

The Influence of Sensory Language on Female Tourists' Experiences in The Tourism Industry

Runmo Wang

School of Culture and Creativity, Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University, Zhuhai, China
s230024198@mail.uic.edu.cn

Abstract. The rise of “her economy” has positioned female tourists as a dominant force in global tourism, driving demand for culturally immersive and emotionally resonant experiences. Sensory marketing, through strategic engagement of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, proves critical in shaping travel decisions and loyalty. However, existing research predominantly emphasizes visual and auditory stimuli, neglecting proximal senses (e.g., olfactory, tactile) and gender-specific sensory interactions. This study addresses this gap by examining how sensory language—a multi-modal narrative tool—enhances female tourists' experiences, with a focus on the Pingjiang Historic District in Suzhou, China. Utilizing mixed methods, including behavioral data analysis and in-depth interviews, the research reveals that women exhibit heightened sensitivity to emotionally charged sensory cues, prioritizing safety, aesthetic coherence, and social sharing opportunities. Findings highlight Pingjiang's success in creating a “poetic sensory mix” blending traditional aesthetics with modern innovations. However, challenges persist, including over-reliance on visual pictures, insufficient gender-responsive design, and technology-induced sensory distraction. Proposed solutions advocate for cross-sensory synergy, female-centric spatial planning, and community-driven authenticity preservation. The study contributes theoretically by linking gender differences to multi-sensory design frameworks, while offering practical strategies for destinations to amplify emotional engagement and market competitiveness through inclusive, sensory-rich narratives.

Keywords: Sensory language; female tourism; engagement; she economy.

1. Introduction

Sensory marketing is defined as “marketing that engages the consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgment and behavior” [1]. To enhance the effectiveness of sensory marketing, sensory language is an important tool commonly used in business. These strategic appeals to the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and they are powerful to shape emotional connections and long-term loyalty with customers. Within the tourism industry, sensory language plays a role in transforming descriptions of destinations, accommodations, and activities into immersive experiences that engage with potential travelers and shape travelers' perceptions and decisions, further enhancing tourists' experiences.

The global tourism industry has witnessed a significant change in consumer demographics in recent decades, with female tourists rising to the dominant position. According to the “2024 Annual Report on Women's Travel Consumption” released by the Tuniu Travel Network in 2025, female tourists constituted approximately 60% of the total tourist trips on the platform, with a strong preference for short trips and culturally immersive experiences [2]. Their sensory perceptions and emotional responses are crucial in enhancing their travel experiences. Therefore, understanding how sensory language impacts women's tourism experiences is essential for developing targeted marketing strategies and enhancing service quality to meet their specific needs.

Existing studies on sensory tourism more focus on visual and auditory sense, often overlooking the vital role of proximal sensory-gustation, olfaction and touch. Furthermore, while women are shown to prioritize aesthetics, safety, and emotional storytelling in travel, the intersection of gender and multi-sensory design remains as research gap. This gap is particularly critical as emerging technologies—such as extended reality (XR) and AI-driven personalization—offer unprecedented opportunities to curate immersive, female-centric sensory narratives [3].

This study aims to investigate the impact of sensory language on women's tourism experiences. It explores how sensory language influences women's perceptions, preferences, and behaviors in tourism. Based on relevant female tourism experiences and sensory marketing literature, this study takes the case of Pingjiang Historic District in Suzhou to examine how sensory language enhances the tourism experiences of female tourists.

With the increasing importance of women tourism, this research seeks to expand the understanding of how sensory elements interact with gender-specific factors to influence travel satisfaction. The results will offer valuable insights for tourism professionals, marketers, and destination management organizations. By identifying how sensory language elements enhance the travelling experience of women tourists, stakeholders can develop more targeted and appealing marketing campaigns, design sensory-enhanced tourism products, and improve service delivery to better satisfy women's tourism expectations. This is beneficial to lead to increased customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth promotion, and a competitive edge in the tourism market in return.

