

The scent marketing: consumers perception

Marta Grybś-Kabocik

University of Economics in Katowice
Katowice, Poland

Keywords

Consumer, Scent marketing, consumer perception

Abstract

Scent marketing understood as influencing consumers with consciously prepared mix of scents is rapidly developing both in Europe and all over the world. It is found by many researchers that scent to which consumers are exposed positively influence their attitudes towards sales environments, improve their brands memory directly leading to increase of likelihood to purchase. Therefore, the goal of the paper is to analyze the perception of consumer regarding sensory marketing, which is important from marketing, both scientific and practice, point of view. There was a questionnaire conducted as a pilot studies with 96 respondents. It enables the beginning of the discussion about the scientific aim which is to assess the effectiveness of scent marketing, as it is perceived by consumers. According to research, consumers are aware of using pleasurable scent in retail environment and majority of them are prone to believe that fragrances used in shops may influence their decision making process

1. Introduction

The sense of smell is increasingly examined by academia and still is often called to be one of the most mysterious of all senses (Davies, et.al, 2003:614-615). People within their bodies possess between 6-10 million receptor cells which are placed in olfactory epithelium which enable people to receive and distinguish up to 4 thousands smells. What is more, smell appears to be a sense which contribute to human perception of totality of the set of stimuli, in other words if smell does not correspond with what is present to people they might be unable to identify it (Davies, et.al, 2003:615-617). This knowledge is being more and more frequently used by marketers and entrepreneurs in retailing environment (Mattila&Wirtz, 2001:273)

2. Literature review

The scent marketing, also called the aroma-marketing, is a part of a quickly developing trend in a marketing communication – the sensory marketing. A scent appeared to be very important aspect of sensory marketing (Hultén et al., 2009). The reason of that is that other senses (sight, touch, taste or hearing) are conscious one while a scent is a sense targeting unconsciousness directly, being analyzed by the brain without any consumer awareness (Bradford & Desrochers, 2009). The aroma-marketing may be defined as a method of influencing the receiver by consciously prepared mix of fragrances (Morrin & Ratneshwar, 2003:10-25) which include influencing the consumers in the point of sales or by the product itself (Bartholmé & Melewar, 2011: 58-59). Scent which is accurately prepared and adjusted to customers may have an enormous impact on the atmosphere in the shop and therefore on emotional reactions of consumer. It is found by many researchers that scent to which consumers are exposed positively influence their attitudes towards sales environments and improve brands memory. It is then definitely confirmed that exposure to scents ultimately leads to in increased likelihood of purchase (Rimkute, et.al., 2016:25-24).

3. Research methodology

In order to obtain information about the perception of aroma-marketing by consumers and the level of their awareness about it, both secondary sources analysis and primary sources research were made. A questionnaire research was designed and conducted. As a result of the fact that aroma-marketing is relatively new and still developing area of academic interest, as well as that scent marketing is designed to influence consumers below their consciousness, it was decided that the research will be first conducted among consumers. Future research will engage wider spectrum of respondents in quantitative research, but also experts in aroma-marketing and companies' employees in a in-depth interviews. Pilot studies

already present interesting input to the discussion about sensory marketing perception by consumers. The questionnaire was made in the Internet using non-probability method with snowball sampling in which existing respondents recruit future research subjects from among their acquaintances. Research had a regional character and was conducted in two major cities in southern Poland: Katowice (58%) and Kraków (42%) in 2015. There were 96 fully answered questionnaire by 49 women and 47 men. Research had a direct character using questionnaire with 20 questions, brief description of researchers, aim of the research and definition of aroma-marketing.

4. Results

Respondents while asked what they associated with the term „aroma-marketing” were not very specific, however only one answer suggested that respondent have never heard about aroma-marketing. Among the most often indicated association with aroma-marketing were perfumery (30%), gastronomy (22%). This leads to an conclusion that respondents associate aroma-marketing with spaces where scents play major roles, where they can be easily sensed and connected to sales offer. Further associations are connected with any scent used in shops, companies or within products packages. According to next answers, only 8% of respondent never noticed any pleasurable scent used in a shop (within which 80% were male respondents). Majority of answers confirmed that consumers did observe pleasurable fragrances used in sales spaces.

Only 5% of consumers are sure that scents influence decision making process and almost 60% believe that it is rather possible. Around 20% believed that scents rather cannot influence their decision making process while sensed in a shop, 15% were not sure. Above mentioned answers lead to a conclusion that majority of consumers are aware of engaging scents in a shop and believe that it might have an influence on decision making process especially in case of purchasing products which one did not intend to buy before (48%) or purchasing higher quantity of such a product (20%) or purchasing product of other brand than originally intended (7%). Respondents confirmed that they bought some products in effect of being exposed to scents: 75% - bakery shop, 10% - coffee shop, 4% - popcorn, 3% - lunch.

