

Smells like teen spirit: How retailers can utilize sensory stimuli to create an appealing customer environment

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Anybody who's taken a teen to shop at Abercrombie & Fitch or Hollister is well aware of the scents and songs piped in to create an environment conducive to consumption and to help define their brands. Now researchers have teamed up to provide guidance to retailers contemplating similar strategies, via a meta-analysis of research related to the impact of music, scents, and colors on shoppers.

In "Calibrating 30 Years of Experimental Research: A Meta-Analysis of the Atmospheric Effects of Music, Scent, and Color," Professors Holger Roschk of Alpen-Adria-Universität, in Austria, Professor Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro, of the Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, and Jan Breitsoh, lecturer at the UK's Aberystwyth University, analyzed 66 studies of 15,621 shoppers - mostly women - conducted between 1982 and 2016. They found that all three sensory agents affect shoppers, but in different ways and to different extents.

The underlying studies had explored the impact of atmospheric stimuli on shoppers' arousal, pleasure, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. For instance, Roschk and his co-authors found that music was significantly and positively related to pleasure and satisfaction as well as behavioral intentions, but not particularly related to arousal. In contrast, scent affected all the variables, whereas color - warm versus cool tones - had more of an effect on arousal and satisfaction. Music and scent had stronger effects in service settings than in retail.

The authors suggest that retailers, in considering implementing a sensory environment, be attentive to the subtle effects of the stimuli and not expect immediate returns. Music offers the greatest potential for being tailored to the purchase setting, while scent has the advantage in that pleasant scents may occur naturally (e.g., roasted coffee beans) and can be vented to adjacent store areas. Warm colors are recommended for new product aisles, leveraging their arousal property, while cool colors might work well around complaint-handling areas.

More information: Holger Roschk et al, Calibrating 30 Years of Experimental Research: A Meta-Analysis of the Atmospheric Effects of Music, Scent, and Color, *Journal of Retailing* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jretai.2016.10.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2016.10.001)

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