



Beyond Visual Branding: A Literature Review of Multisensory Brand Experience and Brand Perception in the Fashion Industry

Shabira Maharani^{1*}, Rista Nurdianasari², Zelika Nidya Damarani³
Department Management, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Shabira Maharani shabiramaharani@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Fashion branding remains organised around what consumers see, yet visual codes are copied within a single season. This review asks whether non-visual senses shape brand perception independently. Eighty works, twenty-seven of them set in fashion, were coded by sensory modality and outcome level. Of thirty-seven works isolating specific senses, only seven reach a brand-level outcome, and all seven involve vision; touch, the category's defining attribute, is studied mainly at product level. Multisensory stimulation outperforms single cues only when congruent, and effects travel through an affective route. Online, verbal and vicarious touch cues outperform richer imagery. The luxury versus fast fashion difference is assumed but untested. A Multisensory Brand Perception framework and a research agenda are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion branding has historically been an exercise in looking. A brand is recognised by its monogram, its house colours, the typography of its wordmark and the choreography of its window displays, and visual merchandising exists precisely to manage that recognition. This visual-centric logic rests on an increasingly fragile assumption: that what a brand looks like is what distinguishes it. Where silhouettes, colour stories and store aesthetics are replicated across the price ladder within a single season, visual distinctiveness has a short half-life. Sensory marketing theory offers an alternative account. Hultén (2011) argues that every point of contact engages the five senses simultaneously, each generating a sensory experience that contributes to brand identity and brand image, while Krishna (2012) adds that the senses interact rather than operate in parallel, so that perception in one modality is shaped by input from another. Lindstrom (2005) anticipated the managerial implication: a competitor can copy a logo far more readily than a coherent sensory signature.

Practice has moved faster than theory. Flagship stores deploy signature scents, curated playlists and sonic logos, tuned lighting, and material palettes chosen as much for how they feel as for how they photograph. Spence et al. (2014) describe the store as a multisensory environment whose cues operate jointly rather than additively, and Alexander & Nobbs (2016) show for fashion retail specifically that sound, smell, sight and touch together shape consumer-based brand equity. Touch is especially consequential here: Peck & Childers (2003) establish that consumers differ systematically in their need for touch, and Wilfling et al. (2023) show that when fabrics are assessed visually rather than by hand, ratings of haptic attributes fall and become less stable. The commercial stakes are immediate. The State of Fashion 2026 report (McKinsey & Company & The Business of Fashion, 2025) projects another year of low single-digit growth with value-conscious consumers across income levels, conditions under which differentiation through price is self-defeating and differentiation through features is quickly matched.

Three gaps motivate this review. First, sensory marketing research has accumulated largely outside fashion, and the available reviews reflect that distribution: they map the construct without a sectoral focus (Zha et al., 2022a; Wörfel et al., 2022; Pandey & Tripathi, 2025), so findings established in a restaurant or a bank branch do not transfer automatically to a fashion floor, where the product itself is a sensory object. Second, the fashion-specific literature is skewed towards the visual and, more recently, towards technology; the closest existing review synthesises fifty studies of luxury fashion retail interiors but frames them through Industry 4.0 and 5.0 adoption rather than through the senses, and excludes fast fashion altogether (Ratnayake et al., 2026). Third, the empirical findings that exist conflict. Iglesias et al. (2019) report no significant direct effect of sensory brand experience on brand equity, Gao & Shen (2024) report direct and indirect effects on loyalty, and Abd Jabar et al. (2026) find that brand experience raised referral while reducing loyalty. Whether these divergences reflect contextual moderation or differences in measurement cannot be settled within any single study.

This review therefore asks how multisensory brand experience, beyond visual elements alone, shapes brand perception in the fashion industry, and through what mechanisms and contexts that relationship operates. It maps how the construct is conceptualised and measured in fashion research, synthesises the effect of each sensory element on brand perception, identifies the mediating and moderating mechanisms involved, compares how sensory strategies work across luxury and fast fashion and across physical and digital channels, and sets out the research gaps that remain. Its contribution is threefold: it extends fashion branding beyond the visual-centric paradigm, consolidates four theoretical traditions into a single framework, and quantifies for the first time in this context how much of the sensory evidence actually reaches the level of the brand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sensory Marketing Theory

Sensory marketing theory begins from the observation that consumers do not encounter brands through a single channel. Hultén (2011), developing the multisensory brand-experience concept with colleagues (Hultén et al., 2009), treats sensory cues not as decoration applied to a finished brand but as the material from which brand meaning is built. Krishna (2012) defines sensory marketing as marketing that engages the senses and thereby affects perception, judgement and behaviour, locating the effect in perception rather than preference; Krupka (2023) provides recent evidence that sensory marketing activity is associated with how consumers perceive the brand itself.

