
SENSORY MARKETING STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE ELDERLY CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: A STUDY AT KUNOKINI CAFÉ & RESTO

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Abstract

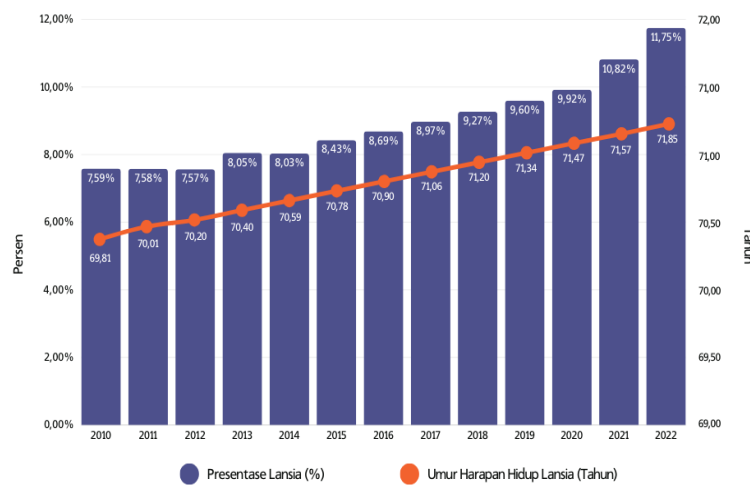
As the global ageing population grows, the food and beverage (F&B) industry faces the challenge of catering to the evolving sensory needs of elderly customers, whose physical and sensory capacities gradually decline. This study investigates how sensory marketing practices shape the dining experience at KUNOKINI Café & Resto, emphasizing the need for tailored sensory elements to enhance comfort and satisfaction. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, including elderly patrons, management, and staff, and observations of sensory elements such as lighting, music, aroma, and food texture. Findings indicate that while elements like ambient lighting, curated music, and food presentation are well-executed, specific needs of elderly customers remain unmet. They prefer non-glare lighting for visual clarity, soft-textured meals for easier consumption, low-volume music for a relaxed atmosphere, and spacious seating for enhanced physical comfort. Optimizing these elements can foster more inclusive dining experiences, strengthen customer engagement, and offer businesses a competitive edge.

Keywords: Sensory Marketing, Elderly Consumer Satisfaction, Consumer Experience, Marketing Strategy, Multisensory Engagement

INTRODUCTION

A demographic transformation is quietly redefining the landscape of global societies. The rise of the ageing population represents not merely a shift in age structure but a profound reconfiguration of economic priorities, healthcare demands, and consumer behavior. In Indonesia, this phenomenon has gained critical momentum. Statistics Indonesia reported (BPS, 2022) that in 2021, over 10% of the nation's population had entered the elderly category, individuals aged 60 years and above. Forecasts indicate that this figure will reach 14% by 2042, signaling an accelerated demographic shift within a remarkably short span of just over two decades. Such projections position Indonesia as one of the fastest-ageing societies in Southeast Asia.

Figure 1
Percentage and Life Expectancy of the Indonesian Population



The implications extend far beyond the realms of policy or healthcare. An ageing society redefines the fabric of market dynamics. Older adults are frequently mischaracterized as economically inactive or socially withdrawn. Contrary to such perceptions, they represent a growing consumer base with distinct preferences, expectations, and behaviors. Physiological and cognitive transformations accompanying ageing, such as decreased motor skills, sensory decline, and greater sensitivity to environmental stimuli, necessitate a nuanced understanding of how they engage with products and services. Conventional marketing strategies that focus solely on functionality and affordability fall short of addressing the complex experiential needs of this demographic.

Multisensory engagement emerges as a compelling response to these shifting needs. As conceptualized by (Krishna, 2012), sensory marketing transcends traditional transactional models by integrating sensory stimuli to evoke emotional responses, build memory, and foster long-term loyalty. The elderly segment, in particular, benefits from environments and experiences that are accessible yet immersive. Research by (Kulkarni & Kolli, 2022) underscores sensory design's psychological and behavioral impact on consumer spaces, revealing how strategically curated stimuli ranging from visual aesthetics to ambient sounds can heighten satisfaction and deepen attachment.

Empirical evidence reinforces the relevance of sensory approaches in elderly-centered consumer experiences. As individuals age, their ability to perceive and process

sensory input alters. Visual clarity diminishes, auditory sensitivity changes, and tactile precision declines. Despite these limitations, sensory experiences remain vital for emotional well-being (Shahid et al., 2022) argue that when sensory cues are adjusted to accommodate the physiological changes of ageing, businesses can create environments that resonate emotionally while remaining physically comfortable. These interactions influence satisfaction and perceptions of dignity, inclusion, and care values increasingly prioritized by modern consumers.

