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IMPACT OF SENSORY BRANDING, PACKAGING, AND VALUE ON FRAGRANCE CHOICES: MEDIATING ROLE OF ATTRACTIVE QUALITY AND MODERATING ROLE OF BRAND PREFERENCE

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Abstract

This paper investigates how consumer decision-making and relationships in the fragrance market in Pakistan are complex issues. The study uses 350 respondents to explore the impact of the packaging design, perceived value, and consumer behavior on the decision-making process directly and indirectly via the attractive quality mediating value, and the moderating impact of brand preference. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the results indicate that attractive quality is affected by the packaging design, perceived value and consumer behavior, which makes consumer decision-making highly affected. The attractive quality has a significant mediation role in such relationships, whereas the brand preference plays a key role in mediating the attractive quality-decision-making relationship. The research offers empirical data on the effectiveness of combining sensory branding approach in marketing fragrances, which can be of immense help to practitioners and scholars in the new markets.

Keywords: Sensory Branding, Packaging Design, Perceived Value, Consumer Decision-Making, Attractive Quality, Brand Preference

Introduction

The perfume business is a special crossroads between sensory and consumer psychology and brand strategy, where the choice to buy depends on the complex stimuli that are not necessarily related to the product (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2026). The fragrance industry in the fast-growing consumer market in Pakistan has experienced significant growth with the consumer moving to demand products which do not only provide the consumer with the satisfactory smell but also provide aesthetic appeal and a perception of value (Ilyas et al., 2023).

The competitive environment requires fragrance brands to position themselves strategically using the packaging design, perceived value propositions and consumer behavior knowledge to distinguish themselves and have an impact on purchase decisions.

Sensory branding has become an urgent tactic in the building of memorable consumer experience especially in product segments where sensory factors are the dominant factor (Rai, 2025). Packaging design is the initial physical interaction between the consumers and the fragrance products, which convey the brand identity, perception of quality, and appeals to emotions before the actual experience of the scent (Srivastava et al., 2022). Packaging takes on an even greater significance in consumer perception and purchase intentions in the fragrance market, where consumers are not able to directly evaluate the products until their purchase.

The concept of perceived value includes the general evaluation of the usefulness of a product by the consumers in terms of perceptions of what they get and what they give (Spreng et al., 2022). Perceived value in fragrance purchases goes beyond functional to symbolic, hedonic and social levels which have an aggregate impact in decision making. On the same note, the consumer behavior patterns such as the shopping orientations, involvement levels and information-processing styles have a profound influence on how consumers respond to the marketing stimulus and eventually purchase the product (Krishnan et al., 2022).

The idea of attractive quality, which is based on the Kano model, is the product features that are disproportionately more likely to lead to customer satisfaction as they exist in the product but do not contribute to the dissatisfaction to a significant degree. Attractive quality in the fragrance marketing context could include the aesthetics, emotional connection and experience of a product that goes beyond the normal functional expectation of a product. Moreover, brand preference is a very essential moderating factor that influences consumer processing information and reaction to product characteristics (Shahid et al., 2022).

Although there has been a lot of research on consumer behavior in different product categories, little empirical data have been conducted to investigate the combined impacts of packaging design, perceived value and consumer behavior on the decision-making process in the fragrance industry, especially in the Pakistani environment. This gap in research is considerable because of the cultural peculiarities of the preferences to fragrances and the specifics of the market in the new economies. Knowing not only the direct but also the indirect loop in which these variables guide consumer choices can be actionable information to the marketer of fragrances who wants to maximize their branding strategies and use it as an instrument to better engage their consumers.

This research fills this gap by creating and experimenting with a holistic framework that explores direct effects, mediating factors and moderating factors between variables that are important in the consumer decision-making process in the fragrance market in Pakistan. This study is both theoretically and practically valuable to both academic and practice by using sophisticated statistical methods and basing the analysis on a set of previous theories.

Scope of the Study

The paper is extremely specific to the perfume market in Pakistan where the authors analyze the consumer perception and decision-making process as far as purchasing perfumes are concerned. This study involves branded perfume products with different price points and distribution networks, and this will reveal the sensory processes of branding that will motivate consumers to make decisions on the particular cultural and economic background.

