

## Tertiary Education Students' Knowledge and Awareness of Perfumes as Tools of Communication in Relationships and Marketing

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### Abstract

This study evaluated students' understanding of perfumes, their role in forming and maintaining personal relationships, including romantic and social interactions, as well as how awareness and preferences for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. The paper employed the survey research design. A questionnaire titled Knowledge of perfumes as tools of communication questionnaire (KPTCQ) was used for data collection. The population of the study was 28,900. Three hundred and ninety-five (395) students constituted the sample of the study. Face and content validity were done, and a reliability index of 0.8 was determined for the full-length questionnaire. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and weighted mean. Findings revealed that students who wore perfumes (74.68%) were more than those who did not; and a majority (37%) preferred floral fragrance. More importantly, they were aware of the use of perfumes in marketing (3.2) and relationship (4.2) respectively. The study also found that a person's choice of perfume can influence their attractiveness (3.8), the same way as the choice of one's perfume could be made with the intention of making a positive impression (3.8). Findings, also, indicated that scents affect students' shopping experience (4.1) and enables them to relax (4.2). The mean of 3.4 indicated that students have purchased products because of the scent in the store and have stayed longer in a store due to the pleasant scent in the environment (4.0). The paper therefore recommended that individuals should leverage the power of perfumes to deepen their emotional connections, while brands should learn to integrate perfumes into advertising, to create a sensory experience that strengthens their market presence and appeal.

### **Background to the Study**

Perfumes have long been a significant aspect of human culture, serving not only as a means of personal hygiene but also as a crucial component in social interactions and marketing strategies. The fragrance industry is a multi-billion-dollar sector, reflecting the high value placed on scents by consumers worldwide (Koul and Tyagi, 2017). For tertiary students, understanding and awareness of perfumes extend beyond personal preference to encompass broader implications in relationship dynamics and marketing potential. This demographic sector, characterized by its diverse social interactions and emerging consumer behavior, represents a critical segment for the study of perfumes' impact on relationships and marketing.

Fragrance, of which perfumes are one, have long been recognized not only for their aromatic and aromatherapeutic qualities but also for their profound impact on human emotions, behaviour, and interpersonal relationships (Sowndhararajan & Kim, 2016). The use of scents in marketing has garnered significant attention in recent years due to its potential to influence consumer behavior. Spangenberg et al. (1996) conducted pioneering research demonstrating that ambient scents in retail environments can significantly affect consumers' evaluations of products and their likelihood of making a purchase. This study laid the groundwork for subsequent investigations into the strategic use of fragrances in various marketing contexts. In the realm of branding and product differentiation, Hultén et al. (2009) explored how olfactory cues can create unique brand experiences and foster brand loyalty. Their findings underscored the congruence between a brand's identity and the scent associated with it, highlighting the potential for perfumes to serve as a powerful branding tool. Furthermore, research by Krishna (2012) elucidated the role of scent in enhancing consumers' perceptions of product quality and value. By creating positive sensory experiences through strategically chosen fragrances, marketers can elevate the perceived value of their offerings and cultivate a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Beyond their commercial applications, perfumes also play a crucial role in interpersonal communication and relationship formation. Lundström and Olsson (2010) conducted neuro-scientific studies revealing the profound impact of olfactory stimuli on social behaviour and emotional processing. Their research highlighted the role of scent in eliciting emotional responses and shaping social interactions, suggesting its potential significance in fostering interpersonal connections.