The five modalities carry unequal weight in fashion. Sight dominates practice, and its brand-forming capacity is established outside the sector: colour maps onto brand personality dimensions and can be used to alter them (Labrecque & Milne, 2012), and holistic package design produces distinct brand impressions (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Sound covers in-store music and sonic identity; music steers product choice within a category (North et al., 1999), and meta-analytic evidence shows that environments with music yield higher pleasure, satisfaction and behavioural intention than those without (Roschk et al., 2017). Scent operates through store fragrance, with effects on store and merchandise evaluation (Spangenberg et al., 1996) that are conditional on congruence with setting and shopper (Spangenberg et al., 2006; Doucé & Janssens, 2013). Taste is relevant only in flagship concepts incorporating food service.

Touch requires fuller treatment because the fashion product depends on it. Consumer research distinguishes instrumental touch, undertaken for diagnostic information, from autotelic touch, undertaken for the pleasure of the sensation (Peck & Childers, 2003; Krishna et al., 2024). Peck & Wiggins (2006) show that autotelic touch produces an affective response that is persuasive in its own right, and Ranaweera et al. (2021) find that haptic attributes such as softness and weight carry into broader impressions of the product and its maker. Spence & Gallace (2011) argue that touch is the most neglected sense in multisensory design despite being among the most emotionally potent, and Hultén (2012) shows that store cues can be designed specifically to increase touching behaviour. Two complications follow for fashion: tactile perception of textiles varies with

individual tactile sensitivity (Mehta et al., 2024), and the channel through which touch is delivered is shifting along a continuum from proximal physical contact to increasingly distal forms mediated by devices, imagery and language (Krishna et al., 2024).

Brand Experience Theory

Brand experience theory supplies the construct through which consumer response is measured. Brakus et al. (2009), building on experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999), define brand experience as subjective internal responses and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli embedded in a brand's design, identity, packaging, communication and environment. The four-dimensional scale became the field's default instrument (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010) and remains the most frequently adapted measure in the studies reviewed here; its relevance to brand-level outcomes is established, with all four dimensions positively related to brand equity in an event setting (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2013). Its sensory dimension is the entry point for the narrower construct of sensory brand experience, which several authors argue should be modelled independently rather than as one quarter of a composite (Zha et al., 2022a; Gao & Shen, 2024). Hepola et al. (2017) isolate it precisely because it is the one experiential dimension not already absorbed into consumer brand engagement.

Two measurement issues recur. The first is the conflation of the sensory and affective dimensions, whose correlations are frequently high enough to raise discriminant validity questions, complicating any claim that an effect is genuinely sensory. The second is heterogeneity of operationalisation: some studies adopt the three-item sensory subscale unchanged (Iglesias et al., 2019; Gao & Shen, 2024), others build cue-specific instruments (Zha et al., 2024), and others use projective techniques that surface sensory associations without scale items (Castillo-Villar & Villasante-Arellano, 2020). A meta-analysis confirms that this variation is itself a source of between-study effect size variance (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018).

Crossmodal Correspondence, Embodiment and Sensory Expectation

Crossmodal correspondences are non-arbitrary, population-shared associations between modalities, distinguished from synaesthesia by being shared rather than idiosyncratic (Spence & Van Doorn, 2022). Krishna & Schwarz (2014) locate the mechanism in embodied and grounded cognition: sensory experience is part of the representation on which judgement operates, which is why a physical sensation can colour an abstract brand evaluation. Congruence is therefore the operative variable rather than stimulation as such. Mattila & Wirtz (2001) show that scent and music affect evaluations positively when their arousing qualities match; Spangenberg et al. (2006) find that gender-congruent scent improves evaluations in a clothing store while incongruent scent depresses them; and Fürst et al. (2021) establish that congruence is not binary, since partial and full congruence produce different outcomes.

A related line concerns expectation. Spence (2012) argues that sensory cues work largely by setting expectations that the product must then satisfy, so that a cue raising expectations beyond what the product delivers produces disappointment rather than delight. Fashion-relevant crossmodal effects are well documented: Imschloss & Kuehn (2019) demonstrate a correspondence between music and haptic perceptions of softness; Hagtvedt & Brasel (2016) show that sound frequency automatically guides visual attention towards lighter or darker objects; Eklund & Helme Falk (2018) describe a visual-tactile interplay in which visual cues generate texture expectations that touch confirms or violates; and Krishna et al. (2010) show that scent-touch congruence shapes aesthetic evaluation. In digital settings these effects acquire a compensatory function, since screens transmit neither texture nor scent (Petit et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2021).

