

DOI: 10.29141/2218-5003-2025-16-3-6

EDN: FGSRMG

JEL Classification: M3, M31, M37

The customer journey in the light of sensory marketing for fast food restaurants

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Abstract. Providing high-quality services and delivering a positive customer experience has become critical to the success of any restaurant. The purpose of the paper to analyse the customer journey during fast food service delivery, establish a correlation between sensory marketing and the customer journey, and improve the interaction with touchpoints by comprehending the sensory influences that can be used to enhance the customer experience throughout the journey. The theoretical basis of the study is comprised of classical marketing theory and the customer-centric approach. Structural equation modelling, descriptive statistics, regression and correlation analyses were used as research methods. The empirical framework includes the results of an online survey with 303 respondents, who are regular customers of four most popular fast food restaurants in Baghdad (Iraq). SPSS V.26 software was used to analyse and process the data. The study found that there is a significant relationship between sensory marketing and the customer journey. The fast-food restaurants use sensory marketing techniques (visual, auditory, olfactory, and gustative) to enhance the customer experience and better manage the customer's journey during food ordering. In the fast food industry, gustative and olfactory marketing techniques have the most significant impact on the customer journey. It was also revealed that the interaction with touchpoints is influenced by the sensory response of the customer.

Keywords: sensory marketing; customer journey; visual marketing; auditory marketing; customer experience; touchpoints; fast food restaurants; Iraq.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank the participants for completing the questionnaire.

Article info: received January 27, 2025; received in revised form March 12, 2025; accepted March 25, 2025

For citation: Al Khazraje M.E., Raad Saleh M., Khaleel Ibrahim N. (2025). The customer journey in the light of sensory marketing for fast food restaurants. *Upravlenets / The Manager*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 78–91. DOI: 10.29141/2218-5003-2025-16-3-6. EDN: FGSRMG.

Путь клиента и сенсорный маркетинг: анализ взаимосвязи на примере индустрии быстрого питания

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Аннотация. Предоставление высококачественных услуг и обеспечение положительного клиентского опыта – ключевые факторы, определяющие успешность компаний ресторанного бизнеса. Статья направлена на анализ пути клиента при пользовании услугами ресторанов быстрого питания, установление взаимосвязи между сенсорным маркетингом и путем клиента, а также на изучение взаимодействия с точками контакта за счет сенсорных влияний, применяемых компаниями для улучшения клиентского опыта. Методологическая основа исследования представлена классической теорией маркетинга и клиентоориентированным подходом. Использовались методы моделирования структурными уравнениями и описательной статистики, а также регрессионный и корреляционный анализ. Информационной базой послужили результаты онлайн-опроса 303 респондентов, являющихся постоянными клиентами четырех наиболее популярных фаст-фуд-ресторанов в г. Багдаде (Ирак). Анализ и обработка данных осуществлялись в статистическом пакете SPSS Amos V26. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о наличии значимой корреляционной связи между сенсорным маркетингом и путем клиента. Рестораны быстрого питания используют техники сенсорного маркетинга (визуальные, слуховые, обонятельные и вкусовые) для улучшения качества обслуживания и более эффективного управления клиентским опытом во время предоставления услуг. В рамках фастфуд-индустрии наиболее значимое воздействие на путь клиента оказывают техники вкусового и обонятельного маркетинга. Установлено существенное влияние сенсорной реакции клиента на взаимодействие с точками контакта.

Ключевые слова: сенсорный маркетинг; путь клиента; визуальный маркетинг; аудиальный маркетинг; клиентский опыт; точки контакта; рестораны быстрого питания; Ирак.

Благодарность: Авторы выражают благодарность респондентам за участие в исследовании.

Информация о статье: поступила 27 января 2025 г.; доработана 12 марта 2025 г.; одобрена 25 марта 2025 г.

Ссылка для цитирования: Al Khazraje M.E., Raad Saleh M., Khaleel Ibrahim N. (2025). The customer journey in the light of sensory marketing for fast food restaurants // *Управленец*. Т. 16, № 3. С. 78–91. DOI: 10.29141/2218-5003-2025-16-3-6. EDN: FGSRMG.

