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Sensory Triggers and Consumer Emotional Connection in the Hospitality Industry in Ilorin Metropolis

[1]Bolatito Amudat BRIMAH (Ph.D), [2]Wasiu Olumuyiwa AJIROWO, [3]Mariam Olatilewa OMOBO, [4]Kamal Asola BELLO (Ph.D), [5]Waheed IBRAHIM (Ph.D)

[1]Department of Business Administration
Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria
bolatitobrimah@gmail.com / +2348033792870
Orcid ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3272-0304

[2]Department of Business Administration
Federal University of Agriculture and Development Studies, Iragbiji, Osun State
muyextarget2012@gmail.com / Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4573-5270

[3,4,5]Department of Marketing, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State

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Abstract

The increasing competitiveness of the hospitality industry has made it difficult for hotels to rely solely on functional service delivery as a means of attracting and retaining customers. In Ilorin Metropolis, many hospitality establishments continue to experience challenges relating to weak customer emotional attachment, low brand loyalty, and inconsistent revisit intentions despite ongoing investments in physical facilities and service improvements. This situation revealed that traditional service quality approaches are no longer sufficient to create memorable guest experiences, thereby necessitating the adoption of sensory-based marketing strategies capable of stimulating emotional responses and strengthening consumer–brand relationships. This study examined the effect of sensory triggers on consumer emotional connection in the hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. A total of 384 copies of questionnaire were administered to hotel guests, and the responses retrieved were analysed using multiple linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that sensory triggers through visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile, have positive and statistically significant effects on consumer emotional connection. The regression model demonstrated that sensory triggers collectively explain 43.4% of the variation in consumer emotional connection ($R^2 = 0.434$, $p < 0.05$) among hotel guests in Ilorin Metropolis. Specifically, olfactory sensory triggers exerted the strongest positive influence ($\beta = 0.300$, $p < 0.05$), followed by auditory sensory triggers ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$), visual sensory triggers ($\beta = 0.235$, $p < 0.05$), and tactile sensory triggers ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$). This study concludes that sensory marketing plays a vital role in shaping emotional attachment in the hospitality industry, particularly in emerging urban markets. The study recommends that hospitality operators adopt a multisensory marketing approach that integrates

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scent, sound, visual aesthetics, and physical comfort to enhance emotional engagement, customer satisfaction, and long-term loyalty.

Keywords: Sensory Triggers, Consumer Emotional Connection, Hospitality Industry, Neuromarketing.

1.0 Introduction

Consumer wants and expectations are continually changing and the services offered are changing as well, and the hospitality industry is more competitive than ever in attracting, satisfying and retaining consumers. Hospitality businesses are not only expected to offer accommodation, meals and other ancillary services, but also to create experiences that will evoke positive emotions from their guests. Recent marketing theory focuses on rational calculations regarding the characteristics of products and services, but subconscious emotional processes are also mentioned as factors that influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavioural intentions (Kotler et al., 2021). With the business world being so competitive, marketers in the hospitality industry are seeking fresh avenues and concepts to connect with consumers on an emotional level and foster customer loyalty.

One of these new approaches is called Neuromarketing, which is an integrative discipline that combines neuroscience, psychology and marketing to better understand how individuals react to marketing stimuli. According to the theory of Neuromarketing, when people make buying decisions, they are not only conscious of their reasoning but are also influenced by unconscious emotional and sensory processes, which play a significant role in the decision-making process (Cordeiro et al., 2024; Nagpal et al., 2026). Multiple senses can be used to affect consumer perception and emotional experiences, not just consumer satisfaction, but consumer attachment to a brand as well, if used strategically in a way that uses sight, sound, scent, taste and touch. The importance of sensory triggers in the hospitality sector is particularly high because hospitality is a multi-sensory industry, and the service environment is a multi-sensory event that has an impact on customers' experience and perception of service quality (Krishna, 2012).

Sensory triggers are cues, both experiential and environmental, which impact consumers' senses and their cognitive and emotional response. These triggers could include attractive interior design, calming background music, pleasant fragrances, and comfortable furniture; each is a deliberate element of the customer experience. Sensory stimuli have a significant influence on consumers' emotions, memories and preferences, which can have a lasting impact and can even influence future behaviour (Krishna, 2021). The power of sensory triggers is based on the premise that sensory experiences activate, via emotional channels, the way that people feel and interact with the service environment.

