

## **POST-PURCHASE DISSONANCE – A DIFFICULT AREA OF RESEARCH IN POLAND**

***Tomasz Olejniczak***

Department of Product Marketing  
Poznan University of Economics, Poland

**Key words:** consumer behavior, post-purchase dissonance, marketing research.

### **A b s t r a c t**

The qualitative and quantitative increase in market offerings has led to an increased significance of purchasers in the market and has changed their expectations over a short period of time. Consumer's role has changed from a suppliant to a strong entity with high demands addressed at producers and service providers. The strong position of consumers has spawned an increased research interest in consumer market behavior, especially after purchasing. The decision about purchasing a specific product or service is not the last stage in the consumer decision making process on the market. Many consumer behavior models distinguish two post-purchase types of reaction in consumers – satisfaction (when the expectations have been met), or post-purchase dissonance (when the expectations have not been met and the consumer has doubts concerning the purchase). The aim of the present paper is to make an attempt at specifying the reasons why the issue of post-purchase dissonance has generated so little interest among Polish researchers.

## **DYSONANS POZAKUPOWY – TRUDNY OBSZAR BADAŃ W POLSCE**

***Tomasz Olejniczak***

Katedra Marketingu Produktu  
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu, Polska

**Słowa kluczowe:** zachowania konsumenckie, dysonans pozakupowy, badania marketingowe.

### **A b s t r a c t**

Wzrastająca ilościowo i jakościowo oferta rynkowa produktów i usług w szybkim czasie doprowadziła do wzrostu znaczenia nabywcy na rynku i zmieniła jego oczekiwania. Konsument z roli petenta stał się silnym podmiotem o wysokich wymaganiach kierowanych do producentów i usługodawców. Silna pozycja konsumenta spowodowała większe zainteresowanie obszarem badań

---

Address: Tomasz Olejniczak, Poznan University of Economics, al. Niepodległości 10, 61-875 Poznań, Poland, phone: +48(61) 856 94 27, e-mail: tomasz.olejniczak@ue.poznan.pl

jego postępowania na rynku, szczególnie po dokonaniu zakupu. Decyzja dotycząca nabycia określonego produktu lub usługi nie jest ostatnim etapem w procesie decyzyjnym konsumenta na rynku. W wielu modelach zachowań konsumenckich wyodrębnia się bowiem dwa rodzaje odczuć pozakupowych konsumenta – zadowolenie (gdy oczekiwania zostały spełnione) lub dysonans pozakupowy (wątpliwości co do zakupu, sytuacja gdy oczekiwania konsumenta nie zostały spełnione). Celem artykułu jest próba charakterystyki trudności badawczych polskich naukowców w procesie pozyskiwania wiedzy o dysonansie pozakupowym odczuwanym przez konsumentów.

## Introduction

The establishment of market economy in Poland led to significant changes in many social and economic areas. The economic transformation process initiated in mid-1989 opened the door to the change of economy – marketization, namely enabling the market to function as the regulating mechanism. The activities undertaken (among others, privatization, economic entities' self-reliance, free price mechanism, creating competitiveness fostering conditions) induced creating consumer freedom to purchase the preferred goods and services. The sufficient quantity and variability of products on the market enabled Polish consumers to cater for their own needs in a more broad and attractive way (GRZEGA 2008). The qualitative and quantitative increase in market offerings has led to an increased significance of purchasers in the market and has changed their expectations. A consumer, whose role used to be rather suppliant, became a strong entity with high demands addressed at producers and service providers.

The decision about purchasing a specific product or service is not the last stage in the consumer decision making process in the market. Many consumer behavior models distinguish two post-purchase reaction types of consumers – satisfaction (when the expectations have been met), or post-purchase dissonance/ dissatisfaction/ discontent (when the expectations have not been met and the consumer has doubts concerning the purchase). According to some sources, the post-purchase dissonance is a phase that precedes the feeling of dissatisfaction with the product or service.

