Online Sensory Marketing: Developing Five-Dimensional Multi-Sensory Brand Experiences and its Effectiveness

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Abstract

The online environment has long been a sensory interaction between a brand or product and its consumers through visual imagery and sonic elements. While newer technologies have developed that cater to a customer's more psychological need for haptics (touch), gestation, and olfaction, brands have not explored its true potential. Immersions and other forms of Human-Computer interaction have vastly developed and present scope for more than just a single sense for online consumers. While brands are employing these multisensory interfaces (vs. single-sensory) in certain product categories, it remains to be seen whether customers who unknowingly experience sensations online want to adapt to it. Several product categories could find multisensory elements beneficial. This study aims to delve deeper and understand the motivations of such behavior and identify the need for a customer to engage all its senses beyond the traditional visuals and sound while interacting with brands virtually for a more holistic experience. While external environmental factors such as pandemics have resulted in the inevitable loss of physical touchpoints, the aim is to determine whether sensory elements beyond images and sounds will benefit customer engagement.

Key-words: Gestation, Human-Computer, Multisensory Interfaces, Elements Beneficial, Environmental Factor.

1. Introduction

The digital boom has largely benefited brands with their customers largely depending on online interfaces to make purchasing decisions. While browsing brands online, we often wonder what a particular piece of clothing would look like on us or the smell of a particular fragrance [1]. Whether

those delicious dishes on our Instagram feed is just as tasty as it is in our minds. Whether or not being in Paris would be as delightful and serene as it is for the couple featured in an AirBnB Ad.

Customers desire to have memorable experiences which stimulate them both physically and mentally. This paradigm shift from production to a marketing concept gave way to developing the 'marketing of senses,' otherwise known as Sensory Marketing. All and any experience we have with a brand is through their five sensory channels- visual, acoustic, haptic, olfactory, and gestations which largely contributes to three important marketing outcomes- attitude formation, word-of-mouth, and buying decisions [2]. Due to these sensory experiences, there is a subconscious trigger in the customer's brains brought about by the carefully crafted visuals and sound effects that create certain perceptions about the brand or product and can often serve as a judgment of the brands' perceived quality and impressions leading to self-generation of positive ideas about the brands [3]. Brand loyalty can be strengthened not only by the consumption experience but more effectively by engagement.

In the offline marketing environment, sensory marketing has long been an ally of the traditional brick-and-mortar selling model. Customers make purely hedonic decisions based upon their abilities to physically experience a product through all its five senses. Online developments have enabled marketers for long trying to adapt forms of sensory elements into engaging customers [4]. The most widely used sensory elements are engaging customers through visuals and auditory notes that create tangibility for products that customers cannot feel or touch [5]. However, this tangibility is limited. Prior studies show positive correlations between sensory elements and consumer engagement. With the advent of newer technologies, there remains a large scope to explore more complex forms to engage their hap tics needs [6]. These developments in technology rightly coincide with the increasing engagements of a consumer's emotional senses, i.e., the touch feels sensations and smell to a large extent. However, do the customers feel the need? Would they engage more holistically with a brand if the brand can stimulate all their five sensory needs? The technology exists but is there a real need, or are the current sensory elements enough? This research aims at understanding the consumers' perspective in terms of five-dimensional sensory experiences and the adaptability of such sensations in the online environment [7].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Mental Tangibility in an Online Environment

Interaction in an online environment is largely dependent on decoding a message based on mental image and perception rather than self-evaluation. Once a customer interacts with a brand, they

need to form a mental image of it [8]. This image should include every element of sensations - what the product feels like, its touch sensation, texture, smell, etc. The human brain is more often than not unable to do it, which is due to the lack of mental tangibility or the inability of a customer to imagine and experience a product holistically.

According to a prior study, once a consumer's senses have been engaged, he/she wants to self-evaluate the product before purchasing, which is where sensory marketing comes into play as visual and auditory searches provide certain semantic congruence's [9]. Purchased items often tend to appear different once delivered or not similar to how the customer pictured it in his/her mind due to the limited expansion of multisensory interactions present in the online environment, which affects how the customers will evaluate the product. The lack of online multisensory control feeds further into this intangibility [10]. When the product cannot be physically evaluated, customers struggle to form tangible representations of the product or brand and need a more holistic product interaction to engage with them. Several studies have been conducted to develop models for understanding how sensory marketing works to overcome this intangibility. While there is no specific model to observe and understand the motivations, studies on consumer behavior, cognition, and sensory inputs have largely supported this study [11]. A customer needs more than just images and sounds to overcome this mental intangibility. Research shows that touch serves as the most important factor in overcoming this mental block, physically touching a product or even imagining touching a product can increase the value perception of the product compared to visuals. It provides sensory control, which reduces mental intangibility and increases the willingness to interact and engage [12].

