

Effects of occasion-based targeting: Evidence from Valentine's Day

Abstract

Even though it is well known that sales are likely to increase on days before widely celebrated occasions such as Christmas or Easter in Western Christian civilization, literature on occasions and occasion-directed in-store marketing activities is still in its infancy. To sensitize marketers as well as retailing researchers of shopping occasions, the present paper examines effects on sales volume arising from Valentine's Day. As sales volume could be boosted as a result of occasion-directed in-store marketing activities, the authors also investigated effects arising from displays which were placed at the point of sale reminding shoppers of the forthcoming occasion. Findings provide evidence that sales are immediately increasing on the studied occasion and days before. The increase of sales is even higher as far as a display promotion is additionally carried out at the point of sale. However, products must have a direct link to a specific occasion to satisfy occasion-driven needs of shoppers. Summarizing, the present paper delivers valuable findings on the studied occasions which might be highly beneficial for marketers and retailing researchers likewise.

Key words: Occasion marketing; Point of sale marketing; In-store marketing; Display promotion; Valentine's Day; Impulse purchases

> **Felix Horstmann & Michael Lingenfelder**
Chair of Marketing and Retail Management, Philipps-University of Marburg,
Universitätsstraße 24, 35037 Marburg, Germany

1. Introduction

42 percent of all shopping trips in the FMCG sector are driven by specific occasions (GfK 2016). What it makes interesting for marketers is the fact that many shoppers depart from their usual purchase behavior as far as they purchase products for a specific occasion. For instance, on days before widely celebrated holidays like Christmas and Easter in Western Christian civilization shoppers are likely to purchase more than normal, claw at branded instead of private labeled products, or purchase products which they would not typically purchase (Cartwright et al. 2016; Shankar et al. 2011). Therefore, especially manufacturers of branded products spend vast amounts of money on in-store promotions to win at the first moment of truth and thus influencing shoppers' decision making.

Lewin (1936) was the first who identified occasions as an important aspect in marketing segmentation. According to him, people will adapt their behavior in terms of a specific situation. Fennell (1978) additionally noted the relevance of specific product-use situations and their impact on purchase decisions. Hence, marketers might find more success as they focus on how they can satisfy occasion-driven purchase needs based on specific shopper segments. In this context, especially holidays and seasonal feasts (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day) as well as widely celebrated events (e.g. Olympic Games, World Cups, Super Bowl final) represent high-relevant occasions as those were celebrated by numerous shoppers around the world. However, as marketers address a widely celebrated occasion, they need to highlight their own over competing products as shoppers are confronted with a huge number of in-store promotions related to the same occasion. Therefore, relevant products are usually glorified in amazing displays which are served as a crucial trigger of impulse purchases

Although occasion-directed marketing activities could unleash considerable sales potentials, literature on this topic is still not well mapped out. Providing a contribution on this, the author conducted an extensive store test. Results provide information on sales effects arising from Valentine's Day and shed light on what fundamentally has to be considered to fulfill occasion-driven needs of shoppers. Effects arising from displays, placed in-store enhancing occasion-driven sales volume, were additionally investigated. Summarizing, this paper aims to sensitize marketers as well as retailing researchers of shopping occasions and provide managerial implications. For retailing researchers, the paper moreover outlines avenues for future research to gain a comprehensive understanding on in-store factors determining occasion-driven sales volume.

2. Impulse purchasing

Marketers have long recognized the relevance of impulse purchasing and this topic has therefore generated considerable research interest for many years (e.g. Beatty and Ferrell, 1998; Cobb and Hoyer, 1986; Stern 1962). An impulse purchase occurs when a person experiences a sudden, strong, and irresistible urge to buy a particular product (Solomon et al., 2016). Hence, impulse purchasing comprises more than the criteria of being unplanned. In this context, it has to be distinguished between four types of impulse purchasing which may have various underlying motivations: Pure impulse purchasing, reminder impulse purchasing, suggestion impulse purchasing and planned impulse purchasing. They have in common, that each type of impulse purchase is triggered by specific stimuli (S) which affect a shopper's organism (O) and finally result in a response (R) behavior. Introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), this relationship is well known as S-O-R model.

