



The Impact of Sensory Branding on Tourist Experience**

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of sensory branding on the tourist experience in the hospitality industry and emphasize its importance. The scope of the research consists of 5-star hotels in Izmir, Turkey. In the study, 413 questionnaires were obtained and the data were analyzed with quantitative research methods. The experience in the research is related to the sensory tourist experience. For this purpose, the relationships among sensory branding, tourist experience, satisfaction, decision-making, and revisit intention were also examined as related topics with experience. According to the basic finding of the research, sensory branding affects the tourist experience under some conditions and mediating variables. This research includes the adaptation of sensory research, which has a multidisciplinary field of use, to the field of tourism. The inadequacy of academic studies on the use of senses in tourism research is among the limitations of the research. According to the main result of the study, sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on sensory tourist experience. In addition to the contribution of tourism literature, the findings will be beneficial in providing a competitive advantage for accommodation establishments and keeping up with developing technologies and innovations. At the same time, it will be a research that sheds light on the gap in the sensory branding literature in tourism.

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INTRODUCTION

Each brand grows with the experiences it offers to its consumers. Creating unique experiences that determine the meaning and value of the brand for the target audience is at the core of branding efforts (Alemdar, 2012). The idea of experiential marketing is based on how the brand adds meaning to the lives of consumers rather than realizing the sale of a brand (Keller, 2003). Experiential marketing enables the development of a relationship at the behavioral level between brands and customers. It increases the chances of competition for businesses with the emotional impact it creates (Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006). One of the experiences mentioned here is a sensory experience. The use of the senses in creating experience is also the focus of this research. In this research, sensory experiences are associated with sensory branding and their effect on the tourist experience is examined.

The senses are important for the promotion of a product and its storage in human memory. Many marketing planners use senses in their marketing plans. The senses are utilized for advertising, promoting and marketing, and also used for remembrance. For instance, the sense of smell is associated with the limbic system that provides permanent memory. For this reason, senses are related to the behavior of customers and the product evaluation process of customers (Davies et al., 2003). The smell of flowers may remind a lotion or a romantic situation. A brand's appearance, smell, taste, voice, or touch may invoke memory. This situation is valid for a single place as a product, and the examples can be adapted to hotels. The natural flower scent spread throughout the hotel reminds a person of a romantic or beautiful moment belonging to that area. The situation may be just the opposite (Yun & Yazdanifard, 2013). Thus, the memories created by the senses indicate a peculiar and distinct memory system (Zucco, 2003).

This perspective points to the relationship between branding and experience. One of the important research fields in this regard is sensory branding and tourist experience. This also points to the effects of sensory branding on the tourist experience. There are few studies on the impacts of sensory branding on guest experiences in accommodation establishments. This aspect also points to the research gap in the field. The main purpose of the research is to examine the effect of sensory branding on the tourist experience. With this aspect, the model associated with tourist experience, revisit intention, satisfaction and decision-making in the literature have been examined. With the associated model and research area, a different structure was revealed from other studies. In this research, it has been chosen as the application area in the accommodation enterprises located in the province of Izmir, which stands out with its touristic features, and results that will contribute to the industry and literature have been obtained.

Literature Review

Sensory Branding

Senses affect human behavior (Morris & Ratneshwar, 2000). Sensory advertising has become important in marketing efforts over the last few years. Such a marketing strategy may increase consumers' motivation to purchase a product (Yun & Yazdanifard, 2013). The relations between retail dealers and consumers can be enhanced by creating sensory images (Davies et al., 2003). For example, Singapore Airlines, Kellogg's and Ford emphasize their brands as sensory experiences (Lindstrom, 2005a). According to Lindstrom (2005), Singapore Airlines ignored sensory experiences at first. After that, they started to work on sensory experiences and developed some sensory strategies. Singapore Airlines was at the peak of sensory branding at the end of the 1990s. First, a new brand toolkit

was created and introduced. Special uniforms for the staff were made compatible with the plane's interior design. The hostesses were offered two colors to match the interior design of the plane and were made to use these colors for their makeup. Moreover, a special odor was designed for Singapore Airlines. The flight attendants used this smell, and this smell permeated the entire plane. This odor has since become representative of that brand and has become synonymous with Singapore Airlines (Lindstrom, 2005a, Lindstrom, 2005b). Research has argued that products appealing to multiple senses, as in the example, have an impact on the desire for purchase (Krishna, 2010; Costa et al., 2012; Krishna, 2012). One of the topics that such situations are associated with is sensory branding and thus the interaction with tourist experiences