In comparison to such issues as customer satisfaction and loyalty, the post-purchase dissonance is rarely discussed in the literature. Polish sources are especially scarce here, and if the problem is addressed at all, it usually concentrates on analyzing the psychological aspects of cognitive dissonance (on the basis of the feelings experienced by people when making various decisions). In the world's literature this topic is gaining popularity due to its huge impact on the companies (the market competitiveness aspect) and lack of a unified approach to the issue. The aim of the article is to make an attempt at specifying the reasons why the post-purchase dissonance has spawned so little interest

among Polish researchers and the managers of the companies operating on the Polish market.

## **Materials and Methods**

The article presents an overview; the author used EMERALD and JSTOR databases of economics articles as well as domestic marketing journals (e.g. *Marketing i Rynek*) to conduct a review of literature from recent years in order to describe the state of knowledge on consumer behavior among those experiencing post-purchase dissonance. The article therefore presents the current state of knowledge on the process of creation and reduction of post-purchase dissonance in consumer behavior.

The dynamic changes in the market environment made the consumers' purchasing process highly emotional. The high emotionality of and thus difficulty in the purchasing process are determined by such various factors as the increase in market offerings (which makes the consumers feel insecure and the decisions they take more impulsive), multivariate decision making (e.g., household decision making, seeking information and purchasing in various retail outlets), multitude of decision making criteria (often conflicting/mutually exclusive) (GUTKOWSKA 2007), diverse sources of information (formal and informal), the speed of information flow (negative or positive feedback about the product/service), increased consumer demands, and increased purchase risk. All these features of the decision making process make the consumers emotionally distressed. Uncertainty and risk become natural features of consumer purchasing processes. The risk range concerning customer product purchase nowadays is markedly larger than just the decision itself, and is connected with the danger of making a wrong decision.

The importance of post-purchase dissonance is also growing in the face of the development of large-area facilities, which encourage emotional purchasing by customers. Fast, impulse purchases can lead to dissatisfaction with the decisions made. With the growing competitiveness, consumer dissatisfaction leads to economic losses of retail outlets (a dissatisfied customer changes the purchasing place), as well as the producers (negative post-purchase opinions). Research on customer reaction to post-purchase dissatisfaction also indicates that only 4% of the dissatisfied customers file complaints (GRIFFIN 2007), and 91% among the ones who do not file any complaints do not return to purchasing either (OTTO 1998).

Dissonance is a subjective feeling of tension and anxiety which a customer may experience after making a purchase; the anxiety caused by uncertainty as to the appropriateness of the purchasing decision (SMYCZEK 2002). The concept

of *post-purchase dissonance* derives from the theory of the so called *cognitive dissonance*, formulated by Leon Festinger (FESTINGER 2007). He made an assumption that people have a need for an inner harmony (consonance) between their beliefs, attitudes, and values. When there is a discord between at least two of these elements, an unpleasant inner tension occurs (a dissonance). Because a dissonance acts as a punishment, it is natural to strive for the elimination or reduction of the unpleasant state and for regaining harmony (balance). For this reason, people try to avoid situations which could cause a dissonance (HAMER 2005).

The theory of cognitive dissonance was soon applied in explaining some aspects of consumer behavior, especially the post-purchase behavior. According to this concept the majority of purchases (with the obvious exception of routine purchasing) cause a certain degree of anxiety concerning the decision. This anxiety and doubts (post-purchase dissonance) occur in a situation when a customer made a choice from among products with both positive and negative features. In such a situation the chosen item has some drawbacks, and at the same time the rejected alternative has some advantages. The negative features of the purchased product and the positive features of the one not purchased lead in consequence to the post-purchase dissonance. It is worth mentioning that the probability of the occurrence of post-purchase doubts, as well as their intensity depend on a variety of factors (Table 1).