Underlying processes which initiate impulse purchasing do not vary across the different types of impulse purchasing. As a fundamental feature of behavior, the role of arousal has to be stressed. Arousal can be defined as the neurophysiological basis underlying all processes in the human organism. Thus, it is source of emotions, motivation, information processing, and behavioral reactions (Gröppel-Klein, 2005). Both internal and external stimuli can cause arousal as far as they are perceived. At the POS, phasic arousal can be seen as the driving force for decision-making processes. It arises in response to specific stimuli resulting in short-term variations in the level of arousal (Gröppel-Klein, 2005). Based on Yerkes-Dodson law, the relationship between arousal and performance follows an inverted-U function. Even if the exact shape of the arousal-performance-function is not clear, Yerkes-Dodson law may serve as heuristic orientation which should be considered in the design of POS marketing stimuli (Kroeber-Riel and Gröppel-Klein, 2013). Hence, external stimuli such as in-store displays should strive to attain an optimal level of arousal inside the shopper which initiates a passive process of perception.

Subsequently, emotional processes associated with an impulse purchase will probably cause a specific action (Kroeber-Riel and Gröppel-Klein, 2013). For instance, a shopper could recognize a specific need which was perceived from his or her inner (e.g. giving a little pleasure to a person, just because you like him or her) and strengthened by an in-store display (e.g. the display is perceived by a shopper because of its fancy shape and glorifies a product which can be given as a little pleasure to a beloved person). As a result of emotional information processing, the shopper puts the promoted product from the display into the shopping cart. In summary, the recognition of hidden needs which were strengthened or initially triggered by external marketing stimuli at the POS must be considered as relevant to foster any kind of impulse purchases (Iyer 1989).

3. Occasion-driven purchase behavior

As about 40 percent of all purchases are related to a specific occasion, it possesses a strong impact on shoppers' purchase behavior (GfK, 2016; Belk, 1974, 1975a, 1975b). Especially the annual sales increase caused by Christmas has to be stressed (e.g. Barsky and Miron, 1989; Chevalier et al., 2003; Wen, 2002). As Christmas is an important occasion for many people in Western Christian civilization on which families and friends spend time with each and bethink of things which go too short in the daily grind, they also depart from their usual purchase behavior. Shoppers are likely to purchase more than normal, claw at branded instead of private labeled products, or purchase products which they would not typically purchase, resulting in a significant increase of sales volume (Cartwright et al., 2016; Shankar et al., 2011). Apart from widely celebrated holidays like Christmas, marketers and retailing researchers likewise should think about further promising occasions in retailing. Less meaningful occasions or year-around individual occasions also could evoke specific needs, subsequently stimulating sales volume.

According to GfK (2016), occasion-driven purchases have to be differentiated from everyday purchases (e.g. stock purchases, replacement purchases). Occasion-driven purchases are temporal as well as emotional very close to later consumption and will be part of a specific shopping mission. The diversity of occasions for which shoppers satisfy their occasion-driven needs can be systemized in four broader groups: Holidays and seasonal feasts (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween), widely celebrated events (e.g. Olympic Games, World Cups, Super Bowl final), individual seasonal occasions (e.g. spring cleaning, family BBQ, back to school, advent tinker), and individual year-round occasions (e.g. girls' nights, birthday parties, candlelight dinners, board game parties).

On occasions which are celebrated by many shoppers, the challenge is to highlight one's own over competing products as shoppers are confronted with a huge number of in-store promotions. Nevertheless, widely celebrated occasions naturally came along with a significant increase of sales volume across diverse product categories. To unleash considerable sales potentials apart from widely celebrated occasions, therefore, marketers need to create further occasions which are perceived as relevant by shoppers. However, to trigger purchases on impulse, additionally, extraordinary in-store promotion activities telling shoppers why they need to purchase a specific product are absolutely necessary to be successful. Hence, the selection of relevant occasions is closely linked to POS marketing stimuli.

