
Advertising and the Advent of Olfactory Marketing

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Summary

Smell was immortalized by the French novelist Marcel Proust, who described a flood of memories being triggered by the sensation of a Madeleine dunked in tea. However, there is no common vernacular for the plethora of scents we encounter on a daily basis; in part, due to the lack of language but also due to the late acceptance of smell as something of value.

This paper discusses current 'odor-styling' in brands and will argue that the future of olfactory marketing may diversify and replace current advertising methods. The new advent of odour-styling is revealed in comparison to the rational, microeconomics model of traditional marketing theory. Previous research is collated to present the determining factors in purchase decision making, based upon the emotional and sentimental state.

The notions of scent and smell in modern society, and in history, are used to underpin our relationship to the olfactory sense and to the semiotics in the West, in comparison to other world cultures. Marketing research and psychology are explored in order to give context to the relationship between sensory stimulation, memory and language. From this perspective, we can pose the inevitable questions, 'what *does* the future smell like?' and 'will we know we are smelling it!'

...the smell and taste of things endure in time, like souls reminding, waiting, hoping on the ruin of all the rest and bearing unflinchingly, in tiny and almost impalpable droplets, the immense edifice of memory.

Michel Proust –The Remembrance of Things Past

Smell, known very simply as one of the five senses is still subconsciously considered to be a lesser faculty. Society dictates what is an acceptable odour or fragrance and a whole culture is defined by these unspoken rules about smell and smelling.

Seeing, (the dominate sense) and thinking are linked, because we 'see' what we are thinking. Hearing and thinking, is connected to cognitive thought - audio digital thinking. We cannot transform our sense of smell into 'thinking in smells' unless the smell is present and an involuntary memory response is evoked. This lack of voluntary 'smell-thought' has often been the way in which western thinking has denigrated the smell sense often referred to as the 'animal' sense. (Arnheim, 1969)

... fragrance is an experience which is an outgrowth of life-style trends, of fashion, of the world of entertainment, and of social and cultural pressures. A fragrance has never existed in a vacuum ... (Green (1988): p 228)

In line with current trends of styling and mimicry, this is an enquiry into the socially transmitted information in aromas and the future of sensory perception, including cultural signifiers, visual indicators and the future of new marketing. Drawing upon contemporary sensory branding theory, current olfactory campaigns, and by way of analyzing the notion and language of smell, will serve as an indicator of what is possible as we become more adept at manipulating and understanding odors. In order to further define the main thesis, past notions of scent, the language and semiotics of smell and the ideas around specific odour styling, will structure the main analysis.

Olfactory Past

Although, it may seem that the current western perception of smell has always be thus, the history of olfaction has been rich and ever changing. Incense, once confined to sacred ritual and associated with the divine and with purification in ancient Hebrew worship. The 'magic' of smell then spread to the profane and was used in other rituals employing the use of sandalwood, jasmine, amber, saffron and patchouli oils anointed on specific body parts. The ancient Japanese art of Kodo, talks of 'listening' to incense and perfumery is mentioned in the Old Testament as blended plant and flower oils. From the ancient use of aromatics of crocus, hyacinth and blooming violet (Classen, 1994) to the denial of the scent-sense and its values by famous philosophers to the sanctimonious smells of the unwashed bodies of the early Christians and on then to the rotting stench of the streets and the working classes during the London plague and on to the clove-stuck oranges of the early pomanders in the houses of the gentry. Smell and smelling has been secret and obscene, luxurious and divine; it has divided society and created aspiration.

Almost all the notable philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Descartes and Kant, all under underestimated and considered irrelevant, the sense of smell. Their philosophy had a disregard (and sometimes disapproval) for such sensing and feeling, but Nietzsche made the connection between smell, instinct and judgement, a special locus where logic could be overruled. It is this late acceptance of the olfactory sense into our modern world which points to our undeveloped language, limited understanding and use of the world of odours.

Aroma is now a postmodern obsession. Technology (odourless in itself) is used to create, imitate and simulate smells and help eliminate natural smells and personal odours. We now experience smell and memory as a closely entwined experience. It is a natural occurrence to discuss for example, the moment we catch a whiff of a sun tan lotion which takes us back to a beach holiday long gone, or we smell a perfume of an ex-lover and we are right back in the experience. However, the notion of smell, emotion and memory is a modern concept.

