IMPACT OF SENSORY MARKETING STRATEGIES ON BRAND LOVE: A STUDY OF FRANCHISED FAST FOOD CHAINS IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Brands competing in food industry require a clear emphasis on sensory stimuli when developing their marketing strategies to cater different segments in the market. Sensory marketing plays a vital role in creating long standing relationship with consumers. The impact s sensory marketing on consumer behaviour is a widely examined research scope but still empirical gaps are claimed within different product scopes and market contexts. Having said, this paper investigated the research problem of how sensory marketing strategies result brand love in line with the empirical gaps and practice issues posited within the franchised fast food chains in Sri Lanka. Study was based on the international franchised fast food channels operate in Sri Lanka. Multi stage cluster sampling method was used and 200 questionnaires were distributed to the consumers of fast food chains. Quantitative method was employed with a questionnaire to execute the study in order to investigate how five sub divisions of sensory marketing strategies influence brand love. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) supported by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) produced with AMOS-23 software version was occupied to test five hypotheses formulated in this study. Results revealed that four dimensions namely visual, olfactory, auditory & gustative factors impact brand love whilst tactile factors were not proven. Based on key findings this paper highlights the managerial implications and areas for future research directions.

KEYWORDS: Brand Love, Fast Food Chains, SEM, Sensory Marketing, Sri Lanka

1. INTRODUCTION

The passionate linkage in between the brand and consumer has been proposed as vital in building solid brands. To build that linkage or the bond, it has been affirmed and examined that consumers search for enthusiastic encounters around what has been purchased and never again purchase products and services alone (Brembeck & Ekstro, 2004; Ratneshwar & Mick, 2005). Firms need to intensively focus on relationship building with customers through comprehensive communication strategies based on the market offerings whereas new media can do a strategic role within (Ratneshwar & Mick, 2005; Siriwardana & Dissanayake, 2018). The brand has tangibles and intangible values and marketers apply sensory marketing applications to create a stimulation via five senses of human kind (Dissabandara & Dissanayake, 2019; Keller, 2013; Lindstrom, 2010). As described by Krishna (2010) "Sensory marketing is a strategy that connects with the consumers' senses and in this way influences their behaviour". Essentially, the client's decision for an item or service will be cognizant and contingent

upon its qualities and advantages.

With the usage of sensory marketing strategies and techniques, it creates an environment for consumers to identify the brand, products and services from competitive brands, which creates a separate identity, perceived premium, inclination and finally they tend to fall in love with the brand (Sayadi, Mobarakabadi, & Hamidi, 2015). When consumer begins to love a brand, at that point he/she really turns out to be exceptionally enthusiastic about and energetic for the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). As a result of this strong emotional connection, they are relied upon to buy over and again the same brand disregarding other contender brands. Love can be described as an attitude held by a person towards a particular other person, involving predispositions to think, feel, and behave in certain ways toward that other person (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The same concept is applied with products and services via brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Haung 2017; Solomon, 2014).

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Sensory Marketing Strategies and Brand Love have been identified as important concepts within the marketing and consumer behaviour and specifically restaurant industry since stimulating all five senses is possible (Haung 2017; Solomon, 2014). Among the restaurant industry fast-food industry has a larger amount of rivalry and it can be seen that both worldwide and nearby brands are contending in the market to enhance and maintain the present piece of the pie (Wiedmann, Hennigs, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2013). This circumstance is consistent with the Sri Lankan setting as well. In Sri Lanka, it can be seen different universal and neighbourhood fast food brands such as KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut and Dominos implement competitive marketing and sensory branding strategies (Patabandige & Yapa, 2016). It is said that local consumer responses should be intensively examined when it comes to multinational brands including competitive and culturally connected sectors like fast food chains (Wegapitiya & Dissanayake, 2018). All these organizations contend in a similar market and it can be said that they are mostly focusing on similar market segments (Patabandige & Yapa, 2016). Fast food can be defined as food that is prepared and served quickly at outlets called fast food restaurants and is a very aggressive and a competitive industry (Biswas, Labrecque, Lehmann, & Markos, 2014). In brief, studies alarm to examine the food consumption patterns and consumer responses in Sri Lankan whilst sensory marketing application in fast food sector is referred as one of the claimed contexts for further research works (Dissabandara & Dissanayake, 2019; Liyanage & Dissanayake, 2017). Accordingly, this study focused to address the sensory marketing and brand love related practices whilst addressing empirical gaps found in the international franchised fast food chains operating in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, this study investigates the main research question of how sensory marketing strategies influence brand love with reference to franchised fast food industry in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, a comprehensive literature review was carried out to develop the variable relationships and the hypotheses in line with the main research question. Deductive approach was fallowed to rationalize the variables relationships and hypotheses. Survey

method was used to carry out the study and it distributed 200 questionnaires amongst the respondents within the Western province of Sri Lanka due to the higher penetration of fast food chain channels. It followed multi stage cluster sampling as the sampling method. Based on the industry information and justifications figured out through the initial study, we decided to consider top five international Franchised Fast Food chains operating in Sri Lanka namely Mc Donalds, KFC, Pizza Hut, Burger King and Dominos to execute the study.

3. EMPIRICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR HYPOTHESES

In the present context sensory marketing is a marketing strategy used to enhance the relationship between consumer and the brand. As described by Hulten , Broweus, & Van Dijk (2009), there are 5 sensors and sensory expressions. They are identified as Visual (Sight), Olfactory (Smell), Auditory (Hearing), Tactile (Touch) and Gustative (Taste). The sensory elements were identified as the independent variable as sensory element is said to be cognitive responses (Breckler, 1984; Solomon, 2014). Sensory and intellectual experiences can be identified as consumer's cognitive responses, e.g., to touch, see and feel, these experiences should have cognitive elements. There are literature supporting and demonstrating significant antecedents of brand Love as one of the brand evaluation contexts demands more investigations with reference to different products and services sectors (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Dissabandara & Dissanayake,2019). In a recent study carried out by Haung (2017), sensory experience has been identified as a major driver for brand love. It is found that cognitive elements, sensory experience and sharing similar elements might have effects on brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The empirical studies found investigating the five sensory elements of brands particularly consumer goods sector and the brand love have been referred to propose the hypotheses of this study in line with the main research questions. With the above justifications, following main hypothesis and sub hypotheses were developed in relation to the dimensions of sensory marketing (Bandaranayake & Wickramsinghe,2020; Breckler, 1984; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Dissabandara & Dissanayake,2019; Haung, 2017; Lindsrom,2010; Solomon, 2014).

H1: Visual factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands
H2: Olfactory factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands
H3: Auditory factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands
H4: Tactile factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands
H5: Gustative factors have a significant impact on Brand Love towards the franchised fast food brands

4. MEASUREMENTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

With the justifications of previous studies, five dimensions of sensory marketing were tested with following sensory expressions or elements namely Visual – 5, Olfactory – 4, Auditory – 5, Tactile – 4, Gustative – 4 (Haung, 2017; Brakus, 2009; Krishna, 2007; 2012; 2013). The dependent variable of brand love was measured by using the scale of included ten items (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Accordingly, five dimensions sensory elements were separately considered when executing the factor analysis (Ho, 2013). Researchers considered 185 questionnaires out of 200 due to errors found in the responded questionnaires. Out of the 185 respondents, there were 101 males and 84 females who were involved in tasting food from fast food restaurants within last 3 years on regular or planned basis. We included a qualifying question to figure out that fundamental information to screen out the most reliable respondents to answer for the questions.

We carried out test of normality for the all items based on the recommended level of acceptance proposed by Byrne (2010). Alongside, as results of Skewness and Kurtosis measurements were considered for normality and all the values of the items were within range between -3 and + 3 for Skewness and Kurtosis values were between -7 and + 7 satisfying the normality (Bryne, 2010). All the values of five dimensions of Sensory marketing and Brand love were found within the accepted range for reliability based on the Cronbach Alpha values and reported more than 0.7 of coefficient values (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2007; Ho,2013). KMO values were checked and confirmed within the acceptable values in factor analysis in order to confirm the adequacy of the model. Values indicated were above 0.7 justifying adequacy of the model (Hair et al., 2012). And also factor loadings were more than 0.5 for all the items to confirm latent items are related (Ho, 2013). The undermentioned table depicts the summary of factor loadings of the items measured.

Table 1: Reporting Factor Loading of Variables

Variable	Item	Factor Loading
Visual Factors	Colours and design of the Restaurant attract and welcome me	0.798
	I'm happy with the packaging of my selected fast food brand.	0.795
	I'am comfortable with lighting, theme and design of the selected restaurant.	0.709
	I'm happy with the lighting, design and the exterior of the Restaurant.	0.781
	The interior signs and displays of the Restaurant grabs my attention	0.702
Olfactory Factors	I like the environment and smell of selected restaurant.	0.701
	Atmosphere smell improves my appetite [other than food]	0.775
	Food smell in my selected restaurant stimulate my appetite	0.727
	Smell in washroom & service area is pleasant.	0.896
Auditory Factors	I'm not disturbed by noise created by Staff	0.700
	I'm not disturbed by the noise created by Customers	0.744
	Background music and the sound create a good	0.794

