

MOTOR VEHICLE EVALUATIVE CRITERIA: USING UNMET EXPECTATIONS AS SIGNALS FOR DISSONANCE

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Abstract

This study assesses whether motor vehicle consumers base their purchases on functional or symbolic needs. It also evaluates motor vehicle buyer's level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and the extent to which they believe the purchased vehicle fulfils the evaluative criteria, in order to assess whether expectations have been met or not and hence, the potential for cognitive dissonance. Biographical correlates (race, marital status, age, education, occupation, income, gender) are evaluated and the influence of range of motor vehicle is also analysed. A sample of 200 brand new motor vehicle buyers was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique based on range of motor vehicle purchased, month of purchases, gender and age of the buyer. Only new motor vehicle buyers (within KwaZulu-Natal) who concluded their purchases in one major, reputable and leading motor vehicle manufacturing company and who owned the vehicle for a maximum period of seven months were considered, so as to avoid cognitive intrusion. The results indicate that consumer's expectations were not met in terms of price, economy and performance yet these were buyers' most highly rated evaluative criteria, thereby reflecting the potential for dissonance. Significant biographical correlates were noted in terms of race, age, occupation, income, gender and motor vehicle evaluative criteria. Whilst bottom and middle of the range motor vehicle consumers favour functional or utilitarian value, top of the range motor vehicle consumers aim to fulfil symbolic needs.

Keywords: Evaluative Criteria, Cognitive Dissonance, Functional Needs, Symbolic Needs, Motor Vehicle Purchases

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1 Introduction

The emergence and development of the marketing concept has diverted the focus from the product to the consumer. Marketing researchers have modified and applied a variety of behavioural science theories in order to better understand consumer decision-making and purchasing processes. Hence, much of the focus and research evidence concerned the decision-making process, with increasing attention being given to exploring the psychological consequences of buying decisions. More specifically, researchers are focusing on gaining more knowledge about consumers' reactions and behaviour once a decision is made. Marketing managers today are becoming keenly interested in how the new purchaser feels after buying, mainly because customer satisfaction after the purchase is a key factor in repeat purchase intentions, post-purchase attitudes and brand loyalty. One approach to understanding and predicting buyer behaviour is to analyse the various needs, motivations and goals underlying consumption patterns and habits. A key need underlying, and having a significant effect on the consumer's actions and decision-making is the need for cognitive consistency.

The consumer strives towards consistency within by establishing internal harmony or congruity amongst opinions, attitudes and values. When inconsistencies arise individuals try to rationalise them. But rationalisation and attempts to achieve consistency may fail. Thus, inconsistency may persist, thereby causing a psychological discomfort or dissonance. Dissonance, the existence of incongruent relations among cognitions arises when a person, after purchases, recognises the positive cognition of the rejected alternatives and the negative cognitions of the chosen alternatives.

1.1 The role of cognition

Fundamental to any understanding of a wide range of human behaviour is the study of the basic principles of human learning, memory and cognition. Cognitive processing has become the primary theoretical perspective for understanding and predicting human behaviour. Individuals engage in mental or cognitive activities throughout their daily lives and, rely on internal structures and processes for comprehending and recalling what was heard or seen. Cognition is the process of organising information in our minds to achieve some desired end state and refers also to the

way people acquire, store and use knowledge, that is, human mental processes.

The success of any business organisation is dependent upon the development of effective marketing strategies. Since marketing focuses on target markets, which are composed of people with certain patterns of behaviour, the realisation of the latter necessitates an analysis and understanding of the complex activities, both physical and mental, that consumers engage in. Hence, consumer analysis incorporates an evaluation of the four interrelated dimensions, namely, cognition, behaviour, environment and marketing strategies aimed at obtaining a profile on the target market. Whilst cognition refers to the psychological processes that lie internal to consumers, behaviour, the conative aspect, represents the overt actions that they perform (Brijball Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012; du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003). The stimuli external to consumers that influence their cognitions and behaviours are referred to as environmental influences. Marketing strategy depicts the processes by which marketing stimuli, for example, advertisements, price, products, stores, are created and located in the consumer environments. These stimuli, together with limited disposable income, force consumers to weigh the pros and cons of available alternatives in order to obtain maximum utility from scarce resources. Consequently, consumer behaviour can be analysed as a decision-making process whereby the former is viewed as rational, problem-solving behaviour (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003) and Rauch and Anderson, (2011) maintain that decision quality may be enhanced when guidelines are followed so that the outcome of the decision will be closest to the desired one. This process is not a single activity or step. Rather, consumers need to identify and evaluate choices, explore the results of particular actions, and analyse the consequences of their behaviour within a post-purchase time period. This is imperative since consumers do not just buy objects but solutions to problems.

1.2 The influence of internal and external variables on the consumer decision-making process

Consumer decision-making is influenced by numerous individual and environmental variables (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2006; Brijball Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012; du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013; Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014; Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006). The former encompasses variables that control internal thought processes whilst the latter refers to influences external to the consumer. An understanding of consumer behaviour and the decision-making process is thus, a critical element when designing managerial decisions to affect the frequency of exchanges in order to achieve marketing objectives. Such an analysis enables the marketer to know, serve and influence the consumers. It is therefore, logical to initially analyse

the interrelationship amongst the individual and environmental variables that impact on consumption behaviour, whilst focusing on the cognitive approach to consumer behaviour. The progression from the conceptual framework of consumer behaviour into the stages of consumer decision-making will emphasize the role of cognitive thinking.

