

Scent Marketing: Research on the Applicability of Sensuality in Offline Fashion Retail Stores

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, marketers are becoming more aware of the potential impact that smell may play a significant role in distinguishing brands in the marketplace. An increasing number of fashion retailers are engaging with scent marketing in their fashion retail stores. The purpose of this study is to present the applicability of scent marketing in fashion retail stores. It also seeks to provide an overview of consumer and fashion retail perspectives. The paper is built on the works of literature from the field of fashion retail marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour, covering the period between 2005 and 2021. The results confirm the application of scent marketing in luxury fashion retail stores has a better performance than using in fast-fashion retail stores.

Keywords: Scent marketing, Fashion retail, consumer behaviour, service quality, brand

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers found that scent may improve sales and loyalty to a firm in 1993, which gave birth to the notion of scent marketing [1]. After a decade of retailers' hard work, it was finally given its official name – "Scent Marketing" in 2002, which was a subfield of neuroeconomic study that addresses the use of fragrances for commercial purposes [2]. Scent marketing aims to create a distinct multi-sensory environment surrounding the product and service.

To date, the traditional and the majority scent related marketing research has concentrated on the beneficial influence of a pleasant scent, as well as the validation of the effectiveness of scent marketing strategy. Krishna et al. [3] demonstrated that a scented product will gain long-term memory for other (non-scent-related) elements of that product rises. While Gottschalk [4] associated scent with the payment environment in stores, customers who perceive the sent tend to be guided by the shopper and complete the payment. These results provide support for the commercial value of scent when applied to offline stores.

However, despite a large amount of research on the benefit of scent marketing, there is less consensus on whether ambient scent can be effectively implemented in the retail industry. For example, Bradford and Desrochers [5] found that scent marketing has the ability

to make consumers more vulnerable to marketing messages. More seriously, it may even mislead consumers.

This article discusses scent marketing from the attitude of consumers and explores the applicability of scent marketing in fashion retail stores. While scent marketing consists of product scent and ambient scent, this paper will mainly focus on the ambient scent. The goal of this article is to give fashion retail marketers different views from the perspective of the customer when they bought fashion retail goods. And based on the intention of consumers combined with characteristics of fashion retail stores, giving suggestions on whether scent marketing strategy can be successfully used in offline retail stores. This article will discuss consumer behaviour in fashion retail stores and the effect of scent marketing by searching and reviewing relevant literature.

2. BRAND PERSONALITY OF FASHION RETAIL STORES

2.1 Brand personality of luxury fashion retail

Compare with the fast-fashion retailing sector, Luxury fashion retailers need to consider more dimensions rather than focus on cost performance and other price-related factors. One of the most important considerations is brand personality. Each luxury fashion brand will have its own unique brand personality, which

relates to the entire value proposition that the brand provides to its target market [6]. Brand personality can greatly influence the brand's marketing decisions and corresponding customer segments. Luxury fashion brands, as opposed to the fast-fashion retail business, have a more defined brand personality.

According to Sung and Tinkham [7], Brands do not have objective personality characteristics that are independent of customer views of them. This suggests that brand personality is derived from customers' subjective cognitions of the brand, that is, from the perspective of consumers' view of the brand. It is less about "something I have" and more to do with "who I am" for brands [8]. Brand personality directly reflects what consumers think about one brand. This also illustrates that the more distinct a brand's goods and services are from those of other brands, the more perceptive customers will be about the brand's personality.

2.2 Luxury fashion brand personality and scent marketing

Consumers identify luxury brands with high quality, overpriced, and non-essential goods and services that appear to be unique, exclusive, distinguished and authentic [9]. Every luxury fashion brand has its own distinct brand personality. For example, Fendi, a subsidiary of LVMH, has been attracting consumers by inheriting the technique of hand-made goods [10]. For consumers, Fendi's brand personality is defined by its unique artificial technology and commitment to quality in the creation of each product.

According to Fendi's brand personality, the prominent French perfumer Olivia Giacobetti designed a special fragrance to evoke the image of a young woman opening her grandmother's old cabinet [11]. Inspired by Fendi's historic product – suede, and the Travertine Marble Columns in the store's architecture, the perfumer developed a distinctive fragrance for Fendi. It supposes that when consumers shop inside the store, their noses will immediately be tied to the brand's history.

A well-established brand personality can assist consumers to develop their emotional links to the company, and increase consumer preference has a positive correlation with levels of trust and loyalty [12]. Fendi takes the advantage of its unique brand personality, with the help of scent marketing, and finally creates a distinct scent. This will trigger those customers to recall Fendi the next time customers come across anything vintage.

