



CORRELATION BETWEEN AMBIENT SCENT AND THE BRAND POSITIONING WITHIN CONSUMERS' UNCONSCIOUS SELF

Ooi Wan Yun, & Dr. Rashad Yazdanifard

Center for Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) Programs,
HELP College of Arts and Technology, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract

Ambient scent has the strongest impact in enhancing consumer behavior in terms of cognitive, emotion, evaluation, willingness to return to the store and purchasing intention compared to any other atmospheric variables. Congruity and incongruity of ambient scent both have similar positive effects on the consumers' behavior. Stimulus Organisms Response Paradigm (S-O-R) claimed that scent is a very important environment cue to affect the behavior of patrons. Brand positioning can be improved with the specific scent used by retailers as scent had a unique system towards the human memory. Sensory advertisement is becoming a trend in the new century market as it can enhance the search motive and purchasing intention that exists within consumers. Appropriate scent is the right key to avoid negative behavior on ambient scent. This research's aim is to raise awareness towards the benefits acquirable by implementing ambient scent into retailers' outlets and aim to help consumers understand the use of ambient scent.

Keywords: Ambient scent, consumer behavior, brand positioning, retail marketing.

1. Introduction

As consumers, we are exposed to all types of advertisements every day. New products are launched into the already present market every day to improve the future of society. Past researches have reported that the effects of ambient scent on consumers' perception, emotion and behavior have received little attention from researchers (Orth&Bourrain, 2005; Peck & Childers, 2008; Roxanaa&Ioan, 2013; Teller & Dennis, 2012). However, more attention needs to be given on the topic of ambient scent as it is possible to enhance consumer shopping experience and purchase intention and therefore increase retailers' profit (Fiore, Yah,&Yoh, 2000). Ambient scent is the easiest, economical and effective ways to enhance consumer and increase the sales in retail markets. According to S-O-R paradigm, scent acts as the mediator of consumer purchasing behavior. Ambient scent not only can attract and influence consumers' behavior while it also acts as the tool to enhance brand memory. Appropriate ambient scent is the key to success. Besides retail scent, sensory advertisement has also increasingly affected the market and brings benefits to retailers.

2. Ambient Scent

Retail markets are becoming increasingly competitive. Atmospheric variables such as ambient scent, lightings and music are important strategies and plans that are the core influence for consumer evaluation, satisfaction, and time spent in the store and the purchasing rate (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Hence, ambient scent is becoming the trend in retail markets in order to attract customers. Spangenberg, Crowley and Henderson defined ambient scent as "scent that is not emanating from a particular object but is present in the environment" (as cited in Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011). Ambient scents are strategies aimed and attempted to attract target consumer and stimulate them into purchasers (Davies, Kooijman& Ward, 2003). Relationship and loyalty between retailers and consumers can be built through the specific ambient scent (Davies et al., 2003). Atmosphere of a particular retail outlet affects its dimension of attractiveness (Teller & Reutterer, 2008). Competitive advantage can be created by customizing the atmosphere of a retail place by providing patrons with a pleasant ambient scent in order to increase the pleasure levels of consumer (Morrison, Gan, Dubelaar&Oppewal, 2011). Ambient scent tactic was used by British Airways to make their customer feel comfortable (Bosmans, 2006). Identical Nikes shoes are more likely to be sold in the presence of a pleasant ambient scent compared to the store without ambient scent (The Smell of Success Grows Stronger, 2013).

3. Consumer Behavior and Ambient Scent

Researches proposed that ambient scent is associated with consumers' cognitive pleasure, emotion, attitude and behavior (Fiore et al., 2000; Roxanaa&Ioan, 2013; Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011). Ambient scent has increasingly influence consumer behavior (Bradford & Desrochers, 2009). Store environment has an effect of arousal on pleasantness that can increase spending time in store and willingness to return (Klatcheva&Weitz, 2006; Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011). Ambient scent is more effective in enhancing consumer cognitive shopping style (Morrin&Chebat, 2005). Consumers' loyalty and satisfaction can be increased by having favorable retail' environment and in this research, ambient scent will be the promotional agent that will retain consumers (Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011). Consumers tend to be more impulsive and they exhibit unplanned buying intention and behavior with the presence of mesmerizing scent (Morrin&Chebat, 2005). Consumers are more willing to pay more in a scented store (The Smell of Success Grows Stronger, 2013).

