

## HOW DOES SENSORY MARKETING INFLUENCE THE CONSUMER'S PERCEPTION TO PURCHASE FAST FOOD?

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the consumer's intention as well as the decision-making process of ordering fast food. Accordingly, it studies how visual marketing techniques influence the perception of consumers towards the food industry. When browsing an app, the consumer only relies on the sight sense to make a purchase whereas all the senses influence that decision when is made physically in- store. In order to enrich the research, a quantitative analysis in the form of a survey was designed to analyze the fast-food industry. The current pandemic has shifted the food delivery industry, thus this research also analysis the consumer's perception to purchase fast food during COVID-19. Specifically, five transnational fast-food chains were selected to better understand smell, sound, taste, and touch senses in marketing. Essentially, this research explores how sensory marketing strategies can influence the consumers' perception and result in brand love.

**Keywords:** sensory marketing, visual marketing, consumer perception, digital transformation, fast food chains.

### 1. Introduction

Digital adoption has taken a quantum leap at both the organizational and industry levels (McKinsey, 2020). Consumers have dramatically increased the use of technology in the past year and companies have responded in turn. Ever since the start of the pandemic, businesses have decided to operate mainly by their online channels to meet the new needs of consumers.

Therefore, the customer experience has been reduced to an online basis where every product and service is displayed online and thus perceived by the eyes. Before COVID-19, other factors influenced this decision-making process. Besides the sight sense, consumers could rely upon their taste, touch, sound, and smell senses as well.

Even if the products are the exact same, the experience of obtaining them is totally different. For instance, burgers and fries have the same taste, scent, appearance, etc. However, in the restaurant, multiple factors enhance the consumer experience by involving the rest of the human senses. In fact, the image of the brand is created by mental conceptions and imaginations through the experience that consumers had with the brand (Grybś-Kabocik, 2018).

### 2. Problem Statement

Sensory marketing is a marketing practice that consists of selling and promoting products or services based on the five senses: sound, smell, taste, touch, and sight. This last sense is the most common and has been crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, it has been observed an increase in the use of digital devices and have shifted into a complete digital marketing strategy. Craving a burger, getting a new perfume, or buying a t-shirt, everything can be done with only a couple of clicks

and a little typing. However, how are consumers completely aware that what they are buying is actually what they want or need?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses use sensory marketing for branding to engage with customers and establish a relationship. This was complicated when physical stores started to close and were moved almost fully online, however, it was present in every order through the memory of the consumer.

Consequently, the research problem of this study is to identify to what extent sensory marketing can result in brand love. How each sense: smell, sound, taste, touch (with the exception of sight) can create a strong and positive perception of a franchised food chain restaurant.

### 3. Methodology & Data

A survey was conducted to gather information about the consumer's behavior before, during, and after physically buying fast food. The survey was based on four senses: smell, touch, taste, and sound. As mentioned before, the fifth sense: sight has played a crucial role in digital marketing and did not experience many changes during this past year. For that reason, there was no need to analyze the sight sense.

The survey was designed in Google Forms and distributed randomly to potential consumers of the selected franchised fast-food chains. It was promoted on social media platforms (Instagram and LinkedIn) and sent to individuals between the age of 11 and over 50. It was available on each platform from April 2021 until May 2021. The first part of the survey had a total of six questions consist of close-ended questions for determining demographic aspects. This includes but is not limited to age, gender, ethnicity, and occupational status (Table 1).

Furthermore, the second part consist of research-related questions. This section is a questionnaire in sensory marketing that analyzes the following fast food chains: McDonald's, KFC, Domino', Pizza Hut, and Burger King. The questions are related to five variables which are sound, smell, taste, touch, and brand love. It consisted of four multiple-choice questions and twenty one Linkert scale questions. The Linkert scale is used to measure the level of agreement with each question. This is a 5 point scale that allows consumers to express how much they agree or disagree with the particular statements. Respondents rated the statements from 1 ("not satisfied") to 5 ("extremely satisfied"). The data collected was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to highlight significant insights and elaborate the graphical results.