The consumer is continuously making decisions regarding what products to purchase and this becomes increasingly needed when more than one choice or alternative exists and has the potential to satisfy the individual's needs. It is evident that consumer behaviour is triggered by needs and consumer decision-making is a cognitive process that directs needs by evaluating and selecting the option that will fulfil the need. The outcome of the consumer's decision will depend on numerous internal or individual and external or environmental factors. The former include needs, motives, personality, self-concept, perception, learning, attitudes, involvement, feelings and knowledge whilst external or environmental factors include culture and sub-culture, social influences and social class, reference groups, family, economic demand factors, business and market, household characteristics of the buyer and demographic factors (Koklič & Vida, 2009).

This study therefore assesses whether motor vehicle consumers base their purchases on functional or symbolic needs. It also evaluates motor vehicle buyer's level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and the extent to which they believe the purchased vehicle fulfils the evaluative criteria, in order to assess whether expectations have been met or not and hence, the potential for cognitive dissonance. Biographical correlates (race, marital status, age, education, occupation, income, gender) are evaluated and the influence of range of motor vehicle is also analysed. These aims will be analysed within the context of the consumer decision-making process which extends from problem recognition, search for alternative solutions, evaluation of alternatives, response/purchase, post-purchase use and re-evaluation of chosen alternative. Although chronologically stated and presented, the stages are fluid and rather intertwined especially with regards to the search and evaluation of alternatives which take place concurrently (Koklič & Vida, 2009; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014).

1.2.1 Problem recognition

A problem arises when the buyer recognises a difference between what he/she perceives as the current and the desired situation. The desired situation reinforces the gap and the need in the psychological field of the consumer and motivates him/her to act. When a consumer decides to fulfil the need and two or more alternatives exist the problem becomes more complex especially if the purchases involves a large capital outlay like the purchases of a motor vehicle which absorbs the buyer's economic means for the long term, thereby triggering a spectrum of mental

activities and attitudinal reactions. The problem or need may be functional or symbolic. Functional needs motivate the quest for items that resolve problems related to consumption, for example, wanting to purchase a car simply for the purpose of transportation. It relates to the ability of the product to perform its functional, utility or physical purposes (Donoghue, de Klerk & Ehlers, 2008). Symbolic needs are desires for products that satisfy inner needs for enhancement of self/image, role position, group membership or ego-identification, for example, purchasing a 'top of the range' motor vehicle with elaborate features as a status symbol as it is particularly relevant for conspicuous products to fulfil aesthetic satisfaction and image projection (Donoghue et al., 2008).

1.2.2 Search and processing of information

In many buying situations when the problem is perceived, the consumer begins to seek information by engaging in mental and physical activities. It is basically a learning process by which the consumer becomes aware of aspects like alternative products or brands, specific stores, prices of products and terms of sale. This search process provides information that is necessary when evaluating alternatives in order to arrive at the choice which derives maximal benefits at minimal cost. It is selective since consumers choose data that is most in keeping with their wants and which is most likely to correspond with their views, beliefs, personality and attitudes.

The search consumers engage in may be internal or external. Whilst internal search refers to information relating to the consumer's experience with the product that is stored in memory and information obtained through the process of learning such as treatment from salesman, consumer advisory services, parking facilities, store layout and availability and price of items, external search refers to personal information sources (for example, family, friends), business and marketing forces (for example, advertising, in-store promotions, personal selling), neutral sources (booklets, pamphlets, brochures), economic (expert financial advice), social (peers, social groups) and cultural influences (cultural organisations) (Blackwell et al., 2006; du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003). The concepts of internal and external search imply that the type of decision-making determines the extent of search effort, namely, habitual decision-making, limited decision-making and extended decision-making which are respectively associated with minimal, limited and extensive search effort and search behaviour (Peter & Olson, 2010). In other words, habitual, limited to extended decision-making involves accelerating degrees of decision-making, consumer thought processes and involvement. Hence, a high involvement purchase is associated with extensive search for information often from numerous sources (Hansen, 2005; Koklič & Vida, 2009; Peter &

Olson, 2010) in attempts to reduce the risk of making an incorrect decision, to compensate for a lack of expertise and lack of involvement, to overcome complexity and to match information search processes (Brady, Bourdeau & Heskel, 2005). Research in the area of consumer involvement reflects that high price, high perceived risk and high product heterogeneity are likely to increase the degree of involvement (Hansen, 2005). Whilst habitual decision-making occurs when the consumer purchases an item without considering alternatives, limited decision-making takes place when the consumer engages in little alternative evaluation. The buyer thoroughly evaluates multiple alternatives in extended decision-making, for example, when engaging in a durable, long-term purchase that requires a large capital outlay like buying a motor vehicle, the consumer will engage in extensive search and the purchase will involve extended decision-making. In other words, the consumer will engage in a tremendous degree of cognitive and mental activity and will engage in detailed evaluation and comparisons of product alternatives before making a rational decision (Dubey, 2014; Hansen, 2005; Hoelzl, Pollai & Kastner, 2011); however, in the complexity of decision-making, consumers do not use their cognitive and affective skills separately but interactively (Hansen, 2005; van der Merwe & Campbell, 2008; Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2005).

