INSATIABILITY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE CREATION OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION AS A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESSFUL MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary marketing thought and practice identifies the creation of customer satisfaction as key to successful marketing and superior firm performance. However, in 1932 Charles Kettering, then head of research for General Motors and future CEO, stated, "One of the fundamental purposes of research is to foster a healthy dissatisfaction" (Kettering, 1932). Similar statements concerning the creation of customer dissatisfaction as a goal of General Motors can be found in Sloan (1941, 1963), Oliver (2010), Larson (1993), and Kettering (1929). This conceptual paper explores why GM pursued an objective that was inconsistent with the satisfaction strategies that dominate current management thought and practice and considers the implications for contemporary marketing.

INTRODUCTION: THE GOAL OF DISSATISFACTION

A key goal for many organizations is the creation of customer satisfaction. The justification for a goal of customer satisfaction rests in large measure on the marketing concept, which states in part ". . . the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more efficiently than competitors" (Kotler, 1988). Satisfaction has also been an element of the past American Marketing Association's definition of marketing which, echoing the marketing concept, stated, "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives (Marketing News, 1985).

Validating the widespread belief that customer satisfaction is a key objective of marketing, Ferrell and Lucas (1987), in a survey of marketing educators, managers, and students, found that satisfaction emerged as one of four factors deemed important to a comprehensive definition of marketing. Ultimately, satisfaction can be traced to Adam Smith, who conceived "the end objective of all economic activity to be the satisfaction of consumption" (Bartels, 1962, p. 196.) Satisfaction received a boost from the Total Quality Movement (Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986) and Customer Relationship Marketing (CRM). For instance, Mithas, Krishnan, and Fornell (2005) found that CRM systems had a positive effect on customer satisfaction. Umashankar, Bahadir, and Bharadwaj (2022) found that mergers and acquisitions had a negative effect on customer satisfaction while Fornell, Morgeson, and Hult (2016) found a positive effect between Customer Satisfaction and stock returns. Customer Satisfaction has even been examined in the context of political identity (Fernandes, Ordabayeva, Han, Jung, and Mittal (2022). Indeed, few topics have been more widely studied in the marketing literature than customer satisfaction. For instance, a search of the Journal of Marketing for customer satisfaction yields a total of 3,099 published articles as of early 2024. At a practitioner level, the importance of customer satisfaction can be seen in such axioms as "the customer is always right" and "the customer is king." Larsen and Wright (2020) have argued that consumer satisfaction is the telos, or foundation, and the ultimate dependent variable of marketing theory and practice.

The creation of customer satisfaction as a, if not the central, goal of marketing is so simple, compelling, and obvious that it is not surprising that marketing academics and practitioners have a widespread consensus on this point. Firms that fail to deliver customer satisfaction will ultimately fail (given competition that does deliver customer satisfaction).

However, historically, the goal of General Motors (GM) was the creation of not just satisfaction, but also dissatisfaction. For instance, in the 1920's, the stated mission of the consumer-research division of General Motors was “the organized creation of dissatisfaction” (Larson, 1993, 1992; Oliver, 2010). In 1932, then head of research and future CEO of GM, Charles Kettering stated, “One of the fundamental purposes of research is to foster a healthy dissatisfaction” (Kettering, 1932). Additional statements affirming the organized creation of customer dissatisfaction as a central goal of General Motors can be found in the writings of Alfred P. Sloan (1941, 1963) as well as Bayley (1983), Dichter (1960), Halberstam (1993), Kettering (1928, 1929), Kuhn (1986), Livingston (1958), McCollough (2001, 2010), (Meikle (1979), and Mingo (1994).

The objectives of this paper are threefold. First, the reasons why GM pursued an objective so inconsistent with the satisfaction strategies that dominate current management thought and practice will be explored. Second, the concept of customer insatiability as the objective of successful marketing will be introduced. Third, the implications for current marketing thought and practice of customer dissatisfaction and insatiability strategies will be explored.

This paper is conceptual in nature. It is not empirical, nor does it lay out a research program to quantitatively verify the proposition put forth. Stating both conceptual arguments for the benefits of the creation of dissatisfaction while laying out an empirical research agenda would be beyond the scope of one paper. However, theory must precede empirical study, and the presentation of conceptual agreements has merit in the study of marketing science. Therefore, the propositions offered are intended to summarize key arguments and are not intended to be testable as presented.

GM AND THE GOAL OF CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION

The Model T

Why would General Motors, the most successful industrial organization of its time, have adopted a goal so at odds with today’s conventional wisdom? The explanation can be found in the competitive situation General Motors (GM) found itself in in the early 1920's. In its early years General Motors had a problem that threatened the existence of the organization. The problem was, essentially, customer satisfaction, specifically high customer satisfaction with the Ford Model T. In 1924, Ford had nearly a 60 percent share of the domestic automobile market compared to GM’s 16 percent. General Motors could not outdo Ford at producing basic, affordable transportation. Further confounding GM was the problem that the Model T was a vehicle that was designed to keep going indefinitely.” Replacement parts were plentiful, and Henry Ford had designed the vehicle to be easily repaired by any owner with a rudimentary mechanical knowledge (Womack et al., 1990). Simply put, customer dissatisfaction with the Model T would not arise soon because the vehicle had exhausted its life span. Indeed, it is estimated that 50,000 Model T’s are still in roadworthy condition as of this writing. Even given the ultimate exhaustion of the automobile, the consumer could simply purchase a new Model T at a price that was less than any of its competitors could match.

If GM was to survive, its most immediate marketing problem was not the creation of satisfaction, but of dissatisfaction. GM had to make American car drivers dissatisfied with their Model T and provide them with the solution to this dissatisfaction in the form of a new General

Motors product.