2.3 The availability by connecting luxury fashion brand personality and scent marketing

Scent can effectively create a powerful brand personality and even remind consumers whenever and

wherever possible. Chanel once launched a popular fragrance, Chanel No.5.

With it, the brand, breaking the mould of the world's perception of women, empowered them with a fragrance that would give them a brave and adventurous spirit. Simultaneously, the fragrance directly made Chanel an elegant and confident brand personality. Whether in a Chanel boutique or on the street, the smell of Chanel No.5 conjures up images of blossoming white flowers and that prestige double C Chanel logo.

The unique brand personality of the luxury fashion brand can help perfumers to draw inspiration and create a fragrance that suits the brand better. For example, sandalwood can be used in aromatherapy to symbolize the history and strong cultural deposits of the brand, and white flowers can represent tenacity and confidence. Moreover, luxury fashion brands do not change the identity of the brand in a short period, which means the products are designed according to the positioning and characteristics of the brand and the designs are more homogeneous than fast-fashion brands, therefore scent marketing is a long-term approach that is appropriate for premium fashion firms.

2.4 Brand personality of the fast-fashion brand

Unlike luxury fashion brands that have a distinctive brand identity and personality, fast-fashion brands tend to cater to the public, paying close attention to seasonal fashion displays and changing their product assortment on a regular basis [13]. The fast-fashion brands not only have their original design and also incorporate references to luxury fashion brands. They use relatively inexpensive materials to produce these goods as an affordable alternative to more expensive goods in order to get more attention.

Fast-fashion brands hardly find a matching brand personality. According to Choi et al., Fast fashion is a retail approach that allows retailers to swiftly and effectively incorporate current and developing trends into their present goods assortments [14]. As a result, customers find it difficult to identify the characteristics of a fast-fashion brand (i.e. brand personality), because the brand includes many fashion elements for diverse ages and styles of consumers.

2.5 The similarity of fast-fashion brand

Consumers have a tough time distinguishing between different fast-fashion brands. For consumers, fast-fashion brands have comparable pricing ranges, the same quality and even similar marketing models. These fast-fashion brands lack a fixed brand identity, a distinctive feature that consumers will remember. Scholars argue that fast fashion is a brand category that satisfies

consumers through low costs, trendiness, and frequent inventory turnover [15].

Fast-fashion brands face the same problems and design similar clothes in response to fashion trends. A substantial amount of research on fast-fashion brands often discusses brands such as H&M and Zara together. It is the high degree of similarity between these fast-fashion brands that make it tough for consumers to differentiate between them and to identify the right characteristic for the brands.

2.6 The availability of scent marketing in fast-fashion brand

Due to the high degree of similarity between fast-fashion brands and clothing styles that change according to fashion trends, it is difficult for brands to select the appropriate fragrance in the store. In addition to this, fast-fashion brands are highly inclusive, and customers can find a broad range of styles in the stores, from basic to sporty and flamboyant. So that the purpose of shopping and the styles that fit vary widely, making it impossible to create a suitable scent to meet the preference of each individual. The pleasant ambient scent might fail to have the desired impact if they are inconsistent with consumers' tastes and expectations [16]. Therefore, using scent marketing in fast-fashion stores may be counterproductive.

3. THE CONSUMER EMOTIONAL FACTOR WHEN SHOPPING IN FASHION RETAIL STORES

3.1 Emotion of buyers in luxury fashion stores

Based on the analysis of Ehbauer and Gresel, people consider shopping to be a leisure activity and buying luxury products frequently shopping for presents [17]. Since luxury fashion products aren't usually a frequent purchase, so the psychology of consumption varies. Based on the experiment of Nwankwo et al. [18], a high proportion of consumers buy luxury products for self-fulfilment (ranked 4.68/5), followed by fun and enjoyment of life (ranked 4.1/5). This implies that consumers prefer emotional satisfaction when shopping in fashion retail stores, similarly, they have high expectations of the shopping experience.

Besides that, Tsai [19] separately defined the emotion of luxury fashion goods as internalized luxury and externalized luxury. Internalized luxury will be associated with notions such as self-directed pleasure, self-gift giving, and internal congruency. Customers who purchase luxury fashion products for personal reasons are more demanding in terms of sensory satisfaction and are more likely to be influenced by emotions.

On the contrary, the behaviour of external luxury mainly reflects some purchasing decisions related to "others", such as choosing luxury products for friends. These customers have a relatively rational mindset, preferring to buy the right things over shopping. They pay more attention to comparing the feature of products and the people they tend to give. Therefore they are less likely to be affected by external circumstances.