The food and beverage (F&B) industry offers a fertile ground for applying sensory strategies. Dining is no longer a purely utilitarian act. For many elderly individuals, it becomes a space of social connection, reminiscence, and sensory pleasure. The ambiance of a café, the aroma of brewed coffee, the texture of a warm meal, or the harmony of background music all contribute to a holistic experience. These elements can restore autonomy, foster joy, and create meaningful consumer engagement when designed with intention. (Guido et al., 2022) highlight that elderly consumers are more responsive to atmospheric cues and are likely to develop strong brand loyalty when their emotional and sensory needs are addressed with empathy and precision.

KUNOKINI Café & Resto in Surabaya exemplifies this approach in practice. Its spatial design blends aesthetic elements with comfort-focused ergonomics. Its subtle, familiar, and calming olfactory identity functions as a brand signature. Background music, curated to evoke nostalgia and tranquility, complements the physical experience of dining. Located in an area frequented by diverse age groups, including a notable number of elderly patrons, KUNOKINI presents a unique case for examining the influence of sensory marketing on elderly customer satisfaction.

This study explores the strategic deployment of sensory marketing elements such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to enhance the dining experience of elderly consumers. The objective is to assess how sensory design contributes to satisfaction by addressing the physiological, emotional, and psychological dimensions of ageing. Through the lens of KUNOKINI Café & Resto, the research aims to generate practical insights for F&B establishments and extend theoretical understanding within consumer behavior and gerontological marketing. Rather than viewing the ageing population as a challenge, this study positions them as an opportunity for an evolving market segment deserving of dignity, delight, and design that resonates with the senses.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Active Ageing Framework (Guido et al., 2020)

Elderly consumers are conceptualized as passive actors and active economic and social life participants. Five core dimensions define this transformation: shifting socio-economic roles heightened attention to self-care, diversified spending behavior on personalized goods and services, distinct risk perceptions, and the emergence of an ageless identity. These dimensions underscore the need for inclusive marketing strategies catering to senior citizens' evolving values and lifestyles. Businesses should leverage innovation and technology to address this segment, emphasizing barrier-free service design and emotional resonance.

Sensory Marketing Theory (Hulten, 2015; Krishna, 2012)

Marketing becomes an immersive experience when it engages all five human senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Each sense contributes uniquely to consumer perception, with sight influencing first impressions and product appeal, sound shaping atmosphere and emotional response, smell triggering memory and brand association, taste forming core satisfaction, especially in F&B contexts, and touch validating product quality and comfort. Multisensory stimulation enhances brand memorability, emotional attachment, and customer satisfaction, which is particularly relevant for elderly consumers with heightened sensory needs.

Customer Satisfaction Model (Kotler, 2000)

Satisfaction is formed when perceived performance meets or surpasses prior expectations. Emotional comfort, service responsiveness, and sensory alignment are critical determinants of elderly customer satisfaction. High levels of satisfaction result in brand loyalty, reduced price sensitivity, and increased likelihood of positive word-of-mouth. To generate lasting satisfaction, the experience must align with both cognitive expectations and emotional needs.

Consumer Behavior Theory – Elderly Segment (Kurnianto, 2015; Liu et al., 2022; Moschis, 2003)

The ageing process brings physical and cognitive changes that directly affect consumption preferences. Seniors prioritize simplicity, comfort, and familiarity. Shopping habits are structured, and brand loyalty is built upon emotional connection and reliability. Declining mobility and sensory perception increase the importance of ergonomics, clarity, and service empathy. Trust, security, and perceived value become central decision-making factors.

Experiential Marketing and Emotional Branding (Azhar & Nirawati, 2022)

Experiential marketing positively influences satisfaction and customer loyalty by immersing consumers in environments that stimulate emotions and personal connections. Emotional branding, while effective in enhancing satisfaction, requires the mediating effect of positive experiences to influence loyalty. This theory supports emotionally evocative design and personalized service, particularly beneficial in F&B settings where emotional atmosphere influences return intention.

Empirical Evidence: Sensory Marketing in F&B (Utama, 2022)

In Bandung's F&B industry, visual aesthetics, taste quality, and tactile design emerged as dominant sensory variables in shaping customer satisfaction. Product arrangement, lighting, and visual ambiance form strong initial impressions. Taste anchors satisfaction and determines revisitation, while tactile comfort enhances physical engagement. Smell had lesser influence due to contextual limitations but retains potential as a subtle emotional trigger when applied consistently.

Case Study: Sensory Branding for Younger Consumers (Mbatha et al., 2023)

When applied effectively, sensory marketing creates emotional consistency across age groups. Younger customers at McDonald's responded strongly to coordinated sensory elements, including ambient sound and flavor profiling. The success in a youth market suggests that these methods are highly translatable to older demographics when adjusted for sensory acuity and emotional needs. Personalization and environmental harmony are central to successful multisensory branding.

