

# Winning Competitive Edge in the Market through Augmented Product Profiles to Deliver Higher Values & Experiences to the Buyers

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**Abstract:** *In an effort to enjoy competitive advantage in the market for increased sale volumes and values, marketers of products & services (Hotels & eateries in particular), keep upgrading their Product profiles making the 'actual' product to attract the visibility. The Actual product, in fact, steals the show, working as a 'glorifying part' of the Core product. So it takes the role of creating an aura for the Core product, giving the impression that the customer decides to opt the particular product because of the aural part more than the actual core - product, which may also have its own pull factor for some. In product marketing the marketers adopt different strategies to woo the buyers – delivering higher values or passing on monetary benefits in the form of discounts. While in product marketing there is greater scope for adding product profile features, the same is difficult for restaurants and eateries offering food products. In restaurants and eateries, the food is to a large extent a unique core product, which cannot be upgraded beyond a level. Taste, Hygiene and the Service Quality are the most expected factors. There is one major disadvantage in foods - marketing, as more product - differentiation that is done on the core food to take a winning edge in the market, more they will be away from being called as the original / authentic foods, which acts as a negative factor. So in order to make the product profile look more and more attractive, the features have to be added in the area of actual product of the product profile. Service Scape is the major Guest puller in restaurants and eateries. Service - scape is known as the all - inclusive and the collective non - human features that go to upgrade the over - all product profile. Service - Scape is that part of the product profile (Augmented product profile) which means 'where the food is served', 'how attractive is the place', 'how it engages the guests in a pleasurable mood', 'how they make the guest to long for revisiting the restaurant for having repeat - experiences' that they have had. But building 'engaging and attractive' Service - Scapes naturally involve costs which are not only huge initial investments but also perpetual costs calling for up - keep and maintenance. The paper focuses on the intricate choices that the marketers of products and service providers adopt when it comes to profiling their products (showing higher values, monetary benefits and sometimes making the experiences speak for attracting the buyers/customers/guests). All the acts that the marketers do to woo the customers through various marketing strategies could only be a jugglery – working on the product profiles – which happen in the area of actual product & the augmented product.*

**Keywords:** Product profile – Service marketing – augmented product – Service Scape – Value for customer – Customer experience

## 1. Introduction

Product marketing is comparatively straight forward. The marketer needs to work on the tangible product and could make a great difference in its 'performance area', 'robust design', 'looks area', 'ease of operation' on Service, or any area that will be well within the product and its profile spread possible.

But unlike the above, Food marketing business, setting up restaurants, is generally considered to be a highly profit oriented one, necessarily so, since it involves a great amount of operations. Every busy market place and other busy locations are hot spots for the business to flourish. For food to sell only three basic requirements are essential – 1. Taste of food, 2. Hygiene, 3. Right price. Differentiating product to win a competitive advantage therefore will be difficult to achieve since, one cannot innovate much on Food in terms of ingredients & preparation, as long as the three essentials mentioned are taken care. So in order to fight competition to win a position or to retain a position in terms market share, the only possible value addition that one could do, will be only in the augmented product areas, which are only add - on qualities outside the product. Perhaps, they could be where you serve, how you serve, the delivery, the aesthetics in the business place, all of which are not part of the Core

product/s but aid in overall making the product positioned differently.

**Ref.1.**

## 2. Methodology

The research study and the conclusive statements are made based on the literary review and the author's own experience on account of working in different Corporates in the marketing and sales departments handling different tangible products, conceptual products and also services. The views of the author were amply supported by the Reference study material on the topic/s, which go to support the research review and the points of view thereof.

