

Sensory Stimuli and Crash Imagery in F1's Risk Marketing

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Abstract

F1's one marketing tactic is to promote risk that stimulates spectators' sensory experience. This strategy appeals to spectators' tendency toward sensation-seeking. One intense sensory experience arises from imagining car crashes and collisions, involving multi-sensory imagery that combines diverse types of sensory stimuli. Retrieving cross-sectional data collected at the Korea F1 Grand Prix, this study identified F1 spectators' multi-sensory imagery of car crashes as a valid factor. The study then tested a model in which spectators' perceived sensations through five senses affected multi-sensory imagery, and the imagery, in turn, affected arousal, satisfaction, and intentions to revisit. The results suggest that racing-related sensations significantly influenced their multi-sensory imagery, whereas service-related sensations did not. As risk marketing is controversial, the F1-hosting committee should properly leverage the marketing potential of car crashes, especially in the market where F1 racing is growing.

Keywords: multi-sensory imagery, five senses, risk marketing, sensory experience, Formula One, car crashes

Introduction

F1's recent surge in popularity is partly due to the influx of films and shows, such as Netflix's "F1: Drive to Survive" and the movie "F1," featuring Brad Pitt (Cava, 2025; Hawes, 2024). Also, the US market's additions of Miami and Las Vegas bolstered F1's social media presence, successfully attracting young and female consumers to the sport (Cartwright, 2025). As a result, managing F1's marketing efforts has become even more important.

Korea hosted four F1 events from 2010 to 2013 in Yeongam, a rural area in the southern province. However, they suddenly relinquished hosting the event (Wise, 2013). Several domestic factors contributing to the event's failure included the remote location of the racing track, a limited motorsport culture, and inadequate management by the racing organization (The Chosun Daily, 2010). The primary challenge for Korea's F1 event was financial difficulties (SBS News, 2015), largely due to limited popularity and interest in F1 among Koreans and a low number of domestic event attendees. With the growing popularity of F1, Incheon, South Korea, has formed an F1-hosting committee to resume the race. However, they have faced controversy and criticism (Park, 2025), primarily stemming from the sudden halt of Korea's F1 history. Korea's F1 failures were bound to the contexts specific to the country's underdeveloped sport. To attract a larger domestic fan base, marketing strategies should be tailored to context, not translated from other successful cases. Consequently, research is needed to develop marketing strategies that are applicable to the context of F1 development in Korea. The 2013 F1 Grand Prix was the last opportunity for Korean F1 spectators' live experience to be captured for market research. It remains relevant to the current Korean F1 market.

While the global success of F1 is attributed to several factors, one compelling contributor is F1's rich array of sensory stimuli—watching high-speed racing cars, hearing the roar of engines, and smelling burning tires and oils, to name a few (Chung, 2020; Chung et al., 2015, 2016). Sensory stimuli are loaded on different sensory organs, leading to a physical process known as sensation. Spectators perceive sensations in combination with their cognition and psychological characteristics (Foley & Bates, 2019). Research indicates that spectators' perceptions of the quality and intensity of sensory stimuli significantly impact their emotions, behaviors, and overall experience (Chung, 2020, 2023; Chung & Lee, 2025; Chung et al., 2015, 2016). Sensory marketing is a strategy that engages consumers' five senses—see, hear, smell, touch, and taste (Krishna, 2012). Such marketing—also known as “marketing on five senses”—effectively enhances spectators' evaluations of their experiences by stimulating the relevant senses and satisfying their sensation-seeking tendency. Incheon F1's marketing should spark excitement and anticipation for sensations they have never experienced, vividly illustrating the sensational live experience.

Consumers often engage in their sensory imagery while perceiving sensory stimuli. This process involves mental imagery, where consumers imagine various types of sensory stimuli based on their prior experiences or exposure to similar stimuli (Elder & Krishna, 2024). Multi-sensory imagery is as critical to sensory marketing as live sensory stimuli spark consumers' excitement and arousal in response to specific sensory inputs (Chung et al., 2025). F1 spectators' imagination of car crashes and wrecks during races is a prime example of multi-sensory imagery. Since witnessing high-speed car crashes is a rare occurrence in their daily lives, imagining such incidents plays a significant role in triggering their arousal. This study designates this form of multisensory imagery as F1 spectators' Sixth Sense, defined as an intuitive, sensation-seeking imagination that is predominantly characteristic of F1 spectators. Whereas sensory imagery typically involves input from the five senses, the Sixth Sense integrates spectators' intuitions with their multisensory imagery related to car crashes. It serves as a tool to market car crashes to F1 spectators' intuition and imagination, which is more effective in developing the F1 market base.