INTRODUCTION

The customer journey (CJ) is a modern strategy in the field of marketing that aims to improve customer experience through various points of contact with the brand's products or services. This strategy represents a deeper understanding of the customer's needs and expectations and aims to meet these needs in ways that contribute to creating stronger bonds between the customer and the brand. The customer journey focuses on customer experience as a whole, from awareness and initial discovery of the product or service, through the process of purchasing and using the product or service, all the way to post-sales and support. This strategy is based on a deep understanding of various customer touchpoints with the brand and providing an integrated and consistent experience that allows the customer to better benefit from the product or service and enhances brand loyalty. The customer journey depends on including all of the customer's senses, such as sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, to create an interactive and distinctive experience. Providing customers with a sensory marketing experience can have a positive impact on purchasing decisions and increase brand loyalty. We aim to reveal the nature of the relationship between sensory marketing and the customer journey. The current research enhances the understanding of the role of sensory marketing as a tool for improving the customer journey. It attempts to direct companies' attention to applying more effective marketing strategies to improve customers' interaction with various touchpoints with their products, services, and brands. The current research also aims to analyze and understand the customer journey during service provision and improve interaction with touchpoints by understanding the sensory influences that can be used to improve the customer's experience during the journey. Managing the CJ in light of sensory marketing is an important strategy in the world of modern marketing and plays a vital role in achieving success and strengthening relationships between companies and their customers. The topic of the CJ is receiving great attention [Steward et al., 2019]. According to [Folstad, Kvale, 2018], the customer journey is a path that the customer goes through during his touchpoints with the product or service, which constitutes the customer experience. Emotions play a major role in the CJ, as customers perceive a range of emotions through their senses, positive or negative, across different stages of the journey [Tueanrat et al., 2021a]. The CJ is related to the complete experience of the customer, and one of the creative methods that provides an opportunity for the customer to perceive the product or service is sensory marketing [Abdulkhaliq et al., 2023]. This research attempts to enhance the knowledge of the effectiveness of sensory marketing strategies and develop practical guidelines for companies to use them more expertly. Additionally, it elucidates the role of sensory marketing as a tool in improving the customer journey and directs companies' attention towards imple-

menting more effective marketing strategies to improve customer interactions with various touchpoints related to their products, services, and brands.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sensory marketing. Sensory marketing seeks to engage consumers' senses to influence their perception, behaviour, and purchasing decisions [Al-Moussawi, 2022]. Human senses play a significant role in product selection, as well as in shaping marketing decision strategies. Customers gather information from their surroundings through their five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. These senses act as receptors that are sensitive to various external environmental stimuli. Senses enable consumers to evaluate products before making a purchase [Sendra, Carbonell-Barrachina, 2017]. Abidalghafoor [2021] defines sensory marketing as marketing that engages consumers' five senses in a way that influences their behaviours. It is one of the most effective strategic marketing tools that affect sensory customer experiences. Sensory marketing utilizes marketing techniques to impact human senses with the aim of eliciting emotions in customers and influencing their behaviours [Zahro, 2019]. Sensory marketing is characterized as a new and distinctive marketing technique that integrates consumers' five senses to create an unforgettable experience [Ifeanyichukwu, Peter, 2018]. According to Shaed et al. [2015], sensory marketing goals can be categorized into two types: experiential goals and marketing goals. For experiential goals, sensory marketing can create or evoke memories of previously purchased products, alter the customer's mood, establish emotional connections, and generate interest in sharing experiences with others. Regarding marketing purposes, sensory marketing encourages awareness and exploration of new brand products in the market, increases product sales, and provides lasting product differentiation. Al Khazraje [2024] emphasizes that sensory impressions and experiences influence consumer behaviour and perceptions of goods and services. Images, words, sounds, colours, tastes, and smells all play a significant role in affecting consumer perception. Sensory marketing relies on these techniques to create stronger and longer emotional relationships with customers by influencing their senses [Thatte, 2019; Al-Khazraje, Ghafoor, Saleh, 2023]. Sensory marketing depends on the sensory experience of the customer and attempts to generate experiences related to the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) [Bellinda, Dolorosa, Kurniati, 2020, p. 337]. Sensory marketing also draws its significance from the overall atmosphere surrounding the place of purchase. The term "atmospherics" defined by the American Marketing Association refers to the physical characteristics of the retail store, such as architecture, layout, signage, displays, colours, lighting, temperature, noise, and scents that shape the image in the customer's mind. These physical environmental attributes interact to

create a sensory experience for the customer [Wala, Czyrka, Fraś, 2019]. Kamaludin et al. [2020], Dissabandara and Dissanayake [2020] agree that the dimensions of sensory marketing are the following.

Visual marketing. The sense of sight is considered one of the most important and powerful human senses. Humans often rely on what they see with their own eyes and use it as a basis for making decisions [Kuczamer-Kłopotowska, 2017]. Visual stimulation contributes to enhancing the image of a product and its perceived quality [Nadanyiova, Klietkova, Kolencik, 2018]. Colours, designs, and visual marketing techniques lead to an increase in the time customers spend in a place. Colours and appropriate lighting can make customers feel comfortable, thereby prolonging their stay in a location. In fast-food restaurants, the use of the colour orange can make customers feel hungry, while the colour yellow can make customers eat faster and leave [Abidalghafoor, 2021].

Auditory marketing. Beautiful musical sounds are used to create a suitable atmosphere for customers. Human beings are sensitive to sounds, and it has been proven that sound arouses experiences and memories. Therefore, music was introduced in stores and commercial advertisements [Hameed, Abdullah, 2023]. Studies have shown that calm classical music can create a sense of product quality, especially in coffee shops. Music can also influence the time customers spend in a store. Research has shown that fast-paced music encourages customers to leave early, while slow music leads to customers spending more time inside the store, resulting in higher spending. The same study found that customers eat faster and consume less when there is a loud sound and fast-paced music [Randhir et al., 2016].

