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Merry Guestmas!
An S-O-R study of Sensory Marketing,
Guest Satisfaction, and Post-stay Intentions,
contextualised by Christmas in Madeira

MASTER DISSERTATION

Mário José Moura da Cunha

MASTER IN INTERNATIONAL HOTEL MANAGEMENT

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SUPERVISOR

Mara José Sousa Franco

CO-SUPERVISOR

Nuno Miguel Castanheira Almeida

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this journey towards achieving a Master's degree in International Hotel Management.

To my partner, Marília Ferreira, a pillar of love, strength, and encouragement throughout my academic journey, from the first steps of undergraduate study to the final page of this dissertation. To my mother, Lígia Moura, whose perseverance and strength embody a warrior's spirit. Her unwavering resolve in the face of life's challenges has been my enduring inspiration. To my sister, Ana Cunha, whose resilience in times of change and dedication as a mother are constant reminders of courage and love. To my nephew, Henry Farmer, whose bright spirit and kind smiles have brightened every step of this journey. I am deeply grateful to my entire family and friends for believing in me, and for their continued encouragement.

My deepest gratitude is also extended to my dissertation supervisor and co-supervisor, Professor Mara Franco and Professor Nuno Almeida, for their unwavering support and insightful mentorship. Their expertise, together with their constant reminder that "*A sorte dá muito trabalho*" ("luck comes from hard work"), was both an inspiration and a driving force throughout this journey. I also wish to offer special thanks to Professor Svetlana Kurteš for her invaluable guidance during my undergraduate degree in Languages and Business Studies.

I also acknowledge the valuable role played by my professional journey in shaping my understanding of hospitality. Having nearly a decade of experience as a hotel receptionist and night auditor in the Madeira Regency Club Hotel, Royal Savoy Hotel, Savoy Palace Hotel, and finally Savoy NEXT Hotel, I was fortunate to gain firsthand experience of guest expectations, and the operational realities of the hotel industry. Equally, I am grateful to my colleagues at Funchal City Hall, whose support has helped me to balance professional responsibilities with academic pursuits.

Finally, I extend my sincere thank you to the hotels that supported this research by facilitating the distribution of the questionnaire to their guests: Hotel Imperatriz, Hotel Solar Boaventura, Hotel Riu Palace Madeira and the Aqua Natura Hotels in Porto Moniz. Their collaboration was indispensable in securing the data necessary for the successful completion of this dissertation.

*« Look at all the Christmas lights
blinking, twinkling, shining bright
Listen to the carollers sing
Jingle bells go jing-a-ling!
Smell the cinnamon, smell the spice
Glowing candles smell so nice
Taste the cookies, candies, cakes
Sweet and sticky, freshly baked
Feel the warmth and spread the cheer
Christmas time is finally here! »*

Rachel Lukacsko

Resumo

Esta dissertação aplica o modelo Estímulo-Organismo-Resposta (S-O-R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) para examinar o impacto do marketing sensorial na satisfação dos hóspedes, e o impacto desta satisfação nas intenções pós-estadia na indústria hoteleira. Tendo como base o estudo de Choi e Kandampully (2019) sobre ambientes físicos e sociais, esta investigação introduz o marketing sensorial como um conjunto central de estímulos (S), operacionalizado através de cinco dimensões (visual, olfativa, auditiva, háptica e gustativa) que moldam as experiências sensoriais dos hóspedes (Krishna, 2013). A satisfação do hóspede é posicionada como o organismo (O) central, refletindo as respostas emocionais aos estímulos sensoriais, enquanto as respostas (R) analisadas correspondem às intenções de regressar (Saribaş & Demir, 2024) e de deixar avaliações positivas online (Spence, 2022).

A evidência empírica foi obtida através de um inquérito a 256 viajantes na Ilha da Madeira durante a época de Natal, analisado com recurso à Modelação de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM). Os resultados confirmam que os estímulos visuais, auditivos e gustativos influenciam significativamente a satisfação dos hóspedes, enquanto os estímulos olfativos e hápticos não demonstraram efeitos significativos. A satisfação dos hóspedes, por sua vez, exerceu efeitos muito fortes e positivos tanto nas intenções de regresso como nas intenções de deixar avaliações positivas.

Os resultados reforçam a importância das experiências sensoriais na formação das perceções dos hóspedes e destacam a relevância dos estímulos visuais, auditivos e gustativos nos ambientes hoteleiros. O estudo contribui teoricamente ao clarificar a influência relativa de modalidades sensoriais específicas e, em termos práticos, ao oferecer recomendações acionáveis para gestores que procuram conceber ambientes de serviço que aumentem a satisfação, fomentem a lealdade e reforcem a competitividade num mercado saturado.

Palavras-Chave

Paradigma Estímulo-Organismo-Resposta; Marketing Sensorial; Satisfação dos Hóspedes; Intenções de Regresso; Intenções de Avaliação.

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Abstract

This dissertation applies the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to examine the impact of sensory marketing on guest satisfaction, and the impact of said guest satisfaction on post-stay intentions in the hospitality industry. Building on Choi and Kandampully (2019) study of physical and social environments, this research introduces sensory marketing as a key set of stimuli (S), operationalised through five dimensions (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory), which shape guests' sensory experiences (Krishna, 2013). Guest satisfaction is positioned as the central organism (O), reflecting emotional responses to sensory inputs, while the responses (R) are guests' intentions to return (Saribaş & Demir, 2024) and to leave positive online reviews (Spence, 2022).

Empirical evidence was derived from a survey of 256 travellers to Madeira Island during the Christmas season, analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results confirm that visual, auditory, and gustatory stimuli significantly influence guest satisfaction, whereas olfactory and haptic stimuli did not demonstrate significant effects. Guest satisfaction, in turn, exerted very strong positive effects on both return intentions and positive review intentions.

The findings reinforce the importance of sensory experiences in shaping guest perceptions and highlight the importance of visual, auditory, and gustatory cues in hospitality environments. The study contributes theoretically by clarifying the relative influence of specific sensory modalities, and practically by offering actionable insights for managers seeking to design service environments that enhance satisfaction and foster loyalty in a crowded marketplace.

Keywords

Stimulus-Organism-Response Paradigm; Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction; Return Intentions; Review Intentions.

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List of Abbreviations

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Composite Reliability
eWOM	Electronic-word-of-mouth
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio
OTA	Online Travel Agency
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
S-O-R	Stimulus-Organism-Response
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
WOM	Word-of-mouth
S	Stimuli
VS	Visual Stimuli
OS	Olfactory Stimuli
AS	Auditory Stimuli
HS	Haptic Stimuli
GS	Gustatory Stimuli
O	Organism
GSn	Guest Satisfaction
R	Response
RI	Return Intentions
PRI	Positive Review Intentions

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List of Symbols

α	Cronbach's Alpha
β	Beta coefficient / Standardised Path Coefficient
p	p-value
N	Number of observations or respondents
%	Percentage
R^2	Coefficient of determination
t	t-value

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Chapter I: Introduction, Problem Statement, and Research Questions

1.1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive hospitality industry, guest satisfaction has emerged as a central determinant of hotel success, influencing reputation, loyalty, and long-term profitability (Moreno-Perdigón et al., 2021). As global travel patterns evolve, particularly around festive seasons, hotels are under growing pressure to provide memorable experiences that differentiate them from competitors (Elphick, 2020). One of the most effective strategies for achieving this is sensory marketing, which engages the five senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste) to shape perceptions, evoke emotions, and foster lasting connections with guests (Krishna, 2013; Spence, 2022).

Originally centred on visual and auditory advertising, sensory marketing has developed into a multidimensional approach that creates holistic experiences across service environments (Krishna, 2012). Within hospitality, sensory cues such as design and lighting, ambient scents, curated soundscapes, tactile comforts, and signature food and beverages play an increasingly important role in shaping satisfaction and encouraging repeat behaviour (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022; Worsfold et al., 2016; Yi & Kang, 2019). These elements are not only instrumental in enhancing immediate experiences but also in strengthening behavioural outcomes such as online reviews and return intentions, which are critical to competitiveness in an experience-driven marketplace (Saribaş & Demir, 2024; Xia et al., 2022).

The Christmas season in Madeira provides a particularly rich context to explore these dynamics. The island is renowned for its elaborate decorations, festive music, distinctive gastronomy, and immersive cultural traditions, which heighten guests' multi-sensory experience (Cable, 2024; Visit Madeira, 2024). Yet, there is limited empirical evidence on how individual sensory stimuli shape guest satisfaction, specifically within a context as distinctive and seasonally intensified as Christmas in Madeira.

This dissertation is situated within the theoretical framework of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), building on the foundations laid by Choi and Kandampully (2019) study. Within this framework, sensory stimuli are conceptualised as environmental cues (S), guest satisfaction as the internal evaluative response (O), and post-stay intentions, namely positive review and return intentions as the behavioural outcomes (R).

1.2. Problem Statement

While sensory marketing is increasingly recognised as a key driver of memorable hospitality experiences (Agapito & Sigala, 2024; Fong et al., 2022; D. Kim & Perdue, 2013; Krishna, 2013; Spence, 2022), relatively few studies isolate the effects of individual senses. Applications of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm often conceptualise stimuli broadly, overlooking how visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory cues distinctly influence guest satisfaction and subsequent behavioural intentions.

To the author's knowledge, no published study has examined this relationship, specifically in Madeira, despite the island's reputation as a leading tourism destination. The Christmas season, with its intensified visual displays, music, scents, textures, and gastronomy, provides an especially rich context. Choi and Kandampully (2019) study offers a useful foundation by applying the S-O-R model to atmospheric and social stimuli, but it does not disentangle the role of individual senses. This dissertation therefore addresses this gap by investigating the relative influence of each sensory dimension on guest satisfaction, and said satisfaction's impact on post-stay intentions, within the distinctive context of Christmas in Madeira.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are pursued:

- To determine the extent to which each individual sensory stimulus (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory) affects guest satisfaction.
- To confirm whether or not guest satisfaction influences two key post-stay behavioural outcomes: positive review intentions and return intentions.
- To contribute theoretically by extending the application of the S-O-R paradigm to sensory marketing in hospitality, in the context of Christmas in Madeira, and practically by providing insights for managers on how to leverage sensory cues during the Christmas season.

1.3. Research Question

What is the impact of individual sensory stimuli on guest satisfaction, and how does guest satisfaction influence post-stay intentions, in the context of Christmas in Madeira?

To address this, the dissertation is structured around two sub-questions:

- To what extent does each individual sense (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory) influence guest satisfaction?
- Does guest satisfaction subsequently influence post-stay intentions, namely positive review intentions and return intentions?

Chapter II: Literature Review

2.1. The Stimulus-Organism-Response Paradigm

Several theories help explain how external stimuli influence human behaviour. Pavlov's classical conditioning theory shows that behaviour is shaped by associating neutral stimuli with natural responses (Pavlov, 1927). Skinner's operant conditioning emphasises how reinforcement shapes behaviour (Skinner, 1965). The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, introduced by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 (Hochreiter et al., 2023), is a foundational, and widely used by scholars, framework that is used to understand how surrounding stimuli (S) affect an organism, or an individual's emotional state (O) and lead to a response (R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), represented by figure 1.

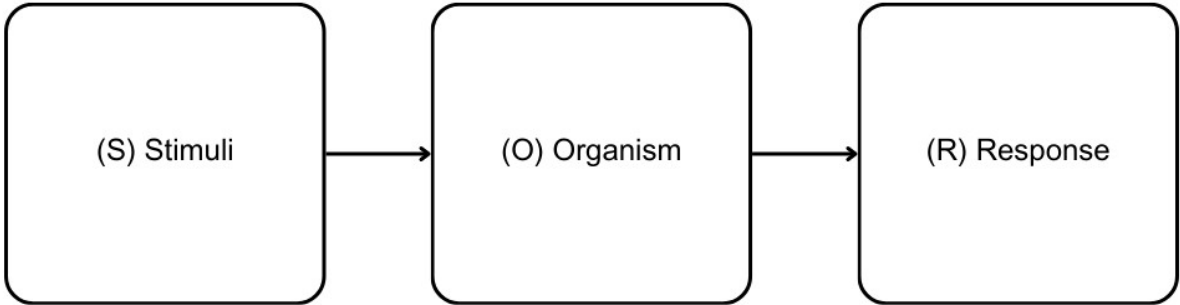


Figure 1: Adaptation of the Stimulus-Organism-Response Framework

Source: Adapted from Mehrabian and Russell (1974)

This framework can be used in many fields of study, for example, Islam and Rahman (2017) applied the S-O-R model to understand online brand community characteristics and their impact on guest engagement. Similarly, Chen and Yao (2018) used the model to explore impulse buying behaviours in mobile auctions, highlighting how stimuli can provoke cognitive and emotional states that lead to specific behavioural responses. Choi and Kandampully (2019), which serves as this dissertation's foundational study, utilised the S-O-R framework to examine how physical and social environments in hospitality settings shape guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Past research in the field of environmental psychology has placed more emphasis on testing the relationship between the organism and response variables rather than studying the stimulus variable (Hochreiter et al., 2023). This may be attributable to the complexity in identifying and measuring a particular stimulus when there are numerous stimuli involved in

any environmental setting (Bitner, 1992). Further research is, therefore, necessary to understand better which elements of environmental stimuli can engage guests, particularly if one assumes that the essence of engagement is not unconscious but conscious (I. Lin, 2016). A stimuli, in the context of this study, refers to any environmental factor that elicits individuals' internal reactions to that atmosphere (Akarsu, 2021). Kotler defined atmosphere as elements designed to evoke emotional reactions and enhance positive behavioural outcomes (Kotler, 1974). In a service setting, such as a hotel, environmental elements that are observable, like lighting or decoration (Geng et al., 2023, p. 3), smellable, in the form of fragrances (Chatterjee, 2015), hearable, in the form of music (Magnini & Parker, 2009), tastable, in the form of tasting food and beverages (Hultén, Broweus, & van Dijk, 2009), and feelable, such as textures (Lockyer, 2002) or temperature variations (H. Kim & Oldham, 2020), act as the stimuli within the realms of this research.

Research supports that the internal processes within an individual, referred to as the "organism," can significantly influence behavioural outcomes (Guo et al., 2022). These internal states are thought to bridge how people respond to various stimuli in their environment, shaping their overall behaviours. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed that individuals experience three distinct types of emotional states: pleasure, arousal, and dominance. However, this study adapts the original model to focus specifically on guest satisfaction as the primary emotional state, reflecting a tailored approach that aligns more closely with the hotel industry's goals and practices. By focusing on guest satisfaction, as seen in Choi and Kandampully (2019), this study addresses the aspect of emotional response most relevant to hotel guests and industry stakeholders, adapting the S-O-R model to better capture the factors that impact guests' behavioural responses.

In this study, two key behavioural responses are examined: guests' intentions to return to the hotel, and their intentions to leave a positive review. These responses are critical indicators of guest satisfaction and loyalty, offering insights into the effectiveness of the hotel experience in fostering guest loyalty and business sustainability, as when guests have positive reactions, such as feeling valued or enjoying a memorable atmosphere, they are more likely to translate these experiences into tangible behaviours, like planning future stays or recommending the hotel to others (Souki et al., 2024).

2.1.1. Sensory Marketing (S)

Sensory marketing (Figure 2) has evolved significantly over the years, tracing its roots back to early advertising practices that focused primarily on visual and auditory stimuli (Batra et al., 1996). In the mid-20th century, marketers began to recognise the potential of engaging multiple senses to create more impactful and memorable consumer experiences (Hulten, 2011). This shift was influenced by advancements in psychology and neuroscience, which highlighted the importance of sensory perception in shaping human behaviour and emotions (Krishna, 2013). The concept of sensory marketing gained further traction in the 1990s and early 2000s, as brands started to experiment with multisensory strategies to differentiate themselves in increasingly competitive markets (Hultén, Broweus, & Dijk, 2009). Today, sensory marketing is a well-established field, with companies across various industries leveraging the power of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell to enhance brand experiences and foster deeper emotional connections with consumers (Krishna, 2012).

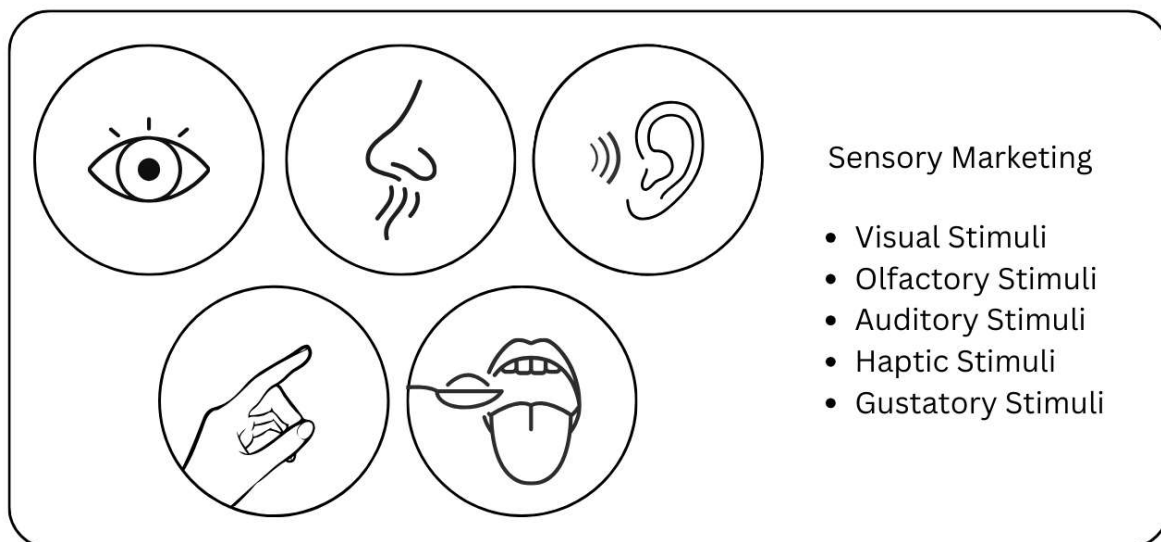


Figure 2: Sensory marketing

Source: Own Authorship

Sensory marketing can be described as a strategy that engages the consumer's senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) to enhance their experience with a brand or product (Krishna, 2011). By appealing to these senses, companies can create emotional connections, influence consumer behaviour (Krishna, 2013), and enhance brand loyalty (Schmitt et al., 2009). This approach is particularly effective in atmospheres like hospitality (Spence, 2022), retail (Roschk & Hosseinpour, 2019), and food services (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014), where sensory experiences play a crucial role in guest satisfaction (E. Santos, Barattucci, et al., 2023)

and decision-making (Summerfield & Parpart, 2022). Sensory stimuli can evoke emotions (Masood & Farooq, 2019), foster stronger connections between guests and brands (Krishna, 2012), which can lead to repeat purchases (Spence, 2022). In competitive markets, sensory marketing helps brands stand out by creating unique and memorable experiences (Spence, 2022). These strategies can influence consumer behaviour, and encourage longer visits and increased sales (Roschk & Hosseinpour, 2019). Engaging the senses improves brand recall, as guests are more likely to remember brands that provided a unique sensory experience (Krishna, 2012). As competition intensifies, sensory marketing offers a unique way for brands to differentiate themselves and enhance guest loyalty (Spence, 2022).

