More Ambient Scent, Less Product Scent?

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This research tries to find that Individuals’ Sensitivity to Scent and environmental temperature in the stores can predict how the intensity of ambient scent has an influence on consumers’ attitudes and choice of scented products.

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Scent literature has shed light on ambient scent and product scent. As described by Orth and Bourrain (2005), ambient scent is scent or odor that is not emanating from a particular object but is present in the environment (Spangenberg et al., 1996), whereas product-specific scent derives from the product itself. According to Krishna et al. (2010), scent research has focused primarily on the effects of ambient scent on consumer evaluations, but they emphasize instead the effects of product scent on memory enhancement. It could be explained as memory for odors is assumed to have a unique system (Zucco 2003). Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000, 2003, 2010) find that ambient scent improves recall and recognition of familiar and unfamiliar brands and the retrieval of brand memory, while product scent has a stronger effect on memory enhancement due to the fact that scent-related associations are focusing on a single subject.

The project attempts to bridge the gap between ambient scent and product scent, except that scent intensity is the key variable in the manipulations, not in the position to support the findings of Spangenberg, Crowley and Henderson (1996) that only the presence or absence (not the nature or intensity) of a scent affects evaluations and behaviors. The importance of intensity should derive from individual differences, sensitivity to scent (STS) (Cupchik, Phillips, and Truong 2005). An importance question is rooted: with or without the presence of ambient scent, how differently would consumers choose scented product?

This research aims to create a framework linking ambient scent with product scent. Individuals’ STS and temperature in the stores as moderators, are found to predict how the intensity of ambient scent influences consumers’ attitudes and choice of scented products. Need for Stimulation (NFS) is proposed to be the underlying mechanism for variety seeking behaviors of product scent (McAlister and Pessier 1982; Menon and Kahn 1995). Based on Menon and Kahn (1995) who are in line with previous researchers developing their theories out of Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL), when the environment provides low (high) stimulation below (above) OSL, the individual desires for increasing (decreasing) stimulation and seeks (avoids) variety and novelty. Thus, NFS (consumer actual stimulation minus OSL) refers to the tendency to maintain OSL, otherwise, simulation seeking (avoidance) will rise in order to reduce or augment incoming stimulation (Sales 1971). In the system of Stimulus Intensity Modulation, the augmenters amplify stimulus intensity, the reducers attenuate the intensity, and the moderates have no effect on the intensity (Sales 1971). Align with Sales’s strength-of-the-nervous-system but not the formulation of Zucker (2003) that argues augmenters (reducers) are high (low) in sensation seeking, Goldman, Kohn and Hunt (1983) prove that high sensation seekers tend to be reducers, lacking sensitivity to weak stimulation (low sensitivity also means strong nervous system). This paper is more prone to apply this strength-of-the-nervous-system so as to explain the effect of ambient scent intensity on variety seeking behavior of product scent. That is to say, individuals with low STS have strong olfactory systems and high NFS, hence tend to be variety seekers. On the contrary, those with high STS have weak olfactory systems, need less stimulation and tend to seek less variety.

In Study 1, three groups of people are expected out of measuring individual differences on STS: low STS, high STS with pleasant disposition, and high STS with unpleasant disposition (neglected in the experiment). In the absence (presence) of ambient scent, STS is positively (negatively) related to variety seeking behaviors of product scent. As the ambient scent intensity increases, consumers with high STS show a greater reduction in variety seeking than those with low STS, while NFS decreases in both groups. In addition, it is hypothesized that temperature is likely to moderate the effect, as NFS could be changeable. This intuitive assumption comes from the cold and warm types of fragrance illustrated by Milotic (2003). In the cold condition, the olfactory system is stronger with increasing NFS that leads to increasing variety seeking, whereas the warm condition tends to weaken the olfactory system with lower NFS and less variety seeking. Study 2 is a 2 (ambient scent intensity: absence vs. moderate presence) x 2 (STS: high vs. low) x 2 (temperature: cold vs. warm) factorial design. In the absence (presence) of ambient scent, warmness is more likely to increase (decrease) NFS, resulting in variety seeking (avoidance) behaviors as well as supporting the results of study 1.

The research hypotheses will be empirically tested by involving undergraduate students in laboratory settings. Completion of data collection is expected by December 2011. Analysis of variance will be utilized to analyze the data and a completed manuscript is expected by April 2011. The implications of this research will advance both theoretical and managerial knowledge in scent, in light of growing concerns about scent research and marketing.