Consumer emotional connection is the psychological and affective relationship developed by the consumer with a brand, service provider or consumption experience. It is not just about the satisfaction of function, it is about the sense of attachment, affection, trust and identification with a brand (Thomson et al., 2022). Guests that are emotionally connected are more likely to have positive attitudes, communicate positively about the organisation, and have extended duration business relationships with service providers in hospitality establishments. Emotional attachment has been proposed as a key determinant of customer loyalty, with emotionally attached customers

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continuing to purchase from a company even if they have other options (Rather, 2023; Boakye et al., 2023).

While sensory marketing is widely used in the international hospitality sector, many hospitality businesses in developing economies are mainly concerned with functional service delivery and have not given much consideration to the emotional aspects of the customer experience. Nigeria's hotels, particularly in growing markets such as Ilorin Metropolis, are increasingly facing the challenge of retaining guests, differentiating themselves from the competition, and providing memorable guest experiences. Although investments are being made in the physical facilities and the efficiency of services, fewer conscious efforts seem to be made to comprehend the impact of sensory elements on guests' emotional relationship with hospitality brands. The value of the consumer is changing, from service benefits to experiential value, which should be paid attention to. Furthermore, the literature has been mainly directed towards consumer purchasing behaviour, brand loyalty and purchase intention, and only a little towards the sensory triggers as antecedents of consumer emotional connection in the Nigerian hospitality context. This is a gap in the contextual and empirical literature that is addressed by the present study.

The importance of emotional attachment in the creation of sustainable customer relationships is crucial and the potential for sensory cues to influence consumer emotional attachment in hospitality environments needs to be carefully considered. Awareness of this connection will help hospitality managers design their environments to be more sensory stimulating to enhance customer experiences and build emotional connections with guests. This background sets the stage for this study to examine the role of sensory triggers (Visual, Auditory, Olfactory and Tactile) in consumer emotional connection in the hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis.

Objective of the Study

i. Examine the impact of sensory triggers on the consumer emotional connection in the hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Sensory Triggers

Sensory triggers are stimuli (environmental or experiential) that are deliberately used to stimulate one or more of the human senses to induce a perception, emotion and behaviour from a consumer. The idea is based on the sensory marketing literature which posits that consumers receive information through sensory perception, and that sensory perception affects their perception of products, services and brands. Sensory triggers have the power to produce memorable experiences that impact attitudes and behavioural intentions, as opposed to traditional forms of marketing that operate primarily at the cognitive level of persuasion.

In the modern service environment, sensory triggers have become more important as consumers can assess the functional value of services as well as the service experience. Spence (2020) proposes that the sensory cues influence consumers' sense of quality and value, satisfaction and emotional satisfaction. These sensory elements can be seen in the physical space, background music, fragrances, surface sensations, lighting, and other elements that make the service environment welcoming and comfortable in the hospitality industry. These are all factors that

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influence customer experience and shape customer perception of a service provider. Recent empirical study conducted by Zhenbin et al. (2024) have validated that sensory experience is an important antecedent of memorable tourism experiences and behavioural intentions.

The theoretical strength of the sensory triggers is that they can evoke psychological associations which are strongly connected with memory and emotion. Krishna (2012) states that the neurological mechanisms that mediate sensory experiences are linked to emotion and memory, which leads to positive emotions for consumers of organisations that provide pleasurable sensory experiences. As a result, the application of sensory triggers has increased as a competitive weapon to distinguish hospitality companies and to enhance customer relationships.

2.2 Dimensions of Sensory Triggers

Visual Sensory Triggers

Visual sensory triggers are stimuli that stimulate and engage consumers' visual system, impacting their perception of the service environment. They can be colours, lighting, architecture, interior design, staff appearance, branding, and layout. It is well known that the sense of sight is the most used sense in consumers' decision-making process, especially in service encounters (Petit et al., 2019). In a hotel, the first impression of the quality of service, the overall experience and the final opinion of the hotel is strongly influenced by the presentation. Positive emotions such as comfort, excitement, relaxation and trust have been linked to positive visual environments, which help to create a more positive psychological image of hospitality brands. In this context, visual sensory stimuli are carefully used to create memorable experiences and emotional connections for customers (Vera-Falcón et al., 2025).