	Ambience and makes me spend more time in the restaurant.	
	I like the type (brand) of music played at the restaurant I selected	0.750
	Music played at the restaurant is not too loud and is not a disturbance	0.799
Tactile Factors	Furniture, fittings and surface in the restaurant makes me feel comfortable to have a meal	0.809
	There is appropriate air conditioning in the Restaurant	0.708
	Food items served in the restaurant are warm and crispy	0.705
	Restaurant is clean and improves my appetite to have a meal.	0.789
Gustative Factors	I'm happy with the taste of food served in my selected restaurant in comparison with other restaurants in the list.	0.799
	I'm happy with the taste of food served in my selected restaurant in comparison with other restaurants in the list.	0.706
	I like the way food is presented.	0.761
	Food served in the restaurant suits my lifestyle and I'm delighted.	0.709
Brand Love	I have selected a wonderful fast food brand.	0.780
	This fast food brand makes me feel good	0.734
	This Fast Food brand is totally awesome	0.772
	I have neutral feelings about this brand	0.702
	This brand makes me very happy	0.838
	I love this fast food brand	0.794
	I have no particular feelings about this brand	0.718
	This brand is a pure delight for me	0.795
	I am passionate about this brand	0.873
	I am very attached to this brand	0.779

4.1 Hypotheses Testing and Results

Prior to carrying out hypotheses testing, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed to validate the scales used in our study. AMOS-23 version was used to analyze the data set which reflected the model fit indices specifically Chi-square, the CFI, the GFI and the RMSEA. All the values were within the acceptable ranges proposed by Ho (2013), except for CFI reported a low value of .795 which was improved considering the model fit improving options proposed by AMOS outputs table (Bentler,1990). The final measurement model indicated Chi-Squire = 2.022, GFI= 0.979, CFI= 0.910 and RMSEA= 0.052.

As recommended by Ho (2013) composite reliability (CR) was improved to 0.875 and the average variance extracted (AVE) value was above 50% with the final measurement model and hypotheses testing. Our study was conducted by a process of two stages recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), at first confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the measurement model and based on the measurement model Structural equation modelling was run to estimate the fit of the model. Following table (Table 2) shows the output of the SEM.

Table 2: SEM Output Statistics for Variable Relationships

Variables		Estimate	S.E	C.R.	P
Brand Love	<--- Visual	0.479	0.068	7.087	0.000
Brand Love	<--- Olfactory	0.593	0.092	6.412	0.000
Brand Love	<--- Auditory	0.483	0.118	4.097	0.000
Brand Love	<--- Tactile	0.409	0.052	3.307	0.561
Brand Love	<--- Gustative	0.793	0.083	9.113	0.000

According to the hypotheses test results, H1 is supported indicating Brand Love is impacted by Visual factors. Additionally, H2, H3 and H4 were found as supported according to the SEM results indicating Olfactory, Auditory and Gustative factors attribute significant impacts on Brand Love. However, H4 was not supported as P value was not significant indicating tactile factors (touch and feel) do not confirm to have an impact on Brand Love. Thus the findings of H1, H2, H3 and H5 are in line with previous studies (Breckler, 1984; Solomon, 2014; Haung, 2017). Since the findings in relation to H4 have shown different results, tactile factors have to be examined in different contextual and cultural settings.

5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Sensory marketing appearances to create positive experience over the five human senses making consumers fall in love before, during and after the purchase decision. What is important is brand awareness and how this wave can help solve new marketing challenges (Hultén, Broweus, & Dijk, 2009). The essential strategy of sensory marketing is to trigger emotional depth beyond the tangible features of the product where the brand will expand its awareness and strengthen brand loyalty (Lindstrom, 2007). The results of this research will be beneficial to the marketing managers looking to widen the scope of their current marketing and branding strategies in the attempt of targeting new customers and retaining the existing consumers within the fast food chain in particular. It indicates the significance of considering the local customs and cultural values in the implementation of sensory marketing since local customer preferences should be considered by global brands when tactical marketing being executed. The findings of this study can be used by academicians to enrich their knowledge on sensory marketing and brand love within the fast food chain sector as it shows many

consumer involvements and market responses. The model used in this study will be more useful to establish an eminent framework to explain brand love in relation to sensory marketing strategies. Findings of this study could be used to address the practise-related knowledge gaps found within fast food chains operate in Sri Lanka when it comes to effective applications of sensory marketing for brand-related responses (Bandaranayake & Wickramsinghe, 2020; Dissabandara & Dissanayake, 2019). In addition, we encourage future studies to investigate the brand love with reference to consumer and employee perspectives specially within the service sector organizations or service component related businesses including fast foods, modern trade channels, heath services, financial services and other upcoming sectors.

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