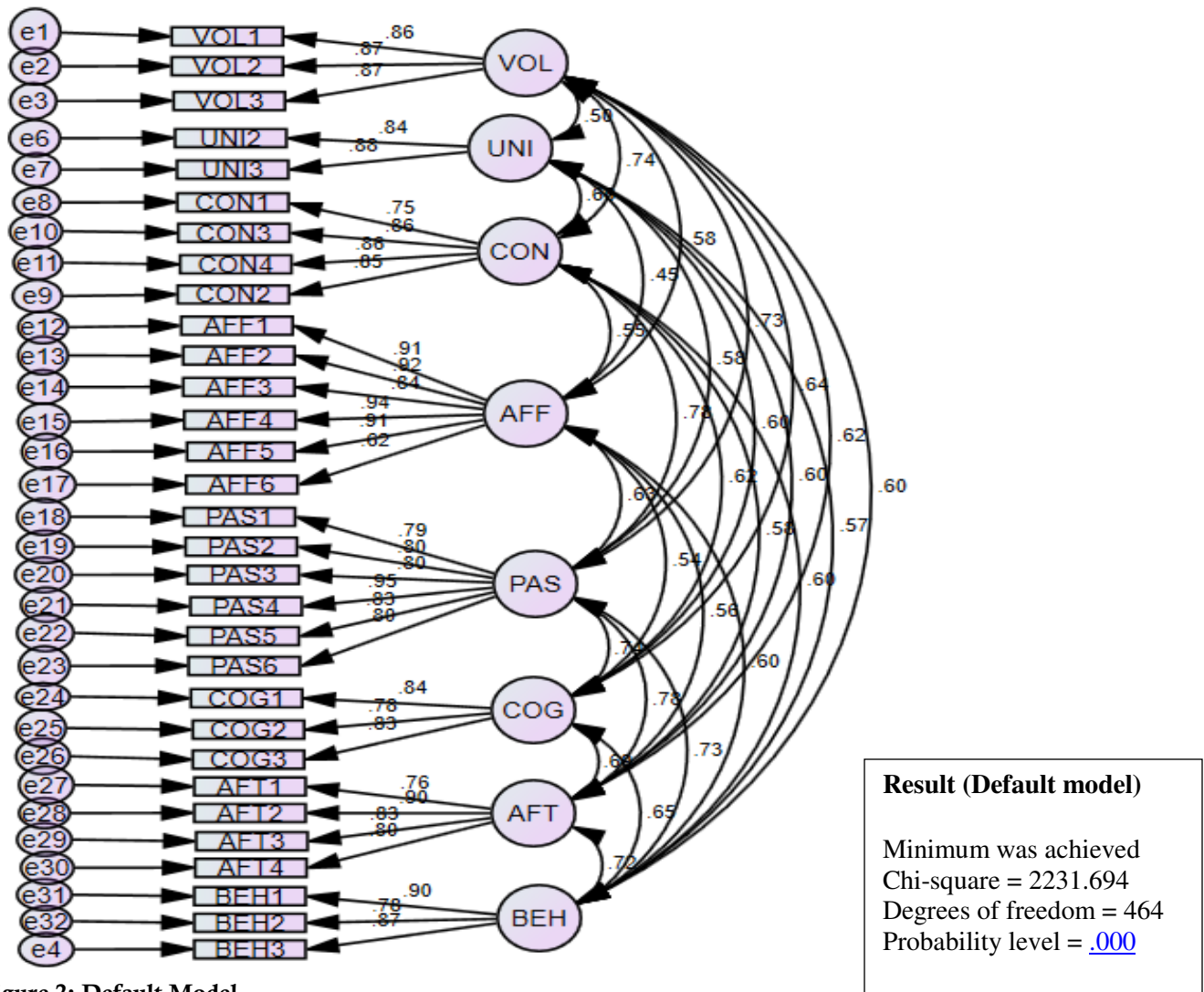
The univariate statistical analysis confirmed that there were no missing values presented in the data set. The researcher has initially collected 447 questionnaires out of 480 questionnaires distributed and conducted box plot analysis on item wise in order to identify the scores which are unusually high or low compared to all other data. Based on the box plot analysis, 27 outliers were identified and removed from the data set. Consequently, 420 questionnaires were remained for the final analysis. The statistical values received for Skewness and

