

A RELOOK AT THE MOTOR VEHICLE BUYER AFTER THE PURCHASE: DISSONANCE AROUSAL

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ABSTRACT

This study, based on Leon Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, evaluates the relative power of various dissonance arousal factors, the impact of price and the psychological conditions necessary for dissonance arousal, for example, effort exerted. The empirical analysis was undertaken on a sample of 200 new motor vehicle buyers. Eight dimensions impact significantly on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance, namely, awareness of expectations, unconfirmed expectations, reported dissonance, effort, congruence with self-concept, price, persuasiveness, and level of confidence during purchases. The results contribute to a better understanding of human behaviour and cognitions thereby, enabling the development of effective marketing strategies to enhance post-purchase satisfaction.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie is gebaseer op Leon Festinger (1957) se teorie van kognitiewe dissonansie, wat die relatiewe krag van verskeie opwekkingsfaktore, die impak van prys, asook die sielkundige toestande evalueer wat vir dissonansie-opwekking vereis word soos byvoorbeeld inspanning uitgeoefen. Die empiriese analise is uitgevoer op 'n steekproef van 200 eienaars van nuwe motorvoertuie. Agt dimensies het 'n betekenisvolle impak op die vlak van kognitiewe dissonansie uitgeoefen naamlik, hoe bewus verbruikers van hulle verwagtinge is, verwagtinge wat onbevestig is, dissonansie wat gerapporteer word, inspanning, ooreenstemming met die eienaar se selfbeeld, prys, hoe oortredend die verkoper is en die koper se vlak van selfvertroue gedurende die aankope. Die resultate dra by tot 'n beter begrip van menslike gedrag en van kognisies en bevorder daardeur die ontwikkeling van doeltreffende bemarkingstrategie om na-verkooptevredenheid te verhoog.

The emergence and development of the marketing concept has diverted the focus from the product to the consumer. Marketing managers today are becoming keenly interested in how the new purchaser feels after buying, mainly because post-purchase customer satisfaction 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 cognitions, needs, motivations and goals underlying consumption patterns and habits. Cognition incorporates the mental structures and information processing that individuals undergo during consumer decision-making. Consumer decision-making is a cognitive process, which comprises of those mental activities that determine what is actually done to remove or reduce a tension state caused by the recognition of a need. It is a sequential and repetitive series of psychological and physical activities ranging from problem recognition to post-purchase behaviour (Markin, 1974). During the first stage of the decision-making process, the individual perceives a difference between the ideal and the actual state of affairs and therefore, recognises a need. In the second stage, the individual seeks relevant information about potential solutions to the problem from the external environment or activates knowledge from memory. During the third stage, the consumer evaluates or judges competing alternatives in terms of salient beliefs about relevant consequences and combines this knowledge to make a choice (Peter and Olson, 1996). The act of buying marks the fourth stage which is followed by the final stage called post-purchase evaluation, that is, use and evaluation of the chosen alternative in light of its performance.

Consumers do not function in isolation but their choices are influenced by numerous individual and environmental factors that constantly and simultaneously interact (Figure 1).

Figure 1 indicates that in any purchasing situation individuals absorb information from their external environment and integrate or combine it with their inner needs, motives, perceptions and attitudes. The choice outcome may also be influenced by the past, the act of recalling and personality factors. In addition to past product experiences, anticipating future conse-

quences of behaviour may also influence the choice outcome in a current act of purchase. The consumer also faces family and cultural influence, peer group pressure, reference groups, economic demands and persuasive advertising. However, despite these and marketing pressures, the decision whether to buy or not in the final purchase situation is an individual one and an important decision that consumers have to make (Du Plessis, Rousseau and Blem, 1990). A key need underlying, and having a significant effect on the consumer's actions and decision-making, is the need for cognitive consistency.

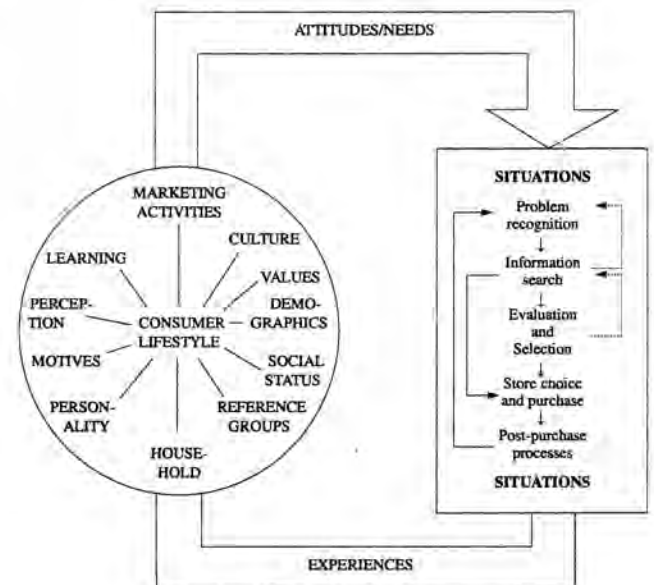


Figure 1: Overall model of consumer behaviour

Hawkins, D. I., Best, R. J. & Coney, K. A. 1986. Consumer Behaviour: Implications for Marketing Strategy. 3rd Edition. Texas: Business Publications, Inc. p. 37.

