

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

OLFACTORY MARKETING AND THE NEW TOURIST EXPERIENCE: TOWARDS THE NEW *‘WELLNESS HOTEL’*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Olfactory marketing is an area of sensorial marketing whose potential is still unknown in functions such as branding, persuasion, and communication at the point of sale or product policy. On the other hand, how the use of scents might influence the perception of other variables of great relevance in our days, such as health, perception of safety, working conditions or sustainability. Those subjects still admit wider research. Indeed, many of these aspects can be measured through new tools to evaluate quality of air in the rooms, among some other aspects that are addressed in this article.

Olfactory marketing is an area of sensory marketing that is becoming increasingly important in the tourism sector, especially after successive years of socio-political and health crisis in Europe, among other reasons for its impact on compensatory and experiential functions of tourism. Likewise, tourists need to meet new expectations about health and safety of establishments and destinations. On the other hand, the hotel industry needs to recover its positioning and the loyalty of customers. This is a subsector subjected to great restrictions. Additionally, hospitality is facing extreme international competition and must deal with the undeniable impact of user reviews in social media and online agencies, frequently very critical of sensory aspects such as smell.

The construction of this pleasant and relevant experience through sensory marketing is based on the ‘5-D’ model of Lindstrom (2008). It seeks to project the brand through the five senses. Marketeers and advertisers use of sight more frequently and with more

confidence than the other four senses to attract their potential consumers. In fact, 83% of campaigns focus on visual stimuli and only 4% of marketing resources are directed to scent, hearing, taste, or touch. Nonetheless, the influence of the senses on the intention to purchase ranges from 58% sight, 45% smell, 41% hearing, 31% taste and 25% touch (Lindstrom, 2005). Therefore, there is a notorious neglect of the possibilities that the sense of smell might provide to attract consumers. The aroma evokes moments, spaces, and stages of life. As we will see later in this article, this aspect is used in sensory branding for the differentiation and thematization of rooms, brands and stores; thus, becoming an unavoidable variable in the quality of the tourist experience.

2. OBJECTIVES

The idea of creating lasting and memorable experiences in consumers becomes the strategic focus for the new business world. 'The economy of experiences' replaces the traditional market approach of goods and services, giving rise to a new paradigm in which experiences acquire a fundamental role. An agency, a hotel or any other service creates value for the client when, in addition to providing products that improve their quality of life, they make this relationship a pleasant and unforgettable experience.

The objective of this article is to deepen into the conceptual and prospective application of tourist olfactory marketing to reach a wider knowledge of the relevance and opinion about the use of this technique in Spanish hotels, analyzing how its implementation takes place in the Spanish hotel offer at this moment, the perception of the olfactory marketing among hotel professionals and impact on consumer experience. Finally, we will draw conclusions and proposals in this regard.

3. METODOLOGY

Firstly, the theoretical framework is analyzed through bibliographic and structural analysis to gather the state of the art in tourism and the modeling of the phenomenon from scientific literature. Secondly, empirical analysis has been carried out, first through qualitative and quantitative techniques, through interviews with experts in experiential marketing (5) and a survey to leading professionals in the sector (70 Skal International, Mesa del Turismo, AEPT), and the qualitative approach through the contrast of this variable in the opinions of users from Trivago and Tripadvisor OTAs; all of that in order to achieve a more accurate overview of the impact of the positive and negative aspects of aroma in the Spanish hotel industry as well as the appreciation of corporate aroma by tourists.

The opinion of users on booking platforms Tripadvisor and Trivago was carried out exhaustively from January 2019 to January 2021, using the search terms related to aroma and tourist experience, scanning the negative and favorable comments uploaded into these sites for hotels. Subsequently, and throughout the writing of this article, we complement the perception of the offer over the aspects presented in the previous conceptual and applicative-prospective framework to determine the casuistry of good and bad hotel practices that emerges from our study.