Pleasure or displeasure is not in the odour per se, but is part of an ecological situation involving an interaction of the individual and the odour. (Engen (1988): pg 79)

Smell Semiotics

Due to the abstract nature of smell, there is a lack of universal language which can determine a norm, a zero-point on which people can agree when describing certain smells. The language of smell is culturally specific and it is in the West where the debates about the semantics of odour encoding, still continue. The main issue we encounter is the lack of direct language. We have no word for *actual* smells but preface with 'it smells like ...' or it smells 'fishy' or 'milky' for example. In English we can only describe smells in relation to an existing substance. Therefore, in the western vernacular and perception, smell has had radically interior propensities which defy common language and a shared context. Smell has remained personal and subjective. The smells and the words themselves to describe smell, such as, fragrance, odour, scent are all interpreted differently between languages, cultures and individuals in the West.

An example of this can be easily seen, by way of observing the three main Western cultures involved with the fragrance industry and analysing how they each interpret the word 'odour'. This clearly indicates just how much difference there is in the language and meaning in olfactory understanding in the West. As defined by American Heritage Dictionary, 'odour' is interpreted as something which defines the difference between good and bad smells in the world. The English dictionary talks of a more physiological response to a smell and the Robert (French) dictionary refers to 'odour' as a psychological object.

The English language uses a Latin based root derived in a time when the sense of smell was revered. We are present to words which have their root in the importance of the olfactory sense. The now obsolete term 'nose wise' was used to mean that someone was clever and keen scented. The idea of knowing and smelling was directly linked in the Latin vernacular. Homo Sapiens meaning 'knowing man' also meant 'keen scented man' (Howes, 2005) Again, another word still used today to mean wise, 'sage', came directly from the Latin word meaning 'having a good sense of smell'. Despite these and other examples, compared to indigenous world cultures

the English language scent vocabulary is stunted. To further compound the issue, Western perfumers and scholars have a varied number of defined odor descriptors; notes and qualities and even odor categories, classes and sub-classes which vary between specialists in every country and within every field. Each specialist has defined its own terms, thereby creating its own system, language, understanding and codes.

As stated, olfactory logic is cultural, not universal, and an extensive number of global cultures have expansive olfactory vocabulary, a social and semiotic system which is used throughout a nation. The classifications in some systems distinguish people and class by their smell. Others have a specific smell category into which everything is included. The Incas even had terms for the various ways in which they experienced (inhaled) or transmitted smells and they had a complete vocabulary for types of odours. (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994) Furthermore, because there is evidence to support that our response to odors is an essential learned response (in almost all cases) which begins in utero at 12 weeks, there are general but pervasive cultural likes and dislikes for certain fragrances. This is apparent when cultures have categorical opinions about particular scents. For example, the smell of onions is considered to be the most prized fragrance and is worn as a perfume by a tribe in Mali. The Dassanetch tribe of Ethiopia, associate the smell of cows with social status. The strong smell of bovine odour is considered to be a beautiful aroma, so much so that the urine and manure is used as a body rub. The smell of 'Whites' (Westerners) is considered to be disgusting and ruinous according to the Serer Ndut of Senegal. (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994) It is in such contrast to what beliefs are held in the West around foul or fragrant smells. Although these olfactory systems are not part of our everyday Western understanding, we find that we are exposed (in part) to a comprehensive olfactory/ sensory system which, although not part of the Western vernacular, has been accepted as a known cultural perception which can be used in relation to the ancient practice of Chinese medicine.

The table below shows the comprehensive, interrelated system and how each season, element, direction, sound tone, taste and colour has a smell associated with it. (Classen, Howes, Synnott, 1994) The system represents the Eastern theory of the 'Five Elements' whereby each element transforms into the other, in a never ending cycle, like the seasons.

