ijamrsd.com
ISSN: 2583-6404
Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research Studies and Development
Peer Reviewed Referred Journal | Bi-monthly | Open Access

THE POWER OF TOUCH: A STUDY OF TEXTURE AS A SENSORY BRANDING ELEMENT INFLUENCING CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS IN MUMBAI

Ms. Bhumika Chauhan[1], Dr. Pooja Ramchandani[2]

[1] *Research Scholar, Department of Commerce / Management, H. R College of Commerce and Economics, Churchgate, HSNC University, Mumbai.*

Email: bhumikaskt9@gmail.com

[2] *Principal of H.R College, Department of Commerce / Management, H. R College of Commerce and Economics, Churchgate, HSNC University, Mumbai.*

Email: hrcollegeprincipal2020@gmail.com

Abstract

In today's competitive marketplace, brands increasingly rely on experiential factors to influence consumer perceptions. Sensory branding focuses on engaging consumers through the senses; however, the sense of touch has received comparatively less academic attention. This study examines texture as a sensory branding element and its influence on consumer perceptions in Mumbai. Texture is experienced through physical interaction with products, packaging, and service environments, and it plays an important role in shaping consumers' judgments and emotional responses. The objective of this research is to understand how tactile experiences affect consumers' perceptions of quality, trust, and overall brand image. The study is based on primary data collected from consumers in Mumbai using a structured research approach. Quantitative methods are applied to analyze consumer responses and identify patterns related to texture-based sensory cues. Primary data was collected from 73 respondents in Mumbai using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The findings indicate that texture has a significant impact on consumer perception and contributes positively to brand evaluation. Consumers tend to associate favorable tactile experiences with higher quality and stronger brand reliability. The study also observes that the influence of texture varies across product categories and individual preferences. This research contributes to the field of sensory branding by emphasizing the strategic importance and power of touch in consumer decision-making. The findings offer practical insights for marketers and brand managers to design effective tactile experiences that enhance brand perception. The study highlights the need to integrate texture into branding strategies, particularly in urban markets such as Mumbai.

Keywords: Sensory Branding, Sensory Marketing, Texture, Tactile Experience, Consumer Perception, Brand Image, Perceived Quality.

► *Corresponding Author: Ms. Bhumika Chauhan*

Introduction

In an increasingly experience-driven marketplace, sensory branding has emerged as a strategic approach for influencing consumer perceptions beyond conventional visual and promotional cues. Among the various sensory dimensions, texture plays a significant yet often understated role in

shaping consumer's judgments related to product quality, trust, and overall brand image. Tactile interactions with products, packaging, and retail environments provide subtle cues that influence emotional responses and decision-making. While existing research has acknowledged the importance of sensory cues in branding, empirical investigations have predominantly emphasized visual and auditory elements, with limited attention given to texture as a standalone sensory dimension.

Moreover, much of the existing literature on tactile branding is concentrated in Western markets, offering limited insights into emerging urban contexts. In markets such as Mumbai characterized by diverse consumer profiles, rapid urbanization, and high brand exposure consumer perceptions are increasingly shaped by experiential factors. However, there remains a lack of focused empirical evidence examining how texture-based sensory cues influence consumer perceptions across product categories in such urban Indian settings. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of texture as a sensory branding element and its influence on consumer perceptions in Mumbai.

Key Aspects of the Study

- Analysis of texture as an integral component of sensory branding.
- Examination of tactile experiences and their influence on consumer perceptions.
- Assessment of the strategic role of texture in urban branding practices.

Literature Review

Krishna (2012), in her book Customer Sense: How the 5 Senses Influence Buying Behavior, states that sensory branding enables firms to create deeper consumer connections by engaging sensory experiences rather than relying solely on functional attributes. She emphasizes that touch plays a critical role in shaping product evaluation and emotional responses, as tactile sensations influence how consumers perceive quality, comfort, and brand authenticity. This work laid the foundation for understanding sensory branding as an experiential marketing strategy.