The reason for a firm's desire to develop its sensory strategies is to separate brands from competitors in situations where price and quality are similar (Hultén, 2011: p.263). Most companies have used audio and visual items to differentiate their brands from competitors in the past. This phenomenon known as sensory branding gives companies the advantage to distinguish themselves from other companies. Sensory branding aims to use the senses to form a five-dimensional experience for consumers (Upadhyaya, 2017; Krishna, 2010; Hussain, 2014). Sensory branding is one of the types of marketing that appeals to the senses (Randhir et al., 2016). The sensory branding strategy appeals to many senses and creates strong brands with lasting consumer connections (Hussain, 2014). According to Thomson (2016), it's an important tool in product development and packaging. It is about how a brand uses senses to create an identity and place the brand in an individual position (Hultén, 2017).

Role of Five Senses in Branding and Tourist Experience

Under this heading, the five senses, which are the components of sensory branding, are briefly mentioned one by one. However, it is necessary to focus on the concept of the tourist experience first. Experience is associated with a sensory, emotional and creative approach to the product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) and the tourist experience is also made up of many interactions (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006). According to Larsen (2003), "a tourist experience is a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory". Andersson (2007) relates the tourist experience to the moment when tourism consumption and tourism production meet. "The experience of tourism can be described as the subjective mental state felt by participants" (Otto & Ritchie, 1996).

Considering together with all these definitions and the focus of the research, one of the elements that create an experience is sensory stimuli. In this context, the first sense mentioned is vision. Vision is a dominant sense and it can be said that visual stimuli such as color, lighting, graphics and interior design influence the product choices and consumption of the customers (Hultén, 2017). It emerged of factors such as visual stimulation, lighting, artwork, decoration and presentation (Yozukmaz & Topaloğlu, 2016).

The odor is one of the most effective sensations for purchasing decisions and brand loyalty among consumers due to its impact on the limbic cortex system (Jayakrishnan, 2013). If the fragrance creates a positive image for the customers, it creates the possibility of making reservations in the same hotel again in the future (Krishna, 2013). The Westin Hotel has a signature smell of white tea (Krishna, 2012). The Four Seasons Hotel in Buenos Aires welcomes in the lobby with their signature fragrance, "Bayo," which reflects the ecosystem diversity in Argentina. Mandarin Oriental group has its smells that vary according to location and identity. There are many other hotels, such as Ritz Carlton and Hotel Vermont, with their signature scents to create an endless sensory experience for consumers.

The sense of taste has importance in the life of humankind. It varies between different cultures and people in the same culture (Bourezak & Nouri, 2017). Studies indicate that there is a link between optional and perceived food quality and buying intentions. When hotels or restaurants begin to offer special dishes, their dining experience becomes a part of the customer's memories thanks to these evocations (Rupini & Nandagopal, 2015). According to Nagarjuna & Sudhakar (2015), a “Signature dish” belonging to the hotel can be obtained, and hotels can receive patents for these meals. As it can be seen, companies may use different flavors to create a memorable and unforgettable environment that will remain in the minds of consumers (Nair, 2013).

Music and ambient sounds played in accommodation establishments, restaurants and retail stores can affect the consumer atmosphere. The sound can affect the real-time spent on the place, the perception of the time spent and the actual expenditure (Krishna, 2012). Interested in Experiential Hospitality and Neurohospitality, Curruz (2016) said that hotels are a large stage full of voices to be recognized, cataloged, integrated and defined by the guests. Sounds will be processed into the minds of the guests in their environments; the comparison process with other sounds will start to take place in their memory and will be in a position to affect the behavior and decision-making process.

The feeling/touch of a product is also effective in sales. Psychology researches show that consumers feel a small sense of ownership (belongingness) and are more likely to purchase the products they touch after they feel the product (Rupini & Nandagopal, 2015). The tactile strategy is felt more strongly in industrial and consumer products because people like to feel it by touching the product or making contact with the skin. However, the importance of touch in the five-star hotel segment and service sector cannot be ignored. Consumers can reach the feeling of touch through furniture, equipment, and facilities in hotels. A nice and comfortable bed, sofa, towel and so on will provide guests with an unforgettable stay experience and give importance (Jamaluddin et. al, 2013). Singapore Airlines has started to make branding efforts by using the effect of the sense of touch on customers, through the “Singapore Girl” flight attendants who were tasked with wearing fine silk uniforms, which combine silk decor elements (Lindstrom, 2005b). The sense of touch, like the other senses such as seeing, smelling, tasting and hearing, which has an intensive effect on sensory branding and tourist experience, is a feeling that takes place in the minds of people and is effective in decision-making processes (Sing & Mehraj, 2018; Verma & Mishra, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2019).