The consumer strives towards consistency within by establishing internal harmony of congruity amongst opinions, attitudes and values. When inconsistencies arise individuals try to rationalise them but 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 cognitions of the rejected alternatives and the negative cognitions of the chosen alternatives. Festinger (1957) refers to these post-decision and post-action states as 'dissonance'. For example, when purchasing a new car, the consumer may compare prices on different brands and models. Each of these has specific advantages and disadvantages, for example, prestige versus economy and combinations of accessories. Once the person selects the car, dissonance can develop because economy may have been sacrificed for additional prestige, or the wrong combination of accessories was included. Undoubtedly, dissonance is inevitable if the consumer wants equal amounts of economy and prestige. Furthermore, a consumer may learn information that is dissonant with his behaviour. Dissonance in itself is a motivating factor to reduce the tension. This cognitive interpreting process or desire for consistency was explored by Leon Festinger (1957) in the theory of cognitive dissonance and later revised by Elliot Aronson (1968). The original theory claims that the individual consumer strives toward consistency within the self. The current paper aims to identify the dimensions that trigger cognitive inconsistency, and which are responsible for dissonance arousal. The goals of this paper are:

- To identify whether the dimensions studied (awareness of expectations, unconfirmed expectations, anxiety, reported dissonance, psychological importance, effort, self-concept, price, persuasiveness, lack of information, confidence, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap, perceived quality of service, reported satisfaction) significantly impact on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced amongst motor vehicle buyers.
- To determine whether significant interrelationships exist amongst the dimensions studied.
- To investigate which of the dimensions studied have the greatest impact on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced and significantly account for its variance.

The dimensions studied have been conceptualised in the following manner:

- *Awareness of expectations:* This paper aims to evaluate the extent to which motor vehicle consumers are aware of their needs and expectations before engaging in the act of purchase. The lack of awareness of expectations may be attributed to confusion, the lack of product related information and the lack of confidence due to the complexity of the decision-making process.
- *Unconfirmed expectations:* Before the act of purchase, consumers develop expectations regarding the consequences of the purchase. The feedback serves to either confirm or reject these expectations. When the purchase confirms the expectations, the latter are reinforced. However, when expectations are not met, dissonance, an uncomfortable condition, arises.
- *Reported dissonance:* This paper aims to assess the extent to which consumers recognise and confess that they regret choosing the motor vehicle that they did. It evaluates the expression or confession of the buyer expressing dissonance.
- *Effort:* Effort refers to the resources, such as, material, intellectual and psychological resources, a consumer invests in a purchase (Geva & Goldman, 1991). This paper aims to determine whether a relationship exists between effort expended and dissonance.
- *Congruence with self-concept:* This paper evaluates the extent to

which the motor vehicle buyer experiences violation of the self-concept. It aims to assess the degree to which motor vehicle consumers experience dissonance because of a discrepancy between their self-concept and the actions that they have taken or choice that they have made.

- *Price:* Due to the huge capital outlay required for the purchase of a motor vehicle, this paper aims to assess whether post-purchase regret or dissatisfaction is due to the opportunity cost of having made a particular choice or decision.
- *Perceived persuasiveness of salesperson:* Sometimes consumers feel pressurised by the salesperson into buying a motor vehicle that they do not want or do not consider to be the right price to pay. This papers aims to assess the extent to which persuasiveness acts as a cause of consumer dissonance.
- *Level of confidence:* The level of confidence of motor vehicle consumers is determined by their ease when making the purchase decision, the extent to which they wondered whether they made the right decision and the extent to which they wondered whether they received the same kind of deal that other purchasers had received.

Dissonance arousal

According to Cooper and Fazio (1984) the acceptance of responsibility for some aversive consequence, not cognitive inconsistency per se, produces a generalised state of arousal that they refer to as dissonance arousal. Consequently, the individual searches the environment to determine the nature of the tension and its cause. The arousal may be attributed to the acceptance of responsibility for some aversive consequence (Wright, Rule, Ferguson, McGuire and Wells, 1992). High dissonance and low dissonance conditions are determined by the individual's attitudes and values as well as the nature of the product and the conditions surrounding the purchase decision (Markin, 1974). Worchel and Cooper (1979) maintain that dissonance increases as the degree of discrepancy among cognitions increases and as the number of discrepant cognitions increases. Furthermore, dissonance is inversely proportional to the number of consonant cognitions held by an individual and is influenced by the importance of the various cognitions that must be considered (Worchel and Cooper 1979). Therefore, several factors may simultaneously interact to increase or reduce the magnitude of dissonance.

Statement of the problem

Not much is known about the relative power of the various dissonance producing factors when engaging in the purchase of durable goods, or whether any interrelationships exist between them. The psychological conditions necessary for dissonance arousal, for example, effort, need to be explored. The relationship between the dissonance producing factors and the marketing variable, price, also needs to be established.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1

There exists significant interrelationships between the respective dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making (awareness of expectations, unconfirmed expectations, anxiety, reported dissonance, psychological importance, effort, self-concept, price, persuasiveness, lack of information, confidence, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap, perceived quality of service, reported satisfaction) when engaging in motor vehicle purchases.

Hypothesis 2

The dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making significantly impact on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced by motor vehicle consumers.

Hypothesis 3

The dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making significantly account for the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced by motor vehicle consumers.

METHOD

Subjects

A sample of 200 new motor vehicle buyers was drawn using the stratified random sampling technique. Only new motor vehicle buyers (within Kwa-Zulu Natal) who bought their motor vehicle 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 prevent the effects of cognitive intrusion from impacting on the results of the study. The sample was proportionately stratified on the basis of four controls or criteria (range of motor vehicle purchased, month of purchase, gender and age of the buyer) since these subgroups are expected to reflect different parameters on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced. It is expected that buyers who purchase varying ranges of motor vehicles are likely to experience differing levels of cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, with the lapse of time buyers are likely to encounter negative experiences and feedback about their choice or positive feedback about alternatives not selected, thereby contributing to their level of post-purchase dissonance experienced. Similarly, correlates between gender and age and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced were expected. Therefore, representativeness was achieved by drawing a proportional frequency of consumers in the different ranges of motor vehicles purchased. The motor vehicles purchased were divided into 'bottom of the range' (47.25 % of sample), 'middle of the range' (33.75 %) and 'top of the range' (19 %) on the basis of price. Secondly, a representation of male (47 %) and female (53 %) motor vehicle consumers was attained. In addition, the sample ranged from 20 to 65 years with a preponderance of candidates in the age group 30 - 39 years. However, the impact of these controls is not analysed in this paper. The adequacy of the sample was determined on the basis of the Kaiser-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.87062) and the Bartlett Test of Sphericity (21 059.071), which respectively showed suitability and significance. The results indicate that the normality and homoscedasticity preconditions are satisfied.