Research Objectives

The research questions are as follows:

- To determine the direct effect of the perceived value on consumer decision.
- To examine what the direct correlation between consumer decision-making and consumer behavior is.
- The study aims to determine how the packaging design, the perceived value, and consumer behavior can be used in the creation of attractive quality perceptions.
- To determine the direct impact of attractive quality on consumer choice.
- To examine the mediating effect of attractive quality on the relationship between the packaging design, perceived value and consumer behavior to consumer decision-making.
- To determine the moderating influence of the brand preference in the connection between attractive quality and consumer decision-making.
- To create and evaluate a full-fledged framework of incorporating sensory branding aspects within the context of fragrance market.

Research Questions

- How does the packaging design directly impact consumer decision-making in buying fragrances?
- What is the immediate effect of the perceptions of value on consumer choice?
- What is the extent of influence of consumer behavior on consumer decision-making?
- How does perceived quality, the packaging design and consumer behavior affect attractive quality perceptions?
- Will attractive quality be able to directly affect consumer decision-making?
- Are there any relationships between the perceived value, consumer behavior and consumer decision-making mediated by attractive quality?
- The research question is: What role does brand preference mediate between attractive quality and consumer decision-making?
- What are the direct and indirect paths in sensory branding framework in terms of their relative strength?

Literature Review

Sensory branding is a strategic move in developing unique brand experiences through the appeal of several senses of consumers, thus creating emotional resonance and boosting branding (Rai, 2025). Packaging design is an especially important marketing tool in the fragrance industry, which can affect consumer perceptions and buying intentions, even before the product is experienced (Srivastava et al., 2022). The studies have shown that aesthetically pleasing and functionally better packaging have a direct positive impact on the probability of purchase as it indicates quality, high-end status, and brand name (Romeo-Arroyo et al., 2023). The aesthetic and physical appearance of fragrance packaging can immediately produce impressions, which can directly lead to the purchase decision, especially in hedonic products where the emotional factors prevail over the rational considerations.

According to the perceived value theory, consumers use cognitive trade-offs involving the perceived benefits and costs in making a purchasing decision, which entails the functional, emotional, social, and epistemic dimensions of value (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). In the fragrance marketing, high value is viewed by the consumer and thus more likely to make a buying decision since the perceived benefits are more than the cost involved monetary and psychological. Research shows that perceived value has a direct impact on the purchase intentions and real purchasing behavior and is a crucial factor determining consumer choice (Krishnan et al., 2022).

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Consumer behavior refers to the psychological, social and behavioral processes involved in making decisions related to acquisition, consumption, and disposal. The differences in shopping orientations, involvement levels and decision-making styles are individual differences that directly affect purchase decisions. The high-involved, and specific behavioral pattern manifested in consumers of the fragrance industry have a unique decision-making pattern which is directly reflected in purchase behavior (Krishnan et al., 2022).

The dimension of attractive qualities in the Kano model is product features that produce delight and differentiation when they are there, resulting in disproportional satisfaction (Krishnan et al., 2022). Good appearance is an important mediating variable whereby external stimuli are processed and converted into the decision to purchase. When the perceived value, packaging design and consumer behavior patterns converge to form perceptions of excellent quality, these factors are internalized, and processed, which eventually affects the results of decisions. This mediating procedure indicates that attractive quality is a psychological process which attracts and directs the effects of various sensory branding factors.

Repetition of positive experiences, strong brand associations and being aligned with brand positioning and consumer values lead to brand preference (Zhiying et al., 2024). Brand preference is a moderating variable that determines the strength of product attribute-decision outcome relationships. Customers that have greater brand preference show enhanced reactions to appealing quality features whereas the customers with lesser preference might not be affected by such attributes (Shahid et al., 2022). The boundary conditions are emphasized in this moderation effect that outlines which conditions of attraction quality are most efficient to influence decision-making.

