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## **Refine the Services by Touching the Customer Senses Sensorial Marketing Strategy for Hospitality Industry**

Kattepogu Nagarjuna\* and Bushan D. Sudhakar

Dept. of International Business,  
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

### **Abstract:**

With the advancements and ever changing recent trends, the service providers in Hospitality Industry are facing critical situation due to cut throat competition in the market because of too many competitors. In addition, the needs and increasing expectations from the customers' side towards hospitality industry are also confusing the hoteliers concerning the way they have to offer their services to the customers in order to give them delight. As the traditional marketing services are not sufficient to meet the expectations of customers, the hoteliers need to look back to the way they offer services and go for the refinement and improvement. Current study tried to introduce the "Sensorial Marketing Strategy" (marketing practices which target five human senses Sight, Hearing, Smelling, Taste and Touch Senses) into the Hospitality Industry in order to refine the hospitality services. Different relevant research papers and books related to "hospitality industry" and "sensory marketing", have been referred and reviewed. Findings of the study explained the role of the human senses in the day to day human life and their relevance in the hospitality settings. The study provides insights as the integration of sensory marketing concept into hospitality industry can refine the services with a great quality.

**Key words:** Hospitality Industry, Sensorial Marketing Strategy, Refining the Services, Experience

### **Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality Industries:**

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in modern world. Out of every eleven jobs in this world's employment market, one belongs to Hospitality Industry. So, a fact that all of us have to accept is that, Hospitality Industry is one of the largest sectors in the world and will continue to grow in the future. The modern world has brought so many changes in the life style of the human being. Every human being who is visiting another place (other than his home town) needs hospitality for various personal needs and commitments in the life... be it leisure, business purposes, academic purposes and so on. Humans are visiting many other places because of so many reasons like leisure, medical, cultural, religious, academic, business related issues, availability of medical services, business conferences, sports and games, film tourism and what not. People have always travelled to distant parts of the world to see monuments, arts and culture, taste new cuisine etc. All of them seek the hospitality services and hotel is a good place to get revived by using it's services. Knowing the need in the hospitality industry, many hospitality business organisations have entered into the demanded places in order to provide the hospitality services to the needed ones. But the problem comes, as there are quite a big number of hotels in the market which puzzles the customer in choosing a better one among many which can be found with unique service offerings (if not, better at least) than any other hotel. So, the hoteliers need to satisfy the existing regular customers and attract the new ones by providing effective services which will give the customers a unique experience. In this regard, this paper makes an effort to bring out the concept of "Sensorial Service Strategy" in order to show a way to the hoteliers for becoming the best one among the competitors which gives a unique experience to the visitors. While introducing the Sensory Marketing Strategy, the first

objective of current study is to focus on the importance and significance of each human “sense”. Second objective of study is to explain how a hotel can make use of the sensorial strategy while offering the refined services to the customers.

### ***Definitions of Tourism:***

Since all the people need to travel and visit different kinds of places (apart from their place of own residence) because of different kinds of commitments in life. UNWTO says, if a person is staying in a place as a visitor if his/ her trip includes an overnight stay, that person can be called a ‘tourist’. Earlier it was only leisure activities were considered to be the reasons of tourism.

According to Tourism Society in Britain, “Tourism is the temporary short-term movement of people to destination outside the place where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at their destinations, includes movement for all purposes, as well as day visit or excursions”.

There is also a discussion regarding the roots of 'tourism'. The French School, led by A. Houlot, argues that the term 'tourism' comes from the old Aramaic Tur, which was used for the exploration and movement of people in the Bible. This word was used for the first time when Moses began his expedition to the lands of Canaan.

The term tourist was firstly used as official term in 1937 by the- League of Nations. Tourism was defined as people travelling abroad for period of over 24 hours. Whatever it may be, a fact that all of us have to accept is that, Hospitality Industry is one of the largest sectors in the world and will continue to grow in the future. It is mostly because all of them seek the hospitality services as hotel is a good place for any visitor to get revived by using it’s services.