2.1.1.1. Visual Stimuli

Visual sensory marketing has its roots in the early 20th century, with the advent of print advertising (Marchand, 1985). Initially, marketers focused on the use of colours (Hynes, 2009) and fonts (Henderson & Cote, 1998) in posters and billboards to attract attention and convey messages effectively (Marchand, 1985). The 1940s marked a significant period when research began to explore the psychological effects of colours and visual elements on consumer behaviour (Wagemans et al., 2012). This era saw the rise of iconic brands like Coca-Cola, which utilised distinctive red and white colours to create a strong visual identity (Pendergrast, 1993), as seen in figure 3.



Figure 3: The science behind the Coca-Cola logo

Source: Chowdhury (2024)

With the introduction of television in the 1950s, visual marketing evolved to include moving images and more dynamic content. Advertisers began to experiment with visual storytelling, using commercials to create emotional connections with audiences (Tedlow, 1990). The digital age brought further advancements, with the rise of online advertising and social media platforms, allowing for more interactive and visually engaging marketing strategies (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). Sight is traditionally one of the most prominent senses in marketing, as visual elements are critical in attracting attention and conveying brand identity (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). The use of colour (Hynes, 2009), shape (Raghubir & Greenleaf, 2006), and design (Underwood et al., 2001) in product packaging, advertising, and store layouts can evoke specific emotions and associations (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). For example, and as seen in figure 4, warm colours can evoke a sense of excitement, confidence, and creativity, while cooler colours may evoke feelings of freshness, peace, and sophistication (Institute, 2020).

Visual sensory marketing leverages these principles to create compelling and memorable brand experiences. By carefully selecting and combining visual elements, marketers can craft environments that resonate with consumers on an emotional level. This approach is particularly effective in retail settings, where the visual appeal of a store can significantly influence shopping behaviour. For instance, a visually stimulating store layout can encourage customers to spend more time browsing, increasing the likelihood of purchases (Bitner, 1992). Similarly, visually appealing product packaging can attract attention on crowded shelves, making products stand out from competitors (Underwood et al., 2001).



Figure 4: The psychology of colours

Source: Institute (2020)

According to research by Worsfold et al. (2016), guests' satisfaction with a hotel's physical attributes such as architecture, decor, and overall design has a stronger impact on their intention to return than satisfaction with service alone. This finding underscores the importance of the visual and physical environment within hospitality, showing that guests connect deeply with the ambience and aesthetic of a hotel, which shapes their overall satisfaction and loyalty. As a result, it is unsurprising that hotels invest substantial resources in creating a space that aligns with the preferences and expectations of their target audience. The design, layout, and even the thematic decorations are crafted to enhance visual appeal and create an atmosphere that resonates with guests, offering a distinctive experience that stands out in memory and encourages return visits. Claridge's in London, for example, exemplifies this approach with its renowned annual Christmas decorations, as seen in figure 5, which have become a hallmark of the hotel's brand identity. As per Doig (2021), Claridge's collaborates with high-profile designers each holiday season to create a unique, festive display that captures the spirit of the holidays in an elegant and glamorous style.

These Christmas trees and holiday decorations, fashioned in past years by brands such as Louis Vuitton, Sandra Choi, Kim Jones and Christian Louboutin, attract guests specifically during the holiday season (Conti, 2024). In this way, Claridge's exemplifies how a well-executed design strategy, particularly when it aligns with seasonal celebrations and cultural expectations, can create an inviting environment that guests want to experience again. A hotel's design and visual aesthetics design isn't simply about decoration; it's about creating an emotional connection with guests (Nanu et al., 2020).

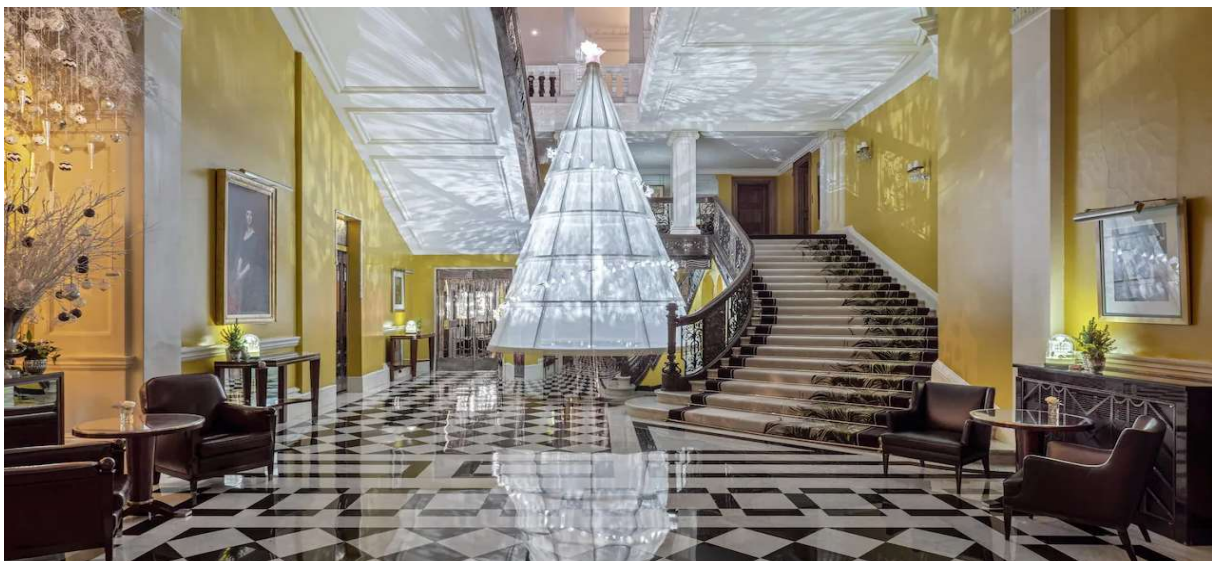


Figure 5: The Claridge's 2021 Christmas tree

Source: Doig (2021)

2.1.1.2. Olfactory Stimuli

The olfactory system is closely linked to the brain's emotional centres and respiratory systems (Shepherd, 2004), as seen in figure 6, making scent one of the most potent senses in sensory marketing (Spangenberg et al., 2005).

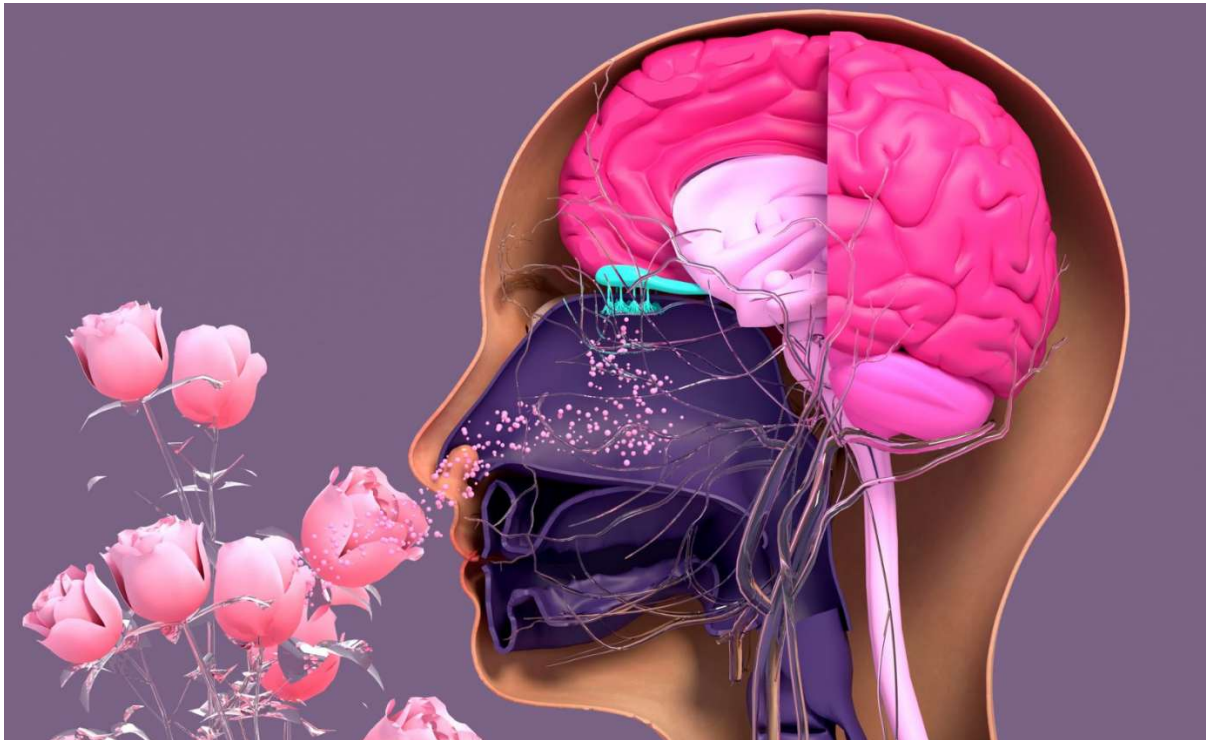


Figure 6: The science of smell

Source: Design Cells (2021)

The use of scent in marketing, or olfactory sensory marketing, began to gain attention in the 1970s with the introduction of aromatherapy (Hulten, 2011). Retailers and marketers started to explore how scents could influence consumer behaviour and enhance the shopping experience. In the 1990s, scent marketing became more sophisticated with the development of scent diffusers and the use of signature scents in retail environments (Lindstrom, 2006). Today, brands take advantage of this marketing strategy by often using signature scents to create a unique identity and strengthen brand associations and return intentions (Morrin, 2010), improve a premises' atmosphere perceptions and sales, and make guests happier and have a more positive emotional state (Chebat & Michon, 2003).

For example, the smell of freshly baked bread in a grocery store has been shown to create a pleasant and inviting atmosphere, which leads to an increase in sales (Heras-Mozos et al., 2019). Similarly, the scent of lavender can evoke feelings of trustworthiness (van Nieuwenburg

et al., 2019). These examples illustrate how powerful scent can be in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours. By carefully selecting and integrating olfactory elements, marketers can create environments that resonate with consumers on an emotional level. This approach is particularly effective in retail and hospitality settings, where the olfactory ambience can significantly influence customer behaviour. For instance, a hotel lobby infused with a calming scent can create a welcoming atmosphere that encourages guests to relax and enjoy their stay, while a retail store with a signature scent can create a memorable shopping experience that encourages repeat visits (Spence, 2021). As seen in figure 7, some Rosewood Hotels offer fragrance butlers, which is a unique take on offering guests an olfactory experience that is hard to find elsewhere, hence differentiating the brand from other hotels (Lynch, 2012).



Figure 7: Fragrance butler

Source: Lynch (2012)

Overall, olfactory sensory marketing is a powerful tool that helps brands create strong olfactory identities, evoke emotions, and influence consumer behaviour. By understanding the psychological impact of scent and leveraging it effectively, marketers can design experiences that not only attract attention but also foster deeper connections with consumers. As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, the importance of olfactory sensory marketing remains paramount, offering brands a unique way to stand out and engage their audience in meaningful ways.

2.1.1.3. Auditory Stimuli

Auditory sensory marketing gained prominence with the advent of radio in the 1920s and 1930s. Radio commercials relied heavily on jingles and catchy tunes to capture listeners' attention and create memorable brand associations (Douglas, 1999). The 1950s and 1960s saw the integration of sound in television advertising, where jingles became an essential component of commercials. Iconic jingles like McDonald's "I'm Lovin' It" (Graakjær, 2019), represented in figure 8, and Coca-Cola's "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke" (Taylor, 2014) are examples of how sound has been used to reinforce brand identity and create emotional connections. In recent years, auditory marketing has expanded to include branded soundscapes and audio logos (Spence, 2022). Companies like Intel have developed distinctive audio signatures that are instantly recognizable (Carter, 2014). The rise of podcasts and streaming services has also provided new opportunities for brands to engage with consumers through auditory content (Yin & Jaime, 2024).

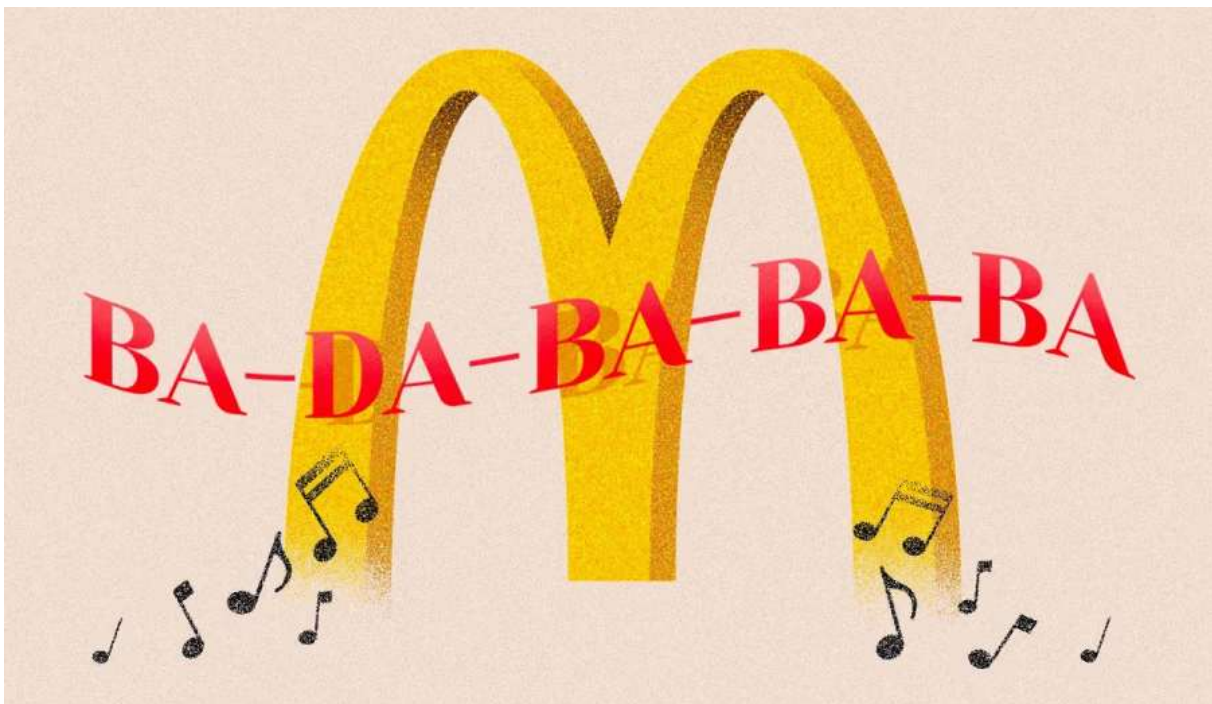


Figure 8: The McDonald's jingle

Source: Meyers (2023)

Sound plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and experiences. For instance, fast-paced music might energise consumers and encourage quick decisions (Sun et al., 2023), while softer music can make consumers feel more relaxed (Staum & Brotons, 2000). Moreover, sound recognition can contribute to brand choice (Anglada-Tort et al., 2022). The

strategic use of sound in marketing can significantly influence consumer behaviour and enhance brand recall (Rodero, 2019). Auditory sensory marketing leverages these principles to create immersive and memorable brand experiences. By carefully selecting and integrating auditory elements, marketers can craft environments that resonate with consumers on an emotional level. This approach is particularly effective in retail and hospitality settings, where the auditory ambience can significantly influence customer behaviour (Yi & Kang, 2019). Figure 9 shows an example of live music being played The Soho Hotel, in London.



Figure 9: Live music at The Soho Hotel

Source: Firmdale Hotels (n.d.)

Overall, auditory sensory marketing is a powerful tool that helps brands create strong auditory identities, evoke emotions, and influence consumer behaviour. By understanding the psychological impact of sound and leveraging it effectively, marketers can design experiences that not only attract attention but also foster deeper connections with consumers. As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, the importance of auditory sensory marketing remains paramount, offering brands a unique way to stand out and engage their audience in meaningful ways.

2.1.1.4. Haptic Stimuli

Haptic marketing, which involves engaging customers through touch, has also evolved significantly. The concept of using touch in marketing can be traced back to the 1970s when retailers began to understand the importance of product texture and packaging (Hulten, 2011). The introduction of haptic feedback technology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries revolutionised this field. For example, video game controllers, as seen in figure 10. and mobile devices started incorporating haptic feedback to enhance user experience (Pushpakumar et al., 2023). In retail, brands began using textured packaging and interactive displays to create a tactile connection with consumers (Peck & Wiggins, 2006). This approach has been particularly effective in industries like fashion (Wilfling et al., 2023) and automotive (Wellings et al., 2008), where the feel of the product is crucial to the purchasing decision.



Figure 10: Haptic vibration on a gaming control

Source: Baird (2020)

The texture (Peck & Wiggins, 2006), weight (Ryu & Park, 2019), and temperature (Pramudya & Seo, 2018) of a product can significantly affect its appeal and perceived quality. Retailers often encourage touch by allowing guests to handle products, which can increase the likelihood of purchase (Tu & Yang, 2019). Touch can also evoke emotional responses; for example, a salesperson's touch can increase consumer trust (Hornik, 1992). Product packaging can influence consumers' expectations towards the product through touch-related stimuli from the surface (Peck & Wiggins, 2006).

Haptic marketing leverages these principles to create compelling and memorable brand experiences. By incorporating tactile elements into product design and marketing strategies, brands can create a direct sensory connection with consumers. This approach is particularly effective in retail settings, where the opportunity to touch and feel a product can lead to

immediate sales. For example, a clothing store that allows customers to feel the fabric of garments can enhance the shopping experience and increase the likelihood of purchase. Similarly, automotive showrooms often encourage potential buyers to sit in and touch the vehicles, creating a tactile connection that can influence purchasing decisions.

It is not uncommon to find “Do Not Touch” signs, but the Please Touch Museum, as seen in figure 11, is an example of how touch, as a sensory stimulus, is valued and encouraged. A study by Hein (1998) discusses the role of museums in promoting "constructivist" learning, where visitors learn best by interacting directly with exhibits, fostering engagement.



