

# Product features that hit consumers' pain points may lead to reduced willingness to pay

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**Abstract.** The pain point is a specific form of consumer demand and a concept that has been widely used in marketing business strategies in recent years. Pain points arise when consumers have put in enough effort to achieve their goals but have little effect. In this paper, the concept of the pain-feature matching effect is proposed by combining past research on consumer pain points and consumers' attitudes with pain point targeting features. It is predicted that consumers' willingness to pay may decrease significantly when the product feature matches their pain point to a high degree. This hypothesis was tested through a questionnaire experiment: by assigning products with different pain scenarios and features, the conclusion was judged based on different feedback data from participants. The results show that consumers' willingness to pay decreases when there is high pain-feature matching. This finding adds to the theory of the effectiveness of consumer pain marketing and provides guidance to retailers on how to effectively promote product features in their business activities.

**Keywords:** Consumer Pain Point, Product Feature, Willingness To Pay

## 1. Introduction

Meeting the needs of consumers can impact their willingness to buy a product. In marketing today, it is common practice to design and promote product features tailored to consumer groups' needs. For example, consumers who consume excessive amounts of sugar may need low or zero sugar foods, and manufacturers can effectively meet this need by designing products and promoting features relevant to this group of consumers. A pain point is a form of consumer demand that arises from a strong dissatisfaction within the consumer. Some companies try to tap into consumer pain points in their social research and hope to create products that focus on them to achieve better market performance.

In this paper, we proposed a pain-feature matching effect, such that consumers are less willing to pay for the product when the level of matching between product feature and consumer pain point is high.

This paper seeks to make several contributions. First, we expand on the theoretical aspect of pain points by introducing the concept of the pain-feature matching effect, which is an indicator of how well a consumer's pain point matches a product's pain point feature. Second, this paper experimentally proves the hypothesis that consumers' willingness to pay is significantly lower when the pain-feature match is high. Third, we disprove past marketing strategies for consumer pain points in business. The findings of this study can guide retailers in their marketing campaigns for product features. Companies

would do well to avoid promoting pain-targeting features to consumers with pain points, as this may have a negative effect on the target consumer's willingness to pay and thus affect the product's market performance.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is a theoretical framework review, while section 3 presents the research design and results. The final section 4 provides a general discussion and an outlook on future research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Pain Point

The pain point is a concept that is widely used in marketing research. Usually, a pain point is an unmet need that a customer is waiting to have met and can be solved by a product or service with a targeted feature (Platzer, 2018). In business, the pain felt by customers comes from emotions rather than the body. Pain points can reflect current or potential customers' main interests and needs (Wang et al., 2016). Consumer pain points often vary from person to person and can be recurring or persistent, causing inconvenience or annoyance to the customer (Ma, 2014). Identifying groups of customers with similar pain points allows for timely adjustment of product strategies and helps companies achieve accurate market segmentation and positioning (De Bonte and Fletcher, 2014). Many products are now presented with text that

wants to hit the consumer's pain points. Pain points are likely to arise when there is no effective feedback after the consumer has a goal and has put enough effort into the goal. For example, a customer who wants to lose weight may feel frustrated when the weight does not come off after hard exercise, which is a pain point for this type of consumer. Many products are now presented with text that wants to hit the consumer's pain points. Consumer pain points are usually caused by a psychological gap or dissatisfaction arising from the weak results of working towards a goal, and these various pain points can directly affect the consumer's purchase decision (Lee, 2014). Consumers with pain points often have an end goal, and the reason for creating a pain point often implies the failure of a sub-goal. The failure of the sub-goal has a negative effect on the achievement of the ultimate goal, and therefore the pain point may bring about the idea of abandoning the goal for the consumer (Ilies & Judge, 2005; Shah & Kruglanski, 2002). The painful memories caused by pain points are likely to create negative emotions for consumers, which may influence their rational decision-making, in which case they are more likely to choose products that are inconsistent with their goals (Andrade & Cohen, 2007). Consumers avoid products that hit pain points because they want to escape the pain to have a better consumption experience (Cova, 2021).

## **2.2 pain-feature Matching Effect**

Various product features are important factors that influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Hoegg et al., 2010; Park et al., 1991; Brose et al., 2005; Auger et al., 2010; Schuitema & De Groot, 2015). There are many different types of product information and are usually presented to consumers in various forms. Consumers can learn basic information about a product, including its appearance, price, and brand by its exterior. These apparent features help consumers initially judge the quality of the product (Dawar & Parker, 1994). At the same time, manufacturers also print information on the packaging that is not readily observable about the product, such as origin, ingredients, and process. Consumers will judge whether a product meets their needs based on their trust in the product's feature information (Luhmann, 2018).