Theoretical Evolution: From Transactional to Sensory-Centric Marketing (Grönroos, 2008; Hultén, 2012; Kotler et al., 2016)

Transactional marketing focuses on product, price, place, and promotion. Relationship marketing emphasizes interaction and long-term engagement. Sensory marketing introduces a new layer by addressing emotional and aesthetic expectations. The multisensory design transforms consumption into an experience, creating deeper bonds between brand and consumer. This evolution reflects the growing demand for human-centric, emotionally intelligent marketing approaches.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applies a descriptive-qualitative approach to investigate how elderly consumers experience sensory marketing in a natural setting. Qualitative research enables the exploration of subjective realities and emotional responses that numbers alone cannot explain. The researcher acts as the primary instrument, directly engaging with the field, interpreting phenomena, and constructing meaning through empirical data.

Field data were obtained using three integrated techniques: passive participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation focused on the natural behavior of elderly consumers in KUNOKINI Café & Resto, particularly how they responded to multisensory elements such as lighting, aroma, sound, texture, and taste. No manipulation was involved, allowing authentic expressions and interactions to emerge.

In-depth interviews were conducted with informants selected through purposive sampling. Criteria included a minimum age of 60 and prior experience visiting the café. These informants contributed diverse perspectives and helped contextualize the phenomenon under study.

Documentation was used to complement and validate primary data. Photographs of the setting, café layout, and design elements were collected alongside written notes and supporting reports. These materials served as both evidence and interpretive support for observations and interviews. The triangulation of data sources enhanced the study's credibility, consistency, and analytical depth.

The study involved informants from various roles to ensure data richness and representativeness. The table below outlines each participant's categories, identities, and specific contributions.

Table 1.
Participants

Category	Name & Role	Function in Research
Key Informant	Nienda Paramita (Marketing Officer)	Provides strategic insight into the café's marketing design, customer targeting, and sensory concept development
Main Informant	Elderly Consumers (Aged 60 and above)	Share lived experiences regarding sensory elements, emotional comfort, and satisfaction levels. Serve as primary data sources.

Supporting Informant	Sanditya Anggraini (Supervisor)	Offers operational insight into the customer service model, space usage, and elderly interaction patterns.
Supporting Informant	Mohammad Solichin (Captain Waiter)	Provides an in-depth perspective on daily service execution, coordination of the waiter team, and specific requests or responses from elderly customers during their visits.
Supporting Informant	Eko Wahyudi (Bar Staff)	Observe and interpret consumer behavior during ordering and dining, focusing on elderly customer preferences.

Source: Researcher

Data collection and interpretation were conducted with ethical consideration, informed consent, and attention to participants' comfort and clarity. Informants were approached respectfully, and interviews were conducted at convenient times to minimize disruption and maximize disclosure.

This methodological structure provides a solid foundation for capturing how sensory marketing influences elderly satisfaction. Insights generated through this approach contribute to developing inclusive marketing strategies tailored to an aging consumer base, especially in the food and beverage industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate how sensory marketing elements tangibly shape the dining experience of elderly consumers at KUNOKINI Café & Resto. Through data triangulation involving key marketing personnel, elderly customers, and frontline staff, the results uncover the interplay between environmental stimuli and sensory satisfaction among older patrons. Each sensory dimension visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile revealed strengths and gaps in the current experiential strategy, calling for a more inclusive and adaptive sensory framework.

Visual Comfort and Spatial Design

Illumination emerged as a primary determinant of physical and psychological comfort. Elderly informants preferred natural lighting diffused through large windows, which enabled them to engage in visual activities without strain. Overhead lighting that was too bright or dim caused discomfort and affected their willingness to remain seated for extended periods. Spatial organization, including generous aisle width and adequate distance between tables, enhanced mobility and reduced feelings of confinement, especially for elderly groups visiting with family.

These findings are consistent with (Hultén et al., 2009) framework, which positions visual perception as a gateway to emotional comfort in hospitality settings. In the context of

aging consumers, the interaction between lighting and spatial planning becomes even more critical, underscoring the need for adaptive interior strategies. Informants also desired visually clear signage and unobstructed pathways, which enhanced their confidence in navigating the restaurant independently.

Soundscape Sensitivity and Emotional Regulation

Auditory elements were revealed to be highly impactful yet also problematic when unregulated. While ambient music contributed to a relaxed environment, excessive volume, and fast-paced tracks triggered sensory overload among elderly patrons. Preferences strongly favored slow-tempo music genres, including jazz and traditional keroncong, with minimal percussion and at lower decibel levels. Informants noted that high-pitched or bass-heavy music reduced their ability to converse and induced feelings of fatigue.