Stimulus-Organism-Response and the Servicescape

The S-O-R model supplies the mechanism linking these traditions. Mehrabian & Russell (1974) propose that environmental stimuli act on internal emotional and cognitive states, which produce approach or avoidance responses; Kotler (1973) and Donovan & Rossiter (1982) imported the logic into retailing, and Jacoby (2002) reformulated it for consumer research. Bitner (1992) extended it by treating the built environment as ambient, spatial and symbolic cues shaping customer and employee responses, and Baker et al. (2002) showed empirically that multiple store cues jointly shape perceived merchandise value and store image. The servicescape tradition was thus already treating environmental cues as inputs to a brand-level judgement before the vocabulary of sensory brand experience was adopted. Candidate moderators follow from the same tradition: sample composition and setting (Roschk et al., 2017), gender (Gao & Shen, 2024), need for touch (Peck & Childers, 2003), shopping motivation and affect intensity (Douc   & Janssens, 2013), and self-congruity (Sirgy, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The traditions above are complementary rather than competing and are consolidated here into the Multisensory Brand Perception (MBP) framework shown in Figure 1. On the stimulus side sit multisensory brand stimuli across five modalities, delivered through fashion touchpoints: the store, the garment and its textile, packaging, communication and the digital interface. Crossmodal congruence is positioned as a property of the stimulus set rather than a separate cue. The organism component contains multisensory brand experience itself, which activates internal states such as affective response, brand trust, satisfaction and brand-self connection and, in some specifications, consumer brand engagement. The response component separates brand perception from downstream brand outcomes, a distinction the literature often blurs but which matters here, since a sensory cue may shift how a brand is perceived without shifting what a consumer does. Moderators are specified at model level: fashion segment, channel, need for touch, gender, generational cohort and cultural context.

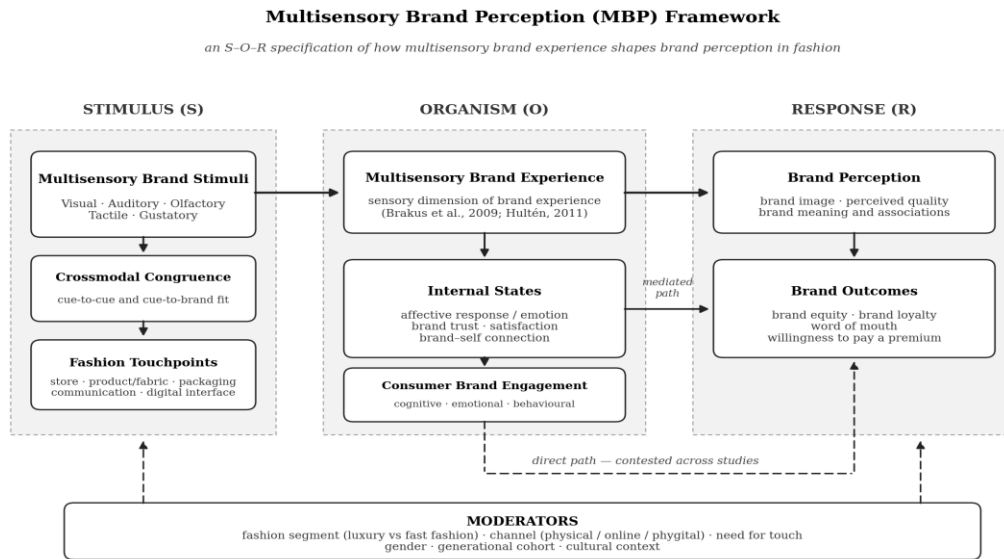


Figure 1. The Multisensory Brand Perception (MBP) Framework. Source: Authors.

METHODOLOGY

This article is a structured narrative literature review. The choice reflects the state of the literature: work on multisensory brand experience in fashion is dispersed across marketing, retail management, design research, consumer psychology and textile science, and much of the relevant evidence appears in outlets that keyword-based screening reaches unreliably. A narrative approach permits the inclusion of conceptually decisive studies from adjacent domains, particularly the crossmodal and haptic experiments, that a fashion-restricted protocol would exclude by construction, while still applying explicit selection criteria.