Table 1  
Factors increasing the probability of the rise of post-purchase dissonance

- <b>the importance of the decision to the consumer</b> – the more important the decision, the greater the chance that dissonance will arise
- <b>the degree of irreversibility of the decision</b> – the easier it is to change the decision, the smaller the risk of the appearance of dissonance
- <b>the complexity of the decision</b> – the more complex the decision (i.e. the more difficult it is to make a choice), the greater the dissonance. Complexity – a large number of similar products generates many comparative features
- <b>the number of positive features noticed in the rejected products or the number of negative features in the purchased product</b> – the increase in this number corresponds to the increase in the chance that the dissonance will arise
- <b>the effort and time needed to purchase the product</b> – as the effort increases, the dissonance increases as well
- <b>the type of product</b> – complex – the difficulty in noticing all attributes of the product – increases the chance that the feeling of dissonance will subsequently arise
- <b>the price of product</b> – the higher the price, the more frequently the dissonance will arise
- <b>personality of the buyer</b> – the correlation between self-confidence and the ability to feel dissonance
- <b>social reception of the purchase</b> – the greater the social visibility of the product, the bigger the chance that anxiety about the appropriateness of the purchase will appear

Source: SMYCZEK (2002) as well as RUDNICKI (2004)

The issue of post-purchase dissonance is extremely significant and relevant from both theoretical and practical point of view. In the existing literature the question of post-purchase dissonance as seen from the perspective of economics has received a very general treatment, confined essentially to the explanation of the basic concepts – here among others (RUDNICKI 2004, DULINIEC 1986, GAJEWSKI 1994, FALKOWSKI and TYSZKA 2011, SMYCZEK 2002). It needs to be emphasized, however, that none of the mentioned sources presents any results of the studies conducted on the Polish market. The research on post-purchase dissonance has been conducted in Poland among others by SMYCZEK (2008) ODERKIEWICZ (2012). Theoretical considerations in the marketing area are presented in SMYCZEK (2002) and ANKIEL-HOMA and OLEJNICZAK (2006).

In the foreign literature the first attempt at the transfer of the problem of dissonance from the field of psychology to that of economics was made in the 70s. (ANDERSON 1973, COHEN and GOLDBERG 1970). Subsequently, occasional references to the consumers' decision making process have appeared (GILAD et al. 1987, HOSSEINI 1997, SMITH 2009, CAO and JUST 2010, COOPER and FAZIO 1984). However, what has been much more often analysed are instances of consumer dissatisfaction when the satisfaction level in particular branches was researched (COGHLAN 2012, NAHID and MOJGAN 2012, WU 2013, JUNG and YOON 2013). The interest in the issue of consumer dissatisfaction increased considerably after the year 2000, when, by applying innovative approaches, newly formulated hypotheses were verified in the analyzed area (SWEENEY et al. 2000, LINDSEY-MULLIKIN 2003, SPANGENBERG et al. 2003, O'NEILL and PALMER 2004, WICHARDT 2012, GBADAMOSI 2009).

## **Discussion**

Given the increase in the significance of the study of dissonance on the one hand, and little explanation of the problem offered in the context of economics on the other, it seems justified to pose the question why this topic has been largely neglected in the Polish economic literature. The relatively limited treatment of the question of post-purchase dissonance in the academic and commercial research is an effect of, among others, the difficulty in conducting research in the discussed field, and, apparently, the underestimation of the problem by managers of the enterprises operating on the Polish market.

The major reason for the limited interest in the research on post-purchase dissonance is a broadly-understood difficulty in the preparation and implementation of the research. The preparation of the study entails determining its scope and when it comes to dissonance in particular, many open questions

arise, including such as whether to investigate the consumers' formed lack of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, or only the doubts related to the purchased product or service. Another element inducing a dilemma is the choice of adequate methodology (according to the dissonance theory, it is caused by the doubts arising when the expectations are not met) – in this case, the study should consist in a number of successive stages: determining consumer expectations about the product/service, defining the level of satisfaction with the purchase, identifying the respondents reporting post-purchase doubts, as well as a detailed analysis of the selected group of subjects.

