

Fragrance Selection in Consumer Care Products

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Five decades ago the public at large believed that cosmetics and fragrances were non-essential luxury items. Today luxury is solely intended as a promotional attribute to stress the fact that the product belongs to precious high quality category.

Why is fragrance important in a consumer product? The answer is simple. People are well aware of the air of glamour and magic a fragrance creates to give a consumer product a distinct character and identity. Fragrance in a consumer product occupies a predominant position attaining general recognition. This distinct identity is sufficient to ensure the acceptance of the product to make the consumer loyal to it or reject it outright.

“Presiding over the ear, the eye, the touch, the taste, and the smell, as also the mind he experiences objects,” said, Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavat Gita* (Chapter 15, Verse 9).

As ordained, we have five sensory perceptions namely vision, sound, touch, taste and smell using which we enjoy life on earth. The sense of smell is the only one that is fully mature at birth. Newborn babies have a nose for their natural mothers. Infants calm down perceptibly when wrapped in a cloth worn by their mother, but show mounting unrest if the cloth is freshly laundered or belongs to someone else. Man smells fellow humans and distinguishes between them by odour, reacting to their impressions at an emotional level. Smell plays a major part in fostering human relations to the extent one can recognise and judge others by their personal odour signature.

Of all sensory perceptions, fragrance communication is the most complicated one with a very high degree of subjectivity. In spite of high subjectivity, an average healthy nose, the instrument of smell, can detect about 4,000 different odours, while sensitive and trained noses can smell more than 10,000 odours in a lifetime. Thanks to the six to ten million receptor cells present in the olfactory membrane of the human nose, directly linked to the brain. Since times immemorial, humans have been disposed to please their senses. This also explains their desire to adorn themselves and enhance their beauty. The art of fragancing is so old that it can be traced to all people who had at least some bit of civilisation. Use of fragrances was practised by humanity more by the upper class through the ages although much more subtly than at present.

Today fragrances are present throughout all levels of

product, right from an expensive one to the cheapest, and play an invaluable role. The fragrance used in a product may range from 0.5 to 2.0%, but its performance and signal attributes claim a very high percentage of almost 70 to 80%. As the Prophet Mohamed once remarked, “Perfume is the nourishment that stimulates my thinking.”

Fragrance in functional products takes care of this emotional need, stimulating as well as calming or relaxing the user. That is the importance of this sensory perception. Consumer care products have two basic requirements to fulfil.

- * *Functional requirement*, which is directly related to the primary product performance. For example, soap for cleaning, shampoo for cleaning and conditioning, deodorant to keep one free from bad odour, skin cream say for moisturising, skin lightening, hair oils to make hair manageable, etc.
- * *Emotional requirement* to give feeling of satisfaction that the product is of high quality. Fragrances are used to necessarily provide that emotional feeling of satisfaction and social expression to a purely functional product.

Odour stimulates the brain determining moods and influencing spending habits. The odour of a product as perceived along with visual sense and colour is linked to moods and expectation and ultimately decides one's real interest in any product. Following initial product attraction, price is always a factor to choose between similar products. Consumer first smells the product to get convinced that the product is right. During usage, it should support the in-use claims and so the product effectiveness.

FRAGRANCE SELECTION PARAMETERS

Country, cultural preference and socio-economic status

Country, cultural preference and socio-economic status are major determinants in fragrance selection. Common sense suggests that one cannot produce and market products that will be suited to every individual, purpose, and purse. People differ in their buying motives, and in the features and benefits that they want to derive from the product purchased. Persons living in different areas have varying reasons in buying the product. Not all consumers may feel the need to buy a medicinal or a herbal soap. Similarly, soap with sandalwood oil will not obviously satisfy every one, especially a person preferring a floral fragrance. The decision whether to make a product that suits everybody or specific customer groups or a unique product for every customer rests on the marketer. Culture plays a very significant role in influencing consumer

perception, which, in turn, influences preference and purchase. Another important factor that a consumer looks for is the amount of money they would like to spend on a specific product category. Understanding culture enables one to interpret the reaction of the consumer on the requirement of fragrance profiles and their liking. Product choice and usage differ among social class. Certain items are bought by the upper classes and the lower social class purchases some others. The upper class prefers sophisticated and subtle fragrances and fragrances that have a strong impact are preferred by lower classes.