1.2.3 Evaluation of alternatives

The evaluation of alternative resolutions to a problem is the third step in the consumer decision-making process. It is the act of identifying alternative solutions to a problem and assessing the relative merits and demerits of each solution (Brijball Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012). The alternatives that the consumer decides to actively evaluate during the choice process are his/her evoked or consideration set (Kardes, Cline & Cronley, 2011; Solomon et al., 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). When evaluating alternatives, consumers make a comparison among product features, dimensions, benefits and store characteristics and pre-established criteria for evaluation (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013). Attributes or evaluation criteria are the limits, standards or specifications that consumers declare as being acceptable when searching for a solution to their problems and which they use to compare and assess different alternatives (Forney, Park & Brandon, 2005). Devlin (2011) refers to evaluative criteria as cues and describes them as an array of features that make up the product and which consumers may utilise in their decision on which alternative to choose. Blackwell et al. (2006) distinguish between salient attributes such as price and reliability in the case of a motor vehicle and determinant attributes such as style and finish in a motor vehicle which consumers may use when salient attributes are equivalent across alternatives.

It is imperative for marketers to have real time knowledge of the criteria influencing the decisions of consumers so that they can ensure the successful delivery of products and customer retention (Hollywood, Armstrong & Durkin, 2007; Mafini, Dhurup & Mandhlazi, 2014). Parker and Schriff (2011) also emphasize the importance of taking cognisance of a no-choice option in the choice set and maintain that it leads to more alternative-based rather than attribute-based information processing. Whilst Devlin (2011) stresses the importance of noting the impact of familiarity and expertise when considering financial services, Lee and Marlowe (2003) found that convenience is prioritised when choosing a financial institution. Attributes or evaluative criteria are moulded and influenced by individual (for example, personality, values) and environmental (for, example, price) variables.

Consumers tend to purchase those products toward which they are favourable and which are in keeping with their personalities and this regard Schiffman and Kanuk (2014) distinguish between the economic, passive, emotional and cognitive individual. The cognitive shopper best depicts consumer behaviour since consumer decision-making focuses on the subsequent behaviour of cognitive consumers and depicts seeking information from various sources before making a decision and the rational considerations of the best possible alternatives when making a decision (Brijball Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012). In addition, economic demand factors (for example, price) and business and marketing influences (for example, negotiating the right price) shape purchasing intentions. The evaluative criteria are product specific and depend largely on the nature of the product being purchased. Evaluative criteria may be tangible and intangible or intrinsic (physical attributes for example, style, colour and size of motor vehicle) or extrinsic (product related, for example, brand name, price, country of origin) (Devlin, 2011). In studying the evaluative criteria applied by South African female fashion consumers when purchasing casual daywear, Hugo and van Aardt (2012) found that three functional performance aspects (durability, comfort, fit) were prioritised for judging quality and Beaudoin, Moore & Goldsmith, (2000) studied the influence of aesthetic attributes. On the other hand, van der Merwe and Campbell (2008) found that consumers evaluated home ware based on their needs, values and personal style and made their final product choice based on product quality, appearance and price. Forney et al. (2005) found that the image of fashion products was the strongest predictor of purchase when brands were extended from apparel to home furnishings products. However, in the purchase of a motor vehicle typical evaluative criteria include price, style, economy, performance, roominess, popularity, colour and speed. The consumer attaches levels of importance to different product features. Evaluation brings the

consumer right to the stage of making a choice/decision on the best alternative to purchase.

1.2.4 Response/the purchase decision

Consumer decision is the outcome of evaluation and relates to the cognitive processes that the consumer undergoes in order to select the most suitable alternative, which is the option that comes closest to fulfilling the evaluative criteria decided by the consumer. Undoubtedly, the reason for entering into the consumer decision-making process, in the first place, was the perception of an incongruence between the desired and the existing state of affairs. The consumer therefore, engages in purchases in order to seek greater satisfaction. Hence, a crucial question from a marketing point of view, is whether the consumer is satisfied after the purchases is made.

1.2.5 Post-purchase response

Post-purchase assessment involves the consumer's evaluation of the performance of the product or service, in relation to the evaluative criteria once it has been purchased (Peter & Olson, 2010). The post-purchase phase involves different forms of psychological processes consumers can experience after a purchase. Post-purchase learning means that after a purchase is made the consumer reflects on the purchasing process and the product/service experience and adds this to new knowledge which can serve as input for similar future purchases. Hence, during the process of post-purchase evaluation, consumers encounter new information that results in learning and change in attitudes with regards to the products consumed. Post-decision information is necessary to assess the outcome of the decision, to evaluate the effectiveness of the decision and to evaluate the decision process. The outcome of the purchase evaluation may be satisfaction which stems from a positive assessment and feeling of 'good value', post-purchase dissatisfaction which stems from the perception that the selected alternative does not meet expectations or anticipated performance or, a neutral assessment which relates to post-purchase indifference (Donoghue et al., 2008; Laufer, 2002; Ndubisi & Ling, 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014). Consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is determined by consumer expectations, actual performance of the purchased item and the comparison between expectations and actual performance, confirmation or disconfirmation of what was expected, the magnitude and direction of the discrepancy score (Donoghue et al., 2008; Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff & Terblanche, 2008; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2014).