Auditory Sensory Triggers

Auditory sensory triggers include music, sounds and background or environmental noises which impact consumers' mood, perception and emotional responses. These include background music, ambient soundscapes, employee communication style and acoustic design features. According to Spence (2020), auditory stimuli can affect consumers' emotions by creating a sense of comfort, atmosphere and enjoyment. Research has demonstrated that music used in a planned way in service situations can improve customer satisfaction and emotional responses. In hospitality settings, music and soundscapes are selected and carefully orchestrated to provide relaxation and positive emotional experiences. The role of sound in creating emotional associations in food, beverage, and hospitality contexts is given special emphasis by Spence's (2020) extensive research on extraordinary emotional reactions to auditory cues in consumption situations.

Olfactory Sensory Triggers

Olfactory sensory triggers are scents, aromas and fragrances used to influence consumers' emotions and perceptions. Smell is considered to be one of the strongest senses, closely linked to the memory and emotion parts of the brain (Krishna, 2021). This special neurological connection allows scents to evoke strong emotions and memories. In the hospitality industry, signature fragrances are often employed to create a unique brand identity, improve the customer experience, and make the environment welcoming and soothing. Fragrances that are attractive have been shown to evoke positive emotions, boost service quality, and foster customer loyalty. Nguyen et al. (2026) also show that the olfactory dimensions of sensory brand experience act as a moderator

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between marketing stimuli and brand outcomes, including brand love and purchase decisions, suggesting the power of scent as an emotional cue.

Tactile Sensory Triggers

Tactile sensory triggers are stimuli that are felt through the sense of touch. These include the feel of bedding or furniture, comfort of seating, room temperature, and the overall physical quality of the service environment. Tactile experiences can cause instant psychological reactions (Peck & Childers, 2020) which can have a significant impact on the consumers' perception of quality and value. The sense of comfort that comes from touch is a very important element in the guests' emotional experience in a hotel setting. Comfortable furniture, high-quality bedding and physical surroundings can provide a sense of relaxation, security and satisfaction. Building on this insight, Zhang et al. (2026) show that contextual and psychological factors influence tactile information preferences, illustrating the complex nature of touch in consumer behaviour. These positive experiences reinforce the emotional connection and reinforce consumers' loyalty towards hospitality brands.

Consumer Emotional Connection

Consumer emotional connection is the affective relationship that consumers develop with a brand, service provider or consumption experience. While customer satisfaction is more oriented towards convergence with expectations, emotional connection is a psychological bond that encompasses elements of affection, trust, belongingness, and commitment (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The concept is based on the theory of relationship marketing that values long-term relationships over transactional relationships. Consumers who have developed an emotional connection with a brand are more loyal, more positive in their advocacy behaviour and less likely to be influenced by competitive alternatives (Thomson et al., 2022).

In the hospitality sector, emotional connection is created when consistently positive interactions are met with functional and emotional needs and are resonating with guests. These bonds are strengthened by the memorable service encounters, personalised service and rich sensory stimulation. Rather (2023) states that emotional connection is a key element in customer retention, with emotionally connected customers being more likely to re-engage and recommend service providers. Khan et al. (2025) also showed that emotional connection is an important mediating variable between experiential tourism activities and tourist well-being, highlighting its pivotal role in the experience-behaviour link. Furthermore, Boakye et al. (2023) found that the emotional connection plays a mediating role between customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, suggesting that customers who are emotionally connected are more likely to convert their satisfaction into loyalty. Emotional connection has thus become a key strategic focus for hospitality organisations aiming to gain a sustainable competitive edge.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) were the first to develop the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Theory to account for the effect that environmental stimuli have on an individual's internal psychological state and the resulting behaviour. The theory suggests that stimuli in the external environment stimulate internal emotional and cognitive responses (the organism) which then lead

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to behavioural reactions. It has since emerged as one of the most prevalent models in consumer behaviour, environmental psychology, retail marketing and hospitality studies, and is used to explain the impact of environmental cues on consumer experiences and decision making.