Therefore, GM evolved a strategy of technical innovation and styling changes that demonstrated to the consumer all an automobile could be, and that the Model T was not. It essentially responded to Ford's unassailable cost advantage with a differentiation strategy. For instance, GM, in a relatively short period, introduced the electric start (key to putting women behind the wheel), the anti-knock engine, the enclosed cab, and most famously, affordable cars in colors other than black. This strategy of creating dissatisfaction worked brilliantly. By 1927, GM had registered a share of 43 (versus 16 percent in 1924) percent while Ford's had shrunk to approximately 10 percent (from 60 percent). In this pivotal year, Ford ceased production of the Model T and, after nearly a full year spent retooling, introduced the Model A (Kuhn, 1986). GM's continued success against Ford during the 1930-1938 period is even more impressive given that the economic conditions of the Great Depression should have favored the low-cost producer Ford. While industries and products in the early stages of growth often witness sharp swings in market share, the competitive success of GM against Ford from 1924 to 1938 is still breathtaking in its scope and completeness, ranking as perhaps the most important competitive clash in industrial history.[1] Can any company practicing a customer satisfaction strategy claim similar success in a similarly important industry, in a similarly intense competitive situation, and against a similarly dominant market leader?

Consumer Satiation, Market Saturation, and The Annual Model Change

Having bested Ford, GM now faced a similar but distinct problem: high customer satisfaction with GM products. Simply put, how could GM sell additional cars when almost every consumer who wanted one had one, and since the vehicles were years away from the projected end of their life span? The answer was simple. Introduce new products to create "a healthy dissatisfaction" (Mingo, 1994). As Kettering noted, "The simplest way to assure sales is to keep changing the product – the market for new things is indefinitely elastic. One of the fundamental purposes of advertising, styling, and research is to foster a healthy dissatisfaction" (Mingo, 1994). Likewise, Alfred P. Sloan, the legendary head of GM, stated in 1941, "We want to make available to you, as rapidly as we can, the most advanced knowledge and practice in the building of motorcars; we want to make you dissatisfied with your current car so you will buy a new one" (Sloan, 1941).

Eventually, the strategy of introducing new products to stimulate demand led to the annual model change, formalizing the strategy of creating customer dissatisfaction as a key marketing strategy of GM. As Sloan put it, "Each year we build the best car we possibly can to satisfy the customer, and then the next year we build another to make him dissatisfied" (Livingston, 1958).

Sloan credits the annual model change as key to understanding GM's ascension. "Consider, for example, that survival in the automobile industry in the United States has depended upon winning the favor of buyers of new cars each year. Part and parcel of this is the annual model, the spur to which the organization must respond or die. The urge to satisfy this requirement is the dynamism of General Motors. Many things regarding the progress of the enterprise and the industry fall into place through an understanding of the annual model – its origin and evolution, and the associated concept of upgrading cars, in which General Motors played a prominent role in contrast to the early Ford organization" (Sloan, 1963, p. xxi).

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[1] For an illuminating discussion of the competitive battle between Ford and GM the reader is directed to Kuhn (1986) from which much of the preceding is drawn.

It is worth noting that creating customer dissatisfaction with your own product is potentially a much trickier undertaking than dissatisfying consumers with your competitors' product, one fraught with potential pitfalls. The danger of dissatisfying customers via frequent model changes was not lost on Sloan, who stated, "The degree to which styling changes should be made in any one model run presents a particularly delicate problem. The changes in the new model should be so novel and attractive as to create demand for the new value and, so to speak, create a certain amount of dissatisfaction with past models as compared with the new one, and yet the current and old models must still be capable of giving satisfaction to the vast used-car market" (Sloan, 1963).

The Annual Model Change as a Key Competitive Business Strategy

Ultimately, the annual model change became not just a key marketing strategy but a key business strategy. The annual model change had four principal aspects for GM. First and most obviously, the annual model change drove the sales of new GM cars. Second, the annual model change created a steady supply of reliable used cars that eliminated low-end competition. Indeed, it was primarily used, and not new, Chevrolets that doomed the Model T. Consumers in the market for an automobile found that they could buy a used, but still reliable, Chevrolet with more product features for the same as or lower price than a brand-new Model T. Faced with such a choice, they increasingly chose the used Chevrolet product (Thomas, 1973). Third, the annual model change imposed significant annual retooling costs on the competition which none could afford, except Ford, which was committed to the concept of the "static" automobile, first with the Model T and then the Model A (Kuhn, 1986). Fourth, the annual model change allowed GM to guide and anticipate change in a rapidly growing and technologically turbulent marketplace. Hence, the goal of customer dissatisfaction as epitomized by the annual model change should be viewed as more than just a marketing tactic or strategy but as a total business and competitive strategy that guides the entire organization. Finally, it should not be ignored that the steady stream of increasingly sophisticated automobiles created true customer satisfaction. Therefore, paradoxically, GM first created customer dissatisfaction as the means to the creation of customer satisfaction.

Planned Obsolescence

Eventually, the annual model change led to charges of planned obsolescence, charges that GM, not surprisingly, rejected. GM did not use the term planned obsolescence internally, and Harvey Earl (legendary, longtime head of styling for GM) preferred the term dynamic obsolescence. This reflected a belief that innovation and styling changes were inevitable. As one GM executive stated, "We have not depreciated these old cars, we have appreciated your mind" (Bayley, 1983, p. 89). In this sense, an innovation did not depreciate an existing automobile by directly lowering its value. Rather, by creating in the customer an appreciation of the new, the older vehicle suffered by comparison. Kettering, in an article in *Nation's Business* with the wonderfully paradoxical title of "Keep the Consumer Dissatisfied," used an example to make this point. Kettering pointed out that a new car, placed in a sealed showcase, would still lose value even if its finish remained perfect and no miles were put on the vehicle. The simple introduction of new and improved vehicles would render the "old" but immaculate vehicle progressively worthless[2] (Kettering, 1928).

In addition, the annual styling changes did create customer value and did create, ultimately, satisfaction. Marketers should be the last to dismiss the creation and marketing of primarily styling

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[2]While Kettering did not anticipate the collector market his example, nevertheless, holds in its essence.

changes as a key and positive element of any marketing strategy from which the consumer can derive value. As Bayley (1983) argues, “When Harley Earl used a word like ‘streamline’, … he knew that it was a commodity which meant that the odd Joe on the street had his life as a consumer enhanced” (p. 121). Critics who would dismiss GM’s marketing efforts as “style over substance” and as, therefore, inferior marketing must similarly dismiss as effective marketing the development and marketing of sport utility vehicles (SUV’s). Such vehicles rarely perform their functional benefit of going off-road. Instead, consumer satisfaction with such vehicles is fundamentally image-driven. In this respect, the 1959 Cadillac with its huge fins has much in common with today’s hot-selling SUV’s and trucks.