Consumer responses to a dissatisfying purchase may be verbal or behavioural (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003). Whilst a positive verbal response may cognitively reinforce purchase decisions, negative ones may result in rumours. Equally dangerous to the

latter, is indifferent verbal responses or responses which can evoke suspicion among other potential consumers. Whilst positive behavioural responses usually involve repeat purchase behaviour and brand loyalty in the case of satisfaction, a negative behavioural response may involve complaint behaviour or brand switching in the case of dissatisfaction (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003). A neutral behavioural response incorporates inertia or impulse buying in the case of indifference. Several researchers found that consumption emotions impact on post-consumption behaviour like positive and negative word-of-mouth communication, repurchase intention and complaint behaviour (Ladhari, 2007; Soscia, 2007; Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006).

Sometimes consumers undergo post-purchase conflict and question whether they made the correct decision or should have selected another alternative. The consumer may experience doubt or anxiety especially after making a difficult, important and rather permanent decision. This type of anxiety, psychological discomfort or inner tension (Hoelzl et al., 2011; Lamb et al., 2008) is called post-purchase dissonance and stems from Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance which was later modified by Elliot Aaronson (1962). Dissonance occurs because making a rather permanent commitment to a selected alternative demands giving up the attractive qualities of the unchosen alternatives (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2001; Solomon et al., 2006). Furthermore, the degree of dissonance is dependent on the level of self-confidence of the consumer, his/her persuasibility and the quality of service received during the purchase process (Bell, 1967; Engel, 1963). Researchers have extended the issue of lack of self-confidence to confusion and sources of confusion and found that while confusion triggered by ambiguous information and choice overload is found to reduce choice confidence, perceived similarity in evaluative criteria between products or brands increases choice confidence (Wang & Shukla, 2013; Shukla, Banerjee & Adidam, 2010; Walsh & Mitchell, 2010). Both Festinger's and Arronson's versions of the theory of cognitive dissonance maintain that the basic ingredients for dissonance are "volition concerning the choice, irrevocable commitment to the decision (product choice) and importance of the choice to the individual's self-concept" (Cummings & Venkatesan, 1975, p. 25). Dissonance is especially likely if the purchase involves a large capital outlay and when compromise and choice was required, that is, several attractive alternatives were rejected in favour of the purchased product (Blackwell et al., 2006; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Since dissonance produces unpleasant feelings, the individual will be motivated to act to reduce the amount of dissonance experienced. In some cases consumers may try to reduce such dissonance via changes in cognitive elements by seeking supporting information or distorting information regarding the product or service, changes in attitudes and changes in behaviour (Brijball Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012; Schiffman &

Kanuk, 2014). They will try to rebalance their psychological field either by searching for information that supports the chosen alternative or by distorting information regarding the chosen option (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003; Hoelzl et al., 2011). This response is termed cognitive dissonance which belongs to the family of cognitive consistency theories. Each consumer has many cognitions about himself/herself or other people and the decision he/she makes. If these elements follow logically from the other, there exists 'consonant cognitions' but if there is logical inconsistency, 'dissonant cognitions' occur (Wilkie, 1990). Undoubtedly, the aim of the choice process in the outset is to optimise the accuracy of the decision taken, minimise evaluative costs, minimise negative feeling and possible regret, maximise choice confidence and the ease with which a decision can be justified (Heitmann, Lehmann & Hermann, 2007; Wang & Shukla, 2013).

Although post-purchase assessment is the final stage in the consumer decision-making process it is not necessarily the end. The information gained, as a result of purchasing and post-purchase evaluation, is stored in the individual's memory as part of his/her experience. The consumer would recall this information when entering into another purchase decision-making process. In other words, irrespective of the outcome, post-purchase assessment is a learning curve that provides feedback to the buyer and is stored as information for future use (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003). Thus, the end of one purchase decision is the link to another thereby making the purchasing process a continuous one.

The objectives of this research locate the study predominantly into the 3rd and 5th stages of consumer decision-making, namely, evaluation of alternatives and post-purchase evaluation.

2 Research methodology

2.1 Subjects

A sample of 200 brand new motor vehicle buyers was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. Only new motor vehicle buyers (within Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa) who concluded their purchases in one major, reputable and leading motor vehicle manufacturing company and who owned the vehicle for a maximum period of seven months were considered, so as to avoid cognitive intrusion. The sample was proportionately stratified on the basis of four controls or criteria (range of motor vehicle purchased, month of purchases, gender and age of the buyer) since these subgroups are expected to have different parameters on the level of importance attached to the evaluative criteria and the potential to experience cognitive dissonance. Representativeness was achieved by drawing a proportional frequency of consumers in the different ranges of motor vehicles purchased. The motor vehicles purchased were divided on the basis of price into 'bottom of the range' (47.25 % of sample), 'middle of the range' (33.75 %) and 'top of the range' (19 %).

Secondly, representation of male (47 %) and female (53 %) motor vehicle consumers were needed to establish whether the level of importance attached to evaluative criteria, and the potential to experience cognitive dissonance, is related to gender. Age and time of purchases served as two further controls. The sample ranged from 20 to 65 years with a preponderance of candidates in the age group 30 to 39 years. The adequacy of the sample was determined on the basis of the Kaiser-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.87062) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (21 059.071), which respectively showed suitability and significance. The results indicate that the normality and homoscedasticity preconditions are satisfied.

