

Is that a risotto in your pocket? The app that smells like dinner

January 28 2014, by Adrian Cheok



Incoming message: Nice glass of rioja and a baked camembert.

Even though we are communicating in more ways than ever using online technology, we remain largely confined to the audiovisual when we do it. An app that has been on sale in Japan for some time aims to add smell into the mix.

Now that so many interactions are mediated by means of a screen, we

find ourselves behind a window all the time. The [virtual world](#) of the internet does not permit us to use all of our senses; touch, taste and [smell](#) are off-limits.

The next frontier is allowing people to use all their senses to communicate over the internet and that's what we're trying to do at the [Mixed Reality Lab](#), using the Scentee app. So instead of sending a picture of your dinner to a friend, you'll be able to send them the smell. It can also be synced with your [alarm clock](#) to emit a whiff of freshly brewed coffee to get you going in the morning.

The app works when the user presses an icon on the smartphone screen. The app comes with a small tank which is plugged in to the smartphone and will light up and release a puff of scent is released from the top. The individual tanks are each filled with various food aromas so different smells can be sent.

Daily specials, straight to your nose

Given the close relationship between smell and taste, this [technology](#) has potential for those who want to change the taste of their food too. If you're dieting, you might want to spray the smell of beef into the air when you're eating a salad to trick yourself into thinking you are having something more substantial.

This kind of technology is already being taken up in the restaurant industry, where digital dining is becoming an increasingly popular way to deliver fine cuisine. Customers already get a mixed-media experience in some restaurants, such as when they listen to the sounds of the sea when eating fish.

My team of researchers is working with Mugaritz, a restaurant in Spain, to develop a digital food app that will enable customers to not only see

the dishes on offer when they look at the menu but to be able to smell them too. So instead of only relying on traditional audio visual information to pick a meal, auxiliary technology bridges the gap between culinary creativity and customer experience.

We use Scentee to enable them to virtually prepare a recipe from Mugaritz and then smell the results when the aroma from the dish is emitted from the phone.

Private companies are likely to lead the charge in adopting them, as can be seen in the keenness with which restaurants are experimenting.

But there are also applications for health, such as for people with smell and taste disabilities. Their experience of the world could be enhanced using technology. It could also be used by using familiar smells to trigger memories for elderly patients, reminding them to do things such as take their medication.

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