From the S–O–R perspective, stimuli are environmental factors that can affect individuals' perceptions and emotions. Sensory triggers, such as music, sounds, smells and touch, in a hospitality context are environmental stimuli that influence guests' perceptions of their service experiences. The sensations these stimuli elicit are the organismic component: feelings of pleasure, excitement, comfort, attachment, and satisfaction that are felt when exposed to sensory stimuli. Consumer emotional connection is included in this part, because it is an effective response that arises from the sensory experience when consuming services. It is suggested that positive sensory experiences create positive emotions and drive consumers towards a brand or service provider. The response component reflects the behavioral results of the internal emotional processes (such as customer loyalty, revisit intentions, recommendation behavior, brand preference, and long-term commitment).

This theoretical alignment is affirmed by recent empirical studies. In the specific case of food brand experience, Vera-Falcón et al. (2025) explicitly test and validate the S–O–R model, which shows that sensory experience positively influences consumer loyalty, satisfaction, and word of mouth. Likewise, Nagpal et al. (2026) apply the S–O–R model to dual-process theory to examine the relationship between neuromarketing stimuli and consumer impulsivity, which further demonstrates the utility of the S–O–R model in various marketing scenarios. Similarly, Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) use the S–O–R model to explore how brand experience affects brand loyalty, and conclude that emotional brand attachment is the mediating mechanism between brand experience and brand loyalty, which is directly comparable to the theoretical mechanism examined in the present study. The S–O–R Theory is the most suitable theory to analyse the relationship between sensory triggers and emotional connection in the hospitality sector, as it focuses on environmental cues and emotional outcomes.

2.4 Empirical Review

Krishna and Schwarz (2020) examined how sensory cues influence consumers' emotions and perceptions about brands in experimental studies in different service settings. According to their findings, sensory stimuli have a positive effect on emotional involvement and brand attachment, and the authors suggest that organisations that intentionally use sensory experiences in service delivery will be more successful in creating long-term emotionally loyal consumer relationships.

Spence et al. (2021) discussed multisensory marketing and consumer experience, specifically how sensory stimulation can influence perceptions and emotional responses within service settings. The findings from the controlled experiments with hospitality and retail consumers showed that the sensory congruence positively influenced consumers' emotional evaluations, and was critical to building strong customer–brand relationships.

Rather (2021) studied the customers of the hotel in India and concluded that experiential customer service variables are important factors in emotional attachment and future loyalty intentions. The study, which was based on a survey design, involved 412 hotel customers, and concluded that emotional engagement is a key mediator between service experience and loyal behaviours.

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Dwivedi et al. (2021) have explored relationship marketing between consumer and brand in the context of services. Based on quantitative research method and structural equations modeling, it was confirmed that the development of consumer emotional bonds was significantly affected by positive sensory and experiential interactions.

Ali et al. (2020) conducted a study on how the hotel environment auras affects the customer's feelings towards the hotel and its loyalty. Based on the survey data collected from hotel guests, results showed that the environmental sensory factors had a significant influence on the hotel customer's emotions and increased their emotional bond with the hotels brand.

Han and Hyun (2021) investigated emotional attachment in the context of consumer behaviour in the hospitality industry. The researchers found that, based on the data from the hotel customers, sensory experiences had a significant positive impact on consumers' emotional brand relationships and their subsequent behavioural intentions.

In the context of slow tourism, Xu and Chia (2025) explored the role of destination stimuli in fostering emotional attachment among tourists, discovering that the emotional attachment induced by rich sensory experiences, especially visual and tactile stimuli in natural environments, is deep. Their results validate the applicability of the S–O–R framework to the process of emotional connection formation by environmental stimuli.

Zhenbin et al. (2024) explored the formation of behavioural intentions towards rural tourism through sensory experience and memorable tourism experiences in Henan, China. The study validated the role of sensory triggers in the emotional and behavioural outcomes of memorable tourism experiences with a quantitative methodology and 490 participants, and the results indicated that sensory experiences positively and significantly predicted the emotional and behavioural outcomes of memorable tourism experiences.

