

PERCEIVED PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES, CONSUMER MOTIVATION AND PRODUCT POSITIONING DECISIONS

By

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When a certain perceived product attribute is suggested as a brand's most advantageous product positioning choice, the product manager concerned invariably asks: "Is this really the attribute or claim that will make consumers buy my brand?" The question directs attention to the often unanswered issue of the motivational force in perceived product attributes.

Current approaches to product positioning based on varying forms of attribute evaluation do not tackle this issue explicitly but instead tend to assume that the "best" attribute identified in the evaluation technique must also be the most motivating. The idea of determining product positioning by identifying the "most important" product attribute or the attribute most predictive of purchase intention (12) assumed that the most important attribute perceived or the one most predictive of purchase intention is the most motivating attribute to the consumer. The same assumption is found in Myers and Alpert's (10) recommendation to use the "determinant buying attitude", a measure of an attribute's importance combined with how differentiating it is of existing brands. The Shocker and Srinivasan (13) procedure for identifying "a new product idea" by multivariate analysis of the relation between product attribute ratings and preference measures was also based on the same assumption. This is also true with Myers' (10) suggestion to use the most expected and most unsatisfied attribute measured through his "benefit structure analysis." Green's (3) suggestion to use multi-dimensional scaling of perceived similarities between brands or of preference data, and Johnson's (8) idea of using multiple regression to establish the "importance" of attributes were similarly based on the premise mentioned earlier.

Experienced product managers have questioned the validity of the assumption. The most important attribute, for example, may not be the most motivating product claim to consumers. Neither are the attributes the most productive of purchase intention, the most differentiating attributes, the most-expected-most-unsatisfied attributes, and so on.

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A needed approach is to explicitly build into the existing tribute evaluation procedures a measurement of the motivational intent of perceived product attributes. To do this, it is necessary to construct a model or theory of consumer perceived product attribute motivation as a basis for measurement. This paper will present such a model and empirically test its validity.

2 Model

In several different focus group discussions conducted by the author, the following revealing reasons were given by consumers:

"Even if taste is the most important coffee attribute, that's not what I look for in my coffee. After all, my brand has already got the taste of coffee."

"Sweetness? Sure that's important but only if one of these candies is not. Otherwise, who cares? Candies are supposed to be sweet to start with."

"You know, for me it's those little things that count. There's this bank I can't leave because it has always sent me a card on my birthday. Security? Stability? Aren't all banks that? Otherwise, the Central Bank won't let them operate."

The concept conveyed has strong intuitive appeal. It says very simply the following:

1. There are product attributes perceived to be basic minimum requirements and accordingly function as "dissatisfiers". This means that when they are not around or when the product is deficient in them, they are a source of dissatisfaction or demotivation. However, when they are present, they are taken for granted and are not motivators or sources of satisfaction.
2. On the other hand, there are product attributes perceived to be more than the basic minimum and function as a "satisfier". When they are around or when the product is particularly endowed or rich in them, they are a source of satisfaction or motivation. However, they are a matter of indifference when they are not expected to be around.

From these focus group discussion quotations, it is clear that "taste," "sweetness" and "security/stability" are dissatisfier attributes for coffee, candies, and banks, respectively, while gestures of "thoughtfulness" are a satisfier bank attribute.

The foregoing consumer motivation theory is adapted from Herzberg's (5) popular dual-factor theory of job motivation. The

theory has received both extensive support and severe criticisms (6). When applied to consumer behavior, its basic concepts remain strongly stimulating and useful. The study described in the succeeding sections will demonstrate this.

Research Hypothesis

To operationalize the satisfier/dissatisfier product attribute propositions, it is useful to think of consumers as being presented by a set of product attributes and for each of these attributes they will be asked the following questions:

1. "Suppose you find your brand is deficient in the attribute, how would you feel? Would you feel disappointed or would it not really matter that much?"
2. "Now, suppose you find out that your brand is superior in terms of this attribute, how would you feel? Would you feel pleased and happy or would you feel this is what it was supposed to do or to be anyway?"

A dissatisfier product attribute and satisfier attribute may now be more specifically defined in terms of the answers of consumers to these questions.

A product attribute is a dissatisfier if:

1. Consumers feel more disappointed than indifferent when they find their brand to be short of or deficient in the attribute; and
2. Consumers feel more that their brand was supposed to have the attribute anyway than feel pleased when they find their brand to be superior in terms of the attribute.

