

The Adoption of Sustainable Sensory Marketing to Enhance Non-Financial Business Performance in Hotel Spas: A Case Study of Thailand

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Abstract

In Thailand, hotel spas have been expanding rapidly. As customer expectations evolve, hotel spas are adopting advanced marketing practices, including the integration of sustainability. This has led to the emergence of sustainable sensory marketing, which blends sensory stimuli with environmentally friendly practices to improve non-financial business performance. The objective of this research is to explore the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing practices and investigate their influence on enhancing non-financial business performance in hotel spas. A qualitative research method was employed, using in-depth interviews with a purposive and snowball sample of fifteen hotel spa managers across six major hotel spa destinations in Thailand: Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Surat Thani, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Ratchasima. Thematic analysis was conducted to examine the interview transcripts. The findings reveal that sustainable sensory marketing practices in hotel spas incorporate six sensory dimensions; sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and an emerging sixth sense of the mind. The study confirms that these practices positively influence non-financial performance outcomes, including customer satisfaction, revisiting intention, customer referrals, brand reputation, while also revealing new themes such as positive online reviews and increasing the length of stay. This research extends the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model by showing how sustainable sensory stimuli influence spa customers' emotions and behaviors. The study also offers practical implications for hotel spa managers to enhance guest experiences and increase competitive advantages.

Keywords: Sustainable Sensory Marketing, Non-Financial Business Performance, Mind, Hotel Spas

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Introduction

The spa market is one of the emerging segments of the global wellness industry, with a projected value of over \$137 billion in 2023 and an approximate 4.1% annual growth rate between 2019 and 2023. More than 80,000 hotel spas have been established worldwide (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Thailand is regarded as one of the greatest hotel spa markets, and its potential for further growth is even greater than that of other competing countries in Asia. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2024) reported that Thailand was named as the top global spa destination and ranked among the top 20 worldwide, generating revenue of \$1.6 billion in 2024. As customer expectations evolve, businesses in the service sector are adopting more advanced marketing strategies to deliver greater value. One such strategy is sensory marketing, which uses the five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to engage customers and produce memorable, emotionally charged experiences that improve business performance. Sustainable sensory marketing has developed from a recent initiative to integrate sustainability into this strategy (Išoraite & Aktas, 2025). This strategy uses sensory stimuli and eco-friendly practices to meet customer needs while also showing that the company cares about the environment and society.

However, studies sustainable sensory marketing and its influence on business performance remain limited in the context of emerging wellness trends in Thailand (Somkematkun & Wongsurawat, 2017; Kim et al., 2020). Sustainable sensory marketing strategies began in the food and beverage service industry and have been widely studied in multiple sectors; yet, they have been somewhat neglected in the spa industry (Išoraite' & Aktas, 2025). This gap is especially important because there is a lot of research on sensory marketing management. Nonetheless, there is a lack of research regarding the integration of sustainable sensory marketing strategies in hotel spas and their effects on non-financial business performance (Han et al., 2018; Isaac et al., 2023). A non-financial indicator, such as customer satisfaction, customer revisit intention, customer referrals, and brand reputation, is increasingly acknowledged as a critical measure of business performance and crucial for attaining long-term sustainability and growth (Isaac et al., 2023). Research studies indicate that ineffective marketing strategies can result in the failure of spa businesses (Zandiyyeh et al., 2022; Han et al., 2020). Therefore, hotel spa managers should adopt sustainable sensory marketing to create immersive and engaging customer experiences, thereby reducing the risk of business failure. Customers seek more than functional products or services; they also want an experience that emphasizes being responsible to the environment (Pollák et al., 2022). To address this research gap, this study aims to explore the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing and its influence on enhancing non-financial business performance

in hotel spas in Thailand, employing the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) theory as the analytical framework.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how environmental stimuli influences customer responses and non-business performance, while providing practical insights for hotel spa managers to increase experience and achieve competitive advantages.

Research Objectives

- 1) To explore the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing practices in hotel spas.
- 2) To investigate the influence of sustainable sensory marketing on enhancing non-financial business performance in hotel spas.

