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INFLUENCE OF SENSORY MARKETING ON PURCHASE DECISION: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY IN BAKERIES AND PASTRY SHOPS IN ARICA

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ABSTRACT: Over time, marketing has evolved to adapt to consumer habits. In this context, one of its main objectives has become providing memorable or disruptive experiences during the purchasing process. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how sensory marketing influences customer purchasing decisions in bakeries and pastry shops in the city of Arica. A non-probabilistic sample of 140 individuals was surveyed using a quantitative methodological design that included non-parametric approaches and an exploratory focus. While tactile ($\beta = -0.13$) and auditory stimuli ($\beta = -0.06$) do not show a significant link with purchasing behavior, the results derived through a structural equation model indicate that visual ($\beta = 0.85$) and olfactory stimuli ($\beta = 0.25$) significantly influence the decision-making process.

Keywords: sensory marketing, neuromarketing, purchase behavior, decision-making, sales strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing plays an essential role in the strategic planning of organizations, as it directly influences future business results. In recent decades, the traditional approach has evolved toward models that prioritize the consumer experience, in response to growing knowledge about human behavior (Rodas and Cervantes, 2017; Rivera et al., 2000).

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In this context, sensory marketing has gained relevance by considering that consumers interact with the product through their senses. Cases such as Bubblegummers demonstrate that a brand can be remembered through a sense and its influence on emotions (Paredes and Gutiérrez, 2021). This trend has become particularly established in the food industry, where neurogastronomy highlights the role of the sense of smell in constructing meaningful experiences (da Silva et al., 2017).

From a psychological perspective, purchasing behavior can be classified as high or low complexity depending on the type of product, situation, and consumer needs (Forero, 1978). This classification justifies the need to explore commercial strategies that transcend conventional approaches, incorporating multisensory elements into the decision-making process.

In Chile, the consumption of baked goods and pastries has a significant weight in the average household diet. According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (n.d.), in 2023, total bread consumption per household was 207.76 kg per year, while consumption of sweet pastries reached 41.68 kg. These indicators confirm the centrality of this sector in the country's daily life. The city of Arica, with 171 companies dedicated to the production of bread and pastries, is no exception to this trend. However, this sector has suffered a 10% contraction in the number of companies between 2019 and 2020, which highlights an urgent need for commercial restructuring (Servicio de Impuestos Internos, n.d.). At the regional level, this scenario is exacerbated by the high failure rate of startups in Latin America, largely due to deficiencies in marketing strategies (Zapata Molina et al., 2022).

In response to these challenges, marketing has been fragmented into specialized areas such as digital, experiential, and sensory marketing (Liendo, 2017). Of these, sensory marketing represents an effective way to connect emotionally with consumers, optimizing product perception and facilitating purchasing decisions (Yarosh and Kalkova, 2022). Despite its potential and the growth of this trend in sectors such as retail and entertainment, very few empirical studies have been identified that analyze its application in specific markets such as bakeries and pastry shops in medium-sized cities in Latin America, particularly in northern

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Chile. Considering the above, the present study aims to analyze the influence of sensory stimuli on consumer purchasing decisions in bakeries and pastry shops in the city of Arica.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Conceptual foundations of sensory marketing

Sensory marketing is a strategy that stimulates the consumer's five senses to create memorable experiences that influence purchasing behavior (Rubio Gil et al., 2023). This approach is closely related to neuromarketing, a discipline that applies principles of neuroscience to understand cognitive and emotional responses to market stimuli (Birkenová et al., 2022).

In highly competitive environments, sensory stimulation emerges as a differentiator that enables companies to connect emotionally with consumers, thereby strengthening their relationship with the brand and promoting loyalty.

Influence of the senses on consumer behavior

The sense of sight acts as the first and main channel of sensory information in commercial contexts; in fact, humans process images almost instantaneously. Studies estimate that up to 80% of brand recognition is conditioned by the color used in its visual identity, since colors generate specific emotional associations: white conveys purity, blue conveys safety, and green conveys freshness (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2019; Rivas, 2017). Likewise, the design of the space and the presentation of the product have a direct impact on the formation of judgments about quality and perceived value (Merchán Price and Henao, 2011).

In terms of hearing, music can act as a moderator of mood, regulating the pace of shopping without being consciously perceived. Holgado (2019) documents how soft rhythms induce longer stays in the store, while fast rhythms stimulate quick purchasing decisions. Even when the music is not to the consumer's taste, its presence can still serve an emotional containment

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function. Thus, the auditory sense creates an intangible but powerful atmosphere that accompanies the entire shopping journey.