4. Congruent versus Incongruent

Scent congruity, presence of scent and scent pleasantness are the three main dimensions in understanding the positive effects of ambient scent (Roxanaa&Ioan, 2013).Bradford and Desrochers (2009) had reported that congruity between ambient scent and products are capable of increasing positive evaluation, time and money of consumers spent in the store. Congruity scent is also associated with responses, sense of likings and familiarity acceptability (Fiore et al., 2000).The effectiveness of ambient scent can be increased by improving their congruence with the products (Spangenberg, Sprott, Grohmann & Tracy, 2006).Gender-congruent scents in gender-based products departments have increased the sales and also rated as more favorably store by shoppers (Spangenberg et al., 2006). Besides that, past research also reported that incongruent ambient scent with the products may also have a positive product evaluation in certain conditions, given that the scent is not too salient (Bosmans, 2006).Cognitive evaluation of sensory pleasure can be stimulated through ambient scent which acts as the product evaluations' guide for consumers as well (Bosmans, 2006; Orth&Bourrain, 2005).Positive product evaluations are result from how congruent the ambient scent is with the products (Bosmans, 2006; Spangenberg et al., 2006). Scented store had witnessed an increase in the number of purchases and also an increase in positive evaluation (Bradford &Desrochers, 2009; Lunardo, 2012).

5. Sensory Advertisement through Ambient Scent

Market sensory branding has been tested with scented products such as rose-scented tires, vanilla cola and frangipani sewing threads (da-Costa, Zouein, Rodrigues, Arruda & Vieira, 2012).Advertisements and commercials need cognitive activity to enhance memory and create imagery. This can be done through ambient scent as research has shown that scents can stimulate imagery through a specific scent from the human memory (Fiore et al., 2000). In Tokyo, Japan, an appetizing aroma will be emitted during the display of advertising videos that attract people with scents to pick up coupon books attached to the display for underground cafes (da-Costa et al., 2012).Scented magazine advertisement such as perfume ads witnessed an increase in the purchasing rate from consumers (Making scents of it all, 2004).

6. Stimulus Organisms Response Paradigm (S-O-R)

In S-O-R paradigm, (S) represents the cues and environment which affect consumer evaluation (O) to make either an approach behavior or avoidance behavior (R) (Davies et al., 2003; Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011). Sensory pleasure can be enhanced through ambient scent as a scent is a direct link to limbic system of the brain that responsible for emotions (Fiore et al., 2000). Limbic system governs the emotion processing component of the brain that is generally in charge of producing human behavior, emotion and memory (The Smell of Success Grows Stronger, 2013). The reception of smell is directly linked to the limbic system which enables to enhance memory (Davies et al., 2003). Therefore, ambient scent is associated with the behaviors of consumers and the evaluation process that takes place in the minds of consumers towards the retail outlet.

7. Enhance Brand Memory

The smell of roses may remind a person of a particular brand of body lotion and also retrieve the memory of a romantic date. Memory for odors represents a unique and separate memory system (Zucco, 2003).Krishna, Lwin and Morrin (2010) proposed that long term brand memory can be enhanced by scent. Information associated with either familiar or unfamiliar scent is both memorable and long lasting as humans are strong in encoding scent and associated information(Krishna, Lwin & Morrin, 2011;Orth&Bourrain, 2008). Research proposed that a distinct scent or arousal product has the strongest impact on brand memory and attention (Hernandez &Minor, 2011; Bradford &Desrochers, 2009).Consumers are able to recall a particular brand if the retail environment is scented (Ward, Davies & Kooijman, 2003). Hence, ambient scent acts as a tool to attract consumers to spend more time at a retail outlet which will eventually cause them to have better memory toward the brand (Morrin&Ratneshwar, 2003).The use of scent in enhancing consumer memory has strong and substantiated scientific foundation (Krishna et al., 2011). Past studies have reported that scent memory can be retrieved with an accuracy of 65% after one year (The Smell of Success Grows Stronger, 2013). Another past research has shown that scent is associated in improving memory in children (Stagnetto, Roubly&Bensafi, 2006).Brand memory and retail brand image can be enhanced through either congruent or incongruent ambient scent as it can improve recognition of familiar and unfamiliar brands (Morrin&Ratneshwar, 2003;Ward et al., 2003).Brand encoding stage has the greater impact on how ambient scent affects the brand memory (Morrin&Ratneshwar, 2003). Therefore, newly launched products with the present of scent are more likely to have inclined brand image and it is more likely to last in the memory of the consumers. Moreover, the search motivation of consumers can be affected by the presence of scent (Vinitzky&Mazursky, 2011).