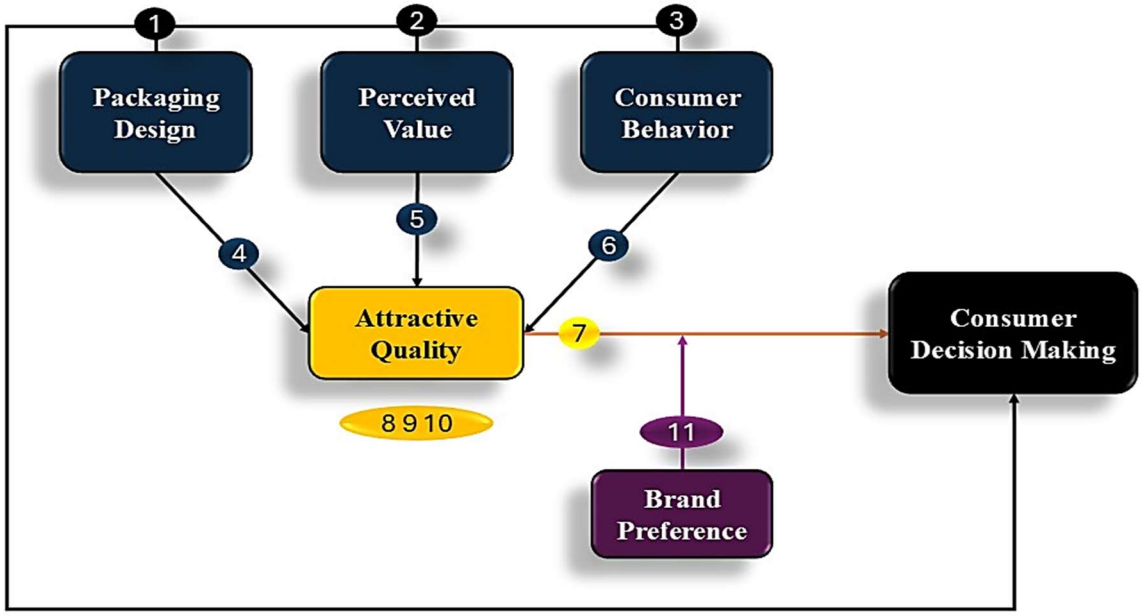
Hypotheses Development

Following the theoretical underpinnings reviewed and the empirical evidence reviewed, the hypotheses below are suggested:

- H1 Packaging design has a positive impact on consumer decision-making.
- H2: The perceived value has a positive effect on consumer decision-making.
- H3: Consumer behavior is positively related to consumer decision making.
- H4: Packaging design has a positive impact on attractive quality.
- H5: The value in perception has a positive impact on attractive quality.
- H6: Attractive quality is positively affected by consumer behavior.
- H7: Beautiful quality has a positive impact on consumer choice.
- H8: There is no mediating relationship between attractive quality and consumer decision-making and the packaging design.
- H9: The relationship between the perceived value and consumer decision-making is mediated by attractive quality.
- H10: The quality as an attractive factor mediates the relation between consumer decision-making and consumer behavior.
- H11: The attractive quality is moderated by brand preference in its relation to consumer decision-making in that the positive correlation is greater as brand preference increases.

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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Methodology

This study is a quantitative study with a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the association between packaging design, perceived value, consumer behavior, attractive quality, brand preference and consumer decision-making in the Pakistani market of fragrances. A designed questionnaire was created on the basis of validated scales modified on the basis of the previous literature, and all the constructs were measured utilizing five-point Likert scales that might be strongly disagree, strongly agree, etc. The research used a convenience sampling method, which involved the population that was targeted (fragrance users in the big cities in Pakistan).

A total of 350 respondents who had bought fragrances in the last six months were used as the final sample as it is important and gives the most recent experience. To ensure an elevated level of reach and diversity, both online and offline data collection methods were used. A pilot study was done with 30 respondents before the main data was collected in order to determine the reliability and clarity of the instruments.

The analysis of the data was conducted with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through the SmartPLS 4.0 software due to its ability to collaborate with multifaceted models with numerous relationships and the ability to predict research (Hair et al., 2021). The analysis went into two phases, the first one was the evaluation of the measurement model in terms of reliability and validity, Cronbach alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) and discriminant validity by the Heterotrait-Monomethod (HTMT) ratio. Second, structural model was evaluated to evaluate hypothesized relationships, including path coefficients, level of significance, effect sizes (f 2) and explanatory power (R 2).