2.2 Instruments

The measuring instrument was a self-developed, precoded, standardised questionnaire comprising of Sections A and B. Section A related to biographical data (race, marital status, age, education, occupation, income, gender) and a motor vehicle specific variable, namely, range of vehicle (bottom, middle and top of range). Section B comprised of items relating to motor vehicle buyers' needs, that is, functional or symbolic needs. Section B also included items relating to the level of importance that buyers attach to eight motor vehicle evaluative criteria where the scale ranges from extremely unimportant (1), unimportant (2), unsure (3), important (4) to extremely important (5). Respondents were also required to indicate the extent to which their purchased motor vehicle fulfilled the eight evaluative criteria using the 1 to 5 point scale ranging from does not fulfil expectations (1) to completely fulfils expectations (5). The aims were to compare the level of importance that motor vehicle buyers attached to the evaluative criteria and then assess the extent to which the purchased motor vehicle fulfilled their expectations on the eight evaluative criteria in order to assess unfulfilled expectations and the potential for cognitive dissonance. Biographical correlates and the influence of range of motor vehicle were also assessed. The range of motor vehicle was also related to the evaluative criteria and the buyer's need (functional, symbolic) for purchasing a motor vehicle.

2.3 Procedure

The mail survey was used and hence, the questionnaires were self-administered. The questionnaire, together with a covering letter indicating the purpose and need for the study was posted to sample subjects, using the postal services. Each respondent was contacted telephonically informing them of the arrival of the questionnaire, already posted. The questionnaires were numbered so as to follow up on non-responses. Those who did not respond within two weeks were again telephoned to remind them of the purpose of the study, so as to ensure a suitable response rate. A self-addressed envelope and stamp was provided so respondents need not bear a financial cost, thereby increasing the return rate.

2.4 Statistical analysis

Face and content validity was ensured by including all evaluative criteria relating to motor vehicle purchases that repeatedly surfaced when conducting the literature review. Descriptive statistics (mean analyses, frequencies, percentages) were used to analyse the level of importance motor vehicle buyers attach to the evaluative criteria, the extent to which consumers believed that the purchased vehicle fulfilled their expectations of the evaluative criteria, the percentage of consumers who purchased the various ranges of motor vehicles (bottom, middle, top of range) and, the level of importance consumers who purchased various ranges of motor vehicles attached to the evaluative criteria. Inferential statistics (Kruskal-Wallis One-Way ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U-Test) were used to assess whether there were significant differences in the way in which consumers varying in biographical profiles and range of motor vehicle purchased differed in their level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and, to determine whether there exists a significant relationship between range of motor vehicle purchased (bottom, middle, top) and purchase need (function, symbolic) (Pearson chi-square correlation).

3 Results

The evaluative criteria refer to the factors motor vehicle buyer use to judge decision alternatives when engaging in purchases. In this study, eight motor vehicle evaluative criteria were predetermined, namely, price, style, economy, performance, roominess, popularity, colour and speed. Respondents were required to rate their level of importance attached to these eight motor vehicle features when evaluating alternative makes of cars considered before the act of purchase. Attributes considered to be extremely unimportant were rated 1 and those regarded as being extremely important were rated 5. Respondents were also asked to rate their selected vehicle on these evaluative criteria after their purchase. The intention was to determine whether consumers' expectations were met in terms of these criteria. Pre-purchase evaluation and post-purchase evaluation mean ratings were derived from the 1 to 5 point continuum (Table 1).

Table 1 reflects that motor vehicle buyers attach varying levels of importance to the different product selection criteria. It is evident that before the act of purchase, motor vehicle consumers attached a high level of importance to economy (Mean = 4.475), price (4.390) and performance (Mean = 4.245) and the lowest level of importance to popularity (Mean = 2.955) and speed (Mean = 2.865). Against a maximum attainable score of 5, it can be concluded that motor vehicle consumers consider all these criteria to be important except for speed due to adherence to traffic laws. When engaging in post-purchase evaluation, it is evident from Table 1 that

consumers rated the evaluative criteria on their motor vehicle lower in terms of price, economy and performance. However, higher ratings on the evaluative criteria were noted in terms of speed, popularity, colour, roominess and style. This would indicate that consumer' expectations were not met in

terms of price, economy and performance yet these were buyers' most highly rated evaluative criteria, thereby reflecting the potential for unhappiness. These signify unmet expectations on the most important motor vehicle evaluative criteria thereby creating the potential for post-purchase dissonance.

Table 1. Mean Ratings on pre-purchase and post-purchase evaluation based on evaluative criteria

Criteria	Mean Ratings		Difference (Post – Pre) Expectations met (+) or unmet (-)
	Pre-purchase evaluation	Post-purchase evaluation	
Price	4.390	3.895	-0.495
Style	3.820	4.085	0.265
Economy	4.475	4.010	-0.465
Performance	4.245	4.010	-0.235
Roominess	3.600	3.920	0.32
Popularity	2.955	4.070	0.6
Colour	3.470	4.025	0.555
Speed	2.865	3.820	0.955

The level of importance attached to the evaluative criteria was also assessed in terms of the biographical data of respondents to determine whether significant differences exist.

3.1 Hypothesis 1

There is a significant difference in the level of importance that motor vehicle buyers varying in biographical profiles (race, marital status, age, education, occupation, income, gender) attach to the evaluative criteria.

Table 2 indicates that motor vehicle consumers varying in race differ significantly in the level of

importance they attach to popularity and performance at the 1% and 5% levels of significance respectively. Furthermore, consumers varying in age differ significantly in the level of importance they attach to style and popularity at the 5% level of significance. In addition, consumers varying in occupation and income differ significantly in the level of importance they attach to economy at the 5% levels of significance. Consumers varying in income also differ significantly in the level of importance they attach to price at the 1% level of significance. Marital status and education do not influence the level of importance that motor vehicle consumers attach to the evaluative criteria.