In the context of romantic relationships, Herz and Inzlicht (2002) investigated the link between scent and attraction, uncovering the role of pheromones and individual olfactory preferences in mate selection. Their findings shed light on the subconscious processes underlying human mate choice and the potential for perfumes to enhance romantic allure. Moreover, Robles et al. (2013) explored the use of perfumes as relational cues in interpersonal communication, emphasizing their symbolic significance in conveying intimacy, trust, and affection. By leveraging on the associative power of scents, individuals can deepen their emotional connections and strengthen interpersonal bonds.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the evident importance of perfumes in both personal and commercial contexts, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive research regarding tertiary students' knowledge and awareness of perfumes as tools in fostering relationships and in marketing. This gap is significant because tertiary students are at a stage where their social and professional identities are being formed, and their consumer behaviour is becoming more defined. A deeper understanding of how these students perceive and utilize perfumes could offer valuable insights into the role of fragrances in fostering interpersonal relationships and influencing purchasing decisions. Moreover, this knowledge could enhance marketing strategies targeted at this demography, ensuring that campaigns are more effectively tailored to their preferences and behaviour.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to explore and assess the level of knowledge and awareness among tertiary students regarding perfumes. More specifically the intention of the study to:

- i. Evaluate students' understanding of perfumes, and the appropriate contexts for their use.
- ii. Investigate how students perceive the role of perfumes in forming and maintaining personal relationships, including romantic and social interactions.
- iii. Analyze how awareness and preferences for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What is the level of students' understanding of perfumes, and the appropriate contexts for their use?
- ii. How do students perceive the role of perfumes in forming and maintaining personal relationships, including romantic and social interactions?
- iii. In what ways do awareness and preferences for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study adopted the survey research design.

#### **Area of the Study**

The area of study is Abia State of Nigeria. Abia State is a state in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. The Capital is Umuahia. Abia state was created in 1991 from part of the old Imo State and its citizens are Igbo people (99.9% of the population). It has a population of 2,845,380 (2006 census figures) and a population density of 578 persons per square kilometer (Ahaiwe and Agodi, 2015). Abia state is home to Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities, which are state, federal, and privately-owned. These include the Abia State University, Uturu (ABSU); Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAAU); Gregory University, Uturu (GUU); Rhema

University, Aba; Abia State Polytechnic, Aba; Covenant Polytechnic, Aba; Abia State College of Education (Technical), Arochukwu, and College of Health Sciences and Management, Aba. Two new federal institutions have recently been established in the state. These are the Federal Polytechnic, Umuochi and the Federal College of Education, Ofeme, Umuahia.

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study consisted of 28,900 students. This was made up of 20,400 students at ABSU and 8,500 students at MOUAU.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample size was 395. Samples were proportionately drawn from the two institutions. Thus, 279 was drawn from ABSU and 116 from MOUAU. The Taro Yamani sampling formula with a confidence level of 0.05 was used in determining the sample size while the purposive sampling technique was adopted in choosing the individuals. This is a non-probability technique whereby individuals are selected because they have characteristics needed in a sample.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

A Questionnaire titled “Knowledge of Perfumes as Tools of Communication (KPTCQ)” was used for data collection. It was developed in line with the specific objectives of the study and had two sections. Section A sought the demographic information of the respondents while Section B sought responses to specific items relating to the research questions. It had a 5-point Likert scale, irrespective of the response mode, which enabled the respondents to express their views with regards to the questionnaire items. The questionnaire was validated by two university experts in the Faculty of Education. The test-retest technique was used to establish the reliability of the

### **Data Collection Method**

A total of 395 copies of the questionnaire were administered by hand with the assistance of two personnel from each of the institutions. All the 395 copies were retrieved from the respondents.

**Data Analysis Technique:** The data were analyzed using percentages, and weighted mean. The benchmark for weighted mean is 3.0.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Information of Respondents**

Respondents in this study provided information on their gender, age, graduate level, and relationship status. Accordingly, 51.7% of the population were females, while the male gender consisted of 48.3%. The information gathered shows that 21.3% and 54.1% of the students were between the ages of 17– 20 and 21 – 24 years, respectively. Similarly, 22.5% of the respondents were aged 25 - 28 years, while 2.1% were aged 29 years and above. The data shows that majority of the students were within the age limit that permitted them to have romantic relationships, and equally get involved in marketing activities. This

implies that businesses could leverage on the power of good fragrance, while reaching out to this segment of the society. Findings also demonstrate that, majority (68.6%) of the respondents were in their 300 and 400 levels at the university, 29.3% were in 200 and 300 levels, while 2.1% only were postgraduate students. Regarding the students' relationship status, 18.9% were married, 54.8% were in a romantic relationship, while 26.3% were completely single. The significance of this finding is that most of the students were already in the dating circle and could relate to the use of perfumes in enhancing relationships.