3.2 Scent and emotion of buyers in luxury stores

Human emotional states are directly influenced by scent. In reality, the scent has an impact on approximately 75% of our emotions [20]. The consumer's emotions fluctuate to a large extent through the perception of different scents. Especially when entering the luxury fashion stores, customers are no longer looking for objective quality and the characteristics of the goods, but rather for a unique experience that stems from the delight of purchase as a whole and is orientated toward their fulfilment [21].

Customers who are more sensitive to the customer experience will be largely influenced by scent marketing strategy. Those kinds of customers will pay greater attention to service and atmosphere, including the presentation of the product, the environment of the shop and the attitude of the employees. Meanwhile, the customer's ability to detect the scent of the store is also improved, making them more likely to be guided by ambient scent.

Customers are increasingly driven by their emotions when purchasing things that provide psychological advantages (i.e., strong emotional engagement). As a consequence, customers who shop in luxury fashion stores are more likely to be influenced by emotion, which is inextricably tied to scent, and therefore, scent marketing is more successful in luxury fashion retail stores.

3.3 Emotion of buyers in fast-fashion stores

Shoppers in fast-fashion stores appear to move faster than those in luxury fashion stores. Unlike luxury fashion stores, where the flow of people is limited, fast-fashion stores are more free-flowing, and the stores are often crowded with shoppers. Therefore fast-fashion stores become a regular part that customers visit. Blazquez [22] also considers that the fast-fashion store is a crucial touchpoint, with 'shoppers' visiting the store on a routine basis to check what new items have arrived. In stores, consumers are continually looking through the clothes and jewellery on the racks and paying for their goods without hesitation.

Consumers in fast-fashion retail stores don't give high consideration to the environment. Through the

investigation of Coskun et al., consumers believe that there will be a shortage of garments in fast-fashion stores and the chaotic atmosphere makes them assume the products will be gone immediately hence they hoard them [23]. In addition to this, fast-fashion product buyers are generally price-conscious. According to Gabrielli et al [24], customers feel that the notion of fast fashion is more significant than the product itself. And they subconsciously believe that fast-fashion products won't be worn for long periods of time.

After the purchase, the pleasant emotional consequences will be discovered, particularly in the experience of having found something that is useful or cheap. Consumers enjoy the freedom of shopping in fast-fashion stores than the constraint of being served by a sales advisor. Furthermore, consumers are more likely to gain the satisfaction of having purchased the right item. As a result, these consumers are more concerned with the outcome of their purchasing rather than with the process of shopping.

3.4 Scent and buyers in fast-fashion stores

For those shopping in fast-fashion stores, the ambient scent of the shop is of little importance. Consumers are also less concerned about the environment since they are more focused on the products on display. Scent marketing not only improves customers' moods but also aids in the understanding and interpretation of visuals and other sorts of information in the surroundings [25]. But customers in fast-fashion stores only capture information limited to products and discounts, which often do not need to proceed in conjunction with the senses.

Although the use of scent marketing can unconsciously attach the customer's memories to the scent and evoke them numerous times, it is only better used in small and medium-sized fast-fashion stores. Larger fast-fashion retailers, such as H&M and Zara, are typically positioned in the main outlets of the capital city, occupying the busiest locations. They always appear in the large plaza or near the supermarkets. Even without the assistance of scent marketing, people acquire habituated to shopping in these large fast-fashion retailers on a frequent basis.

In contrast, the ambient scent is more useful in the new fast-fashion stores. The stores of these emerging brands are usually not located in major shopping positions. So consumers who shop at an emerging brand will simply remember the brand as having bought the cloth, and will not actively recall and visit again. But scent marketing can change that and be an effective means of triggering consumers to think about the brand.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that scent marketing works better in luxury fashion stores than in fast-fashion stores. This paper compares the consumer psychology of shopping in luxury and fast fashion stores, as well as the different perspectives on the two fashion brands.

The finding of the study can be of interest to marketing managers who desired to applicate scent marketing to stores. This study proves the practicability of using ambient scent in stores can instinctively connect the shopping memories of consumers with the brand to improve the shopping experience and repurchase rate.

This study also has some limitations since the paper only considered the review of previous papers, and there is no specific data to prove the argument. Also, due to the differences in consumer preferences, it's extremely difficult to determine what fragrance customers will appreciate. So the conclusions of the experiment can only be generalised and not representative of everyone. Therefore, future research still needs to concentrate on the consumer perspective of scent marketing, and it is essential to collect data on the influence of scent marketing without the environmental factors in the fashion industry.

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