2.2. Sensory Touch Points

A vast majority of life's most cherished experiences are multisensory. There is a proven congruence between a real-life store experience and positive purchase decisions because physical touchpoints in the traditional brick-and-mortar model tend to provide a complete multisensory experience [13]. Offline experiences trigger a customer's impulse buying behavior to a greater extent than online experience due to the free interaction of the multi senses and the physical store effect. A study conducted on the impact of sensory branding amongst coffee shop customers was a combination of multi sensations that drove customers to the shop sv [14]. They could smell the aroma of coffee and imagine tasting it even before setting foot inside the shop. There was also an increase in the duration of the time spent within these shops due to the constant sensory elements at play. Similarly, retail as well as department stores bank heavily upon visual merchandising to increase

customer engagement [15]. Offline consumers rely heavily on color, packaging, and product design, sometimes even more than ingredients and content due to the sensory trigger that haptics senses induce.

Virtual touch points are anything from social media to product advertisements, e-commerce to product catalogs. With such multi-variant sources, brands can often become difficult to differentiate based on their characteristics alone. Images tend to look similar after a point and do not provide a lasting memory. Multisensory marketing becomes even more important here. It allows consumers a five-dimensional brand experience instead of a two-dimensional flat one. The online environment has limited capacities in terms of multisensory experiences. Any form of sensory experience is either single sensory (e.g., images, sounds) or is a combination of senses with visual or haptics enabling technologies through immersions.

While this technology exists, it is limited to certain brands and is not expansive across categories. An earlier study showed that consumers preferred shopping offline when it came to expensive high-involvement products because they felt online sources lacked credibility due to no information beyond imagery. For them, simply looking at the product was not reason enough to purchase it due to intangibility [16]. The sentiments were strong in luxury and fashion brands and fragrances where consumers either preferred shopping offline or wished for a source that allowed them to smell the product virtually. However, the current forms of virtual experiential content are only marginally more real than their traditional offline counterparts. They need adaptive forms in real life, which are based on the consumer's sensory needs [17].

2.3. Sensory Impulses

Earlier research on cognition and buying behavior has suggested that an impulse buying behavior occurs when consumers are exposed to sensory-stimulating elements online, as compared to offline as offline touchpoints have no limitation on time or on space, which serves as a reason why marketers bank on multisensory elements such as visual imagery or haptics in order to get a more spontaneous response from the consumers rather than try to build stronger positive brand images. Impulse buying is purely based on psychological motivations more than rational ones. Thus, a holistic feel of the brand in the limited time and online space could potentially serve as a more potent tool of inducing purchase [18]. Online consumers often show higher materialistic tendencies lower self-esteem, and shopping online is a way for escapism and self-fulfillment. These tendencies get heightened with external stimuli and have a positive correlation with impulse buying behavior.

2.4. Multisensory Online Experiences: Touch and Feel is the Key?

Sensory experiences are constructed when there is an intentional or unintentional internal interaction of the senses with an external environment. In terms of a virtual environment, there are always multiple interactions all at once. Study shows that newer technologies have been developed to stimulate more of the customer's senses in such a complex environment. Although a larger part of them are not commercial, their nascent forms have shown the potential to develop further tech to stimulate all our senses [19].

Haptic elements provide customers with more direct interaction with the product than visuals that stimulate mental imagery and increase the perception of ownership of products. Touch is very important when it comes to establishing secure attachments and interpersonal connections between people. It builds social attachments and induces emotions.

Brands in the food and beverage industry, perfume industry have already suggested the benefits of infusing smell and tastes before visuals in a virtual environment. Online Fashion and Retail uses ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), a set of certain sounds that gives pleasure to the listener' to enhance sensory experiences [20]. The Tourism Industry totes how multisensory experiences have helped increase review ratings for brands because the customers felt more psychologically connected and closer to the brand. There has been a stronger commitment amongst customers who engage in marketing to all the five senses seen in the travel and tourism industry. The use of haptic feedback technologies allows consumers to generate more positive online reviews for the services as consumers perceive closeness and belonging to the destination [21].

