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# Sensory marketing in the women's fashion sector: The smell of the shops in Madrid

## Marketing sensorial en el sector de la moda femenina: El olor de las tiendas en Madrid

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### Resumen

El olfato es uno de los sentidos más poderosos y el que mejor conecta emocionalmente con las personas. Por estas razones, las grandes empresas están utilizando técnicas de marketing olfativo para crear experiencias mejores y más memorables para los consumidores al tiempo que agregan valor a sus productos y servicios. Dada la creciente importancia del marketing olfativo, el presente trabajo se centra en estudiar el uso de esta técnica en tres cadenas de tiendas de moda femenina en Madrid, España, y cómo impacta en sus entornos olfativos. Se utilizaron técnicas cualitativas y cuantitativas para medir su relevancia entre mujeres jóvenes tanto en las propias tiendas como su valoración fuera de ellas.

### Abstract

Smell is one of the most powerful senses and one that best connects emotionally with individuals. For these reasons, large companies are using scent marketing techniques in order to create better and more memorable experiences for consumers while adding value to their products and services. Given the growing importance of scent marketing, our work focuses on studying the use of this technique in three female fashion chain stores in Madrid, Spain, and how it impacts their olfactory environments. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to measure the importance and experiences of young women regarding aromas within the stores and in their vicinities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Marketing carried out by companies has evolved into what we know today, especially in sectors such as fashion retail. Decades ago, retailers and customers gave greater importance to variables such as price, product quality and service in their purchases that are not enough to operate successfully in the market (Elliott & Percy, 2007). Today, however, the marketing focus is on consumers' perception and emotions that lead them to remember a brand. These memories affect other types of factors, such as experiences and sensations in the final decision related to the brand. Retailers have to build relationships with consumers and differentiate from competitors by creating unique brand perceptions in order to achieve emotional bonds with their clients.

In the early 1970's, Kotler defined the term 'atmosphere' as the intentional control of environmental variables in order to achieve a certain response in the consumer (Kotler, 1973). In fact, for a majority of consumers, fashion brands are more than 'just' product brands. They have emotional and symbolic meanings and are a way to articulate and express their own individualism (Kapferer, 2004).

Today, companies focus more and more attention on creating positive and memorable experiences for their customers and potential customers that is aligned with their brand. One of the most experienced marketing techniques used by large companies is sensory marketing. It plays a fundamental role in the shopping experience and brand image, since it takes advantage of the five senses as a means to generate sensations and memories in the consumer's mind. Sensory branding is one way to achieve and communicate the 'feel of a brand' and help distinguish from competitors and other commerce channels by generating immersive, emotional relationships with consumers (Lindstrom, 2005; Hultén, 2011; Krishna, 2010; Gómez & Mejía, 2013).

By addressing all the human senses, sensory branding can help to create stronger visibility and recognition within contemporary retail spaces (Hultén, 2011). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the growth of omnichannel retailing, the role of the physical store must be rethought as an opportunity to look beyond the visual expression and engage with all of the senses to gain distinction and differentiation (Lindstrom, 2005).

One of the most effective sensory marketing applications is "scent" marketing or olfactory marketing, which consists of the relationship of a particular smell with a brand or product, in order to create a brand image in the consumer's mind that relates to an aroma. Nowadays, olfactory marketing is often used at the point of sale and is one of the most effective communication methods (Daucé, 2000).

To further develop this subject, our study was carried out based the theoretical framework of sensory and olfactory marketing. In it, empirical research was performed to draw conclusions about the use of olfactory marketing strategies in selected women's clothing stores as well as the perceptions of the consumers at and away from the point of sale.

### **Olfactory marketing as an area of experiential marketing**

Sensory marketing, or sensation marketing, can be defined as a marketing style strategy that revolves around perceptions through the five senses. Its objective lies in providing aesthetic pleasure, emotion, beauty and satisfaction through sensory stimulation (Moral & Fernandez, 2012).