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The bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples was used to evaluate the indirect effects of the packaging design, perceived value, and consumer behavior on the consumer decision-making based on the attractive quality. The interaction term analysis was used to research the moderation effects between brand preference and attractive quality. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was used to evaluate model fit, where a value of less than 0.08 is acceptable. Preliminary information about the variables and their relationships was given by descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Variance	Kurtosis
PD	350	1.00	5.00	3.4314	0.862	0.743	-0.442
PV	350	1.00	5.00	3.3406	0.877	0.769	-0.626
CB	350	1.00	5.00	3.4817	0.812	0.659	-0.595
AQ	350	1.00	5.00	3.3937	0.875	0.766	-0.430
CDM	350	1.60	5.00	3.3354	0.741	0.549	-0.088
BP	350	1.20	5.00	3.3011	0.867	0.751	-0.553

Note: PD = Packaging Design; PV = Perceived Value; CB = Consumer Behavior; AQ = Attractive Quality; CDM = Consumer Decision Making; BP = Brand Preference

Descriptive statistics demonstrate the moderate values of mean of all variables (between 3.30 and 3.48) which can be seen as positive perceptions towards fragrance consumers. The standard deviations indicate that there were reasonable variations in the responses without any extreme clustering, and the negative values of kurtosis indicate that the data distributions were flat, which proved that the data were not skewed and did not have any extreme outliers (Bibi et al., 2026).

Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

	PD	PV	CB	AQ	CDM	BP
PD	1					
PV	-0.003	1				
CB	-0.003	0.115*	1			
AQ	0.491**	0.486**	0.460**	1		
CDM	0.413**	0.417**	0.376**	0.634**	1	
BP	0.360**	0.375**	0.276**	0.591**	0.484**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Correlation matrix illustrates that all the predictor variables have significant positive relationships with consumer decision-making (PD: $r = 0.413$, PV: $r = 0.417$, CB: $r = 0.376$, all $p < 0.01$) which support hypotheses of direct effects. There are strong correlations between the packaging design, perceived value, consumer behavior and attractive quality (with the ranges of 0.460 to 0.491), which implies that these variables have a significant impact on the perceptions of attractive quality. The high relationship between attractive quality and consumer decision-making ($r = 0.634$) justifies both direct and mediating relationships (Fahad et al., 2026).

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Constructing Reliability and Validity

Table 3: Reliability and Validity Assessment

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
PD	0.799	0.553
PV	0.799	0.554
CB	0.799	0.555
AQ	0.799	0.554
CDM	0.798	0.554
BP	0.799	0.553

All the constructs show an elevated level of internal consistency with the values of Cronbach alpha above 0.79, which is significantly higher than the recommended value of 0.70. All constructs have an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.55 and this indicates good convergent validity and that constructs account more than 50 percent of the variance in its indicators so that measurement model is validated (Kamran et al., 2026).

Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	PD	PV	CB	AQ	CDM	BP
PD	-					
PV	0.107	-				
CB	0.089	0.160	-			
AQ	0.614	0.608	0.575	-		
CDM	0.518	0.522	0.471	0.794	-	
BP	0.451	0.471	0.346	0.740	0.606	-

The values of all HTMT are lower than the conservative value of 0.85, and the largest value of them is 0.794 between attractive quality and consumer decision-making, which proves that there is sufficient discriminant validity. This means that each of the constructs is empirically different and a measure of different phenomena, which proves the theoretical difference of the variables (Khalid et al., 2026).

