

Consumer Behavior

L'Oreal Case Discussion

French and American Consumer Behavior

French and American consumers are different with regards to beauty products. With the case of L'Oreal, their marketing team claimed that American consumers really did not know much about skin care products compared to European women. L'Oreal claimed they would have to 'educate them'.

The success of L'Oreal Plénitude in France was secured by the brand's image of "high end, superior performance, but accessible," supported by upscale packaging and merchandising. French women were relatively sophisticated in their use of skin care products and many brands competed in the high end of the market. Yet this was different for American women. According to L'Oreal's market research, American women were overwhelmed by the sophisticated packaging, and they did not want a brand that competed at the high end of the market: they wanted something a little more simple and affordable.

It is this difference between French and American women that slowed the success of L'Oreal Plénitude in the United States.

The Problem of L'Oreal

Based on my understanding of the situation and the market research data, I believe the problem of L'Oreal to lie in its generally overwhelming impression with consumers. On the whole, the idea of bringing sophisticated department-store type products to the mass, convenience-store channels seemed successful in theory. However, on numerous occasions, research data showed the consumers to be overwhelmed and turned-off by the amount of text displayed in the packaging of the products. The same overwhelming sensation was felt as a result of the amounts of packages as well.

All marker research studies lead to the same conclusion about the packaging. The Acceptor/Receptor studies of those who used L'Oreal Plénitude (April 1996) revealed opinions such as *confusing*, *a lot to read*, and *overworked*. The Acceptor/Receptor studies of those who used Oil of Olay and Ponds (May 1996) left similar views about

L'Oreal Plénitude such as *very busy, confusing, no time to read all of that stuff, and unnecessary*. The Shelf-Shopping Study (May 1996) contributed to the same theme: *overwhelming, confusing, so many things, frustrating, and package is just chaos*.

It seems clear from the amount of market research data that L'Oreal Plénitude needs to work on their packaging and display. Through such improvement the company might reduce the overwhelming and confusing sensations their consumers are left with.

Positioning Maps: Perceptions of L'Oreal

According to the first perceptual map, those who were aware of L'Oreal Plénitude believed the brand to be *technologically advanced*. These same individuals perceived L'Oreal Plénitude, to some degree, to *contain alpha hydroxy* as well as act as an *exfoliate for the skin*. These perceptions put L'Oreal Plénitude closest to brands Nivea Visage and Alpha Hydrox in terms of similarities, and not far from the department store brands of Clinique and Estée Lauder.

L'Oreal Plénitude was perceived furthest from brands like Ponds, Oil of Olay, and Avon, whose products were considered a *good value for money*, and *reasonably priced*. Being far from these latter brands also put L'Oreal Plénitude furthest away from product impressions like *face stays younger looking, skin feeling soft, and relieves dryness*.

According to the other perceptual map, those who were aware of L'Oreal Plénitude believed that users of the product line were more likely to *spend money on themselves*, similar to Clinique product users. L'Oreal Plénitude users were also perceived, to some degree, to be *stylish, upper class, and glamorous/sophisticated*, like the users of Estée Lauder.

L'Oreal Plénitude users were perceived furthest from the *mother, traditional or 60's ideal* of Oil of Olay. They were similarly perceived to be far from the *practical, old fashioned, and wholesome* ideals of Ponds and Avon users.

Recommendations for L'Oreal

Based on the research findings, I would recommend the following to L'Oreal Plénitude:

- Reduce the amount of text on the packaging of products
 - Focus text on simple results, not necessarily what the product is made of (i.e. antioxidants, liposomes, pro-retinol A and E, etc.). This is where the confusion for customers seems to lie.
- Continue to focus promotion on the new item; let the new item stand out.
 - By attracting the consumer to the one, new product, you can let her discover the vast product line on her own—this may help the feeling of being overwhelmed since the entire line is not being marketed to her all at once, just the new product. She'll be able to take her time with the rest of the merchandise.
- Change the descriptions of *reduce* or *delay the signs of aging* to something like *prevents*.
 - *Delay* (the change made when L'Oreal Plénitude began marketing in the US) does not sound that much different from *reduce*.
 - In the market research, consumers said that L'Oreal Plénitude gave them the impression that the product was geared towards older people: I believe this is enhanced by the words *reduce* or *delay the signs of aging*.
 - Instead, use *prevent*: it implies the same treatment and effects as *delay* or *reduce*, and it gives the impression that 1) the product is not only intended for older women, but younger women who care about their skin as well, and 2) if you use the product, you won't *look* like an older woman: it *prevents* that.