Kurtosis analysis performed for the data set found within the acceptable range of acceptable range of +1 and -1 indicated that, the data set of the study was normally distributed. A scatterplot was developed in order to identify the nonlinear patterns in the data. Since there cannot be observed any significant deviations, linearity assumption has been observed in the scatterplots. In order to identify whether the dependent variable(s) exhibit equal levels of variance across the range of predictor variable(s), the homoscedasticity analysis was performed, and the scatterplot indicated a random pattern in the diagram variable with the predictor variable i.e. Sensory brand experience and Customer brand engagement hence the relationship is homoscedastic. The test of multicollinearity was performed in order to identify whether there are any multicollinearity issues are in existence. Based on the analysis it affirms that the tolerance values are greater than 0.1 and the VIF values are less than 10, evidencing that there is no multicollinearity in existence. Harman's single factor test was performed in order to analyze the Common Method Variance. The test revealed that, the largest extracted factor explained less than 50% of the variance (i.e., 19.841%). The common method bias is only a concern when more than 50% is explained and this suggests the estimates were not biased (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff, 2003). KMO analysis and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was performed in order to test the adequacy of sample for the study. The test results confirmed that, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin values are  $>.5$  as acceptable. Therefore, it can be concluded that factor analysis is appropriate for these data set. Moreover, for these data set, Bartlett's test is highly significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), and therefore factor analysis is appropriate.

#### 4.3 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural equation modeling is characterized by two basic components namely, the measurement model and the structural model (Hair et al., 2014). Accordingly, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis was performed in order to assess the contribution of each of the measurement items as well as to identify the extent to which the scale measures the concept which is simply assuring reliability. It is recommended to evaluate the Goodness of Fit (GOF) when assessing the model fit (Hair et al., 2010). Mainly there are three types of indices namely, absolute fit indices, incremental fit indices and model parsimony. To ensure the model fit and convergent validity the standardized factor loadings below 0.5 were removed from the initial model applying the stepwise deletion method where the items with lowest factor loadings were removed first (Hair et al., 2014) in order to refine the initial model of the study. As a result, one item (UNI 2) was removed. Hence, through CFA it was confirmed that the items did not fit with the current context in reality. According to Hair et al. (2014) modification indices of approximately 4.0 or greater suggest that the fit could be improved significantly by freeing the corresponding path to be estimated. Hence, modification indices were taken into consideration and were corrected accordingly to further refine the model. All the standardized regression weights of the final CFA model were above 0.5 and the final measurement model achieved a good level of fit. According to the refined model fitness statistics all the fit indices have reached their threshold levels in an improved way in the final measurement model. The value of CMIN/DF is below 03 and closer to 01, the values of GFI and AGFI are closer to 0.9 and the RMSEA value is well below 0.08 assuring the absolute fit. On the other hand, values of IFI, CFI and TLI have almost closer to 1 indicating the incremental fit of the model. Finally, PRATIO is surpassed 0.9 affirming the parsimony fit of the model. According to Hair et al. (2014) more complex models with larger samples should not be held to the same strict standards, and so when samples are large and the model contains a large number of measured variables and parameter estimates, cutoff values of 0.95 on key GOF measures are unrealistic. Thus, there are evidences to predict that the final measurement model fit is up to the satisfactory level.





**Figure 2: Default Model**

Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was performed for the data set in order to provide an indication of internal reliability of indicators used to measure constructs. Additionally, it assesses how highly interrelated the indicators are used together to measure their associated construct (Hair et al, 2014). Given the recommended Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.7 (Hair et al; 2014), the analysis shows acceptable reliability, with the coefficient alpha for more than 0.7 for all dimensions namely Volume (0.746), Uniqueness (0.701), Consistency (0.897), Affection (0.756) and Passion (0.885). Validity is a "test of how well an instrument that is developed measures the particular concept it is intend to measure" (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). As mentioned above, in order to achieve the ultimate objective of CFA construct validity should be guaranteed. The purpose of discriminant validity is to check whether concepts or measurements that are not supposed to be related are actually unrelated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). High discriminant validity provides evidence that a construct is unique and captures some phenomena other measures do not (Hair et al., 2014). One of the tests to mark discriminant validity is to compare the AVE values for any two constructs with the square of the correlation estimate between these two constructs. If the AVE is greater than the squared correlations, discriminant validity can be established (Hair et al., 2014). The respective AVE, CR and discriminant validity measures of the constructs in the final measurement model are given below. Consequently, all the AVE values are above the threshold of 0.5 and similarly CR values are above 0.6 for which indicates validity of the dimensions.