Building on this newly developed concept that reflects the intuitive characteristics of F1 spectators, the current study aims to examine the mediating effect of multi-sensory imagery on the relationship between five sensory stimuli and spectators' outcomes. Several studies have suggested that consumers' sensory stimuli shape multisensory imagery (e.g., Chung & Lee, 2025; Lee et al., 2012). F1 spectators are sensualized by each of the five senses, and their perception of the stimuli affects multisensory imagery, generating the following hypotheses.

H1-5: F1 spectators' sensory stimuli in each of the five senses positively affect their multisensory imagery.

Numerous studies have found that consumers' sensory imagery is related to their evaluations of experiences, emotions, and behaviors (Kim et al., 2021). Based on this, the study develops the hypotheses as follows:

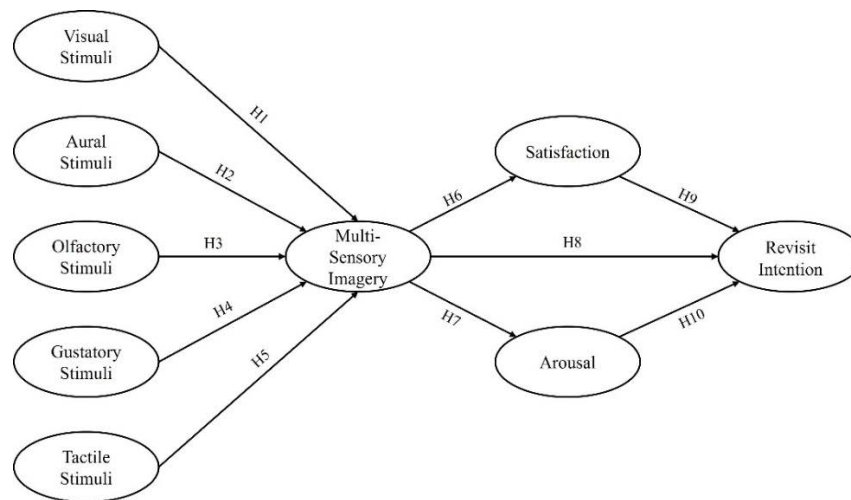
H6-8: F1 spectators' multisensory imagery positively affects their satisfaction, arousal, and race revisit intentions.

H9-10: F1 spectators' satisfaction and arousal positively affect their revisit intentions.

These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Research Design



Testing these hypotheses reveals the role of multisensory imagery of car crashes in marketing F1 for an underdeveloped market, such as Korea. The study also highlights the potential of car crash marketing to promote F1 in Korea.

Methodology

Samples and Data Collection

To offer practical, evidence-based marketing insights that can be implemented even before the event, cross-sectional data were collected during the 2013 Formula One Korea Grand Prix. The data are particularly valuable for informing pre-event marketing strategies, given that the event is no longer held. Also, it offers insights into domestic spectators' sensory stimuli and multi-sensory imagery of racing. While F1's international market has been rapidly changing, its market conditions in Korea remain similar to those of a decade ago. Therefore, the data from the 2013 Korean F1 generates marketing implications applicable to the Korean F1 market, without translating cases from other successful F1 races.

Researchers divided the entire grandstand into seven sections, and each researcher was assigned to one section and given 50 surveys. Surveys were administered during the race to capture spectators' fully immersive live stimuli and characteristics. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

After removing missing and incomplete surveys, a total of 330 questionnaires were collected (a 94% response rate). Of them, 204 (61.8%) were males, and 126 (38.2%) were females. The participants' average age was 33.1. Specifically, 41.3% ($n = 136$) were in their 20s, followed by the groups of 30s (30.4%, $n = 100$) and 40s (13.1%, $n = 43$). Most participants (59.4%, $n = 196$) held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. While 33% of the participants ($n = 109$) had prior experience spectating motorsport, 67% ($n = 221$) made their first visit to watch car racing.