A pain point is an expression of a consumer's needs, but unlike conventional needs, products with features related to a consumer's pain point may have a different impact on the consumer's willingness to pay. Many companies confuse consumer pain points with consumer needs in their marketing decisions, claiming that the product has a pain point feature. A pain point feature is a product that has a feature that hits a consumer with a corresponding pain point. However, the same product features cannot be called pain point features for consumers who do not generate pain points. The pain point characteristics of a product will vary depending on how well it matches the consumer's pain point. When a consumer with an intense pain point encounters a product feature that is specific to the pain point, the product feature matches the consumer's pain point to a high degree. If product features are not

highly relevant to consumer pain points, the pain point-feature match will be low. The effect on consumers is most pronounced when the pain-feature match is high. According to rational choice theory, consumers will always choose the product with the most excellent utility, and a product that satisfies consumers' needs will make them more eager to buy (Green & Fox, 2007). However, a large body of previous research has shown that psychological factors can significantly impact consumer behaviour and that consumers do not always make rational decisions (William, 1976; Hansen, 1976; Woods, 1960). Consumers may be less willing to pay for the product in question when there is a high degree of pain-feature matching, which stems from the hedonistic motivation of consumers in choosing their purchases (Malkoc and Zauberan, 2018). Hedonic motivation is a person's feelings of pleasure and pain that lead to internal thoughts of being close to a goal or away from a threat (Higgins, 2006). According to the hedonic principle, consumers tend to approach pleasure and avoid pain (Alba & Williams, 2013). Consumers may avoid products with a high pain-feature match out of motivational orientation to avoid recalling the bad experiences associated with the pain point (Elliot, 1999). Consumers who have a pain point and have been unable to resolve it for a long time are internally distant from the psychological distance of achieving the goal of solving the pain point (Maglio, 2019). With the psychological implication that the goal of solving the pain point becomes inaccessible, consumers who see a product with a high pain point-functionality match may have less confidence in the product's feature presentation and reduced willingness to pay (Tsai & McGill, 2011). Therefore, the effect of a high pain-feature match may be negative. This paper proposes the hypothesis that consumers' willingness to pay is significantly lower when there is a high level of pain-feature matching.

## **3. Study**

### **3.1 Experiment Purpose**

This study aimed to test the pain-feature matching effect we proposed. We predicted the highest pain-feature match when participants had a pain point and encountered a product with a pain point feature, in which case they had an avoidance desire to purchase the product. Conversely, the pain-feature match was lower when participants had a pain point and encountered a product without a pain point feature. When participants had no pain points, the pain-feature match was lower regardless of their encountered feature. By manipulating participants' pain point level and the type of feature they encountered, we expected no significant difference in outcomes across scenarios where participants had a low pain-feature match but a significant negative effect on participants' willingness to pay when the pain-feature match was high.

### **3.2 Procedure**

This study employed a 2 (Pain point: with vs. without) × 2 (Product feature: Pain point targeting vs. Not targeting)

between-subjects design. Two hundred and forty-one participants from the prolific platform participated in the experiment for monetary reward. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. We first asked participants to imagine a scenario “At the beginning of this year, you took a physical examination. Your weight was 90 kg (BMI=27.7). Your family doctor thought that you were overweight and might have a potential risk of hypertension. He advised you to lose some weight to reach the standard weight range (BMI 20-25).”. For participants in the pain point condition, they were told that “After two months of continuous exercise (an average of 1.5 hours per day), you have lost 2 kg! Now your weight is 88 kg (BMI=27.2). Although you keep exercising hard, you are still some way from achieving your goal (BMI<25)”, while participants in the no pain point condition were told that “After two months of continuous exercise (an average of 1.5 hours per day), you have lost 8 kg! Now your weight is 82 kg (BMI=25.3). Although you keep exercising hard, you are still some way from achieving your goal (BMI<25)”. After the scenario imaging, participants answered the questions “To what extent do you think you have achieved the goal of losing weight?” and “To what extent do you think your have made effective effort to lose weight?”

Then participants viewed a poster ad for bread. In the pain point targeting condition, the ad introduced the feature as “Sugar-free and cream-free wholemeal bread,” while in the not targeting condition, the poster ad introduced the bread as “Wholemeal bread from France.” After viewing the ad, participants indicated how much they were willing to pay for this bread.

### 3.3 Results

#### 3.3.1 Manipulation Checks

Pain points were generated if the consumer had a goal and had put enough effort into getting closer to the goal, but the result was not good. In order to check whether the two hypothetical different consumer scenarios acted differently for participants in guiding the generation of pain points, participants were asked two questions for the pain point manipulation check. For each manipulation check, we asked participants to indicate how satisfied they were on a 7-point scale of a similar type (1 = strongly dissatisfied; 7 = strongly satisfied). A one-way ANOVA yielded a significant effect of Effectiveness of effort ( $F(1,240) = 43.525, p < 0.05$ ). The second question asked participants to indicate how they perceived their effort to be effective. an one-way ANOVA yielded a significant effect of Effectiveness of effort ( $F(1,240) = 43.616, p < 0.05$ ). The results could demonstrate that the independent variables were meaningful and that the successful pain point manipulation check.