2.5. Scope and Development of Sensations in a Pandemic Driven World

In an ongoing pandemic-driven world, restrictions on consumers' freedom to decide their desired touchpoint in terms of shopping choices, trips, and movement due to COVID-19 contamination are likely to affect their psychological reactance. The study has shown that this reactance minimizes and perceptions and desirability and requires strong external affirmations. Since offline touchpoints have become largely diminished, online multisensory experiences can serve as those affirmations [22]. While being stuck at home and being in an unpleasant state of motivation, the feeling of uncertainty induces hesitation in wanting to purchase a product. Another trend that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic is that consumers have newfound trust and integrity in shopping online. However, they still wish to self-evaluate products before engaging.

Customer engagement can largely be driven by marrying the existing sensory interfaces with newer technologies and providing customers the experience they ideally desire. Marketers must consider what kind of virtual sensory experience they want to provide their consumers and choose between single and multisensory stimulation technologies [23]. Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) studies are being conducted to understand the different ways and interfaces through which holistic sensations can be developed. It is suited for also identification of the type of consumers. While prior research confirms that tech advancements can induce motivations through senses, further research is required to understand the consumers' need for sensory marketing and what forms they feel they are likely to adapt. Research also needs to be done to identify which product categories and interfaces they would benefit the most from if five-dimensional sensory experiences are introduced [24].

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Multisensory Experiences through Evaluation of Senses

According to Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, brand experience comprises four dimensions - sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. This sensory dimension captures the extent to which the brand appeals to the customers and determines whether they will engage with them. All consumer experiences depend upon the integration of sensory inputs within this dimension and are responsible for affecting the consumer's behavior and judgment in terms of product or brand evaluation [25]. When it comes to digital brand experiences, brands have been using varied and evolved forms of each sensory element to appeal to the senses. More often than not, these experiences are multisensory. More than one of the five senses contributes to the perception of the brand and the engagement. These sensations are interconnected and interact together as well as on their own. Furthermore, the five senses all have different weights in terms of forming the overall experience.

3.1.1. Visuals: Visual imagery or the sense of sight remains the most effective sensory element for sensing changes and differences and is the most commonly used sense in receiving goods and services and contributing the maximum to the formation of mental imagery in the online environment. Visuals-induced stimuli stem from form, color, dimensions, design, image, and style. Visual sensations are processed differently depending upon products as well as the individuals. In an online environment, where visual cues become the most potent sensory experience, several visual factors come into play. Visual placement becomes important as it greatly affects the judgment of the buyer. Packaging color, shape, and design is again another visual aspect of creating an imagery-based

sensory experience. Customers often struggle with evaluation based solely on the hedonic properties of a product. Thus, the extrinsic evaluation property of packaging and design becomes beneficial.

Newer immersive experiences, visual enabling technologies are being integrated into icons, logos, pictures, undoubtedly allowing them to interact more holistically with the product. Virtual product controls such as virtual try-on, 3D product visualization, and haptics imagery have a positive impact on flow experience and, as a result, on engagement, increasing the value of the online process. These integrations have largely stemmed from the need to virtually touch and feel the products and detach from reality and fully immerse in experiencing the product online. Prior research shows a positive impact of visual sensory elements when combined with other elements, mainly sound and haptics (touch), and enhances the customer's ability to imagine the tangibility of the products better.

3.1.2. Sound: There is a semantic congruence between sound (e.g., a popping sound) and the product (e.g., a bottle of champagne). It is this congruency that facilitates visual search. Sound as a sensory element is perhaps the most tangible in an online environment. Research shows that high-frequency sounds lead consumers to focus on light objects faster. In contrast, low-frequency sounds lead them to fixate on darker objects faster and longer which ultimately induces impulse purchase intent. According to Zapping & Spence, potato chips are perceived to be crunchier when the sound frequency is higher. Similarly, perfume or spray objects are considered more pleasant and less forceful when the high-frequency sounds are blended.

Sound, like visuals, is multisensory and works best with other sensations, mainly images, and haptic elements. The concept of ASMR has developed in the past few years. It is rapidly used to induce strong sonic triggers into the customer's mind. Jennifer Allen defined them as specific sounds that induce pleasure and are accompanied by strong visual stimuli, making listeners relaxed and more focused throughout the experience. ASMR content uses different angles and sound frequencies, and compositions to ensure the listening audience gets a real-life experience. Several brands use such triggers along with natural sound frequencies to heighten the experience and allow consumers to experience indirect triggers.