The sense of smell has a direct connection to the areas of the brain responsible for emotion and memory, making it a sense with great persuasive potential. Gómez Ramírez (2012) points out that olfactory experiences have a retention rate of up to 65% in human memory. In this regard, Aristizábal and Díaz (2020) demonstrated through a study in Cali on the process of purchasing milkshakes that certain aromas, such as vanilla and chocolate, can elicit positive physiological responses and reinforce the predisposition to purchase.

The tactile experience, although less intense than other sensory stimuli, plays an important role in the judgment of product quality. The texture, temperature, and weight of the product can influence the perception of reliability and authenticity (Ortegón-Cortázar and Gómez Rodríguez, 2016). In sectors such as food, tactile contact has been shown to correlate with greater interest in purchasing (Melero, 2019).

Finally, taste represents the culmination of the consumer's sensory experience; it is the last filter and, in many cases, the most decisive one. Although not all products can offer a prior taste test, for those that do, this experience can seal the customer's decision. Taste buds not only register basic flavors, but also work in conjunction with smell to create an integrated multisensory experience. Jiménez-Marín et al. (2019) state that memory retains approximately 15% of what is tasted, which can make the difference between a one-time purchase and a repeat customer.

Business applications of sensory marketing

Sensory marketing has been implemented by various companies. Apple, for example, has designed its retail spaces with a predominance of white and has eliminated intermediaries, allowing consumers to interact freely with the product (Velasco and Martos, 2014). Disney, for its part, has incorporated characteristic aromas such as popcorn in its parks, achieving repeat purchases (Vieslo, 2020). Similarly, Old Spice has positioned its brand through a distinctive jingle, demonstrating the effectiveness of auditory branding (Castillón, 2023).

More recent applications include that of pastry chef Cedric Grolet and a tasting strategy that has generated long lines of people eager to delight in his creations (Chisik et al., 2018).

Research hypothesis and theoretical model

Based on the literature, it has been established that sensory stimuli influence the consumer experience, affecting their emotional and cognitive evaluation of the product (Rubio Gil et al., 2023; Gómez Ramírez, 2012). This influence can manifest itself at different stages of the decision-making process, from initial perception to final choice. Based on this theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Visual stimuli significantly influence the purchase decision
- H2: Auditory stimuli significantly influence the purchase decision
- H3: Olfactory stimuli significantly influence the purchase decision
- H4: Tactile stimuli significantly influence purchasing decisions

These hypotheses consider purchasing decisions as a dependent variable influenced by external stimuli that can be managed through sensory marketing. Their validation will be carried out using a structural equation model that allows the interaction between the constructs evaluated to be represented graphically.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design and a correlational scope. The structural equation modeling (SEM) technique was used for statistical analysis, which is widely recognized in the field of business marketing for its ability to evaluate complex relationships between variables. This model combines the principles of linear regression and factor analysis, allowing theoretical hypotheses to be tested by representing latent constructs (concepts that cannot be directly observed) using observable or measurable indicators (Larry et al., 2009).

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Variables evaluated

A structured questionnaire consisting of 29 items was applied, 17 of which correspond to the dimensions of sensory marketing covering the visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile modalities, adapted from the instrument proposed by da Silva et al. (2017). The remaining 12 items, aimed at measuring purchasing decisions, were taken from the study by Yana Salluca et al. (2022). All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

In terms of ethical considerations, participation was voluntary, anonymous, and based on informed consent. Prior to the application of the instrument, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, ensuring the confidentiality of the information collected and its exclusive use for academic purposes. No sensitive or identifying personal data was collected, and participants were free to withdraw from the process at any time.

Sample size and demographic profile

The sample consisted of 140 residents of the city of Arica, selected using non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Of the total, 50% were men, 49.3% were women, and 0.7% chose not to specify. In terms of age range, most of the respondents were under 30 years old (44.3%), followed by the 30-44 age group (29.3%), 45-60 (20%), and those over 60 with the smallest proportion (6.4%).