Figure 11: Please Touch Museum

Source: Nolan (2022)

Overall, haptic sensory marketing is a powerful tool that helps brands create strong tactile identities, evoke emotions, and influence consumer behaviour. By understanding the psychological impact of touch and leveraging it effectively, marketers can design experiences that not only attract attention but also foster deeper connections with consumers. As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, the importance of haptic sensory marketing remains paramount, offering brands a unique way to stand out and engage their audience in meaningful ways.

2.1.1.5. Gustatory Stimuli

Taste is a critical element in sensory marketing, exerting a profound influence on consumers' emotions and behaviours (Krishna, 2012). Taste can evoke nostalgia and emotional connections, which makes it a powerful tool for brands aiming to create lasting memories. For instance, a familiar childhood flavour can transport a consumer back in time, evoking personal memories and forging a strong emotional bond with the brand (Reid et al., 2022).

Within the hospitality industry, various food and beverage concepts are employed to maximise the impact of gustatory stimuli on guest experience. For example, in the late 20th century companies began capitalizing on taste by offering free samples, allowing customers to experience their products firsthand and creating a direct sensory connection that effectively influenced purchasing decisions (Lindstrom, 2006). This strategy, grounded in the idea that experiencing taste can drive consumer action, laid the foundation for contemporary taste-driven marketing approaches (Sedláčiková et al., 2020). One such approach is “tryvertising”, as seen in Lei et al. (2020), which refers to advertising through direct experience, allowing consumers to try products before buying. The Public hotel in Chicago, for example, provides complimentary snacks in guest rooms, as seen in figure 12, which enhances the sensory experience and creates a warm, welcoming atmosphere and gives them a taste of local foods and beverages which they can repurchase later in the hotel.



Figure 12: Complimentary welcome snacks by The Public Hotel in Chicago

Source: Clawson (2011)

Similarly, hotels are embracing this principle by greeting guests with a thoughtfully crafted welcome drink at check-in. No longer limited to basic water stations, today's welcome drinks are often signature cocktails designed to reflect the hotel's location, staff stories, or local flavours. This small gesture makes a strong first impression, inviting guests to relax and feel at home (Walsh, 2024).

Complimentary breakfast is a value-added concept that appeals to guests looking for convenience and comfort. Many hotels offer breakfast, ranging from English, American, Continental spreads to elaborate buffets with hot and cold options (Adriatik, 2023). Research by Leite-Pereira et al. (2022) shows that breakfast is among the three main attributes that guests consider when choosing a hotel.

Afternoon tea is a classic concept, often inspired by British tradition, where guests enjoy a selection of teas paired with light snacks such as finger sandwiches, pastries, and scones. This experience, usually offered in the hotel lobby or lounge, provides an elegant ambience that encourages socializing and unwinding (Lingle, 2023).

Happy hour, another popular concept, draws guests during quieter times, boosts customer satisfaction, fosters social engagement, and increases sales in hotels' food and beverage outlets. By offering reduced prices on drinks and appetisers at certain hours, hotels can stimulate demand during typically slow periods, creating a vibrant environment for guests. This approach helps attract more visitors, increases spending, and enhances guest loyalty (Kotler et al., 2017).

Taste-focused sensory marketing is an influential tool in hospitality, helping brands establish distinct identities, evoke emotions, and positively influence consumer behaviour. By providing samples and incorporating local flavours, brands offer a direct sensory experience that can significantly impact guests' satisfaction and encourage on-the-spot purchases. Hotels like The Savoy in London, which offers complimentary beverages such as tea, coffee, soft drinks, and beer, enhance the guest experience by making guests feel valued and relaxed (Whitehead, 2023). Similarly, Kimpton Hotels create a unique gustatory experience through a nightly complimentary wine hour, a tradition rooted in the brand's founding values, while Hotel Lucia in Portland, Oregon, celebrates the local craft beer culture with a complimentary beer hour, providing guests with an authentic taste of the city (Teel, 2024).

2.1.2. Guest Satisfaction (O)

In contemporary psychological research, the term "organism" encompasses the internal processes of an individual such as perceptions, emotions, thoughts, and motivations that bridges the relationship between external stimuli and behavioural responses. This perspective is central to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, which posits that an individual's internal state influences how they perceive and react to external stimuli. For instance, a study published in 2021 highlights that the organism's internal processes, including perceptual, physiological, sensory, and cognitive activities, serve as intermediaries between external stimuli and the individual's responses (G. Zhang et al., 2021).

In the context of the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model within this dissertation, guest satisfaction is considered an "organism" because it represents an internal state that bridges the relationship between external stimuli and behavioural responses. This perspective is supported by recent academic research. For instance, a study by Ye et al. (2022), examining guest behavioural intentions in peer-to-peer accommodations, found that the physical and social environments (stimuli) positively impact guest satisfaction (organism), which in turn influences behavioural intentions (response). The study concluded that stimuli cues can induce favourable levels of organism factors, such as guest satisfaction, highlighting the role of guest satisfaction within the S-O-R framework. Similarly, research on fast-food restaurants demonstrated that food quality, service quality, and physical environment quality (stimuli) affect customer satisfaction (organism), which then influences revisit intentions (response). The study emphasised that customer satisfaction is associated with fast food quality, restaurant service quality, physical environment quality, and revisit intention, underscoring the function of satisfaction in the S-O-R model (Rajput & Gahfoor, 2020). These studies illustrate that guest satisfaction functions as an internal process that bridges the effect of external stimuli on behavioural responses, aligning with the organism component of the S-O-R model.

Hotel guests' satisfaction is a critical factor in the success of any hotel (Moreno-Perdigón et al., 2021), as it directly impacts guest loyalty (H. Han et al., 2019), hotel reputation (O'Connor & Assaker, 2022), and can even be more relevant than pricing in long-term profitability (Demydyuk & Carlbäck, 2024). The literature on guest satisfaction focuses on understanding the factors that influence the experiences of hotel guests, the methods for measuring satisfaction, and strategies for improving guest satisfaction in a competitive hospitality atmosphere. Service quality is often cited as the most important determinant of guest satisfaction (Padma & Ahn, 2020). This includes the professionalism, friendliness, and

attentiveness of hotel staff, as well as the ability to respond promptly to guest requests (Lam et al., 2021). The quality and availability of hotel amenities (e.g., pool, gym, restaurant) and in-room facilities significantly affect guest satisfaction (Hon & Fung, 2019). Guests place high value on facilities that enhance their stay experience, from necessities to luxurious extras. Research consistently highlights cleanliness as one of the top priorities for guests (Giovanni et al., 2022). Cleanliness affects both the physical comfort of the stay and the perceived safety and hygiene, especially in the context of post-pandemic hospitality (Yang et al., 2024). Studies have shown that guests respond favourably to atmosphere elements such as social, design, and ambient factors, which act simultaneously as cues to influence satisfaction (H. Han et al., 2019).

Recent academic research underscores the significant role of sensory marketing in enhancing guest satisfaction within the hospitality industry. Research by Fong et al. (2022) critically examines the theoretical foundations and empirical evidence related to sensory marketing. The authors highlight that engaging multiple senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch can create an immersive environment, elevating the overall guest experience. They emphasise that sensory marketing strategies can significantly enhance customer satisfaction by creating memorable and engaging experiences. Additionally, Spence (2022) discusses the concept of *sensehacking* in hotel environments. The author explores how effectively stimulating guests' senses can positively influence their perceptions and satisfaction. They note that recognizing the importance of effectively stimulating the guest's senses is crucial for enhancing the multisensory hotel experience.

Visual stimuli, including thoughtful design, festive and seasonal decorations, colour schemes, and lighting, play a crucial role in creating a welcoming atmosphere that enhances the guest experience. A study by Spence (2022) emphasises the impact of these elements on guest perceptions and satisfaction. A study by Lee et al. (2019) demonstrated that multisensory experiences, including visual stimuli, enhance hotel guest satisfaction. Their analysis of online customer reviews revealed that positive visual elements in a hotel's environment contribute to favourable affective evaluations and increased satisfaction. Further, Fong et al. (2022) critically reviewed sensory marketing in hospitality, highlighting the importance of visual cues in operations such as hotels and restaurants. They emphasised that visual elements are crucial in creating appealing environments that enhance customer experiences and satisfaction. These studies underscore the importance of carefully curated visual elements in hospitality settings to create engaging and satisfying guest experiences.

Recent academic research underscores the significant impact of ambient scents on guest emotions and satisfaction in hotel environments. A 2024 meta-analysis compared the effects of pleasant ambient scents on consumers' affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses in the retail and hospitality sectors. The study found that while pleasant scents positively influenced all responses in both sectors, the effects on cognitive and behavioural responses were stronger in hospitality settings. This suggests that ambient scents can enhance the guest experience by positively influencing emotions and behaviours (Fong et al., 2024). In addition to guest rooms, pleasant scents in common areas, such as lobbies and hallways, contribute to creating a positive first impression and elevating the overall ambience. Signature scents, when strategically used, can further establish a unique and memorable identity for the hotel, enhancing brand recognition and guest loyalty (Fong et al., 2022). Moreover, a study by Lee et al. (2019b) explored the role of sensory marketing on hotel guest experiences, highlighting that multisensory experiences, including scent, significantly affect customer satisfaction. These findings collectively indicate that the strategic use of ambient scents in hotel environments can substantially enhance guest satisfaction and contribute to a memorable and positive experience.

The selection of music that aligns with the hotel's brand and caters to guest preferences is crucial in achieving this effect (Yi & Kang, 2019). A study by Wu and Tabari (2024) examined the impact of background music in hotel lobbies on customer satisfaction. Their findings indicate that appropriate background music positively influences customer satisfaction, and the duration guests are willing to spend in the lobby. Kemp et al. (2019) explored the psychological influence of music in service environments, including hotels. Their research demonstrated that the presence of music can improve guests' moods, leading to more favourable evaluations of service and product quality. They also found that music helps in attracting new customer segments and enhances the overall customer experience. Agapito and Sigala (2024) provided a critical reflection on experience management in hospitality and tourism. They discussed the importance of sensory elements, such as music, in creating memorable guest experiences. Their study emphasised that a well-designed auditory environment contributes to positive emotional responses and overall satisfaction. These studies underscore the importance of carefully selecting background music that aligns with the hotel's brand identity and resonates with guest preferences to enhance the overall guest experience.

Incorporating tactile elements into hotel environments significantly enhances guest experiences and satisfaction. Academic research underscores the importance of touch and feel in shaping perceptions and behaviours within hospitality settings. A study by Lee et al.

(2019) investigated the role of multisensory experiences in hotels, emphasizing that tactile stimuli, such as the texture of furnishings and materials, positively influence guest satisfaction. Their analysis of online customer reviews revealed that guests often associate tactile comfort with overall service quality, leading to higher satisfaction levels. Further, Fong et al. (2022) conducted a critical synthesis on sensory marketing in hospitality, highlighting the significance of haptic elements. They noted that tactile interactions, such as the feel of linens and furniture, contribute to a hotel's sensory appeal, thereby enhancing the guest experience. Additionally, Saribaş and Demir (2024) explored sensory experiences in the hospitality industry, focusing on their influence on satisfaction and decision-making. Their findings indicate that tactile elements, including the texture and comfort of hotel amenities, play a crucial role in shaping guests' perceptions and their intentions to revisit. These studies collectively affirm that tactile sensory marketing strategies are vital in creating positive and memorable guest experiences in the hospitality sector.

Taste stimuli play a pivotal role in enhancing guest satisfaction within the hospitality industry. Academic research over the years has extensively explored this relationship, highlighting the significance of culinary experiences in shaping overall guest perceptions. A study by (Rodrigues et al., 2020) emphasised that in hotel spas in Portugal, factors such as food positively influence guest satisfaction. The research underscores the integral role of food in the holistic wellness products offered by these establishments, indicating that culinary offerings are central to the guest experience. In their study, Lee et al. (2019) investigated the effect of customers' multisensory service experiences on satisfaction, utilizing big data and business intelligence techniques. Their findings revealed that taste, as a component of the multisensory experience, significantly impacts customer satisfaction, highlighting the importance of culinary elements in service settings. Pizam et al. (2016) reviewed customer satisfaction and its measurement in hospitality enterprises, discussing the importance of various factors, including food quality, in determining guest satisfaction. Their analysis highlighted that culinary offerings are a critical component of the overall service experience, directly impacting guest perceptions and satisfaction levels. Collectively, these studies affirm that taste stimuli are integral to guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry, with culinary experiences significantly influencing overall perceptions and behaviours.

2.1.3. Post-stay Intentions (R)

In the context of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, this research identifies positive online reviews and guests' return intentions as two pivotal "responses" that reflect critical behavioural outcomes in the hospitality industry.

2.1.3.1. Guest Positive Review Intentions

Consumer decision-making is heavily influenced by peer feedback, with studies showing that travellers are more likely to book accommodations with positive reviews (Xia et al., 2022), while negative reviews strongly impact hotel booking intentions (El-Said, 2020). These reviews also reduce perceived risks and uncertainties, ensuring potential customers feel confident in their booking decisions (Yadav et al., 2023). Chakraborty (2019) emphasises that positive reviews significantly enhance a hotel's trustworthiness, particularly among first-time guests. According to Morrin (2010), guest feedback highlights a hotel's strengths, such as exceptional service, unique amenities, or distinctive sensory experiences. Martin-Fuentes et al. (2020) highlight that the volume and valence of reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor and OTAs directly affect a hotel's ranking, visibility, and booking rates. Spence (2022) illustrates how satisfying sensory experiences such as soothing music, calming scents, or elegant decor enhance positive emotions that encourage guests to both return and recommend the property to others.

2.1.3.2. Guest Return Intentions

Worsfold et al. (2016) highlight that guest satisfaction with a hotel's environment significantly impacts their likelihood of returning. As noted by Xu (2019), high levels of guest satisfaction signal that the hotel has exceeded expectations, reinforcing guests' desire to repeat their experience. Research by Saribaş and Demir (2024) demonstrates that sensory elements such as colours, sounds, scents, and tactile experiences significantly enhance tourists' satisfaction and their intention to revisit. Lee et al. (2019) emphasise the critical role of sensory marketing in crafting guest experiences, showing that multisensory engagement leads to higher satisfaction and increased return intentions. Acquiring new guests can be up to five times more expensive than retaining loyal guests (Gustafsson et al., 2005), and repeat visitors often generate higher revenue (Harris & Goode, 2004). Choi and Kandampully (2019) highlight that loyal guests frequently act as brand advocates, recommending the property to others and amplifying its reputation. Return intentions, therefore, are not just a measure of guest loyalty but also a driver of long-term profitability.

2.2. Contextual Background: The Island of Madeira

Often referred to as the "Pearl of the Atlantic" (Aurindo & Machado, 2020; Bryans, 1959; Marcin, 2014), Madeira Island, the largest and most renowned island in the Madeira Archipelago, stands as an awe-inspiring autonomous region of Portugal situated in the North Atlantic Ocean (Valls et al., 2019). Positioned approximately 800 kilometres southwest of mainland Portugal and around 400 kilometres north of the Canary Islands (Kiesow & Dierssen, 2017), the island attracts visitors with its mild climate, biodiversity, and vibrant traditions (Valls et al., 2019). The Madeira Archipelago includes two inhabited islands Madeira and Porto Santo alongside two groups of uninhabited islands, the Desertas and the Selvagens (Souto et al., 2023). This archipelago, formed by volcanic activity over five million years ago, offers a rugged landscape defined by steep mountains, deep valleys, and lush ecosystems that highlight its geological history (Geldmacher et al., 2000; Omira et al., 2022; Schwarz et al., 2005). Among Madeira's most remarkable natural treasures is the Laurisilva Forest (Figure 13), a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. This ancient laurel forest, spanning approximately 15,000 hectares, represents a living relic of the vegetation that once flourished across parts of southern Europe. Home to many endemic species of flora and fauna, the Laurisilva serves as a sanctuary for biodiversity and a testament to Madeira's dedication to environmental preservation (Castro et al., 2016; Crespo et al., 2014; Llorent-Martínez et al., 2017).



Figure 13: Laurisilva forest

Source: UNESCO (n.d.)

The recorded history of Madeira commenced in 1419, marked by the arrival of Portuguese explorers João Gonçalves Zarco and Tristão Vaz Teixeira, who officially documented the island's existence (Brehm et al., 2003). Recognizing Madeira's strategic location in the Atlantic, Portugal initiated its colonization efforts under the directive of King John I, aiming to establish a foothold that could support maritime routes and Atlantic exploration (Brehm et al., 2003; McCleery, 2015). Around 1425, settlers primarily from the Algarve and northern Portugal began to arrive, transforming the once-wild terrain into a productive settlement (Kiesow & Dierssen, 2017). These early colonisers established a successful agricultural society, leveraging Madeira's fertile soil and favourable climate to cultivate various crops. To address the island's uneven distribution of rainfall, they developed an ingenious system of irrigation channels, known as "levadas", as seen in figure 14. These channels were designed to transport water from the humid northern slopes, where rainfall was more abundant, to the drier southern regions, thereby enabling consistent and sustainable crop production. This irrigation system not only supported agriculture but also became a lasting symbol of Madeira's resourcefulness and adaptability, remaining a vital part of the island's infrastructure to this day (Fernandes, 2016, 2025). Levadas offer hikers an unparalleled opportunity to explore Madeira's lush interior, guiding them through dense forests, alongside steep mountainsides, and past cascading waterfalls, all while providing breathtaking views of the island's dramatic valleys and rugged coastal cliffs (Mota et al., 2021; Nelson, 2015; Oliveira & Pereira, 2008).



Figure 14: Levada

Source: Adam Turner (2024)

In the early years of Madeira's settlement, sugarcane cultivation quickly established itself as the island's principal economic activity, dominating the economy throughout the 15th and

16th centuries (P. Silva et al., 2021). Madeira's favourable climate and fertile volcanic soil created ideal conditions for sugarcane, leading to a booming sugar industry that transformed the island into a significant Atlantic trading hub (Greenfield, 1977; F. R. da Silva et al., 2010).

By the 17th and 18th centuries, as the global sugarcane markets declined, Madeira's agricultural landscape shifted its focus to wine production, ushering in a new era of economic prosperity. The creation of fortified Madeira wine became the island's hallmark, revitalizing its economy and earning widespread acclaim across international markets (Hancock, 2005; Otto, 1994). Known for its distinctive ageing process, which involves exposure to heat that enhances its flavour profile, Madeira wine became a prized export, particularly beloved in British and American markets. Its popularity reached a historical peak when it was famously chosen to toast the United States' Declaration of Independence in 1776, as seen in figure 15, marking its symbolic presence in international events and trade (Perestrelo et al., 2020). The flourishing wine industry not only bolstered Madeira's economic stability but also helped establish the island as a cultural icon in the realm of wine production (Câmara et al., 2023; Sampaio, 2012; V. Santos et al., 2020). The unique methods used in creating Madeira wine, from the ageing process to the careful selection of grape varieties, became a tradition celebrated both locally and globally (Perestrelo et al., 2023; Sampaio, 2012). Today, Madeira's wine production remains a crucial component of its cultural identity, with the island's viticultural practices continuing to draw oenophiles and tourists who are eager to experience the legacy of a centuries-old tradition that has withstood the test of time (Câmara et al., 2023; Sampaio, 2012; V. Santos et al., 2020).