3.1.3. Smell: Scientific studies have shown that around 75% of all human emotions are generated through smell. According to prior research, the impressions of olfactory or smell are linked to a sense of pleasure, satisfaction, and well-being and are closely connected to retention and memory. According to Braun et al., Krishna's newer technologies are already working towards developing smell-based multisensory interfaces. With these adaptations, someday, odors might get diffused virtually when consumers are online to create stronger brand recall. Technological advancements such as the "Season Traveler", a customized and wearable Head Mounted Display,

developed by Ranasinghe et al. system that contains thermal, smell, and wind stimuli, allowing the users to simulate real-world conditions while wearing it. MetaCookie+ is an AR device that allows users to virtually change the smell and flavor of the food by simulating and diffusing smells (e.g., strawberry, vanilla).

3.1.4. Taste: Taste is the sensation that fuses all different senses to create a holistic brand experience. According to Elder and Krishna, multi senses lead to better taste perceptions than single sensory ones, consisting of visuals or sounds. In the virtual environment where like the smell, the taste is hard to replicate. The taste depends on multisensory stimulation. Visual technologies and sound play a crucial role in giving consumers a sense of taste. Packaging plays an important role, and specific colors are used by food and beverage brands to indicate the type or flavor. Research shows SETs techniques have succeeded in virtually simulating the sensation of taste in lab experiments. There are immersive devices that can capture color, pH value and create electric stimulations for a mixed reality experience. It could be virtually possible to taste a product before even touching or smelling it, which in return would reduce the psychological distance between the consumer and the product online [26].

3.1.5. Touch and Feel: According to research, some customers feel the need to touch and self-evaluate a product or imagine themselves touching it to be confident in their decision to purchase it. The need for touch, however, depends upon the type of product as well as the individual. Some products, for example, have a surface and texture to them, a geometrical shape and weight. An image or even a written description of the product would suffice to provide the required product knowledge. However, there are products with higher haptic needs and material properties. For instance, items such as a piece of fine clothing often call for a quality check. Research also shows that the need for touch is extremely individualistic. While some consumers feel the need to touch their products to form mental imagery virtually, others believe their cognitive abilities are superior and do not require touching and feeling products to purchase them. Touch is also one of the key sensory signatures of brand destinations representing the complexity of the product or a sum of multiple products. There is a positive correlation between the complexity of a product and the need for haptic sensations. Another important function of haptics is to build a perception of control and ownership. Touch or the mental visualization of touch has a positive effect on consumers and the ownership of a particular product or service.

4. Research Methodology

In order to explore and understand how online consumers feel about the engagement with brands and products with multisensory experiences and understanding their idea of whether or not the current forms of sensory elements are sufficient, qualitative research was undertaken. The methodology included qualitative depth interviews with 24 participants (7 males and 17 females) who identified as online consumers of different domains. While the reasons for integrating haptic technologies (for touch and feel) varied, the respondents agreed upon the need for a holistic brand experience while engaging with products or services online. Similarly, another theme that emerged was that most interviewees were ready to adapt to technological immersions, allowing them to touch or feel online products, except three respondents who felt that the current forms of sensory experiences through visuals and sounds were sufficient for customer engagement.

The participants were all above the age group of 18. Each of the participants was invited for an interview which took place over a call. The interview was semi-structured, allowing the participants to express their opinions and experiences with sensory marketing online, beyond the questions asked.

The data collected from the personal interviews were recorded, documented, and logged in a record sheet. The interviews were later transcribed and read through so that the repeated and recurring themes could be identified. Based on this data available, I conceptualized and tried to explore what the data represented. The interpretative reading of the data helped me understand how the interviewees understood the concept of sensory marketing and its consumer impact in the digital space, observed Mason. In particular, it showed what sensory elements and experiences the interviewees counted as important to their engagement online. Through the coding, some of the focused codes that emerged were trust and credibility, experience, product centricity, uncertainty about technology, which led to the generation of themes for analysis [27].

5. Data Analysis

A few major themes emerged throughout the interview across all respondents, which further supported past literature and presented a further scope for multisensory experiences in the virtual environment. The questions for this research were:

- Do customers feel the need to development of multisensory sensations while engaging with brands online?
- Do customers feel the need for sensory marketing in product categories other than those where they largely experience it?
- With fewer offline and physical sensory touchpoints in the current scenario, do consumers want online sensory marketing to go beyond the traditional visual and sonic aspects? (Employ other senses such as touch, feel, smell, taste.)