Literature Review

Hotel Spas in Thailand

The Latin root of the word “spa” means health through water. Spa establishments typically offer hydrotherapy treatments administered by trained professionals in peaceful, healing environments. These services aim to improve overall well-being by helping people with their mental, physical, and spiritual health (Mihók & Marčeková, 2022). Hotel spas have experienced substantial growth and profitability in recent years, primarily due to their integration with the tourism sector (Han et al., 2020). Hotel spa is defined as a spa facility located within a hotel or resort that provides a variety of wellness and relaxation services to both hotel guests and often non-resident customers (Global Wellness Institute, 2023). In Thailand, these services usually include massages, facials, skin care treatments, scrubs, wraps, hydrotherapy, and wellness activities like yoga and meditation. According to Global Wellness Institute (2024), the spa products market in Thailand is projected to create revenue of US\$ 1,857.4 million by the year 2030. The Thai market is expected to experience a 9% growth rate from the years 2025-2030. Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Surat Thani, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Ratchasima are Thailand's major hotel spa tourism destinations (Lumkam, 2024). Service businesses such as spa have traditionally concentrated on their sustainable natural resources and sensory services, they offer a wide range of services and are seeking new consumer value propositions to draw emerging market segments. This new marketing idea improves spa performance.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that a hotel spa is located within a hotel and provides wellness services such as massages, along with activities like yoga and meditation, catering to both hotel guests and external visitors. Thai hotel spas are increasingly adopting new

consumer value propositions to appeal to a broader market. Sustainable sensory marketing strategies can play a key role in enhancing spa performance.

Sustainable Sensory Marketing

Schmitt (1999) was the first to establish sensory marketing, the approach that appeals to the five human senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to evoke consumer emotions rather than their rational judgment. Moreira et al. (2017) explained that sensory marketing involves using external environmental elements to engage and stimulate consumers' senses. Lately, customers have been more interested in sensory marketing techniques that focus on eco-friendliness and sustainability. Sensory marketing serves as a strategy employed by sellers to shape consumer behavior by appealing to customers' senses and emotions. Examining the function and impact of sensory marketing offers important insights into how to enhance spa performance. According to Išoraite and Aktas (2025), sustainable sensory marketing is a mix of eco-friendly practices and the emotional power of sensory engagement. They use natural, ethical, and renewable sensory inputs such as organic products. This strategy strengthens a spa's commitment to sustainability while creating immersive brands. Borah et al. (2023) found that

Sight is often the first sense for delivering sustainable sensory marketing messages to customers. They also highlighted that spas are using more eco-friendly design and other sustainable visual elements to improve their brand image and attract customers who care about the environment.

In addition, **Sound** has a long-lasting effect on memory, and a significant amount of information can be retained through eco-soundscapes auditory experiences. Similar to Pollák et al. (2022), they stated that spa use plays eco-soundscapes, such as recordings of natural environments, to increase guest experience while promoting conservation efforts. These sounds can help people relax and feel more connected to nature.

Smell is directly linked to memory and emotion through the limbic system of the brain. Pollák et al. (2022) noted that using natural scents from organic sources instead of synthetic scents in sustainable sensory strategies can foster a calming and healing atmosphere. These smells are known to help people relax and relieve stress. According to Hultén (2017) and Kim et al. (2020), service businesses that offer personalized scents tailored to individual customer preferences can improve their guest experience.

Similarly, **Taste** plays a vital role in engaging customers in sectors such as hospitality, where offering samples or regional flavors strengthens brand distinction. Providing welcoming, organic, and locally sourced drinks can enhance the overall guest experience in hotels. These

drinks can be crafted to promote refreshment (Kim et al., 2020). Snacks like fresh fruits can enhance customer experience by complementing the hotel's emphasis on health and wellbeing.

Touch is a strategy aimed at enhancing the brand's identity and image by engaging with customers both physically and mentally. Additionally, integrating sustainable tactile experiences into product design and packaging by using recyclable or ethically sourced materials can increase customer satisfaction and encourage them to recommend the product to others (Borah et al., 2023).