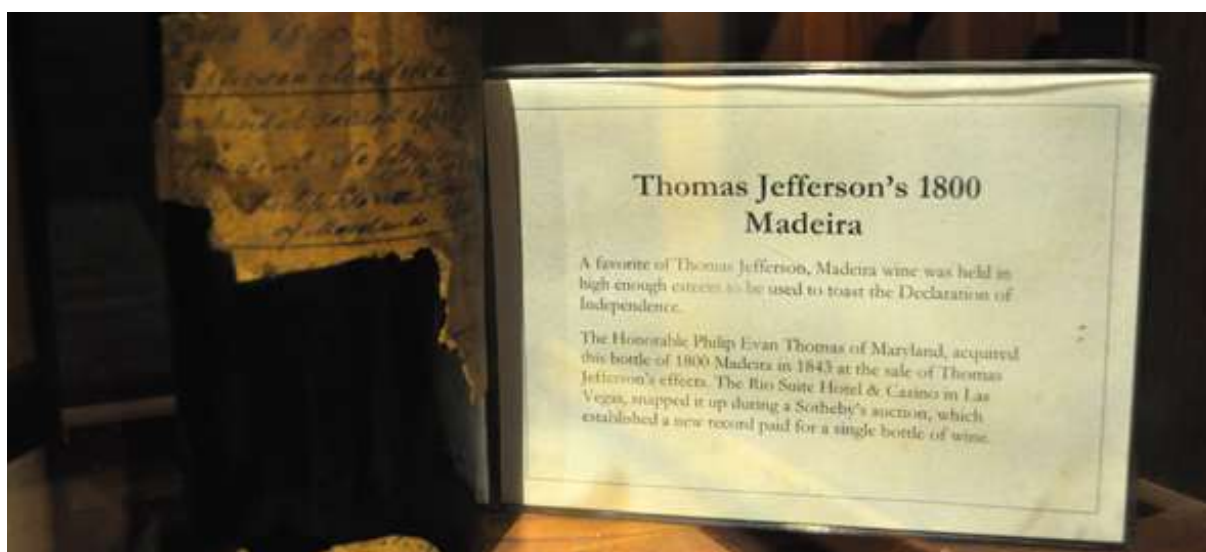


Figure 15: Thomas Jefferson's 1800 Madeira wine

Source: Nyiri (2015)

Madeira's cuisine is an authentic expression of its cultural richness, seamlessly blending Portuguese, African, and Caribbean influences to shape its distinctive culinary identity. Traditional dishes not only offer a taste of the island's unique flavours but also serve as a reflection of its vibrant heritage (González et al., 2024; Valls et al., 2019). Espetada, marinated beef skewers grilled over an open flame, exemplifies the essence of Madeiran cooking with its straightforward yet flavourful preparation. Bolo do caco, a beloved flatbread infused with garlic butter, adds a comforting and aromatic touch, often enjoyed as a staple of communal meals. The island's heritage is a harmonious blend of African, European, and Portuguese traditions, shaped by its historical ties to diverse regions. Nowhere is this fusion more evident than in Madeira's traditional folk music, where African rhythms intertwine with European melodies to create a distinctive sound that has been cherished for generations. Instruments like the cavaquinho are at the heart of this tradition, providing lively, evocative tunes that accompany the iconic bailinho (Figure 16) (Dionísio & Nisi, 2021; Fernandes, 2025; González et al., 2024; Lauw et al., 2022; Leuckert et al., 2023; Nolasco, 2024). This spirited dance, with its rhythmic steps and vibrant energy, is a living expression of Madeiran culture, celebrated during festivals and community gatherings. Through its cuisine, music, and dance, Madeira tells a story of connection and creativity, offering a window into the island's soul.



Figure 16: Bailinho

Source: Visit Madeira (n.d.-b)

Funchal (Figure 17), the capital city of Madeira, effortlessly combines historical charm with modern conveniences, offering visitors a diverse range of experiences that highlight the island's natural beauty and cultural vibrancy (Fernandes, 2025; Freitas & Biscoito, 2019; Machado, 2010; Valls et al., 2019). The city's well-maintained botanical gardens showcase Madeira's rich floral diversity in tranquil, curated settings, while the iconic Mercado dos Lavradores provides an authentic glimpse into local life (Brackenbury, 2024; Camacho et al., 2024; Faraji & Karimi, 2020; Primack et al., 2021). This bustling market is a sensory delight, filled with vibrant displays of fresh produce, exotic fruits, and traditional handicrafts, making it a must-visit for those eager to immerse themselves in Madeira's heritage. Together, these attractions reflect Funchal's unique blend of nature and culture, creating a captivating experience for travellers. Supporting Funchal's role as the gateway to Madeira is the island's robust transportation infrastructure, which ensures seamless connectivity for visitors and residents alike (Baumann, 2021; A. J. Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007; J. Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2008; Liu & Huang, 2025). The Cristiano Ronaldo International Airport (FNC/LPMA) in Funchal links the island to major European cities, providing a convenient entry point for international travellers (A. J. Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007). Once on the island, an extensive network of roads and tunnels facilitates efficient travel, allowing easy exploration of Madeira's scenic landscapes, from its coastal towns to mountain villages. This infrastructure enhances the visitor experience, reducing travel times and making even remote attractions accessible, while also supporting Funchal's position as the heart of Madeira's tourism and commerce. Together, the city's rich offerings and its well-developed infrastructure ensure that visitors can fully experience the island's unique charm and diversity.



Figure 17: Funchal, the capital city of Madeira

Source: Visit Madeira (n.d.-a)

During the Christmas season, Madeira (Figure 18) transforms into a magical wonderland, captivating both locals and visitors with its festive charm. Streets and public spaces across the island are illuminated with lights and adorned with intricate decorations (Figure 19), creating a warm and inviting atmosphere that embodies the holiday spirit (Prideaux & Glover, 2015). In Funchal, the capital, the festive energy reaches its peak, with a calendar full of holiday events and activities. From live music performances to traditional Christmas markets, there is something for everyone to enjoy. One of the season's most anticipated events is Noite do Mercado (Market Night) on December 23rd, where residents and tourists gather at Mercado dos Lavradores to revel in local foods, lively music, and vibrant cultural festivities, making it a highlight of the celebrations. Amid the public festivities, Madeira's Christmas traditions remain deeply rooted in its cultural and religious heritage. Customs such as the Missas do Parto, a series of early-morning services leading up to Christmas, and the Missa do Galo (Midnight Mass) on Christmas Eve bring communities together in reflection and celebration, showcasing the island's faith and communal spirit. These traditions add a heartfelt dimension to the season, blending joy with cultural expression (E. Santos, Tavares, et al., 2023). The festive season culminates with Madeira's renowned New Year's Eve fireworks display. This breathtaking spectacle, once recognised by Guinness World Records, attracts thousands of visitors each year (Ocean Retreat, 2024). Together, these Christmas and New Year's traditions celebrate the island's unique blend of joyous festivity and cultural heritage, offering visitors an enchanting and memorable holiday experience.



Figure 18: Christmas in Funchal

Source: Madeira Best (n.d.-c)

Hotels in Madeira are key players in capturing the island's festive spirit and amplifying its sensory appeal during the holiday season (Brown et al., 2017; Teixeira et al., 2019). Luxury establishments go beyond traditional decorations by creating immersive experiences that stimulate the senses. Through carefully curated visual, auditory, and olfactory elements, these hotels transform into holiday retreats that evoke warmth and nostalgia. The ambience is enriched with Christmas carols echoing through lobbies, sparkling festive lights adorning common spaces, and the comforting aroma of freshly baked sweet potato bread, all of which enhance the holiday atmosphere and make guests feel at home. These hotels also offer unique seasonal activities designed to engage guests and create lasting memories. For instance, Belmond Reid's Palace hosts cookie-making classes, inviting visitors of all ages to participate in a hands-on, festive experience that allows them to craft holiday treats while soaking up the island's hospitality (Belmond Reid's Palace, n.d.). These sensory-rich experiences are part of Madeira's larger tradition of providing an unforgettable holiday atmosphere, underscoring the role of the island's hospitality sector in making Christmas and New Year's celebrations on Madeira truly special. This makes Madeira Island, during the Christmas season, the ideal context for this dissertation study.



Figure 19: Christmas street decoration

Source: Events Madeira (n.d.)

Chapter III: Conceptual Model and Research Hypotheses

3.1. Conceptual Model

Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), this research proposes that sensory marketing (stimuli) targeting the five senses: visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory directly impacts guests' satisfaction (organism). This elevated satisfaction, in turn, influences guests' post-stay intentions, such as their likelihood of returning to the hotel or leaving positive reviews. Figure 20 illustrates this conceptual model, capturing the relationships between these variables. Visual stimuli (e.g., colours, lighting, design), olfactory stimuli (e.g., pleasant scents), auditory stimuli (e.g., music), haptic stimuli (e.g., textures, temperature), and gustatory stimuli (e.g., food and beverages) collectively shape guest satisfaction. Satisfied guests are more inclined to leave positive reviews (positive review intentions) and exhibit loyalty through plans to revisit (return intentions). This model emphasises the critical role of sensory marketing in creating impactful guest experiences, fostering satisfaction, and driving long-term business growth in the hospitality industry.

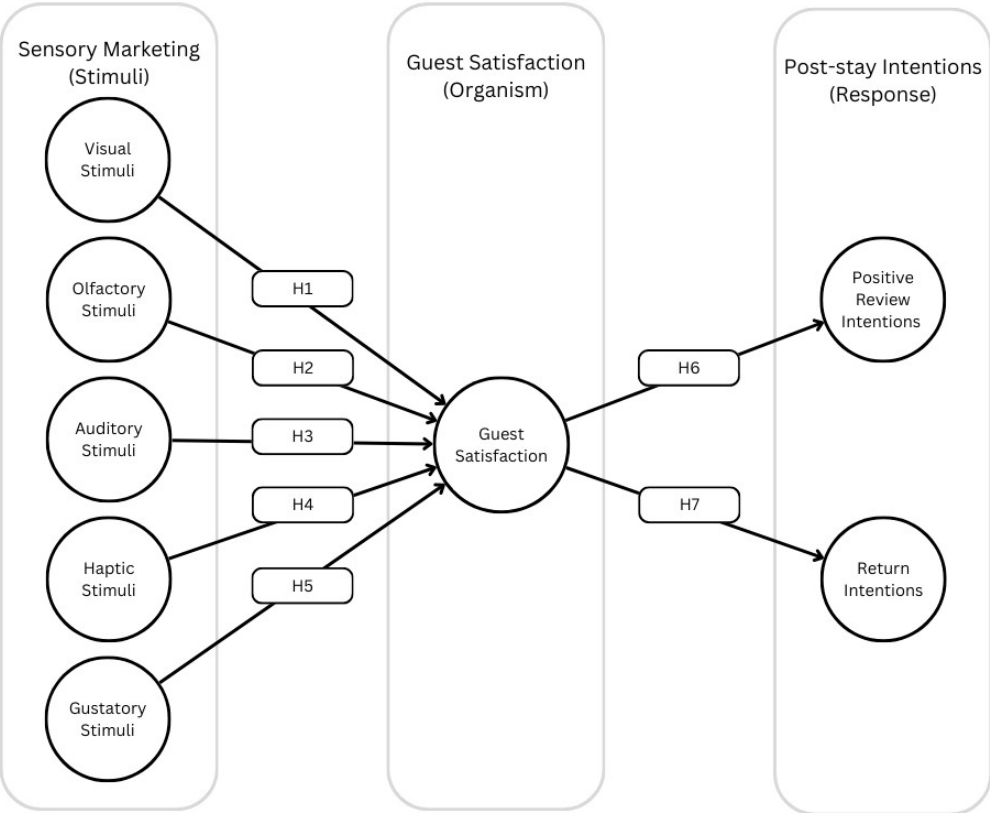


Figure 20: Conceptual model and research hypotheses

Source: Own Authorship

3.2. Research Hypotheses

Visual elements are pivotal in shaping consumer perceptions and emotional responses within hospitality environments. As one of the most prominent senses in marketing, visual stimuli such as colour schemes, architecture, decor, and lighting contribute significantly to the guest experience (Pieters & Wedel, 2004). Research highlights that thoughtful design, and visually appealing environments enhance guest satisfaction by creating welcoming and memorable atmospheres (Worsfold et al., 2016). For example, festive decorations, such as Claridge's iconic Christmas designs, demonstrate how visual stimuli create emotional connections with guests and contribute to positive evaluations of a hotel's ambience (Doig, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: visual stimuli have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (H1).

Olfactory stimuli are among the most powerful sensory inputs due to their direct connection to the brain's limbic system, which governs emotions and memory (Shepherd, 2004). In hospitality, ambient scents and signature fragrances create unique identities, enhance guest experiences, and evoke positive emotional responses (Morrin, 2010). For instance, lavender scents are associated with feelings of trust, while the aroma of freshly baked goods fosters comfort and warmth (van Nieuwenburg et al., 2019). Pleasant scents in hotel lobbies and guest rooms enhance satisfaction by creating an inviting atmosphere and leaving a lasting impression (Fong et al., 2024). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: olfactory stimuli have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (H2).

Auditory stimuli, such as background music and ambient sounds, significantly affect guests' perceptions, emotions, and satisfaction levels within hospitality settings (Yi & Kang, 2019). Music tailored to a hotel's brand identity or guest preferences enhances the overall atmosphere and impacts how guests evaluate their experiences (E. A. Kemp et al., 2019). For example, soft, calming music can relax guests, while lively, fast-paced tunes can energise them (Sun et al., 2023). Studies demonstrate that well-selected auditory stimuli not only create a more engaging environment but also encourage guests to spend more time in hotel spaces, enhancing satisfaction and repeat visitation (Wu & Tabari, 2024). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: auditory stimuli have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (H3).

Haptic stimuli, or the sense of touch and feel, are integral to guest satisfaction in hospitality. Elements such as the texture of furnishings, the softness of bedding, and the overall tactile comfort of a space significantly influence guests' perceptions of quality (Peck & Wiggins, 2006). Research shows that tactile experiences enhance guests' emotional responses, contributing to higher satisfaction levels (Ryu & Park, 2019). For instance, luxurious linens and thoughtfully textured decor in hotel rooms create a sense of comfort and care, leaving a positive impression

on guests (Saribaş & Demir, 2024). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: haptic stimuli have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (H4).

Taste is a key sensory stimulus that significantly impacts guest satisfaction in hospitality, particularly in dining experiences. Research shows that the quality of food and beverages enhances guests' emotional connections to a hotel (Krishna, 2012). For example, welcome drinks, complimentary snacks, or regionally inspired meals create a memorable and personal experience, fostering satisfaction and loyalty (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022; Sedliačiková et al., 2020). Studies have highlighted how gustatory stimuli evoke nostalgia and positive emotions, further enhancing the guest experience (Pizam et al., 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: gustatory stimuli have a positive impact on guest satisfaction (H5).

Satisfied guests are more likely to leave positive online reviews, which serve as critical indicators of a hotel's quality and reputation (Xia et al., 2022). Positive reviews highlight the strengths of a hotel, such as exceptional service, distinctive sensory experiences, or unique amenities, influencing future booking decisions (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2020). Additionally, sensory stimuli such as soothing music or elegant decor contribute to positive emotional states, encouraging guests to share favourable feedback online (Spence, 2022). Reviews not only enhance the hotel's visibility on platforms like TripAdvisor but also build trust among potential customers (Chakraborty, 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: guest satisfaction has a positive impact on positive review intentions (H6).

Guest satisfaction is a primary driver of return intentions in hospitality, signalling that a hotel has met or exceeded expectations (Worsfold et al., 2016). Sensory marketing strategies, such as engaging decor or signature scents, significantly enhance satisfaction, encouraging repeat visits (Saribaş & Demir, 2024). Research demonstrates that loyal guests not only return more often but also generate higher revenue and serve as brand advocates (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Gustafsson et al., 2005). High levels of satisfaction establish emotional connections with guests, fostering loyalty and long-term profitability for hotels (Harris & Goode, 2004). Thus, the following hypothesis is posited: guest satisfaction has a positive impact on return intentions (H7).

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Chapter IV: Methodology

4.1. A Theory-Driven Narrative Literature Review

This dissertation employs a theory-driven, thematic narrative literature review to build the conceptual platform for the proposed S-O-R pathway that links sensory stimuli to guest satisfaction, and this satisfaction to post-stay intentions. A narrative/thematic literature review is appropriate when the objective is to integrate disparate literatures, clarify focal constructs, and develop testable relationships (Sukhera, 2022). Such reviews are recognised as legitimate and rigorous in management and hospitality research when conducted transparently and with methodological fit (Greenhalgh et al., 2018).

Literature identification followed purposive, theory-led searches in multidisciplinary indexing services and discipline publishers central to hospitality, marketing, and other relevant areas of study. Core databases included Scopus and Web of Science; targeted searches were then run on Emerald Insight, Sage Journals, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and others. Search strings combined domain and mechanism terms such as “stimulus-organism-response”, “sensory marketing”, “guest satisfaction”, “return intentions”, and “online reviews”, to name a few. The temporal window prioritised recent articles, with deliberate emphasis on 2019 onward. Some seminal antecedents, as for example, the original S-O-R paradigm, were retained only when historically indispensable to construct definition. Backward and forward snowballing was used to surface high-salience studies and to check the completeness of coverage across the five sensory modalities, guest satisfaction, and the two focal outcomes. This overall approach is consistent with best-practice advice for rigorous narrative and conceptual reviews in hospitality and management (Aguinis et al., 2023; Hulland, 2020; Snyder, 2019).

Title screening established topical relevance to at least one link in the theorised chain from sensory stimuli to satisfaction and then to post-stay intentions within hospitality, or closely related contexts. Full-text screening then assessed conceptual fit with the S-O-R framework and the specific contribution each article could make to clarifying constructs, mechanisms, boundary conditions, or measurement approaches. Because this is not a systematic review, neither a PRISMA flow diagram nor a formal risk-of-bias tool is presented, however, to enhance trustworthiness, preference was given to peer-reviewed journal articles in reputable outlets, and to recent high-quality articles. This stance follows contemporary guidance that non-systematic reviews can be rigorous when their purpose, logic, and selection criteria are made explicit and when reporting is transparent in spirit to PRISMA principles (Booth et al., 2022; Kuckertz & Block, 2021; Page et al., 2021).