It can be argued that GM’s primary problem with its strategy of customer dissatisfaction was not strategic, but tactical. GM’s mistake was that, as consumers’ tastes changed from styling to other factors such as fuel economy, quality, reliability, and safety, it failed to respond in kind. Instead of continuing to flog styling after customers had changed their buying priorities, it should simply have focused its dissatisfaction efforts on different product attributes.

Marketers also must be careful to condemn a phenomenon that consumers brought about through their consumption patterns. As Meikle (1979) comments, the relationship between business and consumers was symbiotic, and “If the business sector later grew proficient in manipulating style trends, consumers in part brought the curse of planned obsolescence down on themselves” (p. 14).

Further, a firm can't practice relationship marketing unless consumers make regular and frequent purchases. Paradoxically as it may sound, for consumer durables, it may be necessary to create customer dissatisfaction prior to when it might “naturally” occur to stimulate more frequent exchanges. In this respect, the use by all automakers of short-term leases might be understood as an effort to formalize, via the financing option, more frequent, regular repurchasing and, therefore, create the opportunity to establish a long-term relationship with the customer. In this respect, short-term leases serve the same strategic and tactical purpose as annual model changes previously did for the auto industry. Interestingly, one of the primary concerns with the annual model change was the impact on the used car market, which is also one of the primary factors with short-term auto leases.

How Do Marketers Create Dissatisfaction?

Marketers can theoretically create dissatisfaction through any element of the marketing mix. However, promotion combined with a new product offering is probably the “one-two punch” of dissatisfaction strategies.

By way of illustration, consider a classic psychology study in frustration conducted by Barker, Dembo, and Lewin (1943). Children are placed in a room and allowed to play with a variety of basic toys. The children, happy with this collection of toys, engage in creative play. Then a partition is removed revealing that the room has two halves, the other half of which is filled with a collection of “nicer” new toys which they had no idea existed. Immediately, the children cross to the other half of the room and begin to play with the new toys. After a brief period, the children are returned to the “old” toys, and the denied “new” toys remain visible through a wire mesh. Predictably, the children are frustrated and upset. Promotional messages often have a similar effect on consumers, drawing back the curtain on their imagination to show them all that they do not have and sometimes never dreamed existed. Such promotional messages work to the degree that the consumer’s dissatisfaction can be addressed by the purchase of the promoted product.

THE DEMOTIVATING IMPACT OF SATISFACTION AND THE MOTIVATING IMPACT OF DISSATISFACTION

Sloan and Kettering understood that satisfaction has a demotivating impact on consumer behavior while dissatisfaction has a highly motivating impact on consumer behavior. A truly satisfied (or satiated) consumer has no reason, no impetuous, to engage in exchange. By definition, if they are satisfied, they lack nothing. Alternatively, a dissatisfied customer is motivated to address the perceived negative state. A customer dissatisfied with the service work performed on his/her automobile is motivated to switch service centers, and perhaps, complain. A consumer dissatisfied by his/her car because of the new model he/she notices on the selling floor is motivated to trade in his or her old car for a new one. Therefore, dissatisfaction and not satisfaction should be understood as the primary driver of exchange. The 1985 AMA definition of marketing states in part that marketing ". . . creates satisfying exchanges. . ." One way marketing creates these exchanges is through the creation of dissatisfaction.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION REDEFINED

The predominant model for understanding customer satisfaction is the expectancy disconfirmation model which holds that consumers compare perceived performance to pre-consumption expectations to render a satisfaction judgment (Olver, 1989, 2010). Performance above expectations results in satisfaction, while performance below expectations results in dissatisfaction. The disconfirmation paradigm was an early and still is a foundation theory in consumer satisfaction research (Dahl & Peltier, 2015; Wright & Larsen, 2023).
Oliver (2010) notes: "Additionally, it is well known among marketers of "style" goods that one purpose of new products is to create dissatisfaction with the prevailing style--a common strategy of automobile companies through the release of new models… dissatisfaction (if that is the firm's goal) as satisfaction. The two goals are strategic mirror images" (Oliver, 2010, p. 9).

However, as should be evident from the discussion, the dissatisfaction that Sloan and Kettering strove to create fundamentally differs from the dissatisfaction most commonly referred to in the disconfirmation literature (Oliver, 2006). The two are similar in that both refer to a state of underfulfillment. However, the dissatisfaction of Sloan and Kettering is a perceived underfulfillment created by the introduction of an alternate and superior comparison standard, while the dissatisfaction that marketers commonly strive to eliminate is caused, from a classic disconfirmation perspective, by underfulfillment when compared to an expected level of product performance. This paper proposes that while the two dissatisfactions are similar states they are the result of fundamentally differing drivers. Therefore, the dissatisfaction that GM strove to create is not, as Oliver (2010) states, a "mirror image" of satisfaction; and the principles to create this dissatisfaction are not the same as the principles needed to create satisfaction.

> **P1:** *The dissatisfaction created by GM was not the mirror image of the satisfaction organizations are urged to create.*

To distinguish between the two differing levels of dissatisfaction, the following definitions will be proposed.

Positive Satisfaction: Traditional definition of satisfaction, as good as it should have been; the consumer's fulfillment response (Fournier & Mick, 1999; Giese & Cote, 2000; Oliver, 2010; Spreng, MacKenzie, & Olshavsky, 1996).

Positive Dissatisfaction: Action-oriented, promise of hope, an awareness that things are not as good as they could be. The primary motivation for the consumer to engage in exchange.

Negative Dissatisfaction: Traditional definition of dissatisfaction, not as good as it should have been. Unpleasant and unfulfilling. The opposite of the traditional definition of satisfaction.

Negative Satisfaction: Is that all there is? Been there, done that. Satiation.

