

The Seductive Scent of Coffee: Effects of Caffeine Placebos in a Real-World Shopping Scenario

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Abstract

The research objective was to find out whether the perception of caffeine placebos in a real-world shopping scenario can elicit reactions shown to be caused by caffeine. We recruited 150 shoppers in a book store in a large shopping mall to participate in our study. A between-subjects experimental design with three groups was applied. 50 participants were exposed to coffee scent, 50 participants consumed decaffeinated coffee and 50 participants served as a control group. The impact of the manipulation on shoppers' time in store and their overall store evaluation was measured. Coffee scent and decaffeinated coffee produced positive medium size effects in extending participants' shopping times. Furthermore, coffee scent had a large positive effect and decaffeinated coffee had a medium to large positive effect on store evaluation. Our results indicate that effects of caffeine shown under laboratory conditions also occur in real-world scenarios and that the effects of psychoactive substances can be triggered by exposing customers to a placebo. Based on these results we are able to give valuable implications for research and practice.

Keywords: *caffeine placebo; consumer behavior; retail environment*

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