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis One-Way ANOVA (Corrected for ties): Mean level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and biographical variables

Evaluative Criteria	Biographical Variables											
	Race		Marital Status		Age		Education		Occupation		Income	
	H	p	H	p	H	p	H	p	H	p	H	p
Price	1.267	0.737	3.313	0.346	5.044	0.283	0.040	0.998	13.874	0.054	19.382	0.004**
Style	6.113	0.106	0.797	0.850	9.675	0.046*	5.291	0.152	3.597	0.825	4.509	0.608
Economy	2.912	0.405	3.892	0.273	1.861	0.761	1.253	0.740	17.103	0.017*	13.393	0.037*
Performance	10.473	0.015*	5.929	0.115	3.204	0.524	1.089	0.780	7.460	0.383	2.166	0.904
Roominess	5.339	0.149	5.032	0.170	4.456	0.348	0.971	0.808	5.724	0.572	10.376	0.110
Popularity	12.196	0.007**	1.082	0.781	10.023	0.040*	1.879	0.598	7.671	0.363	2.495	0.869
Colour	5.308	0.151	1.030	0.794	9.133	0.058	7.576	0.056	6.660	0.465	6.448	0.375
Speed	6.101	0.107	0.780	0.854	3.992	0.407	2.030	0.566	9.620	0.211	8.459	0.206

Note: ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table 3 reflects that male and female motor vehicle buyers differ significantly in the level of importance they attach to popularity at the 1% level of significance and, roominess and economy at the 5% level of significance.

Hence, hypothesis 1 may be partially accepted in terms of the level of importance motor vehicle consumers varying in biographical profiles attach to specific evaluative criteria.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U-Test (Corrected for ties): Mean level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and Gender

Evaluative Criteria	U	W	Corrected for ties	
			Z	p
Price	4447.5	8818.5	-1.3299	0.186
Style	4587.0	9642.0	-1.0206	0.307
Economy	4103.5	8474.5	-2.3338	0.020*
Performance	4559.0	8930.0	-1.0005	0.317
Roominess	4182.0	10047.0	-2.0633	0.039*
Popularity	3674.5	10554.5	-3.2340	0.001*
Colour	4914.5	9314.5	-0.0389	0.969
Speed	4428.5	9800.5	-1.3113	0.190

Note: ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

The level of importance that motor vehicle buyers attach to the eight evaluative criteria was also evaluated in terms of the range of motor vehicle that they selected and purchased. Range of motor vehicle was categorized based on price and frequency analyses reflect that 45% of the motor vehicle consumers purchased bottom of the range motor vehicles, 37.5% purchased middle of the range

vehicles and 17.5% purchased top of the range vehicles.

3.2 Hypothesis 2

Motor vehicle buyers who purchase varying ranges of vehicle (bottom, middle, top) differ significantly in the level of importance they attach to the evaluative criteria.

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis One-Way ANOVA (Corrected for ties): Mean level of importance attached to evaluative criteria and range of motor vehicle

Evaluative Criteria	Range of Motor Vehicle (Bottom, middle and top of range)	
	H	p
Price	26.6445	0.0000**
Style	12.8557	0.0016**
Economy	9.8631	0.0072**
Performance	4.3145	0.1156
Roominess	9.6014	0.0082**
Popularity	6.3506	0.0418*
Colour	0.1514	0.9271
Speed	10.8814	0.0043**

Note: ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05

Table 4 indicates that motor vehicle buyers who selected and purchased different ranges of motor vehicles (bottom, middle, top of range) differed significantly in the level of importance that they attached to price, style, economy, roominess and speed at the 1% level of significance, and popularity at the 5% level of significance. The range of motor vehicle purchased is not related to the level of

importance that motor vehicle consumers attach to performance and colour. Hence, hypothesis 2 may be partially accepted.

Descriptive statistics were also undertaken to assess whether the range of motor vehicle purchased is related to the level of importance attached to the motor vehicle evaluative criteria (Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive Analysis: Range of motor vehicle and mean level of importance attached to evaluative criteria

Evaluative Criteria	Bottom of range	Middle of range	Top of range
Price	4.62	4.32	3.94
Style	3.64	3.85	4.20
Economy	4.66	4.41	4.14
Performance	4.11	4.36	4.34
Roominess	3.46	3.60	3.97
Popularity	2.88	2.83	3.43
Colour	3.50	3.45	3.43
Speed	2.62	2.95	3.31

Table 5 reflects that:

- Whilst economy, price and performance mattered most to bottom and middle of the range motor vehicle consumers, top on the range buyers were more interested in style and roominess than price.

- When comparing the mean ratings on each of the evaluative criteria it is evident that consumers who purchased the bottom of the range motor vehicles attached the highest level of importance to price, economy and colour and the lowest level of importance to style, performance, roominess, and speed as compared to middle and top of the range motor vehicle consumers.

- When comparing the mean ratings on each of the evaluative criteria it is evident that consumers who purchased the top of the range motor vehicles attached the highest level of importance to style, roominess, popularity, and speed and the lowest level of importance to price, economy and colour as compared to middle and bottom of the range motor vehicle consumers.