4. FINDINGS

Olfactory marketing in commercial and business environments becomes part of the differential attributes of products, services, companies, and even different rooms at the establishment. It is a necessary tool to associate the brand with a set of values, especially in environments which are already very saturated with information and advertising messages. The groundwork to understand the influence of biological variables on individual choices come from the Psychobiological theory (developed in application of evolutionary theory (Charles Darwin, 1859) to personality psychology by doctors Hans Eysenck, H. and Eysenck, M. (*Personality and individual differences*, 1987)). This approach studies how colors and smells encourage emotions that favor the purchase process (attention, decision, memory and action). For instance, the colors of fire are used in promotions and sales (red, yellow and black) and some aromas infuse calm to reinforce confidence and permanence at the store. Likewise, there is usually a correlation between odotypes and isotypes of brands (suggesting warmth, freshness, etc.) as can be seen from studies of Martín Moraleda (2021).

Other psychological theories study emotions from a psychoanalytic perspective. Example: smells such as talc brings reminiscences of the halo of sweetness and protection of childhood. The smells associated with the mother are also relevant from the psychoanalytic perspective with odors such as talc or the baby fragrances. A fundamental aspect in buying behavior, emphasized by different schools of consumer psychology such as psychobiological neuromarketing and behaviorist, states that smell is a positive or negative reinforcement, depending on the experiences associated with it. Neuromarketing study changes in the psycho-neurological interface for marketing stimuli to measure them through neuroscience techniques. Among all the sensorial stimuli, smell is considered the most powerful of the senses and the most capable of influencing brain activity.

From a cultural perspective, customers are conquered through symbols reconstructed through the decoration and scents that accompanies them: an Irish pub style or an old Parisian café will pursue the design, colors and smells of the past (with aromas that mix nuances of pipe tobacco and wood) with the use of retro marketing. Thus, the well-being transmitted by the sensorial atmosphere is associated with the brand, becoming another attribute of branding. Following López-Rúa (2015), 76% of purchasing decisions are made at the point of sale. Sensory marketing largely contributes to the enhancement of the shopping experience (which must be orderly and with good accessibility), and whose function “is to guide, surprise, and connect with the client to facilitate their experience and boost their decision by creating methodologies that awaken their senses”. The creation of this “atmosphere” is the most important strategy of differentiation for retailers (Kotler, 1973).

Álvarez del Blanco (2011) conducted series of studies where he showed that the average loyalty of a brand increases by 28%, when one of the senses is activated positively, 43% when the brand is based on 2 or 3 sensory aspects, and up to 58% with the activation of 4 or 5 senses. Developing a brand in a multisensory way is not always possible, because it requires recognition and differentiation from a visual (logo), olfactory (odotype), sound (phonotype) gustatory and tactile perspective.

The creation of a branded fragrance must have a series of psychosocial variables so that it can produce the desired effects according to the climate, since the temperature and humidity can alter the aroma or make it unbearable, such as the spicy ones in hot seasons. On the other hand, citrus touches in warm environments have a shorter duration than sweet and floral ones. Another variable involved in the perception of scents is gender, carefully taken into account by the olfactory marketing. Male and female odotypes are clearly differentiated at stores. Women tend to have a more sensitive sense of smell. Both sexes react disparately to the same scents. In relation to age, smell is the most sensitive of the senses and loses faculties with age. Younger people are more interested in softer aromas and colors.

Therefore, a corporate aroma is boost for the brand that allows it to transmit its message. The 'odotype' represents the olfactory identity of a brand, in the same logic as a logo, an isotype or a corporate color does for the sight. The purpose is to differentiate the company from the competition, reinforcing its brand identity. The odotype and the olfactory identity constitute a subtle strategy. The brand identity must be consistent with the materialization of the experience that is obtained through the sensory systems (Hulten, 2009) and which is perceived in every contact with brand products, services and physical displays. This brand communication must generate trust through sensory coherence between all the stimuli emitted through all visual aspects of the company. In the case of hotels we refer to brochures, hotel decoration, bed and table linen, as packaging, labels; as well as auditory (such as background music, the tune and slogan of hotel ads), and the right use of touch: armchairs and other appliances; the temperature and humidity of the environment (warm, cool, right temperature, etc.), all of them are sensations that accompany customers from the reception all the way towards the complete hotel experience and that must include the olfactory identity (odotype).