Personal and laundry care habits/household requirements

Social factors, reference groups, family, social roles and status, influence consumer behaviour either directly or indirectly. Shopping behaviour also varies depending on class and promotional response, due to media choice and usage patterns. People buy different goods and services depending on their lifestyles and their household requirements. A person's educational background, occupation, and income levels are interrelated. Due to the inter-relationship among these variables, they are often combined in to a composite index of social class. More education a person, the greater the likelihood of a better position in society and increased earnings. Occupation of a person influences consumption pattern and product choice. One should also consider all these aspects in totality before selecting a fragrance for a consumer product.

Climate/humidity/packing

Even when the formulation and the method of manufacture are constant, the packing material can cause stability problems of fragrances due to climatic conditions. Not all packing is the same. Glass packing, plastic packing, paper, and hardboard behave differently with different fragrances. Even among them, glass, plastic, and paper have different properties regarding their colourfastness, oxygen permeability, resistant to heat, light and water vapour. In addition, a fragrance suitable for a moisturising cream dispensed in a glass jar may not be suitable to the one sold in a plastic tube. Any fragrance selected should confirm that the fragrance used in the product would remain stable in product packing.

Technical/product formulations

Technically speaking the odour of any personal care or household care consumer product as perceived and interpreted by a consumer is the combined effect produced by the fragrance and the base odour. Fragrance used should perform a dual role of masking the inherent odour of the raw material used and impart a distinct identity to meet any special requirement of the finished products. Fragrance selection, especially in case of formulations with high level of base odour, is therefore very critical.

Image

People groom themselves in order to bolster their self-assurance in dealing with people around them. The fragrance products used by them should be nothing but appropriate to their personalities. The delicate breath of their fragrance should gently stress their charms. A person chooses a product based on the fragrance that discretely outlines the individualistic features of their personality. The perfume selected should harmonise in various ways with the user and complement the product image, the manufacturer wishes to promote. The fragrance should also be adjusted to the type of occasion the product it is to be used and the way it is to be marketed. The market positioning, and the intended market whether, regional, national or global, niche market, premium market, or mass market are all important criteria for fragrance selection.

BASIS OF FRAGRANCE SELECTION

Type of the product and its function

Fragrances are selected specific to the type of the product and the function it is supposed to perform. We cannot expect one to use the same fragrances in all types of products. Soaps, hair shampoo, cleansing lotion, skin moisturiser, *eau de toilette*, lip gel, shaving cream, aerosol air freshener, laundry care, household products, etc., all have different types of fragrance requirement. No woman would ever expect a day cream to have the same characteristics as her evening make up. In case of personal care products the fragrances are selected according to the specific category the product belongs like for adornment purpose/decorative cosmetics or refreshment/skin care.

Eau de Cologne is a pure refresher in the truest sense of the word. What matters is not its effect on others, but of imparting a sense of well being on the user. Once its work of refreshing the user is complete, it should discretely vanish, so that there is no risk of a clash in the use of a 'leave on' product or a fine fragrance later. In laundry care detergents; the fragrance should be able to address the basic objective of removing unpleasant odour from used clothes, smelling nice and cueing cleanliness. The fragrance should persist on the garments after washing and drying. However, in case of detergents for dishwashing, the fragrance should be clean, fresh and not conflict with food odours. It should not persist on the dish after washing.

Target consumer

Selection of fragrances for any product also largely depends on the target consumer whether, male, female, children or babies. The age group of the consumer also reflects on their preferential liking of various fragrance profiles.

Cleanliness and protection are the two main considerations for mothers in selecting a product for use in baby care cosmetic

products. In some instance, healing effect is an added consideration, but this is usually restricted to some extent in cosmetic preparations intended for general use. Although age has now-a-days become a poor predictor of the timings of life events, a persons health, status, occupation or need, one cannot ignore it completely when selecting a fragrance.