4. Relevance of POS marketing stimuli

As marketers address a specific occasion, it specifically has to be promoted at the POS creating a unique shopping experience (e.g. Ballantine et al., 2015; Jones and Runyan, 2016). For instance, an amazing in-store display could be a crucial trigger of planned impulse purchases as it catches the shoppers' attention, thus influencing their purchase decision in favor of the promoted product. However, displays could also encourage shoppers of purchasing the promoted product, thus specifically triggering pure or reminder impulse purchases.

Following Iyer (1989), the recognition of a need triggered by external stimuli is more important than recall from internal memory. Merging complementary products in a display additionally unlocks cross-selling potentials as it offers convenience for shoppers (Lam and Mukherjee, 2005).

From a general perspective, in-store displays extend the number of potential touch points between a product or brand and the shopper. Therefore, marketers of FMCG commonly place displays in a secondary in-store location. Apart from triggering spontaneous occasion-related purchases, usually special offers or new products are highlighted in a display (Horstmann, 2017). Used as an external stimulus, the display's communicative impact is supposed to draw more attention to the promoted product, emotionalize shoppers and, as a consequence, trigger any kind of impulse purchases (e.g. Bellini et al., 2017; Eisend, 2014; Inman et al., 2009). The effect is even higher as a shopper is unexperienced with a particular brand (Zenetti and Klapper, 2016). However, displays visually need to pop out as their brightness levels contrast more with those of the retail environment to be most effective (Reynolds-McInay et al., 2017). Furthermore, promoted products should be listed in store flyers to increase promotion efficacy. Apart from highlighting discounted retail prices, store flyers often offer an added value to shoppers as they provide recipes or further information on products and remind them of forthcoming occasions.

5. Approach of research and hypotheses

Valentine's Day has become a high-relevant cultural and commercial celebration in many regions around the world on February 14th each year. It is celebrated in more countries than other gift-giving occasions and represents the traditional point of time for declarations of love or adoration expressed through a ritual of giving and receiving gifts (Wooten

2000). Horstmann (2018) recently showed that Christmas and Easter progressively become relevant for shoppers. For instance, sales volume of chocolate starts to increase a couple of weeks before both occasions – up to 2.5 times above the year’s average sales volume. As the occasion is gone, sales volume rapidly decreases below year’s average. Even though, when Valentine’s Day does become relevant for shoppers is still unclear. Therefore, the first research questions will deal with this point.

Research question 1: When does Valentine’s Day become relevant for shoppers?

The exchange of gifts has a strong symbolic meaning for numerous couples. Among product categories, sweets are assumed to be a suitable Valentine’s Day gift for a beloved person. However, which features must be fulfilled that a specific product will be contemplated to be purchased and what economic effects could be expected as a product fulfills shoppers’ needs? Hence, both questions will be looked at, too.

Research question 2: Which features must be fulfilled that shoppers will contemplate a specific product to purchase the product as Valentine’s Day gift?

Research question 3: What economic effects could be expected by marketers as a product fulfills shoppers’ needs?

To expand the number of potential in-store touch points between a product or brand and shoppers, manufacturers of branded products commonly place displays in the stores. Previous research has proved that displays typically trigger any type of impulse purchase in favor of the promoted product. In this context, many manufacturers address specific occasions like Valentine’s Day in-store, thus glorifying their products which suite the occasion (e.g. fine chocolates as a Valentine’s Day gift for a beloved person). This finally leads to following two research questions:

Research question 4: Which role is assigned to in-store displays and its design from shopper’s point of view?

Research question 5: What economic effects could be expected by marketers as a product is glorified in an in-store display?

6. Methods

To answer formulated research questions, a store test were conducted on Valentine’s Day in 2017. Special interest was given to selected chocolate products which were suited to be a Valentine’s Day gift. Fig. 1 provides an overview of the observed products, gives some product information, and illustrates the displays considered in the store test.