HOW SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION COMBINE TO INFLUENCE EXCHANGE

Insatiability

Table 1 demonstrates how the four types of satisfaction and dissatisfaction combine to influence exchange. In cell one, *positive satisfaction* and *positive dissatisfaction* combine to create a condition of insatiability. Literally, consumers can't get enough of the marketer's product. Each exchange transaction satisfies a consumer yet also leaves them dissatisfied for more. As an example, consider an amusement park. When parents leave the park with a child at the end of the day, it is to be expected that the parents will ask the child if he/she had a good time, and if the amusement park has succeeded in creating positive satisfaction the child will answer, "Yes!" followed immediately by the question, "Can we go back again?" The parent will likely answer, "Yes," and if the amusement park has succeeded in creating positive dissatisfaction the child will immediately ask, "Tomorrow!?" Alternately, consider the movie Titanic which owed its blockbuster success largely to the fact that young adolescent girls literally could not get enough of the movie and returned to see it time after time. More recent examples would be any movie franchise such as Marvel. Offerings high in insatiability hew to the old show business maxim of "Always leave them crying for more."

Other products potentially high in insatiability include products that are psychologically or physiologically addictive such as smart phones, computer/video games, or tobacco products. In some cases, the cycle of positive satisfaction and positive dissatisfaction plays out over a longer period. For instance, in the case of GM an extended period of satisfaction of several years was followed by a marketer-induced state of positive dissatisfaction. Contemporary examples of markets successfully practicing insatiability include computer chip makers with the never-ending succession of faster and faster processors that render the previous processor "dissatisfying." Apple essentially introduces, like GM in years past, a new iPhone every year, giving it numbers instead of years. Gillette, which has a high share of the worldwide razor blade market, never introduces a new razor until the next generation razor is ready for consumer testing (Pride and Ferrell, 2000). These marketers all understand that to be successful an organization must not simply deliver satisfying exchange transactions but must also deliver the impetus for the consumer to engage in additional exchanges. These firms recognize and exploit the positive dimensions of dissatisfaction to the advantage of the organization and the consumer.

Satiation

When a firm delivers *positive satisfaction* and *negative satisfaction* (or does not hold out the promise to the consumer of further satisfaction through the creation or exploitation of positive dissatisfaction), consumers are satiated. This is a classic condition of "been there - done that" or

"Is that all there is?" The meal was good, but nothing else on the menu entices the consumer to come back again. The movie was good but not worth seeing again. The beer was a nice change of pace but not something to be purchased again. The condition of satiation may explain the phenomenon whereby so many firms striving (and achieving) high customer satisfaction have not been able to translate this high satisfaction into consumer loyalty (Reichheld's 1996 "satisfaction trap"). As Dahl and Peltier (2015) note, contradictory results in the literature have suggested a complex relationship between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repurchase intentions. Voss, Godfrey, and Seiders (2010) found that for high-satiation products, consumers repurchase less than for low-satiation conditions. Firms whose customers are satiated, by failing to create positive dissatisfaction, do not give the consumer a reason to engage in exchange with the firm again. Therefore, they are vulnerable to the actions of competitors that create positive dissatisfaction. Positive dissatisfaction is a critical step between positive satisfaction and repurchase and loyalty.

Products that are high in fad elements such as this season's hot Christmas toy (which is almost guaranteed to be old news by next Christmas) are good examples of offerings high in positive satisfaction and negative satisfaction. However, even marketers of basic staples can find themselves in this difficult position of not knowing what to do for an encore as consumers increasingly seek out new and novel experiences. If the competition offers positive dissatisfaction, their consumers will defect.

Over-promise/Underdeliver

Firms that create positive dissatisfaction and negative dissatisfaction find themselves in the classic case of "over-promising and under-delivering." These firms are excellent at creating positive dissatisfaction by providing the consumer with a reason to engage in exchange but not at providing the satisfying experience they have promised. Oftentimes they even succeed, on the heels of the underwhelming experience, to convince the consumer that next time they will deliver the desired satisfaction. In essence, they keep promising; and the consumer, despite past negatively satisfying experiences, may continue to believe the firm's promises.

In some cases, such firms benefit from having created high positive satisfaction in the past. In other cases, they benefit from high consumer loyalty/inertia or inferior competitive actions. Over-hyped children's products fall in this category. Politicians consistently under-deliver on their campaign promises, but consumers seem ready to forgive and forget and are all too willing to believe the candidate's new promises. Sports teams also benefit from this phenomenon. Up until the recent past, few Chicago Cubs fans rooted for the team on the basis of past successes. Interestingly enough, from a relationship marketing point-of-view, this is a far better situation to be in than consumer satiation, as the marketer provides the impetus to engage in future exchanges and, therefore, provides the one critical element for a relationship. The power of positive dissatisfaction explains why the phenomenon of over-promising is so common.

Traditional Dissatisfaction

Cell four, in which the organization delivers negative satisfaction and negative dissatisfaction, is most consistent with the traditional definition of dissatisfaction. The experience is dissatisfying, and the marketer holds out no hope of anything but more dissatisfaction. In the absence of a marketplace failing (monopolies), these firms cease to exist. However, if high barriers to entry can be created or a monopoly position is established, the organization can continue indefinitely. Some airlines and utilities seem consistent with this situation. The firm's success, in essence, depends on factors other than creating positive satisfaction or positive dissatisfaction.

Table 1
Satisfaction – Dissatisfaction Matrix

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">The Experience</td></tr>
<tr><td>Positive Satisfaction
Traditional definition of satisfaction, as good as it should have been; the consumer's fulfillment response</td><td>Negative Dissatisfaction
Traditional definition of dissatisfaction, not as good as it should have been. Unpleasant and unfulfilling. The opposite of the traditional definition of satisfaction.</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The Motivating State</td><td>Positive Dissatisfaction
Action-oriented, promise of hope, an awareness that things are not as good as they could be. The primary motivation for the consumer to engage in exchange.</td><td>Insatiability

The customer can’t get enough.

Amusement parks, computer games, psychologically or physically addictive products.

Examples: iPhone, Marvel Movies Franchise, Disney World</td><td>Over-promise/Underdeliver

The product does not live up to its promise, but consumers keep believing the marketer's promises.

Over-hyped children's products, politicians, sports teams, fast fashion

Examples: Politicians, Sports Teams (Cleveland Browns), ink jet printers, athletic products that promise vast improvement in a persons game, Fast Fashion</td></tr>
<tr><td>Negative Satisfaction
Is that all there is? Been there, done that. Satiation</td><td>Satiation

Is that all there is? - Been there done that.

