

# Review and Prospect of Sensory Marketing Research

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## Abstract

**This paper takes the practical exploration of the five senses in marketing under the general framework of sensory marketing as the main research content, and systematizes its theoretical connotation as well as the current research status. Sensory marketing is a new marketing paradigm that integrates the five human senses (touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste) into marketing design and then forms a new marketing paradigm. From domestic and international research perspectives, the applied research of the five sensory marketing is summarized respectively. It is found that although the existing results of sensory marketing have formed a systematic framework based on embodied cognition theory and the S-O-R model, there are gaps in cross-sensory interaction, integration of cutting-edge technologies, and negative effects.**

## Keywords

**Sensory Marketing; Cognition; Emotion; Purchase Decision-Making.**

## 1. Introduction

As market competition intensifies and marketing means become more homogeneous, marketing planning faces a bottleneck. Thus, innovative marketing to attract customers is crucial for product sales. With the focus of marketing back to consumers, academics and industry interest in the perceived value of consumers is also rising, and began to think about whether the five senses of consumers can influence their choice of products.

At present, both academics and the industry generally have a positive attitude towards sensory marketing, and believe that this new marketing model can bring consumers a different sensory experience and stimulate the willingness to buy. In fact, although sensory marketing seems to be a new marketing paradigm, marketing to some of the senses has already achieved great results. For example, tactile marketing is one of the more common forms of traditional marketing, but in the past it was not seen as a way of engaging the consumer, but rather as a necessary part of purchasing a product. At the same time, there are some new sensory marketing more and more used by merchants and enterprises, for example, Abercrombie & Fitch, a globally renowned clothing brand, sprays woody - scented perfume in its stores to create a unique shopping atmosphere, which in turn conveys to consumers the brand's concept of a combination of sophistication and relaxation of the attitude of life, and enhances their sense of identity with the brand. The brand's sense of identity is strengthened. With the in-depth exploration of sensory marketing, research on it is no longer limited to its application as a tool to unilaterally discuss how it can be used in different scenarios, but increasingly focuses on the theoretical study of sensory marketing, i.e., the logic of its generation. Usually, research will study the mechanism of sensory marketing from the aspects of emotion and cognition.

In this paper, we systematically review the research status of sensory marketing at home and abroad in recent years, focusing on its theoretical research foundation and application as well as the core research findings, so as to summarize the limitations of the existing research and

look forward to the future research direction. At present, compared with the relevant reviews in the academic community, this paper focuses more on revealing the shortcomings of the current sensory marketing and the lack of technological integration, and puts forward corresponding systematic recommendations accordingly.

## 2. Theoretical Connotation of Sensory Marketing

Sensory marketing (sensory marketing) is a new marketing paradigm put forward by American scholars such as Krishna, that is, the integration of the five sensory experiences of consumers in marketing (touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing) and in this way to influence the perception, judgment and behavior of consumers' marketing approach [1]. Sensory marketing focuses on the interaction between people and products to achieve a deeper understanding of the product or brand and to stimulate their willingness to consume. Krishna has emphasized the importance of a paradigm shift in marketing in his subsequent research and writings, and has argued that companies and brands should push marketing towards the sensory dimension to leave a deep "sensory imprint" on the consumer. [2]. For example, many large shopping malls usually set up unique scent settings in their outlets, so that every consumer who enters the mall can smell the scent, and let the scent repeatedly appear in the olfactory range of consumers, providing olfactory stimulation to consumers, thus triggering the formation of a "scent-mall". This will trigger the consumers to form the correlation cognition of "scent- shopping mall", which will increase the chance of consumers' purchasing.

### 2.1. Sensory Marketing Theory Support and its Application

As a relatively mature marketing concept, sensory marketing has gradually built up a complete theoretical framework in years of research.

#### 2.1.1. Embodied Cognition Theory

The viewpoint of embodied cognition theory is that the body affects individual cognition. The process of human cognition is not a simple abstract activity of the brain [3], but a process of blending abstraction and embodiment formed by the body's constant interaction with the external environment. In sensory marketing research, embodied cognition theory provides theoretical support. External sensory stimulation brings individual body perception, and then realizes the interaction between the individual and the environment, thus affecting individual cognition. This effective interaction between the environment and the consumer brings about a leap in marketing effectiveness and also leaves a deep impression on the consumer.