Measures

The survey's questionnaires consist of three parts: (1) perceived sensation on five senses (Chung et al., 2015, 2016; Lee et al., 2012, 2013), (2) multi-sensory imagery (Chung et al., 2025), and (3) outcomes of sensory stimuli (Bradley & Lang, 1994; Oliver, 2010; Yoshida & James, 2010). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). The original survey questions were translated into Korean. Linguistic equivalence was maintained by following the International Test Commission's guidelines (2017). Table 1 includes the descriptions, descriptive statistics, and reliability of all items.

Table 1

Item Descriptions, Descriptive Statistics, and Reliability

Constructs (α)		Items (M/SD)	Item-to-total Correlations	Interitem Correlations
<i>To what degree do you perceive the stimuli of...</i>				
Visual Sensation (.74)	seeing a racing car's design	(5.94/1.29)	.62	
	seeing racers' outfit	(5.80/1.20)	.65	.49
	seeing pit crews' movement	(6.25/1.05)	.46	
Aural Sensation (.67)	hearing spectators' cheering	(4.73/1.72)	.51	
	hearing game announcement	(4.37/1.56)	.51	.51
Olfactory Sensation (.86)	smelling track's asphalt	(4.48/1.75)	.60	
	smelling burning oil	(4.41/1.70)	.82	.67
	smelling burning tires	(4.29/1.69)	.78	
Gustatory Sensation (.91)	tasting various food and drinks	(3.00/1.63)	.79	
	tasting quality food	(3.24/1.79)	.87	.78
	tasting the concession's food and drinks	(3.32/1.77)	.82	
Tactile	seating in a chair	(3.46/1.61)	.64	.53

Sensation (.77)	spatial arrangement in spectating (3.29/1.66)	.67	
	a packed crowd (4.10/1.70)	.53	
<i>To what degree do you imagine...</i>			
Multisensory	seeing crashes among racing cars (5.16/1.77)	.58	
Imagery (.74)	hearing racing car crashes (4.91/1.77)	.68	.48
	blasting sound of crashes (5.73/1.48)	.44	
<i>To what degree are you satisfied with...</i>			
Satisfaction (.85)	the experience (4.68/1.71)	.76	
	the decision to attend the event (4.92/1.58)	.81	.66
	the excitement of the experience (4.08/1.67)	.60	
<i>To what degree are you aroused by...</i>			
Arousal (.92)	the experience (5.69/1.30)	.86	
	the stimulation (5.59/1.37)	.80	.79
	the excitement (5.75/1.26)	.85	
<i>To what degree do you intend to revisit...</i>			
Revisit Intention (.92)	this event (4.99/1.63)	.80	
	this event among sporting events (4.62/1.69)	.89	.80
	this event among all events (4.64/1.66)	.85	

Data Analysis

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was first conducted to determine whether the observed data were adequately loaded onto the corresponding constructs. Next, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to ascertain the structure of the constructs. Lastly, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to estimate the path coefficients and their significance for each path in the study.

Results

Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In the EFA, a total of 26 items over 9 constructs were included for a varimax rotation solution. The analysis resulted in the loading of 78.73%, accounting for 9 constructs. All items were categorized into a corresponding construct as initially designed. Table 2 explains more details of EFA.

Table 2

Exploratory Factor Analysis

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Arousal (A)	.87 .85 .81								
Revisit Intention (B)		.90 .86 .79							
Gustatory Sensation (C)			.93 .89 .87						
Olfactory Sensation (D)				.89 .88 .68					
Satisfaction (E)					.88 .87 .66				
Tactile Sensation (F)						.86 .81 .72			
Visual Sensation (G)							.86 .85 .57		
Multisensory Imagery (H)								.88 .83 .50	
Aural Sensation (I)									.83 .81

Cumulative Loading	10.5 5	20.6 2	30.6 2	39.9 6	48.9 8	57.1 3	64.9 6	72.7 3	78.73
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After conducting EFA, CFA was performed and revealed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 608.40$, $df = 263$, Normed $\chi^2 = 2.31$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .09, CFI = .93, and IFI = .93 (Schreiber et al., 2006). The analysis achieved the construct's convergent validity by three indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). First, the construct's average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the threshold, ranging from .57 to .80. Second, the construct's composite reliability (CR) surpassed the criteria of .70, ranging from .79 to .93. Third, all the standardized loadings of each construct were significant, ranging from .57 to .94. Therefore, convergent validity was established. In terms of discriminant validity, all the constructs' squared correlations were less than the lowest AVE of .57 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), thereby indicating the presence of discriminant validity.