Fads, “Tourists Traps,”

Examples: Times Square, Rain Forest Café,</td><td>Traditional Dissatisfaction

The experience is dissatisfying, and the marketer offers no hope of anything but more dissatisfaction.

Monopolies or industries are characterized by a lack of competition and choice.

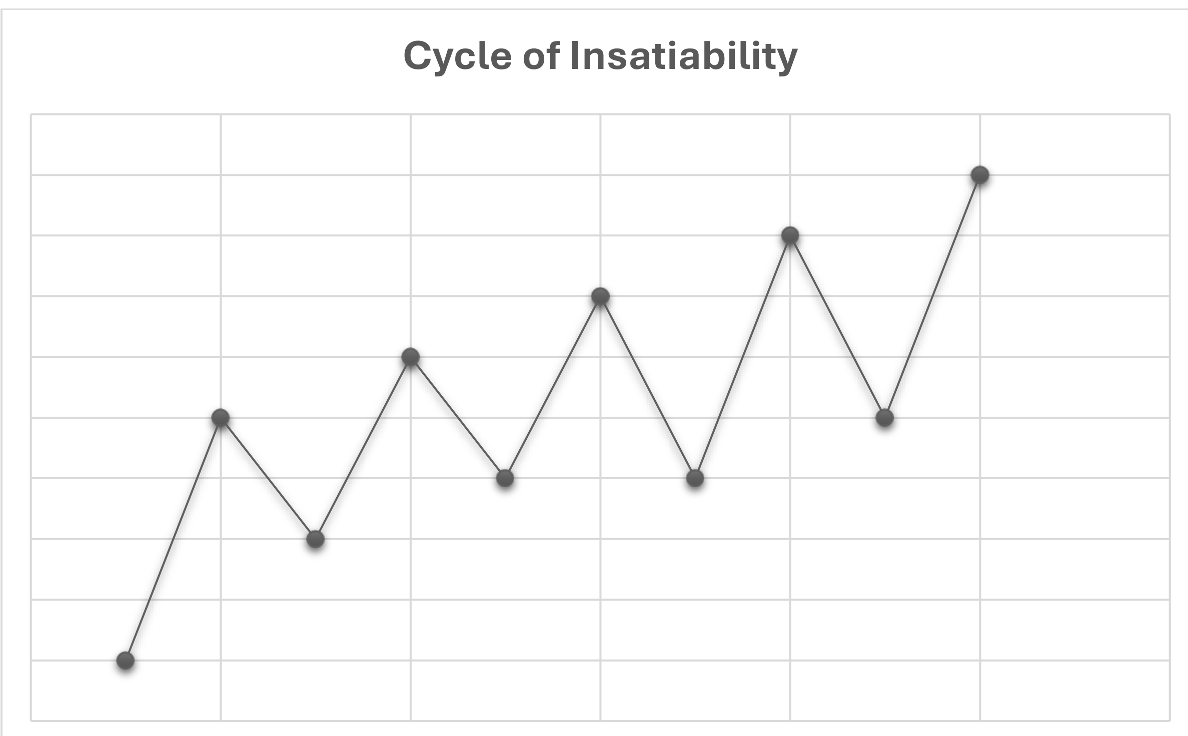
Examples: Airline travel, cable TV</td></tr>
</table>

ALTERNATING STATES OF SATISFACTION AND DISSATISFACTION

Figure 1 illustrates the condition of insatiability in which positive satisfaction, sometimes transient and sometimes long-lived, is ultimately superseded by positive dissatisfaction, which is in turn is followed by positive satisfaction, in essence creating a sawtooth pattern. Figure 1 recognizes that dissatisfaction is as natural and potentially a useful condition for marketers (and consumers) as satisfaction. As Davidow (2012) notes, satisfaction is a relative term in that one can be happy with the performance of a product today but suddenly you can be less satisfied by the actions of a competitor. In some cases, this positive dissatisfaction will arise naturally. For instance, conditions of hunger ultimately follow a meal, no matter how satisfying the dining experience. For the marketer in this condition, the strategic imperative is for the consumer to recognize the firm's offering as the key to this dissatisfaction. However, in some cases, a snack food commercial can actually trigger or induce hunger (or positive dissatisfaction). In other cases, such as those GM faced regarding the Ford Model T, this dissatisfaction must be induced.

P2: *The goal of organizations seeking superior performance should not be solely the creation of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction but of customer insatiability.*

Figure 1
Alternating States of Positive Satisfaction and Positive Dissatisfaction



ISSUES FOR MARKETING THOUGHT AND PRACTICE AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When considering the creation of positive dissatisfaction as a key objective of successful marketing, a number of issues should be considered. Some of these issues will be addressed briefly here.

Is the Creation of Positive Dissatisfaction Immoral?

John Kenneth Galbraith (1958) stated, “A consumer's wants can have bizarre, frivolous, or even immoral origins, and an admirable case can still be made for a society that seeks to satisfy them. But the case cannot stand if it is the process of satisfying wants that creates the wants.” On one hand, Galbraith can be answered by noting that, contrary to the ideological treatment of the marketing concept by many, marketing is neither immoral nor moral but amoral. Alternatively, to answer an economist, it might be most useful to respond by noting that it is through exchange that wealth is created, and it is often through the creation of positive dissatisfaction that exchanges are stimulated. This argument echoes Witt (2001), who argues that the increasing quality and composition of products has allowed economies to escape the satiation of demand and thus to realize increased economic growth. This point is similar to Saint-Paul (2021) who notes that “…there is no satiation in the taste for variety….” (p 292). Likewise, Jones (1973) argues that fashion manipulation has the effect of expanding the economic system. Figure 1 should, therefore, be understood as a constantly increasing cycle in which each subsequent cycle of positive satisfaction and positive dissatisfaction increases the overall level of positive satisfaction and consumer wellbeing. This argument is consistent with Larsen and Wright (2020) who note in relationship to hedonic adaptation that consumers are left consistently better off by innovation. For instance, consider the satisfaction on a 10 point scale of a model T owner in 1920 and the owner of a new F-150 Ford truck today. Both might register a similar high customer satisfaction at the time of purchase, but with the exception of a classic car collector, if given the Model T in place of their new F-150 they would not register the same satisfaction score. In the long run, consumers are more satisfied, and better off, in an objective sense.[3]