**Table 1: Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

Dimension	CR	AVE
Volume (VOL)	0.868	0.746
Uniqueness (UNI)	0.802	0.736
Consistency (CON)	0.843	0.639
Affection (AFF)	0.946	0.744
Passion (PAS)	0.900	0.691
Affective (AFT)	0.785	0.669
Cognitive (COG)	0.891	0.680
Behavioral (BEH)	0.791	0.724

Source: Amos-23 Output Statistics

In order to test the discriminant validity AVE values of the variables were compared with the square of the correlation estimate between these variables as shown in the below. The AVE values for each variable are higher than the square of the correlation between that variable and other variable. Thus, all the variables in the study represent different concepts and there are statistical evidences to prove the discriminant validity of the study.

**Table 2: Square of Inter Construct Correlations and the AVE for All Constructs.**

Dimension	Measurement	VOL	UNI	CON	AFF	PAS	COG	AFT	BEH
Volume	VOL	0.864							
Uniqueness	UNI	0.503	<b>0.858</b>						
Consistency	CON	0.737	0.658	<b>0.833</b>					
Affection	AFF	0.58	0.447	0.549	<b>0.862</b>				
Passion	PAS	0.733	0.58	0.784	0.631	<b>0.831</b>			
Cognitive	COG	0.643	0.6	0.618	0.54	0.739	<b>0.818</b>		
Affective	AFT	0.622	0.6	0.584	0.559	0.781	0.685	<b>0.825</b>	
Behavioral	BEH	0.6	0.571	0.6	0.6	0.73	0.655	0.721	<b>0.851</b>

Source: Amos-23 Output Statistics

#### 4.4 Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The proposed structural model for the current study is composed of four major latent constructs, of which two are exogenous (SBE, BL) and one is endogenous (CBE). Accordingly, undermentioned figure depicts the structural models.