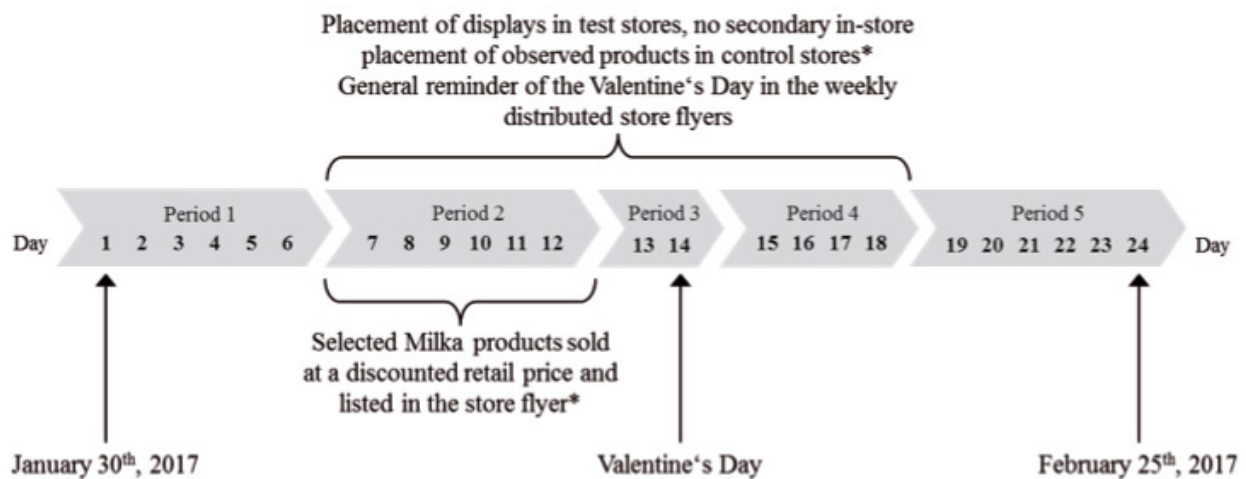
Figure 1: Overview on the products observed as part of the Valentine’s Day store test and used stimuli



Notes: * Recommended retail price, ** Discounted retail price; Product information printed in italic denote products which are observed although those are unsuited to be a Valentine’s Day gift; Illustrated products and displays were photographed at the POS and postprocessed by the authors, brand and design rights on the products as well as displays are owned by its respective manufacturer.

The store test was supported by an independent retailer belonging to Germany's largest grocery chain. Six of the retailer's stores were considered in the store test. In three stores, displays as shown in fig. 1 were placed close to the category of sweets along a well-frequented aisle (test stores). In the other stores, no secondary in-store placement of observed products was realized (control stores). All stores exhibited comparable characteristics. Store test ran from January 30th to February 25th, 2017 and was split into five periods. Fig. 2 illustrates the sequence of the store test. Excluding manipulations which are mentioned in the figure, no marketing activities were carried out concerning observed products. Promotion activities of competing products were carefully recorded in order to take them, if necessary, into consideration in evaluation procedure.

Figure 2: Overview on the sequence of the store test



Notes: * see Fig. 1 for products which were sold at a discounted retail price, listed in the store flyer, or placed in a display; Excluding mentioned manipulations, no marketing activities were carried out concerning observed products across all stores; Stores were open six days per week from Monday to Saturday.

Quantitative calculations were based on daily sales of observed products per 1,000 shoppers of sweets. Treatment-driven additional sales were computed using difference-in-differences estimators. To check whether the differences in the sales between two periods were significant, several post hoc analyses were run. Furthermore, an ANCOVA was computed using SPSS 22. The model included three factors:

- Valentine's Day (period 3 vs. other periods)
- Display placement (display placed vs. no display placed at the POS)
- Product (product 1 vs. product 2 vs. product 3 etc.)