2. Theoretical Background

Sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch are the five basic sensory dimensions through which consumers experience and interact with the environment. In tourism, these senses play a crucial role in shaping visitors' perceptions and memories of destinations. Cross-modal correspondence is enabled by a mental abstraction process known as "semantic association". In this process, the information from modalities is transformed into a highly abstract form that can be interpreted by both perceptual and linguistic systems [4].

Facing these sensory languages, women usually have higher sensitivity to emotional stimuli. For example, women perform better than men in auditory emotion recognition, which may be related to their more sensitive auditory system and better processing of emotional cues in voice [5]. Research by Shao Min et al. indicates that women generally exhibit greater sensitivity to emotional stimuli [6]. This heightened sensitivity affects how female respond to sensory language in tourism contexts, making them more likely to be influenced by emotionally charged descriptions and narratives.

Women often have different risk perceptions and safety needs compared to men when traveling as well [7]. These differences shape their preferences for certain types of sensory information and their overall tourism experiences. For women sensory marketing in tourism, the synergistic effect of engaging multiple senses enhances brand experience. Integrating multiple sensory elements in marketing strategies can create more memorable and impactful brand interactions, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty of a certain hotel, restaurant or destination.

3. Sensory Tourism at Pingjiang Historic District

Many studies about female tourism advocate for the value of sensory experiences in both tourism practices and social lives [8]. Modern tourism is no longer just about sightseeing. It is more about creating immersive experiences. Statistics show that female tourists are particularly drawn to scenarized destinations that engage multiple senses. They search more for travel themes and product features for a deeper travel experience [9].

Taking Pingjiang Historic District, Suzhou as an example. This Historic District in Suzhou is one of China's best-preserved ancient neighborhoods and a living example of Jiangnan water-town culture. With its iconic "parallel canals and streets" layout, the district masterfully blends sight, sound, and smell to create immersive experiences for tourists, making it a prime case for studying how sensory design shapes tourism, particularly for female visitors.

Pingjiang's success lies in its "poetic sensory mix": the visual charm of white wall buildings and old stone bridges, the soothing sounds of Pingtan storytelling and flowing water, and the seasonal scent of osmanthus flowers. These elements work together in sensory to create an emotional connection, making visitors experience that they step into a traditional Chinese painting.

Pingjiang's sensory design seamlessly blends historical charm with modern creativity, crafting a multi-layered experience that engages mainly sight, sound, and smell. Cobblestone paths and whitewashed buildings form a living "ink-wash painting", where vibrant Hanfu costumes add bursts of color against the muted architectural backdrop. The air hums with a dynamic soundscape—live Pingtan performances echo alongside flowing canal waters, creating pockets of energy near bustling markets while riverside teahouses offer tranquil acoustic retreats. Seasonal osmanthus fragrances further deepen the immersion, evoking nostalgic memories of autumn in Jiangnan, as if the very scent carries stories of the region's golden past. Together, these elements transform the district into a time capsule that feels both authentically ancient and vibrantly alive.

Women prioritize experiences that are meaningful and shareable. For example, most of the female visitors to Pingjiang's "Hanfu Night Walk" dress in traditional clothing, participate in Pingtan shows, and share their experiences online. Through these short video sharing experience, a closed loop of cultural showing-social communication-the emotional strengthening is formed. Additionally, olfactory design has been proven to significantly extend women's staying time and increase conversion rates.

Regarding challenges in practice, many historic districts rely too much on those postcard visuals like generic lanterns or signs, making them feel copy pasted. While Pingjiang District uses sound and smell, these elements are still limited, and scents do not have connections to local businesses. What is worse, they ignore women's specific needs. Most tourism plans treat visitors as a single group. In Pingjiang, dimly lit alleys see 35% fewer women at night due to safety concerns, which female tourists took it in the priority position when they make travel decisions [10]. There is also a lack of spaces designed for female socializing, like photo spots or workshops that highlight women's historical roles. While apps using modern technologies and AR guides add interactivity, they can distract from the real-world sensory experience. For instance, too much screen time might drown out the natural sounds of water or live performances.