Instruments

The measuring instrument was a self-developed, precoded, standardised questionnaire comprising of Section A (Biographical data) and Section B (Variables related to Cognitive Dissonance). Statements relating to the dimensions of decision-making and post decision making and the level of cognitive dissonance (as hypothesised) were constructed and respondents were expected to reflect their attitudes using the 5 point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Procedure

A mail survey was used. 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. Respondents were informed that the study was undertaken purely for academic purposes with a view of determining how motor vehicle consumers feel after they have expended effort and money. Respondents were informed that their responses will be beneficial in determining what consumers need, how marketers/dealerships can best fulfil consumer expectations, how to improve the quality of service and hence, how to keep consumers satisfied. Each respondent was contacted telephonically informing them of the arrival of the questionnaire that was 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 that respondents need not bear the financial cost, thereby increasing the return rate. Although 400 questionnaires were distributed only 208 were returned (52% response rate) and a further 8 questionnaires were inappropriately completed, thereby reducing the sample size to 200 (50% return rate).

Statistical Analysis

Validity

The validity of the questionnaire was determined using Factor Analysis. An iterated principal factor analysis was performed using SPSS with an orthogonal Varimax Rotation. Fifteen factors with latent roots greater than unity were extracted from the factor matrix. The eigenvalues and the percent of total variance explained by each factor are reflected in Table I. When analysing the factor matrix, only items with loadings >0.5 were regarded as being significant. Furthermore, when items were significantly loaded on more than one factor only that with the highest value was acknowledged. The factors were then labelled in terms of the loadings of the items (Table I).

RESULTS

TABLE 1
FACTOR ANALYSIS: TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED
BY DIMENSIONS OF THE STUDY ON COGNITIVE DIS-
SONANCE USING THE PRINCIPAL COMPONENT
ANALYSIS EXTRACTION METHOD

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Dimension
1	23.637	25.146	25.146	Reported dissonance
2	9.467	10.072	35.218	Perceived quality of service
3	5.651	6.011	41.229	Lack of information
4	5.191	5.523	46.752	Effort
5	3.384	3.600	50.352	Attractiveness of decision alternatives
6	2.465	2.622	52.973	Congruence with self-concept
7	2.356	2.506	55.480	Cognitive overlap
8	2.353	2.503	57.983	Unconfirmed expectations
9	2.180	2.320	60.302	Psychological importance
10	1.953	2.077	62.380	Level of anxiety experienced
11	1.874	1.994	64.373	Level of confidence
12	1.786	1.900	66.274	Perceived persuasibility of salesperson
13	1.770	1.883	68.156	Price
14	1.441	1.533	69.689	Awareness of Expectations
15	1.421	1.512	71.201	Reported satisfaction

From Table I it is evident that the questionnaire measures 15 factors (eigenvalues are greater than 1) as originally identified. These factors cumulatively account for 71.201% of the total variance.

Reliability

The internal consistency of the questionnaire or the degree of homogeneity among the items was assessed using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha (Table II). Due to the multiplicity of the items measuring the dimensions (measured on a 5 point Likert scale) the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was considered to be the most suitable since it has the most utility of multi-item scales at the internal level of measurement (Cooper & Emory, 1995).

TABLE 2
RELIABILITY ESTIMATE: CRONBACH'S COEFFICIENT
ALPHA

Cronbach's Alpha	=	0.9607
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The closer the value of the Coefficient Alpha to 1, the greater the reliability of the questionnaire. Hence, the Coefficient Alpha of 0.9607 in Table II indicates the questionnaire is highly reliable and can consistently measure the dimensions of the

magnitude of cognitive dissonance it is designed to measure. In other words, the measuring instrument is capable of consistently reflecting the same underlying constructs. Furthermore, it indicates a high degree of homogeneity amongst the questionnaire items.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Descriptive statistics using frequency analyses and percentages were undertaken to evaluate the amount of effort motor vehicle consumers exert during decision-making. In order to determine the relationship between the dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making the Pearson's Correlation Matrix was used. To determine if the magnitude of cognitive dissonance, is influenced by these dimensions, stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. Analysis of Variance was used to determine whether any significant difference exists in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced be-

tween individuals who are aware of their expectations and those who are not.

Dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making

The interrelationships between the fifteen dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making were studied (Hypothesis 1). Significant interrelationships between 117 pairs (97.5 %) of dimensions of decision-making and post-purchase decision-making were noted with only 3 pairs (2.5 %) depicting no significant relationships (Table III). Hence, the 15 dimensions correlate significantly with one another respectively at, at least the 5 % level of significance, except for the following:-

- No significant relationships were noted between perceived quality of service and the amount of effort exerted respectively.