Gustative marketing. This dimension is related to the sense of taste and is widely used in food products. It plays a crucial role in persuading customers to buy products by tasting a sample of them [Khalil, 2021; Gosal et al., 2021]. Food companies attach great importance to this sense due to the association of their brand with taste stimuli. Many companies have made significant investments to achieve a distinct taste for their customers, including companies such as McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Starbucks. Taste adds value to foods and their brands, contributing to enhancing the brand's identity and creating a sustainable competitive advantage [Mohamed El-Shanawany, 2021; Perumal, Ali, Shaari, 2021].

Olfactory marketing. Stimuli related to the sense of smell and scent are influencers that affect how long customers stay in shopping places [Guzel, Dortyol, 2016]. Smell is linked to emotions because the brain can connect scents with memories. Many companies have employed the sense of smell to improve their marketing strategies and brand identity [Evtimova, 2020]. Olfactory marketing involves using scents to control the emotional state and enhance customer satisfaction to promote product positioning and influence customers [Bishop, 2017].

Tactile marketing. Tactile marketing is a means used to control customers' subconscious minds to influence their decisions, preferences, tastes, and perceptions, aiming to create emotional connections between the product and the customer [Ifeanyichukwu, Peter, 2018]. In this study, tactile marketing was not included among the dimensions tested due to the nature of the sector under consideration. The fast food restaurant sector relies heavily on the senses of sight, smell, hearing, and taste, and the nature of service provision makes the sense of touch have a limited impact on the customer journey.

Customer journey. The concept of the customer journey is an increasingly important topic for a better understanding of customer behaviours and analysing their experiences [Tueanrat et al., 2021b]. The customer journey is defined as a sequential process that the customer goes through before and after obtaining a product or service and their overall experience [Shavitt, Barnes, 2020]. Towers and Towers [2022] define the customer journey as a process that accumulates customer experience. Through this process, one can understand what customers think, determine their expectations, and identify their behaviours. Customer journey refers to the steps taken by the customer with a company, encompassing their interaction with the company's products and services [Hassani, Habets, 2021; Amir, Al Khazraje, Ghafoor, 2024]. The CJ is highly significant in providing services, especially for companies striving to align their services with customer expectations [Ameen, Cheah, Kumar, 2022]. It helps define customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the effort to rectify deviations in the service delivery process [Meierhofer, Heitz, 2021]. Knowing the steps of the customer journey provides insight into the flow of the process, allowing for improvements in lagging operations [Lemon, Verhoef, 2016]. Tracking the CJ provides vital information about moments of product or service acquisition and the critical moments accompanying the customer's experience [Varnali, 2019]. As noted by Tueanrat et al. [2021b], all the five senses play a significant role in the customer journey, acting as devices for sending and receiving information that influences the customer's experience and their response to the service. Pantouvakis and Gerou [2022] mention that the customer journey consists of six stages, including sensory, cognitive, behavioural, emotional, social, and spiritual responses. The CJ is a path driven by the customer, starting from their point of contact with the company and ending with their interaction with it. It is characterized by its relatively short duration, and if it extends beyond 7 days, it is assumed to mark the beginning of a new journey [Hassani, Habets, 2021]. When analysing the customer journey, the focus is placed on interactions with touchpoints to enhance the customer's experience [Homburg, Jozić, Kuehn, 2017]. These touchpoints represent the customer's interactions with service providers [Boyd, Kannan, Slotegraaf, 2019] making them one of the most critical components in the customer

journey [Pantouvakis, Gerou, 2022]. These touchpoints encompass both direct and indirect connections with the company and its brand [Towers, Towers, 2022]. Customers meet the brand and interact with products or services, whether online or in a physical environment like stores. This ultimately forms the customer's final experience [Ieva, Ziliani, 2018].

According to Lemon and Verhoef [2016], the customer journey is divided into three stages: pre-purchase, during-purchase, and post-purchase. Various touchpoints are encountered throughout these stages. The pre-purchase stage involves the customer's interaction with the brand in a physical or online environment preceding the purchase. Here, the customer gets acquainted with the brand. The first touchpoints consist of promotional tools and advertisements, and then the customer takes a first look at the product or service [Märting, Bissinger, Asta, 2023]. This stage activates the cognitive and behavioural response of the customer and stimulates purchasing processes [Lee et al., 2018]. The during-purchase stage encompasses the customer's interaction with the service provider during payment, order processes, and product or service acquisition at the time of purchase [Ngarmwongnoi et al., 2020]. Emotional and sensory responses are triggered through the marketing mix, combining the physical environment, service providers, and the product or service itself. This stage represents the highest pressure point on touchpoints, as it involves the customer's selection and purchase [Lemon, Verhoef, 2016]. The third stage includes all interactions that occur after the purchase, as the product or service comes into use. From this stage, post-purchase behaviours emerge, such as product usage, returns, consumption, word-of-mouth sharing, and post-sales services, and they continue until the end of the customer journey [Lemon, Verhoef, 2016].