Four thematic search areas structured the identification of literature: the umbrella constructs combined with brand-perception outcomes and the fashion context; cue-specific work not using that terminology, pairing visual merchandising, scent marketing, sonic branding, haptics and atmospherics with fashion and apparel; the crossmodal and haptic literature published largely in psychology outlets; and the segment and channel comparisons, pairing brand and sensory experience with luxury fashion, fast fashion and online apparel. Searching was complemented by backward and forward citation tracking from the core conceptual works, which proved essential for locating fashion studies published outside the principal marketing indexes. The review concentrates on work published from 2011 onward, taking as its starting point the year of the multi-sensory brand-experience concept (Hultén, 2011), with particular attention to work from 2018 onward. Earlier works were admitted only where constitutive of the theory under review and are treated as framework references rather than contemporary evidence.

Works were retained where they were peer-reviewed articles or chapters in established reference works; treated at least one sensory dimension in relation to brand experience, brand perception or a related outcome; were set in fashion,

apparel, textiles or luxury retail, or offered an explicit conceptual contribution transferable to that context; and reported methods sufficiently for the operationalisation of the sensory construct to be assessed. Practitioner commentary, unpublished preprints, non-fashion work without conceptual linkage, and fashion studies containing no sensory or brand-perception construct were set aside.

The review draws on 80 scholarly works. 27 are set in fashion, apparel or textiles, of which 7 address the luxury segment and 5 the online channel; 47 are cross-sector or general-retail studies retained for their conceptual contribution; 15 are reviews or meta-analyses; and 6 are constitutive theoretical sources. 50 were published from 2015 onward and 30 since 2020. Methodologically the corpus comprises 22 experiments, 19 survey-based quantitative studies and 12 qualitative studies alongside conceptual and review work. The geographical distribution of the 53 empirical works is uneven: 26 were conducted in Europe and 12 in North America, together 38 of 53, against 13 from the Asia-Pacific and 2 from Latin America, with Africa and the Middle East absent.

Two coding decisions shaped the analysis. First, each work was classified by how it treats the senses: as identifiable individual modalities (cue-specific), as an undifferentiated set of all five, or as a composite brand experience measure, since only the first permits conclusions about what a particular sense does. Second, outcomes were classified as brand-level (brand perception, image, meaning, personality, equity, loyalty or relationship) or not (mood, product evaluation, store evaluation, attention, purchase intention), since a sensory effect that stops at product evaluation does not answer the review question.

RESEARCH RESULT

Conceptualisation and the shape of the evidence base

The construct enters the fashion literature by inheritance rather than independent development, and fashion studies adopt one of three positions. The first retains the composite measure and reports brand experience as a whole (Ferreira et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2022; Abd Jabar et al., 2026), so that any sensory effect cannot be separated from affective or intellectual effects. The second treats the senses as an undifferentiated set, through either the three-item subscale or all-five instruments (Shahid et al., 2022; Jahanvi & Sharma, 2025), permitting the claim that the senses matter but saying nothing about which sense does the work. The third isolates individual modalities, allowing modality-level conclusions.

The coding makes the consequences visible. Of the 80 works, 12 use a composite measure and 21 treat the five senses as an undifferentiated set; 37 isolate specific modalities. Within that group, visual cues appear in 23 works, tactile in 19, auditory in 11, olfactory in 10 and gustatory in 1. The second series in Figure 2 changes the picture: of the 37 cue-specific works, only 7 carry the effect through to a brand-level outcome, and all 7 involve vision. The tactile evidence is abundant but measures product evaluation, quality judgement, haptic imagery and purchase intention rather than brand perception; only 2 tactile works reach the brand, 1 olfactory and 2 auditory.

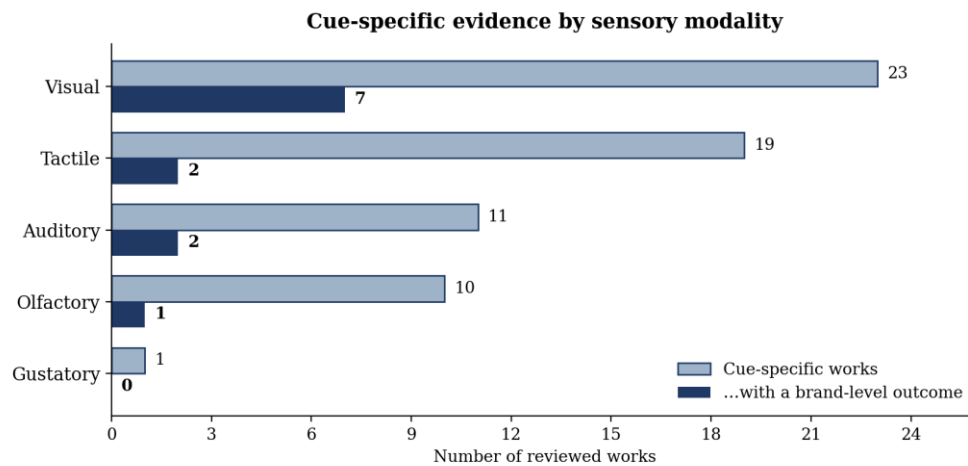


Figure 2. Cue-Specific Evidence by Sensory Modality and the Subset Reaching a Brand-Level Outcome. Source: Authors' Coding.