It can be said that sustainable sensory marketing combines eco-friendly practices with sensory engagement through the five senses. For example, 1) Sight-spas use sustainable visual elements, 2) Sound-spas play natural sounds to help people relax and reinforce conservation values, 3) Smell-spas use organic scents, 4) Taste-spas serve organic drinks to increase guest experiences, and 5) Touch-spas include sustainable tactile experiences in their product design and packaging.

Non-Financial Business Performance

The concept of business performance in hotel spas has gained significant scholarly and industry attention, as wellness tourism is growing quickly and people are looking for more holistic ways to improve their health (Han et al., 2018). Business performance in the hospitality industry is often assessed using both financial and non-financial indicators to evaluate how well businesses are performing. Financial indicators include measures such as revenue and profit, while non-financial indicators include factors such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the intention to return. Recently, sustainability has been integrated into sensory marketing strategies, especially in sectors such as the hospitality industry. Işoraite' and Aktas (2025) highlighted that eco-conscious sensory marketing by using natural, ethical, and renewable sensory inputs strengthens brand reputation and drives long-term business success by appealing to socially responsible consumers. For spas, non-financial indicators including customer satisfaction, the intention to return, customer referrals, and brand reputation are becoming more important as ways to measure business success and long-term success (Somkeatkun & Wongsurawat, 2017; Isaac et al., 2023). The study by Kim et al. (2020) investigated the role of sensory marketing in emotional attachment. The results indicated that brand experiences are much improved by sensory clues, which strengthen emotional bonds and boost customer revisit intentions. The finding from Isaac et al. (2023) demonstrated that sustainable sensory marketing enhances guest experience, subsequently elevating purchase intentions, customer satisfaction, revisit behavior, and long-term profitability.

Stimulus-Organism-Response Model (S-O-R Model)

Sustainable sensory marketing seeks to go beyond meeting customer wants (Stimulus) and achieving primary satisfaction (Response). Its goal is to produce a unique and attractive experience that evokes strong feelings (Organism). According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the SOR model was used to explain the environmental stimulus (S) that creates emotional reactions of the customer (O), which affect behavioral responses of the customer (R). This model is also known as the S-O-R model. Thus, the S-O-R is an individual's "inner organism changes" in response to external stimuli, resulting in behavioral reactions. Kim et al. (2020) further applied the S-O-R model in the hospitality sector, demonstrating how the five senses influence customers' intentions to revisit. Han et al. (2018) employed the S-O-R framework to analyze the effects of environmental stimuli on customer responses and explored the influence of sensory marketing on guest satisfaction and their propensity to return to the spas. The results showed that engaging in multiple senses can greatly boost customer satisfaction and make the spa more appealing and effective.

As Thailand's hotel spa industry continues to grow, businesses aim to differentiate themselves in a competitive market. Sustainable sensory marketing combines emotional engagement with better customer experience to create a strategic approach. Sustainable sensory marketing offers a strategic approach by combining emotional engagement with improved customer experience. This study demonstrates that the incorporation of such strategies can improve non-financial outcomes, as explained by the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review and research objectives, this research proposes a conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

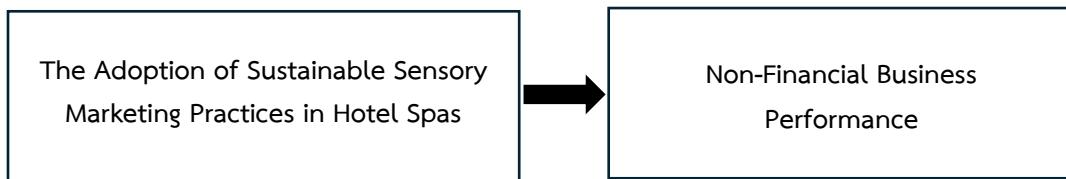


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research aims to explore the emerging and underexplored phenomenon of sustainable sensory marketing and its impact on non-financial performance in hotel spas. Since limited research has been conducted on this topic, especially in Thailand, a qualitative method was appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding of how spa managers employ sensory marketing techniques. Quantitative methods, which depend on established variables, may not fully capture new or context-specific insights.