It is based on three strategic objectives intended to persuade the public and meet proposed goals. The first objective is that the sensations have to be used as a differentiating element. Second, these sensations have to serve to make clients feel motivated to buy the brand's products or services. Finally, the sensations have to provide value to the consumers. These three objectives can be combined, but overuse of stimuli should be avoided as they can become intrusive.

In order to achieve the impact of the sensations and reach objectives, adequate planning is required. For these reason, Schmitt (1999) proposes the SPC model which corresponds to stimuli, process and consequences. He maintains that while consumers are continually exposed to stimuli of all kinds, information has to be provided so that they can remember meaningful information that stands out from competitors' products and/or services relative to what consumers already know.

Sensory marketing includes new information for marketing management by linking customers' experiences with the five senses which stimulates

brand recognition. To this end, the brands must bear in mind that the stimuli presented to the buyers must be perfectly aligned with their advertising image and be coherent with their products. If not aligned, consumers may reject it, resulting in failure. Well-implemented sensory experiences have positive effects on brand equity, with studies showing that participants agreed that sensory stimulators are congruent with brand identity (Alexander & Nobbs, 2020).

Processes refer to the methods of stimulation and can be understood by the modalities (visual, olfactory, auditory, gustatory and tactile) used by providers for experiences that are components made available to marketing professional to create a campaign of sensations, feelings, thoughts, actions and/or relationships that includes communicating visual and verbal identity, product presence, co-management of trademarks, special environments, electronic and personal media through space and time, whose motivational key is found in cognitive/sensory variety coherence. "Cognitive coherence" refers to the intellectual understanding of an underlying idea and refers to the conceptual reproduction of styles and

themes, that is, stylistic and thematic repetition. "Sensory variety" refers to concrete elements of execution that are used over time (i.e., colors, slogans, advertising spokespersons, lighting, physical design and layout) (Schmitt, 1999). The desire to please and excite are categorized as "consequences". This new marketing concept focuses on the perceptions and stimuli of people that appeal to the five senses, thus giving rise to five different types of sensory marketing (Álvarez del Blanco, 2011). The challenge for the marketers is to research, understand and stimulate all five senses of the consumers that can lead to a shift in the consumer behavior, directly influencing the sales, profits and market share (Sharafat, 2019).

*Visual Branding:* Sight is one of the most frequently sense marketing techniques used since the beginning of advertising. This is deeply rooted in the identity of the brand through corporate colors and symbols and the association of them to certain sensations or feelings that individuals had before their purchases. The perception and visual signature are responsible for differentiating the product from its competitors and is usually the buyer's first contact.



**Figure 1.** H&M store. Source: H&M.

A good example of this type of marketing would be product placement in fashion stores (Figure 2.1). Most stores have a neutral background that does not distract shoppers from what they are selling, and highlighting, above all, the new season's products.

*Auditory Branding:* Background music or certain sounds are one of the most used variables to

evoke memories and influence the behaviors that consumers can have within a place of sale. Music is a source for emotions and is linked directly to the memory of a brand and the feeling of belonging to a group who share the same identity. One of the most relevant examples in this category is the sound of the famous Harley-Davidson motorcycle which its manufacturers unsuccessfully tried to patent.

**Tactile Branding** is another way to reinforce brand identity during the decision-making process. It is one of the ways in which the client perceives rational value and direct information about different products, but most importantly, generates cognitive value and experiences. Interest is aroused by the sense of touch, and is frequently used in food packaging because it can reinforce the experience when consuming the product.

**Gastronomic Branding:** This is often used in conjunction with other brand experiences which reinforces and links it with the client's moods that identify with these perceptions. Coca-Cola is one of the brands that uses this type of marketing with the famous flavor of its product, which is one of the best kept trade secrets, and one of which none of its competitors has been able to imitate.