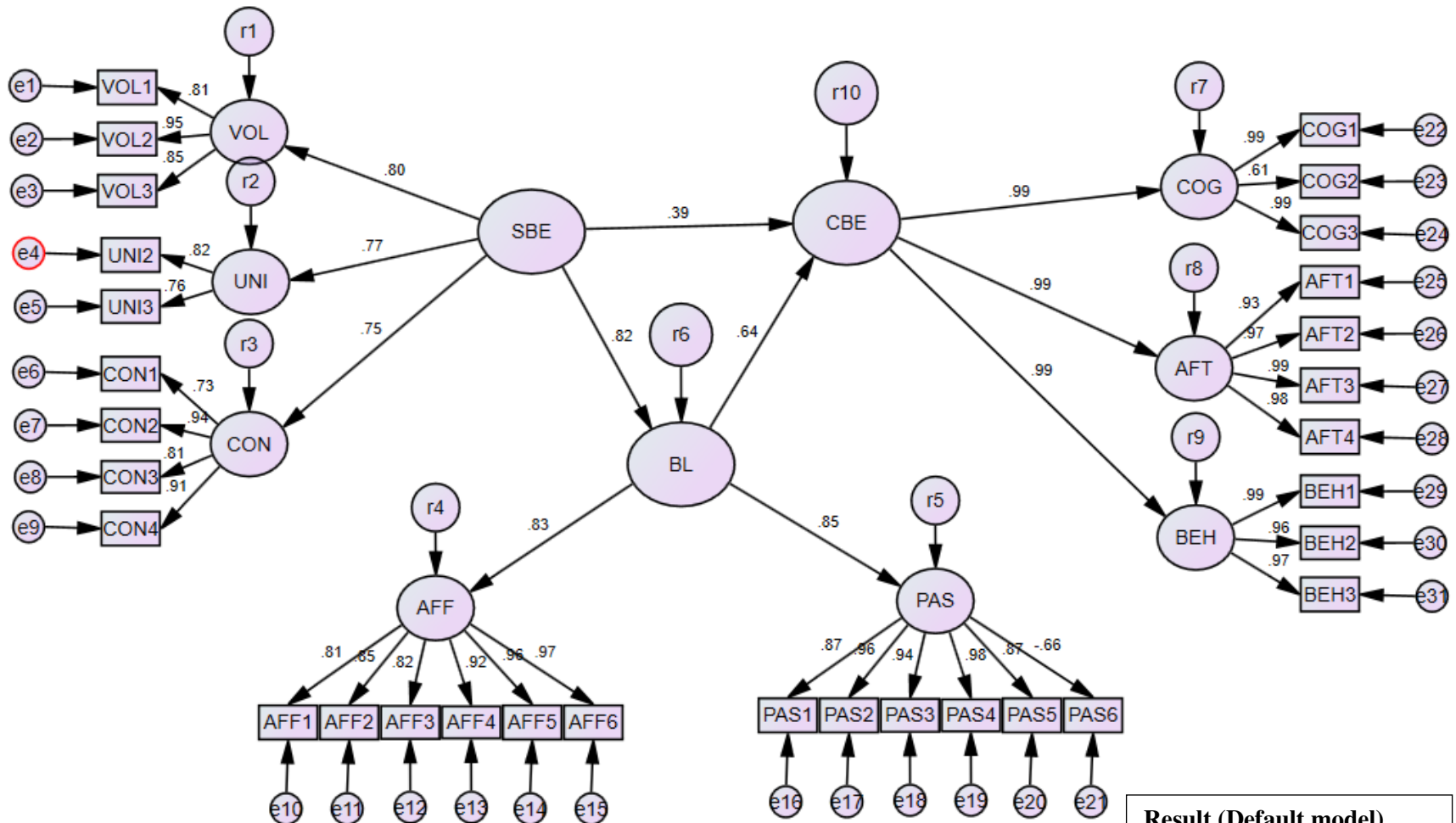


Figure 3 :Structural Equation Model for H1, H2 and H3

The overall fitness of the above structural model was assessed prior to discussing the hypotheses proposed by the current study. The purpose of assessing the model fit was to evaluate the extent to which the proposed causal relationships between the latent constructs fit the research data. As mentioned before, it is recommended that a study reports one absolute fit index and one incremental index besides the Chi-square value and the degrees of freedom (Hair et al. 2014). Accordingly, besides the Chi-square ( $\chi^2/df$ ), the GFI and RMSEA were reported as absolute fit indices, and the CFI and TLI were reported as incremental fit indices. Thus, the overall fit of the structural model was assessed with the same set of fit indices as those of the measurement models. Accordingly, Goodness of Fit measures for the above model are presented below.

**Table 3: SEM GOF Indices for Structural Model**

	GOF Measure	Model Values
<b>Absolute fit indices</b>	CMIN/DF	2.431
	GFI	0.830
	AGFI	0.728
	RMSEA	0.078
<b>Incremental fit indices</b>	IFI	0.655
	CFI	0.851
	TLI	0.897
<b>Parsimony fit index</b>	PRATIO	0.815

Source: Amos-23 Output Statistics

The fit indices indicated that the structural model had a good fit with the data on structural model thus supporting the basic theoretical model of the study. The causal research hypotheses underlying the proposed model will be examined in the following sections. Two sets of relationships will be examined: direct and mediating relationships. The results of testing the hypothesized direct relationships are presented first.

#### 4.5 Hypotheses Testing: Direct Relationships

The following table presents the results of testing the hypothesized direct relationships among Sensory brand experience, Brand love and Customer brand engagement. The table also includes the standardized path coefficients, *t*-values, and the corresponding significance levels.

**Table 4: Hypotheses Test Results for the H1, H2 and H3**

Hypothesis	Path	$\beta$	p- value	Result
H1 : Sensory brand experience significantly impact on customer brand engagement	<b>SBE → CBE</b>	0.395	0.003**	Supported
H2: Sensory brand experience has a significant effect on brand love	<b>SBE → BL</b>	0.816	0.000**	Supported
H3: Brand love significantly influences customer brand engagement	<b>BL → CBE</b>	0.645	0.000**	Supported

\*\*P<0.05

Hypothesis 1 investigated the impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on customer brand engagement (CBE). It was hypothesized that there would be an impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on customer brand engagement (CBE). The results demonstrate a positive and significant path ( $\beta = .395$ ,  $p$  value of 0.003). Thus, hypotheses one (H1) was supported. The hypothesis 2 investigated the impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on brand love (BL). It was hypothesized that there would be an impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on brand love (BL). The results demonstrate a positive and significant path ( $\beta = .816$ ,  $p$  value of 0.000). Thus, hypotheses two (H2) was supported. Meanwhile, the hypothesis 3 investigated the impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on customer brand engagement (CBE). It was hypothesized that there would be an impact of sensory brand experience (SBE) on customer brand engagement (CBE). The results demonstrate a positive and significant path ( $\beta = .645$ ,  $p$  value of 0.000). Thus, hypotheses three (H3) was supported.