For each included study, the review captured aims, context, constructs and their operationalisation, methods, and principal findings. Evidence was then coded to themes corresponding to the S-O-R architecture: stimuli disaggregated by sense (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, gustatory), organismic states with guest satisfaction, and responses operationalised as positive review intentions, and return intentions. The synthesis privileges explanatory coherence, linking sensory cues to satisfaction and onward to post-stay behavioural intentions, over exhaustive coverage, which is consistent with the aims of theory-building narrative reviews (Paul & Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019; Wright & Michailova, 2023).

The review also engaged, in a limited and transparent way, with computational aids for search and screening. Specifically, academically reputable databases were used to identify and cross-check relevant sources. Zotero was used for bibliography and citation management. This technological stance reflects emerging practice that leverages efficiency without displacing judgement and is aligned with methodological discussions on computational support for literature reviews (Antons et al., 2023; Booth et al., 2016; Wolfswinkel et al., 2013).

4.2. A Quantitative, Questionnaire-Based Approach

Grounded in the S-O-R framework, this dissertation employs a quantitative design, using a questionnaire specifically developed to capture the relevant constructs. The choice of a questionnaire-based design reflects its efficiency for collecting standardised data and its suitability for modelling latent constructs and their interrelations (El-Den et al., 2020; Rosellini & Brown, 2021). To support theory testing with latent variables and to accommodate prediction-oriented aims and distributional uncertainty, the structural models were estimated with partial least squares structural equation modelling (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Ethical approval was obtained from the host institution in advance of data collection, informed consent was recorded on the opening page of the questionnaire, and no directly identifiable personal data were collected (Hammer, 2017; Wu et al., 2019).

The target population for this voluntary questionnaire comprised adult visitors to Madeira Island during the festive season who had stayed in a hotel. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old and to have completed a hotel stay. A non-probability convenience sampling approach, combining intercept surveys with online distribution, was employed to maximise reach among both international and domestic visitors while ensuring standardised questionnaire administration. Convenience sampling is widely used in hospitality and tourism research because it enables efficient access to diverse participants in naturalistic settings where probability sampling is often impractical (Koç & Boz, 2020; Luo et al., 2019; Pham & Khanh, 2020). Intercept surveys allow researchers to approach respondents at the

point of consumption, increasing contextual validity, while online distribution extends reach to broader segments and supports participation from international travellers (Hung & Law, 2011; M. S. Lin et al., 2021; Litvin & Kar, 2001). This combined strategy balances feasibility and breadth of coverage, providing a pragmatic means of generating sufficient sample size for structural equation modelling analyses. The self-administered questionnaire was made available for approximately one month, beginning on 16 December 2024. The flyer (Appendix A) was designed by the researcher and prepared in four languages to ensure accessibility to a broad international audience. English and Portuguese versions were prepared directly by the researcher, who is bilingual in both languages, while the German version was produced by the researcher drawing on his undergraduate degree in Languages and Business Studies (B2 proficiency). The French version was translated with external assistance to ensure linguistic accuracy. This multilingual approach reflects best practice in tourism research, where language inclusivity is critical for reducing participation barriers and capturing diverse visitor perspectives (Heller et al., 2014; M. S. Lin et al., 2021). In addition, hotels across Madeira were contacted and invited to disseminate the questionnaire (Appendix B) among their guests, however, only a handful agreed to participate, namely Hotel Imperatriz, Hotel Solar Boaventura, Hotel Riu Palace Madeira, and the Aqua Natura Hotels in Porto Moniz. The self-administered format was deemed appropriate as it allowed respondents to complete the survey at their own pace and convenience, thereby reducing interviewer bias and facilitating greater candour in responses (Priporas et al., 2017; Saunders & Kulchitsky, 2021; Stover & Stone, 1974). Moreover, online delivery platforms such as Microsoft Forms enhance accessibility and efficiency in data collection, particularly among international travellers who are accustomed to digital interactions (Cuomo et al., 2021; Kalvet et al., 2020). The use of QR codes in situ further enabled direct engagement with visitors in naturalistic settings, a practice shown to increase participation rates in tourism and hospitality research by capturing respondents at the point of experience (Rozali et al., 2024; Vuksanović et al., 2020).

The questionnaire comprised eight sequential sections that moved from consent and demographic profiling to the S-O-R constructs (Appendices C through W).

Section 1 presented a brief study introduction, the data-use policy, and captured informed consent. Respondents who selected “No” were thanked and the survey terminated. This procedure followed standard ethical research practices, ensuring voluntary participation and compliance with data protection requirements (Bell, 2020; Frechtling, 2018).

Section 2 recorded sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, education, employment, marital status, and household income, which helps identify and characterise different types of consumers (Tasci et al., 2021).

Section 3 captured destination insights, asking how participants first heard about Madeira Island, whether it was their first visit, whether Madeira had been their preferred choice, what their main trip purpose was, and whether they already knew about the island's Christmas festivities. These questions were designed to contextualise visitor profiles and travel motivations, which are critical for understanding tourist decision-making processes (Domènech et al., 2023; Mihai et al., 2023).

Section 4 focused on hotel-level insights, covering first awareness of the specific hotel, whether the stay was a first or repeat visit, the hotel's location in Madeira and star category, the reasons for choosing that property, nights booked, the party for whom the room was booked, the booking channel used, and whether Black Friday or other Christmas-related deals were used. Collecting this information provided contextual depth on travellers' accommodation choices and purchasing behaviour, factors that play a central role in understanding hotel consumer decision-making in hospitality research (Masiero et al., 2020; Mody et al., 2022; Pabara et al., 2024; Putra et al., 2020; Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017).

Section 5 recorded guest preferences, namely preferred payment method, preferred online-review platform, and preferred communication channel with hotels. These variables are increasingly relevant in hospitality research, as payment choices reflect technological adoption, review platforms shape destination image, and communication channels influence service quality (Román & Martín, 2016; Tran et al., 2025; Xiang et al., 2017).

Sections 6 through 8 operationalised the constructs of the proposed S-O-R framework. Section 6 measured the five sensory stimuli (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory) using three reflective items per sense, rated on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Strongly disagree", and 7 = "Strongly agree". Section 7 captured the 'organism' state through three guest-satisfaction items. Section 8 measured the two response variables with three items on return intentions and three items on positive review intentions. The use of multi-item reflective measures is consistent with established practice in hospitality research, as it enhances construct reliability and validity by capturing latent perceptions through multiple indicators (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

The questionnaire remained open until 21 January 2025, after which the results were collated and subjected to data management and preparation using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics (version 30. build 172). Excel was employed to consolidate raw files and harmonise variable labels and coding, ensuring consistency across the dataset. SPSS was subsequently used to conduct descriptive diagnostics and preliminary reliability checks, thereby confirming that the dataset entering the structural model was both clean and analysis-

ready. Structural models were then estimated in SmartPLS 4, which was appropriate given the study's predictive orientation, its medium sample size, and the model's reflective constructs, conditions under which PLS-SEM is widely recommended (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Cheung et al., 2023; Elliott et al., 2006; Hair et al., 2019; Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

Measurement model evaluation preceded any interpretation of structural relationships and followed current PLS-SEM conventions for constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Indicator reliability was assessed through the examination of outer loadings, with a threshold value of 0.70 or higher considered preferable, as such loadings indicate that the construct explains at least 50% of the variance in the indicator (Sumarno, 2024; Uddin, 2021). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha, with threshold values of 0.70 or higher regarded as acceptable (Taber, 2017). Convergent validity was evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE), with values of 0.50 or higher indicating adequacy. This criterion suggests that, on average, a construct explains at least half of the variance in its indicators, thereby providing evidence that the items converge to measure the same underlying concept (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), applying the benchmarks of 0.85 for conceptually distinct constructs and 0.90 for more conceptually similar constructs. Confidence intervals were also examined to ensure that HTMT values did not include 1.00, which would indicate a lack of discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

Once satisfactory measurement properties had been established, structural model assessment was conducted in SmartPLS. Path coefficients represent the hypothesised relationships between latent constructs, with values closer to ± 1 indicating stronger effects, with standardised coefficients above 0.10 generally considered meaningful in behavioural research (Hemphill, 2003; Lorah, 2018). The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate the explanatory power of endogenous constructs. R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 can be interpreted as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively (Lorah, 2018). The statistical significance of path coefficients, indicator loadings, and other model estimates was assessed using a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, bias-corrected percentile confidence intervals, a two-tailed test, and a 5% significance level. This means that relationships were considered statistically significant if $p < 0.05$ and the bootstrapped confidence interval did not include zero (D. K. Lee, 2016; Leo & Sardanelli, 2020; Ranganathan et al., 2015). A fixed random seed was applied to ensure replicability of results (Khan, 2016).

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Chapter V: Results

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

5.1.1. Sociodemographic Profile

As seen on table 1, the sample of 256 valid responses was skewed toward middle-aged and older travellers, with the largest cohort aged 45-54 (27.7%) and notable shares in the 35-44 (18.4%) and 65+ (15.6%) brackets. This distribution suggests that Madeira attracts a relatively mature tourist segment. The gender distribution, with women representing 64.5% of respondents, is consistent with evidence that women are often more likely to participate in surveys (Pirastu et al., 2020; Slauson-Blevins & Johnson, 2016). In terms of nationality, English visitors accounted for the largest share (39.5%), followed by Portuguese (21.5%) and Germans (13.3%). This mirrors statistics for Madeira, where British, Portuguese, and German tourists consistently represent core inbound markets (Mullen, 2021; Zapevalova, 2024). Educational attainment was concentrated at secondary and higher education levels, with more than three-quarters holding at least a high school diploma. This resonates with research suggesting that higher education levels can correlate with greater engagement in leisure activities such as travel (Z. Han et al., 2024; Junek, 2004; Tomasi et al., 2020). Employment status was similarly consistent with international visitor profiles: more than half employed full-time (53.1%) and 15.2% retired. Marital status findings confirmed the dominance of couples (54.3% married, 17.6% in a relationship). Household income levels clustered between €2.001 - €4.000 (54.6%), reflecting a middle-to-upper income demographic (Fabre et al., 2020).

Table 1: Sociodemographic Profile

Sociodemographic Profile			
	Total	N.	%
Valid Responses		256	100.0%
<i>How old are you?</i>			
18 - 24		24	9.4%
25 - 34		37	14.5%
35 - 44		47	18.4%
45 - 54		71	27.7%
55 - 64		37	14.5%
Equal to, or over 65		40	15.6%
<i>What is your gender?</i>			

Female	165	64.5%
Male	91	35.5%
<i>What is your nationality?</i>		
English	101	39.5%
Portuguese	55	21.5%
German	34	13.3%
Other Nationalities	22	8.6%
French	15	5.9%
American	13	5.1%
Spanish	13	5.1%
Italian	3	1.2%
<i>What is your education level?</i>		
Primary School	4	1.6%
Middle School / Junior High	37	14.5%
High School Diploma	89	34.8%
Undergraduate's Degree	79	30.9%
Master's Degree	34	13.3%
Doctorate's Degree	13	5.1%
<i>What is your employment status?</i>		
Full-time	136	53.1%
Retired	39	15.2%
Self-employed	31	12.1%
Part-time	19	7.4%
Student	13	5.1%
Working Student	11	4.3%
Unemployed	7	2.7%
<i>What is your marital status?</i>		
Married	139	54.3%
In a Relationship	45	17.6%
Single	33	12.9%
Divorced	25	9.8%
Widowed	10	3.9%
Separated	4	1.6%
<i>Net Monthly Household Income (€)</i>		

Equal to, or under €1.000	2	0.8%
€1.001 - €2.000	35	13.7%
€2.001 - €3.000	59	23.0%
€3.001 - €4.000	81	31.6%
€4.001 - €5.000	42	16.4%
€5.001 - €6.000	20	7.8%
€6.001 - €7.000	8	3.1%
Equal to, or over €7.001	9	3.5%

Source: Own Authorship (Survey Data, 2025)

5.1.2. Traveller Characterisation

The traveller characterisation results, as shown in table 2, reinforce Madeira's position as a repeat-visit and loyalty-oriented destination: 59.8% of respondents had visited before, and 93.8% indicated Madeira was their preferred choice, suggesting positive past experiences, which has been indicated to improve guest return intentions and loyalty (Guan et al., 2021; S. Lee & Chuang, 2021). The predominance of leisure travel (81.3%) over business (18.0%) reflects the island's orientation toward leisure tourism during the Christmas season, which is consistent with previous studies that suggest that seasonal travel is more consistent with leisure motives, rather than business oriented ones (Schiessl et al., 2024; D. Zhang & Xie, 2020). At the hotel level, OTA-driven awareness and booking dominated (28.9% and 33.6% respectively), followed by tour operators (22.7% and 27.0%). This finding echoes previous studies who identified OTAs as critical intermediaries (Lv et al., 2020; Martín-Fuentes & Mellinas, 2018). Only 19.1% of respondents reported using Black Friday or festive promotional deals, which is aligned with theory that suggests rooms in high-demand periods, such as Christmas, are booked well in advance, reducing the effectiveness of such promotions (Guizzardi et al., 2022; Leoni et al., 2024). The majority of respondents stayed in four-star (57.4%) and five-star hotels (37.5%), with extended stays common (35.2% booked seven nights or more). This reflects Madeira's accommodation profile, dominated by upscale hotels (Almeida, 2017), as well as suggesting that Christmas season bookings can be linked to longer lengths of stay (Brida et al., 2013; Grigolon et al., 2014).

Table 2: Traveller Characterisation

Traveller Characterisation		
Total	N.	%

Valid Responses	256	100.0%
<i>How did you first hear about Madeira Island?</i>		
Word-of-mouth (e.g., friends, family)	89	34.8%
I already knew of it	66	25.8%
Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)	37	14.5%
Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)	17	6.6%
Mainstream Media (e.g., TV)	15	5.9%
Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)	15	5.9%
Local Travel Agency	9	3.5%
Influencers	7	2.7%
Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)	1	0.4%
<i>Is this your first visit to Madeira?</i>		
No	153	59.8%
Yes	103	40.2%
<i>Was Madeira your preferred choice?</i>		
Yes	240	93.8%
No	16	6.3%
<i>Why are you visiting Madeira?</i>		
Leisure	208	81.3%
Business	46	18.0%
Health	2	0.8%
<i>Did you have any previous knowledge about Madeira's Christmas Festivities?</i>		
Yes	194	75.8%
No	62	24.2%
<i>How did you first hear about this hotel?</i>		
Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)	74	28.9%
Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)	58	22.7%
Word-of-mouth (e.g., friends, family)	53	20.7%
I already knew of it	20	7.8%
Local Travel Agency	17	6.6%
Maps (e.g. Google, Apple)	14	5.5%
Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)	8	3.1%
Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)	5	2.0%
Mainstream Media (e.g., TV)	4	1.6%

Influencers	3	1.2%
<i>Is this your first stay at this hotel?</i>		
New Guest	139	54.3%
Repeat Guest	117	45.7%
<i>Where is the hotel located in Madeira?</i>		
Funchal	168	65.6%
Porto Moniz	42	16.4%
Santa Cruz	33	12.9%
Calheta	7	2.7%
Ponta do Sol	4	1.6%
Câmara de Lobos	1	0.4%
Santana	1	0.4%
<i>How many stars does the hotel have?</i>		
3 Stars	13	5.1%
4 Stars	147	57.4%
5 Stars	96	37.5%
<i>How many nights did you book?</i>		
1 Night	11	4.3%
2 Nights	17	6.6%
3 Nights	21	8.2%
4 Nights	40	15.6%
5 Nights	31	12.1%
6 Nights	46	18.0%
7 or more nights	90	35.2%
<i>Who was the room booked for?</i>		
Couple	147	57.4%
Family	70	27.3%
Myself	23	9.0%
Friends	16	6.3%
<i>How did you complete your booking?</i>		
Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)	86	33.6%
Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)	69	27.0%
Email	38	14.8%
Local Travel Agency	26	10.2%

Hotel Website	17	6.6%
Walk-in	10	3.9%
Phone	10	3.9%
<i>Did you take advantage of Black Friday deals, or other deals related to Christmas marketing, to book your room?</i>		
No	207	80.9%
Yes	49	19.1%

Source: Own Authorship (Survey Data, 2025)

5.1.2.1. Preferred Method of Payment

Preferences for payment, review platforms, and communication channels provide insights into consumer behaviour relevant to hospitality management. Table 3 shows that card payments (credit 50.4%, debit 44.9%) were dominant, though notable shares used mobile apps (35.9%) and cash (36.3%), indicating a hybrid payment environment. Cryptocurrency use (6.6%) remained marginal, echoing findings that mainstream adoption in hospitality is still limited (Nuryyev et al., 2020).

Table 3: Preferred Method of Payment

<i>What is your preferred method of payment?</i>				
Options	Answer	N.	%	
Cash	Yes	93	36.3	
	No	163	63.7	
Debit card	Yes	115	44.9	
	No	141	55.1	
Credit card	Yes	129	50.4	
	No	127	49.6	
Cryptocurrency (e.g., Bitcoin, Ethereum, etc)	Yes	17	6.6	
	No	239	93.4	
Mobile payment apps (e.g., Apple Pay, Google Wallet)	Yes	92	35.9	
	No	164	64.1	

Source: Own Authorship (Survey Data, 2025)

5.1.2.2. Preferred Online Review Platforms

In terms of review behaviour, and according to table 4, Google Reviews (58.2%) and Tripadvisor (42.2%) emerged as the dominant platforms, surpassing hotel websites (8.6%). This pattern reflects broader eWOM trends, where third-party platforms seem to command

higher credibility and influence over booking decisions compared to hotel channels (Callarisa et al., 2012; Chakraborty, 2019; Phillips et al., 2017; Reyes-Menéndez et al., 2019).

Table 4: Preferred Online Review Platforms

<i>What is your preferred platform for online reviews?</i>				
Options	Option Chosen	N.	%	
Hotel Website	Yes	22	8.6	
	No	234	91.4	
Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)	Yes	108	42.2	
	No	148	57.8	
Google Reviews	Yes	149	58.2	
	No	107	41.8	
Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)	Yes	90	35.2	
	No	166	64.8	
Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)	Yes	26	10.2	
	No	166	89.8	
Maps	Yes	45	17.6	
	No	211	82.4	

Source: Own Authorship (Survey Data, 2025)

5.1.2.3. Preferred Communication Channels

Table 5 shows that communication preferences were led by hotel email (62.1%) and in-person contact (53.5%), followed by phone (36.3%), with limited reliance on OTAs (20.3%), WhatsApp (13.3%), and hotel apps (2.7%) showing that traditional direct channels still remain highly valued by hotel guests (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021).