### ***Understand Hospitality in Different Point of Views:***

- a) Broadly speaking, Hospitality is *the act of kindness* in welcoming and looking after the basic needs of guests or strangers, mainly in relation to food, drink and accommodation.
- b) Contemporary explanation of Hospitality refers to the *relationship process between guest and host*.
- c) By saying “Hospitality Industry”, we refer to the companies or organisations which *provide food and drink and/or accommodation* to people who are away from home. The hospitality industry includes hotels and restaurants, as well as many other types of organisations or institutions. These products and services are offered not only to people away from home, but *also to local guests*.
- d) Hospitality is the relationship between guest and host, or the *act or practice of being hospitable*.
- e) Hospitality is also known as the act of *generously providing care* and kindness to whoever is in need.
- f) According to Dictionary.com hospitality means ‘the *friendly reception and treatment* of guests or strangers’. Specifically, this includes the welcome, reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers in a warm, friendly and generous way.
- g) Tourism and Hospitality is often described as ‘the *pleasure industry*’ or ‘the welcome industry’. It’s an industry where communication is the key feature.
- h) It’s also an international industry and will involve a range of *inter-cultural encounters*. The language of this industry is quite clearly English in an international context, but it is also the language of meeting needs, of providing high levels of service, of understanding people, of *delighting people*, of solving problems.

**Need for the Study:**

So, the increasing number of hospitality service providers has brought great cutthroat competition in attracting the confusingly crowded tourists. What good is for any hotel offering similar kind of services, being in the highest competitive world when the remaining competitors are providing just in relation to food, drink and accommodation? They need to attract the new customers and also make the revisiting customers loyal to them. For that they need to refine the hospitality services to offer them in a unique way to be special in the sight of the customers and differentiated from competitors.

**Objectives of the Study:**

While introducing the Sensory Marketing Strategy, objective of current study are

- a) To focus on the importance and significance of each human "sense".
- b) To explain how a hotel can refine their services with the help of sensorial strategy

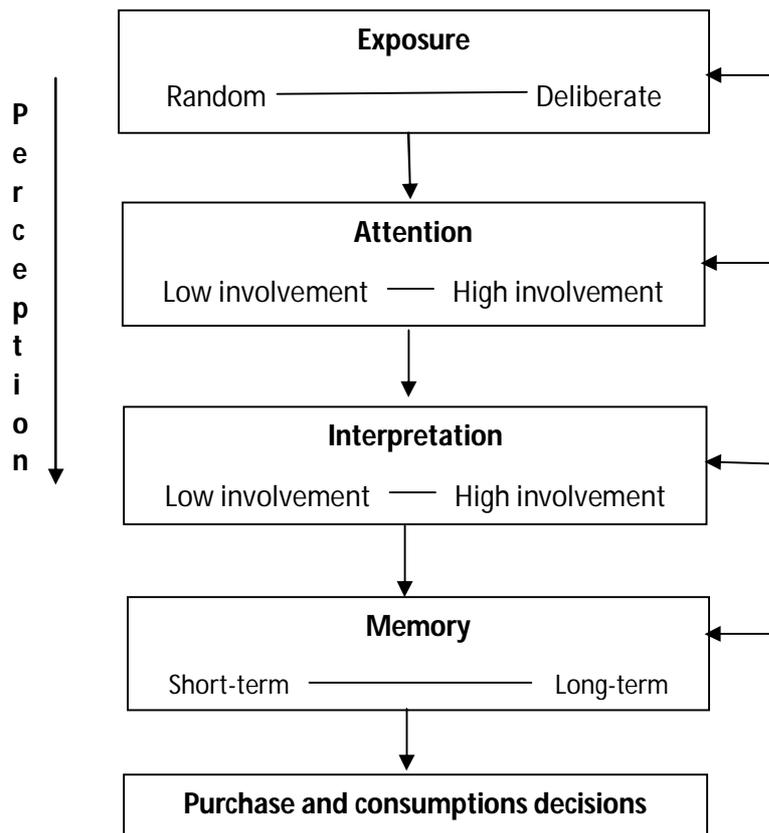
**Experiential Marketing:** That is where the concept of experiential marketing practices came into the practice as a tool of differentiating the hotel's services from their competitors. As Philip Kotler points out, it is not mere *service*, but the service environment and the *service offering as a whole* that matters. The conventional, *experiential marketing* has reached a highest saturating point and became old. The hotels need to try even more wisely in order to get the unique identity in the sight of customers. Both conventional and experiential marketing services can no more make the tourist (or visitor) get attached to them because the expectations of the customers are growing. And at the same time, the so called big (luxury) hotels have also raised their standards to dominate the expectations of the customers by which, they become the first choice to potential customer group.