Afterwards, respondents were asked which products and services do they associate with scent marketing. Respondents indicated wide range of products (sequenced accordingly): cosmetics(65%), food (48%), clothes (35%), cars (20%), furniture (15%), alcohols and beverages (5% - indicating whiskey), RTV (2%) and paper products (2%). Respondents also indicated several services (sequenced accordingly): cosmetic (42%), coffee shops and restaurants (38%), hair dressers (10%), hotels (6%), buses(5%) and airplanes (4%). Some respondents indicated also cinemas and discos.

Respondents were also asked what features would they use to describe scent marketing. More than 40% of answers indicated that respondents perceive scent marketing as interesting or very interesting as well as a positive way of communicating with consumers. Majority of respondents also believe that scent marketing is quite emotional. Ethic of scent marketing was not assessed in an uniform way, half of respondents rather perceive it as ethic and half of respondents are more prone to assess it as unethical. Thus, it may be conclude that it is a controversial part of scent marketing. Vast majority of respondents believe that it is not very popular form of marketing communication yet.

Above mentioned research results are part of wider analysis. It enabled to conclude that the awareness of consumers about scent marketing is increasing. Despite ethical issues which were risen by some respondents, scent marketing is perceived as positive form of communication. Despite the fact that consumers still associate it mainly with scent-based retailing environment, they believe that scent marketing may be effective in influencing their decision making process.

5. Discussion

Marketing and marketing communication has changed. It is caused by the technology development, popularity of online and mobile solutions as well as sociological changes. Consumers who were attacked by the ubiquitous advertising in last decade became resistant towards it. What is more, so called “Y” generation (people aged 20-30) is much more demanding, quick and aware as consumers segment. All of that changed the situation on the market and put the focus on experience and senses in order to reach and engage the consumers in long-term relationships. Growing number of companies changes the structures in marketing department starting from Chief Marketing Officer into Chief

Experience Officer in order to ensure consumers with genuine, one of the kind experience which will engage consumers' senses.

Sensory marketing concept evolved throughout last years. It focuses on influencing consumers' brains through all the senses. It is believed that the image of the brand is created by mental conceptions and imaginations through experience which consumer had with the brand or company. What is more, the basic economic theory had been refuted. According to Nobel prize winner Daniel Kahneman (2012, p. 14-23) people do not behave fully in rational way and their choices are not rational either. Peoples' brains are prone to systematic mistakes as a result of several simplified rules of concluding which the brain follows unconsciously. For example, Kahneman indicates heuristic of affect what can be explain as the tendency to assess the environment based on the emotions or impressions like when one judge the sales' skills of a person based on sympathy towards him or her. (Kahneman, 2012, p. 14-23) It is common bias made by people's brains, very often observed during purchasing decision making process.

Several researches over the scent marketing effectiveness were conducted. First of all there was a research made by researchers at Washington State University who discovered that simple scent are more effective than the sophisticated compositions. It resulted from the fact that simple scent (e.g. lemon) was easier to analyze by brain that the composition of several e.g. orange with basil and green tea, on which consumers were required to focus. Another example of research which considers scent marketing effectiveness was also conducted at Washington State University by a consumer psychologist and dean of business school –Eris Spangenberg. The research was aimed at proving that the scent shall not only be simple but also shall be tailored to the customer. When rose Marco fragrance was sprayed in the clothing shop male part of customers spend more money and made bigger purchases, while in comparison when vanilla fragrance was sprayed the same situation could be observed in female part of consumers. Yet another research was made by neurologist from Chicago - Alan Hirsch, who place two pairs of Nike shoes in two identical rooms with only one difference. In one room there was a pleasant scent sprayed, while in the other the scent was neutral. It was observed that customers in room one were more eager to buy the pair of shoes even when the price was higher than in the second room. (The Smell of Success Grows Stronger, 2013, p. 27-28) There were many observation made over the scent marketing, nevertheless there is still a niche in effective research methodology concerning this area.

Research made for the purposes of this paper consider much broader scope. It considers possible scents which consumer would like to be used in shops, but also services' providers. The area of services is hardly analyzed in other research, especially considering services like banks or public transportation. It also answers the questions about the association which consumers have with particular smells. Scent can evoke particular emotions in consumers, thus it is important to be aware of the type of emotional reaction that might be caused by scent used in marketing. Further research in this area will make several contributions. First of all it will help to understand consumers attitudes towards scent marketing. Second of all, it will support managers by suggesting ways for successful engagement of consumers by scent marketing practice and thus to gain from one hand devoted and loyal customers, on the other active opinion leaders spreading positive word-of-mouth about company. Therefore, managerial implication of the further study is the support in marketing management decision regarding engagement of consumers by using scent marketing.

6. Conclusions

To conclude, it shall be emphasized that according to both consumers and marketers, scent marketing is a powerful tool which may have an influence on purchasing behavior. According to research, consumers are aware of using pleasurable scent in retail environment and majority of them are prone to believe that fragrances used in shops may influence their decision making process. There is a rising interest among academia in relation to scent marketing, therefore its full potential is yet to be explored and described.

7. Limitations

The research was conducted as a pilot research on sample which consisted of less than 100 respondents. What is more, respondents were residents of two regions in Poland only. On one hand it gave a solid background for future research, but the sample is too small to be generalized on population.

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