TABLE 3
INTERCORRELATION: DIMENSIONS INFLUENCING DECISION-MAKING AND POST-PURCHASE DECISION-MAKING

	CD	JUST	SE	TRIV	AC	RS	SERV	CO	ADA	CONF	LI	PERS	PRICE	SC	EFFORT	PI	RD	ANXIETY	UE	AE	
CD	1.000 0.000																				
JUST	-0.6764 0.000	1.000 0.000																			
SE	-0.2848 0.000	0.3458 0.000	1.000 0.000																		
TRIV	-0.4855 0.000	0.5117 0.000	0.3873 0.000	1.000 0.000																	
AC	-0.6080 0.000	0.6550 0.000	0.4496 0.000	0.5280 0.000	1.000 0.000																
RS	-0.7672 0.000	0.7605 0.000	0.2965 0.000	0.4757 0.000	0.6975 0.000	1.000 0.000															
SERV	-0.4158 0.000	-0.4434 0.000	0.0564 0.427*	0.3096 0.000	0.4168 0.000	0.6695 0.000	1.000 0.000														
CO	0.4480 0.000	-0.4161 0.000	-0.1992 0.000	-0.3260 0.000	-0.3300 0.000	-0.4421 0.000	-0.2750 0.000	1.000 0.000													
ADA	0.4773 0.000	-0.3215 0.000	-0.2605 0.000	-0.4486 0.000	-0.3544 0.000	-0.3572 0.000	-0.1844 0.000	0.5260 0.000	1.000 0.000												
CONF	0.8325 0.000	-0.6279 0.000	-0.2866 0.000	-0.4840 0.000	-0.4945 0.000	-0.6610 0.000	-0.3890 0.000	0.4381 0.000	0.5447 0.000	1.000 0.000											
LI	0.8090 0.000	-0.6100 0.000	-0.2600 0.000	-0.4592 0.000	-0.5408 0.000	-0.6321 0.000	-0.3675 0.000	0.4336 0.000	0.4803 0.000	0.8431 0.000	1.000 0.000										
PERS	0.8148 0.000	-0.5481 0.000	-0.2301 0.000	-0.3496 0.000	-0.4703 0.000	-0.6082 0.000	-0.3599 0.000	0.3733 0.000	0.3828 0.000	0.7023 0.000	0.7118 0.000	1.000 0.000									
PRICE	0.8202 0.000	-0.6373 0.000	-0.2916 0.000	-0.4387 0.000	-0.4719 0.000	-0.6432 0.000	-0.3503 0.000	0.3866 0.000	0.4482 0.000	0.7892 0.000	0.7438 0.000	0.7538 0.000	1.000 0.000								
SC	0.8502 0.000	-0.4905 0.012	-0.3063 0.000	-0.4003 0.000	0.4853 0.000	-0.6211 0.000	0.3027 0.000	0.4199 0.000	0.4967 0.000	0.7066 0.000	0.6710 0.000	0.6755 0.000	0.6648 0.000	1.000 0.000							
EFF	0.2630 0.000	-0.1779 0.000	-0.2826 0.000	-0.2890 0.000	-0.2203 0.002	-0.2406 0.000	-0.0860 0.226*	0.3298 0.000	0.5034 0.000	0.3074 0.000	0.1567 0.027	0.2007 0.004	0.3275 0.000	0.3367 0.000	1.000 0.000						
PI	0.5841 0.000	-0.3903 0.000	-0.1683 0.017	-0.4204 0.000	-0.4136 0.000	-0.4982 0.000	-0.2275 0.001	0.3221 0.000	0.3664 0.000	0.5374 0.000	0.5156 0.000	0.4344 0.000	0.4602 0.000	0.4889 0.000	0.2997 0.000	1.000 0.000					
RD	0.9356 0.000	-0.6364 0.000	-0.2357 0.001	-0.4195 0.000	-0.5747 0.000	-0.7628 0.000	-0.4196 0.000	0.4147 0.000	0.4308 0.000	0.7450 0.000	0.7418 0.000	0.7402 0.000	0.7368 0.000	0.7460 0.000	0.2046 0.004	0.5940 0.000	1.000 0.000				
ANX	0.9227 0.000	-0.6241 0.000	-0.2165 0.002	-0.4130 0.000	-0.5544 0.000	-0.7294 0.000	-0.3899 0.000	0.4180 0.000	0.4655 0.000	0.7659 0.000	0.7393 0.000	0.7432 0.000	0.7497 0.000	0.7459 0.000	0.2408 0.001	0.6378 0.000	0.9538 0.000	1.000 0.000			
UE	0.9123 0.000	-0.6368 0.000	-0.2573 0.000	-0.5011 0.000	-0.5809 0.000	-0.6972 0.000	-0.3836 0.000	0.4299 0.000	0.4479 0.000	0.7341 0.000	0.6975 0.000	0.6899 0.000	0.7317 0.000	0.7022 0.000	0.3168 0.000	0.5527 0.000	0.7898 0.000	0.7915 0.000	1.000 0.000		
AE	-0.2015 0.004	0.1366 0.054	-0.0181 0.799*	0.1760 0.0013	0.0790 0.266*	0.1921 0.006	0.1513 0.032	0.1520 0.032	-0.1937 0.006	-0.2438 0.001	-0.1994 0.005	-0.1802 0.011	-0.1842 0.009	-0.2490 0.000	-0.0983 0.166*	-0.0969 0.172*	-0.1668 0.018	-0.1854 0.009	-0.1832 0.009	1.000 0.000	

* p > 0.05

- No significant relationships were noted between pre-purchase awareness of expectations and amount of effort exerted and psychological importance to the purchase respectively.

Of the 117 pairs (97.5 %) of dimensions reflecting significant relationships, 81 pairs (69.23 %) represented direct relationships whilst 36 pairs (30.77 %) depicted inverse relationships. Whilst 112 pairs (95.7 %) of dimensions were significant at the 1 % level, the following 5 pairs (4.3 %) were significant at the 5 % level of significance:

- The relationships between pre-purchase awareness of expectations and perceived good quality of service, the degree of cognitive overlap, persuasiveness of salesperson, and reported dissonance respectively.
- The relationship between effort expended and lack of product-related information.