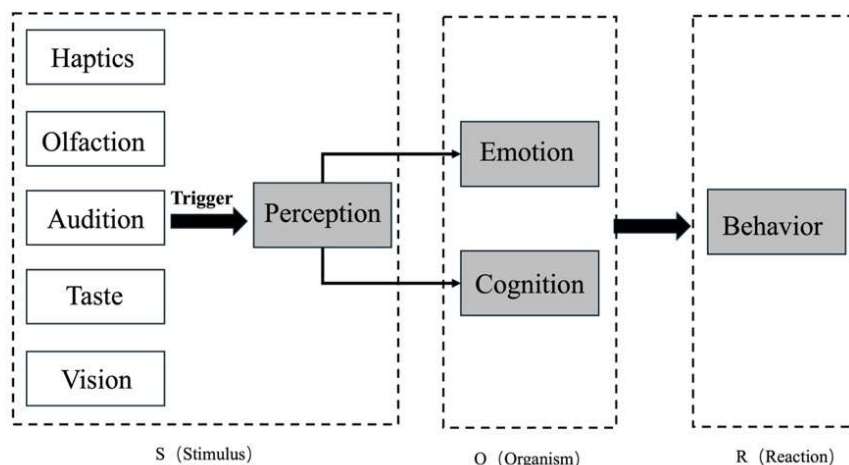
#### 2.1.2. Perceived Value Theory

Perceived value theory is mostly used in the marketing field, which refers to the fact that customers weigh the value they receive from a service or product against the cost they pay to form an overall evaluation of the product or service. Consumers are more likely to make purchasing decisions when they have a positive value perception of a product [4]. How to make consumers form a higher value evaluation of the product as much as possible has become an inevitable consideration in brand marketing, so as a direct stimulation of individual sensory feelings of the five senses of the sensory marketing has attracted much attention. Sensory marketing can create a richer experience for consumers through sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell and other sensory stimulation, so that consumers can get extra satisfaction when they touch or even just remotely watch the products, thus enhancing their perception of the benefits brought by the products and services, and improving the value evaluation of the products.

#### 2.1.3. S-O-R Model

S-O-R refers to the influence chain of "Stimulus-Organism-Response", which is often used in psychology and marketing research. S (Stimulus) refers to the various stimuli brought by the external environment to the individual, O (Organism) refers to the internal mental processing

carried out by the individual after receiving external stimuli, which can be expressed as emotions, personal cognition, etc., and R (Response) refers to the externalization of the results of the individual's internal processing [5]. The S-O-R model provides theoretical support for the study of the mechanism of sensory marketing. The S-O-R model provides theoretical support for the study of the mechanism of sensory marketing, in which the sensory stimulation brought by the product usually undergoes the individual's mental processing, affects the consumer's cognition and emotion, and finally manifests itself in the making of the purchasing decision.



**Fig. 1** Sensory marketing research framework based on S-O-R model

### 3. Current Status of Sensory Marketing Research

#### 3.1. Research Status of Sensory Marketing at Home and Abroad

With the increasing depth of the research on sensory marketing, the related research field of sensory marketing has been expanding, and has become a popular research topic in the direction of marketing in recent years.

#### 3.2. Current Status of Domestic Research

Domestic research on sensory marketing first appeared in the form of experiential marketing, mostly analyzing its concept and theoretical basis. Some scholars analyze the value difference between pure coffee products and coffee shop experience with "service", and find that experiencing products is also a way of marketing, and put forward the idea that sensory marketing has been quietly changing the current marketing methods, and this way can bring consumers a new feeling and give it a wider social significance (Yu Ping and Chen Yingjian, 2002). Chen Yingjian, 2002) [6]. With the in-depth research on sensory marketing, the research field has been expanded to many areas. In the field of tourism, some scholars have explored the potential impact of the song "Chengdu" on travelers' choice of destination and found that perceptual consistency is a necessary condition for a song to have a marketing impact (Lv Xingyang et al., 2020) [7]. In the context of tourism as a life philosophy that increasingly promotes the restoration of physical and mental health, both visual and auditory senses are important sources of restorative environmental experiences for individuals, and the interactive effects of the two can further affect the quality of life of tourists (Qiu Mengluo et al., 2021) [8]. Sensory marketing has also received attention in the retail sector, where market competition to satisfy consumers' sensory needs has explored the varying degrees to which different demographic characteristics respond to visual and auditory experiences, for example, younger consumers have a more pronounced preference for retail outlets with a better visual experience

