The Effect of Primary and Secondary Product Attributes on Customer Satisfaction

Inge Brechan, Institute of Transport Economics

The distinction between primary (core) and secondary product attributes is well recognized. However, the different impact of primary and secondary attributes on customer satisfaction has received little attention. We tested two hypotheses regarding the impact of primary and secondary attributes on customer satisfaction, based on a survey of attribute quality and customer satisfaction with local public transport. We propose that primary attributes have a greater impact on customer satisfaction compared to secondary attributes. We also propose that the relationship between secondary attribute quality and customer satisfaction is moderated by primary attribute quality. Both hypotheses were supported by the results.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/13686/eacr/vol7/E-07

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The Effect of Primary and Secondary Product Attributes on Customer Satisfaction
Inge Brechan, Institute of Transport Economics, Norway

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The distinction between primary (core) and secondary product attributes is well recognized in product development (Kotler and Armstrong 2004), service marketing (Rust, Zahorik, and Keiningham 1996), and branding (Keller, 2003). However, the different impact of primary and secondary attributes on customer satisfaction has received little attention. Although, theories of relationship marketing (Butcher, Sparks, and O’Callaghan 2003) and attribute searchability (Mittal 2004) imply that secondary attributes, such as social regard and credentials, may sometimes be more important than core product benefits, we propose that primary attributes have a greater impact on customer satisfaction compared to secondary attributes. We also propose that the relationship between secondary attribute quality and customer satisfaction is moderated (i.e., increased) by primary attribute quality. We tested the two hypotheses regarding the impact of primary and secondary attributes on customer satisfaction, based on a survey of attribute quality and customer satisfaction with local public transport, and found support for both hypotheses.

The survey was conducted through phone interviews with a representative sample of the adult population (from 15 to 75 years of age) in the greater municipal area of Stavanger, Norway. In all 1038 (49.6 %) men and 1064 (50.4 %) women were interviewed during the period from November 2002 until January 2004. Of the total sample, 1834 (87.3 %) persons reported that they used local public transport more (i.e., daily or weekly: 26.6 %) or less (i.e., monthly or more seldom: 60.6 %) frequently. Participants answered questions related to quality of specific service attributes and overall customer satisfaction. The quality items were positive statements regarding specific service attributes, measured on five-point scales from “disagree completely” to “agree completely”. Overall customer satisfaction was measured on a five-point scale from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied”. A core service factor was constructed as the arithmetic mean of three items regarding routes, schedules, and value for money. Two secondary attribute factors, Hedonic aspects and Information quality, were constructed as the arithmetic mean of five (i.e., maintenance, cleanliness, driver friendliness, comfort, and security) and three (i.e., information about schedules, changes, and delays) items respectively. All factors were internally consistent (Chronbach’s alpha > .69).

The hypothesis regarding the difference in impact of primary and secondary attributes was tested by comparing binary correlation coefficients and through a multiple regression analysis. Correlation between primary attributes and customer satisfaction was significantly (p ≤ .01) larger than correlation between secondary attributes and customer satisfaction. The multiple regression analysis gave all significant (p ≤ .01) regression coefficients, were the effect of primary attribute quality on customer satisfaction was larger than the combined effect of the secondary attributes. The hypothesis regarding the moderating effect of primary attribute quality on the relationship between secondary attribute quality and customer satisfaction was tested by means of hierarchical regression. The interaction was significant (p ≤ .02) in both cases (core service x hedonic aspects and core service x information quality). Primary attribute quality increased the effect of secondary attribute quality on customer satisfaction.

Exploratory analyses of the data also indicated that the effect of secondary attribute quality on customer satisfaction is regressing, though the quadratic effects were only marginally significant (p ≤ .10). We found no such tendency in the relationship between primary attribute quality and customer satisfaction. We also found that secondary attribute quality had a significantly (p < .01) greater impact on customer satisfaction for frequent users of local public transport compared to non-frequent users. In contrast, the relationship between primary attribute quality and customer satisfaction was marginally (p = .09) smaller among frequent users compared to non-frequent users.

We conclude that primary attribute quality is more important than secondary attribute quality and discuss when secondary product attributes contribute to a larger extent to customer satisfaction. As implied by our second hypothesis, secondary attribute quality has a stronger impact on customer satisfaction when primary attribute quality is high, compared to when primary attribute quality is low. Further, the results of our exploratory non-linear analyses indicated that secondary attribute quality influences customer satisfaction more when secondary attribute quality is low, compared to when it is higher. Finally, the exploratory group comparison showed that secondary attribute quality contributes more to the satisfaction of frequent users than to that of non-frequent users. We discuss whether this last finding can be attributed to the fact that our secondary attributes can be characterized as experience attributes, whereas our primary attributes can be characterized as search attributes, following the distinction between search, experience, and credence attributes in theory of attribute searchability. We propose that product experience may increase the impact of quality on customer satisfaction, but not when attributes are evaluated by other means than through experience.

REFERENCES