This is the most important descriptive finding of the review, and it reframes the gap. The problem is not that the non-visual senses are unstudied but that they are studied at the level of the product and the store and almost never at the level of the brand, which is precisely where the beyond-visual-branding argument must be made. Vision is the exception: colour and design were connected to brand personality and brand impressions two decades ago (Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008), and no equivalent programme exists for fabric hand, store scent or sonic identity. Table 1 summarises the position for each modality.

Table 1. Evidence base by sensory modality

Modality	Cue-specific works (brand-level)	Dominant outcome studied	Assessment for fashion brand perception
Visual	23 (7)	Brand personality, brand impressions, store image and luxury, engagement	Only modality with an assembled brand-level evidence base; effect sizes modest
Tactile	19 (2)	Product evaluation, quality judgement, haptic imagery, purchase intention	Strongest category relevance, weakest brand-level evidence; the clearest gap
Auditory	11 (2)	Pleasure, satisfaction, attention, product choice, perceived softness	Robust affective and crossmodal effects; route

Modality	Cue-specific works (brand-level)	Dominant outcome studied	Assessment for fashion brand perception
			to the brand runs through touch and vision
Olfactory	10 (1)	Store and merchandise evaluation, approach behaviour	Congruence requirement best demonstrated within fashion; brand level untested
Gustatory	1 (0)	Product expectation via packaging	Contextually marginal; niche flagship concepts only

Source: authors.

Effects of individual sensory elements

The visual evidence is the most directly tied to brand perception, and the mechanism is documented outside fashion before being applied within it (Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Baker et al., 2002). Fashion-specific work extends it: interior colour shifts perceived store luxury (Cho & Lee, 2017), luxury stores are read as art institutions whose spatial and aesthetic cues carry brand meaning (Joy et al., 2014), domestic visual and material staging produces intimacy and meaning in luxury retail (Debenedetti, 2021), and atmospheric cues in fashion retailing have been modelled holistically (Ballantine et al., 2015; Blázquez et al., 2019). The meta-analytic estimate for colour is qualified, with warm colours raising arousal and cool colours raising satisfaction at small to medium effect sizes (Roschk et al., 2017).

Music is among the most-studied atmospheric variables outside fashion and among the least-studied inside it. Its behavioural potency is not in doubt (North et al., 1999; Roschk et al., 2017), but most auditory studies terminate at mood, dwell time, attention or spending. Two crossmodal results indicate where the fashion-relevant route lies: music alters haptic perceptions of softness (Imschloss & Kuehnl, 2019), and sound frequency guides visual attention towards lighter or darker objects (Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016). Sound's most promising route to fashion brand perception may therefore be indirect, running through touch and vision rather than alongside them.

Scent produces the clearest conditional pattern. Pleasant ambient scent improves store and merchandise evaluations relative to no scent (Spangenberg et al., 1996; Roschk et al., 2017), but two fashion-specific field experiments show the effect is not unconditional, being contingent on gender congruence (Spangenberg et al., 2006) and on shopping motivation and affect intensity (Doucé & Janssens, 2013). Notably, none of these experiments measures the

brand. Touch has the strongest category claim and the weakest brand-level evidence: the consumer psychology foundation is secure (Peck & Wiggins, 2006; Ranaweera et al., 2021; Peck & Childers, 2003; Hultén, 2012) and textile research adds that tactile sensitivity varies enough between consumers to alter judgements of the same fabric (Mehta et al., 2024), yet fashion-specific tactile studies concentrate on the absence of touch online (Silva et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Wilfling et al., 2023) rather than its contribution to brand perception offline. Taste appears only through packaging-based crossmodal expectation (Spence & Van Doorn, 2022) and should be treated as contextually marginal.

The studies treating the senses as a set provide the most direct evidence that multisensory experience reaches the brand: multisensory brand experience shapes brand image and lovemarks across eleven fashion brands (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2025), sensory marketing builds emotional attachment and loyalty in luxury stores (Shahid et al., 2022), sensory marketing is linked directly to brand perception (Krupka, 2023), and multisensory boutique design fosters attachment and loyalty in Indonesian batik retail (Ustazah et al., 2025). What these studies cannot say is which sense carried the effect.