The study on the effect of physical service environments on customer loyalty in selected hotels in Lagos State Nigeria by Akinyele and Fasogbon (2020) focused on the effect of physical service environments on customer loyalty in selected hotels in Lagos State, Nigeria. They used survey data from 287 hotel guests and multiple regression analysis to determine the relevance of the sensory dimensions in the Nigerian hospitality context as they influence the emotional satisfaction and loyalty intentions of the customers. They concluded that ambience, décor, lighting and comfort were significant environmental factors affecting the emotional satisfaction and loyalty intentions of the customers.

In the South-West Nigeria, Ogunnaike et al. (2021) examined the effect of experiential marketing on customers patronage in the hospitality industry. The study identified that sensory experiences had a significant impact on customers' emotional involvement, which had a positive impact on their patronage decision, using a cross-sectional survey with 354 hotel customers.

Abdulkareem and Suleiman (2023) have investigated the factors that influence the responses of guests to hotel service delivery in the North-Central region of Nigeria. They further established the strategic importance of sensory cues for the hospitality industry in the Nigerian context by employing structural equation modelling (SEM) with 312 respondents to demonstrate that the

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sensory and environmental elements were significant contributors to positive emotions and customer loyalty.

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design using a quantitative research approach. The study was conducted in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. Ilorin serves as the capital city of Kwara State and has experienced significant growth in commercial and hospitality activities over the years. The increasing number of hotels within the metropolis has heightened competition among hospitality service providers, thereby necessitating innovative strategies for attracting and retaining customers. The hospitality industry in Ilorin therefore provides an appropriate context for examining how sensory triggers influence consumers' emotional connection with hotel brands.

The population of the study comprised guests of selected hotels in Ilorin Metropolis. The population was deemed suitable as the guests of the hotels have direct experience of the sensory aspects that are present in the hotel environment and can therefore give informed feedback on the emotional aspects they have experienced. The study was conducted on five selected hotels namely Noktel Resort Hotel, E-Phoenix Hotel Annex 2, G-Pinnacle Signature Hotel, Wingate Exotic Hotel and The Peace Hotel. Respondents were deemed suitable because they had previously stayed or were currently staying in these hotels, and therefore had first-hand experience of the sensory environments within the hotels. Since there was no complete and readily available sampling frame of hotel guests, the study used Cochran's (1977) formula for the sample size for an infinite population. The formula calculated a minimum sample size of 384 respondents at a 95 per cent confidence level with a 5 per cent margin of error. The study used purposive sampling method in selecting the five hotels because they are the prominent hotels in the Ilorin metropolis and attract a wide variety of visitors. Subsequently, copies of the questionnaire were distributed by convenience sampling to guests who were available and willing to complete the questionnaire during the data collection period.

Primary data were obtained by using a structured questionnaire which consisted of two sections. The items in Section A were used to measure the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the items in Section B were used to measure the study variables. The sensory dimension was operationalised by visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile sensory dimensions. The data collected were analysed descriptively and inferentially with multiple regression analysis used to examine the effect of the four sensory trigger dimensions on consumer emotional connection.

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4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 384)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	212	55.2
	Female	172	49.4
Age	18–27 years	94	24.5
	28–37 years	140	36.5
	38–47 years	98	25.5
	48 years and above	52	13.5
Marital Status	Single	148	38.5
	Married	214	55.7
	Others	22	5.7
Educational Qualification	SSCE	41	10.7
	ND/NCE	87	22.7
	HND/B.Sc.	176	45.8
	Postgraduate Degree	80	20.8
Occupation	Civil Servant	96	25.0
	Business Owner	98	25.5
	Private Sector Employee	126	32.8
	Others	64	16.7
Hotel Patronage Frequency	First Visit	62	16.1
	Occasionally	144	37.5
	Frequently	178	46.4

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic profile shows that 55.2% of the respondents were male and 49.4% were female, which means that there is a slight majority of male hotel guests in the selected hotels. The age distribution shows that the highest representation was for those aged 28-37 years (36.5%), followed by those aged 38-47 years (25.5%), 18-27 years (24.5%) and 48 years and above (13.5%). This implies that most of the guests of the hotel are economically active adults, who have a great purchasing power and hospitality experience. Respondents were split on marital status, with 55.7% married, 38.5% single and 5.7% in other categories.