The retail price of observed products was considered as a covariate. In addition to the store test, a supplementary in-store survey was carried out to learn more about shoppers' motives whether to purchase or not to purchase a particular brand or product. Moreover, shoppers were asked to evaluate their attitude toward the brand (AB), toward the display (AD) and the display's Valentine's Day fit. AB was measured as suggested by Goodstein (1993). AD was measured following Horstmann (2017). To keep duration of interviews as short as possible, the scale was modified as each dimension of the AD construct were represented by the single-item, initially pre-selected based on expert judgment in Horstmann's scale development procedure. Measurement of the display's Valentine's Day fit followed Becker-Olson (2003). The survey took place during periods 2, 3, and 4 when the displays were placed in-store. To prevent affecting shoppers' in-store behavior, interviewers avoided to be noticed and shoppers were addressed to become a respondent not before they left the display behind. Finally, 200 shoppers voluntarily participated in the survey and were not rewarded. The analysis followed Mayring's (2014) process of content analysis.

Furthermore, authors analyzed the average sales volume of observed products per day across 960 stores. All stores belonged to the same regional division of the grocery chain as the retailer who supported the store test. The stores were located in western Germany and equal each other so that the same products were listed and sold at the same price. Moreover, store flyers highlighted almost the same products at a point of time and price promotions were carried out across all stores.

7. Findings

7.1. Results based on sales data analyses

A clear tendency that sales are likely to increase on days before and on February 14th across all stores was detected. However, due to spaces restrictions we dispense with a discussion of the sales trend of every product. Instead, we look at the results on a summarized level. Across test stores, sales volume of products which were in addition to their permanent shelf placement promoted in a display raised about 562 percent from period 1 to period 3. Across control stores, sales volume of the same products lifted up about 86 percent only. Shedding light to products which were not placed in a display, neither in test nor control stores, leads to another picture: Across test stores, sales volume raised about 461 percent while it lifted up about 736 percent from period 1 to period 3 across control stores. Hence, displays catching shoppers' attention influence their product and brand choice behavior. As products placed in displays across test stores were not specifically promoted across control stores, increase of sales volume is inferior to the other products.

Moreover, results show that sales volume did not exclusively rose on Valentine's Day. Apart from effects on sales volume arising from displays, a significant sales uplift was detected as a result of the discounted retail price of Say it with Milka pralines in period 2. Based on average sales volume across all stores in period 1, the price promotion indicated a sales increase of 883 percent. The additional uplift which could be realized resulting from the displays amounted to 190 percent points. Hence, findings provide evidence that both display and price promotion separately stimulate sales volume. However, combining promotional activities is highly encouraged as the sales increase is even higher.

To learn more about the size of single main and interaction effects among observed variables, an ANCOVA was computed. R^2 amounted to .576. A substantial influence on sales volume was assigned to the specific products ($F(15, 2039) = 78.979, p < .01$) and the product's price ($F(1, 2039) = 1,131.217, p < .01$). Partial eta2 amounted to .367 respectively .357. Main effects of whether a display were placed ($F(1, 2039) = 92.920, p < .01$; eta2 = .044) and Valentine's Day ($F(1, 2039) = 66.511, p < .01$; eta2 = .032) was quite low. However, both factors receive enhanced relevance as a result of their interaction with a specific product (Display x Product: $F(7, 2039) = 17.654, p < .01$; eta2 = .057; Valentine's Day x Product: $F(15, 2039) = 12.438, p < .01$; eta2 = .084). The interaction effect between Display and Valentine's Day was not significant ($F(1, 2039) = 2,460, p > .10$; eta2 = .001). The interaction of all factors yielded the lowest effect ($F(7, 2039) = 9,234, p < .01$; eta2 = .031).