Table 5: Preferred Communication Channels

<i>What is your preferred method of communication with the hotel?</i>				
Options	Option Chosen	N.	%	
Online Travel Agencies (e.g., Booking, Expedia)	Yes	52	20.3	
	No	204	79.7	
Communication Apps (e.g., Whatsapp)	Yes	34	13.3	
	No	222	86.7	
Hotel Email	Yes	159	62.1	
	No	97	37.9	
In Person	Yes	137	53.5	
	No	119	46.5	
Phone	Yes	93	36.3	

	No	163	63.7
Hotel app	Yes	7	2.7
	No	249	97.3
Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)	Yes	2	0.8
	No	254	99.2

Source: Own Authorship (Survey Data, 2025)

5.2. Measurement and Structural Model

5.2.1. Measurement Model

Measurement model evaluation preceded any interpretation of structural relationships and followed established PLS-SEM conventions (Hair et al., 2019). As seen on table 6, all indicator loadings were well above the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.867 to 0.994, which demonstrates that the latent constructs explain at least 50% of the variance in their respective indicators and confirms indicator reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Internal consistency reliability was also strong as in Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.902 to 0.991, and composite reliabilities (CR) ranged from 0.939 to 0.994, comfortably surpassing the 0.70 benchmark for adequacy (Taber, 2017). Convergent validity was confirmed, as average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.837 to 0.983, exceeding the threshold of 0.50, thereby demonstrating that the indicators converge to represent their intended latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), and all values were below or close to the conservative benchmark of 0.85 for conceptually distinct constructs and below the more liberal 0.90 cut-off for conceptually related constructs. The highest values involved guest satisfaction and the two behavioural intention constructs (HTMT = 0.887 and 0.922), but bootstrap confidence intervals did not include 1.00, which indicates that discriminant validity was not compromised (Henseler et al., 2015). Overall, the measurement model demonstrated strong reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, supporting the adequacy of the constructs for subsequent structural analysis.

Table 6: Measurement Model Validation

Items	Loading	t-value	CR	AVE
Visual Stimuli ($\alpha = 0.937$)			0.960	0.889
VS1	0.967	139.551		
VS2	0.966	165.429		
VS3	0.895	36.407		

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Olfactory Stimuli ($\alpha = 0.902$)			0.939	0.837
OS1	0.935	78.456	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
OS2	0.871	33.624		
OS3	0.937	94.836		
Auditory Stimuli ($\alpha = 0.944$)			0.964	0.901
AS1	0.903	40.701	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
AS2	0.967	93.281		
AS3	0.976	212.618		
Haptic Stimuli ($\alpha = 0.909$)			0.943	0.847
HS1	0.946	88.536	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
HS2	0.941	107.693		
HS3	0.872	26.861		
Gustatory Stimuli ($\alpha = 0.938$)			0.960	0.890
GS1	0.952	80.051	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
GS2	0.950	84.577		
GS3	0.927	57.580		
Guest Satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.991$)			0.994	0.983
GSn1	0.994	607.913	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
GSn2	0.990	293.733		
GSn3	0.991	531.830		
Return Intentions ($\alpha = 0.985$)			0.990	0.972
RI1	0.981	244.262	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
RI2	0.989	428.257		
RI3	0.988	254.772		
Positive Review Intentions ($\alpha = 0.914$)			0.945	0.853
PRI1	0.969	180.965	THIS CELL HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY	
PRI2	0.931	110.992		
PRI3	0.867	39.952		

Source: Own Authorship via SmartPLS 4 (2025)

5.2.2. Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Table 7 presents the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios used to assess discriminant validity. Most values lay below the conservative 0.85 benchmark, with sensory-sensory pairs ranging from 0.691 to 0.883. The highest associations involved guest satisfaction, namely with positive review intentions (HTMT = 0.887) and return intentions (HTMT = 0.922). Bootstrap confidence intervals for all pairs did not include 1.00.

Table 7: Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

HTMT Matrix	Visual Stimuli	Olfactory Stimuli	Auditory Stimuli	Haptic Stimuli	Gustatory Stimuli	Guest Satisfaction	Return Intentions	Positive Review Intentions
Visual Stimuli								
Olfactory Stimuli	0.755							
Auditory Stimuli	0.737	0.800						
Haptic Stimuli	0.883	0.760	0.706					
Gustatory Stimuli	0.807	0.723	0.691	0.863				
Guest Satisfaction	0.807	0.679	0.689	0.770	0.748			
Return Intentions	0.773	0.696	0.699	0.774	0.727	0.922		
Positive Review Intentions	0.758	0.731	0.700	0.719	0.719	0.887	0.893	

Source: Own Authorship via SmartPLS 4 (2025)

5.2.3. Structural Model Validation

Once satisfactory measurement properties had been established, the structural model was assessed. As shown in table 8, path coefficients (β) represent the hypothesised relationships between constructs, with standardised coefficients above 0.10 generally regarded as meaningful in behavioural sciences (Hemphill, 2003; Lorah, 2018). Among the five sensory dimensions, three significantly influenced guest satisfaction: visual stimuli ($\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.005$), gustatory stimuli ($\beta = 0.200$, $p = 0.014$), and auditory stimuli ($\beta = 0.158$, $p = 0.037$). These findings indicate that visual elements had the strongest positive effect, followed by taste and sound. In contrast, olfactory ($\beta = 0.034$, $p = 0.536$) and haptic stimuli ($\beta = 0.135$, $p = 0.165$) did not significantly predict guest satisfaction, suggesting that scent and tactile factors play a more limited role in this festive hotel context. Guest satisfaction significantly predicted both positive review intentions ($\beta = 0.857$, $p < 0.005$) and return intentions ($\beta = 0.911$, $p < 0.005$), underscoring its role in shaping post-stay behaviours. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values demonstrated that the model explained substantial proportions of variance in the endogenous constructs: 66.9% of guest satisfaction, 73.5% of positive review intentions, and 83.0% of return intentions.

Table 8: Structural Model Validation

Relationship between Variables (Hypothesis)	Beta (β)	P- values	Results
H1: Visual Stimuli → Guest Satisfaction.	0.384	0.000	Supported
H2: Olfactory Stimuli → Guest Satisfaction.	0.034	0.536	Not Supported
H3: Auditory Stimuli → Guest Satisfaction.	0.158	0.037	Supported
H4: Haptic Stimuli → Guest Satisfaction.	0.135	0.165	Not Supported
H5: Gustatory Stimuli → Guest Satisfaction.	0.200	0.014	Supported
H6: Guest Satisfaction → Positive Review Intentions.	0.857	0.000	Supported
H7: Guest Satisfaction → Return Intentions.	0.911	0.000	Supported

Source: Own Authorship via SmartPLS 4 (2025)

Figure 21 illustrates the structural model, with standardised path coefficients and p-values. Guest satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.669$) was significantly predicted by visual, gustatory, and auditory stimuli; olfactory and haptic effects were not significant. Guest satisfaction accounted for 73.5% of the variance in positive review intentions and 83.0% in return intentions.

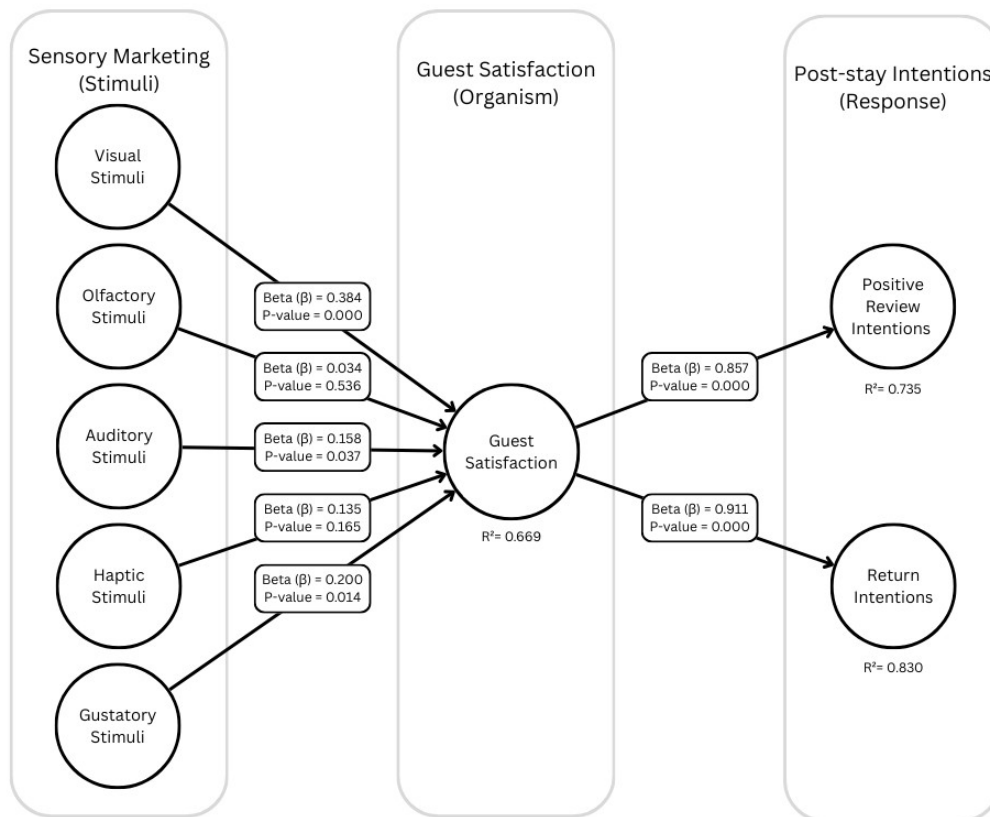


Figure 21: Standardised path coefficients (β) and p-values

Source: Own Authorship via SmartPLS 4 (2025)

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Chapter VI: Discussion

The findings highlight the central role of visual stimuli in shaping guest satisfaction, reinforcing the long-established view that sight is one of the most influential senses in service environments. Visual elements such as colour and lighting function as powerful environmental signals that frame affective appraisals and overall evaluations, a pattern consistently observed in hospitality and related fields (Bitner, 1992; Krishna, 2012; Pieters & Wedel, 2004; Spence, 2022; Worsfold et al., 2016). This study's evidence therefore corroborates existing theoretical and empirical work, underscoring the pivotal role of vision in shaping multisensory experiences.

By contrast, olfactory stimuli did not emerge as significant predictors of satisfaction, diverging from earlier findings that pleasant ambient scents can influence affect and evaluation (Chebat & Michon, 2003; Spangenberg et al., 2005). This discrepancy is plausibly contextual. During the Christmas season in Funchal, environments are already saturated with rich sensory cues, including elaborate visual decorations, music, and gastronomy. In such settings, olfactory signals may be overlooked or overshadowed by more salient sensory experiences, a phenomenon recognised in previous research (Gilbert et al., 1996; S. Kemp & Gilbert, 1997; Sakai, 2011).

Auditory stimuli demonstrated a positive, though comparatively modest, influence on guest satisfaction. This aligns with evidence that carefully curated soundscapes enhance service encounters without necessarily dominating guests' affective responses (E. A. Kemp et al., 2019; Spence, 2022; Yi & Kang, 2019). The pattern observed here suggests that auditory cues operate in a complementary capacity, supporting rather than defining the overall sensory experience.

Haptic stimuli were not found to significantly affect satisfaction. This indicates that tactile cues in Madeira's hospitality context may be perceived as baseline expectations rather than differentiating features. With a mild climate and widely standardised service provisions, aspects such as room temperature, bedding, and comfortable furnishings are likely regarded by guests as essential attributes of hospitality rather than elements that elevate the experience, echoing work that frames haptics as a factor in service encounters (Ban et al., 2019; Nilsson & Blom, 2023).

Conversely, gustatory stimuli exerted a clear positive impact on satisfaction, reinforcing the centrality of food and beverage in shaping hospitality experiences (Leite-Pereira et al., 2022; Pizam et al., 2016). In the context of Christmas in Madeira, traditional recipes, festive

dishes, and seasonal drinks contribute to authenticity and enhance the celebratory atmosphere, resonating with broader literature that positions gastronomy as a strong anchor in tourism and hospitality (Prideaux & Glover, 2015).

Beyond the role of individual senses, the study confirms a strong link between guest satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Satisfaction is a powerful predictor of both positive review intentions and return intentions, reflecting the well-established relationship between satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth in hospitality markets (Martin-Fuentes et al., 2020; O'Connor & Assaker, 2022) and aligning with loyalty literature that consistently positions satisfaction as the primary antecedent of revisit behaviour and advocacy (Abbasi et al., 2021; Čulić et al., 2021; Polas et al., 2020).

Taken together, these findings underscore the multidimensional role of sensory stimuli in shaping guest experiences, while reaffirming the pivotal importance of satisfaction as a driver of loyalty-related outcomes. Crucially, the results demonstrate that not all senses contribute equally, and that their impact varies with contextual saturation and guest expectations. Visual and gustatory cues emerge as strong differentiators, whereas olfactory and haptic dimensions appear muted by either sensory overload, or their status as baseline expectations. This asymmetry highlights the value of a nuanced approach to multisensory design in hospitality, one that considers not only the presence of sensory cues, but also their relative salience and interaction within specific service contexts.

Methodologically, these conclusions are strengthened by a robust inference strategy based on nonparametric bootstrapping with bias-corrected percentile confidence intervals and two-tailed testing at conventional significance levels, alongside guidelines indicating moderate to substantial explanatory power for the model as a whole (D. K. Lee, 2016; Leo & Sardanelli, 2020; Lorah, 2018; Ranganathan et al., 2015). Collectively, the evidence supports the proposed S-O-R framework, in that visual, gustatory, and auditory stimuli enhance guest satisfaction, which in turn strongly drives both return intentions, and the likelihood of posting positive reviews.

Chapter VII: Study Limitations and Future Recommendations

7.1. Study Limitations

First, the use of a voluntary, non-probability convenience sample of hotel guests can constrain external validity (Andrade, 2020). Although such sampling is common and often unavoidable in hospitality and other contexts (Ferber, 1977), findings from convenience samples are most applicable to visitor groups similar to those represented in the survey, namely, leisure travellers staying in upscale hotels in Madeira during the Christmas period. Caution should be exercised in generalising the results to other tourist segments or contexts (Andrade, 2020).

Second, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to make strong causal claims (Kesmodel, 2018; Pandis, 2014). Although the S-O-R framework assumes a directional flow from environmental stimuli to guest satisfaction and onwards to behavioural responses, the contemporaneous self-reports collected in this study cannot fully establish whether sensory cues preceded satisfaction, nor can they exclude the influence of unmeasured factors. Cross-sectional surveys are well suited to identifying associations and providing theory-consistent evidence, but they remain less robust than longitudinal or experimental approaches for testing causal mechanisms (West, 2011).

Third, all constructs in this study were measured through single-source, self-report data collected in one survey session, which raises the possibility of common-method bias (CMB) (Cooper et al., 2020; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Although steps were taken to reduce this risk, such as avoiding repetitive item phrasing, some degree of method bias cannot be ruled out (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Yao & Xu, 2021). Common-method bias can either inflate or weaken observed relationships, meaning that the strength of associations between sensory stimuli, guest satisfaction, and post-stay intentions should be interpreted with caution.

Fourth, the outcome variables in this study were operationalised as intentions rather than behaviours. The literature does suggest that intentions are strong, although imperfect predictors of action, and effect sizes vary by context, hospitality included (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Given the practical scope of this dissertation, and the absence of access to longitudinal booking or review data, intentions provided a feasible and theoretically appropriate proxy for behavioural outcomes (Frommeyer et al., 2022; Gieure et al., 2020).

Finally, the substantive context of Christmas in Madeira creates a vivid, multisensory environment that is arguably atypical of off-season or business-oriented stays (Benney et al., 1959; Brida et al., 2013), which limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other temporal or market contexts.

7.2. Future Recommendations

To address the restricted generalisability of convenience samples, future studies should aim for more diverse sampling strategies. Where feasible, probability-based methods or stratified sampling could be employed to capture a broader range of visitor segments. Such approaches would strengthen external validity and help test whether the observed relationships hold across different demographic and market segments (Cornesse et al., 2020).

Future research should move beyond cross-sectional designs to approaches that allow stronger causal inference. Longitudinal surveys that capture guest perceptions at multiple time points, or experimental and quasi-experimental designs that manipulate specific sensory cues, could establish temporal sequencing more firmly and provide stronger evidence of causality (Y. Kim & Steiner, 2016).

To mitigate the risk of common-method bias, future studies should integrate multi-source or multi-method data (Jordan & Troth, 2020; Podsakoff et al., 2023). For example, survey responses could be combined with observational audits of hotel environments or with behavioural data such as actual online reviews or booking records. This triangulation would reduce reliance on self-report data and yield a more robust understanding of the relationships among sensory stimuli, guest satisfaction, and post-stay intentions.

Future research should move beyond self-reported intentions to examine realised behaviours directly as they do not always translate into action, with meta-analyses showing only a moderate correlation between intentions and actual behaviour (Jordan & Troth, 2020; Rhodes & Dickau, 2012). Studies could, for example, analyse verified repeat bookings, track actual online review postings.

Finally, replication of this research in alternative temporal and cultural contexts would help to assess the generalisability of the findings (Fried et al., 2018; Funkhouser et al., 2019; Uncles & Kwok, 2013; Urminsky & Dietvorst, 2024). Extending the study beyond the Christmas season in Madeira, and into other destinations or off-season periods, could reveal how seasonality and cultural atmospherics influence the salience of different senses.

Together, these limitations delineate the conditions under which the conclusions hold, and the future recommendations suggest concrete avenues to advance a robust programme of research on multisensory hospitality experience.

Chapter VIII: Contributions

8.1. Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation advances theory by extending the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) by disaggregating sensory marketing into five distinct modalities (visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory) rather than treating atmospherics as a broad construct. This granularity refines understanding of how individual senses shape guest experiences. The findings reveal that not all senses are equally influential: visual, gustatory, and auditory cues significantly affected satisfaction, while olfactory and haptic cues did not. This asymmetry highlights the importance of context, such as seasonality and cultural atmospherics, in sensory marketing theory. By positioning guest satisfaction as the core organismic state, the study adapts the S-O-R model from its traditional focus on pleasure, arousal, and dominance to a hospitality relevant evaluative construct. Guest satisfaction explained substantial variance in both return and positive review intentions, which highlights guest satisfaction as a central construct in hospitality theory.