This entails the necessity of triangulation on the part of the researcher, i.e. the application of various testing methods and various types of analyses of the results (quantitative and qualitative). At least personal interview and in-depth individual interview, or group interview. Other methods described in the foreign literature include observation, experiment and the use of a panel of respondents. The complex study of the post-purchase dissonance would require applying the *mixed method*, which involves conducting the tests, analysis, the integration of the results, their interpretation and drawing conclusions, using both quantitative and qualitative methodology (MAZUREK-ŁOPACIŃSKA 2011).

Aside from the mentioned difficulty in capturing the study group, an essential element subject to academic discussion may be the choice of the criterion for measuring dissatisfaction, be it objective (e.g. the number of complaints, statements, opinions on Internet forums) or subjective (customer impressions/opinions). Another reason for limited interest into the question of post-purchase dissonance seems to be its underestimation among the company managers operating on the Polish market.

The development of individual markets, and relatively lower intensity of competition when compared to foreign markets contribute to the fact that company managers are more interested in offering services to the existing customers, increasing their shopping cart value (in terms of quantity and quality) and building their loyalty, rather than seeking opportunities to regain the dissatisfied customers. Naturally, the criticism directed at the Polish managers may be rejected by them on the grounds of the number of studies on customer satisfaction level, however, it must be emphasized that these customer satisfaction studies serve only to identify the scale of the problem (dissatisfaction), but entirely disregard the causes and behaviors of dissatisfied customers.

## Conclusions

In the era of dynamic changes of macro-environmental factors (particularly in the economic and socio-demographic spheres) as well as of the boost in the intensity of market competition, analyzed in terms of both subjective and objective system, companies need to undertake intensified actions aimed at guaranteeing the consumer satisfaction with the purchased products and services. The problem of identification of psychological, economic and socio-cultural determinants of post-purchase dissonance is significant from the perspective of both the supply (economic entities) and the demand (individual consumers) of the market. Aside from identifying the determinants of the post-purchase dissonance, it is of particular significance from the perspective of the suppliers of consumer products, to determine the possibilities and potential instruments to alleviate the post-purchase dissonance. This is an important indicator of the need to increase the significance of the issue of post-purchase dissonance in the economic studies.

Translated by JOANNA ŚMIECIŃSKA

Accepted for print 24.11.2016

## References

- ANDERSON R.E. 1973. *Consumer dissatisfaction. The effect of disconfirmed expectancy on perceived product performance*. Journal of Marketing Research, 10(1): 38–44.
- ANKIEL-HOMA M., OLEJNICZAK T. 2000. *Dysonans pozakupowy – odczucia niezadowolonego klienta*. Przegląd Organizacji, 1: 38–41.
- CAO Y., JUST D.R. 2010. *Cognitive dissonance under food-borne risk. A lab experiment*. Agriculture and Agricultural Science Procedia, 1: 364–371.
- COGHLAN A. 2012. *Facilitating reef tourism management through an innovative importance-performance analysis method*. Tourism Management, 33(4): 767–775.
- COHEN J.B., GOLDBERG M.E. 1970. *The dissonance model in post-decision product evaluation*. Journal of Marketing Research, 7(3): 315–321.
- COOPER J., FAZIO R.H. 1984. *A new look at dissonance theory*. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 17: 229–266.
- DOYLE P. 2003. *Marketing wartości*. Felberg SJA, Warszawa.
- DULINIEC E. 1986. *Postępowanie nabywców towarów konsumpcyjnych w krajach o gospodarce rynkowej*, Wydawnictwo SGPiS, Warszawa.
- EAST R., WRIHT M., VANHELE M. 2011. *Zachowania konsumentów*. Oficyna Wolters Warszawa.
- FALKOWSKI A., TYSZKA T. 2011. *Psychologia zachowań konsumenckich*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk.
- FESTINGER L. 2007. *Teoria dysonansu poznawczego*. PWN, Warszawa.
- GAJEWSKI S. 1994. *Zachowanie się konsumenta a współczesny marketing*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź.
- GBADAMOSI A. 2009. *Cognitive dissonance. The implicit explication in low-income consumers' shopping behaviour for "low-involvement" grocery products*. International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, 37(12): 1077–1095.
- GILAD B., KAISH S., LOEB P.D. 1987. *Cognitive dissonance and utility maximization. A general framework*. Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 8(1): 61–73.