Figure 1

Demographic profile

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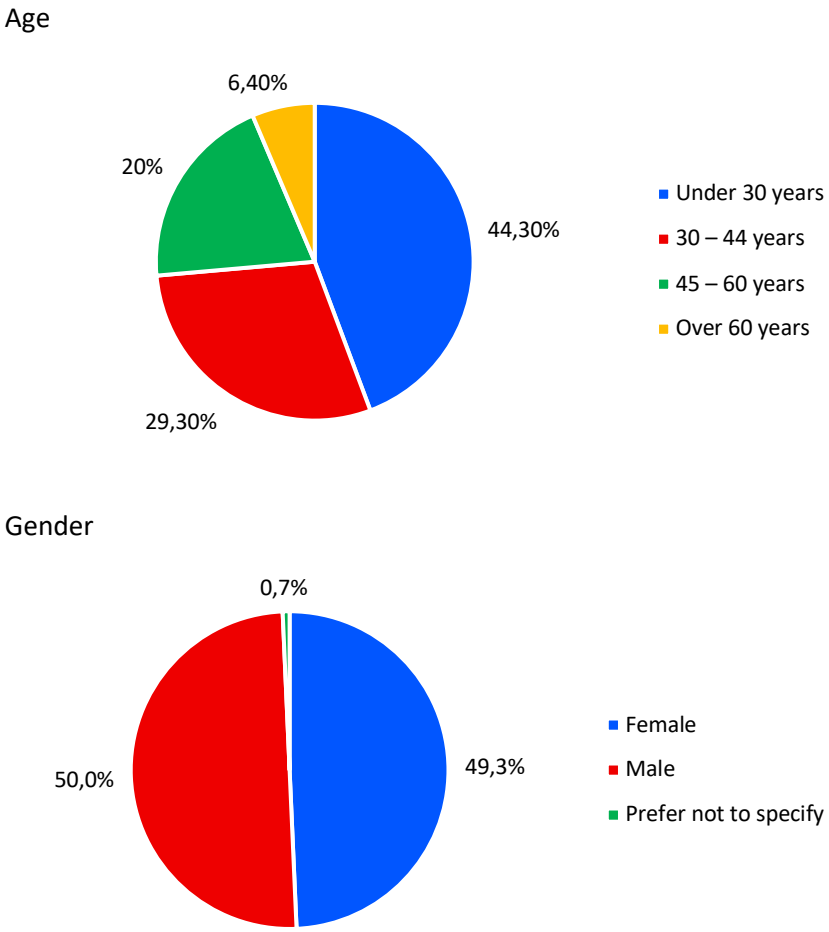

Note. Report obtained from Google Forms.

Software used

SPSS and SmartPLS statistical programs were used complementarily for data processing and analysis. First, SPSS was used to perform descriptive analyses, verify the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha, and apply normality tests such as Kolmogorov-Smirnov. This initial analysis helped to evaluate the quality of the data and correctly choose the statistical techniques for the next step. Subsequently, SmartPLS was used to run the structural equation model. This allowed us to estimate relationships between latent variables, evaluate the reliability of the constructs, and validate the study's hypotheses, following the recommendations of Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Roldán and Sánchez-Franco (2012).

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RESULTS

Internal reliability analysis

Before definitively applying the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted on a group of 30 people, and then the internal consistency of the items was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The results exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating that the items are internally consistent and reliably measure the defined constructs, allowing the questionnaire to be administered to the remaining 110 people.

Figure 2

Calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1}\left(1 - \frac{\Sigma V_i}{V_t}\right)$$

$$\alpha = \frac{29}{29-1}\left(1 - \frac{38{,}4}{178{,}9}\right)$$

$$\alpha = 0{,}81$$

$\alpha: Cronbach's\ alpha$
$k: Number\ of\ items$
$V_i: Variance\ of\ each\ item$
$V_t: Total\ variance$

Note. Own elaboration.

Normality tests

To determine the type of statistical test to use, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were applied. Both showed statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the variables do not follow a normal distribution. Consequently, non-parametric tests were chosen.

Table 1

Normality tests by variables

	KS test[a]			SW test		
	Statistician	**gl**	**Sig.**	**Statistician**	**gl**	**Sig.**
SM	,096	140	,003	,945	140	,000

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DM	,146	140	,000	,883	140	,000

a. Lilliefors significance correction

Note. Report obtained from SPSS software.

Evaluation of the structural equation model

A PLS-SEM model was constructed to analyze the relationships between sensory stimuli and purchasing decisions. Initially, 29 items distributed across five latent constructs were incorporated. Four of these constructs correspond to exogenous variables (visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile stimuli), while the fifth represented the endogenous variable "decision-making," operated through three dimensions: need detection (ND), inquiry (I), and option evaluation (OE). However, during the factor loadings analysis, six items were identified whose standardized loadings were less than 0.5 (OS3, TS4, TS5, I1, I2, and OE4), so they were eliminated in accordance with the recommendations of Mavrou (2015). This reduced the total number of observed variables to 23, optimizing the quality of the model. All composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7, and the AVE values were greater than 0.5, meeting the criteria of Joseph F. Hair (Arango-Ramírez et al., 2023).