Peck and Childers (2003), in their book Touch and Consumer Behavior, state that tactile interaction significantly enhances consumer confidence and perceived ownership of products. They argue that texture provides diagnostic information that consumers subconsciously use to judge reliability and value. Their research demonstrates that products allowing physical touch are evaluated more positively, highlighting texture as a powerful sensory cue influencing consumer perceptions and purchase intentions.

Lindstrom (2018), in his book Small Data: The Tiny Clues That Uncover Huge Trends, states that consumers form strong emotional bonds with brands through consistent sensory cues, including texture. He explains that tactile elements such as packaging material, surface finish, and product feel act as silent brand signals that communicate trust and premium positioning. According to Lindstrom, brands that strategically design tactile experiences gain a competitive advantage by appealing to consumers' subconscious preferences.

Spence (2019), in his book The Multisensory Mind, states that texture influences consumer perception by acting as a symbolic communicator of brand meaning. He explains that smooth, soft, or refined textures are often associated with luxury and sophistication, while rough or coarse textures may signal durability or affordability. Spence emphasizes that tactile cues often operate below conscious awareness, making them especially effective in shaping consumer attitudes and brand judgments.

Velasco and Spence (2019), in their book Multisensory Packaging Design, state that packaging texture plays a crucial role in enhancing perceived product value and emotional engagement. They argue that congruence between texture and brand positioning strengthens consumer-brand relationships and improves recall. Their work highlights that tactile packaging elements are increasingly important in modern retail environments where brands compete for sensory attention. Schmitt (2020), in his book Experiential Marketing: How to Get Customers to Sense, Feel, Think, Act, and Relate to Your Company, states that sensory experiences are central to creating memorable brand interactions. He notes that tactile elements such as texture contribute significantly to experiential value by reinforcing brand identity at the point of contact. Schmitt emphasizes that sensory branding strategies must be adapted to cultural and market-specific contexts.

In the Indian context, Malhotra (2021), in his book Consumer Behaviour in the Indian Market, states that urban Indian consumers are becoming increasingly experience-oriented and responsive to sensory cues beyond price and visual appeal. While visual branding remains dominant, he highlights a growing opportunity for brands to leverage tactile elements such as texture to influence perceptions of quality and trust. However, empirical research on texture-based sensory branding in cities like Mumbai remains limited, indicating a clear research gap that the present study seeks to address.

Research Objective

- To examine the relationship between product/packaging texture and consumer's overall brand perception in Mumbai.
- To analyze the impact of tactile texture on consumer's perceived product quality.
- To assess whether texture influences consumer's emotional responses toward a brand.
- To evaluate the effect of texture on consumer's purchase intentions.

Hypothesis Statements

H_{o1}: Texture has no significant effect on consumer's overall brand perception.
H_{a1}: Texture has a significant effect on consumer's overall brand perception.
H_{o2}: Texture does not significantly influence consumer's perceived product quality.
H_{a2}: Texture significantly influences consumer's perceived product quality.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the influence of texture as a sensory branding element on consumer perceptions in Mumbai. Primary data is collected from consumers using a structured questionnaire designed to capture responses related to tactile experiences, perceived quality, trust, and brand image. A non-probability convenience sampling method is employed due to accessibility and diversity of respondents in the urban setting. Quantitative techniques such as descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and inferential tests are used to analyze the data. The methodology ensures systematic data collection and objective analysis to achieve the research objectives.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

A survey form was created and circulated to various people in Mumbai and 73 responses were recorded as follows -

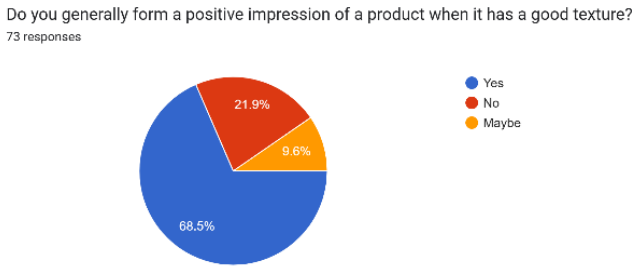

Figure 1.1 - Response related to product texture impression.
Source: Author's compilation based on collected data.