Population and Sample

This study employed in-depth interviews with fifteen experienced hotel spa managers across Thailand, continuing until data saturation was reached. A sample size ranging from nine to seventeen participants is considered sufficient for in-depth interviews (Boddy, 2016). These participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The selection criteria for choosing participants were 1) they must currently work at hotel spas, and 2) they must have at least five years in a managerial role. Finally, only Thai citizens were chosen to make sure that the research was culturally and contextually relevant. Participants were selected based on their expertise in executing sensory marketing strategies that are consistent with sustainable practices. Professional networks between the Hospitality Business Management program in the School of Management at Mae Fah Luang University and collaborating hotel spas facilitated the recruitment of the initial participants. The researchers first emailed hotel spa managers and subsequently followed up with phone calls to formally introduce themselves and explain the goals of the research. After the first interview, snowball sampling was used by asking the first participant to recommend other hotel spa managers.

Data Collection

Three experts in spa management looked over the semi-structured questions. The questions were improved based on their feedback and then tested in a pilot study with three spa professionals. A pilot study was conducted to assess the flow of the questions, ensure appropriate wording, eliminate weak content, and confirm alignment with the research objectives (Hillman & Radel, 2018). A pilot study was conducted to assess the flow of the questions, improve their wording, eliminate any content weaknesses, and ensure alignment with the research objectives (Hillman & Radel, 2018). The guideline questions employed in this study were designed to collect data regarding: 1) general information about hotel spa managers, 2) general information about their hotel spas, 3) details on the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing practices, and

4) insights into the effects of sustainable sensory marketing on their non-financial business performance.

This research was approved by the Mae Fah Luang University Ethics Committee for Human Research (Approval Number: EC25101-12). After receiving ethical approval, data collection was carried out by well-trained researchers. All participants provided written consent before conducting the interview. The interview transcripts were anonymized, and no participants' names were included. This research employed semi-structured questions as a data collection tool by conducting an online interview via Zoom with spa managers from six major hotel spa destinations in Thailand which are Bangkok, Chonburi, Phuket, Surat Thani, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Ratchasima. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour. This qualitative study also employed documentary analysis and participant observation to enrich the data. Relevant documents such as spa reports, journals and academic books were reviewed to explore the relationship between sustainable sensory marketing and non-financial performance. Researchers also observed how hotel spas adopt sustainable sensory elements in their business.

Data Analysis

The researchers established content analysis by applying coding and categorization to increase understanding of how hotel spas implement sustainable sensory marketing in their business. Data was recorded during in-depth-interview, transcribed word-for-word. Additionally, the analysis employed thematic analysis, utilizing the constant comparative method to develop and refine emerging categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To improve the validity and reliability of the results, this study employed methodological triangulation. Triangulation of the data source was accomplished through the integration of diverse qualitative data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis. This enabled the researchers to validate and cross-check the findings through various methodologies. Researchers used data source triangulation by comparing the views of people who stayed at different hotel spas with relevant secondary data such as spa reports and academic literature. Furthermore, industry experts were engaged to evaluate the themes and interpretations, thereby validating the accuracy and rigor of the analysis (Tisdell et al., 2025).

Research Results

The semi-structured questions are equipped with initial data such as gender, age, working experience in manager roles, and major spa hotel destinations in Thailand are shown in Table 1. There are fifteen respondents in this study.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Spa Managers from the Hotel Spas in Thailand

Respondents	Gender	Age	Year of Experience	Hotel Spa Destinations
R01	Female	35	5	Bangkok
R02	Female	36	6	Bangkok
R03	Female	40	5	Chonburi
R04	Female	42	10	Chonburi
R05	Female	34	7	Chonburi
R06	Female	45	6	Phuket
R07	Male	38	8	Phuket
R08	Female	41	9	Phuket
R09	Female	39	10	Surat Thani
R10	Male	50	12	Surat Thani
R11	Female	33	5	Chiang Mai
R12	Female	36	7	Chiang Mai
R13	Male	40	6	Chiang Mai
R14	Female	42	5	Nakhon Ratchasima
R15	Female	36	7	Nakhon Ratchasima

Note: R represents Respondents

According to the results of the in-depth interviews and content analysis, the researchers identified categories for the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing which are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and a newly emerging theme, *the mind*.