The online environment is favorable in terms of gathering information, as observed in the account of all the respondents. All the respondents spent about a significant time online every day, with the average being four to seven hours daily. When further asked about what they looked for, most of them responded that significant time was spent browsing through social media, eCommerce platforms, and individual websites. In the case of two respondents, their surfing time was spent on news platforms. On being asked what products or services they looked for, most of them responded with apparel, daily essentials, and products they saw in social media advertisements or pop-up ads, which triggered an impulse buying motivation. A few respondents (4) agreed that they were currently looking to buy anything and everything online due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of offline sources. The responses were analyzed based on some major themes that emerged from the data [28].

5.1. Need for Multisensory Experiences

When asked about the nature of these online sources, a large majority (about 15) agreed that the sources did manage to grab their attention in terms of visual imagery & sound perceptions. At the same time, a few of them were uncertain whether it was the sensory aspects that grabbed their attention or otherwise (e.g., storytelling, copy of the advertisement, review). During the interview, one respondent noted, "When I am browsing for individual products, they do not tend to grab my attention. (...) It depends upon the brand whether they or not they are using many visuals because that makes me somewhat confident in the authenticity of the brand." It is noteworthy that although some of the other respondents were uncertain, quite a few agreed that visuals or even videos for the matter helps in building trust and credibility on the source and wants them to further engage with the brand. Most respondents believed that they tend to engage and, as a result, purchase more when brands use a large number of visuals or sounds or in cases where they have experienced haptics, touch, and feel sensory elements [29].

5.2. Technological Affordances of Haptics

The lack of availability of five-dimensional sensory experiences, mainly haptics, may have been the reason for the participants to say they believed the reason behind visual or sonic triggers was that their sources were often heavy on images and sounds, which was further reflected in the responses of the interviewees when quite a few (9 participants) said that they had not come across any brand or product that had an element of touch or feel to them. In the respondents who did, some did not remember the product category that it belonged. Some participants cited the example of Lenskart and Nyakka and their virtual- try-on (which are not based on haptics) as well as PepperFry and Ikea. The participants were perhaps not exposed to the haptic technologies because many brands and products are yet to use them in their marketing. Only two participants who were into gaming had experienced AR and VR immersions.

5.3. Trust and Credibility of Multisensory Experiences

The need for a multisensory technology exists for the respondents who believed that they would be 'open to experience' it. There was also an agreement amongst many that this holistic experience would positively affect their online product engagement and purchasing decisions. While most were certain it would also be more effective in terms of building trust for the brand, some were uncertain whether they needed such technological advancement or not [30].

5.4. Sensory Touchpoints and Its Effect on Buying Behaviour

Buying behavior of the consumer is largely affected by their buying source. It is therefore important to build favorable brand experiences in all the various settings. Consumers purchase products from an online touchpoint compared to an offline source depending upon several factors. Degree of involvement (high vs. low) plays a crucial role in determining the degree of engagement with the product.

On being questioned whether or not respondents preferred purchasing products online in contrast to offline sources, they felt that it depended on the degree of involvement of the product, price, and convenience. About 16 participants recorded that they preferred purchasing 'expensive products' from a physical source because they could self-evaluate the product. They felt that online platforms took longer in delivering products even though they were more convenient. Others were extremely adapted to shopping online.

5.5. Adaptability and Responsiveness towards Five-Dimensional Sensory Experiences

Digital natives are more likely to adapt to new experiences than their non-digital counterparts. In case of developing a response towards multisensory triggers, consumers need to be accustomed to single-sensations first. While a vast majority experience sight and hearing sensations already, there is still scope for more touch triggers online. When it comes to responding positively towards technological immersions, it is important to have a slow transition from single-sensory experiences to multisensory ones. This gradual shift depends on the degree of sensory inputs the brands currently employ and depends heavily on the type of consumers of the particular brand. Some product categories are more likely to receive more positive responsiveness in terms of adaptability than others [31].

6. Findings

All the respondents spent a considerable amount of time online on average. They had interacted with various interactive interfaces in the virtual environment. While most interviewees were somewhat unfamiliar with sensory marketing as a concept (14 students and 2 working professionals) or could guess what the term referred to based on the name. In contrast, a few interviewees (4 participants) were completely unaware and unfamiliar with the term, which allowed me to elaborate the concept of sensory marketing to them for understanding whether they had knowingly or unknowingly come across online products that triggered a sensory reaction in them. Once again, the respondents were either sure they experienced it, whereas some were uncertain. In addition to this theme, the major product categories they believed they had experienced sensory triggers ranged from the gadget and electronic products, virtual try-on ads for apparel, glasses, and makeup and skincare products. In contrast, a few (5 participants) could not recall any significant product or service category, if at all. Most respondents did not just experience a singular form of sensory experience. More often than not, participants believed that multiple sensory elements were at play while they were viewing some brand or product online; however, respondents were not aware of the fact that what they were experiencing was a made-up construct and that the visual triggers or sounds they experienced were a sensory marketing tool [32].