On the other hand, a product attribute is a satisfier if:

1. Consumers feel more pleased and happy than feel that their brand was supposed to have the attribute anyway when they find their brand to be superior on the attribute; and
2. Consumers feel more that it does not matter than feel disappointed when they find their brand to be short of or deficient in the attribute.

These predictions constitute the research hypothesis being tested in this study.

Research Method

Data for this study were obtained from a sample of 352 males and females recruited from different sections of Greater Manila. Recruitment and interviewing of respondents were undertaken by senior undergraduate students as part of the course requirement in an

ctive on consumer behaviour research that the author taught at De Salle University, Manila. Table 1 presents a demographic and one profile of the study sample.

TABLE 1

Description of the Study Sample

	352
Base	%
Age: Below 15 years	2
15 — 20 years	20
21 — 29 years	38
30 — 39 years	26
40 years and above	14
Sex: Male	48
Female	52
Education:	
High School and less	9
College	78
Postgraduate	13
Marital Status: Single	49
Married	51
Monthly Family Income:	
P1,000 and below	7
1,001 — P3,000	28
3,001 — P5,000	18
Above P5,000	47

The data obtained from the respondents who were first screened r product category usage consist of answers to two sets of estions for each of 10 product attributes of their brand of ampo. The salient product attributes were identified through two us group discussions conducted for the purpose and by examining oduct packages of shampoo brands on supermarket shelves, and ntent-analyzing shampoo ads. The two sets of questions asked ere:

Set 1:

I have here a list of attributes of a shampoo which I will read to you. Please tell me how you would feel if you find out your brand is DEFICIENT in a given attribute.

As an example, let us take the attribute "removes dandruff." SUPPOSE you found out that your brand of shampoo was DEFICIENT in removing dandruff, would you be disappointed OR would this not really matter that much?

<u>NOT Really Matter that Much</u>	<u>Feel Disappointed</u>	<u>Attributes</u>
()	()	Easily lathers
()	()	Makes hair shiny
()	()	Makes hair manageable
()	()	Cleans hair
()	()	Removes dandruff
()	()	Does not cause split ends
()	()	Gives hair a pleasant smell
()	()	Does not cause dandruff
()	()	Makes hair soft
()	()	Does not hurt the eyes

Set 2:

Let us look again at the shampoo attributes by which you just evaluated your brand. This time, please tell me how you would feel if you find out your brand is SUPERIOR on a given attribute.

Example: Take again the attribute "removes dandruff." SUPPOSE you found out that your brand of shampoo was SUPERIOR in removing dandruff, would you feel pleased and happy OR would you feel this was what it was supposed to do or to be in the first place?

<u>Supposed to be/do this anyway</u>	<u>Feel pleased and happy</u>	<u>Attributes</u>
()	()	Easily lathers
()	()	Makes hair shiny
()	()	Makes hair manageable
()	()	Cleans hair
()	()	Removes dandruff
()	()	Does not cause split ends
()	()	Gives hair a pleasant smell
()	()	Does not cause dandruff
()	()	Makes hair soft
()	()	Does not hurt the eyes

Results and Discussion

The responses of the total sample distributed between the alternative answers are shown in Table 2a. Table 2b presents the distribution of responses which classifies each of the product attributes on the dissatisfier or satisfier categories. The test consisted in comparing the results with the two conditions for designating a given product attribute as a dissatisfier or as a satisfier. These test conditions were derived from the research hypothesis.

The two conditions must be both satisfied for a given attribute to be considered as either a satisfier or a dissatisfier. Satisfaction of only one condition qualifies the attribute into something else. The two conditions applied in this study are:

a dissatisfier:

Condition I: There should be more respondents who feel disappointed than those who feel it does not matter if their brand is deficient in the attribute in question.

Condition II: There should be more respondents who feel their brand was supposed to be so than those who feel pleased if their brand is superior in the attribute in question.

a satisfier:

Condition I: There should be more respondents who feel pleased than those who feel their brand was supposed to be so if the brand is superior in the attribute in question.

Condition II: There should be more respondents who feel it does not matter than those who feel disappointed if their brand is deficient in the attribute in question.

