

# Smellizing – making consumers imagine a product's smell

**Smellizing could be an effective way of attracting consumers toward a product, researchers reported in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.**

Smellizing means prompting people to imagine the smell of a product.

After carrying out four studies, the researchers concluded that most consumers would like to smellize cakes and cookies, i.e. imagine what they smell like.

The article is titled "[Smellizing Cookies and Salivating: A Focus on Olfactory Imagery](#)."

Maureen Morrin, Professor of Marketing at Temple University's Fox School of Business, Aradhna Krishna, Professor of Marketing at the University of Michigan, and Eda Sayin of Koç University in Turkey, set out to determine what the impact might be on consumer behavior if people were asked to imagine what certain foods smelled like.

## **Smellizing hardly used by marketing professionals**

Prof. Morrin said:

"Before we started this project, we looked for print ads that asked consumers to imagine the smell of the product, and we found none. We think it's because advertisers don't think it'll actually do anything."

The team found that when consumers were asked to imagine the smell of a tasty product, e.g. a cookie or cake, it enhanced their desire to consume it, and more importantly to purchase it.

The researchers tested consumer response to smellizing in several

ways, including what effect it might have on salivation, desire and eventual food consumption.

### **Smellizing only effective with visual exposure**

Morrin explained that smellizing is only effective if the potential consumer sees a picture of the advertised product at the same time.



*Smellizing while looking at the image has the greatest impact.*

Study volunteers were asked to look at pictures of cakes and cookies and prompted with several questions, such as:

- Fancy a freshly-baked cookie? Feel like a chocolate cake?
- Feel like a freshly baked cookie. Look for these in a store near you.

The authors found that these types of phrases were effective in encouraging people to consume the product, as long as they were also asked to imagine the smell of the food.

The most powerful effect occurred when smellizing happened at exactly the same time as seeing the image of the product.

Olfactory imagery processing is not the same as that of the other senses, especially vision, the authors explained.

### **Remembering just by smell is not enough**

According to the researchers:

“It has been shown, for example, that although individuals can discriminate among thousands of different odors and are reasonably good at detecting odors they have smelled before, they are quite poor at identifying the odors they smell.”

“That is, individuals often have difficulty stating just what it is they happen to be smelling at any particular moment, unless they can see the odor referent.”

That is probably why looking at a picture helps enforce the effects of smellizing.

In one study, half the participants were asked to imagine the smell of a product while looking at a picture of it, while the other half just looked at it with no prompts. The smellizing volunteers had 0.36 to 0.39 grams more salivation.

Another study showed that participants who were prompted to imagine the products' smell when looking at a picture of it consumed 5.3 more grams of it compared to those who just looked.

Advertisers should be aware that if they incorporate smellizing in their campaigns they are likely to obtain not only superior sales, but possibly better consumer loyalty for their food products.

When people are presented with the real smell of the advertised product the effect is even greater, the researchers found. However, they added that this is not always feasible. When placing posters in public places, for example, releasing odors is not an option.

Advertisers are underestimating the power of smellizing, Morrin stated. It is a power tool which could significantly increase consumer interest and drive up sales.

In an Abstract in the journal, the authors wrote:

“The results demonstrate the interactive effects of olfactory and visual imagery in generating approach behaviors to food cues in

advertisements.”

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