Further, the creation of positive consumer dissatisfaction can lead to true and profound satisfaction. Research has shown that when asked how happy they are individuals generally provide a rating of 7 on a 10-point scale. Even following catastrophic incidents (a relative received a cancer diagnosis, injury to a child, etc.), satisfaction after dropping to the 2-5 range relatively quickly rebounds to a 7. Conversely, after positive events (winning the lottery), satisfaction would return to the range of 7 (Manson 2017). Individuals therefore tend toward a state of moderate satisfaction or stasis. Sometimes this may result in what is objectively a negative state. For instance, consider the example of prescription drug advertising, often decried by critics. One of the amazing things about the human mind is its ability to achieve satiety or satisfaction in the face of a negatively dissatisfying situation that they feel cannot be addressed. Such appears to be the case with many people who had grown accustomed to a variety of physical ailments that they believed were both chronic and untreatable. While controversial, prescription drug advertising had the effect of promoting hope for these individuals by holding out the promise of a cure.

[3] There are similarities and parallels to the use of satiation and insatiability here and in the economics literature. Here the term is used more in a micro sense as it applies to individuals and business whereas in the economics literature, it is more traditionally used in a macro sense.

Therefore, the advertising generated visits to doctors' offices and treatment of a variety of physical ailments by, in effect, triggering dissatisfaction with the consumer's condition (Jenkins, 1998). Therefore, rather than being cynical and manipulative, the creation of positive dissatisfaction can have a positive effect on consumers.

Human Progress as a Result of Positive Dissatisfaction

> *"If it had not been for the discontent of a few fellows who had not been satisfied with their conditions, you would still be living in caves. You would never have emerged from the jungle. Intelligent discontent is the mainspring of civilization. Progress is born of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation."* Eugene V. Debs

> *Restlessness is discontent – and discontent is the first necessity of progress. Show me a thoroughly satisfied man – and I will show you a failure*. Thomas Alva Edison

Not only did Sloan and Kettering not view the creation of consumer dissatisfaction as immoral or manipulative, they saw it as a noble and moral goal that advanced the condition of man. Throughout the writings of Sloan and Kettering looms the backdrop of the Great Depression and the belief that at its root was inadequate consumer spending. Therefore, both Sloan and Kettering viewed the creation of positive consumer dissatisfaction as the key to increasing consumer spending and as a moral imperative to eliminate the very real suffering brought about by the economic collapse. Indeed, they would have questioned the morality, under the dire economic conditions of the time, of creating what is here termed satiation.

What if the advertising creates in the consumer a desire for a product that is unattainable? To the degree the goal is blocked (for instance, the promoted products are beyond the budget of the consumer), it is possible that the effort of the marketer has been to raise the consumer's dissatisfaction without providing any answering satisfaction. However, the consumer has other means available, both conscious and unconscious, to deal with what is, in essence, marketer-induced cognitive dissonance. Many consumers that know the luxury automobile being advertised is beyond their means simply tune out the commercial or think "what a waste of money for a car."

Does the Creation of Positive Dissatisfaction Lead to Excessive Consumption?

While it may seem that consumption is not "politically correct," it can be argued that, if marketing speaks for the consumer, then certainly marketing must speak for the benefits of consumption? Consumption empowers individuals and allows the obtainment of true satisfaction. Consider advertising for a new automobile. If this advertising encourages the consumer to trade in an older vehicle that because of its age, produces higher pollution, has poorer fuel economy, and is less safe, has not the state of the consumer, society, and the marketer been advanced, given the creation of jobs associated with the new automobile and given that large elements of the old car can ultimately be recycled? Indeed, a recognition that marketing does indeed engage in the objective of insatiability and that dissatisfaction must surely follow satisfaction should lead marketers to place a high premium on similarly recycling not just consumer desires but the tangible product.

Ultimately, the pros and cons of consumption and the definition of "excessive" consumption are normative and not an objective issue. By way of proof, consider the shifting perspectives of the relative merits of consumption by progressive liberals. Feminist Progressive Emily Fogg

Mead, mother of anthropologist Margaret Mead and wife of noted economist Edward S Mead argued in a classic 1901 defense of advertising, and given concerns of production over-capacity, that business should awaken Americans to "the ability to want and choose." Such a perspective was progressive in that it empowered all consumers, not just rich elites, to enjoy the fruits of economic prosperity. Indeed, by definition, consumption is liberal, and frugality means conservatism.

However, it is true that some people engage in compulsive consumption that resembles a disease. Whether marketing creates this condition or not, it certainly benefits from and can encourage it. This is to the determent of the individual and society. Further, overconsumption is often blamed for climate change and environmental degradation. There is, of course, validity in such claims, and only by acknowledging that marketing creates not just satisfaction, but dissatisfaction can the marketing literature fully understand the role of marketing in society for both the good and the bad.

Is the Creation of Positive Dissatisfaction Inconsistent with the Marketing Concept?

Is the creation of positive dissatisfaction inconsistent with the marketing concept and more reflective of either a production or selling orientation? First, a production orientation can be dismissed because Sloan, in introducing the annual model change, had to overcome the objections of his plant managers who disliked the extensive retooling necessary. Regarding the selling versus the marketing orientation, compelling evidence exists that GM was practicing (if not inventing) the marketing concept as we understand it today. The annual model change coincided with the refinement of GM's differentiation, targeting, and segmentation strategy of offering a car for every purse and taste. Further, in 1938 GM spent over $500,000 on market research, a figure estimated to approximate 10% of the total spent by U.S. industry (Kuhn, 1986). Market research is considered a key indicator of a firm practicing a marketing orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990), GM's efforts would seem inconsistent with a selling orientation, especially as GM's efforts were focused on understanding the consumers' often unarticulated needs and translating these needs into dissatisfaction for current GM products.

Why Use the Term Dissatisfaction?

Why not use the term "desire" or "marketer-induced problem recognition" (Belch and Belch, 1998) instead of positive dissatisfaction? First, it's inconsistent and perhaps intellectually dishonest. If marketers wish to argue that they create satisfaction with all of the positive connotations associated with it, they must use the term dissatisfaction if they are to come to fully understand the true nature and impact of marketing. Further, critics of marketing do accuse marketers of artificially creating dissatisfaction in consumers. If marketing is to effectively respond to such critics, it is perhaps best to acknowledge the truth in their claims and demonstrate the positive aspects of the creation of dissatisfaction.