8.2. Managerial Contributions

The findings confirm that guest satisfaction is the critical driver of return and positive review intentions, highlighting the need for hotels to prioritise strategies that maximise satisfaction if they wish to secure loyalty and strengthen their online reputation. The results also demonstrate that not all senses contribute equally, specifically in the context of this research. Visual, gustatory, and auditory cues emerged as the most influential in enhancing satisfaction. Managers should therefore invest in creating visually appealing environments through design, lighting, and decoration. Similarly, offering distinctive food and beverage experiences and carefully curating background music can yield meaningful improvements in satisfaction and subsequent post-stay intentions. The weaker effects of olfactory and haptic cues in this study suggest that guests may perceive them as baseline expectations in upscale hospitality rather than as differentiating features. However, this does not mean that hotels should neglect them. Maintaining pleasant scents and high tactile comfort remains essential for meeting guest expectations and avoiding dissatisfaction. The key implication is that while scent and touch are necessary for service quality, strategic differentiation and added value are more likely to come from enhancing visual, gustatory, and auditory cues.

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Chapter IX: Conclusion

This dissertation set out to clarify how individual sensory stimuli shape hotel guest satisfaction and, in turn, post-stay intentions in the distinctive setting of Christmas in Madeira. Grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response paradigm, the study conceptualised sensory stimuli as five separate modalities, namely visual, olfactory, auditory, haptic, and gustatory, and positioned guest satisfaction as the organismic state bridging these cues to two post-stay intentions, the intentions to return and to post positive online reviews. A survey of 256 travellers provided the empirical basis, and the model was assessed using PLS-SEM with established procedures for measurement and structural validity.

The findings are clear. Not all senses contribute equally to satisfaction in this context. Visual, gustatory, and auditory cues exerted significant positive effects, whereas olfactory and haptic cues did not, which suggest that these two senses operate more as quality safeguards than as differentiators. Guest satisfaction emerged as a powerful driver of both focal outcomes, explaining a substantial share of variance in return intentions and in positive review intentions. The proposed pathway from targeted sensory design to satisfaction and onward to commercially relevant post-stay intentions is therefore empirically supported, with the model demonstrating strong explanatory capacity for all endogenous constructs.

Theoretically, the study advances hospitality applications of the S-O-R framework by disaggregating sensory marketing into its constituent modalities rather than treating atmospherics as a single aggregate. It also adapts the organismic core from the classic emotions to a sector-relevant evaluative state, namely guest satisfaction, and confirms its centrality as the mechanism that translates sensory experiences into intentions.

Managerially, the evidence suggests a pragmatic sequencing of investment. Hotels that wish to lift satisfaction and, by extension, repeat business and online advocacy should prioritise high-impact visual design and lighting, distinctive food and beverage, and carefully curated soundscapes. At the same time, the weaker effects of scent and touch should not be taken as licence to neglect them, as pleasant ambient fragrance and tactile comfort remain necessary to meet expectations and prevent dissatisfaction.

In sum, this dissertation shows that thoughtfully engineered sensory environments can measurably elevate guest satisfaction and that satisfaction, in turn, strongly shapes intentions to return and to endorse hotels online. By specifying which senses carry the most weight in a real-world, high-season setting, the study sharpens theoretical understanding and offers actionable guidance to managers who seek to compete through multisensory experience design.

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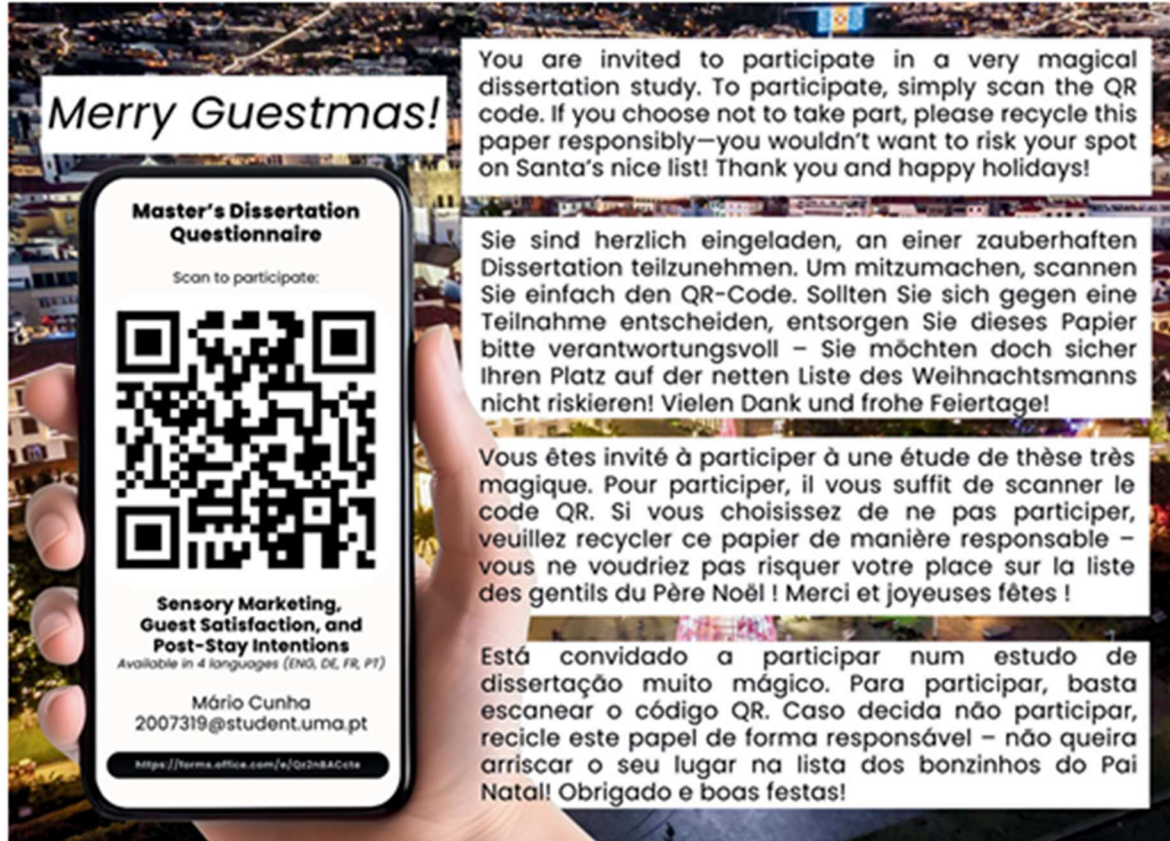
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Appendices

Appendix A: In-person Questionnaire Model



Appendix B: Hotel Questionnaire Model



My name is Mario Cunha, and I am a Hotel Management Master's student at the University of Madeira.

This questionnaire is part of my master's dissertation, titled: "Merry Guestmas! The Impact of Sensory Marketing on Guests' Post-Stay Intentions, and the Mediating Role of Guest Satisfaction in the Context of Christmas in Madeira."

The questionnaire consists of 7 short sections and should take no more than 7 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain completely anonymous and will only be used for academic purposes.



Mein Name ist Mario Cunha, und ich bin Masterstudent im Bereich Hotelmanagement an der Universität Madeira.

Dieser Fragebogen ist Teil meiner Masterarbeit mit dem Titel: "Merry Guestmas! The Impact of Sensory Marketing on Guests' Post-Stay Intentions, and the Mediating Role of Guest Satisfaction in the Context of Christmas in Madeira."

Der Fragebogen besteht aus 7 kurzen Abschnitten und sollte nicht länger als 7 Minuten dauern. Ihre Antworten bleiben vollständig anonym und werden ausschließlich für akademische Zwecke verwendet.



Je m'appelle Mario Cunha et je suis étudiant en Master de Gestion Hôtelière à l'Université de Madère.

Ce questionnaire fait partie de ma dissertation de Master intitulée : "Merry Guestmas! The Impact of Sensory Marketing on Guests' Post-Stay Intentions, and the Mediating Role of Guest Satisfaction in the Context of Christmas in Madeira."

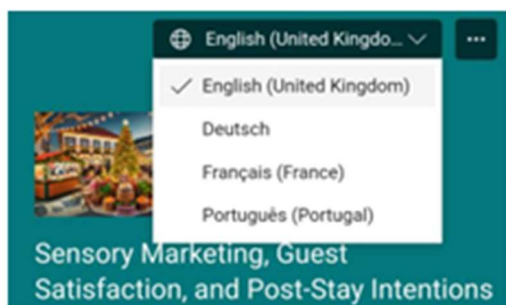
Le questionnaire comprend 7 sections courtes et ne prendra pas plus de 7 minutes à remplir. Vos réponses resteront totalement anonymes et seront utilisées uniquement à des fins académiques.



O meu nome é Mário Cunha e sou estudante de Mestrado em Gestão Hoteleira na Universidade da Madeira.

Este questionário faz parte da minha dissertação de mestrado intitulada: "Merry Guestmas! The Impact of Sensory Marketing on Guests' Post-Stay Intentions, and the Mediating Role of Guest Satisfaction in the Context of Christmas in Madeira."

O questionário é composto por 7 pequenas secções e não deverá demorar mais do que 7 minutos a ser concluído. As suas respostas permanecerão completamente anónimas e serão utilizadas apenas para fins académicos.



This questionnaire is available in 4 languages (ENG, DE, FR, PT) and it is easy to change languages.

Dieser Fragebogen ist in 4 Sprachen verfügbar (ENG, DE, FR, PT), und es ist einfach, die Sprache zu ändern.

Ce questionnaire est disponible en 4 langues (ENG, DE, FR, PT), et il est facile de changer de langue.

Este questionário está disponível em 4 idiomas (ENG, DE, FR, PT) e é fácil alterar o idioma.

Appendix C: Questionnaire 1/21

← Back Computer Mobile

English (United Kingdo... 📄 ...

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

Seasonal Greetings!
My name is Mario Cunha, and I am a Hotel Management Master's student at the University of Madeira.

This questionnaire is part of my master's dissertation, titled: **"Merry Guestmas! The Impact of Sensory Marketing on Guest Satisfaction, and it's influence on Post-Stay Intentions in the Context of Christmas in Madeira"**.

The questionnaire consists of **7 short sections** and should take no more than **7 minutes** to complete. Your responses will remain **completely anonymous** and will only be used for **academic purposes**.

Please note that this questionnaire is only accessible via QR code to reduce paper usage and support environmental sustainability. **Let's work together to protect our planet.**

Please share with friends and family to help me complete my research. Thank you.

When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself.

* Required

Data Protection and Privacy Policy 📄

Confidentiality and anonymity of the data are assured, as is the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. You willingly consent to participate in this study and allow the use of the data you voluntarily provide, trusting that it will be used exclusively for this research. You also consent to the publication of the results in scientific contexts, with full assurance of anonymity. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 2007319@student.uma.pt.

Do you consent to the Data Protection and Privacy Policy? * 📄

Declining will terminate the questionnaire at this stage, whereas consenting will enable you to proceed.

I consent

Do not consent (terminates questionnaire)

Next Page 1 of 10

Appendix D: Questionnaire 2/21

← Back Computer Mobile

English (United Kingdo... ...

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 1 of 7: Demographic Profile ...

This section of the survey is designed to collect general demographic information about participants.

How old are you? * ...

Please select your age group. If you are under 18, kindly note that participation in this survey is restricted.

Equal to, or under 17

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 54

55 - 64

Equal to, or over 65

Back Next

Page 2 of 10 Progress bar



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Appendix E: Questionnaire 3/21


English (United Kingdo...  

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 1 of 7: Demographic Profile

This section of the survey is designed to collect general demographic information about participants.


What is your gender? * 

Please indicate your gender.

Female

Male

Other

What is your nationality? * 

Please specify your nationality. Below are a few examples for reference. If your nationality is not listed, kindly add it in the space provided.

Portuguese

American

German

Spanish

English

French

Italian

Appendix F: Questionnaire 4/21

Other

What is your education level? *

Please select the highest level of education you have completed.

Doctorate's Degree

Master's Degree

Undergraduate's Degree

High School Diploma

Middle School / Junior High

Primary School

No Formal Education

Other

What is your employment status? *

Please indicate your current employment status.

Full-time

Part-time

Self-employed

Unemployed

Retired

Student

Appendix G: Questionnaire 5/21

Working Student

Other

What is your marital status? *

Please select the marital status that applies to you.

Single

In a Relationship

Separated

Married

Divorced

Widowed

Other

Net Monthly Household Income Currency *

Please specify the currency in which your household salary is paid.

Euro (EUR)

US dollar (USD)

Pound sterling (GBP)

Other

Page 3 of 10

Appendix H: Questionnaire 6/21

English (United Kingdo... 🗕 ⋮)

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 2 of 7: Destination Insights 🗕

This section aims to collect information about the destination, including how you learned about it, the reasons for your booking, reasons for visit, christmas festivities, and other context relevant details.

How did you first hear about Madeira Island? * 🗕

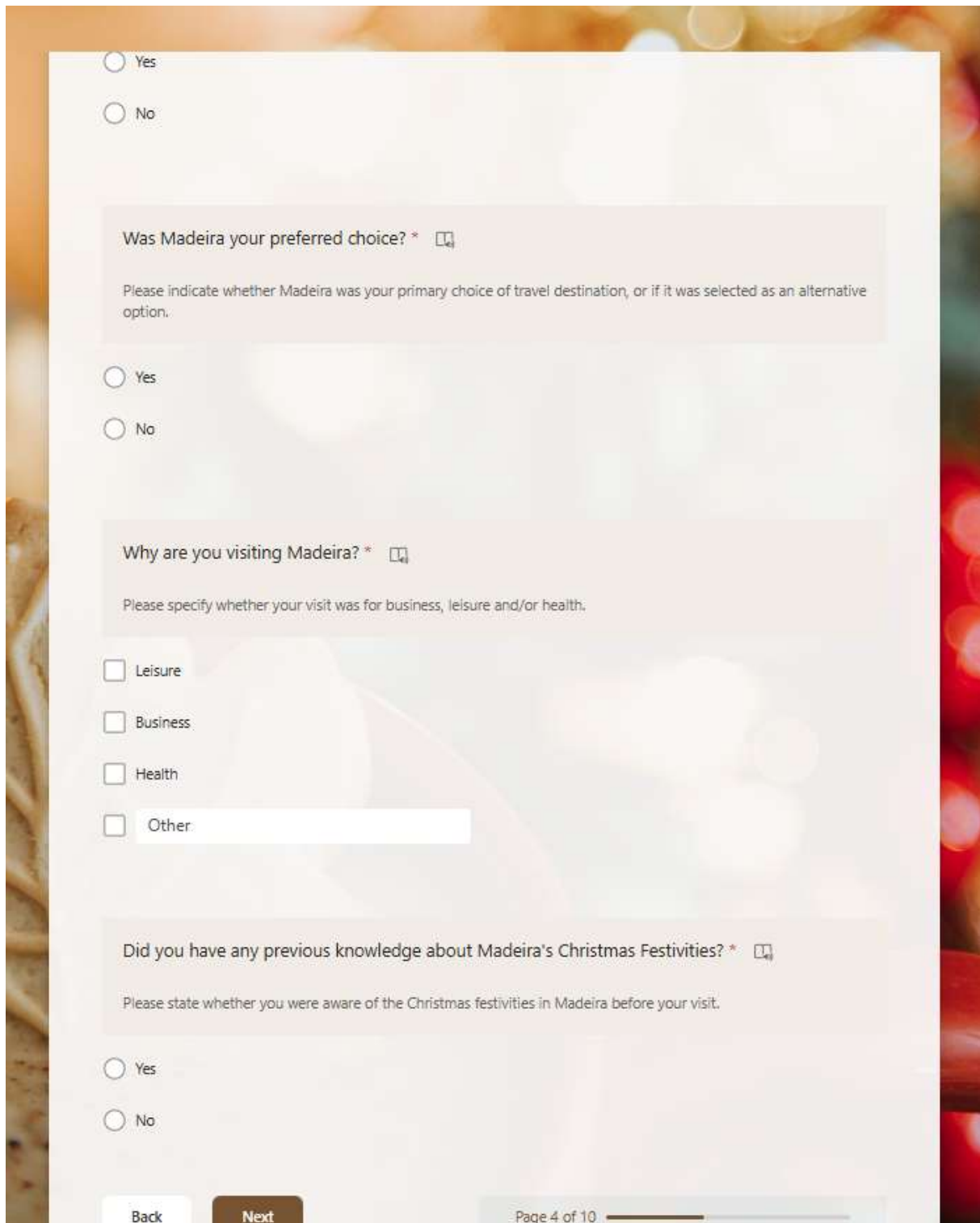
Please indicate how you first learned about Madeira Island.

- I already knew of it
- Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)
- Word-of-mouth (e.g., friends, family)
- Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)
- Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)
- Mainstream Media (e.g., TV)
- Local Travel Agency
- Influencers
- Other

Is this your first visit to Madeira? * 🗕


Please specify if this is your first visit to Madeira.

Appendix I: Questionnaire 7/21



Yes


No

Was Madeira your preferred choice? * 

Please indicate whether Madeira was your primary choice of travel destination, or if it was selected as an alternative option.

Yes

No

Why are you visiting Madeira? * 


Please specify whether your visit was for business, leisure and/or health.

Leisure

Business

Health

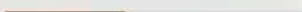
Other

Did you have any previous knowledge about Madeira's Christmas Festivities? * 

Please state whether you were aware of the Christmas festivities in Madeira before your visit.

Yes

No

Page 4 of 10 

Appendix J: Questionnaire 8/21

English (United Kingdo...)

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 3 of 7: Hotel Information

This section aims to collect information about the hotel, including where it's located, how many stars it has, how you learned about it, the reasons for your booking, whether it was your first choice or an alternative, and other context relevant details.