**Review of Literature:****Services and Senses:**

In this context, Bertil Hulten & Niklas Broweus (2009) says traditional mass and relationship marketing theories do not offer the satisfactory answers to the question how a firm should treat its customers in a more individualized way in today's society. They ignore the significance of the human senses & the supreme sensory experience of human beings five senses viz. **Sight, Smell, Taste, Touch and Sound** through which we engage, communicate and understand the whole world. So, Sensory Strategy is needed in order to give the customers an effective experience in the hotel so that they will be attached to it even in future.

While introducing the importance of human senses, Martin Lindstrom explained from the most basic points where most of the humans do not recognize it which we do every day: We sniff the milk before drinking it, we sniff at the slightest indication of smoke and then we act accordingly. Our sense of smell keeps us safe by helping choose fresh and avoid rotten food.

Victor Anandkumar (2009) understood the way the customers take decisions:



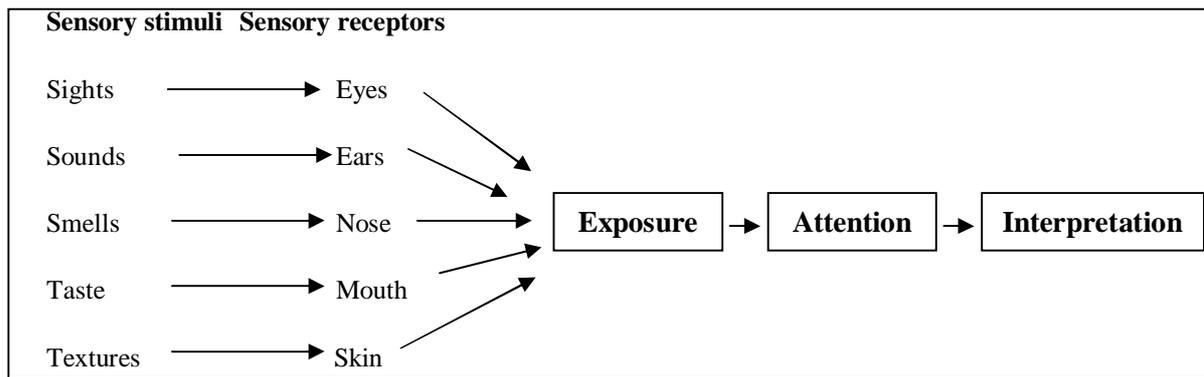
**Figure 1.** Information processing for consumer decision making

*Adapted from:* Victor Anandkumar's Consumer Decision Model, 2009

Martin Lindstrom (2005) identified the things that we undergo automatically, sometimes without our consciousness, we store our values, feelings and emotions in memory banks. He compared the memory to a standard video recorder which records on two separate tracks, one for image and one for sound. The human being has at least five tracks image, sound, smell, taste, and touch. These five tracks contain more data than one can imagine because they have direct bearing on our emotions and all that they entail. They can fast forward or back track at will, and stop just exactly on the right spot in split second.

The senses are linked to our memory and help us to make emotional attachment or connection with everything around us in the world. Thus, in the similar way people are emotionally connected to the different kinds of brands. Even by becoming the unique experience provider with refined services, the hotel also can project its self as a brand.

Customers first they get exposed to the things around them. Based on the things that they have exposed to, they will automatically be involved be it low involvement or high involvement by which the customer starts to interpret the things in his mind. The interpreted things will be store in his memory so that he can take the decision based on the over all situation.



**Figure 2.** An overview of the perceptual process

## What is the big deal with the senses?

### *Significance of the SENSE OF SIGHT*

- The first sense to be attracted by most of the hotels in their promotional activities. Colours are used to evoke the emotion, express personality, and stimulate brand association.
- 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual
- The brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text
- 46% of the people say a website's design is the number one criterion for discerning its credibility
- In Facebook, posts that include videos attract 3 times more than plain text posts
- Flat screen videos or graphics, music, smells, lighting and flooring that tend to capture the brand image or personality and help to create a unique environment and shopping experience (McGoldrick, 1990; Marsh, 1999)

### *The Sense of SMELL:*

- The 'smell' sense is closely related to our emotional life and can strongly affect our emotions (*Hulten, 2009*)
- Smell is the sense that is most **closely linked to the brain's** emotional centre and could therefore be harnessed to provoke a powerful emotional reaction (*Lena Goldkuhl and Maria Styve'n, 2007*)
- A human being can remember more than **10,000 different** scents (*Niklas Broweus, 2009*)
- The perception of a scent experienced earlier is enough for us to **associate it with earlier memories**
- The role of a scent in a hotel is to create attention around a product or a brand, or long-term strategies, so that the scent becomes a major element of the identity of the hotel
- Scent plays a crucial role in **reducing the "stress"**, giving the **pleasure**, and **arousing** the feelings to buy
- Scent creates a pleasant environment in the hotel and can determine the customers' level of satisfaction