In addition, the creation of positive dissatisfaction can have negative effects (as well as positive) on society. As one of many possible examples, consider fashion advertising that may lead to eating disorders among young women and tobacco advertising. To adequately address this phenomenon, marketing scholars must first recognize it.

Finally, Sloan and Kettering carefully chose to use the term dissatisfaction. They did not opt for a "softer" adjective such as "desire" which would have been more palatable and consistent with the academic literature of the day. They truly conceived of the mission of GM as being the creation of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore, to fully appreciate what might best be understood as their paradigm, their way of looking at and conceptualizing the world, it is necessary to understand that they believed they were creating dissatisfaction. Ultimately, the use of the term dissatisfaction reflects a certain mindset or perspective on the objectives of marketing that cannot be gained by using a more "comfortable" euphemism. Just as proponents of creating customer satisfaction may treat their perspective as almost ideological and choose not to use terms such as "marketer-induced problem solutions" or aversion (the antonym of desire) to describe satisfaction, to use of the term dissatisfaction is not a matter of trivial euphemism but an important matter of substance.

Does Marketing Capitalize on, and Not Create, Dissatisfaction?

> *It is the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it.* Aristotle

> *"Poor man wanna to be rich, rich man wanna be king, and king ain't satisfied 'til he rules everything."* --Bruce Springsteen/Badlands

In some cases, marketers do not create dissatisfaction but capitalize on consumers' naturally occurring dissatisfaction - - for instance, hunger. In this case, the challenge for the marketer is to turn generalized need recognition into a want for the marketer's offering, to create positive dissatisfaction for the marketer's specific product. As an example, Coca-Cola, understanding that the capacity of the human stomach is ultimately finite, has the objective of maximizing "share of stomach." But in other cases, marketers most certainly do create dissatisfaction by producing compelling products that exceed the consumer's imagination. Amazon.com carefully analyzes consumer-purchasing behavior and uses the home page to draw consumers to their products of which they were unaware but are likely to want. In essence, Amazon strives to understand consumers better than they understand themselves and combines this knowledge with an understanding of its offerings to create positive dissatisfaction just as GM used its understanding of consumers combined with its technical abilities to show the consumer everything a car could be that the Model T wasn't.

A related question concerns the natural state of consumers. It is possible that people tend toward a state of dissatisfaction as much, if not more so, than toward a state of satisfaction. This is an alternative perspective to the natural state of consumers is stasis or satisfaction. If so, the creation of satisfaction should be understood to be inevitably a short-term proposition that runs counter to the natural tendency of consumers to be dissatisfied. As such, both dissatisfaction and satisfaction become transient states that marketers can use to the benefit of the consumer and the organization. Dissatisfaction with the human condition might well be argued to be the fundamental cause of all human advances. If so, the recognition of positive dissatisfaction should lead to a fuller and more complete understanding of the nature of consumers, marketing, and marketing exchanges.

In this context, there is a difference between needs and opportunities. When needs are satisfied, such as hunger or thirst we return to a state of being satiated. No marketing effort will make a fully hydrated person thirsty, or a dinner that is full, hungry again. However, some products, such as technology goods present an almost limitless opportunity for the creation of positive dissatisfaction. For thirst, satisfaction simply means that the individual is no longer thirsty. For a new iPhone, even a fully satisfied customer can be made dissatisfied by the new iPhone. In this way needs can be fully satisfied, while opportunities, akin to wants can be truly insatiable.

The preceding highlights that in some situations (thirst, hunger) marketers might not create the need but from a competitive standpoint they still introduce positive dissatisfaction by converting the need to a want for their specific product (i.e., Coca-Cola, Evian bottled water, a McDonald's meal, etc.) Indeed, for some loyal customers of for instance Starbucks coffee the situation literally looks like they can't get enough of the product, or insatiability.

Likewise, while General Motors use of positive satisfaction and positive dissatisfaction to create insatiability is the primary example in this paper, the concepts outlined here also apply to consumer nondurables and lower involvement products. For instance, the consumer that eagerly looks forward to the next steaming season of their favorite Netflix show and literally "binge" the entire season in one weekend. Other examples might include a favorite restaurant that each week introduces a novel and unique special, a child buying collectable game cards, a fan looking forward to the start of the next season of their favorite sports team, or a individual eagerly awaiting the release of a new streaming single from their favorite artist. Insatiability can apply to all products in the marketplace.

The Hedonic Treadmill

This tendency toward a natural state of stasis with an equally strong tendency toward dissatisfaction is referred to as the hedonic treadmill, which is based on adaptation level (AL) theory (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). As Brickman and Campbell (1971) state, "Even as we contemplate our satisfaction with a given accomplishment, the new satisfaction fades, to be replaced finally by a new indifference and a new level of striving" (p 287). "The pessimistic theme is that the nature of AL phenomena condemns men to live on a hedonic treadmill, to seek new levels of stimulation merely to maintain old levels of subjective pleasure, to never achieve any kind of permanent happiness or satisfaction" (p 289). Adaptation theory and the hedonic treadmill provide the theoretical basis for Insatiability as a marketing strategy.

However, Diener, Lucas, & Scollon (2006) challenge the inevitability of the hedonic treadmill arguing that long-term levels of happiness can and do change. In this respect, consumers who tend toward a natural state of satisfaction can be induced by marketing efforts or circumstances to dissatisfaction and will seek to address this dissatisfaction via consumption. Once satisfied, perhaps highly, they will revert to a natural state of stasis again. Great marketers capitalize on the hedonic treadmill to deliver positive satisfaction and positive dissatisfaction – instability, which leaves the consumer objectively better off.

Consider the satisfaction in 2015 of a consumer that has just taken delivery of a brand-new Ford F150 and that same consumer nine years later buying a brand new 2024 F150. At the time of each purchase, the consumer might report similar levels of subjective satisfaction, even delight, which will likely eventually erode to some level of neutral satisfaction or even dissatisfaction. Yet the individual is objectively better off (as is society) after the purchase of the new vehicle if it is safer and pollutes less.