Mediating and moderating mechanisms

The mediation evidence converges on an affective route. Satisfaction is the most frequently specified mediator and performs consistently (Vera-Falcón et al., 2025); affective commitment and emotional attachment carry the effect in luxury retail and services (Shahid et al., 2022; Iglesias et al., 2019); brand love mediates in two fashion retail samples (Ferreira et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2022); brand attitude and brand-self connection operate as parallel mediators (Gao & Shen, 2024); and consumer brand engagement mediates partially (Hepola et al., 2017). Qualitative evidence points the same way, with nostalgia and identity projection as internal states in a culturally embedded fashion setting (Ustazah et al., 2025). No reviewed work supports a strong direct cognitive route unmediated by affect, a pattern consistent with the embodied account (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014).

Moderation evidence is more fragmented. Need for touch conditions reliance on tactile information (Peck & Childers, 2003), although the expected moderation was unsupported once haptic imagery had been induced (Silva et al., 2021); tactile sensitivity is a further and largely unexplored individual difference (Mehta et al., 2024). Gender recurs (Roschk et al., 2017; Gao & Shen, 2024), as do situational moderators (Doucé & Janssens, 2013). Congruence functions differently from these: it is a property of the stimulus set rather than of the consumer, and it determines the sign of the effect rather than only its magnitude (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017; Krishna et al., 2010; Fürst et al., 2021). Incongruent multisensory stimulation can therefore perform worse than no additional stimulation at all.

Channel and segment

The shift of fashion purchasing online removes precisely the modality fashion depends on most, and the cost is measurable (Wilfling et al., 2023). The evidence on substitutes is more consistent than might be expected: language outperforms imagery, since verbal rather than pictorial haptic cues generate the

haptic imagery that raises perceived quality and purchase intention (Rodrigues et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2021), and observing a hand touch a product produces a vicarious haptic response (Luangrath et al., 2022). Augmented reality and related phygital tools enrich the visual and interactive layers effectively (Yim et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2025; Xue et al., 2024; Ratnayake et al., 2026) but transmit no touch, and their success risks reproducing the visual bias of physical fashion branding in a new medium (Kim et al., 2020).

7 reviewed works address the luxury segment, and their account is consistent: sensory richness functions as a primary differentiator and a signal of status (Shahid et al., 2022; Joy et al., 2014; Debenedetti, 2021; Taube & Warnaby, 2017; Cho & Lee, 2017; Ratnayake et al., 2026). The fast fashion side is where the evidence thins to the point of absence, since no reviewed work tests the same sensory manipulation across both segments within a single design. The non-luxury evidence comes from single-site studies (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022; Servais et al., 2022; Ustazah et al., 2025), the last of which suggests that the relevant contrast in emerging markets may not be luxury versus fast fashion at all but global versus culturally rooted brands, where sensory design carries heritage and identity meaning. The honest conclusion is negative: the luxury-fast fashion moderation is widely assumed and nowhere tested, and with 38 of 53 empirical works conducted in Europe and North America the segment question is confounded with the cultural one.

Patterns Across the Literature

Five patterns emerge. First, the senses are studied but rarely at brand level, and the brand-level evidence for scent and sound rests on a single exploratory study (Alexander & Nobbs, 2016). Second, multisensory stimulation outperforms single-sense stimulation only when congruent, with incongruent combinations capable of depressing evaluations below the single-cue baseline. Third, the affective mediation route is consistently supported while the direct route is not, being non-significant in one study, significant in another, partially mediated in a third and positive in a fourth services setting (Iglesias et al., 2019; Gao & Shen, 2024; Hepola et al., 2017; Moreira et al., 2017), with measurement differences the most plausible explanation (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018). Fourth, online, language and vicarious touch beat imagery as substitutes for touch. Fifth, the luxury versus fast fashion moderation is asserted rather than demonstrated. Counter-directional findings should not be smoothed away: brand experience raised referral while reducing loyalty through expectation inflation (Abd Jabar et al., 2026), an interpretation aligned with the argument that cues work by setting expectations the product must satisfy (Spence, 2012), and employee empathy negatively moderated the sensory experience-satisfaction relationship (Iglesias et al., 2019). Table 2 summarises the key works on which these patterns rest.