Direct Effects

Table 5: Direct Effects Analysis

Hypothesis	Path	β	SD	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
H1	PD → CDM	0.293	0.029	10.170	0.000	0.694	Supported
H2	PV → CDM	0.258	0.026	9.905	0.000	0.531	Supported
H3	CB → CDM	0.241	0.024	10.187	0.000	0.464	Supported
H4	PD → AQ	0.495	0.031	16.043	0.000	0.694	Supported
H5	PV → AQ	0.436	0.032	13.514	0.000	0.531	Supported
H6	CB → AQ	0.407	0.034	12.159	0.000	0.464	Supported
H7	AQ → CDM	0.592	0.040	14.770	0.000	0.595	Supported

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All the direct effects are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The packaging design directly affects attractive quality (= 0.495) and consumer decision-making (= 0.293) most and then the perceived value and consumer behavior. The effect sizes (f 2) are exceptionally large in all the relationships with the value being between 0.464 and 0.694. The attractive quality has a significant impact on consumer decision-making (β = 0.592) which creates the basis of mediation analysis.

Mediation Analysis

Table 6: Indirect Effects (Mediation Analysis)

Hypothesis	Path	β	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
H8	PD → AQ → CDM	0.293	0.029	10.170	0.000	Supported
H9	PV → AQ → CDM	0.258	0.026	9.905	0.000	Supported
H10	CB → AQ → CDM	0.241	0.024	10.187	0.000	Supported

All the three mediation hypotheses are highly supported with an extremely significant indirect impact. The greatest indirect impact is shown by the quality of packaging (attractive) (0.293) then perceived value (0.258) and consumer behavior (0.241). These results endorse the fact that appealing quality is an important mediating variable, which depends on sensory elements of branding to affect consumer behavior (Mahmood et al., 2026).

Moderation Analysis

Table 7: Moderation Effect of Brand Preference

Hypothesis	Effect	β	SD	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
H11	BP × AQ → CDM	0.408	0.031	13.170	0.000	0.538	Supported

There is a strong empirical support of the moderation hypothesis. The interaction effect of the brand preference and attractive quality on consumer decision making is especially important (0.408<0.001) with an effect size of (f 2 = 0.538) which confirms the role of brand preference in enhancing the effect of attractive quality on consumer decision making. This implies that the more consumers are inclined towards a brand, the more they are sensitive to appealing quality features in their buying behavior (Naeem et al., 2026).

Model Explanatory Power

Table 8: R-Square and Model Fit

Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
AQ	0.647	0.644
CDM	0.624	0.621

Model Fit: SRMR = 0.055

The model has a high explanatory power explaining 64.7% of the variance in attractive quality, and 62.4% of the consumer decision-making. The fact that there is not much difference between the value of R 2 and adjusted R 2 shows that the model is stable. The SRMR value of 0.055 is much less than the 0.08 cut-off, which indicates an excellent fit of the overall model (Sarwar et al., 2025).

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 9: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	β	Result
H1	PD → CDM	0.293	Supported

H2	PV → CDM	0.258	Supported
H3	CB → CDM	0.241	Supported
H4	PD → AQ	0.495	Supported
H5	PV → AQ	0.436	Supported
H6	CB → AQ	0.407	Supported
H7	AQ → CDM	0.592	Supported
H8	PD → AQ → CDM (mediation)	0.293	Supported
H9	PV → AQ → CDM (mediation)	0.258	Supported
H10	CB → AQ → CDM (mediation)	0.241	Supported
H11	BP moderates AQ → CDM	0.408	Supported

The eleven hypotheses were all empirically supported, which demonstrated the theoretical framework that is proposed and proved all the hypotheses correct, as well as validating direct and indirect directions in the sensory branding process (Shehzadi et al., 2026).

Discussion

This research paper presents a detailed empirical data to confirm both direct and mediated mechanisms through which the sensory aspects of branding can impact consumer decision making in the fragrance market in Pakistan. The results prove that the impact of packaging design, perceived value and consumer behavior is not only direct but acts through attractive quality as an intermediary mechanism and brand preference is a significant moderator of the effects.

The large direct influence of packaging design (= 0.293), perceived value (= 0.258), and consumer behavior (= 0.241) on consumer decision-making proves the independence of the variables in terms of their influence on the purchase outcomes. These results are consistent with the theory of sensory marketing that suggests that aesthetics in packaging produce instant cognitive and affective reactions that can trigger the purchase decision-making without a lengthy process of deliberation (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2026). Likewise, the perceived value has a direct impact on choices as it offers mental shortcuts of assessing the worthiness of a product (Spreng et al., 2022).