- Mean differences in the level of importance attached to performance and colour is negligible across the bottom, middle and top of the range motor vehicle consumers.

The mean level of importance attached to the motor vehicle evaluative criteria by bottom, middle and top of the range motor vehicle consumers was ranked in order to display how they differed (Table 6).

Table 6. Differing levels of importance attached to evaluative criteria by consumers varying in range of vehicle purchased

Order of importance	Bottom of the range vehicle purchased	Middle of the range vehicle purchased	Top of the range vehicle purchased
1	Economy	Economy	Performance
2	Price	Performance	Style
3	Performance	Price	Economy
4	Style	Style	Roominess
5	Colour	Roominess	Price
6	Roominess	Colour	Popularity Colour
7	Popularity	Speed	-
8	Speed	Popularity	Speed

Table 6 displays that the level of importance attached to the motor vehicle evaluative criteria differ amongst consumers who purchased different ranges of motor vehicles. Consumers who purchased bottom of the range motor vehicles valued economy, price and then performance, whilst those who purchased middle of the range motor vehicles placed emphasis on economy, performance and then price and those who bought the top of the range vehicles rated performance, style and then economy as being important.

From the evaluative criteria, it seems like functional needs are more important than symbolic needs to bottom and middle motor vehicle buyers yet the converse seems true for top of the range motor vehicle consumers. In order to confirm this, the range of motor vehicle purchased was also assessed in terms of needs (functional/symbolic) (Table 7).

3.3 Hypothesis 3

There is a significant relationship between range of motor vehicle purchased and the need that the motor vehicle fulfils (functional, symbolic) (Table 7).

Table 7. Pearson Chi-square correlation: Range of motor vehicle purchased and need (Functional/Symbolic)

Need	Bottom of range (%)	Middle of range (%)	Top of range (%)	Total
Functional needs	43.5	34.5	13.0	91
Symbolic needs	1.5	3.0	4.5	9
Total	45	37.5	17.5	100

Correlation	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson Chi-square	15.5590	2	0.0004*

Table 7 indicates that there is a significant relationship between range of motor vehicle purchased and the need that the motor vehicle fulfils (functional, symbolic) at the 1% level of significance. In fact, as

the range of motor vehicle increases from bottom to middle to top range of vehicle, the percentage of consumers that purchase their vehicle for functional needs decreases and the percentage of buyers that

purchase their vehicle for symbolic needs increases. Hence, hypothesis 3 may be accepted. However, Table 7 also reflects that the majority of motor vehicle consumers in all ranges of vehicles (bottom – 43.5%, middle – 34.5%, top – 13%) purchase their vehicles to fulfil functional needs. The largest segment of consumers that purchase motor vehicles for satisfying symbolic needs are those who bought top of the range vehicles (4.5%).

4 Discussion of results

4.1 Evaluative criteria

The results of the study reflect that motor vehicle buyers attach varying levels of importance to the different product selection criteria with the highest level of importance being accorded to economy, price and performance. These results confirm that the consumer attaches levels of importance to certain product features often in terms of ‘must have features’ and ‘nice to have features’ and use these salient attributes to compare alternatives (Blackwell et al., 2006; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2013). It also confirms that motor vehicle consumers are largely cognitive shoppers who engage in rational considerations of the best possible alternatives and are influenced by individual, environmental, economic, business and marketing factors (Koklič & Vida, 2009). As emphasised by Koklič and Vida (2009), cognitive and rational dimensions do not completely explain consumer behaviour in the case of high involvement product decisions like a motor vehicle. Over and above the typologies of the customer, situational and environmental influences, cognisance must be given to feelings, experiences, underlying factors or deep seated issues, needs and goals in order to understand complex decision-making (Koklič & Vida, 2009; van der Merwe & Campbell, 2008).

The results of the study also indicate that post-evaluation ratings indicate that whilst their expectations in terms of speed, popularity, colour, roominess and style were exceeded, consumer expectations were not met in terms of price, economy and performance yet these were buyers’ most highly rated evaluative criteria, thereby reflecting the potential for unhappiness. These signify unmet expectations on the most important evaluative motor vehicle criteria thereby creating the potential for post-purchase dissonance. Since dissonance produces unpleasant feelings, the individual will be motivated to act to reduce the amount of dissonance experienced (Hoyer et al., 2013). Ehrlich, Guttman, Schonbach and Mills (1957) cited in Hoelzl et al. (2011) found that owners of new cars selectively sought out consonant information (that which supports their decision) in attempts to reduce the dissonance resulting from their choice.

4.2 Biographical correlates, the influence of range of motor vehicle and function versus symbolic needs

The results of the study indicate that whilst race (influences popularity, performance), age (impacts on style, popularity), occupation (influences economy), income (influences economy, price) and gender (impacts on popularity, roominess, economy) significantly influence the level of importance that consumers attach to specific motor vehicle evaluative criteria, marital status and education showed no significant influence. It is important to study such influences to manage motor vehicle market segments and their needs specifically as this will assist marketers in enhancing customer satisfaction because together with customer delight and commitment, satisfaction is one of the crucial ingredients for attaining customer retention (Abdul-Muhmin, 2002; Dimitriades, 2006; Hess & Story, 2005; Terblanche, 2008). Williams (2002) found that social class is a significant predictor of evaluative criterion for a number of products. When comparing Chinese and Indian consumers’ evaluative criteria for denim jeans, Jin, Park and Ryu (2010) found that Chinese consumers place importance on price, followed by fitting, brand/country of origin, quality and then design whilst Indian consumers favoured fitting, brand/country of origin, design, price and then quality. In this regard, Dickson, Lennon, Montalto, Shen and Zhang (2004) emphasized the importance of age and found that younger consumers were more influenced by design and brand/country of origin.