Element	Odour	Taste	Colour	Tone	Season	Direction
Wood	Goat	Sour	Green	chio	Spring	East
Fire	Burnt	Bitter	Red	chih	Summer	South
Earth	Fragrant	Sweet	Yellow	kung		Centre
Metal	Rank	Acrid	White	shang	Autumn	West
Water	Rotten	Salt	Black	yu	Winter	North

Although, no such system exists in Western thinking, there are unspoken positive smell/negative smell association which are quite distinctive and accepted in Western cultures. Two common examples demonstrate the response to common flavours/smells used in typical foods today in the US today; sarsaparilla and wintergreen. Sarsaparilla is much more commonly experienced as root beer, a popular and common beverage which has leant itself to root beer floats, root beer candy and even root beer cakes. The taste and smell of root beer to almost every British person is not something to be ingested but rather a medicinal concoction and what would be called 'germomlene', a branded anti-bacterial cure-all. Similarly, wintergreen flavoured life-savers, gum and candies available throughout the US are made from the identical ingredients used in a British WWII medicated rub and ointment. This further highlights just how culturally unique olfactory response is.

Odourtyping

Academics and perfumers alike, realize that because of all the incongruence with language and perception in the Western experience of smell, there is a grey area around the notion of perfume and the response to any scent. The memory, external factors and associations can affect how each individual responds to an odour. We have a 10,000 plus, scent recall and very unique responses to all smells. As Messing and Beck note, sociobiographical data is at the root of all olfactory responses and such data takes into consideration age, gender, hormonal cycles and changes, country or society trend preferences, climate and the emotional mood of the person at the time. (Messing & Beck, 1988) Therefore by creating a visual, emotional story (branding) perfumes set up a secondary strand of positive, often aspirational touch points to ensure the consumer is in no doubt about the desired response intended.

However, unlike a perfume which is considered to be the primary brand, odourtyping works alongside the tangible product or primary brand by developing fragrance logos to support the initial object or campaign. These odourtypes are unique to a product or company and are created in the same delicate way in which perfume is made; using research, psychology, intuition and inspiration. A smell logo, just like a typical visual logo, is brand-specific and diffused when the brand and/or product is present. Because olfaction is passive, the sense of smell cannot be actively blocked out so the experience of such odourtypes can be pervasive and subtle working at a very different level of cognition. Odour is processed in the part of the brain which is the limbic system, the midbrain through the hypothalamus into the basal fore brain, this ancient core is concerned with both motor functions and emotional expression. (D.M Stoddart, 1998) The limbic part of the brain responds to sensory clues and hard-wires the response in the body-memory, as previously referred.

Smell is a chemical sense Receptor cells in the nose translate chemical information into electrical signals. These travel along olfactory nerves into the cranial cavity, where they gather in the olfactory bulbs. These, in turn feed the cerebral cortex, where association takes place and nameless signals become transformed into the fragrance of a favourite rose or the musky warning of an irritable skunk. (Watson, Lyall (2000): pg 7)

Today perfumery and odourtyping is an exact science with specific, commercial performance criteria directly honing the response in the limbic system. Biochemistry is now the most advanced industry in smell science. NATO have been sponsoring serious olfactory research for the past 25 years. No longer is the making of perfume left to some random creation of allowing various petals to steep in a liquid

suspension, but also the use odours is being trialled in areas, which up until now, have never been associated with olfaction. As described by perfume critic and writer Chandler Burr, who experience the art of perfume creation first hand; *He will hand you a touché that he has sprayed with a molecule called nonenol cis-6, which by itself smells like honeydew melon or fresh water from a stream. He'll then hand you a second touché with a natural lemon on it, direct you to hold them together now, and suddenly before you appears an olfactory hologram of an absolutely mesmerizing lemon sorbet.* (Burr, Chandler (2007):p107)

One of the many reasons for the in depth olfactory research over the years is because despite individuals knowing a smell very well, extensive tests have shown a lack of specifics when using olfactory senses alone. In research conducted by Dubois and Rouby, even common smells such as apple, was frequently mis-named as strawberry in scratch and sniff odorant tests without an image or word attached. In the various classifications offered to the test participants, the apple smell was classified under the following headings: 'fruit', 'flower', 'cleaning product', therefore indicating that both a well known smell can be unidentified but also the association of the smell can be linked to a number of sources both natural and man-made. (Dubois & Rouby, 2005) In part, the misnaming of common smells, which are from edible sources, stems from the re-styling of flavour through chemical enhancers in food. For example, synthetic strawberry flavour has replaced the actual natural taste of strawberry in most products, therefore re-creating 'reality'.