The company's ability to manage the customer journey is closely tied to its capability to gather and interpret information at touchpoints throughout the CJ [Schweidel et al., 2022]. Customer journey management has become more complex and is often referred to as customer journey mapping. These maps identify touchpoints and provide a comprehensive view of the factors that can influence a customer's decision throughout their journey [Hamilton et al., 2020]. Customer journey maps take the form of flowcharts with multiple stages and various touchpoints [Cateriano-Arévalo et al., 2021].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research problem and research hypotheses. In today's marketing world, there is a growing emphasis on improving the customer journey as a fundamental tool for success in the market. One of the strategies that attracts the attention of companies is sensory marketing, which relies on the use of the senses to create experiences for potential customers and enhance brand loyalty. Achieving a positive and enjoyable customer experience has

become crucial for business success of any company. However, there is still a need for scientific research to understand the actual impact of sensory marketing on the customer journey and to analyse how to effectively implement this strategy. The main research problem can be framed as follows: Is there a role for sensory marketing in the customer journey? In light of this, the following potential research questions were designed:

- What is the impact of sensory marketing on the customer journey?
- What are the best practices for implementing sensory marketing strategies?
- What is the nature of the relationship between sensory marketing and customer journey management?
- How can sensory marketing strategies be adapted to meet the needs of different customers?
- Can emotions and feelings play a role in improving the customer journey?
- Do companies leverage sensory marketing practices in customer journey management?

Overall, this research emphasizes the importance of sensory marketing in improving the customer experience, increasing brand loyalty, and achieving success in the market.

Based on the literature review on sensory marketing, its dimensions, and the customer journey, we can put forward the following research hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive significant effect between sensory marketing and the customer journey. The following sub-hypotheses emerge from it:

H2: There is a significant positive effect between visual marketing and the customer journey.

H3: There is a significant positive effect between auditory marketing and the customer journey.

H4: There is a significant positive effect between gustative marketing and the customer journey.

H5: There is a significant positive effect between olfactory marketing and the customer journey.

The research model is presented in Fig. 1.

Research sample and measurement tool. A sample of the most famous fast-food restaurants in Baghdad was chosen as a location to implement the study: KFC, Super Chicken, Chicken Express, and Saj Al Badee. The fast-food restaurant sector was chosen as a research implement because its dynamic nature makes it ideal for examining the customer journey. Moreover, restaurants rely heavily on sensory input to attract customers and engage them in their journeys for repeat purchases. Fast-food restaurants compete to attract customers and increase the effectiveness of touchpoints through their use of the senses (smell, taste, sound, and visual appearance), making this an ideal environment for studying the impact of sensory marketing on the customer journey. A five-point Likert questionnaire was prepared, which included two variables. The first variable was sensory marketing, which was designed according to a scale [Abidalghafoor, 2021],

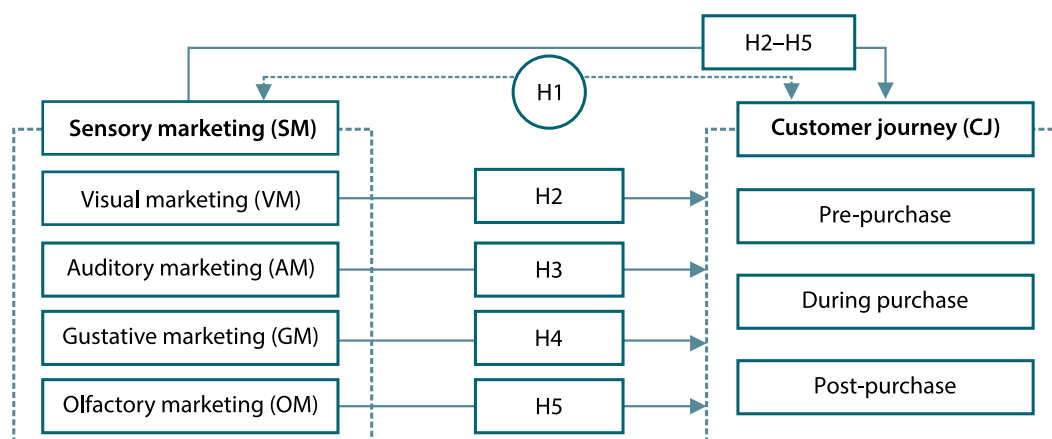


Fig. 1. Research model

Рис. 1. Модель исследования

which contained 11 question, while the second variable included the customer's journey, which included 10 questions. After the researchers made some modifications to it to fit the nature of this research and the application site, the questionnaire was designed in a Google form. An electronic form was presented on social networking sites through pages and groups for lovers of fast-food restaurants and a group for a guide to fast-food restaurants in Baghdad. The number of responses amounted to 378. To reach the real customers of the restaurants under study in these gatherings, a key question was formulated at the beginning of the questionnaire: Have you ever eaten a quick meal in one of the following restaurants – KFC, Super Chicken, Chicken Express, Saj Al Badee? The number of “yes” answers was 303 (82%), while 65 (18%) answers were negative. These responses were excluded from measurement and analysis.

