

Olfactory marketing: How strategic use of scents influences customers' shopping experiences

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In retail, fragrance cues are nothing to be sniffed at. Indeed, the scent of vanilla, baking bread, even fresh linen, can affect customer behavior, according to [a study](#) published in the *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management (IJICBM)*.

In the competitive realm of retail, understanding consumer decision-making is very important. A study by Shuvam Chatterjee and Pawel Bryla of the University of Lodz in Poland has looked at so-called olfactory marketing—the strategic use of scents in the retail environments—to see how much influence they might have on the [shopping experience](#) and how much customers spend in those shops. The team focused on a Kolkata shopping mall for their case study.

In many ways, our [sense of smell](#) is often perceived as a lesser sense when compared with sight and hearing. However, our sense of smell is very deep-rooted in our evolution and connects to what we might think of as primitive responses and behavior. Recent research suggests it significantly affects our emotions and memories, and, in the shopping context, putatively on purchase behavior. Fragrance cues, such as the smell of fresh bread in a retail setting, can evoke a strong emotional response, influencing product recognition, recall, and purchase intent.

Fresh linen and cotton blossom scents are often used to evoke feelings of cleanliness, relaxation, and comfort, Citrus is considered invigorating and refreshing. Vanilla is warm and sweet and evokes feelings of nostalgia and relaxation. Lavender, eucalyptus, and chamomile are known for being reminiscent of calming and soothing feelings. Sandalwood, on the other hand, has a rich, woody aroma that is perceived as quite exotic and often used in luxury boutiques and high-end hotels. Oceanic scents are reminiscent of sea air and commonly used in spas and wellness centers.

The *IJICBM* work shows a direct correlation between the presence of [fragrance](#) cues in the shopping mall and customer behavior. If fragrance is coupled with other environmental factors such as music, the layout of the shop, and the [ambient temperature](#), there can be a strong effect on how long a customer browses in a given shop and ultimately how much money they spend. In addition, the team determined that while age influenced purchasing decisions in this context, gender did not seem to affect how much time or money was spent.

Shop managers and marketers could benefit from working on olfactory marketing. By enhancing the shopping experience in this way, the researchers say that it is possible to boost the [emotional connection](#) with the brands on sale and perhaps even improve long-term customer loyalty. Of course, fragrance selection should be done with care as there may well be odors that could negatively affect the perception and behavior of some customers and counter the benefits achieved with other shoppers who have responded positively.

More information: Shuvam Chatterjee et al, Olfactory marketing as a technological innovation tool for the Indian retail industry - a study of Shoppers Stop retail store in Kolkata, India, *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management* (2024). [DOI: 10.1504/IJICBM.2024.137276](#)

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