The high effects of the packaging design (β = 0.495), the perceived value (0.436), and the consumer behavior (0.407) on the attractive quality indicate that these senses of branding significantly influence the perception of the consumers towards the delight-inducing product qualities. It can be applied to the fragrance industry using the Kano model, in which better packaging, strong value propositions, and adherence to consumer behavioral patterns are all viable in generating appealing qualities perception (Krishnan et al., 2022).

The attractive quality, with its significant indirect effects, has the mediating role, which presents a dual-pathway model in which the sensory branding elements had a direct effect on the decisions and a psychological processing of attractive quality. This mediation proposes that although the packaging design, perceived value and consumer behavior may affect instant

purchase reactions, it may also act via a more conscious pathway as the consumer internalizes the same stimulus into a positive perception of quality, which in turn influences consumer decision making. The fact that the two effects are similar in their magnitude means that the two processes are as important as each other in making the decisions.

The brand preference has a significant moderating effect (0.408, f 2 = 0.538) indicating important boundary conditions to the effectiveness of sensory branding. Consumers who are more brand-loyal are more responsive to appealing quality attributes, indicating that the brand relationships that people have with established brands augment the influence of product features on the purchasing decision (Zhiying et al., 2024). The implications of this discovery are significant to both the already established brands that are interested in utilizing their equity and the emerging brands that have to develop attractive appealing quality that will counter their initial low preference.

On a theoretical level, the study incorporates sensory branding, value perception theory, and the Kano model into a single, two-pathway system, further developing the knowledge about decision-making mechanisms of experiential products. The model has good explanatory power (R^ 2 0.624 CDM), and a particularly good fit (SRMR 0.055) supports its suitability to the fragrance market situation.

Managerially, the results indicate that fragrance marketers need to implement integrated strategies which take advantage of both direct influence processes and appealing quality development. The returns on investment on innovative packaging design are realized in both immediate purchase stimulated and quality appealing enhancement. In the same vein, presenting strong value propositions and matching behavioral patterns of target consumers will provide a variety of avenues to make decisions. Developing brand preference, through a series of positive experiences, would have a tremendous effect on the overall success of any other branding activity.

Limitations

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study has a number of limitations which should be mentioned. To begin with, the cross-sectional design does not allow making causal conclusions and analyzing the change in relationships over time. Second, convenience sampling can be a problem in generalization outside of the population sampled. Third, the paper determines the fragrance market in Pakistan only, which should be considered when generalizing the results to other cultures and product lines. Fourth, self-reported measures are subject to common method bias, which was evaluated and addressed, although it can still impact self-reported measures. Fifth, the article does not consider individual sub-dimensions of packaging design, perceived value or consumer behavior, which would be more specific. Lastly, there were no investigations of potential non-linear relationships and other moderating variables.

Research Directions

Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to establish causality and examine temporal dynamics in how sensory branding elements influence decisions over multiple purchase occasions. Investigating specific packaging design elements through experimental manipulations could identify optimal aesthetic configurations for different consumer segments. Cross-cultural comparative research would illuminate how cultural values moderate the direct and indirect pathways examined here. Additionally, exploring digital contexts, particularly how online product presentations create attractive quality perceptions in e-commerce fragrance purchases, represents an important emerging

research avenue. Qualitative investigations could uncover latent attractive quality dimensions specific to different fragrance categories. Finally, examining non-linear relationships and threshold effects could reveal optimal levels of sensory branding investments for maximizing decision influence.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that sensory branding elements operate through both direct and mediated pathways to shape consumer decision-making in Pakistan's fragrance market. The validated dual-pathway framework provides both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for creating effective branding strategies. All proposed hypotheses received empirical support, confirming that packaging design, perceived value, and consumer behavior significantly influence consumer decision-making both directly and through attractive quality as a mediating mechanism, while brand preference amplifies these relationships. The comparable strengths of direct and indirect pathways suggest that marketers should simultaneously invest in creating immediate appeal and developing attractive quality perceptions. As the fragrance industry becomes increasingly competitive, brands that strategically leverage multiple influence pathways while building strong brand preference will achieve sustainable competitive advantage and superior market performance.

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