7.2. Results based on in-store survey

From the sample, 61.5 percent were female. On average, respondents were 45 years old. Among respondents, 16.0, 33.5 respectively 50.5 percent lived alone, with two, or with at least 3 persons in the household. 64.5 percent of respondents were the main grocery shopper. Across periods, interviewed shoppers mentioned the display as driving factor to purchase one of the observed products. More specifically, 70 percent of shoppers who purchased one of the products in period 2 named the display as key trigger. In period 3, share even rose up to 93 percent. In period 4, finally, all participants corresponded with this point. Further important drivers for purchasing a product were its message on the packaging, its packaging design or simply the product's taste. However, the order of shoppers' motives' priority differed across periods. In period 2, product-specific motives of Say it with Milka pralines need to be highlighted: According to 66 percent of interviewed shoppers in this period, key motive to purchase one or even more products was the discounted retail price. The product's packaging design and the message on the packaging became dominant in period 3. Each respondent either name product design (51 percent) or product message (49 percent) as a predominant driver besides the display. Especially Merci Finest Selection Great Variety benefited from its packaging which contained tender messages such as "Merci for your love" or "Merci for your smile", thus highlighting that a direct link to Valentine's Day was required. In addition to Merci Finest Selection Great Variety with its tender messages, I love Milka pralines packed in a large heart-shaped gift benefited from its appealing design. Consequently, both products were well suited to meet shoppers' needs concerning Valentine's Day, although both products were sold at recommended retail price of 2.99 respectively 4.79 Euro.

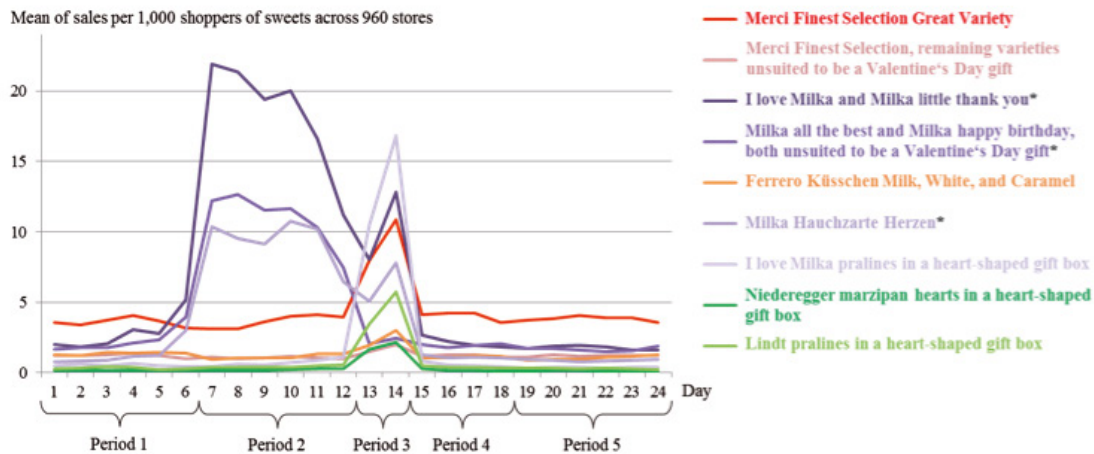
Ferrero Küsschen did not address Valentine's Day well due to its message "Give a Küsschen to your friend". Hence, the product was not shoppers' first choice. Even though, Ferrero Küsschen's display received the best evaluation due to its Valentine's Day fit which was significant from other displays. The banner of the Merci display and the header card of the Milka display reminding shoppers of Valentine's Day were clearly defeated by Ferrero Küsschen's display which benefited from its attention attracting backboard, shaped like a huge heart inviting shoppers to "give gifts with love". Concerning AD, the Milka display achieved the best evaluation across almost all construct's dimensions. Moreover, Milka reached a significantly better evaluation regarding AB than Merci and Ferrero Küsschen. Anyway, a link between a display's evaluation and its Valentine's Day-driven sales performance could not be detected.