It may be noted that the reverse of condition I for a dissatisfier constitutes Condition II for a satisfier. Similarly, Condition I for a satisfier is Condition II in the transposed form for a dissatisfier. This relationship makes it convenient to analyze by just one of the conditions for each classification as was done and presented in Table

As can be seen in Table 2b, not satisfying the stated condition is taken to mean that the attribute was the opposite of what it would have been if the condition were satisfied. This is the case with the attribute "does not hurt the eyes." While there were directionally more respondents (51 per cent) who said they would feel dis-

TABLE 2a

Summary of Responses from the Total Sample

Attributes	If Brand is Deficient in Attribute:		If Brand is Superior in Attribute	
	% Who Will Feel Disappointed	% Who will Feel It Does Not Matter	% Who will Feel Pleased/Happy	% Who will Feel It was Supposed To Be
1. Easily lathers	65	35	48*	52*
2. Makes hair shiny	61	39	64	36
3. Makes hair manageable	78	22	62	38
4. Cleans hair	81	19	46*	54*
5. Removes dandruff	66	34	61	39
6. Does not cause split ends	66	34	57	43
7. Gives hair a pleasant smell	63	37	58	42
8. Does not cause dandruff	72	28	55	45
9. Makes hair soft	71	29	60	40
10. Does not hurt eyes	51*	49*	61	39

*Not significant; all others significant at $p < .05$.

Condition I for D

Condition I for S

Conditions ID and IS

Attributes	Condition I for D		Condition I for S		Dissatisfier or Satisfier
	% Disappointed More than % Feel Not Matter	Dissatisfier or Satisfier	% Happy More than % Feel Supposed To Be	Dissatisfier or Satisfier	
1. Easily lathers	True	D	False	D	D
2. Makes hair shiny	True	D	True	S	-
3. Makes hair manageable	True	D	True	S	-
4. Cleans hair	True	D	False	D	D
5. Removes dandruff	True	D	True	S	-
6. Does not cause split ends	True	D	True	S	-
7. Gives hair a pleasant smell	True	D	True	S	-
8. Does not cause dandruff	True	D	True	S	-
9. Makes hair soft	True	D	True	S	-
10. Does not hurt eyes	False	S	True	S	S

Note: D means dissatisfier; S means satisfier.

appointed if their brand turned out to be poor in this attribute than those who said the thing really did not matter, the difference was not statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level (Table 2a). In other words, there could have been just as many respondents who could have said one or the other of the two responses. Condition I for a dissatisfier is therefore not met and Table 2b records this, together with the conclusion that if it is not a dissatisfier on this condition, it must be a satisfier. If one now looks at Condition II for a satisfier, the latter conclusion is clearly seen to be false. In other words, the attribute is not, strictly speaking, a satisfier. But in terms of Condition I for a satisfier, it indeed qualifies as one.

The same kind of analytical dilemma appears when the attributes "easily lathers" and "cleans hair" are considered as dissatisfiers. While each met very substantially Condition I for a dissatisfier, each satisfied only directionally Condition II (see Table 2a). There were more respondents who said that if their brand were superior in lathering easily and in cleaning hair they would feel that in the first place these were what their brand was supposed to do than those who said they would be pleased (52 and 54 per cent more respectively). However, these differences were not statistically significant.

If one were to invoke one's own experiences with shampoos and what one hears from and sees in others, it does seem intuitively appealing and reasonable to look at the attributes "easily lathers" and "cleans hair" as dissatisfier attributes. They are what shampoos are supposed to do; so they are not strong motivators.

This appeal to "face validity," while not constituting a persuasive case, calls for a modification of the theory used in this study. Specifically, it suggests that Condition II for a dissatisfier and for a satisfier should probably be made less stringent. Thus,

For a dissatisfier:

Condition I: There should be more respondents who feel disappointed than those who feel it does not matter if their brand is deficient in the attribute considered.

Condition II: There should be at least as many respondents who feel their brand was supposed to have the attribute in question as those who feel pleased if their brand is superior in terms of that attribute.

For a satisfier:

Condition I: There should be more respondents who feel pleased than those who feel their brand was supposed to be

so if their brand is superior in the attribute in question.

Condition II: There should be at least as many respondents who feel it does not matter as those who feel disappointed if their brand is deficient in the attribute being analyzed.

Under this set of conditions, it may be concluded, as was done in le 2b, that:

1. The attributes "easily lathers" and "cleans hair" are dissatisfier attributes; and
2. The attribute "does not hurt the eyes" is a satisfier attribute.