and are more likely to engage in repeat purchasing behaviors, whereas older consumers are more likely to have a preference for outlets with a better auditory experience (Qiyuan Yuan Yuan, 2022) [9]. Sensory marketing has also been similarly applied to the study of library services, and scholars believe that when libraries provide video services on the Beep video website, the core of their success lies in their ability to provide a systematic experiential marketing, which in turn provides patrons with a better quality of service (Lujun Jiang, 2023) [10].

### 3.3. Status of Foreign Research

Foreign research on sensory marketing is also mostly from different fields. In tourism-related research, some scholars take Thailand's floating market as an example, and through a survey of more than 1,000 tourists, they found that the impressions of the five senses positively affect the perceived value of tourists, for example, in the tourists who visit Thailand's floating market, the taste experience (try the food) and the visual experience (enjoy the market landscape) will affect their perceived value of the floating market, which in turn affects their willingness to revisit ( Fakfare et al., 2021) [11]. Sensory marketing also plays an important role in the food sector, as a product choice experiment with 924 German consumers found that sensory quality signals had a significant impact on decision-making when purchasing products such as wine and tomatoes, and that sensory descriptions of products were more likely to attract consumers' attention than other means (Jürkenbeck & Spiller, 2021) [12].

Overseas research on sensory marketing is not limited to its application in various fields, but also explores its relationship with consumer behavior. In the online environment, sensory marketing (visual, tactile and other sensory techniques) can influence consumers' purchase intention by enhancing their online experience. Moreover, consumers develop sensory expectations of a product and are more likely to purchase the product if the actual sensory experience of the product matches their expectations (Petit et al. , 2019) [13]. For example, 3D virtual technology and so on can allow consumers to visualize the product more, which in turn increases the probability of purchase. There are also studies that found through experiments that in advertisements, if the background music is consistent with the consumer's preventive focus, consumers will produce more positive evaluations, which shows that sensory marketing will affect the consumer's emotions and attitudes by influencing their evaluation of products and companies (Sunaga et al., 2020) [14]. Some studies have also shown that consumers' responses to human and virtual influencers differ due to differences in their ability to perceive sensory perception, and that consumers' own cultural background, personal preferences and other factors also affect their perceptions of sensory marketing (Zhou et al., 2024) [15].

In summary, domestic and international research on sensory marketing is becoming more and more abundant, ranging from applied research, such as the effective use of sensory marketing in various fields, to theoretical research, which explores the mechanism of sensory marketing to stimulate consumers' purchasing behavior. More and more studies are focusing on how a product in a specific domain can stimulate consumers' purchasing behavior by adding a certain sensory experience to the chain of influence. Therefore, this paper will review the literature from the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste.

## 4. Review of Haptic Marketing Research

Haptics is an important way of interaction between human beings and the environment, and haptics can provide human beings with a variety of information about the environment, including the shape, state, and temperature of objects. In marketing, haptic marketing is one of the most common ways, especially in offline purchasing behavior, where consumers increase their understanding of a product by touching it.

Most of the research on tactile marketing also starts from its theoretical foundation and application practice. In their theoretical studies, Zhong Ke et al. (2014), based on the theory of embodied cognition and the theory of implicit personality, proposed through the design of two experiments that human bodily perception is closely related to its psychological cognition, i.e., soft-touch experience activates the "gradualism" implicit personality view, which in turn improves the consumer's attitude of tolerance [16]. Zhu, Guowei, and Xiao, Meng (2016) discuss the different ways of touch in the marketing field, sort out its different mechanisms and use scenarios, and explore the different marketing experiences brought about by the interaction of the sense of touch with other sensory experiences [17]. The mechanism by which touch enhances consumers' purchase intention is through the activation of consumers' mental imagery and sensory similarity, and utilitarian personal goals reinforce purchase intention when individuals are in a high mental imagery (jiang et al., 2024) [18]. Pino et al. (2020) found that allowing consumers to touch a product, or even guiding them to imagine that they are touching the product, will enhance their intention to consume the product, and also from the perspective of need for instrumental touch (NFT), which is the need for consumers to evaluate products through touch, found that consumers with high NFT rely more on tactile feedback for product evaluation [19]. Some scholars have also found that when multiple sensory cues are used to stimulate consumers, the consistency between multiple sensory cues affects an individual's cognitive fluency, and the effectiveness of their interactive use is also dependent on the scenarios in which they are used and the characteristics of the product itself (Eklund & Helmfalk, 2018) [20].