In line with the peaks on sales volume, the in-store survey confirmed that Valentine's Day became relevant for most shoppers not until the day before. It became the predominant factor in period 3 as 80 percent of interviewed shoppers mentioned Valentine's Day as key driver. In period 2, only 25 percent explicitly named Valentine's Day, but primary in combination with the discounted retail price of Say it with Milka pralines. Instead, most respondents purchased a product as a small gift, e.g. for the doctor and his or her receptionist, an additional birthday gift, to say thank you to helpful neighbors and friends, or they purchased even more to have it in reserve. Furthermore, respondents tended not to make a specific product choice in advance. They rather chose Valentine's Day gifts in-store. For instance, 93 percent of the shoppers stated that they spontaneously purchase a chocolate confection. Only 7 percent chose a specific product before entering the store.

7.3. Validation of the findings

For validation purposes, average sales volume of observed products per day across 960 stores was analyzed. Results indicate that sales volume of almost all observed products which were suited to be a Valentine's Day gift significantly increased in period 3 compared to period 1. The largest uplift was delivered by I love Milka pralines in a heart-shaped gift box. Merci Finest Selection Great Variety and I love Milka / Milka little thank you indicated a sufficient sales increase in period 3 compared to average sales volume of these products in period 1 as well. If sales uplift was not significant, nevertheless, a clear tendency of sales rising on days before as well as on Valentine's Day could be identified. Based on average sales volume of all observed products, sales increased about 389 percent. Furthermore, it has to be stressed that Merci Finest Selection Great Variety seems to be the most suitable product – probably not at least because of the brand's name meaning – to give little pleasure to someone as average sales volume is above sales volume of all other products (cf. fig. 3).

Figure 3: Daily Sales of the observed products per 1,000 shoppers of sweets across all stores of the grocery chain's regional division



Notes: * Products that were sold at a discounted retail price in period 2; Considered stores were located in western Germany and belong to the same regional division of the grocery chain as the retailer who supported the Valentine's Day store test; Even though general promotion activities (as marked by *) were simultaneously carried out across all stores, store-individual promotion activities, e.g. individual display placements, could not be controlled.

As Say it with Milka pralines, excluding I love Milka pralines in a heart-shaped gift box, were sold at discounted retail price, moreover, a significant uplift of sales volume was detected in period 2. Hence, found effects concerning observed products across all 960 stores corresponded with findings from the store test. However, information on the question whether a display was additionally placed in-store is not available.

8. Discussion, conclusion, and managerial implications

With respect to research question 1, findings provide evidence that the whole purchasing process of Valentine's Day gifts is quite short-dated. Majority of purchases represent last-minute decisions. Although Say it with Milka pralines could have been purchased as a gift for a shopper's partner at a discounted price, only a quarter of shoppers had explicitly outlined Valentine's Day. Apart from underlining Mukherjee's et al. (2017) finding that discounted products were less purchased future-oriented, there is no necessity to implement marketing activities weeks before a specific occasion. Widely celebrated holidays like Christmas or Easter are few exceptions which can be utilized several weeks before the actual event as Horstmann (2018) showed. But why do shoppers purchase their Valentine's Day gifts just in time?

Some gift selection processes tend to take longer. According to Wooten (2000), gift-giving is often paired with anxieties on the part of the gift-giving person as expectations of the recipient should be met. To reduce risk of dashing expectations, lots of time is spent in gift selection processes. However, Valentine's Day gifts are purchased just in time which might be explained by the fact that many humans perceive Valentine's Day as a tiresome obligation – and things perceived this way are often done last minute. In this context, obligation motive appeared to be most prevalent and forces many participants to participate. In particular, 88 percent of men and 75 percent of women in a relationship purchase a little Valentine's Day gift for their partner, even though anti-consumption attitudes exist (Close and Zinkhan 2009).

Even though Valentine's Day promptly becomes relevant and is perceived as an annoying obligation by many shoppers, it induces a significant uplift of sales. On average, sales volume increased about 389 percent. Among all products observed as part of the store test, the largest sales uplift was induced by I love Milka pralines in a heart-shaped gift box. Following participants of the in-store survey, the product predominantly highlighted itself with its packaging, shaped like a heart. Among products placed in displays, Merci Finest Selection Great Variety delivered the best sales performance on Valentine's Day and the day before as it benefited from tender messages on the packaging. Consequently, marketers need to focus on that a product and its packaging fit to Valentine's Day to get the most out of shoppers, thus answering research questions 2 and 3. Whereas a product's packaging design has priority for shoppers, its retail price does not play a decisive role in the process of purchasing a Valentine's Day gift. According to Mauss (1969), gifts had always been used to convey wealth, character, and seriousness some decades earlier – many shoppers do not care about their personal budget as they aim to express their devotion towards a beloved person.