Active ingredient

Formulation with certain active ingredients can destabilise a fragrance or discolour the product. Fragrance performance also depends on the acidity or alkalinity, of the product.

Certain active ingredients can destabilise a fragrance and discolour the product or otherwise. Common examples include certain herbal extracts, thioglycolic acids, chlorinated ingredients, antiperspirant actives, and astringent metal salt complexes of aluminium and zirconium, aluminium chlorohydrate, aluminium zirconium trichlorohydrate, etc. Another typical example is when di-benzylidene sorbitol is used as gelling agent in a product it can decompose to benzaldehyde giving a cherry almond note thereby interfering with the fragrance profile.

Product packaging

As discussed earlier, along with the technical aspects of the product, fragrance selected, and its interactions with the packaging are also to be considered. The packaging sometimes absorbs fragrance in the product. Packaging can undergo stress-cracks, blistering, or detachment of inner lining or lacquer on cans and tubes, and blockage of spray valves, etc. All these along with adverse effects of moisture, atmospheric oxygen, can lead to loss of fragrance, or change in odour profile. Packaging related issues should not be ignored while selecting a fragrance for any product.

Cost

Cost of the fragrance in any product formulation is a sensitive affair. To the formulation development chemist, fragrance is the most expensive item per kilogram. Any increase in dosage levels directly increases the cost per ton of the product formulation. The marketing department is not really bothered about the cost of the formulation, and usually believes consumers prefer the more expensive fragrance. This often leads to emotional distress and resentment between the two departments. It is only by a joint decision between the formulation development and marketing departments, a fragrance with a tangible and realistic cost can be selected.

Competition brands and marketing requirements

Fragrance selected in a product must make the latter distinctly different from the ones available in the market. Sometimes, alternatively, competition brands, benchmarks and present trends may dictate fragrance selection in consumer products. Fragrance used should help support marketing/technical claims, product attributes and be in line

with the established house style. The fragrance selected for any product should be long lasting on the substrate. It must appeal to the demanding and discriminating consumers and appeal to their aesthetic sense. The fragrance should make a distinct statement and reveal its character when used and strong enough to be noticeable. Fragrance should not endanger the health of the people using the products or are engaged in its manufacture. Its detrimental effects on the environment should be bare minimum. Ingredients used in the manufacture of the fragrance should confirm to International Fragrance Research Association (IFRA) guidelines.

After preliminary selection, the fragrance is subjected to various tests to ascertain whether it will harmonise technically with the base of the product in which it is to be used. The fragrance should withstand accelerated storage study to confirm the stability of the fragrance throughout the shelf life of the product at varying environmental conditions. In selecting a fragrance, one should also consider the comparatively higher temperatures encountered during processing.

Consumer uses a product to cleanse, refresh, beautify, get functional benefits etc., and the experience of using the product should be positive, emotive, and pleasant. Fragrance contribution is considerable. Fragrance is born out of creative intuition and playful imagination. The choice of a fragrance is the stylish co-ordination of personality and is a matter of good taste. Fragrance selected should be unobtrusive and reserved giving an impression of being aesthetic. The fragrance should enchant and fascinate without tending to be extravagant. People are sensitive to odours and resent one who spread a cloud of intense odour around at every motion. A person doing so will strike us as being showy and bothersome, no matter how popular the fragrance is. It is only the veiled odour phenomenon that playfully approaches, but is capriciously withdrawn, that is appreciated as mystically attractive and alluring.

Proper selection of fragrance for use in a product is an essential factor determining the successful penetration of the market. The decision of the manufacturer in selecting a fragrance being right or wrong can be measured only after initial purchase, followed by repurchase indicating a successful product launch. A good fragrance can make a product extremely popular and a poorly selected fragrance will disappoint the consumer and lead to absolute product failure. Fragrances in a consumer product have to communicate not only a fresh and clean feeling, but also be warm and sensual. Choosing a successful fragrance liked by all consumers is indeed a very difficult task.

The only question, we need to find an answer is 'How to select it?'