Methodology

Research Aim, Scope and Limitations

The sensory characteristics of a hotel affect the perspective toward the service provided. The research aims to examine the impacts of sensory branding on the tourist experience in the hospitality industry and highlights its importance. The sample of the research consists of guests staying in 5-star hotels in İzmir, Turkey. The inadequacy of academic studies on the use of senses in tourism research and the legal situations experienced in accessing the data set is among the constraints of the research.

Research Question & Model of the Research

The basis of the study is to present the impacts of sensory branding tools on buyers' experiences in hotel businesses. Following this purpose, the main research question is formulated as follows: “Does the sensory branding efforts of hotels impact the tourist experience?” While answering this question, hypotheses were formed and a quantitative research method was applied to determine the effect of sensory branding on the tourist experience. The

research model is given in Figure 1.

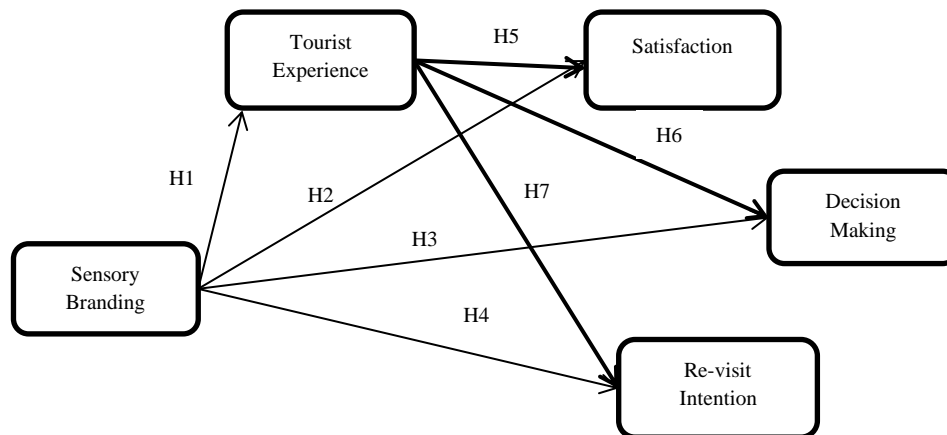


Figure 1. Model of the Research

The model of the study consists of five factors, such as “Sensory Branding, Tourist Experience, Satisfaction, Decision Making, and Re-Visiting Intention.” While the basic steps of the research are “sensory branding and tourist experience”; “satisfaction, decision-making and re-visit intention” are directly related variables with experience and affect each other (Abdullah & Lui, 2018; Ko & Chiu, 2008; Miller, 2019) and it has a relationship with post-brand experience.

Survey Research and Data Collection

With 48 questions, a “face-to-face survey” was conducted by the leading researcher to the participants who stays at 5-star hotels in Izmir, Turkey. The respondents were chosen by “purposive sampling” because the study aimed to reach those people who had sensory experience in 5-star hotels. The sample selection was targeted at those staying in 5-star hotels in Izmir, and these participants were selected by “a simple random sampling technique.”

The questionnaire form includes two parts. The first part of the form includes eight demographic questions. In the second part, there are 40 questions to examine the relationship between “sensory branding, tourist experiences, satisfaction, decision making, and re-visit intention.” The questions were adapted according to the research. The list of questions was formed from the research of Yoo et al. (2000), Uddin (2011), Sthapit (2013), Song et al. (2015), Tosun et al. (2015) and Zarantonello & Pauwels-Delassus (2016) has been made suitable for the research. 5-point Likert was used in the scale.

A face-to-face questionnaire technique was used, and each questionnaire took between 5 and 7 minutes. Some of the questionnaires were handed over to hotels due to the difficulty of surveying the hotel at any time and were received at a later date. The survey has been carried out over four months from May to August 2019. Questionnaires were conducted on the 5-star hotel’s guests who stay at least one night in Izmir. The obtained data were collected from questionnaires interpreted by “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)” and “AMOS”. Then the results were revealed, and suggestions were created.