**Research question 1: What is the level of students' understanding of perfumes, and the appropriate context for their usage?**

The responses to this question are summarized in table one.

**Table 1:** Students' Level of understanding of Perfumes, and appropriate Contexts for their use

S/N	VARIABLES	RESPONSES					$\bar{X}$
1.	Frequency of wearing perfume	DAILY 185(46.83)	WEEKLY 110(27.85)	SOMETIMES 37(9.37)	RARELY 49(12.41)	NEVER 14(3.54)	4.0
2.	Most preferred type of perfume (Scent/Fragrance)	(SWEET) 89 (22.53)	ORIENTAL 69 (17.47)	FLORAL 107 (27.09)	WOODY 66 (16.71)	FRESH 64 (16.20)	3.2
3.	Familiarity with the use of perfumes in marketing	V. FAM. 118 (29.87)	FAMILIAR 84 (21.27)	NUETRAL 23 (5.82)	UNFAM. 107 (27.09)	V. UNFAM. 63 (15.95)	3.2
4.	Familiarity with the use of perfumes to enhance personal relationship	V. FAM 251 (63.55)	FAMILIAR 43 (10.89)	NEUTRAL 26 (6.58)	UNFAM. 55 (13.92)	V. UNFAM 20 (5.06)	4.2
5.	Awareness of the intentional use of perfume in commercial environment.	ALWAYS 179 (45.32)	OFTEN 69 (17.47)	SOMETIMES 78 (19.75)	RARELY 40 (10.12)	NEVER 29 (7.34)	3.8
6.	How do you usually learn about perfumes?	SOC. MEDIA 92 (23.29)	ADVERT 176 (44.56)	REVIEWS 69 (17.47)	FAMI/FRIE 37 (9.37)	IN-STORE PROMO 20 (5.06)	3.7
7.	Importance of brand of perfume when making a purchase	V. IMPORT. 182 (47.08)	IMPORT. 69 (17.47)	NEUTRAL 29 (7.34)	UNIMPO. 52 (13.16)	V. UNIMPO 16 (15.96)	3.6
8.	Factors influencing the choice of perfume	SCENT 225 (56.96)	PRICE 89 (22.54)	PACKAGING 26 (6.58)	BRAND 35 (8.86)	ADVERT 20 (5.06)	

**Grand mean = 3.73**

**LEGEND: V. FAM - Very familiar; FAM -Familiar; V. UNFAM - Very unfamiliar; SOC. MEDIA - Social media; ADVERT - Advertisement; FAMI/FRIE - Family/Friend; V. IMPORT - Very Important; IMPORT - Important; UNIMPO - Unimportant; V. UNIMPO - Very Unimportant.**

Table 1 summarizes the responses on students' level of understanding of perfumes, and appropriate contexts for their use. The analyses of the data showed that a combined percentage of 74.68% of the respondents use perfumes every week and day. This compares to only 25.32% who sometimes, rarely, or never use perfumes. The floral scent (27.09%) was the most preferred fragrance. The means of 3.2 and 4.2 showed the level of

students' awareness on the use of perfumes in marketing and relationship respectively, while the mean of (3.8) indicated that students usually notice the intentional use of fragrance in commercial environment. The analysis further revealed that students learnt about new perfumes, mostly from advertisement (44.56%), and considered the brand of a perfume (47.08%) as very important, during purchase. The grand mean of 3.73 showed that overall, the students had a high level of understanding of perfumes and their use in appropriate contexts.