**4.6 Hypotheses Testing on Mediating Effect**

To test the mediation effect of sensory brand experience (SBE) to brand love (BL) to customer brand engagement (CBE) was tested in the model. A bootstrap analysis using 2000 iterations at 95% confidence level was performed. Hypothesis 4 investigated the mediation effect of brand love (BL) towards the relationship between sensory brand experience (SBE) and customer brand engagement (CBE). It was hypothesized that brand love (BL) mediates the relationship between sensory brand experience (SBE) and customer brand engagement (CBE). The results suggested that the direct relationship between sensory brand experience (SBE) and customer brand engagement (CBE) was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.395$ ,  $p$  value of 0.003). The indirect effect of brand love (BL) on the relationship between sensory brand experience (SBE) and customer brand engagement (CBE) was positive and statistically tested for significance ( $\beta = 0.526$ ,  $p$  value of 0.001). These findings indicates that the relationship between sensory brand experience (SBE) and customer brand engagement (CBE) is partially mediated by brand love (BL). Thus, hypothesis four (H4) was accepted.

**Table 5: Findings of the Mediator Effect**

Hypothesis		Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Mediation Effect
<b>H4:</b> Brand love mediates the impact of sensory brand experience on customer brand engagement	<b>Path</b>	SBE→CBE	SBE→BL→CBE	0.921	Partial mediation
	<b>β</b>	0.395	0.526		
	<b>p-value</b>	0.003**	0.001**		
	<b>Results</b>	Supported			

\*\* $p < 0.05$

**Implications**

Following the discussion of findings, this section presents the managerial implications that can be incorporated by the marketing practitioners' particular in franchised fast-food sector in developing marketing strategies to

deliver a memorable sensory brand experience to the customers in order to make consumers engaged with the brand by being a loved brand.

Brand love can be identified as an essential component in the preservation of the consumers' engagement with the brand. Thus, achieving and maintaining a high consumers' level of brand love is a beneficial strategy for brand managers. First, concentrating on the quality of the products, services and brand identity itself is vital to be considered in creating the brand love. Second, the role of the sensory brand experience plays an immense role in crafting the brand love. Thus, the marketers are encouraged to create an environment for the consumers which is an extraordinary, surprising and loves stimulated one thus, the marketers will be able to spark their brand with a magic. Since sensory brand experience has a significant hierarchical effect on brand love and customer engagement the franchised fast-food marketers should seek factors that enhance a memorable sensory brand experience. Stimulating consumers over five senses can be the most advanced way of engaging with customers as it is a usual biological process which is happening in human bodies. Creating an appealing store atmosphere, playing relevant and mind-blowing background music, arranging food, appetizer aromas and other appealing aromas, making salivated tasty foods and creating an appropriate air conditioning and texture in the food will eventually enhance the positive sensory brand experience of the consumers. Therefore, it is highly suggested to develop sensory marketing strategies in outlets, that appeals all five human senses simultaneously.

It was evident in the research findings that, the uniqueness of the sensory brand experience will create a significant and a strong influence on creating a love for the brand and thereby to enhance the customer engagement. Therefore, it is predicted the inadequacy of just presenting a brand with five human sensory stimulators, but it should be unique and clearly distinguishable with competitor stimulators. With the intense competition, which is largely evident in today's business world, most of the marketers are trying to achieve the share of market by embedding a variety of different elements to their brands over the competitor brands which will be eventually imitated by another competitor just in time. However, creating an emotional attachment for the brand that lasts a long period of time will eventually create a love towards the brand which leads to earn the mind share of the customers. The same was evident in the recent pandemic situation which was undertaken by the entire globe. In that period, the most loved brands got benefitted as they have created a trust in consumers' mindset. An emotionally engaged customer will be always loyal to the brand, ready to bear the price premium for the brand and they forgive the brand for the catastrophes. Thus, it is strongly endorsed for the marketing practitioners to incorporate emotions with brand in each and every possible marketing instrument encountered by consumers. Since franchised fast food outlets are international companies, they should have to possess a significant knowledge and understanding on the local cultural values and preferences in implementing sensory marketing strategies.

## 6. Directions for Further Studies

This study addressed to the empirical gaps claimed within sensory branding and customer brand engagement as the main notions whilst the role of brand love was examined as a mediator. However, future research works could be extended to examine more behavioral insights via longitudinal research design which can be undertaken to capture the consumer engagement levels at different time intervals. We further suggest extending new studies to examine the effectiveness of sensory marketing stimulus on brand love and brand engagements behaviors across different product sectors like consumer products, services, consumer durables, and industrial sector brands addressing to practice related issues to obtain product scope specific insights. The role of demographic and psychographic factors can also be examined as moderators while examining the customer brand engagement with sensory brand experiences to contribute more practical insights for the industry.

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