In terms of the application of tactile marketing at the practical level, scholars have found through online experiments with APPs that touching the purchase button in the clicking mode of advertisements promotes purchase behavior more than the sliding purchase button, and that experiential products, similar to apparel, have a more pronounced promotional effect on low-touch-demanding consumers (Wang Hong et al., 2021) [21]. Meanwhile, in online shopping, short-video style marketing can realize the influence on customers' consumption intention by providing virtual tactile feedback (Liu Yuan, 2024) [22].

Existing research has built a theoretical framework of tactile marketing, explaining the effect of tactile perception on individual behavior from the aspects of psychological cognition, instrumental tactile demand, etc. Moreover, the research at the application level has also broken through the traditional offline scenarios, and begun to explore the effectiveness of the virtual touch technology on the online platform. However, there are still some shortcomings in the current research, including the relatively narrow scope of the research object, mainly focusing on experiential products such as clothing, and at the same time, in the study of the use of haptic marketing in the online scene, but also more to explore the study of its clicking behavior of purchasing, and the lack of exploration on the touch experience of the product packaging.

## 5. Overview of Visual Marketing Research

Vision is one of the most important senses for human beings to obtain external information, and thus visual marketing is also the most traditional and common way of sensory marketing. In the early stage of visual marketing, its main application is concentrated in the clothing industry, because the clothing industry usually needs to attract consumers' attention through visual stimulation, but with the deepening of the research on visual marketing, the scope of its application is gradually expanding.

Many scholars have put forward different opinions on the concept of visual marketing. Liu Jianti (2008) believes that visual marketing is a new marketing concept based on marketing and psychology, which fully utilizes the relevant principles and techniques as well as the practice of

visual design to form a visual impact on potential customers and stimulate purchase interest [23]. Huang Jing et al. (2020) combed through the literature of previous research results from various dimensions of visual marketing, including shape, location, etc., and proposed that among the five senses, vision plays a dominant role, and believed that different visual shapes affect consumer perception and decision-making, and that illumination, location, etc. also have an impact on consumers [24]. Some scholars have also proposed a conceptual framework of visual perception based on the five dimensions of illumination, shape and material, color, and location and the 19 sub-dimensions under them, and studied the impact of these dimensions on consumer perception and behavior (Sample et al., 2020) [25].

In recent years, most studies have been set in the context of e-commerce, exploring how visual marketing can be used to stimulate consumer purchase behavior. In travel e-commerce live streaming, it is found through experiments that both visual and informational elements of visual marketing promote consumers to make impulsive purchases, and that excitement plays a mediating role in it, while gender differences moderate this mediating effect (Jing Zhang, 2024) [26]. Also in the context of live travel e-commerce, Jiemei Zhang and Sister Wei Zhang (2023) found that visual elements and information elements were found to enhance viewers' cognitive-emotional responses, such as sense of control and concentration, and then enhance their purchase intention by constructing structural equation modeling [27]. Some studies have also explored the influence mechanism of visual marketing on consumer brand preference, by studying the process of visual marketing in e-commerce live broadcasting, it is found that visual elements and information elements can significantly enhance consumer preference (Wang Ya, 2025) [28]. Visual marketing not only affects consumer behavior, but also has far-reaching significance on the development and marketing of the brand itself, so some studies start from the level of visual marketing on brand development, and early studies mainly focus on the development of some offline and physical industries, for example, it is found that in the publishing industry, through the design of chic forms and novel layout, etc., it can not only highlight distinctive personality characteristics but also form a differentiation feature from that of the rivals [29] (Chia-Lin, 2006). In recent years, the industry is not only concerned about the impact of visual marketing on product sales, their own differentiation, but also more concerned about the impact of visual marketing on the brand image, some studies have found that when the brand image and visual marketing has consistency, it can be better to establish the brand image, provide brand equity and consumer description of the brand, and then enhance the communication strength (Chen Leijie, 2024) [30], at the same time, under the new media environment, brands can create a personalized, interactive, and interactive brand image through the creation of a new media environment. brands can highlight their brand image by creating personalized and interactive visual marketing, which in turn promotes accurate brand communication (Yao Aoxue, 2025) [31].

