

## *Olfactory marketing – Harnessing the power of scents in retail and other consumer environments*

Digital olfaction technology has the potential to transform several B2C industries. Our sense of smell is central to many decisions that we make daily as consumers. For example, anecdotal suggestions to bake fresh bread or brew coffee before a viewing if you are selling your home.

Odours affect consumers' behavioural, cognitive, and affective responses to products and environments. More than 90% of our responses as consumers are formed at the subconscious level, where odours play a fundamental role<sup>1</sup>. Environmental psychology has demonstrated that pleasant odours lead to approach behaviours in retail settings and increase the amount of money spent, the time spent in the store, and purchases of premium brands<sup>2</sup>. A similar study within the not-for-profit sector confirmed the assumptions that scent increases the desire to revisit a museum/gallery environment<sup>3</sup>.

Beyond the retail environment, there are opportunities for the use of ambient scent within the passenger transport sector to enhance the customer experience. Levels of anxiety/stress while traveling are often higher (especially for air travel), the passenger's personal space is frequently compromised (e.g., rail/metro) and motion sickness is commonplace<sup>4</sup>. Studies have also been undertaken to assess whether scent can encourage consumers to take more sustainable and environmentally friendly forms of transport<sup>5</sup>.

Given the positive effects of olfactory congruence with brand image upon consumers' reactions, brand owners are likely to benefit from developing an olfactory signature that is harmonious with the brand image. Such an approach would produce a pleasant atmosphere and enhance consumers' reactions (increased spending, more positive emotions, attitude towards the store). Such an approach would strengthen other olfactory characteristics (e.g., attractiveness). However, studies have demonstrated that it's not enough to diffuse a pleasant odour; the odour must be congruent with the brand image<sup>6</sup>.

Focussing on the link between brand and scent, trademarks typically refer to tangible identifiers (e.g., designs), however there is some potential for scents to be registered as trademarks. Hasbro has formally registered the iconic scent of Pay-Doh (brand image congruence; synonymous with childhood/fun) and has been granted trademark rights in the US<sup>7</sup>. Within Europe there are currently no active registered scents as current practice in EU trade mark offices is not to allow olfactory marks for want of a clear, precise, and objective mode of representation<sup>8</sup>. Current EU thinking is that odour is essentially subjective which therefore impacts on that trademark's distinctiveness. It will be interesting to see if/how this changes going forward.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/4/1384>

<sup>2</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13162-019-00154-8>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/4/1384>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.702517/full>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-08/singapore-buses-now-have-a-special-smell-to-entice-riders>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sci-hub.yncjkj.com/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101898>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lawyer-monthly.com/2018/05/hasbro-granted-trademark-for-the-smell-of-play-doh/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40319-022-01160-3>

## Activity highlights from the POTION Team:

- ISPA - Instituto Universitário presented at ECRO XXXI 2021 (held in Cascais, Portugal) and gave a presentation entitled “Reutilizing Sweat Samples: The robustness of information transfer through fear chemosignals” (13 September 2021)
- Enzo Pasquale Scilingo (Unipi) was interviewed on the subject of sweat odours (26 January 2022)
- Inventya presented at the Technology Seeker Leadership Programme hosted by the IDG Thailand and Thailand Science Research and Innovation (17 March 2022)
- Karolinska Institutet will be attending the 30th European Congress of Psychiatry hosted by the European Psychiatric Association (4<sup>th</sup> June 2022)

## Publication highlights:

- Callara AL et al. (2021) Cortical network and connectivity underlying hedonic olfactory perception; J Neural Eng 2021 Oct 11;18(5)
- Callara AL et al. (2021) Parasympathetic-sympathetic causal interactions assessed by time-varying multivariate autoregressive modelling of electrodermal activity and heart-rate-variability; IEEE Trans Biomed Eng 2021 Oct;68(10):3019-3028
- Gioia F et al. (2022) Towards a contactless stress classification using thermal imaging; Sensors 2022, 22(3),976

### About POTION Project...



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Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union