Table 2. Key Works on Multisensory Brand Experience and Brand Perception

Author (Year)	Method and sample	Key finding	Relevance
Alexander & Nobbs (2016)	Qualitative, fashion retail cases, UK	Sound, smell, sight and touch jointly strengthen consumer-based brand equity	Only cue-specific non-visual brand-level evidence
Jahanvi & Sharma (2025)	SEM, 456 respondents, 11 fashion brands, India	Multisensory brand experience shapes brand image and lovemarks	Direct fashion evidence at brand level
Labrecque & Milne (2012)	Four experiments, USA	Hues map onto brand personality and can be used to alter it	Visual cue to brand personality
Baker et al. (2002)	Experiment, store environments, USA	Multiple environment cues jointly shape merchandise value and store image	Multi-cue brand-level evidence
Shahid et al. (2022)	Survey, luxury store customers, India	Sensory marketing builds emotional attachment, which drives loyalty	Luxury segment; mediation
Ustazah et al. (2025)	Qualitative case study, batik boutiques, Indonesia	Lighting, music, scent and touch foster attachment via nostalgia and identity	Emerging-market, culturally rooted fashion
Spangenberg et al. (2006)	Field experiment, clothing store, USA	Gender-congruent scent raises evaluations; incongruent scent depresses them	Congruence within fashion
Silva et al. (2021)	Online experiment, 264 responses, Portugal/Brazil	Verbal, not pictorial, haptic cues drive imagery, quality and purchase intention	Digital channel substitute
Wilfling et al. (2023)	Fabric assessment, online and physical, UK	Visual-only assessment underrates and destabilises haptic judgements	Cost of absent touch online

Author (Year)	Method and sample	Key finding	Relevance
Imschloss & Kuehnl (2019)	Lab and field experiments, Germany	Music systematically alters haptic perception of softness	Crossmodal evidence for textiles
Roschk et al. (2017)	Meta-analysis, 66 studies, N = 15,621	Music and scent presence raise pleasure, satisfaction and intention; effects small to medium	Quantitative baseline
Iglesias et al. (2019)	PLS-SEM, 1,739 respondents, Spain	Direct effect on brand equity not significant; fully mediated	Anchor of the contested direct path
Gao & Shen (2024)	PLS-SEM, 304 respondents, China	Effects direct and indirect; brand-self path significant for women only	Counter-evidence and gender moderator
Abd Jabar et al. (2026)	Moderated regression, 252 respondents, Malaysia	Brand experience raised referral but reduced loyalty	Counter-directional finding
Ratnayake et al. (2026)	Review, 50 studies, 2014–2025	Luxury interiors as culturally expressive, technologically mediated environments	Benchmark review
Zha et al. (2022a)	Bibliometric and integrative review	Construct foundations fragmented; context-specific conceptualisation needed	Establishes the construct-level gap

Source: authors.

DISCUSSION

The review set out to establish whether non-visual modalities contribute to brand perception in fashion independently rather than as support for the visual, and the evidence permits a qualified affirmative. Olfactory cues shift store and merchandise evaluations in clothing store field experiments where no visual manipulation is present (Spangenberg et al., 2006; Doucé & Janssens, 2013); auditory cues alter tactile judgements of softness and steer visual attention without themselves being visual (Imschloss & Kuehnl, 2019; Hagtvedt & Brasel, 2016); and tactile cues persuade through affect independently of the information

they carry (Peck & Wiggins, 2006; Ranaweera et al., 2021). Each is an independent contribution in the strict sense: it occurs without, and cannot be reduced to, visual stimulation.

Two qualifications follow. Independence is not sufficiency: a non-visual cue deployed against an incongruent visual or brand context can perform worse than no cue at all (Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017; Fürst et al., 2021; Krishna et al., 2010), so the argument for going beyond visual branding is an argument for designing across the senses rather than adding them. And most non-visual evidence stops short of the brand. The independent effects documented above are effects on stores, merchandise, products, attention and moods; that they carry through to brand perception is plausible and consistent with the multisensory studies measuring brand outcomes (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2025; Shahid et al., 2022; Krupka, 2023), but for individual non-visual modalities in fashion it has been demonstrated directly only once (Alexander & Nobbs, 2016).

Theoretically, four implications follow. The brand experience scale (Brakus et al., 2009) meets its limits in a category whose defining attribute is tactile, since a three-item composite cannot distinguish the effect of the fabric from that of the storefront; the field needs a validated fashion instrument separating product-intrinsic from environmental cues. The claim that each modality contributes to brand identity (Hultén, 2011) is supported in fashion at the level of experience but only weakly at the level of the brand for everything except sight, and the crossmodal argument (Krishna, 2012) receives its most category-relevant confirmation in the music-softness and sound-lightness effects. The S-O-R model emerges strengthened in its mediation logic and weakened in its usual specification, since the direct path produces inconsistent results across comparable studies for reasons that appear at least partly artefactual (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2018). Finally, expectation offers a unifying explanation for counter-directional results: if cues set expectations the product must satisfy (Spence, 2012), an intensified sensory experience raises the standard against which the garment and the service are judged, predicting precisely the referral-up, loyalty-down pattern observed (Abd Jabar et al., 2026).