According to the above justification, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: smell factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands

H2: sound factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands

H3: touch factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands

H4: taste factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands

### 4. Data Analysis

According to the above justification, all of the senses involved in sensory marketing were tested with the except for the sight sense because of the given reasons. This research considered 255 out of 257 responses due to an error found in two of the questionnaires.

The result of the demographic research shows that more than sixty percent of the respondents were between the age of 21 and 30 years old (63%). 24% are responses of consumers between

the age of 11 and 20. The remaining are respondents between the age of 30 and 50 years old, being only 3.9 % the sample for customers over the age of fifty. As for gender, the female sample was slightly larger (54.3%) than the male (41.30%), the remaining percentage were respondents that preferred not to say their gender or other.

#### 4.1. Findings

The intention was to gather a reasonable representative sample that reflects the adult population in terms of age and gender. Participants were informed that the survey was completely anonymous and to be treated with confidentiality. Table 1 summarizes demographic information of the individuals that participated in the study.

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Age	11-20 years old	61	24%
	21-30 years old	163	63%
	31-40 years old	13	5,10%
	41-50 years old	10	3,90%
	Over 50 years old	10	3,90%
Gender	Male	105	41,30%
	Female	138	54,30%
	Prefer not to say	9	3,50%
	Other:	1	0,40%
Ethnicity	White or Caucasian	163	63%
	African-American	10	3,90%
	Latino or Hispanic	58	22,80%
	Asian	1	0,40%
	Native American	2	0,80%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Two or More	16	6,30%
	Other/Unknown	2	0,80%
	Prefer not to say	4	1,60%
Home Location	North America/Central America	74	29,10%
	South America	9	3,50%
	Europe	161	63,40%
	Africa	2	0,80%
	Asia	4	1,60%
	Australia	0	0%
	Caribbean Islands	3	1,20%
	Pacific Islands	0	0%
Education	High School	110	43,30%
	Bachelor's Degree	102	40,20%
	Master's Degree	29	11,40%
	Ph.D. or higher	8	3,10%

	Prefer not to say	5	2%
Occupational Status	Student	177	69,70%
	Part-time Employee	23	9,10%
	Full-time employee	38	15%
	Self-employed	6	2,40%
	Unemployed	8	3,10%
	Other:	1	0,40%

**4.2. Sensory Marketing**

It focuses on influencing consumers’ brains through the human senses (Gryb’s-Kabocik, 2018). The sensory marketing goal is to create a positive impression based upon the consumers’ experiences through the human senses. People are increasingly purchasing and consuming online where, traditionally, the sensory interaction has mostly been limited to visual (Petit, 2019). For that reason and for the purpose of this research, smell, sound, touch, and taste factors are considered when referring to the term sensory marketing.

**4.2.1. Smell Factors**

Respondents were asked questions regarding the sense of the smell (Figure 1). Four questions were asked to determine how smell factors impact brand love. 57 % of the respondents indicated that the food smell at the restaurant stimulates their appetite and extremely agreed or agreed with the fact that the atmosphere smell improves their appetite. However, a compute 42% of respondents do not agree or slightly agree that the smell in the restroom and service area is usually pleasant (23% are slightly satisfied and 19% are not satisfied).