**Olfactory Marketing:** Also known as *scent marketing*, it is one of the most common and successful sense marketing techniques and is the expression of the brand through the sense of smell, one of the senses that produces a greater effect on the memory (Bushdid, Magnasco, Vosshall, & Keller, 2014). It has a much more effective than other stimuli and acts on consumers' long-term memory. In fact, a brand specific odor is likely to evoke connections to the brand and strengthen the brand identity (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997; Iannini, 2010).

However, on many occasions a single sense is not enough incentive to create a full brand experience in consumers, so companies in these situations use a multi-sensory approach to add experiential value. This is done so that customers can interact with brands through more than one sense, thus being much more effective. The multi-sensory strategy makes the user's experience much more complete and having more influence on their behavior while complementing other types of publicity that make the brand.

Thus, olfactory marketing studies the behavior of people using smells in the business's environment and in the products to improve performance. Ambient scents can be used to attract customers to products in a store (Schifferstein & Blok, 2002) by influencing their mood and associations. Or pleasant odors can result in a consumer spending longer time in a store and underestimate the actual time spent in the store (Daucé, 2000). But also, these

techniques aim to influence the buying behavior of individuals by transmitting brand identity through smell, but without selling the product or service itself (Schifferstein & Blok, 2002). It has become a strategic activity, and not just a tactic, in which the main objective is focused on long-term outcomes by reinforcing brand identity and the B2C relationship.

Smell has the advantage of being one of the senses that causes greater, long-term effects and one that allows a quick association through external experience. From the smells that we perceive, internal representations arise in the brain that are translated into remembered and related information (Daniau, 2020). The aroma at the point of sale can positively affect the consumer and has a strong competitive advantage. It is associated with the type of product that is sold, because if not, it will negatively affect the consumer and the brand's perception. (Parsons, 2009).

There are three strategies olfactory marketing uses to achieve the relationship between aroma and brand, according to Martorell (2013). First, *odotypes* consists of aromatizing the point of sale with a specific smell so that the user associates it with the company and its values, that is to say, the corporate identity. Second, an *associative aroma* is the smell of a certain type of product. A type of associative aroma would be the smell of popcorn reminiscent of the cinema. Lastly, a *reproductive aroma* is the smell of a product that creates desire on the part of the consumer. A clear example is the smell of freshly baked bread in a bakery that incites consumers to buy.

Olfactory marketing is used not only at the point of sale and/or with a product because it is pleasant, but to establish a connection with the consumer based on the experience of buying and the emotions that the smell produces.

Regardless of the olfactory marketing strategy that follows, the goal is to captivate the client with an unconscious neurosensory experience that adds value to the products and services. Smell is one of the most powerful senses and is able to provoke more memories than any of the others. A person remembers 1% of what he feels, 2% of what he hears, 5% of what he sees, 15% of what he tastes, and 35% of what he smells (Schmitt, 2003). The sense of smell not only perceives odors, but is strongly related to emotions and memory as well.

Smells have a fundamental role in people's everyday life. As such, aromatization can be a successful strategy to attract customers and stimulate behaviors that lead to a purchase. A study carried out by *Science* magazine affirms that human beings are capable of distinguishing more than one trillion smells and possess the ability to associate them with emotional memories especially (Magnasco, Vosshall and Keller, 2014). Since the human brain possesses millions of nerve cells, smells can influence individuals' buying behaviors through to the limbic system which orients and influences long-term memory and learning, and ultimately, an individual's behavior.

Sensory perception also decides the position of the products, services and brands in our mind, producing a visual representation in our minds. This depends on two phenomena: an external phenomenon, which is determined by external factors away from the person who perceives it (for example price, advertising, etc.), and the experience of it as determined by the personal values and identity of the individual and their lifestyle.

*Scent marketing* is part of what Palomares (2012) calls the, 'commercial atmosphere'. The term is defined as a space at the point of sale where an impulsive purchase is stimulated through the elements located as part of the atmosphere and adapted to the psychology of the consumer. The sale scenario is designed in order to increase the relationship with the user and the possibilities of sale by creating a pleasant space for all the senses.