Findings

Socio-Demographic Profile

Frequency analysis was applied to determine the participants’ demographic profiles. The findings are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographic Features

Gender	N	%	Age Group	N	%
Female	204	49.4	18 or younger	32	7.7
Male	209	50.6	18-24	75	18.2
Educational Status	N	%	25-34	84	20.3
Primary school	5	1.2	35-44	81	19.6
Secondary School	30	7.3	45-54	70	16.6
Vocational Education	32	7.7	55-64	41	9.9
Bachelor Degree	246	59.6	65 or over	30	7.3
Master or Doctoral Degree	100	24.2	Who paid for the travel expenses?	N	%
Accommodation Cost	N	%	by myself	207	50.1
< ₺1.000	91	22.0	by family and relatives	119	28.8
₺ 1.001 – 2.500	152	36.8	by company	87	21.1
₺2,501 – 5.000	102	24.7	What's your purpose of visit?	N	%
₺5.001 – 7.500	44	10.7	Pleasure & Relaxing	208	50.4
> ₺7501	22	5.8	Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)	63	15.3
How often do you stay in a five-star hotel in a year?	N	%	Business	142	34.4
Less than ones	115	27.8	Type of accommodation?	N	%
1 or 2 times	209	52.6	Resort Hotel	238	57.6
3 or 4 times	46	11.1	City Hotel	155	37.5
More than 4 times	43	10.4	Others	20	4.8
Total values may not be exactly 100, due to the absence of fractions.					
Note: TRY;₺ (Turkish Lira) is the currency of Turkey.					
\$1=₺5.70 / 1€ 6.30 (approximately) at the time of data collection in 2019					

Table 1. shows the data on the gender, education level, age groups, accommodation costs of the participants, who pay the travel fees, how often they stay in a five-star hotel per year, reasons for travel, and the types of hotels they stay.

Reliability Test and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Different scales, including sensory branding, tourist experience, satisfaction, decision-making, and revisit intention, were used as data collection tools. Firstly, “validity and reliability tests” were performed, and then EFA was used to determine the dimensions of the scales. While performing these analyses, exploratory factor analysis was applied to each of the scales used in the study, and variance explanation rates were determined.

Reliability Test of Each Factor

“The reliability factor is valued between 0 and 1”, and when it approaches up to 1, its reliability increases (Pelit & Güçer, 2007).

The results of the reliability analysis applied for each of the scales are given below:

- Sensory Branding (Cronbach's Alpha (CA) =0.953)
- Tourist Experience (CA = 0.924)
- Satisfaction (CA = 0.935)
- Decision Making (CA = 0.860)
- Revisit Intention (CA = 0.925)

“Cronbach's alpha value” applied in this research was calculated between 0.860 and 0.953 (as seen in Table 2). This value is within an extremely reliable range and as a result, it is concluded that the scales used in the research are reliable (Hair et al., 1998).

Exploratory Factor Analysis / (EFA)

EFA was applied for each of the scales in this study, and variance explanation rates were determined.

The “Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Sampling (KMO)” test, which is called the “measurement of sampling adequacy”, is considered one of the tests that give a view about the suitability of factor analysis. If the KMO value is near 1, the significance level of the analysis increases. There are different opinions about the adequacy of KMO value in the conducted studies. In many studies, it is stated that the KMO value above 0.50 is sufficient. However, Malhotra (1996) states that the most valid ratio for the KMO value is more than 0.70. In this part of the study, “Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Sampling (KMO), Barlett's Sphericity Test (Barlett), and Factor Analysis” were performed for each scale expression. In the scope of the research, EFA was applied to the expressions directed to the participants to measure sensory branding perceptions. The varimax rotation method was applied to for maximizing variances in the analysis. Furthermore, it is not possible to reach factor score coefficients without Varimax (Nakip, 2003). The structure of the scale after EFA is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Expressions According to Dimensions

Main Dimensions	Expressions	Cronbach Alpha	Total Variance Explanation Rate
Sensory Branding	13	0.953	64.366
Tourist Experience	10	0.924	59.624
Satisfaction	5	0.935	79.267
Decision Making	8	0.860	50.942
Re-Visit Intention	4	0.925	81.791
Total Number of Items		40	

Each of the variables was gathered under one dimension and had sufficient variance explanation ratios which are ranging between 50.942 and 81.791. “Cronbach's Alpha” ranges from 0.860 to 0.953, which is a very reliable range.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis / (CFA)

Firstly, the EFA was applied to the variables in the model. Afterward, CFA was carried out to verify the validity. CFA is an analysis in which a predefined and constrained structure is verified as a model. In other words, the CFA is not used to explore factor structures; it checks whether the measurement models are appropriate to the observed data or not (MacCallum & Austin, 2000; Çokluk et al., 2018). This method is mostly used in scale development and validity analysis to confirm a predetermined structure (Karagöz & Ağbektas, 2016).