**Research question 2:** How do students perceive the role of perfume in forming and maintaining personal relationships, including social and romantic relationships? Answers to this question are summarized in table two.

**Table 2:** Role of Perfume in Maintaining Romantic Relationships/Social Interaction

S/ N	VARIABLES	RESPONSES					X̄
		SA	A	D	SD	U	
1.	A person's choice of perfume can influence their attractiveness.	170	118	49	35	23	3.8
2.	One can choose a perfume with the intention of impressing someone else.	164	95	78	26	32	3.8
3.	The use of a particular perfume can create a lasting memory associated with someone.	179	78	46	66	26	3.8
4.	Wearing a perfume can boost a person's self-confidence.	162	98	40	78	17	3.9
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
5.	How often do you notice and remember someone's perfume?	150	89	101	23	32	3.8
		VL.	L	UL	VUL.	Neutral	
6.	How likely are you to choose a perfume based on your partner's or friend's preference?	118	64	95	78	40	3.4
		VI	I	UI	VUI	Neutral	
7.	How important is wearing a perfume to you when attending a romantic date?	234	81	32	29	20	4.2

**Grand Mean = 3.8**

**LEGEND:** SA - Strongly Agree; A - Agree; D - Disagree; SD - Strongly Disagree  
 VL - Very Likely; L - Likely; UL - Unlikely; VUL - Very Unlikely  
 VI - Very Important. I - Important; UI - Unimportant; VUI - Very Unimportant

**From the analyses,** the means of 3.8 and 3.8 show that respondents agreed that a person's choice of perfume can influence their attractiveness, just as the choice of one's perfume can be made with the intention of making a positive impression. The students also agreed (3.8) that the use of perfumes can create lasting memories associated with a person; and they (46.1%) were likely to choose a particular perfume based on the preference of their partners, however, 43.8% were unlikely to do so. Additionally, 79.7% considered wearing of perfume to a romantic date as important, just as the mean sum of 3.9 shows that wearing of perfume can boost one's self-confidence.



**Research question 3:** In what ways do awareness and preferences for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty?

**Legend to Table 3:**

SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree; U – Undecided.  
 MR – More relaxed; MA – More alert; H – Happier; NC – No change; IND – Indifferent.  
 DEF – Definitely; PRO – Probably; MB – Maybe; PN – Probably not; DF – Definitely not.  
 WOO – Woody; SPI – Spicy; S/F – Sweet/Fresh.  
 CLO – Clothing; COS – Cosmetics; BKS – Books; GRO – Grocery; RES – Restaurant.

**Table 3:** Impact of Awareness on Students' Purchasing Decisions and Brand Loyalty

S/ N	VARIABLES	RESPONCES					X̄
		SA	A	D	SD	U	
1.	Do you think that scents affect your shopping experience?	182	95	61	38	69	4.1
2.	The scent in a store can make me purchase a perfume	124	95	78	81	17	3.4
3.	A pleasant smell can make one stay longer in a store	193	110	23	43	26	4.0
4.	A well-chosen fragrance can enhance one's perception of a brand.	133	121	55	74	12	3.7
		MR	MA	H	NC	IND	
5.	How do you feel when you perceive a pleasant scent in a store	213	84	69	9	20	4.2
		DEF	PRO	MB	PN	DN	
6.	A pleasant scent can influence one's decision to visit a store again.	167	112	15	40	61	3.6
7.	Would you be willing to pay more for a product if the scent in a store environment enhanced you shopping experience?	112	127	37	87	81	3.5
8.	Have you ever been deterred from staying in a business premises on account of unpleasant fragrance?	153	98	49	66	29	3.7
		FLORAL	CITRUS	WOO	SPIC	S/F	
9.	Which type of scent do you find most appealing in a store?	118	87	51	81	58	
		CLO	COS	BKS	GRO	RES	
10.	In which type of business premises do you most appreciate the use of perfume?	120	49	37	78	81	