At the end of the questionnaire, a question was asked: Which of the following restaurants do you prefer to eat fast food in? The answers are given in Table 1, which shows that Saj Al Badee Restaurant received the highest dining experience from respondents with a score of 121, while the majority of answers (50%) were focused on the delicious food option. Super Chicken Restaurant came second with a score of 90 answers with two leading options, namely the delicious taste of food and elegant dealing. Chicken Express Restaurant came third with 47 answers, and KFC came last with 45 answers that focused on the taste of the food and the experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaire validity and reliability tests. To validate the questionnaire and the collected data, we used Cronbach's alpha to assess reliability and validity [Al Khazraje, Sideeq, 2024]. Table 2 shows that the reliability coefficient for sensory marketing and its dimensions (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative) exceeded 0.818, surpassing the 0.700 threshold, confirming stability in the independent

Table 1 – Distribution of respondents' answers to the question “Which of the following restaurants do you prefer to eat fast food in?”

Таблица 1 – Распределение ответов респондентов на вопрос «Какой ресторан быстрого питания вы предпочитаете?»

Restaurants	Answers	Reasons	Share, %
KFC	45	The food is delicious	34
		The ambiance is relaxed	9
		The service is excellent	7
		The experience is great	18
		The presentation of the dish is distinctive	15
		Elegant dealing	17
Super Chicken	90	The food is delicious	37
		The ambiance is relaxed	13
		The service is excellent	10
		The experience is great	7
		The presentation of the dish is distinctive	11
		Elegant dealing	22
Chicken Express	47	The food is delicious	40
		The ambiance is relaxed	5
		The service is excellent	7
		The experience is great	9
		The presentation of the dish is distinctive	3
		Elegant dealing	36
Saj Al Badee	121	The food is delicious	50
		The ambiance is relaxed	9
		The service is excellent	4
		The experience is great	6
		The presentation of the dish is distinctive	2
		Elegant dealing	29

variable and its dimensions. The dependent variable, the customer journey, recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.840, indicating high reliability. Overall, the questionnaire achieved a high reliability coefficient of 0.890 as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Cronbach's alpha reliability test
Таблица 2 – Анализ надежности альфы Кронбаха

Study variables	Symbol	Reliability coefficient	Sources
Visual marketing	VM	0.866	Abidalghafoor [2021]
Auditory marketing	AM	0.707	
Gustative marketing	GM	0.899	
Olfactory marketing	OM	0.793	
Sensory marketing	SM	0.818	
Customer journey	CJ	0.840	Lemon, Verhoef [2016]
The entire questionnaire items		0.890	

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Descriptive analysis. The weighted arithmetic mean for the sensory marketing dimension was 3.733, exceeding the hypothesized mean of 3.0, indicating that sample responses leaned towards agreement. A standard deviation of 0.870 confirms response homogeneity. The relative importance of this dimension was 74.66%, reflecting consensus among most sample members (Table 3).

Table 3 – Results of descriptive analysis of the sensory marketing variable
Таблица 3 – Результаты описательного анализа переменной «сенсорный маркетинг»

Item	Mean	St. deviation	%	Ranking
SM1	3.712	0.837	74.24	5
SM2	3.656	0.925	73.12	7
SM3	3.804	0.909	76.08	4
VM	3.724	0.890	74.48	–
SM4	3.141	1.143	62.82	11
SM5	3.644	0.934	72.88	8
SM6	3.196	1.082	63.92	10
AM	3.327	1.053	66.54	–
SM7	4.110	0.832	82.22	2
SM8	3.693	1.020	73.86	6
GM	3.902	0.926	78.04	–
SM9	3.595	0.960	71.90	9
SM10	4.067	0.854	81.34	3
SM11	4.270	0.770	85.40	1
OM	3.977	0.861	79.55	–
Total	3.733	0.870	74.66	–

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Table 4 shows that the weighted arithmetic mean for the customer journey dimension was 3.820, exceeding the hypothesized mean of 3.0, indicating agreement among sample members. The standard deviation of 0.886 confirms response homogeneity, and the relative importance was recorded at 76.40%, reflecting consensus among the majority of respondents.

Table 4 – Results of descriptive analysis of the customer journey variable
Таблица 4 – Результаты описательного анализа переменной «путь клиента»

Item	Mean	St. deviation	%	Ranking
CJ1	3.620	1.001	72.40	8
CJ2	3.595	0.992	71.90	9
CJ3	3.773	1.014	75.46	6
CJ4	3.669	1.031	73.38	7
CJ5	3.877	0.815	77.54	5
CJ6	3.920	0.816	78.40	4
CJ7	4.098	0.772	81.96	2
CJ8	3.491	0.945	69.82	10
CJ9	4.117	0.715	82.34	1
CJ10	4.043	0.756	80.86	3
Total	3.820	0.886	76.40	–

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Normal distribution. Before conducting statistical analysis, the normal distribution of the data was tested using the Smirnov-Kolmogorov test. Table 5 shows that the significance values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are suitable for linear regression testing.

Table 5 – Normal distribution test
Таблица 5 – Проверка на нормальность распределения

Study variables	Smirnov-Kolmogorov test	
	Test statistics	Sig.
SM	0.104	0.013
CJ	0.082	0.009

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 display the normal distribution of the data based on the research variables.

Fig. 2 shows the normal distribution of the sensory marketing (SM) variable, which provides further evidence that the normal distribution is inferred, despite the presence of some outliers, but in general it indicates that the data are normally distributed, which supports the results of Table 5.