The educational profile indicated that 45.8% of the respondents had HND/B.Sc. certificate, 20.8% had postgraduate certificate, 22.7% had ND/NCE certificate while 10.7% had SSCE certificate. This suggests that the overall education level of the respondents was relatively high and they were able to give informed answers on sensory experience and emotional connection in the hospitality environment. The occupational distribution showed the majority of respondents were employed in the private sector (32.8%), civil service (25.0%), business owners (25.0%) and other occupations

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(16.7%). The patronage frequency data also revealed that 46.4% of the respondents have visited the hotel frequently, 37.5% occasionally, and 16.1% were first time visitors. Repeat visitors provide more valid responses since they are more likely to be able to judge the sensory environment and its emotional effect.

4.1 Test of Hypothesis

H_0: Sensory triggers have no significant effect on consumer emotional connection in the hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis.

Table 2a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.659	0.434	0.428	0.401

a. Predictors: (Constant), Visual Sensory Triggers, Auditory Sensory Triggers, Olfactory Sensory Triggers, And Tactile Sensory Triggers

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

As revealed in the model summary presented in Table 2a, the predictor variables are positively and significantly correlated with consumer emotional connection (R = 0.659). The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.434) shows that the four sensory triggers, when combined, account for 43.4% of the variation in consumer emotional connection among hotel guests. The model is strong when adjusted for the number of predictors with an adjusted R^2 value of 42.8%. The other 56.6% variance may be due to other factors not included in the current model.

Table 2b: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	48.610	4	12.153	72.772	0.000
	Residual	63.477	380	0.167		
	Total	112.087	384			

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Emotional Connection
b. Predictors: (Constant), Visual Sensory Triggers, Auditory Sensory Triggers, Olfactory Sensory Triggers, And Tactile Sensory Triggers

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

The result of ANOVA is F-statistic = 72.772 and significance value is 0.000 (which is less than the level of significance 0.05). This means that the regression model is statistically significant and that the sensory triggers have a significant effect on the consumer emotional connection as a whole. The model, therefore, gives enough evidence that sensory triggers are important factors determining the emotional attachment of hotel guests in Ilorin Metropolis.

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Table 2c: Coefficients[a]

		Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
1	Constant	0.840	0.220	3.823	0.000
	Visual Sensory Triggers	0.235	0.028	8.360	0.000
	Auditory Sensory Triggers	0.288	0.028	10.370	0.000
	Olfactory Sensory Triggers	0.300	0.035	8.625	0.000
	Tactile Sensory Triggers	0.171	0.025	6.925	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Consumer Emotional Connection

Source: SPSS Output, 2026

According to the coefficient results in Table 2c, the visual sensory triggers positively and significantly affected the emotional connection of the consumers ($\beta = 0.235$, $t = 8.360$, $p < 0.05$). This means that the visual elements, like the design of the hotel, the lighting of the rooms, the interior decoration, the colour combinations and the overall appearance, have a significant influence on emotional connection. The findings are consistent with those of Petit et al. (2019) who showed that visual stimuli affect emotional perceptions and play a significant role in consumer attachment. Vera-Falcón et al. (2025) also found that the sensory aspect of brand experience (such as visual cues) has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty, as mediated by the S–O–R process.

The results showed that the auditory sensory trigger had a significant and positive relationship with the emotional connection of the consumer ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$). This includes background music, ambient soundscapes, acoustic design and the tone of the staff communication, all of which have an impact on emotional attachment during a hotel stay. The finding is consistent with Spence (2020) who showed that sound can significantly influence customer emotions and the overall hospitality experience, and also supports Jang and Lee (2022) who showed that positive sound experiences have a significant positive effect on emotional engagement in the hospitality context. The recent study of Nguyen et al. (2026) also supports the connection between marketing stimuli and brand love, with the sensory brand experience (including the auditory dimension) being a moderating factor.

Olfactory sensory triggers ($\beta = 0.300$, $p < 0.05$) were found to have the highest regression coefficient, suggesting that pleasant fragrances and scents have the greatest impact on consumers' emotional association with hospitality brands. This is in line with the argument of Krishna (2021) that the sense of smell has a special power to activate emotional memory and attachment. It also confirms the results of Su et al. (2022) that the scent-based cues have a significant effect on strengthening emotional attachment and sense of belonging among guests, and it is also supported by the results of Nguyen et al. (2026) which showed that sensory brand experience, including olfactory elements, positively affects the brand self-congruence and brand love outcomes.