Table 2

Evaluation of latent variables

Variable	Charges	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
VISUAL STIMULI		0,926	0,928	0,715
VS1	0,77			
VS2	0,89			
VS3	0,82			
VS4	0,90			
VS5	0,84			
AUDITORY STIMULI		0,958	0,958	0,852

AS1	0,93			
AS2	0,96			
AS3	0,88			
AS4	0,92			
OLFACTORY STIMULI		0,895	0,896	0,810
OS1	0,91			
OS2	0,89			
TACTILE STIMULI		0,846	0,835	0,650
TS1	0,90			
TS2	0,84			
TS3	0,66			
DECISION MAKING		0,911	0,900	0,540
ND1	0,92			
ND2	0,85			
ND3	0,70			
ND4	0,86			
I3	0,69			
I4	0,53			
OE1	0,63			
OE2	0,77			
OE3	0,56			

Note. Own analysis based on results generated by SmartPLS.

To verify discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied. The square root of the AVE was greater than the correlations between constructs, confirming that the latent variables are distinct from one another.

Table 3

Assessment of discriminant validity according to Fornell-Larcker

	VS	**AS**	**OS**	**TS**	**DM**
VS	**0,845**				

AS	0,272	**0,923**			
OS	0,766	0,347	**0,900**		
TS	0,780	0,320	0,760	**0,806**	
DM	0,917	0,211	0,774	0,696	**0,735**

Note. Information interpreted and structured based on AMOS reports.

Once the model had been refined, it was verified that it had been correctly identified. To do this, the number of parameters to be estimated was calculated, which turned out to be 55, compared to 276 observed data points. The difference between the two gave 221 degrees of freedom, indicating that the model is overidentified.

Figure 3

Total observed data

$$number\ of\ \text{“}datapoints\text{”} = \frac{p\ (p+1)}{2}$$

$$number\ of\ data\ points = \frac{23\ (23+1)}{2} = 276$$

Note. Own elaboration

Hypothesis verification

The trajectory coefficients obtained in the structural model show that visual (β = 0.85) and olfactory (β = 0.25) stimuli have a significant effect on the purchase decision, confirming hypotheses H1 and H3. In contrast, auditory (β = -0.06) and tactile (β = -0.13) stimuli did not reach statistical significance, with both coefficients falling below the minimum threshold of 0.2 suggested by Bernal et al. (2016) for establishing a significant causal relationship in structural models. Therefore, hypotheses H2 and H4 are rejected.

Table 4

Trajectory coefficients and hypothesis testing of the structural model

HYPOTHESIS	Estimation of the trajectory coefficient (β)	t-value	*p*-value	Result Hypothesis
H1: Visual stimuli significantly influence purchasing decisions	0,85	6.191	0,000	Accepted
H2: Auditory stimuli significantly influence purchasing decisions	-0,06	0,450	0,201	Rejected
H3: Olfactory stimuli significantly influence purchasing decisions	0,25	3.474	0,009	Accepted
H4: Tactile stimuli significantly influence purchasing decisions	-0,13	1.769	0,148	Rejected