The mismatch between programmed soundscapes and elderly tolerance thresholds suggests a gap in inclusive acoustic design. (Krishna, 2012) emphasizes that sound perception plays a vital role in emotional modulation. When unaddressed, acoustic discomfort can erode the perceived quality of service, regardless of excellence in other sensory domains. KUNOKINI's current music programming was generally appreciated for ambiance, but informants recommended volume adjustments during peak hours or a rotation of softer instrumental tracks.

Gustatory and Tactile Experience

Taste and texture emerged as the most immediate sensory experiences, strongly influencing satisfaction and intention to return. Dishes that featured balanced seasoning and soft textures received consistent praise. Conversely, hard vegetables, crusty textures, or overly spicy dishes discouraged enjoyment, especially among informants who used dentures.

These findings mirror studies by (Valenti & Rivere, 2008), which argue that multisensory product satisfaction is tied to flavor and physical ease of consumption. In elderly consumers, the interdependence of mouthfeel and health conditions magnifies the need for gastronomic adaptation. Informants recommended that food presentation also be considered plates with good contrast and stable handling ease consumption's visual and physical burden.

Ambient Aroma and Psychological Presence

While the aroma was not dominant among informants, its regulation was vital in shaping subconscious impressions. The absence of overpowering or mixed-food smells allowed the elderly to focus on social engagement and meal appreciation without distraction. In line with (Krishna, 2012), olfactory control functions as a silent anchor to positive brand memory, particularly when it remains gentle, familiar, and non-intrusive. Informants noted appreciation for subtle herbal aromas or the scent of freshly baked goods, associating them with warmth and home-like comfort.

Staff Responsiveness and Multisensory Mediation

The operational staff played a pivotal role in translating sensory strategies into the experience. Elderly informants consistently highlighted the importance of patient explanations, seating guidance, and menu assistance as factors that amplified or diminished their comfort. Interviews with supervisors and captains confirmed the necessity of tailored staff behavior to support multisensory satisfaction. Service personalization was especially appreciated when staff anticipated mobility or dietary needs without diminishing autonomy. Elderly patrons valued being spoken to respectfully and not rushed during decision-making.

Strategic Gap and Optimization Opportunities

Despite the success of general sensory implementation, the absence of targeted adaptations for elderly needs reveals a significant strategic shortfall. Sensory marketing at KUNOKINI remains non-specific, optimized for aesthetic appeal and general comfort but not calibrated for age-based sensitivity. The opportunity for experience differentiation lies in developing sensory segmentation where elderly customers are offered specialized menu formats, ambient configurations, or audio zones tailored to their perceptual strengths and vulnerabilities. This would align with inclusive design principles and reinforce customer loyalty among a segment often underserved in modern hospitality.

Strategies could include staff training in empathetic communication, lighting adjustments during senior hours, and creating designated quiet zones with soft furnishings and reduced auditory input. Implementing low-contrast tableware or textured handles may further enhance comfort and safety. These initiatives would align with the theoretical foundation of multisensory design and signal a commitment to accessibility and dignity.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies sensory marketing as a meaningful contributor to customer satisfaction in elderly diners, validating the theoretical premise that sensory elements influence emotional and physical well-being in hospitality contexts. While the current implementation at KUNOKINI Café & Resto offers comfort and aesthetic enjoyment to a broad audience, it falls short of addressing the unique sensitivities of aging consumers.

The data reveals a convergence of elderly preferences toward soft lighting, quiet music, ergonomic seating, and easily digestible food. These findings reaffirm sensory marketing frameworks proposed by (Hultén, 2012) and (Krishna, 2012) while extending them to the geriatric consumer experience. The role of staff as mediators of comfort was particularly significant, underscoring the need for service strategies rooted in empathy and attentiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study refines multisensory experience theory, emphasizing the importance of age-responsive design in marketing experience-based services. From a practical perspective, it offers a framework for hospitality businesses to improve elderly engagement through differentiated service, sensory zoning, and staff training. The research highlights that successful sensory strategies must integrate physical design, interpersonal service, and emotional resonance.

Further research is recommended to test adaptive interventions using experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in satisfaction over time and across different sensory modifications would also yield insights into the sustainability of sensory strategies for aging populations. Comparative studies across urban and rural hospitality settings may reveal cultural nuances and preferences within the elderly demographic.

Optimizing sensory marketing through elderly-specific calibrations is not merely an ethical imperative but also a strategic one positioning restaurants like KUNOKINI to capture the growing silver economy with dignity, empathy, and competitive advantage. In a rapidly aging society, aligning business experience with age's physical and emotional contours becomes a social and economic necessity.

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