With respect to research questions 4 and 5, findings provide evidence that the occasion-driven increase of sales volume can be significantly enhanced as a display is placed at the POS. In particular, sales uplift of products specifically promoted in a display across test stores was 476 percent points above the sales uplift of the same products across control stores. Hence, displays must be seen as an essential touch point to draw attention to products and brands promoted in displays. However, displays inherently deliver a considerable uplift of sales volume. An interaction effect on the sales volume between whether a display was placed and the specific occasion was not found. Moreover, display design and its occasion fit had no significant effect on sales performance although it fitted the occasion very well. Findings regarding Ferrero Küsschen can be served as a striking example: While the display with its backboard shaped like a huge heart inviting shoppers to "give gifts with love" archived the best evaluation concerning occasion fit, the product was less suitable as a Valentine's Day gift due to its packaging and message. The product is given to a beloved person – not the display. Hence, top priority has to be given to a product's packaging and message as the occasion-driven sales volume should be significantly enhanced. Nevertheless, it is highly encouraged that manufacturers of branded products supply attention attracting displays which address Valentine's Day to retailers to benefit from the fact that the placement of a display inherently enhances sales volume of glorified products.

In this context, findings arising from the store test additionally indicate that the placement of an in-store display induce a shift of sales volume from products which were not promoted in a display in favor of products which were specifically highlighted at the POS. Across control stores, products which were not glorified in displays across test stores are significantly superior. Across test stores, on the contrary, those products are inferior to their alternatives which were placed in displays, thus once more stressing the relevance of in-store displays to influence shoppers' purchase decision in favor of the promoted product or brand in a display.

9. Limitations and directions of further research

Although the paper provides valuable insights, it is not free from limitations. One limitation arises from the store test setting. Store tests allow researchers to gain an in-depth knowledge of real life phenomena. Even though most relevant factors which could negatively affect the store test results were controlled, there were still a huge number of factors which could hardly be controlled or were beyond the control of researchers. Nevertheless, findings deliver a clear indication with respect to Valentine's Day as a high-relevant occasion for many shoppers and their occasion-driven purchase behavior.

Furthermore, some future research potentials should be stressed: Firstly, research was targeted on a high-relevant

occasion belonging to the group of holidays and seasonal feasts. An equal picture will probably be received with respect to further occasions which are widely celebrated. However, which effects could arise from less meaningful occasions or individual seasonal as well as year-around occasions? Hence, relevant occasions need to be identified and the right point of time to promote an individual occasion in-store needs to be scheduled. As a huge number of further occasions are imaginable, the topic entails nearly unlimited potential to be investigated as part of future studies.

Secondly, it is important that products and its packaging fit to a specific occasion. Consequently, a scale to pre-evaluate the fit of a product and its packaging toward a specific occasion might also be fruitful as it allows manufacturers to alter product and packaging (per se and against other products) before its launch if poor ratings were found, thus reducing the risk that a product will not sufficiently meet target shoppers' expectations.

Thirdly, most promotions focus on a single product or brand belonging to a specific product category. Prior studies indicated that merging complementary products in cross-product displays is more beneficial than selling products separated from each other. Hence, creating an extraordinary special display merging products and brands across categories belonging to a specific occasion may offer convenience to shoppers and subsequently boost sales volume. With respect to Valentine's Day, combining fine chocolates boxed in a heart-shaped packaging containing tender messages and diverse bouquets of roses with a set of greeting cards could stimulate cross-selling potentials. Therefore, possible effects arising from occasion-directed special displays should also be subject of future research efforts.

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