Fig. 3 shows the normal distribution of the customer journey variable, which provides other evidence to be inferred from the normal distribution, which supports the results in Table 5.

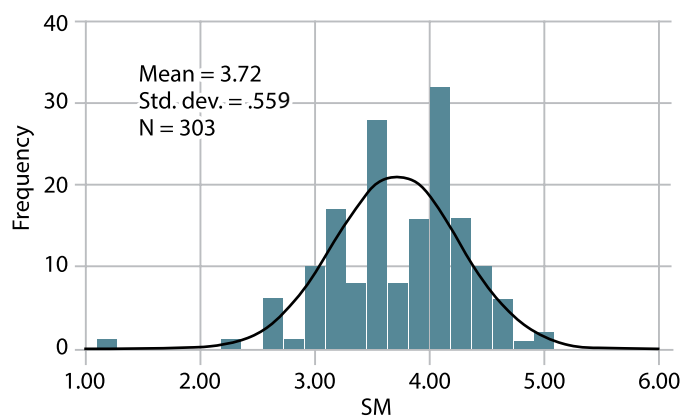


Fig. 2. Normal distribution of the sensory marketing variable¹

Рис. 2. Проверка нормальности распределения для переменной «сенсорный маркетинг»

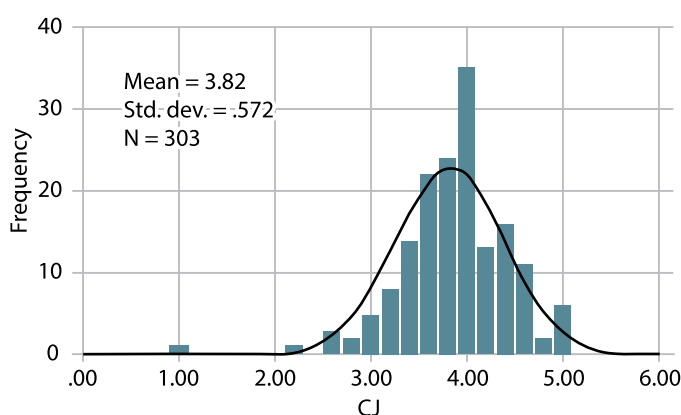


Fig. 3. Normal distribution of the customer journey variable²

Рис. 3. Проверка нормальности распределения для переменной «путь клиента»

¹ Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

² Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Tests of research hypotheses. In order to test the nature of the relationship between sensory marketing and the customer journey, Pearson's test is conducted. Table 6 shows the existence of a strong correlation between the independent and dependent variables, in addition to the presence of a strong correlation between sensory marketing and its dimensions at a significance level of 0.01 and a correlation coefficient of 0.642**, which is a strong and positive correlation rate.

Hypothesis testing will be used by building a structural equation model to determine the impact of the independent variable (sensory marketing) and its dimensions on the dependent variable (customer journey). The main hypothesis (H1) will be tested, which states that: "There is a statistically significant relationship between sensory marketing and the customer journey" by building the structural model shown in Fig. 4.

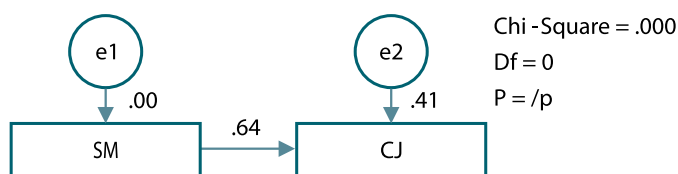


Fig. 4. The structural model for testing the main hypothesis (H1)³

Рис. 4. Структурная модель для проверки основной гипотезы (H1)

Table 7 shows that the results of evaluating the structural model for testing the H1 effect hypothesis were acceptable, as the value of the path coefficient reached 0.642, and the t-value and p-value exceeded the required

³ Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Table 6 – Pearson's correlation coefficient

Таблица 6 – Значения коэффициента корреляции Пирсона

Variables	SM	CJ	VM	AM	GM	OM
SM	1	.642**	.763**	.764**	.822**	.588**
CJ	.642**	1	.477**	.425**	.550**	.481**
VM	.763**	.477**	1	.434**	.486**	.314**
AM	.764**	.425**	.434**	1	.451**	.197**
GM	.822**	.550**	.486**	.451**	1	.496**
OM	.588**	.481**	.314**	.197**	.496**	1
N	303					

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Table 7 – Results of evaluating the structural model for the main hypothesis

Таблица 7 – Результаты оценки структурной модели основной гипотезы

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	t-value	p-value	C.R.	Result	R ²	Adjusted R ²
H1	SM → CJ	.642	4.650	< 0.001	10.654	Accepted	0.431	0.416

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

limits, and the effect value reached 0.416, which indicates that sensory marketing affects the customer journey by 41%, and the rest of the percentage is due to factors not addressed in the current study.

To test the sensory marketing sub-hypotheses H2–H5, the structural model was built (Fig. 5).