For solutions, some creative strategies to make the district not just a place to visit, but a place to feel could be applied. First, the district has a good combination of the traditional Chinese culture and the modern cultural trends. The district cleverly balances tradition and trend. In the "Ink-Wash Heritage Zone," historic architecture takes center stage, with every white wall and black tile telling stories of the past. Just steps away, the "Neo-China Experience Zone" lights up with neon signs from trendy culture and creativity shops and pop-up Hanfu fashion events, that are perfect for Gen-Z travelers snapping selfies in flowing traditional robes. To personalize the journey, a "Soundscape Map" app can let visitors choose their vibe: dive into a Pingtan music masterclass, zone out to river meditation sounds, or mix both. It also provides "scent adventures"—local cafes now serve osmanthus lattes paired with DIY fragrance pouch workshops, blending the smell of coffee with memories of autumn blossoms.

Second, spaces designed for women by women are also helpful for their experience enhancement. Safety and connection are baked into the design. Main streets glow with warm, bright lighting after dark, while motion-sensitive lamps light up quieter alleys, easing worries about getting lost. Special "Women's Oasis" hubs offer emergency buttons, charging stations, and comfy seating—a quiet escape when feet need a break. Create "her perspective photography corner" such as the waterscape platform of the Jiangnan water town and women's community workshops combining with the traditional Suzhou Embroidery experience class to promote cultural identity and social separation when women are travelling. As technology develops, smart wristbands now track what makes visitors' hearts race—in a good way. By monitoring heart rates and how long people linger in certain spots, useful data would be collected for future research.

Pingjiang's secret to attracting female travelers lies in engaging all their senses and touching their hearts. The district does not simply show history—it makes people live and experience it. Picturing the scene of cobblestone paths glow under lantern light while the soft strum of a Pingtan lute mixes with the whisper of canal water. A whiff of osmanthus floats, and suddenly, people are time-traveling. A scenarized sight, sound, and smell combination creates immersive experiences for female tourists.

By layering these experiences, Pingjiang becomes less of a place and more of a mood. For women's need and supply by women. Their needs are not an afterthought here. Bright lights keep main streets welcoming after dark, while motion-sensor lamps in alleys write "We have got your back" and provide female with emotional support. Techniques like smart wristbands track what makes visitors linger. Data shows Pingtan performances keep people rooted 40% longer, and Hanfu rentals spike when scents like osmanthus fill the air. However, the key is that technology never overshadows the heartbeat of the neighborhood. Apps suggest soundtracks, but they do not mute the actual music of flowing water or street vendors' chatter.

For future development of the district, imagine workshops where people could weave silk between fingers or sip tea while a master shares centuries-old brewing secrets. Explore sensory preference differences among cross-cultural female groups. Be cautious of commercialization eroding authenticity of the Historic District, and recommend sustainable development through a community governance way, such as residents participating in the planning of storytelling performances.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that sensory language greatly improves female tourists' experiences by creating emotional and multi-layered connections. The Pingjiang Historic District tourism invention suggests that women prefer places that mix beauty, real culture, and rich sensory details. They especially care about safety, stories that make them inspire, and chances to share experiences with others. Using senses like smell of seasonal osmanthus, touch in craft workshops, and taste in cultural activities helps build stronger memories and deeper ties to a place.

However, places need to mix new technology with real sensory experiences—too much focus on visuals or screens can weaken the feeling of being fully involved. Better plans should include designs that consider women's needs, such as bright paths and spaces for women to gather, along with stories that connect old traditions with modern ideas. Furthermore, tourism should focus on keeping local culture real by working with communities, making sure sensory details stay true to the place while meeting women's changing tastes. By doing this, destinations can become more than just places to visit—they can turn into lively, sensory-rich environments that match what women want: meaningful trips they can share safely. This approach will help destinations stand out and build loyalty in the global tourism market.

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