There is a large amount of data that shows that some odours, not necessarily common smells, seem much more identifiable than daily fragrances. For example, both licorice and 'Bazooka' bubble gum are within the 75% and 83% percentile of accuracy when naming the source of the aroma. (Engen, 1987) (Dubois & Rouby, 2005)

This data is crucial when creating odours and scent styles for brands. What are thought to be identifiable and common odours cannot be assumed, nor can the associations which individuals make when in the presence of certain smells. Another main factor in emitting scents and odours from diffusers, products or vents is the strength of the smell. Olfactory sensitivity decreases at a much faster rate than the sense of taste. Childhood olfactory sensitivity is 200% stronger than that of an adult from about 45 yrs onwards. (Discovery Communications Inc., 2000) Adult sensitivity can begin to decrease as early as 26 years old.

In line with behavioural trends, subtlety and non-tangibility are at the root of new olfactory marketing. The three main observable tendencies in the odour orientation market are not descriptive in terms of actual smells but instead aspirational and ephemeral descriptors. These are: *Magic/fantasy/ecstasy... Security and meaning through traditions ... Idealisation of earth and nature.* (Messing, J & Beck, C (1988): p 204) This indicates that, as the earlier research suggested, common smells may be mis-read or interpreted and each individual may have specific associations with a common smell (not always positive or desired). It also supports the science which has shown that as a species our olfactory development is the most constantly evolving and developing. (QI, 2010) This method of creating fragrance also borrows from the way in which perfume is finely crafted, creating *accords*, combination smells which create a new scent like a musical harmony. Brand strategies that tap into the subconscious and the trend for aspiration and possibility (which include aroma), are the brands which rate the highest in consumer surveys in their product or service group. The brands are: Singapore Airlines, The Eiffel Tower, Rolls Royce, The Fat Duck Restaurant, Barnes and Noble.

Sensory Branding

The sense of smell, and therefore of taste and flavour, also invokes a system of communication. (Douek, E. (1988): Foreword xvii)

Sensory branding is the direct conversation a brand can potentially have with its consumer, from a very kinaesthetic perspective. Incorporating all five senses, the brand gets into direct, almost human, relationship which accesses a part of the individual previously ignored; the visceral need and want, before the thought. The heart of brand is directly and indirectly communicated in a way which bombards the senses, often surreptitiously.

The brand soul is emotional, sensual and value based and the usual 4p's of current marketing theory which base the analysis model on microeconomics and rational is a subtext rather than a driving indicator. The 4p's is in contrast to the psychology and sociology aspect to sensory marketing. When individuals make decisions based on emotion, the conscious thinking and deciding is subverted and the purchase is based on a deeper inclination, possibly as deeply rooted as a memory and a response which comes from the limbic system. Having consumers respond in such a visceral way enables the business and the brand to beat competitors, no matter what they offer from a rational perspective. A multiple offering which speaks to the heart, the mind, the memory and aspiration of a consumer gains so many 'touch-points' that they immediately have an advantage on regular brand methods.

The most successful sensory branding to date has been done by world religions. Using the notion of 'religion as brand', there are seven main components that have captured the essence and communicated directly with consumer. See the table below to note the ways in which elements of religion are present in the most effective sensory branding.

Sense of belonging	A community, a congregation and group who share and support each other.	Fashion, trends, sub-cultures
Clear vision	Direct communication of right and wrong. What life is and what death is. The fundamentals specifically expressed.	Clear USP, every element of the brand strategy communicates the message.
Story telling	The religious book, history of the religion and the people in the story. Myths and legends to tell over again and to keep the religion alive, relevant and human.	Bring the brand to life and touch the consumer with personal and human stories. Give the consumer insights into the brands relationships to others.