As part of the results, sustainable sensory marketing was found to impact on non-financial spa performance by increasing customer satisfaction, revisiting intention, referrals, and brand reputation, with two newly emerging themes are *positive online reviews & ratings* and *increased the length of stay*.

The adoption of sustainable sensory marketing practices in hotel spas.

1. Sight

From the research findings, all hotel spa managers implemented visual elements to deliver sustainable sensory marketing practices to customers. Regarding sight, they believe that natural lighting, eco-friendly designs, recycled décor and the display of eco-certifications all contribute to creating a peaceful atmosphere and positive emotion

1.1 Natural lighting, eco-friendly designs, recycled décor, display of eco-certifications

Respondent 6: “Our spa features a large window, skylights and open-air treatments, allowing guests to experience the atmosphere of the sea, and we use recycled pieces of wood to decorate the walls.”

Respondent 1: “*The highlight of our spa is natural healing, using only eco-certified organic products with eco-friendly labels. Since Bangkok is already a bustling city, we want our in-house hotel's guests to find relaxation and positive emotion here.*”

2. Sound

Based on findings, all spa managers adopted sustainable sound practices in their businesses. In terms of sound, eco-soundscapes have a lasting impact on guests' memories. Natural sounds can promote calmness and foster a stronger sense of connection to nature.

2.1 Eco-soundscapes and natural sounds

Respondent 7: “*At the entrance of our spa, there is a waterfall installed in front of the spa. The sound of the waterfall and the sound of the ocean waves create a refreshing and calming atmosphere that connects guests to nature.*”

3. Smell

Five out of fifteen spa managers emphasized the importance of smell in sustainable practices in their spa, as it enhances customer experience by making them more memorable while supporting environmental sustainability

3.1 Organic herbal scents, Natural and biodegradable fragrances, Personalized scents

Respondent 4: “*We use essential oils with organic herbal scents such as jasmine and lemongrass for guests who have sensitive skin. In addition, our couples can experience and select their preferred fragrances to create a personalized blend for their Romantic Getaway package.*”

4. Taste

Based on the evidence, the trend among hotel spas is to place greater emphasis on organic, healthy food and beverages, as well as natural products. Seven out of fifteen managers mentioned the adoption of taste in their sustainable sensory marketing practice. Spa no longer focuses solely on external beauty; their offerings now also support inner beauty by providing organic foods and herbal beverages that nourish the body from within.

4.1 Organic food and herbal beverages

Respondent 12: “*Our spa begins the experience by serving a special local herbal drink, which features a pleasant flavor, uses stevia instead of sugar, and has a refreshing aroma. This drink is made from organic Thai herbs that help balance the body's elements.*”

5. Touch

Five out of fifteen spa managers emphasized the importance of incorporating touch in their spas.

5.1 Biodegradable scrub ingredients and sustainable textiles

Respondent 10: *"For touching the guest, our massages and body scrubs, especially the scrub ingredients, use materials that are easily biodegradable, and we also use organic cotton towels and robes."*

Interview findings revealed that three out of fifteen spa managers identified "sustainable mind" as a newly emerging theme, describing it as a state of mental well-being centered on fostering lasting emotional stability, inner tranquility, and mindful consciousness. In Thailand, hotel spas offer wellness activities that combine Buddhist ideas, such as Anapanasati yoga, meditation, and monk chats, to help guests feel better physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

6. Mind

6.1 Holistic well-being and mindfulness

Respondent 14: *"Mindfulness classes are very popular here. In addition to massage services, guests can participate in Anapanasati yoga, meditation sessions, and monk chats, which are rooted in Buddhist practices and contribute to overall well-being".*

The results show that all spa managers use sustainable sensory marketing techniques in their businesses, using all five senses, but especially sight and sound. A new theme is the "sustainable mind," which means using eco-friendly practices and promoting mindfulness. This can help guests be more responsible for the environment and improve their overall health.

The influence of sustainable sensory marketing on non-financial business performance in hotel spas.

The interview finding indicates that adopting eco-conscious sensory marketing increases hotel spa performance by appealing to socially responsible consumers. All spa managers stated that sustainable and sensory-rich experiences improve non-financial indicators, particularly customer satisfaction, which is increasingly recognized as critical measures of business success and essential to achieving long-lasting business growth for hotel spas.