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The tactile sensory triggers also had a significant positive impact on the consumer's emotional connection ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$), meaning that the physical comfort, quality of furniture, comfortable bedding and room temperature have a significant impact on the guests' emotional connection. The results are consistent with the previous study conducted by Peck et al. (2020) which found that tactile factors were important factors affecting perceived quality and consumer satisfaction. The findings are also in line with Zhang et al. (2026), who showed that tactile information preferences have a significant impact on the consumer evaluation process, highlighting the emotional and evaluative value of touch in service contexts. The result also supports Ali et al. (2020) who concluded that physically appealing service environments create positive emotional responses and hotel customer loyalty.

In this study, sensory triggers were found to be statistically significant in all dimensions studied. Olfactory sensory triggers had the most significant impact on consumer emotional connection, followed by auditory, visual, and tactile sensory triggers, respectively, of the four dimensions. The null hypothesis is thus rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted: sensory triggers have a significant positive effect on the emotional connection of consumers in the hospitality industry in Ilorin Metropolis. The results support the S–O–R theoretical model, which posits that emotional reactions to sensory stimuli (stimulus) enhance relational connections and behavioural intentions (response) (Vera-Falcón et al., 2025; Mostafa et al., 2021).

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the implications of sensory triggers on the emotional connection of consumers in the hospitality industry in Ilorin metropolis. The results of the empirical study showed that all four sensory trigger dimensions (visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile) had a positive and significant effect on the emotional connection of the consumer. Olfactory sensory triggers were the most powerful predictor, and the experiences of the senses of smell had a strong effect on emotional attachment. Auditory sensory triggers were the second most important, indicating background music, ambience, and interpersonal tone of communication as important factors in emotional engagement. Visual sensory triggers also had a significant influence, reinforcing that aesthetic, lighting, décor and overall visual appeal are part of guests' emotional experiences of hospitality environments. Tactile sensory triggers were the least impactful of the four triggers, but they still played a significant role, suggesting that physical comfort and environmental quality are emotional triggers.

The study also finds that the total variance in emotional connection is accounted for by the sensory triggers, meaning that a significant portion of the experience of hospitality is not just about service delivery, but also about multisensory engagement. The results support the Stimulus – Organism – Response (S – O – R) theory, which suggests that the sensory stimuli of the hotel context trigger consumers' internal emotional responses, which then lead to relational attachment with the hospitality brands. The findings are consistent with the recent international scholarship by Vera-Falcón et al. (2025), Nagpal et al. (2026), Xu and Chia (2025), and Zhenbin et al. (2024) in the Nigerian context of the hospitality industry, adding empirical evidence from an emerging urban market in sub-Saharan Africa.

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The study recommends that hospitality managers should put emphasis on scent marketing strategies. As the olfactory sensory triggers have the greatest impact on consumer emotional connection, hotels should create and standardise signature smells throughout lobby areas, rooms, corridors and common areas. This will improve the guests' emotional memories and strengthen their brand affinity towards the hotel.

Second, hotels need to invest in ambience management and room acoustics. The auditory sensory elements have a strong relationship with emotional connection, and operators should carefully select background music that is suitable for their brand, and provide good acoustic comfort by selecting appropriate sound insulation. A well planned soundscape provides an emotionally engaging and pleasant accommodation experience.

Thirdly, more emphasis needs to be placed on the visual and environmental design. Colour schemes, lighting, architectural decoration, and room decoration that catches the eye and makes a positive first impression are important visual sensory elements that contribute to emotional connection in hotel interiors and should be considered for repeat emotional engagement.

Fourth, the physical comfort and tactile quality of the service environment should be continually improved. Tactile triggers, although having the least impact in this study, are still important. Good bedding, comfortable furniture, perfect temperature and physical comfort will all make a significant contribution to guests' emotional involvement and long term loyalty.

Last, for hospitality organizations, it is necessary to have a multi-sensory marketing strategy that is integrated and planned in a coherent and brand-consistent way. The S – O – R approach will ensure maximum emotional engagement of guests and build the relational bond that will drive sustainable loyalty and competitive edge for the Ilorin hospitality market.

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