## 3. Results & Discussions

There are businesses where a product / service is made up of multiple Utility features. Such products are not Single - Utility Products (SUP), but Multiple - Utility - Products (collection of products – together offered as a single MUP). They could be termed as MUPs – kind of "bundling of products". A Travel ticket for travel in a luxury shuttle train to do an inter - city journey includes the service (travel to the destination), food & beverage (that they serve while on travel), a movie that is shown during the travel of 3 - 5

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hours. Here each utility – such as Travel, a Combo Food bowl and a movie facility are all different products offered together as a Combo of MUP. **Travel** is the lead - service that is purchased and the offer of the other **two products** are not free but offered together, for which a cost - plus - nominal profit is added together for the total price for the MUP. Bus operators also sell such MUPs. Here the Core - service is not one but multiple – could be more than one. Even the **Cab service** operators pull in a couple of other **small core product/service/facilities** to make the MUP more attractive, as you would get two or more core services offered together. Invariably, the

first major product / service will be one which could be marketed as standalone service. For use of cab for travel, travel is the core service that we are offered to avail, providing a **WIFI facility** for internet connection and a **movie** to watch will be the additional core services, which the customers may or may not require. In **multiplex Cinema theatres**, the **ticket** to watch the movie is the major core product/service, and a **bowl of pop corn** during intermission or some other product which is offered together, the price of which is included, also falls under MUP concept.

MUPs are created for two reasons:

- 1) To fight market competition to position the brand in the market winning the competition OR
- 2) To fight market competition to regain the position it lost

Invariably the gain or loss is only seen in terms of sale volumes and Sale Revenues gained or lost. MUPs are normally conceptualized having group of products of closer relationship as a Combo product, or such individual products are built with features of the product, in which case they occupy the Actual product position. Group products and the relationship based products here mean that an Agarbathi packet offered with a match box included in the pack acts as a collective product. Agarbathi needs a match box to light them, and further the co - product also forms a means to make the original product to be put to usage. But here the customer gets a benefit but not an experience.

Ref.2

A group of products alone could only form as an MUP, but such MUPs would not provide an experience to the customers / guests (in hospitality). The MUPs acting as group of products, where in the combination should be like:

- One) Service + (One or more) Product/s
- (One) Service + (one or more) Service/s
- (One) Product + (One or more) Service/s

So for an experience to happen, the MUP should without exception include a service or a time - share experience such as a restaurant having upgraded atmosphere and ambience. It could also be a place of importance, a historical locale (places of tourist - importance. It could be a case of antiques kept in a place such as museum – permitted to view and enjoy.

Sl. No.	“Enhancing the Value delivered” which is also an ADD - ON to Product Profile in Actual Product or Augmented Product			
01	Product	+	Product	Higher Value
02	Product	+	Discount	Monetary Value
03	Service	+	Product	Higher Value
04	Product	+	Service	Higher Value
05	Product	+	Time Share in Place of Comfort	Experience

Under product Sl. No.1, the attempt by the marketer would be to induce trial purchases by the buyers in the market. Here the initial pull will result in a sale, no doubt, but, unless the product is worthy of quality and other aspects, repeat purchase would not happen. Even if the One - for - One offer is continued, the buyer will not buy for a second time if the product performance and quality do not meet the requirements. Same thing applies to the one given under sl. no.3 & 4.

At Sl. No.4, the higher value drawn could be a product delivered at home, on time but with no extra cost added to the services rendered.

If one looks at the serial No.5 above, the product offered is delivered in a place which offers delight in the form of place of delivery, the comfort, the happiness derived by the customer/guest at the place where the delivery of product happened. A decent **Super market** with the facility of space, air quality, temperature, ambience and the people handling the customers/guests with courtesy is also a great experience that is derived by the customer / guest.

### Ref.3

So the above offers clearly indicate that the product performance is of utmost importance, which, and only which would make the customer make repeat purchases by those who tried. Even the trial - purchase making buyers would expect for the basic performance levels from out of the product.

And the danger that the marketers should foresee when they make such attractive offers is that the buyers could stop buying the products when the offers are withdrawn. It is quite obvious for a buyer to think that the purchase of product without offer would mean that the price that would be paid would be double, as the price that is paid is not for 2 nos. but only for 1 no. – in the case of especially at sl. no.1. So the marketer should seriously think what to do in terms of delivering same value, when the offer is withdrawn.