On being asked which of their senses they believed were affected the most in the online environment, all the respondents believed it was the vision and supporting that was auditory inputs from sounds. One interviewee said, "In terms of food images or videos, whenever there is steam

coming off of something, or the sound of crunch, or the sounds of kitchen utensils (...) makes me salivate at times, "This is found to agree with the literature study where we learn that sound frequencies and visual inputs together invoke an extremely strong mental trigger as well as induced a sense of taste in case of edible products. When asked if they believed the reason why sight was such a common response, they believed that because most of their online sources were very heavy on visuals and did not have much touch and feel element to it, almost all participants agreed.

Another theme was that they trusted products that they could self-evaluate physically. It was noted that respondents closer to the Gen-Z age bracket (students and working professionals) wanted the experience. In contrast, the two respondents who were late millennials felt the current tech was sufficient. One of the participants presented, "The image shown on shopping websites is sometimes misleading. It makes the product look a certain way; however, there are differences when the product gets delivered. Moreover, while I can return the product, it discourages me from trusting products from that particular site. If it could feel the product in terms of texture, color shape, etc., that would be very engaging."

The pandemic has restricted the offline touchpoints, which has affected the motivation level of consumers, and they need external affirmations. The participants noted that they have increasingly started purchasing products online ever since the global pandemic. Irrespective of the involvement and price factors, One participant who did not shop much online noted, "I recently purchased an expensive electronic appliance online because I could not get it from the store." Another noted, "Currently, I have become more comfortable with online sources. I have started purchasing everything from groceries to gadgets online due to the risk of going out." On being asked whether or not they trusted online cases in such a scenario, a common theme appeared that a more holistic experience online would increase the trust and credibility of the products [33]. A few participants (3) still preferred offline sources and online for extremely low involvement daily essentials. However, they were comfortable shopping online and wished that online sources would cater to their sensory needs beyond sounds and visuals to get them to try out high-involvement expensive products.

Since customers are unaware that technological advancements are in progress to give them a more holistic five-dimensional experience, they must be accustomed to them first. On being told that such a technology exists that could virtually make them smell and taste things, the respondents in the study were very intrigued to try out for themselves. A large number of participants (19) responded in favor of such developments. They believed that they would be ready to adapt and interact with such sensory experiences repeatedly and across product categories if introduced. Some of the respondents who earlier believed that visual and sound triggers were sufficient were also open to experience more

than just single sensory elements. Two respondents felt that the current forms were sufficient and did not require further development, whereas one was uncertain [34].

7. Conclusion

The research study highlights that multisensory experiences engage consumers holistically in a traditional real-world situation and various online environments. While single-sensations such as visuals or sound inputs engage consumers and increase the likelihood of purchase, multi sensations with some elements of touch and feel will trigger stronger sensory reactions and, as a result, affect the purchase intention. Newer HCI technologies have developed, although not commercially yet, are likely to intrigue the consumers once employed and result in positive affirmations in terms of product experiences.

Customers, when told such experiences could exist (as prototypes and someday as functional interfaces), are open to trying these newer forms of sensations not only in their existing product and service categories but also wish for expansion into categories that could largely benefit from five-dimensional sensations. Consumers are not aware of the extent to which haptic (touch) elements can be introduced online but would feel that it is more engaging than merely looking at or hearing about the product online. Hopefully, these developments would expand beyond the real and virtual environments and prove effective in mixed reality environments. Another motivation to introduce multisensory experiences now than ever before is the need of the hour. The global pandemic has propelled a newer reinforcement to online touchpoints in the form of increased consumer bases (who were used to purchasing offline). Such a development will prove to be beneficial for brands if introduced strategically. It will also impact the value and credibility of digital environments if they can imitate, if not replicate, the real world more holistically.

8. Limitations and Further Research

The study was primarily based on interviews, and hence the experiences shared by the participants were more of 'recall' based. Hence, it brings along its limitations compared to if the study was done in simulated laboratories for real-time understanding. There is a scope for further research to determine what products could benefit firsthand from online multisensory brand experiences and whether or not the consumers of those categories are adaptable to it or not.

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