1. Sight and taste influence customer satisfaction

All hotel spa managers mentioned the impact of sustainable sensory marketing on customer satisfaction, including the enjoyment of natural ambience and appreciation of the locally sourced and sustainable refreshments.

Respondent 1: “*Guests enjoy the use of eco-friendly design and local herbal tea for their refreshment*”.

Seven out of fifteen hotel spa managers reported that customer revisit intention and customer referrals have significantly improved due to the use of natural sensory tools. Customers return because the spa is committed to protecting the environment, and they tell others about the health benefits of organic products.

2. Touch and taste influence customer revisit intentions and referrals

Respondent 6: “*Our scrubs and oils use eco-friendly, biodegradable ingredients that reduce wastewater impact. Customers feel good about helping the environment and want to return.*”

Respondent 12: “*Our customers realize that products such as organic food and beverages are beneficial to their health, so they are more likely to recommend them to their friends.*”

3. Sight influences brand reputation

Based on the interview evidence, three out of fifteen respondents emphasized that brand reputation is strengthened by visible eco-certifications and green practices.

Respondent 8: “*When customers see eco-labels and eco-certificates, they gain confidence in the spa brand reputation, recognizing its dedication to ethical practices and environmental responsibility.*”

From the interviews, two new themes emerged are positive online reviews and increasing the length of stay. Two spa managers said that eco-friendly sensory practices fit with what modern customers want, especially saving resources and energy. Guests are more likely to stay longer at spas that use environmentally friendly practices and offer sustainable experiences.

4. Sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind influence positive online reviews and increase the length of stay

Respondent 3: “*After implementing sustainable sensory marketing, we received more positive online reviews and higher star ratings on TripAdvisor due to the spa’s alignment with health and environmental values.*”

Respondent 4: “*By integrating all five senses, with our ‘Mindfulness Package,’ which combines the spa experience with mindfulness, encourages guests to extend their stays for full enjoyment.*”

From the above research results, Table 2 demonstrates themes and sub-themes related to sustainable sensory marketing adopted by hotel spas. Table 3 also presented the impacts of sustainable sensory marketing to enhance non-financial business performance.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes emerging from the adoption of sustainable sensory marketing in hotel spas in Thailand

Respondents	Themes	Sub-themes
R01, R02, R03, R04, R05 R06, R07, R08, R09, R10 R11, R12, R13, R14, R15	Sight	Natural lighting, eco-friendly designs, recycled décor, display of eco-certifications
R01, R02, R03, R04, R05 R06, R07, R08, R09, R10 R11, R12, R13, R14, R15	Sound	Eco-soundscapes, natural sounds such as a sound of waterfall and ocean waves
R02, R04, R10, R11, R14	Smell	Organic herbal scents, Natural and biodegradable fragrances, Personalized scents
R01, R02, R06, R07, R08, R09, R12	Taste	Organic food, herbal beverages such as a special local herbal beverage
R01, R04, R10, R11, R13	Touch	Biodegradable scrub ingredients, sustainable textiles such as organic cotton towels and robes
R07, R08, R14	Mind (New Emerging Theme)	Mental well-being as part of sustainable wellness, spas fostering mindfulness, and holistic well-being

Source: Authors' analysis

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes on the influence of sustainable sensory marketing in enhancing non-financial business performance in hotel spas in Thailand

Respondents	Themes	Sub-themes
R01, R02, R03, R04, R05 R06, R07, R08, R09, R10 R11, R12, R13, R14, R15	Customer satisfaction	Customers enjoy the natural ambience and appreciate the sustainable local taste of refreshments.
R02, R03, R06, R11, R12, R13, R14	Customer revisit intention	Customer return because of spa's efforts to minimize environmental impact such as biodegradable ingredients
R04, R08, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14	Customer referrals	Customers recommend spas to their friends because of the health benefits of organic products
R08, R10, R11	Brand reputation	Brand image strengthened by visible eco-certifications and green practices, enhance customer confidence.