Smell is one of the elements that plays a fundamental role since it connects memories and creates a link with the buyer who, in the majority of the cases, is positively associated with the brand, thus creating loyalty and repeat purchases through the experience.

The most important companies in the world increasingly invest in products dedicated to enhance the commercial atmosphere at their points of sale. This has created an emerging market that offers a wide variety of services related to the *scent marketing* focused on the use of the elements that affect the environment of the store and taking advantage of scents to generate sensations in consumers that favor the image of the brand, the product, and encourage sales.

The atmosphere at the point of sale through

olfactory stimuli has many peculiarities that can help make the strategy much more effective such that consumers have a positive relationship to the brand. Sensory communication at the point of sale has a clear objective: create a sensory stimulus that the buyer can associate with a specific store. This creates consumers' impressions through non-intrusive communication which does not generate rejection by the public, but stimulates purchases and creates a sensory signature that helps identify the smell of a brand, store or product. All have consequences in the clients' attitudes that pertain directly to the brand's image (Alexander & Nobbs, 2020), satisfaction and loyalty. In fact, experiential marketing influences purchasing behavior in a real way (Lenderman, 2008), and sensory marketing activities increase the profitability of the business which consequentially increases company value (García, Gómez, Molinillo & Yagüe, 2015).

In short, the olfactory marketing is a very powerful tool used by many companies as a means to awaken emotions and establish positive and long-term relationships between companies and potential buyers.

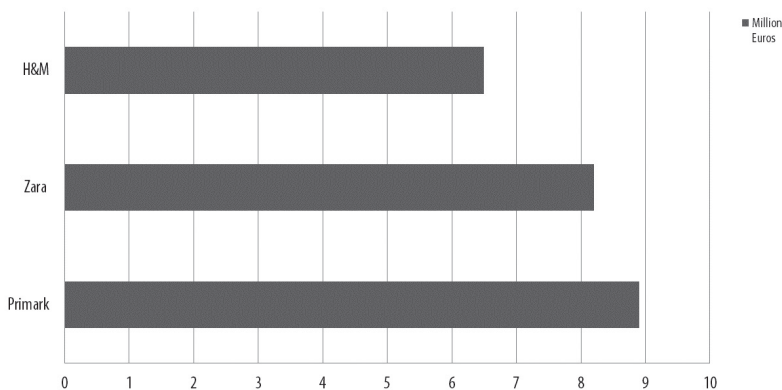
## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This research, conducted in Madrid, Spain, was interested in consumers' knowledge and behaviors associated with olfactory marketing in the world of women's fashion. The main objectives were to investigate the influence of olfactory marketing in memory and its association with fashion brands and the valuation of this strategy in two scenarios: On one hand when the user is at the place of sale and can perceive the olfactory stimuli that are presented at the point of sale itself (with a questionnaire at street level to customers who were leaving the stores); On the other hand, when find out of the place of sale and have to remember it.

The method used in this research was ethnomethodological with a quantitative focus. For ethnomethodology the topic of study is the social practices of real people in real settings, and the methods by which these people produce and maintain a shared sense of social order. Since the collection of data related to the questionnaires was of quantitative nature, the research approach of this study is to be seen as deductive (Saunders et al., 2009).

As for the object of brand research, data of the women's textile fashion market in Spain were used, from which the first three fashion chains by billing were selected based on the 2018 study by Kantar Worldpanel. The brands were Primark,

Zara and H&M. In fact, Primark's entry into the market in 2006 saw a change in model, which allowed this chain to grow strongly and reach more customers than anyone else (González, 2019).