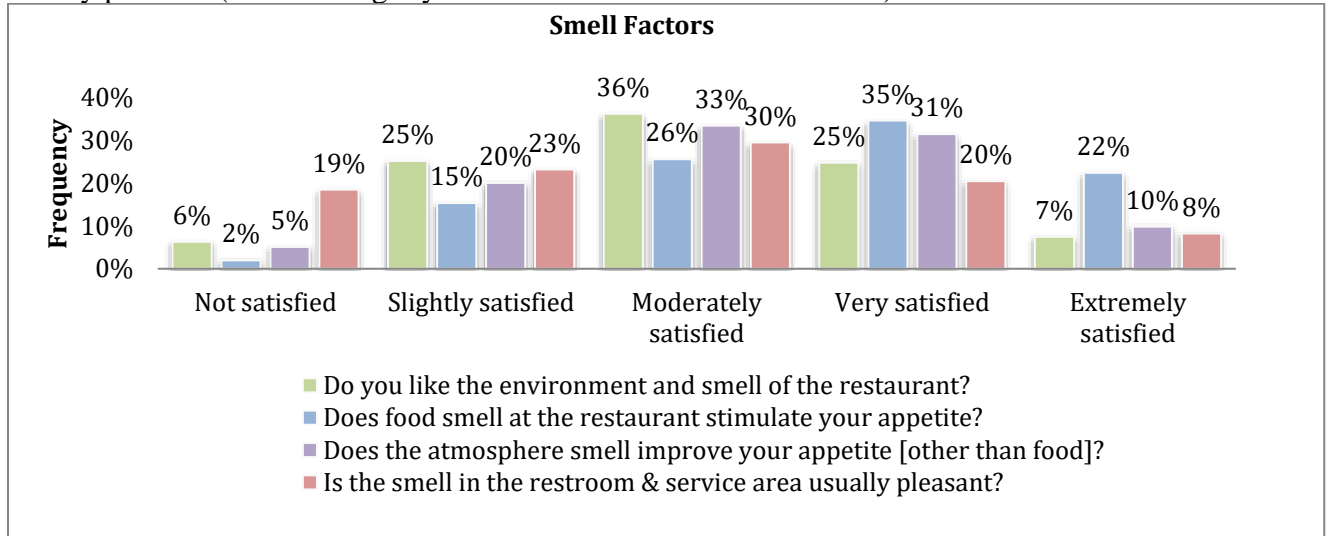


Figure 1. Smell Factors

**4.2.2. Sound Factors**

As shown in Figure 2, when asked about the music, the sound and the noises in the background, respondents agreed for the most part that the background music and sound create a good while they enjoyed their meal at the restaurant in person. A total of six different questions were asked

to collect information about the sense of sound in the fast food industry. In order to find out the level of satisfaction to the question stated, participants were asked to use the Linker scale from 1 to 5. Being five the highest level of satisfaction (extremely satisfied) and one the lowest (not satisfied).