Source: Authors' analysis

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes on the influence of sustainable sensory marketing in enhancing non-financial business performance in hotel spas in Thailand (continued)

Respondents	Themes	Sub-themes
R03, R04	Positive online & Review rating (New Emerging Theme)	Positive online reviews and higher star rating because spa's alignment with health and environmental values.
R03, R04	Increasing the length of stay in hotel spas (New Emerging Theme)	Customers are more likely to stay longer because of the sustainable spa experience

Source: Authors' analysis

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings from the qualitative study and in-depth interview with hotel spa managers. The researchers found that all hotel spa managers deliberately applied sensory practices aligned with environmental values, with a particular focus on sight and sound. This finding aligns with the previous studies by Borah et al. (2023) and Išoraite' and Aktas (2025), which found that visual sustainability cues such as natural lighting, eco-certifications, and recycled décor design strongly impact customer emotions. Similarly, the strategic use of sustainable soundscapes such as waterfalls or natural ambient sounds improves relaxation and promotes an emotional connection to nature, which supports the findings of Pollák et al. (2022). The study also found that smell, taste, and touch worked well together and influenced customer behavior. The use of organic herbal scents, personalized fragrances, and eco-friendly fabrics such as organic cotton towels aligns with the finding of Borah et al. (2023) and Hultén (2017), who demonstrated that sensory elements like smell and touch can evoke emotional memories and improve the spa experience for customers. Taste, although not frequently stated in literature, emerged as an impactful element from the interview findings. As the current trend in hotel spas moves away from just improving outward beauty, they focus more on inner well-being. Spa now serves organic foods and herbal drinks as snacks that are meant to nourish and refresh the body from the inside out. This reflects a holistic approach to wellness, represents a search for new consumer value propositions, and is consistent with the findings of Kim et al. (2020). The emergence of the 'mind' as a sixth sense is a new theme identified in this research, indicating the increasing significance of mental health in hotel spa experiences. This theme expands the scope of traditional sensory marketing by including mental and emotional health as important parts of customer satisfaction. Spas are now offering new services such as mindfulness practices, Anapanasati yoga, meditation, monk chat programs based on Buddhist practices, and massage. This represents a unique response

to the increasing consumer demand for holistic spa experiences in Thailand (Han et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2020).

The study also found that sustainable sensory marketing has a positive effect on hotel spas' non-financial performance. All the hotel spa managers revealed that the use of natural ambiance was strongly linked to customer satisfaction, and that customers' desire to return was based on their appreciation of the spa's efforts to reduce its impact on the environment. Customer referrals were often based on perceived health benefits from organic products. Somkeatkun and Wongsurawat (2017) and Isaac and Keelson (2023) show that eco-certifications and other sustainability practices can help businesses succeed by attracting socially responsible customers. Two emerging non-financial performance themes are positive online reviews and ratings, and an increase in guest's length of stay at hotels. Spa managers now closely monitor a measurable increase in online ratings and duration of guest stays in hotels. This finding aligns with Kim et al. (2020) who emphasized that a spa's alignment with environmental values and sustainable experience drives spa business success by appealing to socially responsible consumers.

In conclusion, the research findings indicated that hotel spas intentionally stimulate all five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, along with a sixth emerging sense, the mind, to provide immersive and emotionally impactful guest experiences grounded in sustainability and well-being. Sustainable sensory marketing in hotel spas serves as a strategic method to promoting long-term business success and discover new customer value propositions through non-financial outcomes, while also enhancing the overall guest experience. Moreover, this finding confirms the applicability of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model by Han et al. (2018) and Kim et al. (2020) which explains how sensory and environmental stimuli lead to customer emotional engagement and behavioral outcomes. As shown in Figure 2, the adoption of a sustainable sensory marketing model to enhance non-financial business performance in hotel spas in Thailand.

Contributions

This research indicates that sustainable sensory marketing is not limited to the spa department but also benefits other hotel departments by encouraging guests to extend their stay at hotel, enhancing their overall experience, and generating additional revenue. In the context of spas, sustainable marketing is more important than in other industries because hotel spas rely heavily on customer perception. Engaging the senses, sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mind creates a multi-sensory experience that makes the service feel more immersive and pleasant. The theoretical and practical implications are as follows.