This result means that a shampoo brand promising that it will y lather or it will clean hair will not motivate the target market. is because the market believes these are what they are buying a npool for at the minimum. As selling banners they can only otivate. This means that if the brand turns out to be in fact short asy lathering or on hair cleaning, it will dissatisfy users.

Moreover, a shampoo brand that makes no claim at "not hurting eyes" will not be perceived to be at a disadvantage. To the et, it is not a basic requirement for a shampoo not to hurt the . But a brand that makes this attribute as its selling point will vate the market more than any other shampoo. "Does not hurt eyes," is a satisfier attribute and the perception of the market of and making a strong claim on this attribute may be cited as an ple. Its growing share in the shampoo market seems to be ainable (at least in part) by the satisfier character of this ute.

ications

Two sets of implications are worth discussing. One is on product iving and the other is the theoretical implications.

ications for Product Positioning Decisions

The product positioning decision of a product or brand manager ically described as a series of decision stages. There are icated descriptions as in Albers and Brockhoff (1), Zufryden and Morgan and Purnell (9). There are less complicated ones rban's (14), and simpler ones such as Myers' (10) and Haley's Whatever the stages may be, they invariably end up with the where the "optimal" product concept is selected from among l alternative concepts (stated in terms of product attributes) as and's "optimal" product positioning.

What is "optimal" is generally interpreted to mean what is most important to the target consumer. And, what is important is determined by either of two basic ways:

1. directly, as in the direct questioning of consumers on how important to them are certain product attributes;
2. indirectly or by analysis, as when an attribute rating is related to brand preference, brand attitude or purchase intention measures to determine the most "determinant" product attribute.

This study says that the decision stages for product positioning should not end at the stage just described. There is one more important stage to consider which is the phase for a satisfier/dissatisfier evaluation of the alternative product attributes.

The present study suggests that if the satisfier/dissatisfier evaluation stage is not undertaken, the product manager runs the risk of choosing a product positioning attribute that may not motivate the consumer even though it may be a very important attribute to the same consumer. This is because the chosen attribute may be a dissatisfier, hence, it cannot be a source of purchase or choice motivation.

Implications for Consumer Behavior Theory. In the latter half of the 1960s, theory building in marketing reached a historic turn with the successive appearances of the scientific and comprehensive consumer behavior models of Nicosia (11), Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (2), and Howard and Sheth (7). These theories tackled among others the link between attitude and motivation. For example, Nicosia (11, pp. 216-218) suggested that the transformation of an attitude into a motivation "implies that a consumer is nearing a decision to buy so that the number of choices available to him is gradually being reduced via the search and evaluation process into an even smaller number of choices visible to him." The need of this conceptualization, according to Nicosia, is to specify and understand the mechanism of "transformation" or the mechanism of "search and evaluation."

The present study suggests one such mechanism. Specifically, it conceptualizes the consumer as transforming his attitude towards a brand (i.e., his liking or favorable rating of the brand along a number of product attributes) into a motivation for that brand by first considering his satisfier/dissatisfier evaluations of the product attributes on which his brand attitude is based and then looking at

performance of the brand in terms of the satisfier attribute/s. This is the "search and evaluation processes" the consumer goes into when making his final brand choice. The brand he perceives as performing most strongly in terms of the satisfier attribute will be his preferred brand and those that, (1) are poor performers on the satisfier attribute, and/or (2) positioned only on the dissatisfier attributes will be selected.

Admittedly, the testing of the satisfier/dissatisfier attribute model developed in this study has its limitations. This should never detract from its potential theoretical contribution. The need for further testing of the model in other and more product categories, consumers, settings and time periods.

The present study suggests that if the satisfier/dissatisfier evaluation stage is not undertaken, the product manager runs the risk of choosing a product positioning attribute that may not be the consumer even though it may be a very important attribute. The same consumer. This is because the chosen attribute may be a satisfier attribute, it cannot be a source of purchase or choice. The present study suggests that if the satisfier/dissatisfier evaluation stage is not undertaken, the product manager runs the risk of choosing a product positioning attribute that may not be the consumer even though it may be a very important attribute. The same consumer. This is because the chosen attribute may be a satisfier attribute, it cannot be a source of purchase or choice. The present study suggests that if the satisfier/dissatisfier evaluation stage is not undertaken, the product manager runs the risk of choosing a product positioning attribute that may not be the consumer even though it may be a very important attribute. The same consumer. This is because the chosen attribute may be a satisfier attribute, it cannot be a source of purchase or choice.

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