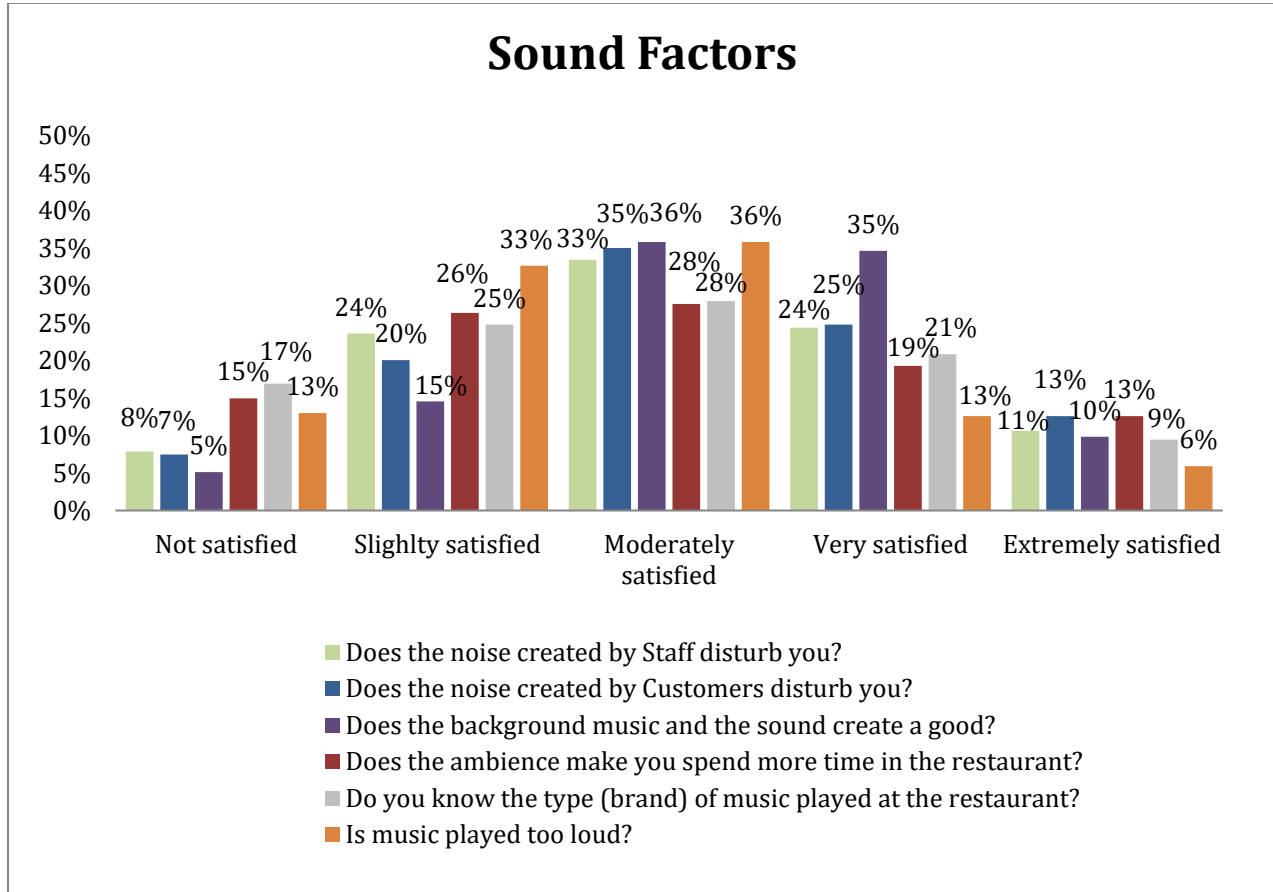


Figure 2. Sound Factors

4.2.3. Touch Factors

In effort to test the fourth hypothesis, the survey contained four questions regarding touch factors. As can be seen in the graph below in Figure 3, a vast majority of participants indicated that their food in the restaurant is usually served warm and crispy. Only 1% of the sample indicated that they do not agree with this statement.

When asking about the cleanliness in the smell factors, respondents were not satisfied with the smell as it was not pleasant. However, 246 respondents agreed with the statement that if the restaurant is kept clean that makes it more likely for them to stay and dine in.