8. Negative Effects on Ambient Scent

Consumers can detect the objective of ambient scent used by the retailers (Bradford &Desrochers, 2009). Skepticism toward retailer's motive or tactic may develop due to the incongruent ambient scent (Lunardo, 2012). For example, consumer may think the smell of leather is a tool for retailers to lead them to believe that imitation leather is authentic leather (Lunardo, 2012).Appropriate ambient scent is the right key to improve consumer's pleasure level and satisfaction (Morrison et al., 2011) which will reduce the likelihood of an aversion towards a certain brand.

9. Discussions

The easiest and most effective way to be outstanding in a competitive retail market is to improve retail environment and atmosphere. Ambient scent has the strongest impact in enhancing consumer behavior in terms of cognitive, emotion, evaluation, willingness to return to the store and purchasing intention compared to any other atmospheric variables.

Ambient scent had also acted as the tool for retailers to change window shopping experience that will potentially change browsing customer into purchasing customer and make the customer willing to spend more money in the same store. These positive consumer behaviors are direct results from ambient scent and this is achievable by bringing benefits for the retailers with minimal cost and minimal effort. Moreover, relationship and loyalty between consumer and retailer can also be built through the unique scent used by retailers as the consumer will feel more comfortable and pleasant when they are shopping in a scented store. Consumers are more willing to return to the store which they feel comfortable and satisfied. According to S-O-R paradigm, scent is a very important environment cue to affect consumer behavior and evaluation and also time spent during shopping. Scent has a direct link with the limbic system which is responsible for emotions; hence, ambient scent is very important in determining purchase intention of the potential customers as research showed that emotions are involved during shopping. Furthermore, retailers need not concern themselves about congruity and incongruity of ambient scent as both have similar effects on the behaviors of patrons. However, congruity of ambient scent is more effective in enhancing the level of positive evaluation and satisfaction of consumers. Scent congruity, presence of scent and scent pleasantness are the main three dimensions for retailer to consider when using scent in retail outlets. Apart from that, a scent has a unique system towards the human memory. Therefore, brand image and memory are more superior to remember with the presence of a scent and it is able to be retrieved and recalled more effectively. As a direct result of that, brand positioning can be improved with a specific scent used by retailers. Consumers will recall a particular retail brand whenever they recall the specific scent employed to beautify the area. Information associated with scent is long lasting and more memorable especially during the brand encoding stage. Newly launch products can be introduced in a scented environment in order to enhance the brand memory and attract more customers. Sensory advertisement is becoming a trend in the new century market as it can enhance the search motive and purchasing intention that exists within consumers. Appropriate ambient scent needs to be used in order to avoid skepticism from consumers and it also prevents consumer's distrust that will inevitably produce negative effects to the retailers.

10. Conclusion

After taking everything into account, ambient scent has many benefits for retailers and it does not stop here as it also enhances the pleasant feeling consumers get when they are shopping at a particular retail outlet. Ambient scent does not require much and hence its low implementation costs, budget and effort yet the benefits are substantial. This research's aim is to raise awareness towards the benefits acquirable by implementing ambient scent into retailers' outlets as the current application of ambient scent in the real world is currently limited. Not only that, this research aim to help consumers understand the use of ambient scent as consumers always deserve the right to know the truth and the objective of ambient scent is to avoid any skepticism if there is any present within the perception of consumers.