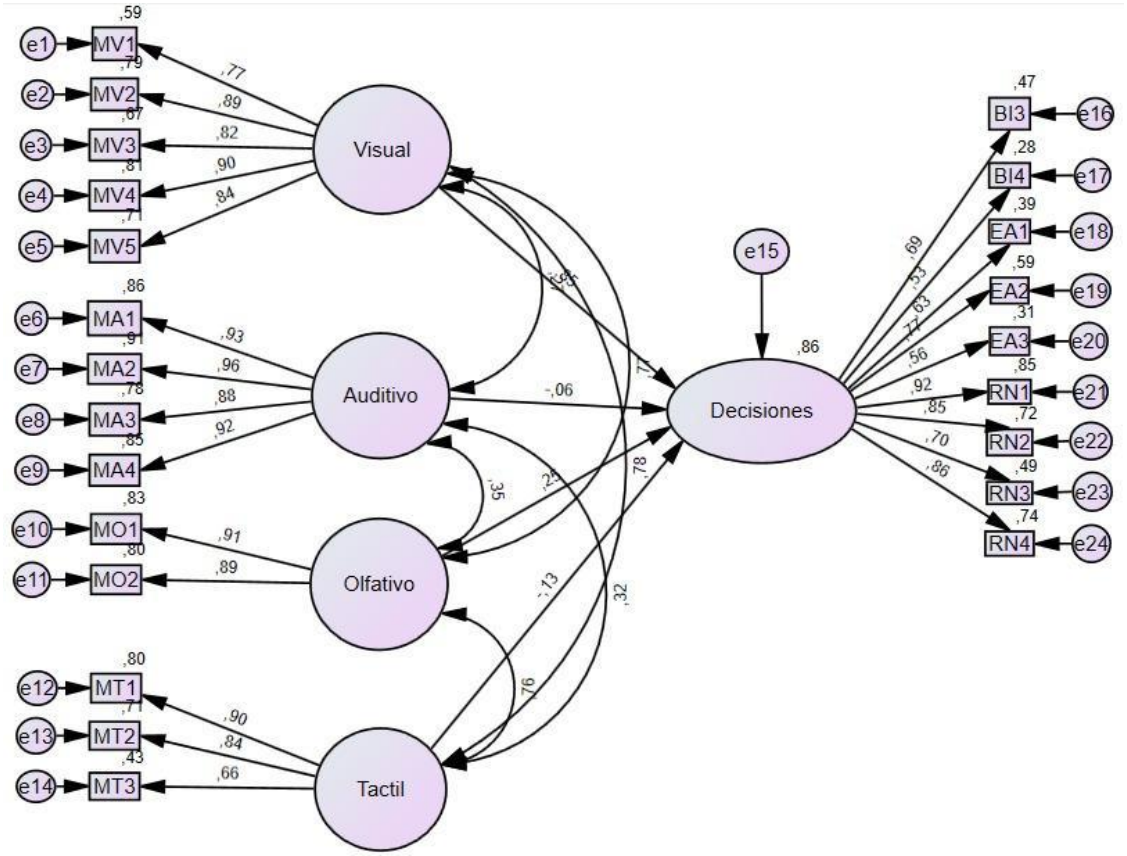
Note. In-house development based on results generated by AMOS and SmartPLS.

To assess the strength of each structural link, the R^2 value or "coefficient of determination" associated with the endogenous construct was examined. In this case, an R^2 value of 0.86 was obtained, meaning that sensory stimuli influence decision-making by 86%. A value close to 1 denotes perfect predictive ability, so this result confirms high explanatory power (IBM, 2025).

In addition, its predictive ability was evaluated using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value, using the blindfolding procedure with systematic data omission. The result obtained was 0.714, which shows that the model has a solid predictive capacity, meaning that the model can explain approximately 71.4% of the variance in the omitted data. According to Mendes et al. (2024), a Q^2 value greater than zero validates the suitability of the model for predictive purposes, and values above 0.5 reflect a strong structural prediction capacity.

Figure 4

Relationship between sensory stimuli and decision-making processes



Note. Prepared internally using SmartPLS.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The model results confirm that visual and olfactory stimuli have a significant impact on purchasing decisions, which is consistent with previous studies that highlight the role of color, product presentation, and aroma as emotional and cognitive triggers (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2019; Gómez Ramírez, 2012). In contrast, auditory and tactile stimuli did not show a significant effect, possibly because they are not widely used in local commerce.

Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical perspective, these results help validate the application of the sensory marketing model in Latin American markets, where empirical research is still in its infancy. They also reinforce the model's usefulness for analyzing complex perceptual constructs.

In practical terms, the findings allow bakery and pastry shop owners and managers to optimize their resources. Investing in lighting, display cases, and furniture design, or packaging and product aesthetics, or subtly diffusing the aroma of freshly baked bread, may be more effective than installing background music or contact strategies.

Study limitations and future research directions

Among the main limitations is the use of non-probabilistic sampling, which restricts the generalization of the results. In addition, the cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of strict causal relationships. It is suggested that future studies incorporate experimental methods, include the taste dimension, and extend the analysis to other sectors such as supermarkets or cafeterias.

CONCLUSIONS

The significant relevance of sensory marketing in the decision-making process of bakeries and pastry shops in the city of Arica has been demonstrated, particularly through its visual ($\beta = 0.85$) and olfactory ($\beta = 0.25$) dimensions. On the other hand, the tactile ($\beta = -0.13$) and auditory ($\beta = -0.06$) dimensions do not influence purchasing decisions.

When buying bread or baked goods, visual and olfactory perceptions have a greater impact than tactile and auditory perceptions. In Arica, consumers do not touch the bread directly, but use tongs or bags for hygiene reasons. In addition, local bakeries and pastry shops do not usually use music or attractive tactile experiences, unlike supermarkets and cafes.

