Literature review on how ambient scent can contribute to more sales in a traditional store

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Abstract

This literature review distinguishes proponents and opponents of ambient scent marketing and compares these points of view with theories of motivation. Definition of Spangenberg (1996): Scent Marketing is an ambient scent or odour that is not emanating from a particular object but is present in the environment. Therefore, this study researches this phenomenon by connecting the use of scent marketing in stores with consumers. Some academics argue that scent marketing has to be forbidden of the ethical perspective, other see scent marketing as an instrument. This review proves that scent marketing is useful to use, but that it also has its limitations.

Keywords: Scent marketing | smell marketing | extrinsic motivation | consumers | traditional stores

Introduction

Lately, the marketing world is changing. The online world of web shops and websites are getting more and more important for the consumers. Maintaining these consumers in traditional retail stores is getting more and more important. Retailers are “pimping” the stores to maintain and attract (new) consumers. A tool for retailers to attract these consumers is the use of scent marketing. This literature review distinguishes proponents and opponents of ambient scent marketing and compares these points of view with theories of motivation. Also, this literature review shows what the effects are, if you combine scent and a traditional store together. At last, this review describes what the best situation is to use ambient scent marketing.

Academic literature used in this literature review shows that there are positive motivations to use ambient scent marketing. Also does this article shows that there are ethical driven researchers how doubt the usage of ambient scent marketing. In this review both sides are shown, and augmented.

This literature review tries to analyze and interpreting different points of views from marketing experts. This in order to decide if it is useful for traditional stores to use ambient scent marketing, where consumers go to buy things.

The first part of this review describes what (ambient) scent marketing is. This is defined by several marketing experts. Secondly, there is an explanation how scent influences consumers (positive and negative effects). Thereafter, it describes the effects it has if you combine scent and a traditional store together. At last, this review describes the best situation to use scent marketing.

An important keynote about this review is that with “traditional store” is meant the environment where people buy products. For example the stores of H&M, Albert Heijn and Hema.

What is scent marketing?

There are few definitions of scent marketing. The outlines of these definitions are mostly the same. A normal interpretation of scent marketing, is the use of a scent in a particular environment to stimulate the senses of a person.
Spangenberg (1996) define scent marketing as “Ambient scent is scent or odor that is not emanating from a particular object but is present in the environment”.

Bradford & Desrochers (2009) define scent marketing as “Ambient scents, which are defined as general odors that do not emanate from a product but are present as part of the retail environment.” The two definitions are expressing the same meaning as well the same purpose. In this article we will hold on to the two given definitions to discus the use of ambient scent marketing.

In the following picture of Bradford & Desrochers (2009) Scent marketing is explained. The picture shows different gradations of scent marketing. In this article ambient scent is discussed. Ambient scent is a scent present as part of the retail environment. The other scent marketing gradations are marketer scent; scent used to attract attention and product scent; providing personal or general odors to motivate approach behavior.

**How does ambient scent influences consumers?**

Scent influences our lives. Ravn (2007):”One whiff of a scent can make a person laugh or cry, and exclaim with delight or disgust.” If a girlfriend wears a nice perfume, a person can get attracted to her of that smell or scent. If that person wears a negative or noisome perfume or that person smells bad, a person wants to keep distance. But how does ambient scent influences consumers in traditional stores?

Before this question can be answered it is good to know how the human body
works. Stevens (2006) says: “On average, each person breathes 20,000 times a day and with each breath comes a chance to pitch a product because the sense of smell cannot be turned off. The average human being is able to recognize approximately 10,000 different odors.”

Scholder (2007) a Georgia State University marketing professor says: “With all of the other senses, you think before you respond, but with scent, your brain responds before you think”.

Given the facts of these researchers, we can conclude that a scent unconsciously influences the lives of persons. A scent goes beyond thinking, and bypasses our natural judgment of something. Scent influences the unconsciousness.

But how does scent influence consumers in traditional stores?

From an applied test, it has shown that the usage of scent increased store sales. Research conducted by Morrin and Chebat (2005) showed that a subtle use of lemon increased store sales by 63%. The use of scent is also argued to have an effect and impact on our sense of time; that is, scented areas enhance the feeling of timelessness. Also Lindstrom (2005) has shown that our mood is enhanced by 40% in pleasantly scented surroundings. Another positive effect is that the image with the scent is recollected accurately. When memorizing a certain scene, the scent that had been smelt before was recalled, and the scene that related to the scent is useful for the memory. It is understood that the image with a scent strongly remains in the impression, and that it is effective for recalling the items. The assumption is that people perceive the object more consciously by recalling their experience.

However, there are aspects that need attention when using scent marketing. We propose that when consumers are exposed to an ambient scent in a store environment in which they did not expect that scent, they develop skepticism toward the retailer’s motives. It is also proposed that in a skepticism-inducing environment, consumers feel less pleasure and develop negative attitude towards the retailer.

Another issue of the use of scent marketing is that it bypasses the normal understanding of a certain situation. People notice a certain scent, but cannot turn it of in the brain. So it always will effect the actions of people. Then the questions arises, is it fair to use scent marketing in traditional stores? With scent marketing people can be controlled in their action and motives to buy things in stores.