Comprehensive Model Testing

The proposed model revealed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2 = 727.95/279$, $p < .001$, CFI = .91, IFI = .91, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .07. SEM revealed that all hypotheses were supported, except for H4 and H5. Each construct's standardized coefficient and explained variance are addressed in Figure 2. Also, all direct, indirect, and total effects and their significances are described in Table 3.

Figure 2

Model Testing Results

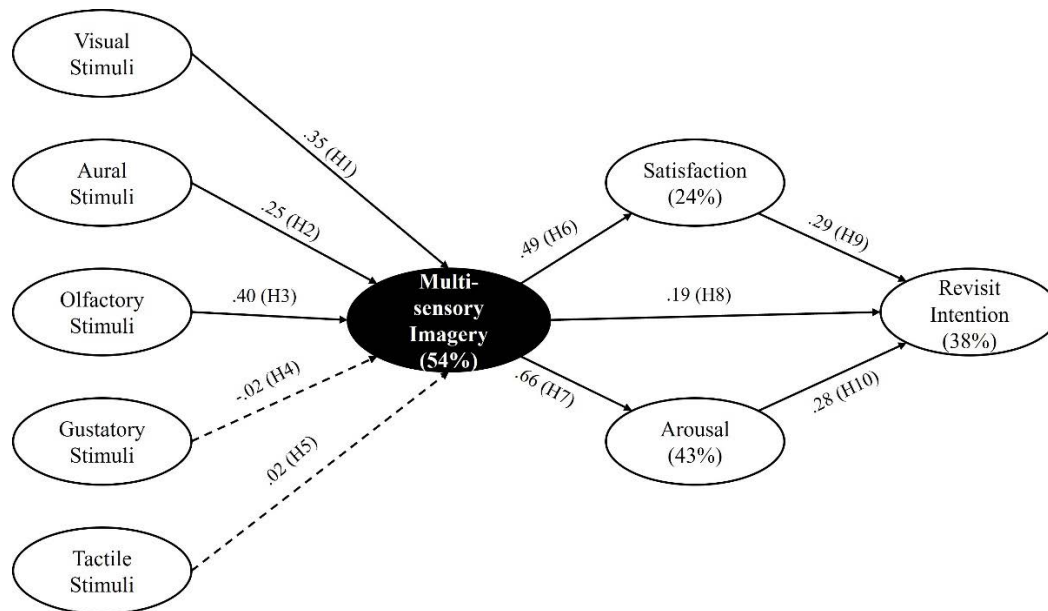


Table 3*Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects*

	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
On Multi-sensory Imagery			
Visual Stimuli	.35*	-	.35*
Aural Stimuli	.25**	-	.25**
Olfactory Stimuli	.40*	-	.40*
Gustatory Stimuli	-.02****	-	-.02****
Tactile Stimuli	.02****	-	.02****
On Satisfaction			
Multi-sensory Imagery	.49*	-	.49*
Visual Stimuli	-	.17*	.17*
Aural Stimuli	-	.12**	.12**
Olfactory Stimuli	-	.20*	.20*
Gustatory Stimuli	-	-.01****	-.01****
Tactile Stimuli	-	.01****	.01****
On Arousal			
Multi-sensory Imagery	.66*	-	.66*
Visual Stimuli	-	.23*	.23*
Aural Stimuli	-	.16**	.16**
Olfactory Stimuli	-	.26*	.26*
Gustatory Stimuli	-	-.01****	-.01****
Tactile Stimuli	-	.01****	.01****
On Revisit Intention			
Multi-sensory Imagery	.19***	.33*	.52*
Satisfaction	.29*	-	.29*
Arousal	.28**	-	.28*
Visual Stimuli	-	.18*	.18*
Aural Stimuli	-	.13**	.13**
Olfactory Stimuli	-	.21*	.21*
Gustatory Stimuli	-	-.01****	-.01****
Tactile Stimuli	-	.01****	.01****

* $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .05$ ****not significant

Discussion

The results indicated that F1 spectators' multi-sensory imagery plays a role in transmitting sensory stimuli into their live experience. Specifically, racing-related stimuli (visual, aural, and olfactory) affected multi-sensory imagery. Olfactory stimuli had the greatest impact on multi-sensory imagery, followed by visual and aural stimuli. Service-related stimuli (gustatory and tactile) presented dynamics different from those of racing-related stimuli, not significantly affecting multi-sensory imagery. This finding is consistent with several previous studies that examined the live experience of motorsport spectators (Chung et al., 2015, 2016).

