Risk & Reward: Alienation Testing

Changing a product for any reason entails risk that current users will reject the new product—reasons such as quality improvement, cost reduction effort or a change due to regulatory or ingredient related issues. Alienation testing involves engaging with current users to quantify their purchase behaviors to proposed changes to assess the potential risk to the business.

InsightsNow takes a unique behavioral approach in assessing this risk through the application of behavioral science to predict how and why current users will react to a proposed product change. This includes a diverse array of situations where product changes are “blind” or accompanied by marketing communications and/or testing is to be conducted in a central location, home use or extended home use environment.

Sensory Tradeoffs

The alienation test quantifies the sensory tradeoffs for a proposed change.

- Is the new product detected as different from current?
- Does the new product create penalties that reduce liking or preference?
- Do benefits if communicated overcome penalties leading to a change in purchase behavior?

Identifying Alienation

The percentage of people who would be alienated can be calculated by identifying the number of people who:

1. DETECT the change
2. PREFER the current over new
3. Would NOT BUY the new product

The Reactions

Analysis through alienation testing looks at when a brand makes a product change, and there are several ways in which the brand’s franchise may respond to that change. Essentially, there are four possible reactions:

- Unaware/Indifferent: Members of this group fail to detect the change, or are unaware or indifferent to it.
- Contented: These consumers detect and prefer the product change.
- Vulnerable: These prefer the current product, but will remain brand loyal and keep buying in spite of the change.
- Alienated: Members of this reactionary group are aware of change, prefer the current product, and in turn will reduce or discontinue product use as a result.

Thinking about making changes to your product? Plan alienation testing!

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