**Figure 2.** Billing from the top three fashion chain-stores in Spain. *Source: Kantar Wordpanel (2018).*

Two types of surveys were carried out considering two moments and a same type of consumers: young women between 18 and 22 years old on the street at the point of sale (20 questionnaires with 3 questions were done at 3 brand-stores in Madrid, 60 answers in total), and current and potential clients of the same brands (same gender and age) via the Internet (93 questionnaires with 9 questions), with a total of 153 respondents.

They were structured questionnaires with closed responses. In the first case, given that the survey was at street level, it was necessary that the duration of the survey be very short to favor the participation of the respondents. The online questionnaire only required a few minutes to be completed again to encourage participation and completion.

However, in addition to the quantitative data collection, qualitative data was gathered through observation at the stores and in-depth interviews with staff members of stores (6 interviews with managers) in order to generate a background and understanding of the odor strategy in each brand before conducting the questionnaires to costumers.

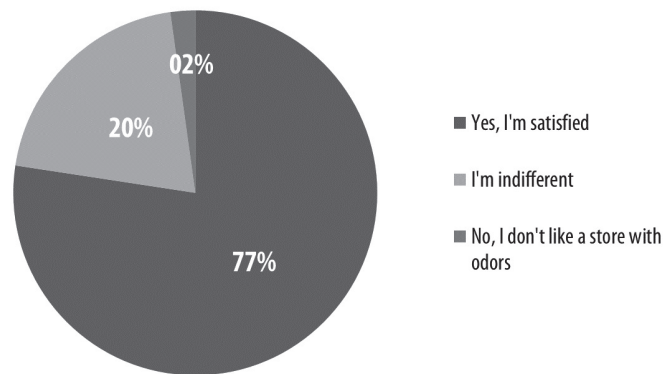
## RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Regarding the observation and analysis at the points of sale and the personal interviews of managers of the fashionable chains already mentioned, olfactory marketing as a technique was confirmed, although it is necessary to point out that Zara was the only company that uses a corporate smell in its stores. PRIMARK uses the method in their dressing rooms and H&M does not use this marketing tool. Similarly, although the valuation of the technique is positive and valid for brand recognition, the three most relevant fashion chains in terms of sales in Spain do not devote some form of training to their employees in store about olfactory marketing.

As for quantitative research, the objective was to check the level of influence of olfactory marketing at the time of purchase and memory away from the point of sale. All respondents stated that they had made purchases in one of the three chains studied: 98.9% in Zara, 93.5% in H&M, and 87.1% in Primark. The frequency with which they usually buy monthly is 81.7%, 14% annually, 4.3% weekly, and no woman claimed daily purchases.

There were no differences observed between subsamples made on the internet and on the street. 77% expressed satisfaction when a store

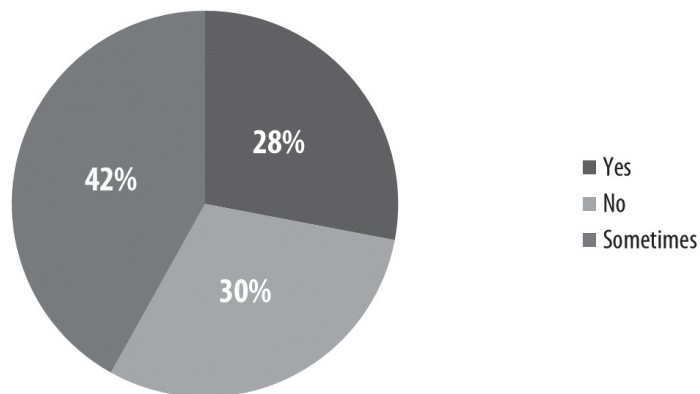
uses olfactory marketing but this percentage increases to 81.5% for those who believe that it adds value to the brand.



**Figure 3.** Are you satisfied when a store has a pleasing odor? *Source: Study Data.*

In the course of the study, the declared behavior of the consumer was investigated in two areas: in presence of the stimulus (at the point of sale) and when away from the stimulus (away of sale location). In this sense, when asked the question,

“Do you recognize the smell of these shops when they are in them?”, 28% responded affirmatively, 41.9% said they sometimes recognize it, and 30.1% said they did not recognize the smell of the stores.