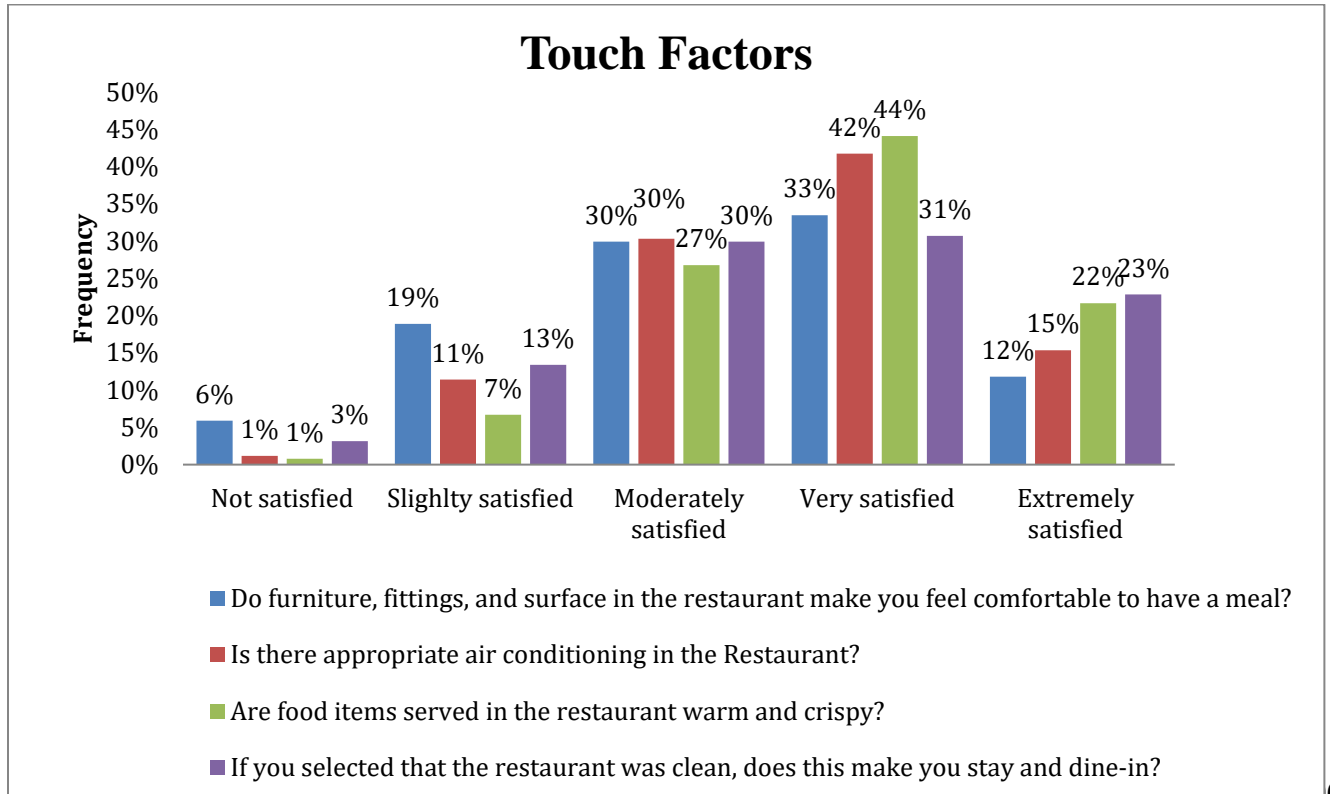


Figure 3. Touch Factors

#### 4.2.4. Taste Factors

In effort to identify the most popular transnational fast food chain, respondents were asked to rank the previously mentioned companies based on the sensations and flavors experienced. As shown in Figure 4, the most popular fast food chain is McDonald’s (yellow bar).

Furthermore, in order to better analyze this sense, two additional questions were asked regarding taste (See appendix A). Respondents were asked if the food served suited their lifestyle and delighted. 48.6 % of participants stated that the food served was “slightly satisfied” or did not satisfied” their lifestyle and delighted. And only 10.7% of the respondents were “extremely satisfied” with this statement. The other additional question was whether or not they liked how the food is presented. 76.4 % of respondents consider the food served to be extremely, very or moderately good. As opposed to 23.6 % of responses do not agree or slightly agree with the statement.