Senses are the foundation to understand and interpreter the world. That's why they affect the behavior of individuals and their decisions. The olfactory system is connected to the most instinctive area of the brain, so olfactory perceptions endure a less rational filter (Serra et al, 2012), raising debate about the ethical premises that should preside over the studies and application of neuromarketing in this field. The sense of smell impacts on both social and psychological aspects. The sensation following the perception of a certain smell is the result of the interpretation and subjective representation that everyone makes of an aroma according to various individual and cultural variables. It is the response to a stimulus (Álvarez del Blanco, 2011). For this reason, sensory marketing requires understanding and measuring sensations, creating new links through the long-term emotional connection with the brand, and achieving enriching and memorable experiences in the purchase process. In this task, neuromarketing is a tool for understanding and measuring the biological basis of non-conscious consumer behavior through the study of brain and neurons in the nervous system (Braidot, 2008).

For this we use the concept of the imprint. Imprint is a combined connection resulting from the combination of the experience with the corresponding emotion when we understand, learn, or meet something for the first time. That generates a mental image or a meaning. In marketing it is often said that there is only one first good impression. In the case of tourism industry, greater importance is given to the receptive function and the

spaces dedicated to it. For instance, a well-defined application of odomarketing strategies at the entrance of a hotel can transport the customer to the 'country experience' (such as England with Kenneth Turner scented candles), to a time or season (Christmas with essences of pine, cinnamon, vanilla, etc.), to childhood (the smell of talcum powder or chewing gum), or to the good old days, with essences such as lilac scent, aligned with the retro marketing strategies. Emotion fosters mental associations that assign a series of attributes on the brand identity, which will become into a behavior: recommending the hotel, staying longer and more frequently, spending more money in products and services, or, in case of a bad emotion, the opposite might occur bad reviews; cutting back stay and expenses at the facilities, etc. Over time, the behavior will generate a footprint, which will condition future customer actions regarding the brand. This last process opens the way to brand loyalty.

The smell remains long in the memory, and "the aroma of the environment increases the memory and recognition of the brands seen" (Morrin and Rattneswar, 2003). Several studies coincide with the classic Rockefeller University of New York of 1999 (Vosshall, and Carandini, 2009) that smell is the sense through which information is best remembered, estimating that humans remember 1% of what he touches, 2% of what he hears, 5% of what he sees, 15% what is tasted and 35% of what he smells. These data have great interest for the hospitality industry in relation to the direct interaction that consumers have with products such as rooms, common areas, bedding, etc. Above all, it is important to highlight the relevance of this findings on gastronomic products (food and drink) which share the three most remembered experiences: sight, smell, and taste. Conversely, displeasure with one of the five sensory factors will jeopardize the chances of return of consumers or even ruin the reputation of tourist services, even when they were performed with maximum effort and care.

Olfactory marketing has two basic qualities to evaluate the use of the senses in business processes: pleasure in reference to the intrinsic experience of smell and the congruence that connects the smell with the store, product, or brand in question. For example, in the south of Spain there is a greater inclination for floral and fruity aromas. On the other hand, North Spain is keen for more sophisticated fragrances (spa, sandal, bamboo, etc.). The most suitable aromas for intercultural spaces are those related to nature, such as flowers and fruits (Mendoza, 2007). *Tone*: It is the affective nature of an aroma, like the concept of hue in color. *Intensity* is the level of concentration of the aroma, which it is cause of many complaints, especially when used in excess in small spaces such as elevators. Lastly, *familiarity* of the smell refers to the fact that the closer an aroma is to the customer's own experience the higher the scent will be valued. We may cite numerous studies, including the classic olfactory advertising campaign by Dunkin Donuts in 2012, which managed to increase sales up to 30%, simply using the smell of coffee (Sala, 2014).

In hospitality, fragrances are usually diffused using nebulizers through air conditioning, diffusers, sprays or mikados in bathrooms. Sometimes, the odotype is used only in the reception and common areas, or extended to the rooms and bedding, modulating the intensity according to the hotel zone. Dining rooms use other more

appropriate scents, such as chocolate with orange, mint, cinnamon, cakes, and freshly baked bread, etc. Depending on the category and type of tourist service, specialized consultants recommend specific fragrances, such as French lavender, mint spicata or green tea in spas; citronella -natural insecticide-, green fig, blackberries and jasmine in golf courses, campsites and swimming pools and cinnamon, cappuccino, toffee, caramelized apple, or cake in cafeterias. Considering that the aroma of each room must be consistent with its functions and allow customers to clearly discriminate where the bathing area ends and starts the lounge, the prayer or children's area, scents fulfill a signaling role so they must be different for different cultures.