**Figure 4.** Do you recognize the smell of these stores when you are in them? *Source: Study Data.*

For Zara, 75% of the respondents say that the smell is a determining factor to enter and purchase, while this percentage drops to 50% for PRIMARK, and is only mentioned 25% of the time for H&M's clients.

ZARA stores, followed by PRIMARK with 55%. To the contrary, 70% indicated that they would never recognize the smell in H&M stores, which is a logical answer because this brand does not have a corporate smell. Thus, the odotype of Zara is the most remembered.

To the question, “Would you be able to recognize the corporate smell of this store outside the point of sale?”, we highlight the 70% recognition for

On the other hand and most importantly, 70% of respondents recognize that olfactory marketing

is an added value for the Zara brand, and 55% for PRIMARK.

Additionally, it is worth commenting that when asked in general about ordering the elements that influence the moment of purchase, aroma is in last place behind product-quality, price, promotion and placement at store, what shows it is consciously not a relevant factor in the purchase decision. Nevertheless, most respondents said that they had made a compulsive purchase at any time motivated by the smell of a store (72%). This question was formulated in general, not specifically about shopping in the fashion sector.

## CONCLUSIONS

The world of women's textile fashion is constantly changing, evolving and adapting to new consumers and trends, considering a concept of buying as a positive and satisfactory branded experience. Due to increasing competition, it is becoming more difficult to acquire differentiating values and competitive advantages that stand out in the marketplace. Companies must continually innovate both in the products and services offered by the company, as well as in the communication they use to address their stakeholders. As a result, communicative strategies have been continuously changing and adapting to their needs, and one of the strategies that stands out in brand communication is experiential marketing, which prioritizes attention given to consumers and their need to provide the best experience. As confirmed by the scientific literature, experiential marketing and sensory marketing influence purchasing behavior and have positive effects on brand equity. Thus, fashion retailers can reinforce their brand through integrating multi-sensory experiences within the physical store, such as smell, in order to influence on consumer perceptions.

*Scent marketing* is not only based on aromatizing at the point of sale, but in associating the smell with the brand in the mind of the consumer. When a consumer associates a scent with a brand, it is the brand that distinguishes itself from others, and provides a competitive advantage against the competition. Today, with studies showing that sensory strategies have positive effects on brands, it is striking that the highest earning fashion companies in Spain do not follow a clear strategy of olfactory marketing, and that only one,

Zara, has a corporate smell present throughout their establishments, as our study reveals.

It is no coincidence that the majority of those surveyed indicate that Zara is the brand with the smell that most encourages people to enter and consume and it's the brand with the most recognize aroma away from the point of sale. These data coincides with the fact that Primark only uses olfactory marketing in their dressing rooms, and H&M does not use an odotype.

Most of the young women in Madrid who have been surveyed think that it is satisfactory that a store has some kind of smell and they agree that the aroma is an added value for the brand. As such, it can be concluded that odotypes meet their function and provide complementary attractiveness to the sale of the product and the brand itself. The user experience is multisensory, that is to say, it is not just that the use of smells attracts the public, but is, when combined with a set of other stimuli such as auditory or visual, when sensory marketing is very effective creating relationships between companies and customers. Most specifically and in the same way that other recent studies show, we can affirm that olfactory marketing affects the brand identity of companies since respondents point out that creates value added by the association of aroma with the brand itself.

Finally, it should be noted that scent marketing still has multiple angles to be addressed in future research, which opens an important field for the development of new evidence in which it would be interesting to determine if the pattern observed in the present study is repeated in other age groups and if in a globalized world like the current one, where international brands operate with equally global marketing strategies, the results of similar research among young women from other countries would yield similar conclusions and in which point the elements of local cultural nature may have some kind of influence on them.

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