Hence, Hypothesis 1 is, in large part, accepted.

The results of the impact of these dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced are depicted in Table IV.

TABLE 4
CORRELATION: MAGNITUDE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Variable	r	P
Awareness of Expectations	-0.2015	0.004 *
Unconfirmed Expectations	0.9123	0.000 *
Level of Anxiety	0.9227	0.000 *
Reported Dissonance	0.9356	0.000 *
Psychological Importance	0.5841	0.000 *
Effort Exerted	0.2630	0.000 *
Congruence with Self-concept	0.8502	0.000 *
Price	0.8202	0.000 *
Perceived Persuasibility of Salesperson	0.8148	0.000 *
Lack of Product-related Information	0.8090	0.000 *
Level of Confidence	0.8325	0.000 *
Attractiveness of Decision Alternatives	0.4773	0.000 *
Cognitive overlap	0.4480	0.000 *
Perceived Quality of Service	-0.4158	0.000 *
Reported Satisfaction	-0.7672	0.000 *

* p < 0.01

From Table IV it can be concluded, during motor vehicle decision-making the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced is higher when:

- The motor vehicle purchasers are extremely unaware of their expectations.
- The consumer's expectations are not met.
- The motor vehicle buyer feels anxious about the purchase decision.
- The consumer reports high levels of reported dissatisfaction or low levels of reported satisfaction.
- The motor vehicle purchase has psychological importance to the buyer.
- The motor vehicle purchaser engages in a tremendous amount of effort in search and evaluation.
- The incongruence between the selected motor vehicle and the individual's self-concept is high, that is, the motor vehicle selected fails to reflect the self-concept of the buyer.
- The motor vehicle is expensive and involves a tremendous amount of capital outlay and produces a financial strain.
- The salesperson is persuasive.

- The motor vehicle purchaser lacks product related information.
- The motor vehicle buyer feels overly confident about the purchase decision.
- The decision alternatives have features which are similar and equally attractive.
- There exists a substantial degree of cognitive overlap between decision alternatives.
- The consumer holds perceptions of 'poor' quality service.

Hence, Hypothesis 2 may be accepted. It must be noted that the relationship between the magnitude of cognitive dissonance and the respective dimensions of awareness of expectations, perceived quality of service and reported satisfaction are significant but inverse.

Whilst significant relationships exist between the dimensions of decision-making and post decision-making and the magnitude of dissonance, only 8 factors significantly account for the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced (Table V).

TABLE 5
STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION: MAGNITUDE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE EXPERIENCED

MULTIPLE REGRESSION					
Multiple R = 0.9960					Significance of R = 0.0000
Multiple R Square = 0.9920					
Adjusted R Square = 0.9916					
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE					
SOURCE	D.F.	SUM OF SQUARES	MEAN SQUARES	F RATIO	F PROB.
Regression	8	99	12.4957486	2	0.0000
Residual	191	965.9886	4.2461	942.872	
		811.0064			

Table V indicates that 99.16 % of the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced, was significantly explained by only eight dimensions of cognitive dissonance. The F-ratio of 2 942.872 (p = 0.0000) indicates the regression of magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced expressed by the R square (R² = 0.9916) is statistically significant. Hence, Hypothesis 3 may be partially accepted as not all the dimensions significantly account for the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced. A summary Analysis of the Variance indicates the amount of variance attributed to each dimension of cognitive dissonance (Table VI).

TABLE 6
STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION: SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE - FACTORS IMPACTING ON THE MAGNITUDE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE EXPERIENCED

Source	df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F ratio	f prob.
Awareness of expectations	1	18.6045	18.6045	4.382	0.0377
Unconfirmed expectations	1	3464.5890	3464.5890	815.945	0.0000
Reported Dissonance	1	898.3790	898.3790	211.577	0.0000
Effort	1	150.5799	150.5799	35.463	0.0000
Self-concept	1	1576.2692	1576.2692	371.227	0.0000
Price	1	61.8072	61.8072	14.556	0.0002
Persuasibility	1	203.0977	203.0977	47.832	0.0000
Confidence	1	56.2704	56.2704	13.252	0.0004
Explained	8	99965.9886	12495.7486	2942.872	0.0000
Residual	191	811.0064	4.2461		
TOTAL	199	100776.9950	506.4171		

Table VI indicates that the impact of these variables on the magnitude of cognitive dissonance in descending level of influence are unconfirmed expectations ($Mean^2 = 3464,5890$), perceived incongruence between motor vehicle and self-concept ($Mean^2 = 1567,2692$), degree of reported dissonance ($Mean^2 = 898,3790$), extent of salesperson persuasiveness ($Mean^2 = 203,0977$), level of effort exerted during purchases ($Mean^2 = 150,5799$), perceived suitability of price ($Mean^2 = 61,8072$), level of confidence in purchase decision ($Mean^2 = 56,2704$) and awareness of expectations ($Mean^2 = 18,6045$). These dimensions account for the 99.16% (Adjusted R square = 0.9916) of the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced (Explained Mean Squares = 12495.7486). The remaining and negligible 0.84 % of the variance, that is, residual mean squares = 4.2461 is explained by the other factors (Table VII).

TABLE 7
MULTIPLE REGRESSION: FACTORS WHICH DO NOT EXPLAIN VARIANCE IN MAGNITUDE OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE EXPERIENCED

Variable	F	Significance
Anxiety	1.338	0.2488
Psychological Importance	3.676	0.0567
Lack of Information	1.658	0.1994
Attractiveness of Decision Alternative	3.305	0.0706
Cognitive Overlap	1.146	0.2857
Service	0.465	0.4959
Reported Satisfaction	0.390	0.8441

From Table VII it can be deduced, since $p > 0.05$ for each of the dimensions (level of anxiety experienced during the purchase, degree of psychological importance, perceived lack of information, perceived attractiveness of decision alternative, extent of cognitive overlap, perceived quality of service, reported satisfaction), these factors fail to significantly explain the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced. The discussion of the results in the current paper will pertain only to the eight dimensions that significantly account for the variance in the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced.