Furthermore, the results of the study reflect that motor vehicle buyers who selected and purchased different ranges of motor vehicles (bottom, middle, top of range) differed significantly in the level of importance that they attached to the evaluative criteria. The results indicate that whilst economy, price and performance mattered most to bottom and middle of the range motor vehicle consumers, top of the range buyers were more interested in style and roominess than price. In addition, when comparing the mean ratings on each of the evaluative criteria it is evident that consumers who purchased the bottom of the range motor vehicles attached the highest level of importance to price, economy and colour and the lowest level of importance to style, performance, roominess, and speed as compared to middle and top of the range motor vehicle consumers. Evidently, bottom of the range motor vehicle consumers will definitely have an internal reference price in mind when comparing alternatives (Peter & Olson, 2010). Furthermore, consumers who purchased the top of the range motor vehicles attached the highest level of importance to style, roominess, popularity, and speed and the lowest level of importance to price, economy and colour as compared to middle and bottom of the range motor vehicle consumers.

When linked to functional and symbolic needs, the findings reflect that the majority of motor vehicle consumers in all ranges of vehicles purchased their vehicles to fulfil functional needs. Furthermore, as the range of motor vehicle increases from bottom to middle to top range of vehicle, the percentage of consumers that purchase their vehicle for functional needs decreases and the percentage of buyers that purchase their vehicle for symbolic needs increases. Hence, in the purchase of a motor vehicle which involves capital, cognition plays an instrumental role especially with regards to price and functionality (Koklič & Vida, 2009) yet functional utility in the case of clothing may include durability, comfort, ease of care and fit (Alexander, Connell & Presley, 2005; Howarton & Lee, 2010; Hugo & van Aardt, 2012; Zhang, Li, Gong & Wu, 2002). In the case of fashion, Beaudoin et al. (2000) found that fashion leaders regard aesthetic attributes more important than fashion followers do. Researchers found that consumers buy major electrical household appliances for functional and symbolic purposes (Donoghue & Erasmus, 1999 cited in Donoghue et al., 2008) and term the latter symbolic performance which refers to the psychological level of performance (Erasmus, Makgopa & Kachale, 2005; Hawkins et al., 2001). Wang, Siu and Hui (2004) found that lifestyle and shopping orientation influences consumers' preference to buy domestic or imported clothing. However, Heath and Scott (1998) found no support for the relationship between self-concept and motor vehicle brands and therefore, their results contradict the image congruence theory.

4.3 Recommendations and conclusion

Motor vehicle consumers attach the highest level of importance to economy, price and performance. Evidently, consumers of high-end decisions are seeking good value for money which is expected due to the high inflation rate and the tight budgetary conditions that households are facing. It is therefore, recommended that the main media appeal should be centred around cost effectiveness. This is particularly imperative as the results reflect that motor vehicle consumers are high-involvement, cognitive shoppers who engage in rational decision-making. The marketing focus should therefore, be on effective communication with buyers and providing factual information through various sources and channels including the use of mobile marketing via cell phones. This should also continue after the purchase to avoid or reduce cognitive dissonance as providing consonant information regarding the brand's superiority over competing brands will reaffirm the consumer's choice and is particularly imperative in a purchase requiring a large capital outlay.

Significant biographical correlates were noted in terms of race, age, occupation, income, gender and motor vehicle evaluative criteria. The implication is

that target markets exist with the motor vehicle market and marketers need to understand each target market's needs in order to reduce uncertainty and design the right marketing mix. Even advertising needs to be tailor-made to each market segment, for example, age impacts on style and popularity so advertising appeal should be designed to include friends and focus on aspects of interior and overall design. The advertising channel must also be aligned with the target market, for example, the younger market can be reached via social media and strategic interruptions during online searches and graphical mobile marketing via the cell phone. Undoubtedly, millennials are proving to be a different generation with different purchasing power, characteristics, personalities and needs so it would be beneficial to target this market separately in order to market opportunistically and effectively. The results also indicate that the majority of the consumers favour functional utility, especially bottom and middle of the range motor vehicle consumers; hence, these ranges should be marketed whilst focussing on utilitarian value. Furthermore, the results reflect that consumers of top of the range motor vehicles place value on style, roominess and popularity so these features can strategically dominate the advertisement of a top range motor vehicle. They also purchase motor vehicles to fulfil more symbolic needs so the advertising appeal will play at the psychological level and be channelled to project more aesthetic attributes and an image of being noticed and standing out.

4.4 Recommendations for future research

This study is based on eight pre-established motor vehicle evaluative criteria, namely, price style, economy, performance, roominess, popularity, colour and speed. Taking cognisance of the millennial market with an increasing level of purchasing power, it makes sense to include other evaluative criteria such as interior design and built-in online access.

With the introduction of the unique millennial generation, it would be advantageous to assess the shopper typologies which the present study did not aim to do.

Research indicates that dissonance is also largely influenced by persuasability in that those who are more easily persuaded experience greater post-purchase dissonance. This study does not assess the influence of persuasion on cognitive dissonance; hence, future studies can make a contribution in this regard.

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