Multi-sensory imagery affected arousal and satisfaction, thus impacting revisit intentions, indicating its effective mediating role between racing-related stimuli and characteristics reflecting the quality of experience. This result confirms that car crash imagery is a valid aspect of the live experience and that it plays a crucial role in shaping F1 spectators' experience. Specifically, spectators are exposed to stimuli

and properly treat them in accordance with their nature. Also, as defined as the Sixth Sense, the crash of multisensory imagery concerns spectators' intuitive nature, which is related to a sensation-seeking tendency. Those findings suggest that sensory stimuli processing and multisensory imagery are stable mechanisms in the context of F1.

Despite its potential to tap into spectators' sensation-seeking tendencies, F1 promoters face the challenge of marketing car crash imagery responsibly. Promoting safety risks often attracts criticism and controversy, which can lead to backlash against the sport (Boyle, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Pope & Williams, 2011). Therefore, F1 marketers must be cautious when dealing with car crashes and associated risks. By adopting a carefully calibrated approach, they can leverage the inherent drama and tension of competitive racing while shifting the focus toward technological innovation and driver skill.

F1 promoters should develop marketing materials to stimulate sensory imagery by leveraging sensory stimuli. For example, the visual components include the images of flying debris and sparks. Dramatic camera angles of a crash and slow-motion footage can heighten excitement and the desire to experience it live. Sounds are as crucial to sensory imagery as visual factors are. Roaring car engines and attendees' excited reactions are examples of auditory components. Given the decisive role of olfactory stimuli, F1 promoters need to be innovative in marketing and delivering such intangible stimuli. This task is challenging because smelling burnt tire and fuel is confined to a specific racing track. Several consumer behavior studies have suggested that smelling is critical to lived experience and memory, underscoring its role in the immersive experience (Krishna, 2012; Herz, 2004; Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003). F1 promoters can incorporate recent technologies into their marketing to feature the scent or use storytelling to link the smelling experience with sensory imagery (Lwin & Morrin, 2012; Spence, 2020).

The study provides several practical implications as follows: First, marketing should position crashes not as dangers and accidents but as thrilling drama of speedy racing and drivers. Also, the drivers' resilience can be a featured narrative after being involved in crashes (Turner, 2017). Second, the marketing message should highlight F1's high-stakes nature while reassuring that the risks are controlled by advanced technology and stringent safety measures (Miller, 2012). For example, marketing can feature the coordination and quick reactions of safety crew members, as well as the sport's rigorous crash tests. Lastly, risk marketing should avoid overemphasizing crashes or employing sensationalism to increase viewership or social media engagement. Instead, marketing should accurately present crashes without glorifying danger or risk. Presentations should provide a comprehensive context, explaining the effectiveness of safety measures following a crash and detailing driver recovery processes.

Limitations and Future Study

This study utilized cross-sectional data from the 2013 Korean F1 to develop context-specific marketing strategies. However, the F1 market and its environment have evolved over the past decade. Although the Korean domestic market has not experienced significant changes since 2013, shifts in F1 media coverage and global popularity are likely to have influenced Korean consumers. Consequently, the practical implications of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Future research should employ designs that examine temporal effects on F1 consumers. Longitudinal and experimental approaches may uncover the effects of prior cues and sensations on multisensory imagery, which are not accessible through cross-sectional designs.

Conclusion

In case of Incheon, South Korea, attempting to host F1, they have faced criticism and concerns about the event's long-term sustainability, particularly given the financial shortcomings of past events. The study introduces the concept of F1's *Sixth Sense*, defined as spectators' intuitive imagery of car crashes, and

offers practical recommendations for utilizing this imagery to enhance the overall sensory experience. It is recommended that F1 promoters market this imagery ethically and responsibly. Effective marketing strategies can emphasize F1's advancements in safety, the resilience of its drivers, and the distinctive sensory experiences available exclusively at the racing circuit.

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