DISCUSSION

• Awareness of expectations

The results of this study indicate that the higher the level of awareness of expectations, the lower the level of anxiety, reported dissonance and cognitive dissonance experienced. In addition, a significant, direct relationship was observed between awareness of expectations and quality of service and reported satisfaction respectively. These results emphasise that post-purchase consumer satisfaction is "the consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations (or some other norm of performance) and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption" (Ise and Wilson, 1988, p. 204). The relationship between awareness of expectations and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance reported in this study is substantiated by researchers (Bearden and Teel, 1983; Day, 1977; Oliver, 1980; Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins, 1983) who have suggested that consumer satisfaction is influenced by a pre-experience comparison standard. The results show that the higher the awareness of expectations of consumers, the higher the quality of service perceived and the greater the degree of reported satisfaction.

Tests of differences (Analysis of Variance) were conducted to determine whether significant differences exist in the perceptions of motor vehicle consumers with varying levels of awareness of expectations and each of the factors influencing decision-making

and post decision-making respectively (Table VIII).

The results reflect that consumers who are aware of their motor vehicle expectations and those who are not fully aware of the motor vehicle features they desire, differ in the following ways:-

- Perceptions of unconfirmed expectations, perceptions of incongruence between motor vehicle purchase and the self-concept, suitability of price, perceived persuasiveness of salesperson, lack of product related information, attractiveness of decision alternative and degree of cognitive overlap.
- Level of anxiety experienced during purchases, reported dissonance, confidence in the purchase decision, reported satisfaction, the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced.

TABLE 8
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: AWARENESS OF EXPECTATIONS

Variable	F Ratio	F Probability
Unconfirmed Expectations	6.8616	0.0095 *
Anxiety	9.1653	0.0028 *
Reported Dissonance	8.2434	0.0045 *
Psychological Importance	0.7978	0.3729
Effort	1.2282	0.2691
Self-concept	14.8952	0.0002 *
Price	6.5029	0.0115 *
Persuasibility	10.1457	0.0017 *
Lack of Information	6.4556	0.0118 *
Confidence	10.0567	0.0018 *
Attractiveness of Decision Alternatives	6.6023	0.0109 *
Cognitive Overlap	5.8929	0.0161 *
Service	3.6939	0.0560
Reported Satisfaction	7.6271	0.0063 *
Cognitive Dissonance	10.2186	0.0016 *

* $p < 0.05$

Furthermore, consumers who are aware of their motor vehicle expectations and those who are not fully aware of the motor vehicle features they desire, do not differ in terms of the level of psychological importance attached to the motor vehicle purchases, the amount of effort exerted during the motor vehicle purchases and their perceptions of quality of service.

• Unconfirmed expectations

Dissonance increases as product performance fails to meet consumer expectations (Walters and Bergiel, 1989). According to Walters and Bergiel (1989) failure to perform or to perform up to expectations is the most crucial reason for post-purchase dissonance. Dissonance can best be conceived of as a violation of expectancy (Shaver, 1985). The importance of consumer expectations is that unconfirmed expectations will be evaluated negatively, irrespective of whether experience exceeds or falls short of the expectancy (Block and Roering, 1976).

The results of this study indicate that the higher the level of unconfirmed expectations, the higher the level of anxiety experienced, reported dissonance, incongruence with self-concept, lack of information, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap and magnitude of cognitive dissonance respectively. Festinger (1957) proposed and Wicklund

and Brehm (1976) found that disconfirmed expectancies will generate dissonance, but with the stipulation that only disconfirmed expectancies for which the person feels responsible will arouse dissonance. Furthermore, Wicklund and Brehm (1976) maintain that, if the consumer perceives performance of the rejected alternatives to be similar to the one selected, dissonance is more likely to result, especially if the selected alternative does not meet expectations.

Furthermore, the current study revealed that the lower the degree of unconfirmed expectations, the larger the perceived quality of service and the extent of reported satisfaction respectively. Gronhaug and Gilly (1991) maintain that high effort matched with low reward results in dissatisfaction which, in this context, is the buyer's cognitive state of being insufficiently rewarded in a buying situation such that the intended purchasing (and consumption) goals have not been achieved.

• Reported dissonance

The results of this study indicate, the incidence of reported dissonance is greater when consumers:-

- Attach psychological importance to the motor vehicle purchases,
- Exert a tremendous amount of effort,
- Perceive their purchases to be incongruent with their self-concepts,
- Perceive the price to be unsuitable,
- Have been persuaded by the salesperson into purchases,
- Lack sufficient product related information,
- Lack confidence in their purchase decision,
- Find the decision alternatives to be equally attractive.

These factors therefore, arouse dissonance in motor vehicle consumers. Similarly, Menasco and Hawkins (1978) report, within decisional contexts the greater the level of difficulty of a decision, the greater is post-purchase dissonance. Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that significant and inverse relationships exist between the level of reported dissonance and quality of service and reported satisfaction respectively.

• Effort

Dissonance theory maintains that regardless of how attractive, desirable and interesting the goal actually is, it is what a person undergoes to achieve it that determines its worth (Pennington, 1986). The results of the study indicate that consumers exert a greater amount of effort when:-

- They desire the motor vehicle selected to be a reflection of their self-concept,
- The motor vehicle is an expensive one,
- They sense a large degree of persuasiveness from the salesperson,
- The decision alternatives are highly attractive,
- They perceive a large degree of cognitive overlap.
- The purchase is a psychologically important one.