#### 3.3.2 Performance

The experiment examined the psychological expectations of offers given by participants in different weight loss effectiveness scenarios for products with different degrees

of pain-feature matching (conducted on a slider scale with intervals ranging from £0.8 to £2.2). Data findings revealed that the degree of effectiveness of weight loss effort had no significant effect on the quotes given by participants to products ( $F(1, 240) = 0.044, p > 0.05$ ). Also, the degree of pain-feature matching did not have a significant effect on the offers given by participants ( $F(1, 240) = 1.758, p > 0.05$ ). However, when a two-way ANOVA analysis was conducted between the degree of effectiveness of the weight loss effort and the different pain-feature matches of the product, we found a significant effect on the offers given by participants to the product ( $F(1, 240) = 7.108, p < 0.05$ ). The degree of the pain-feature match was high when participants were brought into scenarios with pain points and exposed to products with pain point targeting features ( $M_{with} = 1.375; SD = 0.312$ ). When participants were brought into a scenario with a pain point but were exposed to a product without the pain point targeting feature, the pain-feature match was low ( $M_{without} = 1.425; SD = 0.286$ ). By comparing the studies, we conclude that consumers are significantly less willing to pay when the pain-feature match is high. When participants were brought into a scenario where there was no pain point, consumers did not have a pain-feature match for either product they were exposed to, and there was no significant preference to pay ( $M = 1.431; SD = 0.288$ ). The experiment proved the hypothesis that consumers' willingness to pay for products with pain point targeting features decreases significantly when the pain-feature matching level is high.

## 4. General Discussion

Extensive previous research has shown that product features perform better in the marketplace when they meet consumer needs. Our research addresses pain points, which is a specific consumer need that is subjective. This paper demonstrates the different willingness to pay for products with different levels of pain-feature matching. A questionnaire experiment was designed to survey 241 consumers, which showed that the cross-section of consumers' weight-loss effectiveness and the product's pain-feature match significantly impacted consumers' willingness to pay for the product. Participants in the scenario where the weight loss effort was ineffective, and the product pain-feature was a good match were willing to pay a relatively low price for the product. The results suggest that when consumers have a pain point, and the pain-feature match is high, the product causes avoidance, and consumers are significantly less willing to pay.

While there has been a wealth of research on the definition of pain points themselves and consumer needs influencing consumer choice, there has been little research on the intersection of consumer pain points and product pain point targeting features on consumer willingness to pay. Although the emphasis on satisfying consumer pain points in business is widespread, retailers lack an understanding of the consumer psychology behind pain point marketing campaigns in most cases. We extend the pain-feature matching effect concept to the theoretical aspect of pain points, which indicates how well the degree

of consumer pain matches the pain feature of a product. Experimentally, we obtained the result that increasing the pain-feature match of a product may have a negative effect on increasing the willingness to pay of consumers with relevant pain points. The experiment's conclusions are contrary to the theory that satisfying consumer needs will be more attractive to the target group. According to the hedonic principle, consumers tend to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and hitting a pain point can cause painful memories and thus reduce the desire to buy the product. For example, manufacturers believe that products claiming to help with weight loss will hit a pain point and increase the desire to buy for consumers who have had poor weight loss results. In fact, the consumers who tend to buy products have lost weight well because their excellent weight loss results give them a feeling of pleasure. Consumers with poor weight loss results will avoid products with weight loss-related features because of their poor weight loss results. This paper proves the hypothesis experimentally that consumers are significantly less willing to pay when pain-feature matching is high.

The implications of the survey results for marketing campaigns are significant. Manufacturers should probably not focus their market research on finding consumers' pain points and expecting to impress them with products with a high pain-feature match. Hoping to increase the price premium of a product by matching it to a consumer's pain point may not be successful, as consumers with pain points are less willing to pay for such goods. If the company wants to sell products with a high pain-feature match, lower pricing is needed to reduce the consumer's pain of payment. Companies that focus on creating products that meet normal consumer needs are likely to have better results, such as cars with driving aids and fresh vegetable salads, which cater to consumer needs but are not pain points for consumers. Therefore, it is best not to try to address consumers' pain points in the product research process but rather to investigate general hedonic needs, which can help to increase consumers' desire to buy and provide a premium for the product (Ravi and Klaus, 2000).

The current study's findings have some limitations and may provide a basis for future research. A study of weight loss pain points among native English-speaking participants living in the UK concluded that consumers were significantly less willing to pay for products with a high pain-feature match. In future studies, the findings can be repeated by considering different areas of pain and products in multiple trials. At the same time, consumers' cultural background and education level may also influence the perception of pain points and attitudes toward high pain-feature match products. These limitations may affect the accuracy of the findings, and the conclusions should be validated in the future through more targeted research.

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