References

- Bosmans, A. (2006). Scents and Sensibility: When Do (In) Congruent Ambient Scents Influence Product Evaluations?. *Journal Of Marketing*, 70(3), 32-43.
- Bradford, K., & Desrochers, D. (2009). The Use of Scents to Influence Consumers: The Sense of Using Scents to Make Cents. *Journal Of Business Ethics*, 90(14)1153. doi:10.1007/s10551-0100377-5.
- da-Costa, M., Zouein, P., Rodrigues, N., Arruda, J., & Vieira, M. G. (2012). Sensory Marketing: Consumption Experience Of The Brazilian In The Restaurant Industry. *International Journal Of Business Strategy*, 12(4), 165-171.
- Davies, B. J., Kooijman, D., & Ward, P. (2003). The Sweet Smell of Success: Olfaction in Retailing. *Journal Of Marketing Management*, 19(5/6), 611-627.
- Fiore, A., Yah, X., & Yoh, E. (2000). Effects of a Product Display and Environmental Fragrancing on Approach Responses and Pleasurable Experiences. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(1), 27-54.
- Hernandez, M. D., & Minor, M. S. (2011). Investigating the effect of arousal on brand memory in advergames: Comparing qualitative and quantitative approaches. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 14(2), 207-217.
- Kaltcheva, V. D., & Weitz, B. A. (2006). When Should a Retailer Create an Exciting Store Environment?. *Journal Of Marketing*, 70(1), 107-118.
- Krishna, A., Lwin, M. O., & Morrin, M. (2010). Product Scent and Memory. *Journal Of Consumer Research*, 37(1), 57-67.
- Krishna, A., Lwin, M. O., & Morrin, M. (2011). Is scent-enhance memory immune to retroactive interference? *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 21(3), 354-361.
- Lunardo, R. (2012). Negative effects of ambient scents on consumers' skepticism about retailer's motives. *Journal Of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 19(2), 179-185. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2011.11.007.
- Making scents of it all. (2004). *Marketing Management*, 13(1), 6.
- Morrin, M., & Chebat, J. (2005). Person-Place Congruency: The Interactive Effects of Shopper Style and Atmospherics on Consumer Expenditures. *Journal Of Service Research*, 8(2), 181-191. doi:10.1177/1094670505279420.
- Morrin, M., & Ratneshwar, S. S. (2003). Does It Make Sense to Use Scents to Enhance BrandMemory?. *Journal Of Marketing Research (JMR)*, 40(1), 10-25.
- Morrison, M., Gan, S., Dubelaar, C., & Oppewal, H. (2011). In-store music and aroma influences on shopper behavior and satisfaction. *Journal Of Business Research*, 64(6), 558-564. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.06.006.
- Orth, U. R., & Bourrain, A. (2005). Ambient scent and consumer exploratory behaviour: A causal analysis. *Journal Of Wine Research*, 16(2), 137-150. doi:10.1080/09571260500327671.
- Orth, U. R., & Bourrain, A. (2008). The influence of nostalgic memories on consumer exploratory tendencies: Echoes from scents past. *Journal Of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 15(4), 277-287. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2007.06.001.

- Peck, J., & Childers, T. L. (2008). Effects of sensory factors on consumer behavior: If it tastes, smells, sounds, and feels like a duck, then it must be a duck. In C. P. Haugtvedt, P. M. Herr, F. R. Kardes (Eds.), *Handbook of consumer psychology* (pp. 193-219). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group/Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Roxanaa, O., & Ioan, P. (2013). The Effects of Ambient Scent on Consumer Behavior: A Review of the Literature. *Annals Of The University Of Oradea, Economic Science Series*, 22(1), 17971806.
- Spangenberg, E. R., Sprott, D. E., Grohmann, B., & Tracy, D. L. (2006). Gender congruent ambient scent influences on approach and avoidance behaviors in a retail store. *Journal Of Business Research*, 59(12), 1281-1287. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.08.006.
- Stagnetto, J. M., Rouby, C. C., & Bensafi, M. M. (2006). Contextual cues during olfactory learning improve memory for smells in children. *European Review Of Applied Psychology / Revue Européenne De Psychologie Appliquée*, 56(4), 253-259. doi:10.1016/j.erap.2005.09.012.
- Teller, C., & Dennis, C. (2012). The effect of ambient scent on consumers' perception, emotions and behaviour: A critical review. *Journal Of Marketing Management*, 28(1/2), 14-36. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2011.560719.
- Teller, C., & Reutterer, T. (2008). The evolving concept of retail attractiveness: What makes retail agglomerations attractive when customers shop at them?. *Journal Of Retailing & Consumer Services*, 15(3), 127-143. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2007.03.003.
- The Smell of Success Grows Stronger. (2013). *Trends Magazine*, (118), 25-30.
- Turley, L. W., & Milliman, R. E. (2000). Atmospheric Effects on Shopping Behavior: a Review of the Experimental Evidence. *Journal Of Business Research*, 49(2), 193-211.
- Vinitzky, G., & Mazursky, D. (2011). The effects of cognitive thinking style and ambient scent on online consumer approach behavior, experience approach behavior, and search motivation. *Psychology & Marketing*, 28(5), 496-519. doi:10.1002/mar.20398.
- Ward, P., Davies, B. J., & Kooijman, D. (2003). Ambient Smell and the Retail Environment: Relating Olfaction Research to Consumer Behavior. *Journal Of Business & Management*, 9(3), 289-302.
- Zucco, G. M. (2003). Anomalies in cognition: Olfactory memory. *European Psychologist*, 8(2), 77-86. doi:10.1027//1016-9040.8.2.77.