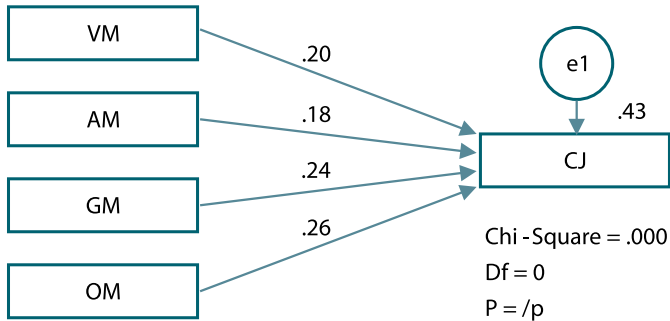


Fig. 5. The structural model for testing the hypotheses H2–H5¹

Рис. 5. Структурная модель тестирования гипотез H2–H5

Table 8 shows that the results of evaluating the structural model for testing the sub-hypotheses emanating from the first hypothesis were acceptable, as the value of the path coefficient for each of the hypotheses H2–H5 reached 0.200, 0.177, 0.242, and 0.263, respectively, and the t-value and p-value exceeded the required limits, thus accepting the sub-hypotheses of the effect H2–H5.

DISCUSSION

The topic of the customer journey has attracted a great research interest to understand customer behaviours before, during, and after purchase [Tueanrat et al., 2021b]. Thus, there is significant pressure on companies operating in the service industry to improve the quality of service provided [Jain, Khan, Mishra, 2017]. This requires a broader study and a deeper understanding of how to manage the CJ. Understanding the dynamics of interaction between the customer and the company in the customer journey works to increase sales and value added, improve customer satisfaction, and consequently, reap greater returns for the brand [Schweidel et al., 2022].

The results of the current study showed a significant relationship between sensory marketing and the cus-

tomers journey, all the hypotheses were accepted. Our findings proved the influence of the visual and auditory marketing dimensions on the CJ. This aligns with the findings presented by [Rosenbaum, Ramírez, Matos, 2019] showing that auditory and visual stimuli and the overall atmosphere affect customer experience and provide initial insights into the customer's movement during their journey. This is confirmed by [Kuuru, Närvänen, 2019] as expressions, gestures, movements, and the general environment in which the service is provided can affect customers' experience during their journey and the resulting feelings. In this regard, [Tueanrat et al., 2021b] emphasize that the five senses act as crucial transmission devices in the customer journey. The present study agrees with [Märting, Bissinger, Asta, 2023] that employing emotions and feelings during customer touchpoints in their journey can improve the customer experience and thus better manage the CJ. Our results also align with the findings in [Fiorentino et al., 2022] that sensory customer response generates tangible results on the customer journey. The emotional and sensory responses of the customer shape situations and behaviour at touchpoints throughout the journey and significantly impact customer experience [Lemon, Verhoef, 2016]. This is confirmed by [Stein, Ramaseshan, 2020] in the transfer of responses from individual touchpoints to the next ones and their impact on subsequent reactions.

The research has achieved its objectives in identifying the relationship between sensory marketing and the customer journey, with a positive significant relationship at the level of variables and sub-dimensions as evidenced in the results and examined in the Discussion section. The fast food restaurants focus on visual marketing through designing attractive menus with appealing images and vibrant designs that stimulate customer desire to purchase, and pay attention to auditory marketing by playing music that creates an atmosphere characterized by a fast tempo. Some fast food restaurants have focused on marketing through both olfactory and visual senses simultaneously by presenting food dish samples, which is an extremely effective strategy in attracting customers by providing comprehensive information about the dish they wish to purchase. However, the other restaurants have not focused on this approach. Additionally, the restaurants have not emphasized marketing through taste

¹ Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

Table 8 – Structural equation modelling results
Таблица 8 – Результаты моделирования структурными уравнениями

Hypotheses	Path	Estimates	t-value	p-value	C.R.	Result
H2	VM → CJ	.200	2.783	0.005	2.818	Accepted
H3	AM → CJ	.177	3.058	0.001	2.561	Accepted
H4	GM → CJ	.242	3.783	0.002	3.097	Accepted
H5	OM → CJ	.263	2.529	< 0.001	3.830	Accepted

Source: SPSS Amos V26 output.

by not providing samples for tasting, as this is not beneficial in the context of the fast food industry.

Furthermore, the current study provided answers to the questions formulated in the research problem, which revolves around how fast-food restaurants can improve customer interaction with products or services using sensory marketing. Fast food restaurants can intensify their marketing efforts on the emotional side by paying more attention to the general atmosphere of the restaurant and following the customer's journey at each touchpoint starting from the pre-purchase stage, whether on social media platforms or the restaurant's page, to the real-world environment, passing through the purchase stage and ending with the post-purchase stage, improving touchpoints during this journey and making the customer experience positive and enjoyable.