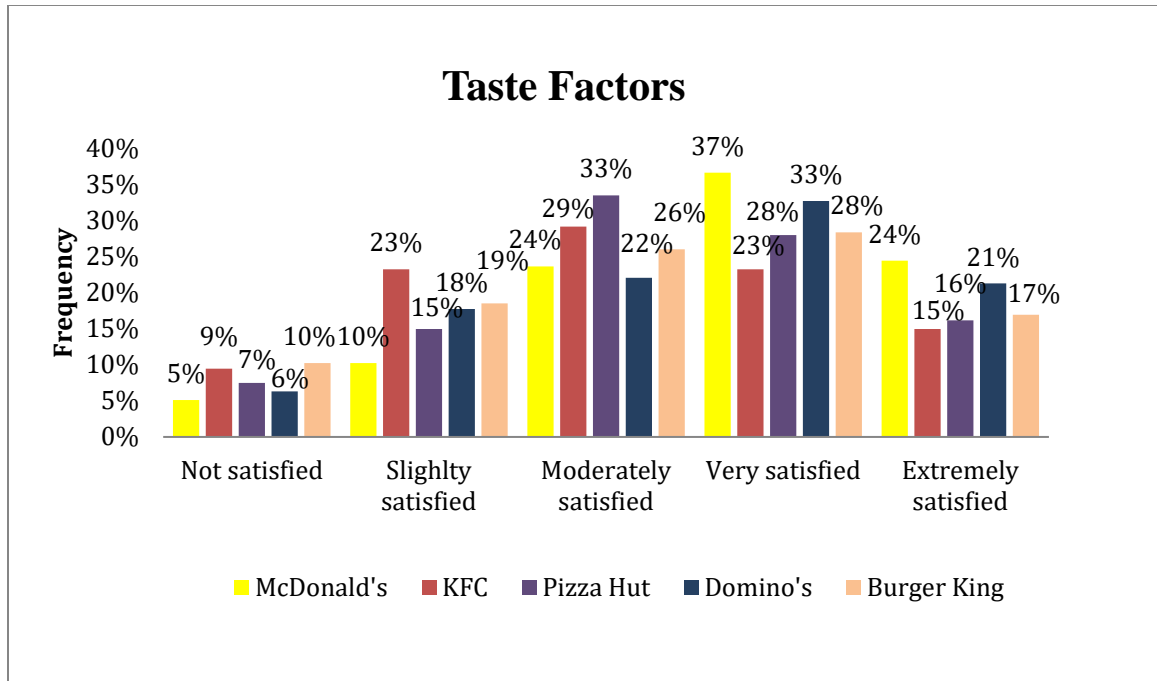


Figure 4. Taste Factors

### 4.3. Brand love

To establish a connection between a consumer and a brand on an emotional level through an interaction of five human senses; sight, sound, smell, taste and touch in buying process (Khanna, 2012). This research aims to measure how consumers have an intense feeling of affection towards a brand. It analyzes brand love based on two variables consumer loyalty to the brand and consumers' behavior towards the brand.

The first variable, states that each brand is unique, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to marketing. Developing emotive creative and promoting and placing that message in a trusted environment, in tune with the audience, leads to consumer loyalty (Deloitte, 2020).

As for the second variable, consumer behavior studies how the consumer's emotions, attitudes and preferences are associated with the purchase or use of goods and services.

#### 4.3.1. Consumer Loyalty

The following graphic analyzes consumer loyalty to the brand. It considers the number of respondents that chose a particular fast food chain as their favorite and how they actually ranked the taste of the food served. For instance, 110 respondents chose McDonald's as their favorite fast food chain in the first section of the questionnaire. Out of those responses, 81 % stated that McDonald's food is extremely good or very good. This indicates the level of customer satisfaction that McDonald's has. Not only, the majority of respondents think that it is their favorite choice as a brand but also it is their favorite choice because of the flavor and the quality of the food. As opposed to KFC that scored the worst fast food consumer loyalty to the brand. From the respondents that chose KFC as their favorite brand, 30 % stated that KFC food is moderately, slightly or not good in terms of taste. In fact, 3 % of the consumers that love this brand suggested that the food is not good. Whereas, for the rest of the fast food chains analyzed in this research, none of the respondents that favored the brand suggested that they were not satisfied with the taste as shown in the following Figure 5.

