Introducing The Halo Effect To Market Research World

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In psychology, the Halo Effect is a bias which states that an individualâ€™s impression of one aspect of a person, product, service or concept affects their views of other aspects of that thing. For instance, if you find someone physically attractive, you are more likely to answer, when asked, that they are kind or intelligent â€“ despite the fact that you may never have spoken to or even met them. This blog is intended to introduce the concept of the Halo Effect to Market Research World.

Similar to the above, consumers may think, when questioned as part of a survey, that a specific brand of crisps was more nutritionally valuable than their competitors, due in part to a number of different factors which are unrelated to nutritional values. These could include familiarity with the brand, packaging, celebrity endorsement etc. In short, the perception of a brand or concept (or person) is influenced by the overall feeling towards that brand, concept or person, which can in turn be influenced by a particularly strong feeling about one aspect of that brand or concept (which may be totally unrelated to the attribute a survey is asking about). This process is an unconscious one â€“ respondents, and people generally, do not actively think â€˜those crisps are well packaged, and thus must be better nutritionally than this other, less colourfully packaged brand of crisps', much in the same way as they do not consciously think 'that person is attractive, and therefore must be kind and intelligent.' As such, it is very difficult for market researchers to gather responses on individual aspects of a product or service which can be seen as removed from the product or service as a whole. This discussion could easily lead in to a wider debate about the location of the â€˜overall satisfaction questionâ€™ within a survey â€“ should researchers gather top of mind satisfaction prior to an individual listing their thoughts about specific service aspects, or should overall satisfaction be asked at the end, when a more considered view is possible? This topic is discussed by a number of individuals, not least Alex McCluckie who, writing in Research Live, bases his analysis on a Christmas theme. However, the overall satisfaction question is not the one to be discussed here. The Halo Effect is an important consideration in market research, and warrants its own article - although at this stage this is very much an introductory piece. The Effect is a systematic response error, and one which should at least be considered when constructing multi-aspect scales as it can result in misleading data and thus poor strategic decision making for organisations further down the line. There are a number of methods to try and manage the Halo Effect, including, for one, reducing the time between consumption of the product or service and the survey being carried out. The thinking behind this approach is to limit the need for a respondent to rely on overall impressions of the product or service when rating independent attributes. For instance, if respondents consumed a packet of crisps and then completed a survey 2 minutes later, they would be much more able to comment on â€˜crispnessâ€™, â€˜flavourâ€™, â€˜packagingâ€™ etc. If they ha before completing the survey, respondents would be much more likely to take the salient memory of eating those crisps, and apply it across a number of different attributes. A number of other methods for reducing Halo Effect within surveys have also been proposed, although as this article is intended as a general introduction to this form of bias, they will not be discussed here.Rippleout Marketing is a marketing consultancy specialising in digital marketing, but with a background in the market research industry. Visit the consultancy's blog for a range of articles across marketing topics.
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