- GRIFFIN J. 1997. *Customer loyalty. How to earn It. How to keep It*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- GRZEGA U. 2008. *Nowe uwarunkowania konsumpcji i ich wpływ na poziom i strukturę spożycia Polaków*, in: *Współczesny marketing. Trendy. Działania*. Ed. G. Sobczyk, Wydawnictwo PWE, Warszawa.
- GUTKOWSKA K. 2007. *Zachowania konsumentów w kontekście teorii konfliktu niewspółmiernych skal wartości*, in: *Konsument, gospodarstwo domowe, rynek*. Ed. Z. Kędzior. Akademia Ekonomiczna w Katowicach, Katowice.
- HAMER H. 2005. *Psychologia społeczna. Teoria i praktyka*, Diffin Warszawa.
- HOSSEINI H. 1997. *Cognitive dissonance as a means of explaining economics of irrationality and uncertainty*. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 26(2): 181–189.
- JUNG H.S., YOON H.H. 2013. *Do employees' satisfied customers respond with an satisfactory relationship? The effects of employees' satisfaction on customers' satisfaction and loyalty in a family restaurant*. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 34: 1–8.
- LINDSEY-MULLIKIN J. 2003. *Beyond reference pricing: understanding consumers' encounters with unexpected prices*. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 12(3): 140–153.
- MAZUREK-ŁOPACIŃSKA K., SOBOCIŃSKA M. 2011. *Badania jakościowe: metody, nowe podejścia i konteksty badawcze*, in: *Metody pomiaru i analizy rynku usług. Pomiar jakościowy – zastosowania i efektywność*. Ed. J. Garczarczyk. Zeszyt Naukowy UE w Poznaniu 204, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Poznaniu, Poznań.
- NAHID K.K., MOJGAN L. 2012. *The effective factors on satisfaction from the view point of patients at the emergency wards in Tabriz emam and Sina Hospitals*. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 31: 750–755.
- ODERKIEWICZ E. 2012. *Reakcje konsumentów na stan dyssatisfakcji pozakupowej*. *Marketing i Rynek*, 6: 24–29.
- RUDNICKI L. 2004. *Zachowania rynkowe nabywców. Mechanizmy i uwarunkowania*, AE Kraków.
- SMITH J. 2009. *Cognitive dissonance and the overtaking anomaly. Psychology in the principal-agent relationship*. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38(4): 684–690.
- SMYCZEK S. 2002. *Dysonans pozakupowy – porażka czy obszar działania firmy*. *Marketing i Rynek*, 3: 8–12.
- SMYCZEK S. 2008. *Model dysonansu pozakupowego konsumentów na rynku usług finansowych*. *Marketing i Rynek*, 10: 2–7.
- SPANGENBERG R.E., SPROTT D.E., GROHMANN B., SMITH R.J. 2003. *Mass communicated prediction requests. Practical applications and a cognitive dissonance explanation for self-prophecy*. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(3): 47–62.
- O'NEILL M., PALMER A. 2004. *Cognitive dissonance and the stability of service quality perceptions*. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 18(6): 433–449.
- SWEENEY J.C., HAUSKNECHT D., SOUTAR G.N. 2000. *Cognitive dissonance after purchase. A multidimensional scale*. *Psychology & Marketing*, 17(5): 369–385.
- WICHARDT P.C. 2012. *Norms, cognitive dissonance, and cooperative behavior in laboratory experiments*. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 39(5): 342–356.
- WU I.L. 2013. *The antecedents of customer satisfaction and its link to complaint intentions in online shopping. An integration of justice, technology, and trust*. *International Journal of Information Management*, 33(1): 166–175.