After the model is set up and tested in the confirmatory factor analysis, the program in which the model is tested may offer some corrections to the researcher. These corrections are made to improve the model the researcher has established. In this research, modifications were applied to increase the compatibility values of the model that was constructed and tested. At this stage, the proposed fit modification was made to optimize the model.

Table 3. Model Fit Statistics

Goodness of Fit Criteria Acceptable Values	Results
Chi-Square Fit Test $\chi^2/df - "x^2/df \leq 5"$	2.596
" $0.85 \leq GFI \leq 0.90$ "	0.859
" $0.05 \leq RMSEA \leq 0.08$ "	0.054
" $0.80 \leq AGFI \leq 0.90$ "	0.831
" $0.90 \leq CFI \leq 0.97$ "	0.942
" $0.90 \leq NFI \leq 0.95$ "	0.900
" $0.90 \leq IFI \leq 0.95$ "	0.943
" $0.90 \leq TLI \leq 0.95$ "	0.935
" $SRMR \leq 0.08$ "	0.05

Acceptable values derived from the studies: Kline, 2005; Şimşek, 2007; Hooper et al., 2008; Wang, 2011; Meydan & Şeşen, 2015; Özdamar, 2016; Schumacker & Lomax, 2016.

As in the Table 3. the values are within the acceptable fit range (" $GFI = 0.859$; $RMSEA = 0.054$; $AGFI = 0.831$; $CFI = 0.942$; $NFI = 0.900$; $IFI = 0.943$; $TLI = 0.935$; $RMR = 0.05$ "). These fit indexes indicated that the model has a good fit and this shows that the model is suitable for research.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) on the Impact of Sensory Branding on Tourist Experience

SEM was used to test the hypotheses created from the model whose "validity and reliability" were confirmed and EFA and CFA performed. It has two essential features in SEM. The process studied involves a series of structures, and these structural equations are illustrated visually for an easier understanding of the hypotheses (Meydan & Şeşen, 2015). SEM is the statistical method performed to test the relationship between observed variables and latent variables (Yılmaz, 2004). This study examines the "impact of sensory branding on tourist experience, and the relationship between satisfaction, decision-making and revisits intentions" that emerge after the tourist experience. The above path diagram shows the impact between the dimensions.

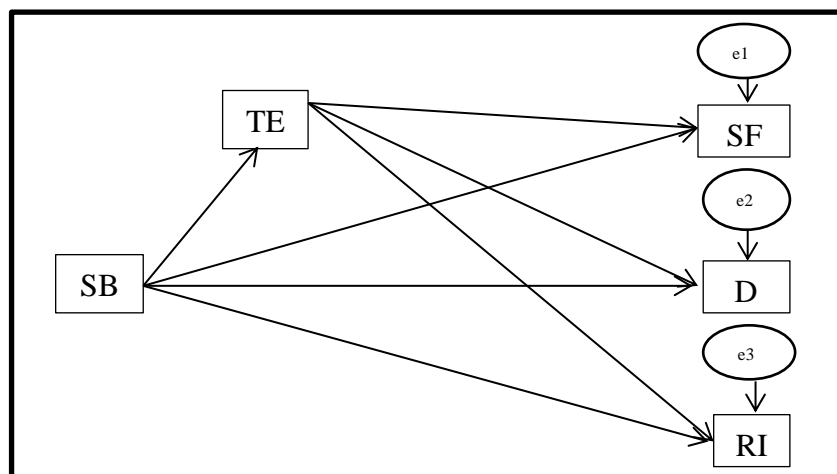


Figure 2. Path Diagram for the Research

*SB: Sensory Branding; TE: Tourist Experience; SF: Satisfaction; DM: Decision Making; RI: Re-Visit Intention

Testing of Hypotheses

The results regarding the impact of sensory branding on the tourist experience are given in Table 4. To strengthen

the model, some variables such as “satisfaction” - “decision-making” and “re-visit intention” which are related to the literature, are analyzed. For this purpose, the results related to the impact of sensory branding on the other variables were determined. Afterward, results are shown to determine the impact of tourist experience on other variables.