Managerially, sensory strategy should be designed as an integrated system rather than assembled as independent enhancements; the practical test is whether each cue would be recognised as belonging to the same brand if encountered in isolation. Touch should be treated as a brand asset rather than only a product attribute, warranting the same deliberate management as the logo: consistency across collections, a vocabulary for describing it, layouts that invite handling (Hultén, 2012), and recognition that customers differ in tactile sensitivity (Mehta et al., 2024). In the digital channel the priority is compensation for the modality screens cannot transmit, and the evidence is specific: verbal haptic description outperforms additional imagery (Silva et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2017) and video of hands handling the garment can evoke vicarious touch (Luangrath et al., 2022), so e-commerce investing in higher-resolution photography while describing fabric merely as soft is optimising the wrong cue. Segment guidance must be cautious, since no comparative evidence exists for fast fashion, and for heritage brands cultural congruence matters as much as cue-to-

cue congruence (Ustazah et al., 2025). Finally, sensory intensity should be calibrated to what the brand can consistently deliver, and outcomes tracked at the level where sensory effects operate, namely recall, dwell time, willingness to pay a premium and trust, rather than sales alone.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review finds that the construct of multisensory brand experience is inherited from brand experience theory rather than developed for fashion, that three incompatible levels of operationalisation coexist, and that the senses are studied far more often at the level of the product and store than at the level of the brand. Each non-visual modality except taste makes an independent contribution to the evaluation of fashion stores and products, but only vision has an assembled body of brand-level evidence behind it. Sensory effects reach brand outcomes through an affective route that is consistently supported, while the direct route is not, and measurement heterogeneity is the most plausible source of the divergence. Online, language and vicarious touch outperform richer imagery as substitutes for touch, and the luxury-fast fashion distinction is assumed rather than tested and confounded with cultural context.

The contribution to the beyond-visual-branding argument is therefore specific rather than rhetorical. Non-visual cues are not decoration applied to a visually defined brand. But the same evidence forbids the prescription that more senses are better: congruence determines the sign of the effect and expectation determines whether a heightened experience is rewarded or punished. Three recommendations carry the weight of the evidence. Design the sensory system as a whole and test each cue for congruence with brand positioning before deployment. Manage touch as a brand asset and, online, deliver it through language and observed handling rather than further visual enrichment. Calibrate sensory intensity to what the brand can consistently deliver, and measure at the level where sensory effects actually operate.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Three limitations qualify these conclusions. The review is confined to work published in English and Indonesian. As a narrative rather than a protocol-driven review it does not claim exhaustive coverage, and the classification of outcomes as brand-level or not, on which Figure 2 depends, is a judgement other reviewers might draw differently. The corpus also reflects the geographical concentration of the field itself, with 38 of 53 empirical works conducted in Europe or North America, so the conclusions describe Western consumers in Western retail environments more confidently than the markets where most fashion is now bought. Table 3 sets out the resulting research agenda, ordered by the degree to which resolving each gap would change what can be said about fashion brand perception.

Table 3. Research agenda

Gap identified	Proposed research question	Suggested design
Non-visual cue-specific evidence rarely reaches the brand	Do fabric hand, signature scent and in-store music shift brand image and perceived brand quality, controlling for visual cues?	Factorial field or laboratory experiments with brand-level dependent measures
No fabric-hand equivalent of the colour-brand-personality programme	Can tactile properties of textiles be mapped onto brand personality dimensions as colour has been?	Replication of the colour-personality mapping design using standardised fabric swatches
Luxury versus fast fashion moderation untested and confounded with culture	Does the same sensory manipulation produce different brand-perception effects across segments and markets?	Multi-group experiment or PLS-MGA with matched manipulations
Direct-path dispute unresolved	Is the inconsistency of the direct path artefactual, arising from measurement differences?	Replication using harmonised cue-specific and composite instruments on one sample
Touch substitutes tested on purchase intention, not brand	Do verbal and vicarious haptic cues affect online fashion brand perception?	Online experiments manipulating description type and hand-touch video
Expectation inflation and reversing returns	Under what conditions does sensory intensity raise expectations beyond delivery and reduce loyalty?	Longitudinal panel tracking experience, expectation disconfirmation and repeat purchase
Geographic and cultural concentration	How do sensory cues carry cultural meaning for heritage and modest fashion brands in Southeast Asia?	Mixed methods in Indonesian and Malaysian fashion retail

Source: authors.

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