**Grand mean: 3.6**

In Table 3, data shows how awareness and preference for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Thus, the students agreed (4.1) that scents affect their shopping experience, and as well enables them to feel relaxed whenever they notice a pleasant scent in a store (4.2). The mean of 3.4 indicated that

students have purchased products because of the scent in the store, just as they (4.0) agreed to have stayed longer in a store due to a pleasant scent in the environment. Meanwhile, data on the type of stores where scents are mostly appreciated, showed that cloth store (30.4%) and restaurants (20.5%) were in the lead, followed by groceries (19.7%), cosmetics (12.4%), and book (9.4%) stores, among others.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The analyses of the data have shown the responses on students' level of understanding of perfumes, and the appropriate contexts for their use. The highpoints indicate a higher percentage (74.68%) of those who use perfumes compared to those who do not (25.33%). On the most preferred fragrance, 22.53% preferred sweet scent, 17.47% chose oriental scent, 27.09% preferred floral fragrance, and 16.71% went for woody fragrance, while 16.2% opted for fresh perfumes. The mean sums of 3.2 and 4.2 showed the level of students' awareness on the use of perfumes in marketing and relationship respectively; while the mean sum of (3.8) indicated that students are usually sensitive to their environment, as they seem to notice the intentional use of fragrance in commercial environment. It has also been shown that 44,56% of the students learn about new perfumes from advertisements. This figure validates the relevance of advertising to marketing. Similarly, 9.37% learnt of new perfumes from their friends/families, 23.29% from the social media, while others were from online reviews (17.47%) and In-store promotions (5.06%). Data on the importance of brand when making a purchase indicated that the majority (47.08%) of the respondents considered the brand of a perfume very important. In the same way, 56.96% are influenced by the type of scent a perfume carries when buying a particular perfume. This is consistent with the position of Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000), who stated that scents can enhance brand memory and recognition, making them an effective tool for differentiating a brand in a crowded market. Thus, perfumes can significantly contribute to brand identity by embodying the brand's personality and values.

Further analyses show the perception of students regarding the role of perfumes in forming and maintaining romantic relationships and social interactions. Accordingly, the mean of 3.8 and 3.8 show that respondents agreed that a person's choice of perfume can influence their attractiveness, just as the choice of one's perfume could be made with the intention of making a positive impression on others. The import of this finding is that perfume significantly affects first impressions, which are crucial in interpersonal interactions. Scents can convey personality traits and moods, influencing how individuals are perceived by others. Studies have shown that people who wear pleasant fragrances are often perceived as more attractive and likable. A study by Roberts et al. (2009) has shown that body odor plays a vital role in mate selection and social interaction, with pleasant scents enhancing one's attractiveness and social appeal. Additionally, scent is a powerful tool in the world of attraction. Human olfactory cues are linked to genetic compatibility and health indicators (Gaby and Zayas, 2017), and the use of perfumes can enhance these natural cues, making a person more appealing. This is demonstrated in a study by Herz and Inzlicht (2002), which found that scented



environments could enhance interpersonal attraction, as the association between a pleasant scent and a person can create a more favorable impression. Similarly, 38% agreed that they always notice and remembers someone's perfume, while the mean sum of 38 showed that the use of perfumes can create lasting memories associated with a person. Correspondingly, the emotional impact of scent is highlighted in a study by Willander and Larsson (2006), which found that olfactory cues are more effective in evoking autobiographical memories compared to visual or verbal cues. Scents are closely tied to the brain's limbic system, which is responsible for emotions and memory. This connection means that fragrances can evoke strong emotional responses and memories, playing a crucial role in forming and maintaining relationships. In the same vein, the table shows that while 46.1% of the students were likely to choose a particular perfume based on the preference of their partners, 43.8% were unlikely to do so. This implies that the choice of a particular perfume and fragrance may depend on other factors, outside relationships. Additionally, 79.7% considered as important, wearing of perfume to a romantic date, just as the mean of 3.9 shows that the students agreed that wearing perfume can boost one's self-confidence. Consequently, perfume can function as a non-verbal communication tool, conveying messages about one's personality, mood, and status. This form of communication is subtle yet, it can influence social dynamics and interactions.