Table 4. Results of Structural Equation Model (SEM)

			β	Std.	t	p	R ²	Hypothesis Results
Sensory Branding	➔	Tourist Experience	0.852	0.058	14.514	0.00**	0.7259	Supported
Sensory Branding	➔	Satisfaction	-0.030	0.109	0.924	0.81	0.0009	Rejected
Sensory Branding	➔	Decision Making	-0.262	0.147	-1.319	0.12	0.0686	Rejected
Sensory Branding	➔	Re-Visit İntention	0.261	0.118	2.740	0.05*	0.0681	Supported
Tourist Experience	➔	Satisfaction	1.129	0.128	7.737	0.00**	1.2746	Supported
Tourist Experience	➔	Decision Making	0.836	0.163	4.449	0.00**	0.6988	Supported
Tourist Experience	➔	Re-Visit İntention	0.689	0.130	4.673	0.00**	0.4747	Supported

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

SEM answer the central question of the research, “the impact of sensory branding on tourist experience.” It is clear from Table 4. that “sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on tourist experience ($\beta= 0.852$; $p< 0.05$).”

H₁: “Sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on tourist experience.” was supported.

The value of R² shows that 72% of the tourist experience is explained by sensory branding. The remaining 28% is explained by different variables. This value represents a very high rate of explanation and answers the central question of the research. In short, the analysis shows that sensory branding has an impact on the tourist experience and that sensory branding largely explains the positive tourist experience.

When the relationship between “tourist experience” and “satisfaction” - “decision-making” and “re-visit intention” is examined, the following findings are reached;

“Sensory branding has not a positive and significant impact on satisfaction ($\beta= -0.030$; $p= 0.81$).”

H₂: “Sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on satisfaction.” was rejected.

“Sensory branding has not a positive and significant impact on decision-making behavior ($\beta= -0.262$; $p= 0.12$).”

H₃: “Sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on decision making.” was rejected.

“Sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on re-visit intention ($\beta= 0.261$; $p< 0.05$).”

H₄: “Sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on re-visit intention.” was supported.

The value of R² shows that 06% of the re-visit intention is explained by the tourist experience.

In short, “sensory branding has no direct impact on satisfaction and decision-making.” The rate of explaining the revisit variable remained at 6%. After examining the effects of sensory branding, other interactions in the model were examined.

At this stage, “the impact of tourist experience on satisfaction, decision-making and re-visit was analyzed.” According to the results, “tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on satisfaction ($\beta= 1.129$; $p= 0.00$).”

H₅: “Tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on satisfaction.” was supported.

“The tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on decision-making behavior ($\beta= 0.836$; $p< 0.05$).”

H₆: “Tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on decision making.” was supported.

“The tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on re-visit intention” ($\beta= 0.689$; $p< 0.05$).”

H₇: “Tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on re-visit intention.” was supported.

The value of R² shows that 127% of the satisfaction was explained by the tourist experience, 0.69% of the decision-making was explained by the tourist experience, and 47% of the re-visit intention was explained by the tourist experience.

Based on the data obtained from the hypothesis tests of the study, it was found that sensory branding had no direct impact on satisfaction and decision-making. At this stage, it is investigated whether the experience of the tourist after sensory branding has a mediating role in satisfaction and decision-making or not. Based on this question, two research hypotheses were developed, and mediation impact was tried to be measured. Additional hypotheses generated are as follows:

H₈: “The tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role in the impact of sensory branding on satisfaction.”

H₉: “The tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role in the impact of sensory branding on decision-making.”

The mediator variable helps explain “the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable” (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016). In this part of the research, sensory branding is considered an independent variable, and decision-making and satisfaction are considered dependent variables. The significance of the mediating impact of tourist experience between sensory branding and satisfaction was analyzed through the Sobel Test. The Sobel test is used to test the significance of the change in the regression coefficient (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001; Meydan & Şeşen, 2015).

In this part of the research, the model of Hypothesis 8 is shown below and then Table 5 about the test results is given.