Common Sense?

To the degree that the concept of positive dissatisfaction is common sense, then it may be said that the concept of insatiability has high face validity. However, if it is common sense, why is a discussion of the creation of dissatisfaction not presented in introductory marketing textbooks side by side with a presentation of the virtues of the arguably equally common-sense goal of satisfaction embedded within the marketing concept? As many might argue the creation of satisfaction is common sense, then why is the creation of dissatisfaction absent from the academic and practitioner literature? The creation of customer dissatisfaction as a key strategy for achieving superior organization is ultimately more paradoxical than self-evident, and the complexity of the concept deserves more extensive treatment in the literature.

How Is Positive Dissatisfaction Created Without Incurring the Wrath of Consumers?

As Sloan (1963) noted, the creation of what is termed here positive customer dissatisfaction "…presents a particularly delicate problem…" While much is understood about how firms create negative dissatisfaction (i.e., traditional dissatisfaction) and the adverse implications of this negative affective state on the consumer's repurchase intentions, the problem of how a firm creates positive dissatisfaction and avoids being held responsible for this similar state of underfulfilment is not well understood. The essence of the problem is in what cases will the consumer view favorably the obsolescence of a current product caused by a new product introduction and in what cases are they apt to view new product introductions as planned obsolescence? The difficulty of balancing this "delicate problem" can be seen in the charges of "bloatware" often leveled at new software products that seem less than innovative (Gomes, 1998).

Reconceptualization of Relationship Marketing Models to Include Positive Dissatisfaction

In some cases, firms are finding that the creation of customer satisfaction does not necessarily or invariably translate into customer loyalty. Reichheld (1996) reports the surprising finding that fully 65 - 85% of customers who are satisfied or very satisfied will defect to the competition. Therefore, the satisfaction trap (Reichheld, 1996) may best be understood as firms creating adequate positive satisfaction but inadequate positive dissatisfaction, or the condition of Satiation. This problem has led some organizations to focus on loyalty as opposed to satisfaction (Oliver 1999). Models of consumer behavior and relationship marketing must include the concept of positive dissatisfaction in order to fully understand marketing relationships.

The Impact of Organizational Dissatisfaction on Firm Performance

Just as Positive Dissatisfaction is a powerful motivator of consumer behavior, it can also be a powerful driver of organizational performance. Likewise, satisfaction can lead to lower performance. As Sloan (1963) states:

> *Growth and progress are related, for there is no resting place for an enterprise in a competitive economy. Obstacles, conflicts, new problems in various shapes, and new horizons arise to stir the imagination and continue the progress of industry. Success, however, may bring self-satisfaction. In that event, the urge for competitive survival, the strongest of all economic incentives, is dulled. The spirit of venture is lost in the inertia of the mind against change. When such influences develop, growth may be arrested or a decline may set in, caused by the failure to recognize advancing technology, or altered consumer needs, or perhaps by competition that is more virile and aggressive. The perpetuation of an unusual success or the maintenance of an unusually high standard of leadership in any industry is sometimes more difficult than the attainment of that success or leadership in the first place. This is the greatest challenge to be met by the leader of an industry. It is the challenge to be met by the General Motors of the future.*

Arguably, as Sloan feared, GM fell victim to this self-satisfaction, or rather had it imposed upon it by external forces. In the years following the Second World War, GM was so dominant that an ongoing and pervasive fear became that the government would act to break the company up. By 1960 GM, with a 50% share of the domestic market, had adopted a very cautious approach to innovation. Any truly innovative technological product that would have bestowed a competitive advantage would also have imposed a significant competitive disadvantage on Ford and Chrysler. If either of these companies had gone bankrupt, the efforts by the U.S. government to break up GM on anti-competitive grounds would have intensified.

As Womack, Jones, & Roos (1990) note, "So caution made sense. GM hardly wanted to innovate its way to corporate dismemberment" (P. 128) Under such pressure, GM understood that a major innovation could break it's weak domestic competitors and essentially ceased to use innovation to create positive customer dissatisfaction. Instead, GM turned increasingly to short-run strategies of expense and cost control to wring financial performance for organizations whose marketing strategies had been rendered static.

Ultimately, this extreme expense orientation led to an increasingly similar lineup of automobiles across divisions. In the name of economies of scale, GM eventually produced vehicle brands that were indistinguishable from one another. This was graphically portrayed by an infamous Fortune magazine cover from August 22, 1983, that lined up four GM products a (Chevrolet Celebrity, Pontiac 6000, Buick Century, and an Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera) which were impossible to tell apart. Gone was Earl's carefully cultivated brand image. Earl had once insisted that every GM car should be so distinctive as to be recognizable to a six-year-old from a block away (Lamm & Holls, 1983, p. 97). In the name of production economies, marketing differentiation had been reduced to little more than the nameplate on the car. Today, Toyota and not GM have the largest worldwide share of automobiles.

Likewise, the famous Corvair debacle, which was publicized by Ralph Nader's "Unsafe at Any Speed," was largely the result of GM pursuing a relentless cost-cutting campaign more akin to Ford's production orientation as manifested with the Model T and A. A stabilizer bar that would have cost less than $4.00 would have corrected much of the Corvair's stability problems (Kuhn, 1986; Nader, 1972). Therefore, GM's eventual marketing and financial performance cannot be blamed on a strategy of creating positive dissatisfaction but on just the opposite: an organizational satisfaction with market share that led to a production orientation. Such complacency set the stage for GM's dramatic reversal of fortunes from 1970 on as foreign automobile marketers invaded the U.S. market. Ultimately, GM's reliance on trivial changes between model years that did not truly create positive customer dissatisfaction gave credence to the charges by critics of planned obsolescence.

CONCLUSION

Successful marketing involves the creation not just of satisfaction but also of dissatisfaction. The creation of this positive satisfaction and positive dissatisfaction serves to advance, not just firm performance, but also society and consumers. Satisfaction in the absence of dissatisfaction is meaningless and is no more likely to create superior long-term performance than is the creation of dissatisfaction in the absence of satisfaction. Consumer behavior models seeking to find a link between positive satisfaction and loyalty must include positive dissatisfaction to be fully specified.

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Submitted: 23 December 2024
Revised: 13 February 2025

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