The research findings are valuable for the local business sector, as they can generate a positive social impact. They enable entrepreneurs in micro, small, and medium-sized bakeries and pastry shops to make more informed strategic decisions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Measuring instrument used

Este cuestionario tiene como objetivo explorar los elementos sensoriales que influyen en la toma de decisiones de compra de los consumidores en la ciudad de Arica. Su participación es fundamental para obtener una comprensión profunda de cómo el marketing sensorial influye en las decisiones de compra. Las respuestas proporcionadas serán tratadas de manera confidencial, siendo accesibles únicamente para los autores encargados de la investigación. Le solicitamos que responda con total libertad, ya que su aporte contribuirá significativamente al desarrollo de este estudio académico.

Consentimiento:

Por favor, lea cuidadosamente la siguiente declaración antes de continuar con la encuesta. Al responder a las preguntas y hacer clic en "Enviar" al final de la encuesta, confirma que:

1-. Ha leído y comprendido la naturaleza y el propósito de esta encuesta.

2-. Participa de forma voluntaria y sin ser presionado.

3-. Entiende que su participación es anónima y que la información proporcionada será utilizada únicamente con fines de investigación.

4-. Acepta que los resultados de esta encuesta puedan ser utilizados con fines académicos o informativos, manteniendo la confidencialidad de sus respuestas.

5-. Puede retirarse de la encuesta en cualquier momento.

Marque con una x la respuesta seleccionada

	Si Acepto	*No Acepto*
¿Acepta participar en esta encuesta según los términos mencionados anteriormente?		

	Seleccione el rango de edad al que pertenece	*Indique su género*
Perfil demográfico del encuestado	Menos de 29 ___	Femenino ___
	Entre 30 y 44 años ___	Masculino ___
	Entre 45 y 60 años ___	Prefiero no especificar ___
	Más de 60 años ___	

	Dimensión Visual	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
1	La iluminación del establecimiento facilita la visualización de los productos.					
2	El establecimiento está organizado adecuadamente.					
3	La ambientación interna del establecimiento tiene un toque profesional.					
4	La disposición de las vitrinas permite observar los productos al detalle.					
5	La apariencia externa del establecimiento me estimula a visitarlo.					

	Dimensión Auditiva	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
6	La música dentro del establecimiento me evoca gratos recuerdos.					
7	La música dentro del establecimiento me permite disfrutar la visita.					
8	La música dentro del establecimiento me inspira a observar los productos.					
9	La música proyectada estimula la visita al establecimiento					

	Dimensión Olfativa	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
10	El aroma peculiar dentro del establecimiento prolonga mi permanencia.					
11	El aroma que se siente dentro del establecimiento libera tranquilidad y seguridad.					
12	El olor del establecimiento pasa por desapercibido.					

	Dimensión Táctil	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
13	La temperatura dentro del establecimiento prolonga mi permanencia.					
14	La temperatura dentro del establecimiento denota un toque profesional.					
15	La disposición y el contacto físico con el personal estimula mi decisión de compra.					
16	La distribución interna del establecimiento permite tocar los productos.					
17	Al ingresar al establecimiento observo y puedo tocar los productos.					

	Dimensión Reconocimiento de la Necesidad	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
1	Conozco y visito el establecimiento porque ofrece los productos que deseo.					
2	Estoy seguro de lo que deseo comprar en el establecimiento.					
3	Los estímulos internos en el establecimiento motivan mi decisión de compra.					
4	Los productos que deseo están a disposición en las vitrinas del establecimiento.					

	Dimensión Búsqueda de la Información	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
5	Busco información sobre los productos que deseo antes de visitar el establecimiento.					
6	Estoy informado a través de catálogos y afiches que provee el establecimiento.					
7	Cuento con información suficiente sobre los productos que ofrece el establecimiento.					
8	Tomo en cuenta las sugerencias de personas antes de visitar el establecimiento.					

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	Dimensión Evaluación de Alternativas	*Totalmente en desacuerdo*	*En desacuerdo*	*Indiferente*	*De acuerdo*	*Totalmente de acuerdo*
9	Comparo los diferentes atributos de otros establecimientos antes de comprar.					
10	La ubicación del establecimiento es atractiva con respecto a otros establecimientos.					
11	Tomo en cuenta las sugerencias de las personas sobre el establecimiento.					
12	Tomo en cuenta las redes sociales para visitar el establecimiento.					

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