Finally, the paper provided an answer to the question of whether emotions and feelings can play a role in improving the customer journey. The findings showed that emotions and feelings can significantly affect the customer experience and thus play a major role in improving the customer journey for the better or vice versa, as the customer journey receives customer feedback by monitoring their emotions, thoughts, sensations, and behavioural responses to the service provider or the environment at all stages of the journey [Tueanrat et al., 2021b]. Researchers may expect to find evidence indicating that sensory marketing can be an important factor in improving the customer's experience and increasing loyalty. Customer satisfaction is linked to what consumers expect to receive [Bradley et al., 2021]. The results may also show variations in the impact of sensory marketing based on the industry or product type.

Limitations. This study faced several limitations, including the use of a customer survey focused on a fast-food restaurant sample. Future research could expand the sample to include first-class and luxury restaurants, as well as explore the impact of sensory marketing on different demographic groups such as youth, the elderly, or consumers in specific areas. Additionally, expanding the sample size would help generalize the results. One limitation was the method of questionnaire distribution via electronic means, which may have introduced bias, particularly since respondents were selected from social media groups focused on fast-food enthusiasts. To reduce bias and gain more detailed insights, personal interviews and open-ended questionnaires could be used to capture customer feedback throughout their journey. Understanding the customer journey is crucial for service delivery [Vaerenbergh et al., 2018] and future studies could apply this research in other sectors, such as retail or travel and tourism, to further explore sensory marketing's effects.

Future research directions. This research paves the way for future studies on the impact of sensory marketing through digital channels on customers, particularly via

social media and websites. It can be expanded to explore cultural adaptations of sensory marketing strategies and examine gender differences in its impact. Additionally, future studies can investigate sensory marketing's role in enhancing customer well-being in the hospitality industry, including hotels and travel companies. The use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to optimize the customer journey and sensory marketing strategies in virtual reality and chatbots is also an area for further research. Lastly, linking sensory marketing to sustainability and improving customer experience in health-related fields, such as sports and nutrition, offers additional avenues for exploration.

CONCLUSION

The results of this research showed that there is a correlation between sensory marketing and the customer journey. Sensory marketing tools greatly affect the customer's journey and experience. Customers interact with fast food restaurants through all their senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Therefore, restaurants must pay attention to these senses due to their importance, as they play an important role in the customer's journey. The interior design of the restaurant plays a major role in influencing the customer journey, as attention to decorations and wall colours is extremely important, especially in fast food restaurants, as these tools are considered marketing techniques. As for the visual effect, the distribution of lighting and the shapes and colours of the equipment must be coordinated in a way that increases the feeling of hunger. For this reason, fast food restaurants rely on the warm colours of red and yellow and their shades. In addition, the general atmosphere of the place and the playing music greatly enhance the customers' feeling of comfort and enjoyment. While eating meals, fast food restaurants often rely on fast music as audio marketing affects the customer's feelings and adds to the enjoyment through a specific style of songs. In general, audio marketing makes the customer's experience more exciting, increases pleasure, and makes it an unforgettable experience. The senses of smell and taste are no less important in building the customer journey.

Fast food restaurants must pay attention to their presence on social networking sites by creating official pages. Their basic duties are to improve communication and increase awareness of the brand, the meals, and the type of service provided. The first step in managing the customer journey is to improve the customer's contact points with the restaurant before purchasing, to create awareness and motivate them. In experience, we can benefit from the power of the electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) that motivates the customer to try the service through the opinions and comments published on the Internet, as well as from the ratings and comments that users place on the restaurants' websites. All these improve the effectiveness of communication and interaction with custom-

ers. Potential users get the opportunity to experience the service and start the customer journey through it. It is also possible to benefit from platforms, blogs, and groups in social networks that are concerned with fast food restaurants. Restaurants can benefit from this free service by identifying the weaknesses and problems that their customers suffer from and improving their services to provide the best experience.

A customer gets the first impression of a restaurant at the entrance where he meets the cashier, who is considered the first point of contact in the customer journey. Therefore, the cashier must be carefully selected. The ideal candidate is pleasant and courteous, has a tidy appearance, and can endure to leave a positive impact on the customer. Therefore, restaurants must train their employees to provide excellent service, fully understand and meet their customers' needs. Speed in serving meals is crucial to customers' comfort and makes a big difference in evaluating their experience. Fast food restaurants should also develop the menu by offering new meals with special sauces that meet different tastes, with the need to pay attention to its design and explain the components of the dishes. It is also possible to provide offers for special meals with discounts or healthy options for children

and customers looking for low-fat and low-calorie meals. Delicious foods presented distinctively make the customer live an experience that is difficult to forget.

All of these represent touchpoints during the purchasing process, and for the optimal experience to continue the last touchpoints must be made distinctive. Simplifying the ordering and payment processes adds to the customer journey, as fast food restaurants must develop payment services by providing electronic payment and mobile applications to improve the online ordering experience and increase the effectiveness of delivery services. The simpler and smoother the ordering and payment processes are, the better the customer journey will be and customers will certainly return to make another purchase trip. To succeed in managing customer relations better and enhancing customer experience after purchase, restaurants should respond to customer inquiries, pay attention to the voice of the customer (VOC), and listen to their feedback to improve the service and thus the customer journey. All of these things affect the CJ before, during, and after the purchase decision, and whenever fast food restaurants better the touchpoints during these stages, they can advance the customer journey and make it more enjoyable. ■

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