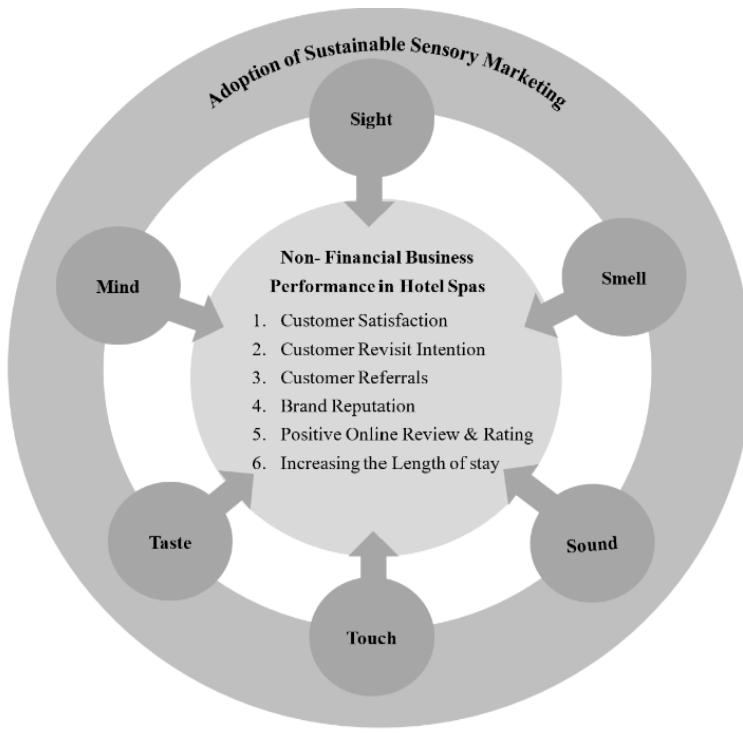


Figure 2: Sustainable sensory marketing model to enhance non-financial business performance in hotel spas

Source: Authors' analysis

Theoretical implications

This research enhances the academic comprehension of sustainable sensory marketing as a strategic business tool that leverages change as an opportunity. It extends the application of the S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Han et al., 2018) and addresses existing gaps by demonstrating how sustainable sensory stimuli such as eco-friendly design, natural sounds, organic scents, and herbal beverage influence the emotional (Organism) and behavioral (Response) reactions of spa customers. This finding shows that stimuli not only induce emotional responses like satisfaction but also lead to observable behavioral outcomes, including revisit intention, positive online reviews, and extended guest stays. Furthermore, the emergence of the “mind” as a sixth sensory dimension which has its root in mindfulness and mental well-being indicates suggests a need to expand the traditional five-sense focus of the S-O-R model by incorporating cognitive and emotional elements, particularly within wellness contexts.

Practical implications

Hotel spas can improve their strategy by integrating sustainable sensory marketing into their offerings. By combining emotional sensory experiences with eco-friendly practices such as showing eco-certifications and using eco-soundscapes. Hotel spas can differentiate themselves from competitors through the development of unique value propositions. This is particularly relevant in saturated wellness markets, where ethical and environmental principles are increasingly influencing consumer preferences. Incorporating Buddhist practices such as Anapanasati yoga and meditation to the spa experiences helps them stand out from others by integrating traditional Thai culture. The results indicated that the sixth sensory dimension, the mind, emerged as a significant factor. Hotel spas can take advantage of this by offering a wellness program that includes mindfulness practices, which have been associated to longer stays. Moreover, hotel spas can encourage guests to share positive online reviews and generate user content related to sensory experiences such as photos of organics beverages or video showcasing the spa atmosphere. These forms of content can influence future bookings and increase brand awareness. For policymakers, government agencies may consider incorporating eco-friendly sensory spa practices into national branding campaigns. Promoting Thailand as a destination that offers eco-conscious, engaging spa services can attract high-value wellness travelers.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study used a qualitative approach and conducted interviews with fifteen hotel spa managers in six major tourist destination in Thailand. Even though, this finding provided rich and background understandings, the research results might not be generalizable to all hotels spas in Thailand or other countries. Future research could employ a mix-method or quantitative approach with large and more diverse samples from several regions to validate and expand these results.

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