Currently, research on visual merchandising is rich and has gradually developed from a single marketing tool to a systematic field integrating multiple disciplines. With the deepening of research, scholars have explored the mechanism of visual marketing influencing consumer behavior in multiple industries. However, the current research is mostly focused on the e-commerce industry and snack food industry, and there are relatively few studies in other fields, as well as fewer studies on the integration of modern cutting-edge technologies.

## 6. Review of Research on Flavor Marketing

Taste marketing refers to a consistent marketing approach that prompts consumers to buy products by stimulating the taste buds of potential consumers or enabling them to experience the taste of the product firsthand. Early scholars have mostly researched from the basic theory and mechanism of action of taste marketing. Wang Zhichao (2017) proposed that taste is one

of the five dimensions of sensory marketing, and that experiential activities such as offline sampling can enhance consumers' knowledge of product characteristics and help their purchasing behavior [32]. Lai, Tianhao and Zhang, Quancheng constructed a framework of internal and external influences on taste perception and argued that cross-sensory interactions and expectancy theory of empirical evidence would jointly influence taste perception, applying embodied cognition theory to taste marketing [33]. Some scholars have also found a temporally sequential interaction effect between taste sensations through experimental research, for example, experiencing a salty taste before will make the sweet taste experienced later more prominent, and the effect is dependent on the intentional processing mode, thus suggesting the importance of mental simulation in taste marketing. (Si & Jiang, 2017) [34].

The applied research of taste marketing is also an important research direction within the field, Ling Ruiqing (2023) incorporated taste marketing into the experiential marketing framework, and proposed that the high-end cigarette market needs to create a competitive advantage by adding taste innovations to cope with the diversified needs of consumers [35]. Gao Zhiliang (2018) proposed to realize the cross-border linkage of "screen vision-taste experience" to improve the marketing effect [36].

## 7. Review of Olfactory Marketing Research

Olfactory marketing, also known as scent marketing in practice, refers to the design of specific odors to stimulate the olfactory organs of individuals, thereby influencing their behavioral choices. Since a large proportion of products are not closely associated with smell, olfactory marketing is usually applied in the fragrance industry, hospitality industry, and food industry. For example, MUJI has launched sweet orange and bergamot fragrances to create "natural and fresh" product characteristics, which has led to the increase in the sales of the combination of aroma diffusers and essential oils (Xuechun Li and Chengqi, 2022). (Li Xuechun and Cheng Qi, 2022) [37]. Some luxury hotels also customize their scents to match the hotel's character, thus connecting the expression of brand values with customers' olfactory perception, and at the same time combining fragrance culture with the hotel's scene (Huang Mei and Xie Jiabin, 2020) [38], to achieve the dual goals of promoting consumers' relaxation and enhancing their loyalty (Liu Cang et al., 2021) [39].

Olfactory marketing is not only limited to itself, but also actively combines with other sensory experiences in an effort to achieve optimal consumer outcomes. Field trials in a shopping mall in India have shown that the combination of music and scent produces a stronger effect than any of the two alone, significantly increasing traffic and repurchase rates, but the combination of the two requires specialized design (Srivastava, 2023) [40]. Even, some studies point out that odors have a temperature, and some warm odors, such as cinnamon, will enable consumers to easily choose low-calorie foods, while the opposite is true for cool odors (Lefebvre & Biswas, 2019) [41].

Most of the research on scent marketing has been done from an applied point of view, exploring how different products in different industries can be integrated with consumers' sense of smell and thus stimulate purchase demand. However, the industries are too concentrated, there is a lack of research on the impact of scented environments on consumer choice, and most of the studies have only explored a particular scent to promote a positive customer response, but relatively little research has been conducted on the possible negative responses to scents.