Sensory appeal	Incense, burning fragrances, the smells of the religious building and book. The sound or the cantor/imam/preacher and prayers. The sounds of the services and the calling to prayer.	Smell, touch, taste elements of the brand as much as possible.
Rituals	Things on which to arrange days and weekly events. Something everyone in the same religion may do, sometimes together. Unspoken rules.	Create habit in the consumer behaviour, something which would be missed or obvious if it was absent.
Symbols	Know people of your own religion instantly. Your 'sign' can be used in many ways –art, jewellery, buildings.	A clearly identifiable logo which others can instantly recognise and attribute to the brand.
Mystery	God cannot be seen or touched and he 'moves in mysterious ways' - therefore anything is possible.	Keeping the customer coming back for more, the next thing, a new and exciting campaign, brand extension and product. The unexpected.

Sensory analysis is a scientific discipline which is now employed by all the leading brands and also companies who are trying to enhance their brand identity. Because, *Consumers' perception is as good as reality* (Lindstrom, Martin (2010):p106), added (non-edible) aromas prove to the scientists that buyer behaviour is absolutely influenced. Nestle, coca-cola, Carlsberg add aroma to the packaging on their products. Exposed, unwrapped foods are how leading supermarkets and shops entice their consumers, an example of this would be the in store environment at Wholefoods. More specific examples include; the Florida hospital which has a seaside centre in which they use scent machines to circulate the smell of sea, coconut and vanilla, with the notion that patients will be soothed and not cancel their appointments. (Hulten, Bertil, Niklas Broweus & Marcus van Dijk, 2009) The Hyatt hotel chain in Paris used their French history of great perfumers and combined that with detailed sensory brand analysis to create their own signature scent. Their scent brand was developed by French perfumer Blaise Mautin for the Park Hyatt Vendome hotel in 2002 and it incorporated eighteen ingredients. It was ultimately described as *fresh cement poured over raw oak plank, plus fresh, ever-so-slightly cinnamony pastry dough with the olfactory texture of thick, rich tan silk* (Hulten, Bertil, Niklas Broweus & Marcus van Dijk (2009):p64) Such detailed descriptions are there to serve our need for developed language around olfaction, due to the fact that our confidence and communication around scent is still developing. That said, olfactory memory is

not semantic but episodic and customers only come into contact with the experience not the description.

Conclusion

People eat what they like, but do not know what they like and certainly not why they like it. (Koster, Peter (2005):p40)

The match between perception and reality has long since blurred in the market for consumables and advertising. Many consumer tests reveal misnomers and unreliable research disconnecting what consumers think, believe, say and do. Due to these factors and the collated data, 8 out of 10 new food products fail to be taken up by the consumer after launch into the market. (Koster, Egon Peter, 2005) The advanced use of olfactory marketing will enable research to target the consumer beyond the obvious retail testing currently being used. The current amount of olfactory research and the possibilities of consumer data capture and profiling, perfumers and scientists, enable odour styling and sensory branding to reach a level of almost quasi-religious auras of desirability. Olfactory values, by their very nature are personal and local/tribal, therefore in direct parallel with trends of bespoke and intimate. These values also enable companies to categorise and identify social, post-modern allegiances due to the varying demographics and their response to specific odours, thereby honing and capturing a very specific market share.

Researchers in South Korea, (along with other global technologists) have predicted that by 2015 the internet will also be a place for olfactory experiences. Adding dimensions to digital media. (Wilczek, 2007) It is for this reason alone, that brands need to hone their olfactory offering and odour styling; because as technology advances this method of communication will subsume current brand relationships and advertising.

Smell, the language of scent, the perception and categorisation used in olfactory acceptance and description, has been used throughout history and in all forms of propaganda, cultural divides and social distinctions of both class and education. It is now with such advanced research that scientists, sociologists and psychologists can use this information to construct bespoke scents, engineered to evoke response and relationship to brands. Research, points to the science of odourtyping so that brands can create direct, emotional relationships with their customer in such a subverted way that the memory and limbic system drives the consumer loyalty.

The future of smell does not include the full range of olfactory expression but more a muting of the natural odours and a replacement of those with constructed 'natural' fragrance: olfactory styling, re-creating the world.

Smell is a potent wizard that transports us across thousands of miles and all the years we have lived.

Helen Keller

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