Each destination is a microuniverse of smells, which can be described in the form of an olfactory-experiential maps of each city. The association of aroma with the spirit of the holidays as an element of experiential marketing has been used intensely by different companies, not only tourist but retail stores such as Hollister. 'The aroma of luxury' refers to the aroma of premium hotels, where sometimes, those products are on sale as part of the merchandising strategy and customers can buy them as holiday souvenirs if the tourist experience was rewarding. Regarding bad reviews related to smell issues, most of them follow geographical patterns and are not related to hotel category. The analysis of the main travel platforms confirms higher number of negative comments in coastal hotels and to a lesser extent in mainland hotels. Different patterns are revealed, as far as the smells of external origin are concerned (either marine and humidity or agricultural in mainland hotels). The participant observation and the analysis of the travel platforms confirm negative comments more concentrated in coastal hotels and to a lesser extent in inland hotels, and with different patterns in each type of hotel as far as the smells of external origin are concerned (either marine and humidity in the coast and agricultural practices in inland hotels). It is confirmed that complaints about scent are related to the geographical location of hotels and not to the hotel category.

In most cases, comments about bad smell at the hotel correlates with the age of the facilities and with a maintenance generally perceived as precarious, especially related to the pipes and sewage systems, bathtubs, and whirlpools, as well as a disagreement with the cleanliness of the rooms. Bad smell can be associated to poor cleaning, although it might not have direct relation with actual room maintenance. That is the case with smell of tobacco, humidity, air conditioning, etc. There are recurrent complaints on Tripadvisor about the impossibility, even for international hotels, to neutralize the smell of tobacco, as well as fried food and oil from kitchens and dining rooms and from outside drains, farms, or industrial areas.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After interviews with experts, it is confirmed that the aroma of an establishment can act as an internal variable to increase customer attachment. Meanwhile, many other experimental studies have shown that properly aromatized premises can produce an increase in sales of 5%, 14.80% more purchase intention and 15.90% more permanence in the

premises “(Venturi, 1998, Gonzalo, 2018). As for products, the right odor can increase up to 84% consumer preference, the perception of added value, the buyer’s experience, and the rapid activation of purchase intention. In hospitality, it is confirmed greater traffic in reception areas and higher expressions of pleasure at the entrance to the rooms, where the client’s idea about a hotel seems to be configured.

Complaints about bad smell are immediate, imperative, and often override any other positive attribute of the establishments. Users claim that they would neither return nor recommend the hotel or that they left immediately. However, the rate of this type of complaint is not very relevant the Spanish case. From a total of 657,709 Spanish hotels (2020) compared in the search engine of the OTHER Trivago, the first Google search only throws comments on bad smell in 20 reviews. And while favorable comments about the aroma are minimal, they do not reflect the opinion of experts and tourists when been asked about their olfactory experiences in the hotel environment, which are generally very positive.

The smell seriously affects the shrink-wrap of tourists flows, as well as ventilation, temperature, and aroma influence work performance, improving productivity of workers. Thus, the emotional comfort and the feeling of cleanliness that surround those hotel areas conveniently adapted and aromatized constitutes a competitive advantage. Experiential marketing is a new area of the company that goes beyond its commercial functions to serve the sustainable development of tourist environments. It concerns six of the World Development Goals (UN, 2020-2030). Therefore, one proposal is its articulation so that it will contribute systemically to the improvement of the living and working environment in hotels, as well as the management of the Quality of Indoor Environments or IEQ (Indoor Environmental Quality), a new area of knowledge which addresses “the physical, chemical and biological properties that the indoor environment must have to avoid causing diseases and ensure a high level of comfort of the occupants” (Rey and Velasco, 2007).

All these aspects have been collected in the prospection of experiential tourism through the proposed ‘Wellness hotel’ model, understanding human well-being in an integral and holistic way, providing security areas and refuge from environmental and social inclemency. This proposal is in coherence with the growing preference of tourists for travels of proximity, which have been rediscovered and that will continue to rise in the coming years, allowing the growth of boutique and charming hotels, self-managed trips of direct acquisition. This trends prioritize sensory factors, slow tourism and regenerative activities in open spaces and in establishments with comfortable and safe private and common areas.