- Scents can also have a positive impact on customers' loyalty to a hotel (brand)
- Scent can determine the customer's perception of service quality
- Customers will be more interested to spend some more time and there by money. It affects the future behavior of the customer if the purchasing environment smells pleasantly
- Example: Stephan Floridian Waters (a signature scent) and Marriott and Hilton Hotel

#### *The sense of HEARING:*

- Music is a powerful tool for evoking emotions, in effect, when listening to music endorphins are released which generates sensation of pleasure. A sound identity can be established if certain music or sounds are associated with a company.
- **Orbach (1999)** stated that feelings are well connected to both the pursuit and the experience of music, can include calmness, excitement, fear, satisfaction and sadness etc.
- Music is proven to reduce negative effects of waiting for service (Hui et al. 1997) and stimulates customer's emotion and induce positive behavioural reaction.
- Bruner (1990) states that **fast tempo music** usually is recognized as happy and pleasant while music of slow tempo has been shown to provoke more sentimental feelings. It is also proved that high volume music in a restaurant will increase the consumption of the customers (North & Hargreaves, 1996). Smith & Curnow (1966) revealed that in a point of sales, customer adopts his walk speed according to the tempo of the music.
- Roballey & Ali (1985) and Milliman (1986), a fast-tempo music will push the customer to leave earlier. In the other hand, a slow music played at low volume will increase the time and the money spends inside
- Music interpreted as either pleasant or unpleasant will generate different responses usually resulting in a positive or negative mood (**Gorn et al. 1993**).
- Marriott hotel has a signature music where we can not find the same anywhere in the world

#### *The Sense of TASTE::*

- From an early age, our behaviour towards foods seems to be strongly influenced by the effects of taste and flavour.
- Food is an integral part of life. Social interaction happens around the table, and food plays a vital role in tradition and ritual. You would still partake in the intimacy of sharing a meal, but the pleasure would be lessened
- Taste and smell are closely related. It would not be incorrect to assume that one smells more flavours than they taste.
- When the nose fails, say from a bad cold, taste suffers an 80 percent loss. Loss of taste without loss of smell is pretty rare.
- "Signature dish" is a special dish which is available only in the hotel. Can have patent right also

- What makes a dish truly memorable is the synergy that exists between the different elements of the 'whole sensory package;' If the chef were appealing only to taste and aroma, it is doubtful if the restaurant would achieve the same results.
- But 'taste' of the food items will fulfil the satisfaction level of the customers

### *Sense of TOUCH:*

- Human skin is the largest of our organs. Touch is the non-verbal communication
- It is through the skin, as our receptor organ for touch, that we are in contact with the world around us (Gallace and Spence, 2010; Serino and Haggard, 2010)
- Touch can create a tactile stimulation that creates a rewarding feeling of pleasure that activates our brain, impacting our feelings and behaviour (Rolls (1999).
- Touching a product is a way of ensuring its quality and is consequently more important when faced to unfamiliar brands
- In the hospitality setting, the key elements in the sense of touch include **softness, smoothness, temperature and weight** (Kotler, 1973)
- Touch has been shown to enhance positive feelings in the context of interpersonal touch (Hornik, 1992), to improve confidence in product judgment when the environment allows physical inspection (McCabe & Nowlis, 2003)
- To enhance product evaluation when softness and texture vary, especially for high quality products (Grohmann Grohmann, Spangenberg, & Sprott, 2007).
- In effect, touch enhances the brand experience for a customer by adding sensory information of a brand such as the touch of opening the doors to a hotel, the feeling of walking on the floor or the sensation of touching an exclusive materials (Gobé, 2001)
- For example **McDonalds** letting their customers make their orders by **touch screens**

### **Discussion:**

Considering the significance of each sense, the hoteliers/ the hospitality service providers has the high chance of getting the attention of the customers as they'll have that attachment.

Considering the Sense of Sight, the hotels can improvise their choice of colours to the walls, lighting system in the important areas of the particular service offering place makes a huge difference in the hospitality setting. The decorative items, cleanliness at the eating places **etc. Signature colour** can give the special identity.