It has also been shown how awareness and preference for certain perfumes affect students' purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Thus, the students agreed (79.7%) that scents affect their shopping experience. This is further reinforced by the mean of 4.1 for the item. Scents also enable them to feel relaxed whenever they notice a pleasant scent in a store (4.0). The mean of 3.4 indicated that students have purchased products because of the scent in the store, just as they (4.0) agreed to have stayed longer in a store due to a pleasant scent in the environment. This finding entails that perfumes can also influence consumer behavior by affecting mood and perception. A study by Spangenberg, Grohmann, and Sprott (2005) found that ambient scents in retail environments can enhance customer satisfaction, increase time spent in stores, and positively influence purchase intentions.

It has also been revealed that the most preferred scent by respondents in a shopping environment was the floral scent (29.90%). This result agrees with the report by Global Data (2021) which found that floral scents are the most popular, with 30% of consumers globally preferring them for their personal care and household products. This is followed by fresh scents at 24%, fruity at 23%, and citrus at 22%. The report explains consumers' interest in unprocessed products that offer natural ingredients and freshness. Floral, fresh, and fruity scents are the most popular in these categories, which is aligned with the fresh and natural consumer trend. Meanwhile, data on the type of stores where scents are mostly appreciated, showed that cloth stores (30.38%) and restaurants (20.50%) were in the lead, followed by groceries (19.75%), cosmetics (12.41%), and book (9.37%) stores. In response to the question on whether respondents will be willing to pay more for a product if the store environment, including the scent, enhanced their shopping

experience, 60.51% agreed, while 39.49% were on the other side. Data further indicates that a well-chosen fragrance enhances the perception of a brand (3.7). An unpleasant smell can likewise deter customers from staying in a business premise (3.7). In line with this finding, scents have a unique ability to evoke emotions and memories, which can be leveraged in marketing to create deeper emotional connections with consumers. In line with this finding, a study by Herz (2004) indicates that olfactory cues can trigger vivid memories and emotional responses more effectively than visual or auditory stimuli. This emotional resonance can foster brand loyalty, as consumers often associate specific scents with positive experiences related to the brand. Moreover, incorporating scents into a multi-sensory marketing strategy can amplify the overall impact of a marketing campaign. Multi-sensory marketing, which engages multiple senses simultaneously, can create a more immersive and memorable brand experience (Hultén (2011).

### **Conclusion**

This paper assessed tertiary education students' knowledge and awareness on perfumes, as pivotal in relationship and marketing. Findings revealed that students who wore perfumes were more than those who did not, and the majority preferred floral fragrance. More importantly, they were aware of the use of perfumes in marketing and relationships. Equally, the study found that, a person's choice of perfume can influence their attractiveness, just as the choice of one's perfume could be made with the intention of making a positive impression. Lastly, the study found that scents affect students' shopping experience and enable them to feel relaxed whenever they notice a pleasant scent in a store. It was also determined that students have purchased products because of the scent in the store and have stayed longer in a store due to the pleasant scent in the environment. Thus, perfume is more than just a pleasant addition to one's appearance; it is a potent tool in interpersonal communication and relationship formation.

### **Recommendations**

This paper recommends thus:

- i. There is need for individuals to use the power of perfumes to deepen their emotional connections and strengthen interpersonal bonds.
- ii. Manufacturers may leverage on the preferences of consumers for floral, fruity, and fresh fragrances to develop and market "natural" fragrance formulations that are floral, fresh, or fruity.
- iii. It is essential for brands to integrate perfumes into advertising, product packaging, and in-store environments, to create unforgettable sensory experiences that strengthen their market presence and appeal.
- iv. Perfumes can significantly contribute to brand identity; hence, businesses can take advantage of this, by embodying the brand's personality and values in a chosen fragrance.

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