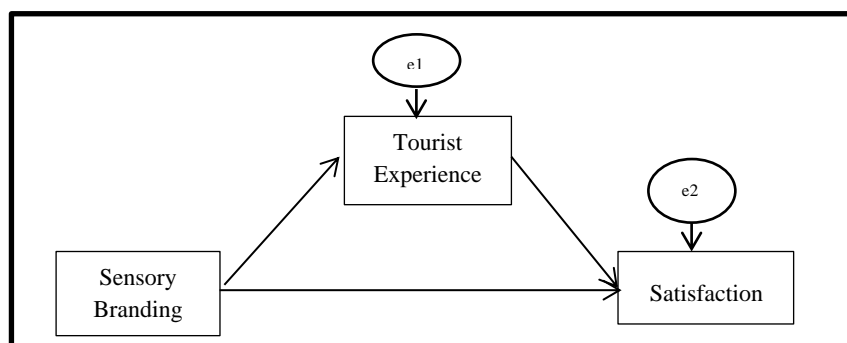


Figure 3. Path Diagram of Mediation Model (H₈)

Table 5. Impact of Sensory Branding on Satisfaction with the Mediating Role of Tourist Experience

Tests	Test Statistic	Std. Error	p
Sobel Test	7.56187457	0.12720497	0.00
Aroian Test	7.54902882	0.12742142	0.00
Goodman Test	7.57478612	0.12698814	0.00

It is observed in Table 5 that tourist experience has a significant mediating impact between sensory branding and satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). In other words, according to the Sobel Test results, “the tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role.”

H₈: “The tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role in the impact of sensory branding on satisfaction.” is supported.

The model of Hypothesis 9 is shown below, and then the table about the test results is given.

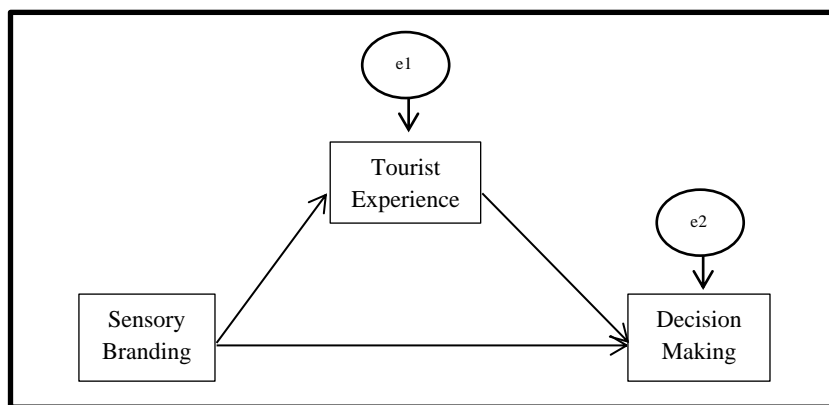


Figure 4. Path Diagram of Mediation Model (H₉)

Table 6. Impact of Sensory Branding on Decision-Making with the Mediating Role of Tourist Experience

Tests	Test Statistic	Std. Error	p
Sobel Test	4.84218114	0.14709735	0.00000128
Aroian Test	4.83221127	0.14740084	0.00000135
Goodman Test	4.85221298	0.14679323	0.00000122

It is observed in Table 6. that tourist experience has a significant mediating impact between sensory branding and decision-making ($p < 0.05$). In other words, according to the results of the Sobel Test, “the tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role.”

H₉: “The tourist experience has a positive and meaningful mediating role in the impact of sensory branding on decision making.” is supported.

It is seen that hypotheses other than H₂ and H₃ are supported. As a result, “sensory branding had a positive and significant impact on tourist experience.” This finding is supported by the supporting findings in the model. According to the results, “sensory branding has a direct impact on tourist experience and customers' intention to visit again.” It was concluded that there is no direct impact on the “satisfaction and decision-making processes” of the customers. “The tourist experience has a positive and meaningful impact on customers’ satisfaction, re-visit intention and decision-making.”

After finding that “sensory branding” has no direct impact on “satisfaction” and “decision-making” variables, analyses have been conducted on the mediating role of “tourist experience.” As a result, it is concluded that “tourist

experience” has a mediator role in “sensory branding” on “satisfaction” and “decision-making.” In other words, “sensory branding does not have a direct impact on satisfaction and decision-making” variables but has a significant impact on the mediation role of the “tourist experience” variable. These findings are among the important results of the research.