In all the areas in the hotel, the signature feature of the hotel can be highlighted so that the services may reach the customers in a unique way. Be it the design of hotel, title, its logo, execution of brand appeal, colours of the surrounding, materials that were used in the hotel, lights, layout, signage, textures, style of furnishings, wall décor, images that are shown on the walls, atmosphere in the hotel, location of the hotel, website outlook, pictures in the website, digital technology used for the hotel, notice boards, dress code of the staff, advertisement, entrance, restrooms, foyer, food & beverages, entertainment, seating arrangement, traditionality in the look, dining table, utensils, architecture, styling, window dressing,

lawns and gardens, parking availability, waiting cues, flooring and carpeting, arrangements of food items on the dining table, visual clutters, reflection from the high glass barrier, distraction of unintended illumination, fabrics, and finishes, composition of plates, safety measurements and all the things in all the things the differentiation can be shown so that it may get great impression in the sight of the customers.

The Sense of Sound especially the background music has the ability to grab the attention of the customer. Only few hotels play filmy music but many hotels play music related to nature, waterfalls and so on. Some hotels have signature music. Signature music is the music which is composed by the hotel itself especially for engaging the customers and give them good experience. The soothing and relaxing music will have much influence on the customer behaviour both in terms of 'time spent' and buying the services. Music, tempo of music, volumes of music, audio logo, audio clutters, controlled, and unified music, communication and language from the staff, advertisement background music, buzzer sound to call room boys, telephone ringing, Music according to time (morning, afternoon, evening and night time) are the ways the services can be concentrated and be refined.

The Sense of Smell has a very important role in hospitality scenario. Places like staying rooms, dining halls, parks, bathrooms and all other places need a decent aroma where it can create a qualitative service environment. It can also influence the customer behaviour, spending time. One of the unique aspects of Keeping all these into considerations Hospitality Industry can refine the Services so that the customer will be involved in the environment and perceive the quality of the hotel services in a great way. For example Stefan Floridian Waters is the signature scent especially made by the Singapore Airlines has played key role in bringing the customers back to travel with them again after one experience.

In the hotel environment, scent, scents and odour of food, Aroma at Spa, natural smells, artificial smells, congruency, Smell in the surroundings, smell of the food, fragrance of the towels, shop-fragrance, smell at washrooms, use of room fresheners, showers have an aromatic steam option have the high chances to get improved so that the customer is engaged all over the hotel and will not get distracted by anything else.

The Sense of Taste has the greatest potentiality where the customer can be caught in his attention and can occupy the first place in his choices. Signature taste can surely be an important aspect in attracting the customer. KFC, with their unique recipe, has become the best chicken provider. Taste has the capacity to maximise the customer experience and satisfactory levels.

Touch Sense also has a significant value. Hotels with its temperature in the environments, different touch points, smoothness of the furniture, bed facilities, bathrooms, softness and all the other touch related things will really involve the customer in the environment and there by their purchasing behaviour will get affected which will result in revising behaviour as well.

### **Conclusion and Implications after refining the services:**

We are all intimately familiar with our senses. They fully inform the picture of our daily life. In the unfortunate situation where one fails to function, the loss highlights how we depend on it. However, for some mysterious reason, the hospitality industry and communication agencies have always faced difficult situation in expanding their market. Messages neglected the full five-dimensional sensory picture. Nevertheless, as illustrated by some of the examples, several marketers are taking sensory strategy seriously to refine their offerings in the crowded marketplace. Despite the recent rise in implementation of sensory stimulus, all this sensory progress is non-branded (Lindstrom 2005). The stimulus still tends to be added randomly, and revolves more around generating traffic than generating loyalty. Sensory appeal has not yet been defined as essential among even the world's famous companies, nor have they examined the major potential that sensory

strategy can unleash. The benefit of sensory marketing strategy is to achieve a better brand awareness through multi-sensual experience, consistency, and effective process that can penetrate consumers' memories. The aim is to generate not only new customers but returning customers. Because the returning customers are vital to brand equity; they are the evidence of a successful sensory branding program.

India, a land of geographical diversity, is blessed with a long history of rich civilization and culture. It is a potential tourism paradise with a wide variety of attractions ranging from beautiful beaches, hill stations, scenery, forts, monuments, fairs, festivals, art, crafts, culture, forest, wildlife, and religious centres etc.

The study can be a helpful one to the hoteliers there by they can refine their services. As a hotel provides an experiential service to the customer, the industry in the country has high chances of growing in an exponential manner as lakhs of international tourists are visiting India a part from domestic tourists (75.02 lakhs). Thereby, it can cause the development of the country.

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