These results coincide with that of Geva and Goldman (1991) who found in their study that effort is a direct function of the importance of the purchase; the more effort invested, the more important the purchase becomes and vice versa. Srinivasan & Ratchford (1991) found that while experience tends to reduce search effort, subjective knowledge tends to increase it. The magnitude of the dissonance is directly related to the amount of work and effort that the individual has undergone to fulfil expectations (Freedman, Carlsmith, and Sears, 1970). Hence, the more effort one expends attaining something, the more dissonance there is if the consequences are less than expected.

The amount of cognitive and behavioural effort consumers exert in their problem-solving processes is highly variable. A choice between two close alternatives is more difficult and hence, requires greater effort (Jones and Gerard, 1967). Loudon and Della Bitta (1984) emphasise that dissonance becomes particularly strong when the consumer makes a large commit-

ment to the purchase. Such commitment refers not only to the amount of money, but also the investment of time, effort and image or ego. Commitment varies directly with the amount of cognitive-affective-behavioural support that exists for the preference. The greater the commitment to the purchase, the greater the degree of effort expended (Crosby and Taylor, 1983). Foxall (1980) maintains that the more effort a consumer exerts to attain a goal, the more dissonance is aroused if the goal is less valuable than expected. Effort appears to be minimal for convenience goods, moderate for shopping goods, and maximal for speciality goods (Kaish, 1967). Furthermore, frequency analyses were undertaken to investigate the amount of effort that motor vehicle consumers expend during decision-making (Table IX).

The frequency analyses as reflected in Table IX support the inferential findings by indicating that 18 % of the respondents strongly agreed and a further 32 % agreed that they spent a

TABLE 9
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS: AMOUNT OF EFFORT
EXERTED DURING DECISION-MAKING

Nature of question	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Total
I spent a considerable amount of time in evaluating alternative makes of cars before making a decision.	32	18	50
The purchase of my car involved a tremendous amount of money, for which I had to plan.	44	26	70
I visited/obtained quotations from many dealerships before making my decision.	41.5	17.5	59
When considering the alternative makes of vehicles, I evaluated each one in terms of the array of special features that I considered important.	46.5	14	60.5
I planned extensively before making my purchase decision.	47	21	68
I searched for a lot of motor vehicle related information before making my decision to purchase.	35	10.5	45.5

considerable amount of time in evaluating alternative makes of cars before making a decision. A combined 70% of the motor vehicle consumers sampled agreed (44%) and strongly agreed (26%) that the purchase of the motor vehicle involved a tremendous amount of money, for which they had to plan. In addition, 59 % of the consumers demonstrated their level of effort exerted by visiting/obtaining quotations from many dealerships before making a decision. A combined 60.5% of the subjects agreed (46.5%) and strongly agreed (14%) that they evaluated each alternative motor vehicle in terms of the array of special features considered important. Sixty eight percent of the respondents indicated that they planned extensively before making their purchase decision. Furthermore, a combined 45.5 % of the motor vehicle buyers indicated that they searched for a lot of motor vehicle related information before making their decisions to purchase. In addition, the results of this study reflect a significant and direct relationship between effort and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced. Similarly, Geva & Goldman (1991) maintain that effort plays a dual function in the dissonance situation since it is a condition for dissonance arousal as well as an element in the cognitive system. They believe that dissonance is likely to be triggered when high effort is matched with low reward. This results in dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the greater the amount of effort exerted during decision-making, the lower the degree of reported satisfaction. No significant relationship was noted

between the degree of effort exerted and the perceived quality of service.

• Congruence with self-concept

Aronson (1992) believes that dissonance is greatest and clearest when it involves not just any two cognitions but, rather, a cognition about the self and a piece of our behaviour that violates the self-concept. Wilder (1992) and Cummings and Venkatesan (1975) support Aronson's view that the basic ingredients for dissonance are (a) willingness concerning the choice, (b) irrevocable commitment to the decision (product choice), and (c) importance of the choice to the individual's self-concept. Similarly, Cooper (1992, p. 321) found that "people experience dissonance largely because of a discrepancy between their self-concepts and the actions that they have been induced to perform in dissonance-generated research settings". Motor vehicle purchases are characterised by product involvement because purchasing a motor vehicle usually involves some degree of product involvement. Traylor (1981) found that motor vehicles are a relatively high ego-involvement product class for many consumers; they are carefully selected, are important purchase decisions, and are sometimes thought to reflect the owners' personalities. The results of this study are congruent with the view of these theorists. These results display a significant and direct relationship between self-concept and price, persuasiveness, lack of information, level of confidence, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced respectively. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a significant and inverse relationship between the self-concept of the buyer and perceived quality of service and reported satisfaction respectively. Therefore, the greater the incongruence between the purchase of the motor vehicle and the self-concept of the individual, the greater the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced.

Similarly, Goethals (1992) found that dissonance is strongest when there is an inconsistency between a cognition about the self and a cognition about how one has behaved. Conversely, Cooper (1992) deduced that consumers will not experience dissonance if no aversive consequence ensues and if they have not done something repugnant to their self-concept. Similarly, in Scher and Cooper's (1997) study, dissonance was aroused when subjects felt responsible for some aversive consequence, regardless of whether their behaviour was consistent or inconsistent with beliefs. These findings support Cooper and Fazio's (1984) view which suggests that the motivational basis for dissonance is the felt responsibility for aversive consequences.

• Price

Individuals react emotionally and psychologically to prices and price-related cues. Price is often used as a search attribute (Alba, Broniarczyk, Shimp and Urbany, 1994). Perception of the price cue for some consumers can be characterised by a concern about the relationship between quality received and price paid in a purchase transaction (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer, 1993). However, Grewel and Marmorstein (1994, p. 453) found that "consumers' willingness to engage in price search does not increase concomitantly with the price variation of durable goods".