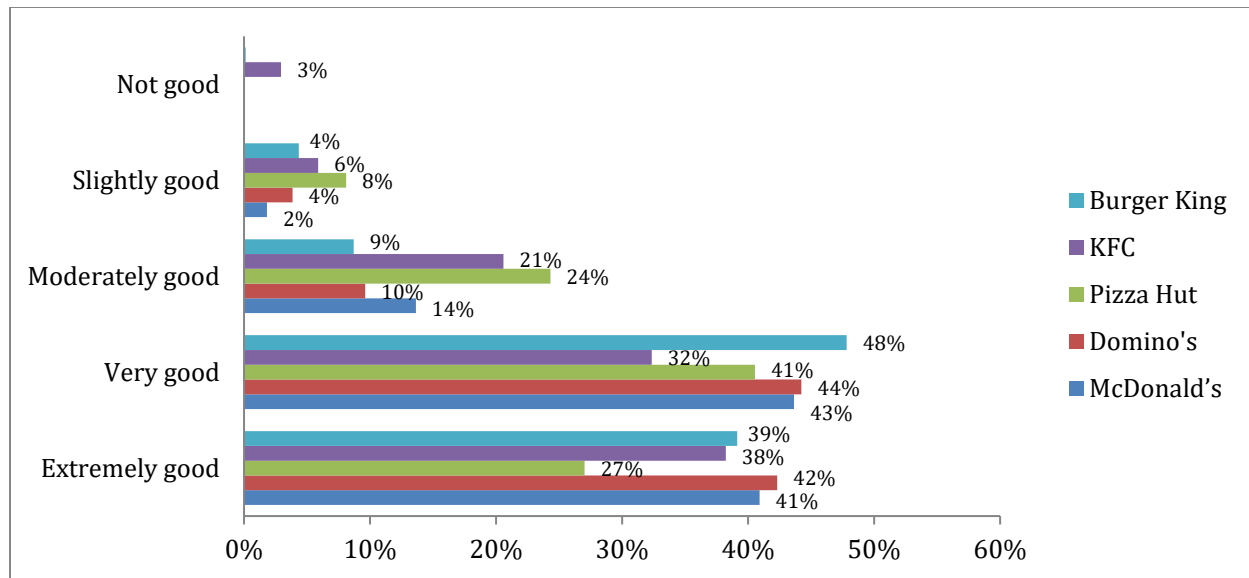


Figure 5. Graphical result of consumer loyalty and brand love

#### 4.3.2. Consumer Behavior

Similarly, to analyze how consumers behave in the fast food industry, the following graphic was developed. Participants were asked to select the option that best describes their behavior when interacting in a fast food chain. The variables were socialization, after party, after work, dine in, and takeaway. Additionally, the average a consumer spends on a fast food chain was also analyzed. As shown in Figure 6, the results suggest that the majority of consumers stick around a \$5 to \$10 budget when they buy fast food. Participants that chose after party as their main reason why they purchase fast food spend on average between \$ 15 and \$ 20. This suggests that respondents usually spend more money when they get the food to go or after a party. Essentially, the more a consumer likes a brand, the higher is the willingness to pay. This means that consumers that come into a fast food franchise after a party are more likely to spend more money than those who come after work.



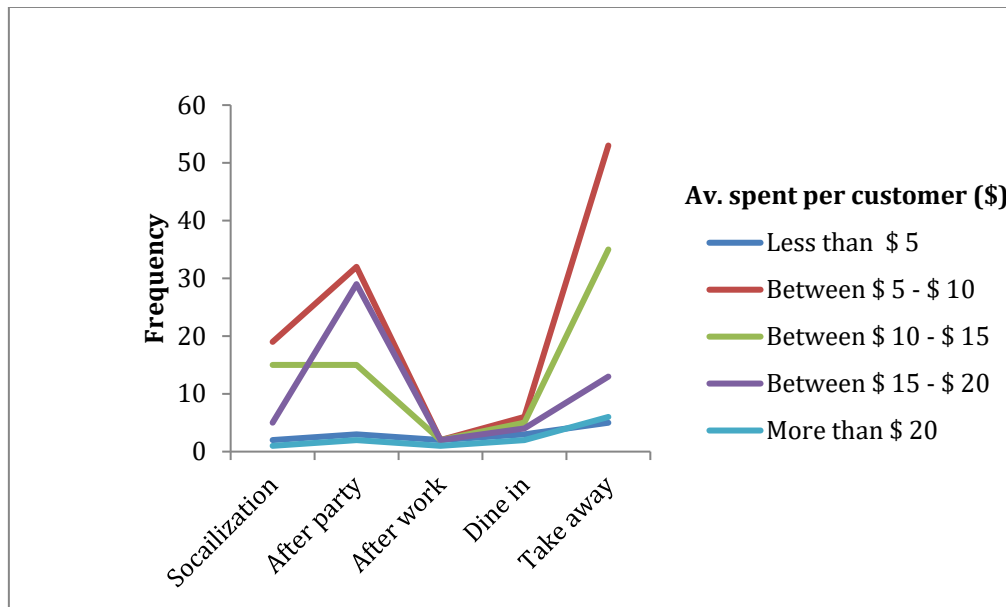


Figure 6. Graphical result of consumer behavior and average spent per customer

## 5. Discussion

Digital technology is transforming how transnational food retailers and chain restaurants use e-commerce strategies and Online Food Delivery [OFD] services to reach customers (Kraak, 2020). As the literature suggests, sensory marketing can result in brand love even with the given conditions due to COVID-19 pandemic. There is a positive correlation between sensory marketing and brand love.

According to the hypothesis results, all the hypotheses tested are supported indicating that each sense analyzed can result in Brand Love. Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H4 were confirmed.

This means that smell factors, sound factors, touch factors, and taste factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands.

### 5.1. Limitations

The majority of respondents were for the most part residents of the United States and European countries. Although this can be very useful for future research, the sample is not large enough to be generalized and identify differences between countries. The size of the sample collected is relatively small to state the difference between demographic groups and market locations. Moreover, as the current vaccines against COVID-19 appear to be effective enough to end the current pandemic (Powell, 2021). Further research is encouraged to explore the new post-coronavirus scenario in the fast food industry.

