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The Use of Scent in Stores

For most of us, we have experienced sensory attractions. Sometimes, it was from people, and it is also a trending strategy for sensory marketing, an essential part of experiential marketing. Nowadays, business is utilizing people's visual, auditory, or olfactory senses to make their products or services more appealing and memorable to customers.

The stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) paradigm theory explains how it impacts consumer behavior. Imagining that we are in a retail store, we perceive the atmosphere (S) in the store by all kinds of sensory organs, such as our eyes, nose, hands, tones, and ears. The atmosphere stimulates consumers' internal evaluations (O). These evaluations then lead to our behavioral responses, which are approach response or avoidance response (R)¹. Approach responses are positive responses to a store environment, such as having the desire to stay in a store. However, avoidance responses are negative responses, such as having a repugnance to stay in a store.

Another study shows the science behind how scent influences our brain. The scent has been used as a naturally occurring stimulus in many retail stores. As well as an artificially induced stimulus to enhance the shopping experience. However, how and why does scent influence consumer behaviors? Research suggests that scent is processed in a more primitive portion of the brain. Therefore, scent requires little or no cognitive effort to enhance alertness.² The scent is usually the first thing that gains customers' attention and they won't even notice that. The study also shows that there is a privileged neural link between the olfactory nerve and

¹ Doucé, Lieve; Janssens, Wim., "The Presence of a Pleasant Ambient Scent in a Fashion Store: The Moderating Role of Shopping Motivation and Affect Intensity", May 26, 2011, <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/doi/full/10.1177/0013916511410421>

² Roschk, Holger ; Loureiro, Sandra Maria Correia ; Breitsohl, Jan., "Calibrating 30 Years of Experimental Research: A Meta-Analysis of the Atmospheric Effects of Music, Scent, and Color", Journal of Retailing, June 2017, <https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/science/article/pii/S0022435916300458>

the area responsible for emotional memory. This explains why smell can trigger much stronger emotional memories compared to auditory and visual stimuli. As a result, when the memory of the smell brings back customers' positive emotions, it will give customers a more enjoyable shopping experience.

There are a plenty of real-world applications of this methodology, and an article from SmartMoney.Com indicates that the first adopters of scent marketing are hotels and retailers, such as Westin, which is known for its White Tea scent. One of the representatives of retailers is Abercrombie & Fitch, which successfully hooked up its customers' soul with Fierce, a cologne that is used in stores and smells like "an underage male model with a freshly shaved chest." This practice is now extended to other types of businesses, such as museums, airports, and law firms, etc. Another study indicates that 75% of the customers' emotion is triggered by scent and customers can use scent to differentiate different products.³ Retailers like Victoria's secret a specific scent in its stores and its products to distinguish themselves from its competitors. A pioneer of solution providers for scent marketing is Prolitec, a company that "provides ambient scenting to roughly 30,000 locations, including 50 Goodwill stores and a chain of 35 senior-care facilities, says business is growing 50 percent annually."⁴

Due the fact that olfactory sense is only one of our senses, correctly integrating scent into consumers' final perception is a difficult and complex work. An article states that "when smell is associated with an unusual colour in food, people are sometimes unable to correctly identify what is presented to them." It shows that an experience is not simply composed of individual stimuli, and it derives from a compounded effect of factors, such as prior experiences, expectations, norms, and judgment⁵. Therefore, creating an experience with sensory stimulus while avoiding confusions is a challenge for these companies.

³ Doric, Barbara ; Primorac, Dinko ; Kozina, Goran., "SCENT IMPACT ON THE STORE PERCEPTION", Economic and Social Development: Book of Proceedings, Jun 9/Jun 10, 2016

https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/docview/1854280779?accountid=9676&rfr_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprimo

⁴ Kadet, Anne, "The New Muzak: Scent Marketing; Kadet: What's that Smell? Companies using Scent Marketing Say it's the Sweet Smell of Success.", SmartMoney.Com, May 18, 2012,

<https://ezproxy.bu.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1014161082%3Facco>

⁵ Ward, Philippa; Davies, Barry J; Kooijman, Dion, "Olfaction and the retail environment: examining the influence of ambient scent", Springer Nature B.V., January 12, 2007,

https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bu.edu/docview/858927397?accountid=9676&rfr_id=info%3Axi%2Fsid%3Aprimo

In conclusion, scent marketing is widely present in the retailing industry. Practioners are in various kinds of businesses, and challenges stated above could become barriers to them. Undoubtedly, retailing participants who have not noticed the magic power of scent marketing should have more focus on it.

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