The findings of this study reflect that significant and direct relationships exist between price and persuasiveness of salesperson, lack of information, confidence, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced respectively. Similarly, Freedman, Carlsmith and Sears (1970) deduced that the magnitude of the dissonance is a direct function of the amount of expenditure of any kind that the individual has undergone to fulfil expectations. Furthermore, a significant but inverse relationship was observed between price and perceived quality of service respectively.

The higher the price of the product, the greater the possibility of dissonance. In a report on the purchaser of the 1963 Chevrolet, Engel (1965) indicates that no doubts were found concerning purchase of the car versus other makes but considerable

dissonance was experienced regarding the price paid. According to Williams (1981) dissonance is likely to be strongest for the purchase of durable goods which signify expensive items with a very low frequency of purchase.

• Perceived persuasiveness of salesperson

Consumers differ in their susceptibility to persuasion (Engel, 1963). The findings of this study indicate that there is a significant and direct relationship between salesperson persuasiveness and lack of information, level of confidence, attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced respectively. Similarly, Engel (1963) found that consumers who are more easily persuaded will be highly dissonant after the purchase. In the current study, like in that of Engel's (1963), consumers reported that they have been talked into buying cars they did not like, for prices they did not want to pay. However, Bell (1967) found that all consumers may not be cognitively dissonant. Bell (1967) deduced from his research that the type of personality an individual brings to the dealership determines the extent of dissatisfaction with the metallic object parked on the driveway. However, Bell (1967) found no association between persuasiveness and dissonance. His explanation for this result is, the customer's self-confidence influences persuasiveness as well as dissonance.

Furthermore, it can be deduced from the current study that there is a significant but inverse relationship between salesperson persuasiveness and perceived quality of service received. However, Bell (1967) found a slight curvilinear relationship between buyer persuasiveness and quality of service.

• Confidence

According to Stuart (1984) consumer confidence is the interrelation and interaction of many attitudes and expectations and determines willingness to buy. It is evident from the results of the current study that there is a significant and direct relationship between the level of confidence of the motor vehicle buyer and attractiveness of decision alternatives, cognitive overlap, and magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced respectively. These results are congruent with that of Bell (1967) who found that consumers would be more dissonant, the more uneasy they were about the purchase decision, the more they wondered if they had made the right decision, or the more they wondered if they received the same kind of deal that other purchasers had received. Bell (1967) deduced from his study that a consumer's self-confidence has an unusual effect on persuasiveness. Bell (1967) found:-

- Customers who were high on self-confidence, were high on dissonance if they were easily persuaded into buying their new cars, since being persuaded is contrary to their usual behaviour.
- Those who were high on self-confidence experienced very little dissonance.
- Those low on self-confidence had little dissonance if they were readily persuaded.
- Those with little confidence were highly dissonant if they resisted influence attempts by the salesperson and were not easily persuaded.

Furthermore, from the current study it can be deduced that there exists a significant and inverse relationship between consumers' level of confidence and perceived quality of service and reported satisfaction respectively.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic nature of consumer behaviour, the increasingly sophisticated needs of consumers and their awareness of expectations, results in target markets being difficult to satisfy and maintain. In addition, the detrimental effects of disconfirmation of expectations on repeat purchases and the prevalence and magnitude of cognitive dissonance make it imperative for marketing managers to attain a deeper understanding of consumer cognitions and behaviour so as to secure a substantial

market share, predominantly through customer loyalty. Magnifying this problem is the multitude of motor vehicle product features (and combinations of them) which increase the number of decision alternatives available and make them more attractive, thereby increasing the potential for dissonance arousal. An understanding of the theory of cognitive dissonance and the dimensions relating to dissonance arousal can help to ensure consumer satisfaction.

Post-purchase evaluation typically results in some change in the consumer. The purchase experience (satisfaction or dissatisfaction) impacts on future buying behaviour. Hence, the marketer should monitor consumers' evaluation of the product to ensure continuous satisfaction. Post-purchase evaluations resulting in partial satisfaction or dissatisfaction present benefits for the marketing manager who can convert these consumers into marketing opportunities. Marketers may use personal selling and advertising to enable the marketing firm to differentiate its product offerings from competitors, lure competitors' customers and to reduce dissonance, thereby reinforcing purchases.

In this study it was found, dissonance may also be significantly aroused by awareness of expectations, unconfirmed expectations, reported dissonance, amount of effort exerted, incongruence between the purchased product and the self-concept, the price of the product, the degree of persuasiveness of the salesperson and the level of confidence. Add to this the impact of and interrelationship amongst other potential dissonance arousal factors and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance experienced becomes crucial.

The results of the study are presented in attempts to address the decision-oriented implication of the theory of cognitive dissonance. A consumer's experience with a motor vehicle and perception of that vehicle's performance will influence repeat purchase behaviour. It is therefore, evident that an individual who experiences post-purchase dissonance with a motor vehicle purchased is most unlikely to purchase that brand or make of motor vehicle again. However, it must be remembered, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance is not a panacea to all business and other problems but provides a broader frame of reference for understanding human behaviour and cognitions. Since individuals strive for equilibrium or cognitive consistency, their behaviour (or purchases of products) are congruent with feelings and cognitions. Therefore, marketers need to provide consumers with sufficient and realistic information, understand consumers' needs and expectations, provide quality service and make the individual's decision-making process a comfortable and reassuring one, especially when the buyer engages in an expensive purchase, for example, that of a motor vehicle. Therefore, marketing managers need to focus on dissonance arousal and the formulation of tactics needed to maintain a competitive advantage and to maximise market share.

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