

Heightened scents: Do ambient fragrances make consumers purchase more?

January 21 2015

Do consumers make different choices based on the fragrance surrounding them? A new study in the *Journal of Marketing* shows for the first time that the "temperature" of scents in a store atmosphere may have a powerful effect on what and how much customers buy.

"People smelling warm fragrances such as cinnamon feel that the room they are in is more crowded, and feel less powerful as a result," write authors Adriana V. Madzharov (Stevens Institute of Technology), Lauren G. Block (City University of New York), and Maureen Morrin (Temple University). "This can lead them to compensate by buying items they feel are more prestigious."

Researchers conducted several experiments to test how warm and cool scents might affect consumer perception and decision-making. When people in a room experienced a "warm" scent such as cinnamon, they felt the room was more crowded than when they experienced a "cool" scent, even though the room contained the same number of people each time.

The people in the "warm, crowded" room felt less powerful as a result of the perceived crowding, and were more likely to compensate for this loss of power by buying items which they felt were prestigious and which helped raise their personal status. The actual temperature and crowding of the room was never increased; the sensation was simply the result of smelling a warm scent versus a cool scent. Not only did the "warm, crowded" customers choose prestigious items, they bought significantly

more items overall.

"This study, to the best of our knowledge, is the first to show how fragrance in the environment can affect how we feel about the space surrounding us, and how that in turn can drive customers to choose prestigious products. We show that retailers can easily manipulate social density perceptions with a subtle and relatively inexpensive application of ambient scenting in the store environment."

More information: Adriana V. Madzharov, Lauren G. Block, and Maureen Morrin. "The Cool Scent of Power: Effects of Ambient Scent on Consumer Preferences and Choice Behavior." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*: journals.ama.org/doi/abs/10.1509/jm.13.0263

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: Heightened scents: Do ambient fragrances make consumers purchase more? (2015, January 21) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-01-heightened-scents-ambient-fragrances-consumers.html>

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