### 5.2. Implications & Recommendations

The results of this research will be beneficial to the marketers that are looking to improve their existing marketing strategies and practices in a physical establishment. In the attempt to target new customers and retain the existing ones, it is highly recommended for marketers to implement a sensory marketing strategy. The findings of this study can be beneficial as well to academicians of any field that would like to expand their knowledge about the relationship between brand love and sensory marketing within the fast food industry, in particular.

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## 1. Appendix A

### Survey Questions

How does sensory marketing influence the consumer's perception to purchase fast food? We'd love to hear your feedback about the questions we provided. The survey should take 5 minutes, and your responses are completely anonymous.

This research aims to analyze the fast-food industry. Specifically, five fast-food chains have been selected to better understand how sensory marketing strategies can influence the consumers' perception and result in brand love.

Questions marked with an asterisk (\*) are required.

We appreciate your input!

### Demographic Factors

What is your age? \*

- 11-20 years old
- 21-30 years old
- 31-40 years old
- 41-50 years old
- Over 50 years old

What gender do you identify as? \*

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other:

Please specify your ethnicity \*

- White or Caucasian
- African-American
- Latino or Hispanic
- Asian
- Native American
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Two or More
- Other/Unknown
- Prefer not to say

Where is your home located? \*

- A. North America/Central America
- B. South America
- C. Europe
- D. Africa

E. Asia  
F. Australia  
G. Caribbean Islands  
H. Pacific Islands  
Other:

What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? \*

High School  
Bachelor's Degree  
Master's Degree  
Ph.D. or higher  
Prefer not to say

What is your current occupational status? \*

Student  
Part-time Employee  
Full-time employee  
Self-employed  
Unemployed  
Other:

What is your favorite fast-food chain? \*

McDonald's  
KFC  
Domino's  
Pizza Hut  
Burger King

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How frequently do you eat fast food? \*

Daily  
Weekly  
Monthly  
Rarely

Main reasons why you visit a fast-food restaurant? \*

Dine-in  
Take away  
Socialization  
After work  
Afterparty

How much time do you usually spend at the restaurant? \*

Less than 10 minutes  
10 minutes – 30 minutes  
30 Minutes - 1 hour

1 Hour – 2 Hours  
More than 2 Hours

How much do you usually spend in dollars (For European countries please consider euros) \*

Less than \$ 5  
Between \$ 5 - \$ 10  
Between \$ 10 - \$ 15  
Between \$ 15 - \$ 20  
More than \$ 20

## Sensory Marketing

### Smell Factors

Do you like the environment and smell of the restaurant? \*

Very unsatisfied  
1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
Very satisfied

Does the atmosphere smell improve your appetite [other than food]? \*

Very unsatisfied  
1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
Very satisfied

Does food smell at the restaurant stimulate your appetite? \*

Very unsatisfied  
1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
Very satisfied

Is the smell in the restroom & service area usually pleasant? \*

Very unsatisfied  
1  
2  
3  
4

5  
Very satisfied

### Sound Factors

Does the noise created by Staff disturb you? \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Does the noise created by Customers disturb you? \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Does the background music and the sound create a good? \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Does the ambience make you spend more time in the restaurant? \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Do you know the type (brand) of music played at the restaurant? \*

Very unlikey

1

2

3

4

5  
Very likely

Is music played too loud? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

### **Touch Factors**

Do furniture, fittings, and surface in the restaurant make you feel comfortable to have a meal? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

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Is there appropriate air conditioning in the Restaurant? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

Are food items served in the restaurant warm and crispy? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

If you selected that the restaurant was clean, does this make you stay and dine-in? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

### Taste Factors

In terms of taste,

How satisfied are you with each fast food chain?

Rate each fast food chain below

McDonald's \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

KFC \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Domino's \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Pizza Hut \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3



4

5

Very satisfied

Burger King \*

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

Do you like the way food is presented? \*

Very unlikely

1

2

3

4

5

Very likely

Does food service in the restaurant suit your lifestyle and delight?

Very unsatisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Very satisfied

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How does sensory marketing influence the consumer's perception to purchase fast food?

Thank you so much for giving us feedback!