Conclusion and Discussions

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of sensory branding on the tourist experience in the hospitality industry and emphasize its importance. This context is especially important for accommodation businesses in terms of competitiveness. In an environment where competition is increasing, it is hard for corporations to protect their competitive power by using old-fashioned methods. This need for competitive innovation is also reflected in academic tourism research, and an increase in the number of researches in the context of senses and tourism is observed. These research fields are concerned with the effects of a product appealing to the human senses on the human mind and the memories it creates. Data acquired with sense organs and converted into perceptions over time become experiences. Those experiences occupy the human mind and then form a perspective/image/or value for the product offered. In other words, the fact that a touristic product takes place in memory and becomes a brand is directly related to the experience. Besides, the human senses also play a role in the formation of the tourist experience.

The sense is a kind of mechanism that includes seeing, smelling, hearing, touching, and tasting activities. Nowadays, companies make an effort to differentiate their brands from their competitors by using “five senses.” This effort is known as sensory branding which helps companies distinguish brands or products from competitors.

The results of SEM answered the central question of the research, and it is clear that “sensory branding has a positive and significant impact on sensory tourist experience.” Similar to the research finding, according to Agapito et al. (2012), “sensory stimulation enhances tourist experiences.” There are other studies on the relationship between senses and experience as the research of Randhir et al. (2016). According to his/her study, the five senses have an important impact on consumers' experience of products, services, and brands (Randhir et al., 2016). This finding is supported by other studies as the study of Schmitt 1999; Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2003; Govers et al., 2007; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Hultén 2011; Moreira et al., 2017.

Sensory branding also has a significant impact on the re-visit intention. There are other studies to support this finding. For example, Galande (2019) states that consumers are likely to re-visit when they are engaged with all five senses in the purchasing process. According to Li (2018), sensory behavior, and intellectual brand experience can motivate the revisit intention of consumers.

On the other hand, it was found that sensory branding had no direct impact on “satisfaction” and “decision-making.” If we consider sensory branding as a sub-dimension of sensory marketing, this finding distinguishes it from the findings of Valenti & Riviere (2008), Shabgou & Daryani (2014), and Sing & Mehraj (2018). In the research of Valenti & Riviere (2008), participants stated that addressing the five senses is an important factor for consumer contentment. Considering the study of Shabgou & Daryani (2014), sensory marketing aims to create sensory stimuli and influence the consumer's purchasing behavior. which is related to the “decision-making process” of customers. Based on their study, five senses affect 21.4% of consumer behavior. Moreover, Sing & Mehraj (2018) mentioned in their study that the factors about the sensory dimension of brand experience have a positive impact on tourists’

satisfaction. Compared to these studies, the result of the research differs. It may be explained by the difficulties in the process of the transformation of sensory branding into perception. When the perception process is taken into consideration, the concept of experience becomes very important. Along with this awareness, the tourist experience was considered a mediator factor, and new hypotheses were created and analyzed.

The findings show that although “sensory branding does not have a direct impact on satisfaction and decision-making, it has an impact on satisfaction and decision making with the mediating role of the sensory tourist experience.” This result suggests that the sensory tourist experience is significant in the perception of sensory branding. One of the most important contributions of the results of the study to the literature is the findings on the mediator role of the sensory tourist experience.

The effect of sensory tourist experience on satisfaction is also among the findings. Findings show that “there is a significant and positive impact of sensory tourist experience on satisfaction.” There are other studies with similar findings. For example, according to the research findings of Iglesias et al. (2019), “sensory brand experience has a positive impact on brand value through customer satisfaction and customer emotional commitment.” There are also other similar findings as to the study of Verma & Mishra (2017) and Sing & Mehraj (2018).

Another hypothesis of this research is related to “the impact of sensory experiences on decision-making.” Research findings show that “the sensory tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on decision-making.” This finding is supported by different studies, such as the study of Suhonen & Tengvall (2009).

Finally, the research focused on “the impact of sensory tourist experience on re-visit intention.” According to the findings, “sensory tourist experience has a positive and significant impact on re-visit intention.” There are also different studies supporting this finding. Barnes et al. (2014) emphasized sensory brand experience and said that sensory brand experience positively influenced the re-visit intention. Moreover, according to Camilleri (2018), a sensory tourist experience is important for tourists both for re-visit intention and for positive word of mouth. There are also similar findings in the studies of Li (2018) and Galande (2019).

It is expected that findings of this research will draw attention to the importance of sensory branding in tourism industry and contribute to the increase of similar studies. It is considered that the studies to be conducted with larger samples will be beneficial to both the enterprises and the literature in terms of developing and applying the sensory branding approach in the tourism industry. The results of this study can be useful to develop a new research idea and model in the field of sensory branding for further research.

Declaration

All authors of the article contribute equally to the article process. The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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