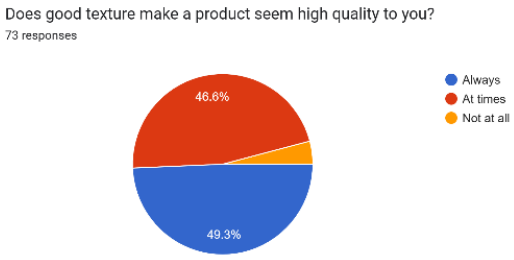

Figure 1.2 - Response related to product quality perception.
Source: Author's compilation based on collected data.

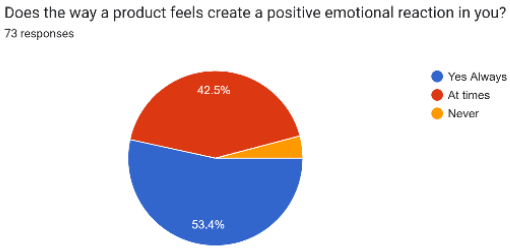

Figure 1.3 - Response related to emotional reaction.
Source: Author's compilation based on collected data.

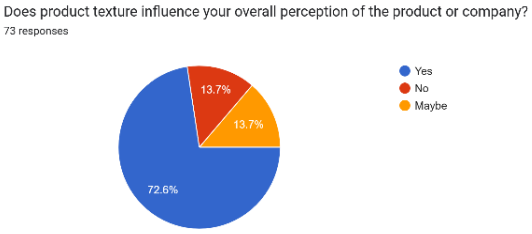

Figure 1.4 - Response related to overall perception of the product or company.
Source: Author's compilation based on collected data.

The findings indicate that product texture plays a powerful significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and responses. A majority of respondents report that a good texture creates a positive

initial impression and positively influences their overall perception of the product or the company. While opinions regarding texture as a signal of product quality are more divided with nearly half of the respondents agreeing and a comparable proportion remaining neutral the emotional impact of product feel is evident, as most respondents experience positive emotional reactions either consistently or at certain times. Overall, the results suggest that tactile attributes, particularly texture, contribute meaningfully to consumers' cognitive, emotional, and evaluative judgments. Highlighting texture as an important element of sensory branding influencing consumer choices.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study includes an examination of texture as a sensory branding element influencing consumer perceptions in Mumbai, based on primary data collected from 73 respondents. The research focuses on tactile experiences related to products, packaging, and retail environments across selected product categories. The limited sample size restricts the generalization of findings to the broader population. The study relies on self-reported data, which may involve subjective bias. Additionally, the research does not incorporate other sensory dimensions, which may also affect consumer perceptions. Time constraints and geographic limitation to Mumbai also act as constraints on the study.

Suggestions

Brands should strategically integrate texture into product design, packaging, and retail environments to enhance perceived quality and strengthen brand identity. Consistent and thoughtfully designed tactile cues can positively influence consumer perceptions, build trust, and create emotional engagement. Marketers should actively consider consumer feedback related to tactile experiences while developing or modifying products. Emphasizing texture as a sensory differentiator can help brands stand out in competitive urban markets like Mumbai and foster long-term consumer loyalty.

Conclusion

The study concludes that texture plays a significant role as a sensory branding element in shaping consumer perceptions of quality, trust, and brand image. Tactile experiences contribute meaningfully to emotional engagement and influence purchase decisions. The findings highlight that consumers associate favorable textures with higher brand value and reliability. The research emphasizes the strategic importance of integrating texture into branding efforts. Overall, texture emerges as a valuable tool for enhancing brand perception in urban markets like Mumbai.

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