REFERENCES
The Tense of the Question Matters: Asking about the Past Leads to Personally Typical Future Behavior

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How likely are you to visit the gym in the coming week? How often did you visit the gym in the past week? Both of these questions are about visiting the gym, but the key difference is that the former asks about visits intended in the future whereas the latter asks about visits already made in the past. According to existing research, when you are asked about future intentions to visit the gym, you are more likely to visit the gym more often than if you were not asked. That is, you are more likely to behave in the socially desirable way and align with social norms. However, extant research does not address what happens to your subsequent gym attendance when you are asked about your past gym visits. In the present research, we theorized that being asked about your past gym visits (or lack thereof) will lead you to go to the gym as frequently (or infrequently) as you did in the past. In other words, your subsequent gym visits will be aligned with how often you typically visit the gym, or what is personally typical for you.

Research has demonstrated that the simple act of asking about future intention questions leads to biased responses on the part of respondents (e.g., Simmons, Bickart, and Lynch 1993) and it can even change the underlying behavior itself (e.g., Morwitz, Johnson, and Schmittlein 1993; Sherman 1980). This phenomenon has been referred to as the “question-behavior effect,” (for a review, see Sprott, Spangenberg, Block, Fitzsimons, Morwitz, and Williams 2006) although it was originally referred to as the “self-erasing nature of errors of prediction” (Sherman 1980) and later referred to as “self-prophecy” (Spangenberg & Greenwald, 1999) and “mere-measurement” (Morwitz, Johnson, and Schmittlein 1993). This robust phenomenon has been demonstrated for a wide range of socially normative (desirable and undesirable) behaviors, including increasing voter registration and turnout (Greenwald, Carnot, Beach, and Young 1987), increasing volunteering for a charitable organization (Sherman 1980; Williams, Fitzsimons, and Block 2004), reducing cheating in a college classroom (Spangenberg and Obermiller 1996), and reducing gender stereotyping (Spangenberg and Greenwald 1999). Past research has repeatedly demonstrated that the simple act of answering a question about socially normative behaviors causes behavioral change aligned with social norms.

Still, it is questionable whether questions always lead to behavioral change aligned with social norms. Past research has shown that individuals align to social norms after answering questions about their future behaviors. However, in the present research, we predict and find that individuals align with personally typical behavior after answering questions about their past behaviors. We argue that this is because asking individuals about past behaviors (but not future behaviors) simply reminds them of the various past instances in which they have engaged (or not) in the target behavior and makes salient how typical it is for them to engage in that behavior. This thought of personally typical behavior then directs behavior accordingly (studies 1 and 2). We test this mechanism for the observed effects (study 3). If it is the case that asking about past behaviors makes salient what is personally typical and then aligns behavior in that way, then it should be possible to wipe out the effect when we make the discrepancy between what is personally typical and socially normative clear. Thus, we test for this possibility. We find that even when individuals are asked about their behavior in the past (and reminded of what they have typically done in the past), simply informing them that what is personally typical is not socially normative (i.e., they are doing “worse” than the average peer) leads their behavior to be more socially normative (than personally typical).

In three studies, we demonstrate that asking about future intentions to engage in behavior alters subsequent behavior differently than being asked about behavior already engaged in in the past. While extant research on the effect of questions on behavior has typically focused on asking about future behaviors, the present research raises the issue of asking about past behaviors. Our data suggest that asking about the past has significant behavioral consequences for the respondent, namely that asking about the past leads the respondent to engage in behavior one typically engages in (personally typical behavior). Furthermore, we provide support that the observed effects are due to a “consistency” mechanism whereby individuals strive to be consistent with thoughts they have about a behavior and their actual behavior.

Although our focus was on asking about the past, these findings raise the broader issue of how mental travel has consequences for what thoughts are made salient in the mind and ultimately actual behavior. As theorized by construal level theory (Liberman and Trope 2008), an event, object, or target of any sort can be removed from one’s sense of immediate experience through psychological distance, with time being one dimension. Thus, an event that is to occur in the far future is experienced differently than one that is to occur in the near future. It would be interesting to test whether psychological distance from an event (near future vs. distant future) would alter behavior differently. One possibility is that asking about the distant future is construed in an abstract manner and corresponds more to abstract information, such as social norms, ultimately leading to behavior aligned with social norm. In contrast, asking about the near future may be construed in a concrete manner and correspond more to concrete information, such as behavior one normally engages in (what is personally typical), eventually leading one to engage in personally typical behavior.

In sum, the present findings contribute to the literature on how asking questions has behavioral consequences by identifying that the tense of the question matters: Asking about the past leads to personally typical future behavior. Importantly, providing feedback that one’s