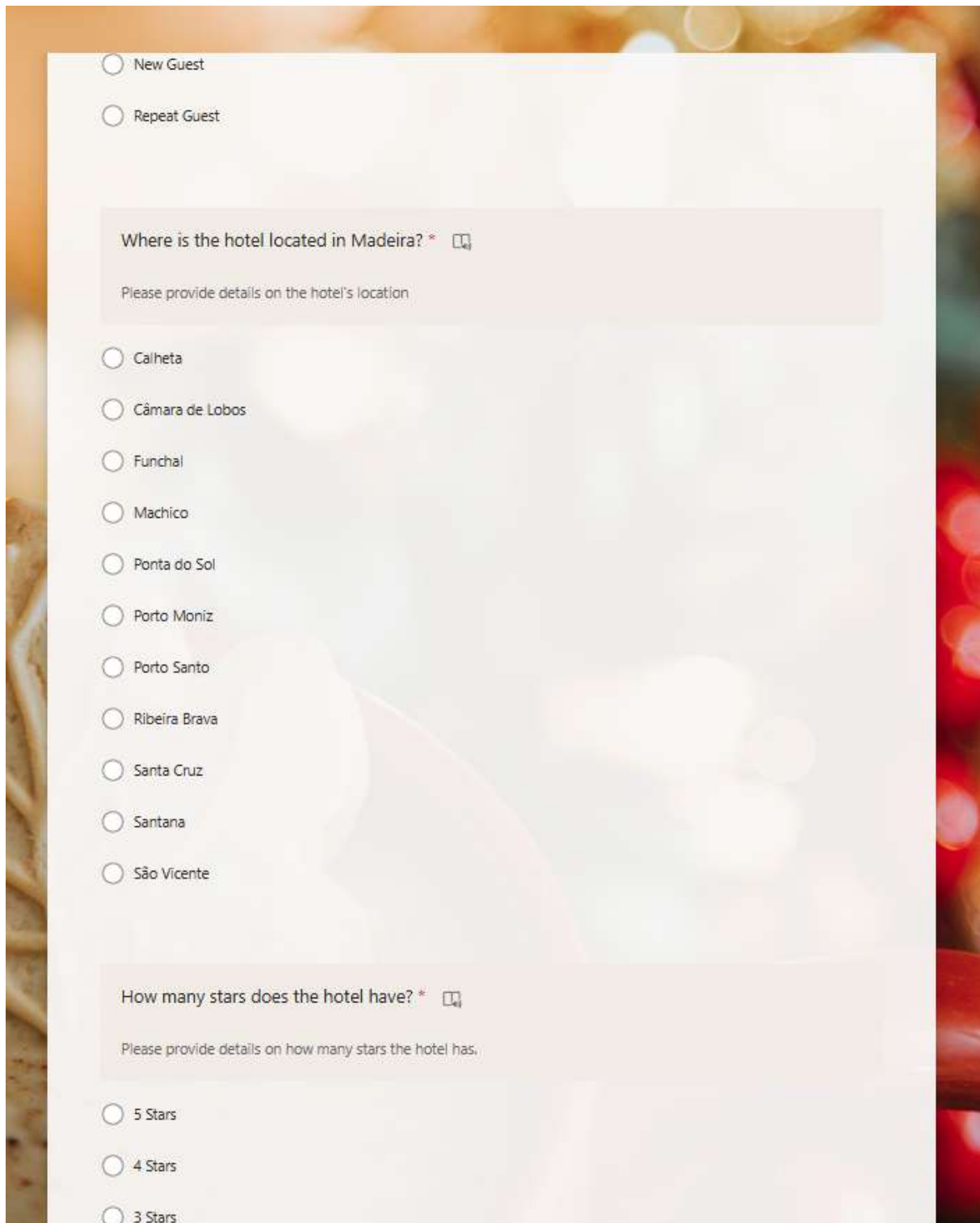
How did you first hear about this hotel? *

Please indicate how you first learned about this hotel.

- I already knew of it
- Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)
- Word-of-mouth (e.g., friends, family)
- Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)
- Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)
- Mainstream Media (e.g., TV)
- Local Travel Agency
- Influencers
- Maps (e.g. Google, Apple)
- Other


Is this your first stay at this hotel? *

Appendix K: Questionnaire Picture 9/21



New Guest

Repeat Guest

Where is the hotel located in Madeira? * 

Please provide details on the hotel's location

Calheta

Câmara de Lobos

Funchal

Machico

Ponta do Sol

Porto Moniz


Porto Santo

Ribeira Brava

Santa Cruz

Santana

São Vicente

How many stars does the hotel have? * 

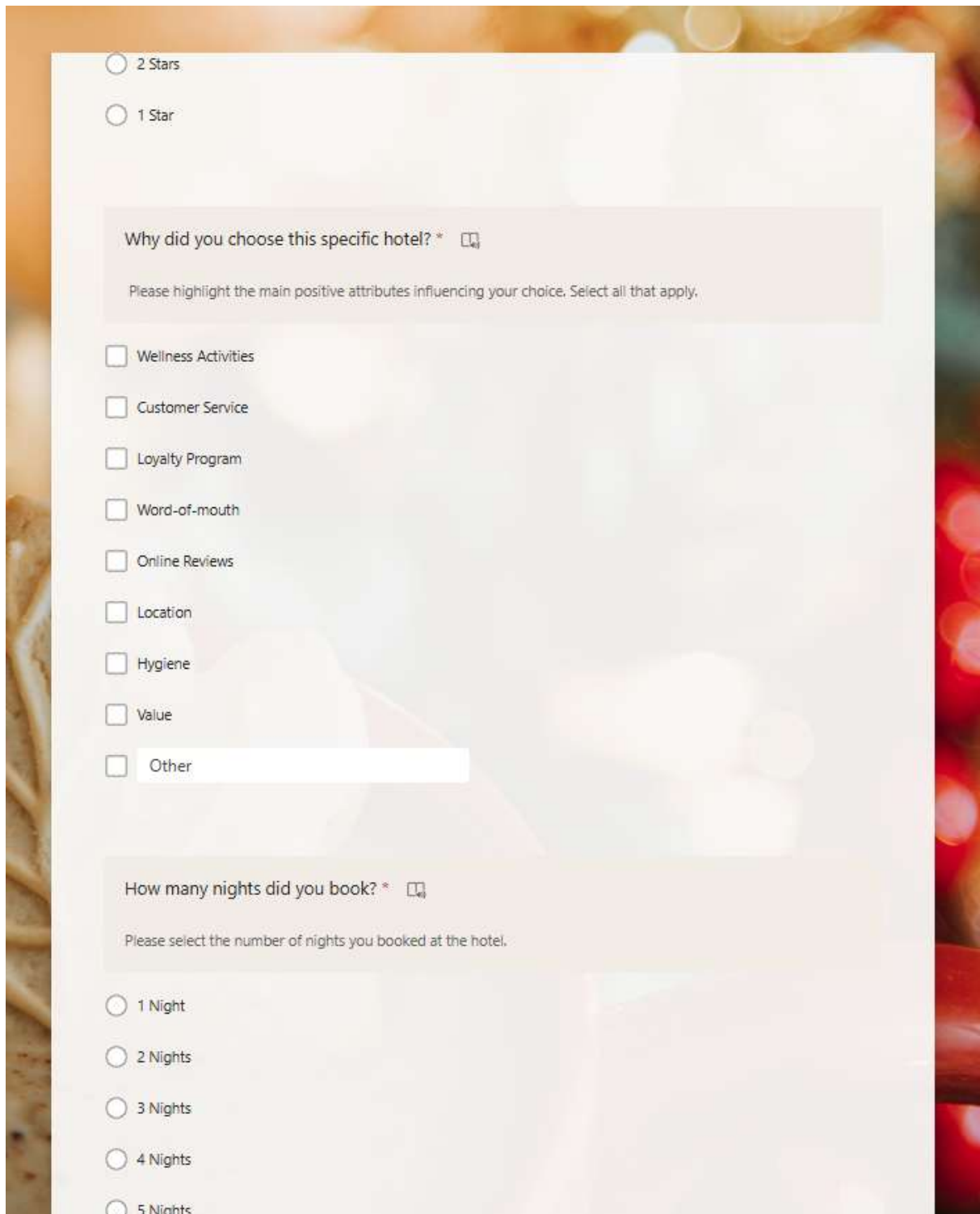
Please provide details on how many stars the hotel has.

5 Stars

4 Stars

3 Stars

Appendix L: Questionnaire 10/21



2 Stars

1 Star

Why did you choose this specific hotel? *

Please highlight the main positive attributes influencing your choice. Select all that apply.

Wellness Activities

Customer Service

Loyalty Program

Word-of-mouth

Online Reviews

Location

Hygiene

Value

Other

How many nights did you book? *

Please select the number of nights you booked at the hotel.

1 Night

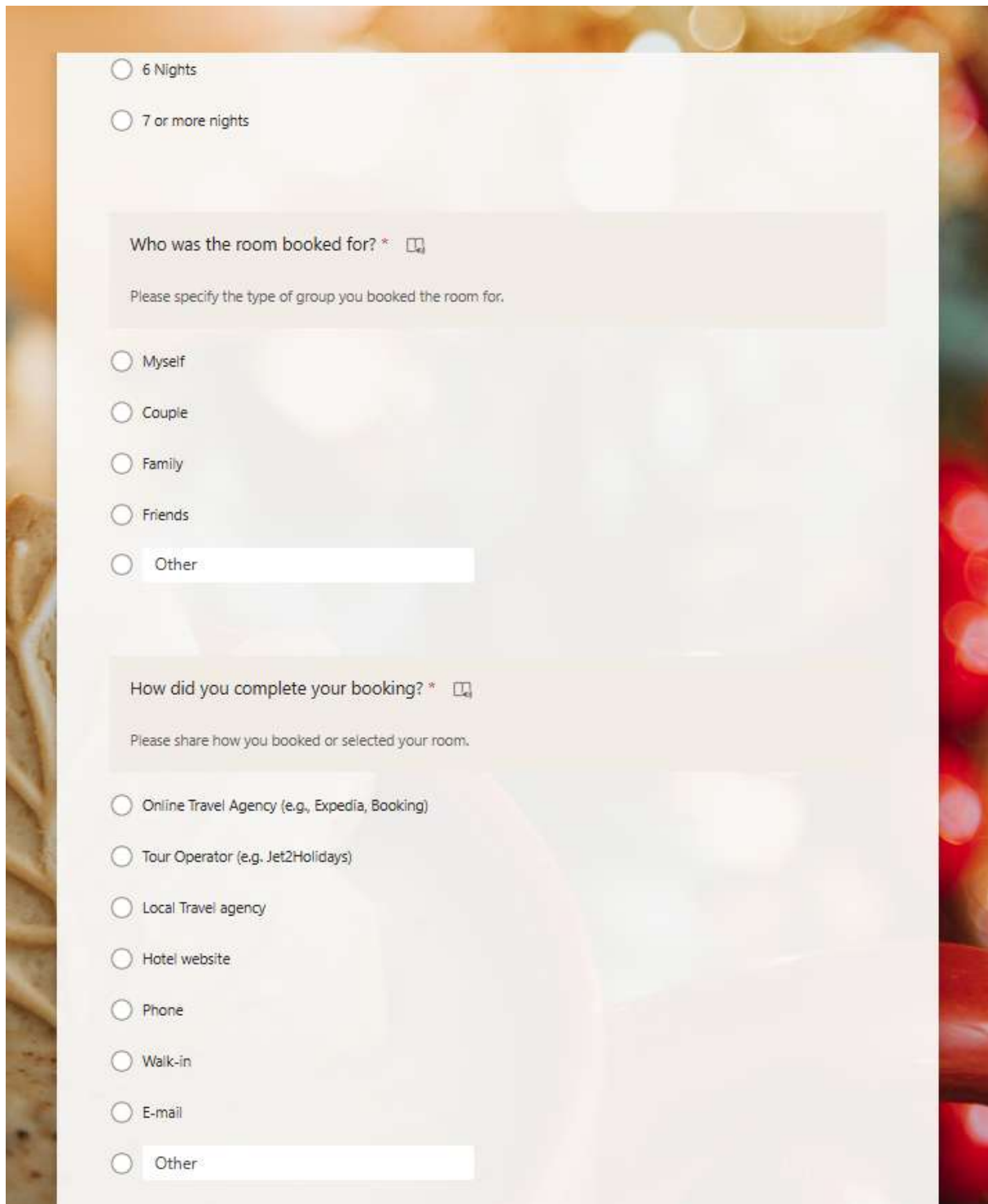
2 Nights

3 Nights

4 Nights

5 Nights

Appendix M: Questionnaire 11/21



6 Nights

7 or more nights

Who was the room booked for? *

Please specify the type of group you booked the room for.

Myself

Couple

Family

Friends

Other

How did you complete your booking? *

Please share how you booked or selected your room.

Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)

Tour Operator (e.g., Jet2Holidays)

Local Travel agency

Hotel website

Phone

Walk-in


E-mail

Other

Appendix N: Questionnaire 12/21


Please share how you booked or selected your rooms.

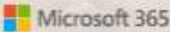
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)
- Tour Operator (e.g. Jet2Holidays)
- Local Travel agency
- Hotel website
- Phone
- Walk-in
- E-mail
- Other

Did you take advantage of Black Friday deals, or other deals related to christmas marketing, to book your room? * 

Please share whether you took advantage of promotions like *Black Friday* deals when booking your room.

- Yes
- No
- Other

Page 5 of 10 

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Appendix O: Questionnaire 13/21

English (United Kingdo...  ...

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 4 of 7: Guest Preferences

This section consists of three brief questions designed to understand guests' preferences, including their preferred payment methods, preferred platforms for leaving reviews, and preferred communication channels with hotels.

What is your preferred method of payment? * 

Please select your preferred methods of payment.

- Mobile payment apps (e.g., Apple Pay, Google Wallet)
- Cryptocurrency (e.g., Bitcoin, Ethereum, etc)
- Debit card
- Credit card
- Cash
- Other

What is your preferred platform for online reviews? * 

Please highlight the platforms you use most for posting or reading reviews about hotels and/or destinations.


- Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)
- Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, Booking)
- Review Platform (e.g., Tripadvisor)
- Google Reviews

Appendix P: Questionnaire 14/21

Hotel Website

Maps

Other

What is your preferred method of communication with the hotel? * 

Please indicate how you prefer to communicate with the hotel.

Social Media Platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)

Online Travel Agencies (e.g., Booking, Expedia)

Communication Apps (e.g., Whatsapp)

Text message (e.g., SMS)


Hotel app

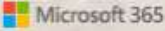
In Person

Phone

Email

Other

Page 6 of 10 



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Appendix Q: Questionnaire 15/21

English (United Kingdo...  

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions


* Required

Part 5 of 7: Sensory Marketing (S)

This section is designed to assess your perceptions of the sensory experiences within the destination, with a focus on Christmas festivities. Please evaluate each statement based on your experience during the festive season, using the scale provided to indicate your level of agreement.

Visual Stimuli *


Please assess the destination's overall visual appeal, particularly in relation to Christmas-themed stimuli such as festive lighting, color schemes, decorations, and how these elements contribute to your overall satisfaction with the experience.



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The destination's lighting and colour scheme was visually appealing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall decoration was visually enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall visual appeal plays a significant role in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


Olfactory Stimuli *

Please assess the destination's overall olfactory appeal, particularly in relation to Christmas-themed stimuli such as overall scents and fragrances, aroma of freshly prepared food, and how these elements contribute to your overall satisfaction with the experience.




Appendix R: Questionnaire 16/21


	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The destination's overall scent and fragrance was inviting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's aroma of freshly prepared food was satisfying.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall olfactory appeal plays a significant role in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Auditory Stimuli * 


Please assess the destination's overall auditory appeal, particularly in relation to Christmas-themed stimuli such as overall background music, sound and noise level and how these elements contribute to your overall satisfaction with the experience.



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The destination's overall background sound and noise levels were enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall auditory stimuli was satisfying.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall auditory appeal plays a significant role in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


Haptic Stimuli * 

Please assess the destination's overall physical comfort during the Christmas season, considering factors such as temperature, infrastructure quality, and how these



Appendix S: Questionnaire 17/21


aspects enhance or affect your overall satisfaction with the experience.



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The destination's overall temperature was comforting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall infrastructure was comfortable and enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall haptic appeal plays a significant role in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Gustatory Stimuli *

Please rate the quality and appeal of the food and beverages you experienced during your stay at the destination during the Christmas season, and evaluate how they contributed to your overall satisfaction with the experience.



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The destination's overall cuisine, food and delicacies were tasteful and satisfying.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destinations's overall drinks, beverages and refreshments were tasteful and enjoyable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The destination's overall gustatory appeal plays a significant role in my satisfaction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix T: Questionnaire 18/21

English (United Kingdo... 🗖 ⋮)

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 6 of 7: Guest Satisfaction (0) 🗖

This section is designed to evaluate your overall satisfaction with the destination. Please rate your level of agreement with each statement using the provided scale.

Guest Satisfaction * 🗖

Please reflect on your overall level of satisfaction with the destination.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
I am happy with my decision to have chosen this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had a comfortable and enjoyable experience in the destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am highly satisfied with the overall experience provided by this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Appendix U: Questionnaire 19/21

English (United Kingdo...)

Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions

* Required

Part 7 of 7: Post-stay Intentions (R)

This section focuses on your intentions following your stay at the destination, including whether you plan to return and whether you are likely to leave a positive review. Please reflect on your experience and indicate your level of agreement with each statement.

Return Intentions *

Please share your likelihood of booking this destination again for future stays based on your overall satisfaction.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
The experience I had makes me want to return to this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would definitely return to this destination in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am eager to book this destination again for my future stays.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>


Positive Review Intentions *

Please indicate if you are inclined to recommend the destination through online reviews and/or word-of-mouth.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
I intend to recommend this destination through positive word-of-mouth (friends and	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix V: Questionnaire 20/21


The experience I had makes me want to return to this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would definitely return to this destination in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am eager to book this destination again for my future stays.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Positive Review Intentions * 

Please indicate if you are inclined to recommend the destination through online reviews and/or word-of-mouth.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
I intend to recommend this destination through positive word-of-mouth (friends and family).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I plan to submit a positive online review highlighting the exceptional experience in the destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am motivated to leave a favorable critique about this destination.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Appendix W: Questionnaire 21/21

The image shows a Microsoft Forms questionnaire interface. At the top right, there is a language dropdown menu set to 'English (United Kingdom)' and a share icon. The main title of the form is 'Sensory Marketing, Guest Satisfaction, and Post-Stay Intentions'. Below the title, there is a 'Thank You for Your Participation!' section with a share icon. The text in this section reads: 'Your valuable input will greatly contribute to the success of my research, helping to explore the role of sensory marketing and guest satisfaction in shaping post-stay intentions.' followed by 'Merry Guestmas! 🎄 ✨'. Below this is a question: 'How would you rate your overall experience with this questionnaire?' with a share icon. Underneath the question is a five-star rating scale, with all five stars currently unselected. Below the rating scale is a text input field with the prompt 'Please feel free to add some feedback or suggestions.' and a share icon. A note below the input field states 'This is a completely optional field.' The input field itself contains the placeholder text 'Enter your answer'. At the bottom left of the form, there are two buttons: 'Back' and 'Submit'. At the bottom right, there is a progress indicator showing 'Page 10 of 10' with a horizontal bar. At the very bottom of the form, there is a Microsoft 365 logo and a disclaimer: 'This content is created by the owner of the form. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner. Microsoft is not responsible for the privacy or security practices of its customers, including those of this form owner. Never give out your password. Microsoft Forms | AI-Powered surveys, quizzes and polls. [Create my own form](#). The owner of this form has not provided a privacy statement as to how they will use your response data. Do not provide personal or sensitive information. | [Terms of use](#)'.