

Experiential Segmentation

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In pharmaceutical marketing, product segmentation is done in a variety of ways. The most obvious is of course the doctors' specialty - Cardiovascular products for Cardiologists, Oncology products for the Oncologist etc. A variation on this is the nature of the doctor's practice - GP's having a predominantly pediatric practice for pediatric products, or the product segmentation could be on the basis of the socio-economic groups to which the doctor's patients belong. Yet another possibility is segmenting products on the basis of doctor classification of Regular, Frequent and Occasional prescribers.

An interesting new segmentation technique is "Experiential Segmentation" (ES) based on experiential needs, which has considerable possibilities of application to Pharma selling.

What are Experiential needs?

In ES, products are segmented on the basis of their satisfaction potential in terms of customers' experiential needs. Simply put, experiential needs are certain feelings people want to experience, such as, feeling loved, socially accepted or pleasure of giving a gift.

Experiential needs also include the desire to avoid such feeling as physical discomfort, social rejection, or the guilt of violating some social standard. In other words, experiential needs are not about what people *want to do*, but it is about how they *want to feel*.

Noted author and expert in marketing communications, David B. Wolfe says, "The first step in product segmentation analysis is identifying generic experiential aspiration or needs. Generic experiential needs are common to all consumers, or to all consumers within a defined category. One example of a generic experiential need common to all consumers within a segment is the powerful desire to project an idealized image of self to others."

In pharma selling an example could be the desire of doctors to be seen as 'knowledgeable' or 'successful'.

The Idealized –Self Drives Consumer Behaviour

All experiential needs may appear to be somewhat the same among people - for example, every normal person has a need to feel social acceptance - but how a common need is consciously experienced and fulfilled is unique to each of us. Partly this is because we bring images of idealized solutions to our needs into our behaviour. Everyone seeks ideal satisfaction of needs, emphasis generally being more on satisfaction of experiential rather than functional needs. David Ogilvy, the advertising guru, believed that "consumers buy products which project images of who they want to be, not who they are"

Relationship between a Product and Prescribers experiential desires

Every product has the power to contribute to or impact unfavorably a person's menu of experiential needs. However it must be understood that unlike a products functional attributes, which are inseparable from the product, there is no direct connection between a product and a prescribers' experiential desires. The prescribers' *mind* - not *product attributes* - is the medium that connects the product to experiential needs, although product design and marketing messages can induce the prescriber's minds to make such connections.

It must be understood that ES of a product does not ignore the functional attributes of a product. In beer taste test conducted on blindfolded college students, it was found that they could not distinguish between the different brands, even when their favourite was one of those tested. This clearly indicated that marketers literally influence a beer's taste through their ads, which influenced them to connect their experiential needs with the beer's functional attributes. The central link, researcher's realized was the consumer's identity, or more precisely, his idealized identity.

Identity represents the most compelling focus in life. It is the source of the will to live, reproduce and leave something behind to keep memories of us alive after we die. Identity is the basis of all survival motivations.