A more important aspect is that there is little research about the effects of exposing people to a lot of different scents, this for the long term. What if people can’t handle to much different scent? There are examples that people can get a headache if they walk into a perfume store. This has to be investigated before the stores and businesses going to use (ambient) scent marketing.

What are the effects if you combine scent and a store together?

According to Lindstrom’s (2009) research, showed that if you combine a picture with a compatible scent, it is better perceived and memorized. Osterberg (2008) argued that scent can have a strong impact on ambience, mood, and behavior, but in order for it to be effective, it has to be clearly linked to the service, situation, or space. Looking at the following statements, scent has an influence on people. But it only has influence, when people can remind a certain object combined with that particular scent. The scent marketing industry and the research that supports it, claims many interesting results for marketers. One study supports that 84% of people were more
likely to buy (in this research shoes), or liked them more, in a scented room. Positive interaction effects were found on shopping behavior, pleasure, and satisfaction when the type of scent and music were combined with each other. When both the scent and music were either low arousal or high arousal. Spangenberg (2005) also found that when the music and the scent were congruent (Christmas music and Christmas scents), this led to higher evaluations of the retail environment. Hirsch (1995) has shown in a casino that a pleasant ambient scent related to 45% more revenue than comparable non-scented slot machine areas. The following statement has shown that if you combine scent and a store or object together, people will likely remember it and will positively confront it.

Skepticism about scent marketing tells another story. Scent is highly related to trust, and thus that the in-store atmosphere can jeopardize the long-term relationship with consumers if it leads to more skepticism. Lunardo (2011) says that his article provides support to the notion that an atmosphere must not generate skepticism. In this regard, the atmosphere consumers are exposed; this can have significant effects on skepticism and subsequent emotional and attitudinal responses. Before a store uses scent marketing it has to consider the effects. The main effect of diffusing an unpleasant scent was an increase in the effect of actual stimulation on risk taking tendencies. In the pleasantly scented condition, consumer actual stimulation had a stronger impact on variety seeking and information search. When a store uses a scent, it can lead to skepticism and a negative association with the brand.

Which situation is the best to use ambient scent marketing?

According to Doty (1985) reports have shown that females are more sensitive to scent intensity than males. This is an important aspect if a store has a particular target group, male or female. Also the scent emitting systems to attract people have been greatly developed. These systems have started to be applied to various advertisements in places such as supermarkets and restaurants. From a merchandising prospect, these systems are expected to attract the passer by to the place, which sells the product that relates to the scent and improve the desire to purchase it. Herz (2002) says:” Research also supports ambient scent affecting performance in the workplace. When exposed to a pleasant scent people are more creative in problem solving versus when they are exposed to an unpleasant scent”.

An other interesting statement of Herz (2002) is: “People who work in the presence of a pleasant scent also reported higher self efficacy, set higher goals, and were more likely to employ efficient work strategies than participants who worked in a no-scent condition.”

The best way to use scent marketing, is to use it in a traditional store. People smell the ambient scent conscious and unconscious. Given the facts in this review, the use of ambient scent with a particular subject or item or the use of scent in an environment has no different effects. Summarized and compared, they have the same effect. Most of the research has proven that scent marketing works in any environment. This review is about the use of ambient scent marketing in traditional stores. For this subject the different research have shown, that the use of ambient scent will increase the sales.
Methodology

For this article, ten sources were used. To provide these ten articles several databases where consulted as: Scopus, Google Scholar and the library of The University of Twente. The search keywords that where used to get the right information are: Scent marketing and smell marketing.

Before this review was written, there was fist a literature matrix made. This to gather the most relevant information of these articles. The time frame of this review was ten weeks.

Conclusion

This review and other research articles about scent marketing have shown that scent marketing works in a particular environment. This review was about the usage of ambient scent marketing in traditional stores. For a traditional store, it can be very attractive to invest in scent marketing. This because people are feeling pleasant, and are remembering a store or a brand faster. This with a positive stimulation.

Although research has shown that scent marketing works, marketers have to consider if they want to use scent marketing. If every brand/ store is going to use scent marketing, people can get skeptical about it. Also the ethical statements about the use of scent marketing have to be considered. In a human body, scent cannot be turned off. A question then, is it fair to use scent if people know about this fact, they can get agitated. At the other hand, it can be very attractive to use (ambient) scent marketing for stores to increase the sale.

Secondly, the researches have shown that scent marketing works. With scent people can get influenced. Although it works, further research does not show what the long term effects (25 to 50 years) of the usage of a lot of scent are. When using scent marketing investors have to account for the effects when contributing to scent marketing.

Thirdly, an important question to ask, can a marketer use every scent? Which scents are associated negative and which scents are associated positive? When marketers use ambient scent in a store, an effect could be that a particular group of people get negatively associated with a brand or store because for them the scent is spoiled. Further research has to shown if people can get boxed in particular attractive scent categories.

The limitations of this research were the time frame of ten weeks and ten literature sources. Another important limitation is the usage of a few sub questions in this review. There are so much more questions about this subject, that can be answered and are very important.

Future research should be focused on the effects of the long term usage of (ambient) scent marketing. Also it is very important to research with which scent people are positively associated, and with which scent people are negatively associated.

This review has shown that ambient scent on the short term works and that it is effective, still marketers have to consider if it is ethical right or wrong to use scent marketing.
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