## 8. Review of Auditory Marketing Research

Auditory marketing is also a core component of sensory marketing, which refers to the use of sound elements to shape brand image, enhance user experience, and thus influence consumer behavior. Sun Zhenghui et al. (2023) set the research object as the short video function in the

Mushroom Street shopping APP, and by constructing a regression model to analyze the values of the spectral rms mean and other values, it was found that the stable situation of the audio carried by the video would make the promotional effect become better [42]. The conclusion also applies to the apparel industry, a study pointed out that in apparel e-commerce, consumers' auditory perception of the environment will be more likely to lead to the occurrence of their impulsive purchasing behavior, and this process is due to the positive influence of emotion in which the tempo of the background music also affects the consumer's mood (Li et al., 2022 ) [43]. Scholars have focused not only on the role of sound in marketing, but also on what types of music are more effective in promoting the market, and research has shown that in fashion retailing, popular music is more likely to increase the length of stay and the amount of money spent by affecting the mood of the customer (Faflek et al., 2024 ) [44]. The application of auditory marketing is not only in its ability to directly increase consumers' purchase intention, but also in its ability to increase sales by influencing brand building. Wang Zheng et al. (2024) found that the emotional resonance of sound affects users' minds, because sound, as a kind of unique logo, will enhance their memory by anchoring with consumers and users' emotions (Vidal-Mestre et al., 2022). al., 2022) [45].

Overall, the core value of auditory marketing is in the positive influence with the stimulation of external sound will be realized through the consumer's emotions to connect with the user . The focus of the current research is mainly on the value attributes of its application, and there is a lack of more detailed in-depth research on the operation of its mechanism, generational differences and other aspects.

## 9. Research Summary and Future Prospects

### 9.1. Research Summary of Sensory Marketing and its Branches

This paper has sorted out the general concept of sensory marketing and its research status, to the applied research of its branches. It is found that the research on sensory marketing has formed a systematic framework logic, and has constructed the mechanism of "sensory stimulation-cognitive processing-behavioral response". Moreover, the application of sensory marketing and its branches is expanding, from retailing to online e-marketing, tourism, libraries and other fields, in order to bring consumers and users a richer product experience and stimulate their consumption possibilities. And in order to demonstrate the significant benefits of sensory marketing, research is increasingly exploring the integration of technologies, such as the use of eye-tracking devices to capture changes in consumer attention, or the use of virtual haptics in e-commerce channels to provide feedback to online users in order to enhance their purchasing desires.

Although the current research on sensory marketing has been more diversified, some problems are still found by combing through the research results in recent years: there is a relative lack of research on the integration of the five senses of marketing, and most of the objects of research are a single sense; and the research focuses on exploring its superiority and lacks a detailed explanation of the potential negative effects; and in terms of the research methodology, the majority of the literature mainly uses the laboratory, experiments and questionnaire surveys. In terms of research methodology, most of the literature mainly uses laboratory experiments and questionnaires, which may be insufficient in terms of ecological validity of the conclusions drawn, and need to be further researched in real-life situations; at the same time, there is a lag in the integration of technology, which is mostly confined to the traditional techniques of sensory categorization, but the utilization of the current cutting-edge technologies (e.g., AI, meta-universe, etc.) is in the initial stage.

## 9.2. Outlook for the Future Development of Sensory Marketing

From the fruitful research results achieved so far in sensory marketing, the future can be further developed in the following aspects:

### 9.2.1. In-depth Exploration of Cross-sensory Interaction Research

At present, most of the researches start from a certain sense and study its application scenario, action mechanism and effectiveness, but human senses essentially constantly constitute a cognitive framework in interaction, for example, visual and olfactory consistency affects consumer's impression of the product, so it is with insufficiency to start only from the research of a certain sensory feeling. In the future, more research will focus on this point and systematically explore the interaction between senses to explain the mechanism of sensory marketing more scientifically.

### 9.2.2. Continuous Integration of New Cutting-edge Technologies

Meta-universe, AI, AR and other technologies can effectively stimulate the user's senses, and even realize the simultaneous mobilization of multiple sensory experiences, bringing users a more realistic and rich product experience. At present, there are also studies that integrate these technologies with sensory marketing, but because some new technologies have not yet been realized for large-scale application, their overall number is relatively small, so as the technology becomes more mature, sensory marketing will definitely be deeply connected to it.

### 9.2.3. Exploration of Cultural Background and Social Group Differences

Different social cultures, ethnic cognitions, and even generational differences will affect consumers' processing of sensory experiences, so in-depth research on the differences in the effectiveness of sensory marketing brought about by the differences in cultural backgrounds is an important aspect that needs to be further deepened in future research.

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