In a restaurant – a fine - dining one, the food offered is a product and the atmosphere the ambience of the location, where the guest sits and has it is an experience (Not a case of a take away, but a comfortable place, time - shared by the frequenting guests)

While products have some advantages and also certain limitations when their profiles have to be made larger to appeal to the customers, services have a greater scope to be shown as a largely different and value added product.

*“Improving customer experience is a key priority for enterprises today. To improve something, you need to have*

*the ability to measure it. Based on your objective, measurement methodologies for customer experience can differ significantly. To steer toward your strategic customer communications management (CCM) objectives, it is important to understand these differences. “In our research in the field of customer communications, we observe a shift in strategy that is moving from a cost-driven strategy toward a customer-centric one. Enterprises today talk about the importance of customer engagement and the need to improve customer experiences. They acknowledge that markets are moving from a “sales era,” which focused on overcoming customer resistance and convincing people to buy their products and services, toward a “social era,” where customers rely more on peer recommendations than on messages from brands themselves.”*

**Ref.4**

The product / Service that is consumable and the place where it is made available open up great scope for product extension. The product's augmented profile area could take in any amount of features, thus making the product profile, beyond compare. The concept of Service scape actually comes here. “It is the physical environment where a service can take place. It helps to analyze and identify the impact of good environment on the service based industry”

“Service scape deals in the settings where a service is consumed or delivered and the place where both the company and customer interactions with each other take place. It has a powerful impact on the assessment, perception, and response of the customer”. Service - scape is responsible for the change in the behaviour of the customers in their viewing of the product and its profile. Booms and Bitner who were responsible for the concept of **Service - Scape** say that it has a direct impact on the customer's behaviours. The surroundings of place encourage or discourage the customer in following a defined course of action. Similarly, in a product, the extended profile engages the attention of the customer and keeps the interest of buyer intact. While the core product creates a strong connect, the extended profile features emotionally engage the customer to keep the relationship in tact – even to the extent of compromising marginally on the core performance.

If the marketer's objective is to enhance the quality of relationship with the customer, Service - scape is essential. Service - scape thus enhances the scope for the customers to behave favourably – which is translated in to business - as better sale volumes and higher revenues.

*“Impressions matter a great deal, and it is the ambiance that proves a deciding factor for most customers. Do you want to conduct any type of service at a place where you are not comfortable in the settings?”*

*“Sometimes the product value of two companies is the same, but what separates from others is its physical environment. A person will feel comfortable in one place and not so in another.”*

*“This can be a deal - breaker for him. For example, if you have the option of having dinner in a plain room with only basic amenities and the other place with the soothing ambiance, you will always choose the latter instead of the former.”*

**Ref.5**

**Not Customer Satisfaction and delight – but Customer's experience wins**

It actually started with products and then services too. Satisfaction of the customer is a level of satiation that the customer feels when he is happy with what he spent and what he got in return. It is just a delicate balance and there is danger of the customer shifting his loyalty if slightly more favourable product is offered. So the marketers should not be complacent with just ‘the satisfaction’ but more than that is possible only when the customer is able to feel and get a ‘WoW’ effect. In food industry it is possible for the restaurants to offer good food in a place that takes the customer's to a level, which brings a feel of having a good food and also being served in a great location. So the satisfaction moves to a feeling of delight and also an experience, which the customer would like to repeat by revisiting to the place. So here the Service - scape could only make that kind of an experience possible.

While the good food served in a Service - scape homogeneously enhances the food value, the product with the enhanced features may not in the same manner homogeneously connect when the performance of the product is put to actual use. The additional features would only enhance value cognizable in the over - all purview and perception, not when the actual performance is being drawn for use, unless all such features are in the area of actual product. For instance, a good detergent provides good washing as performance, the features such as pleasing smell, ease of wash, friendly to the hands while washing, could all go as the performance - supporting features, but a price reduction and offer of a free - accompaniment would not serve as a performance - supporting feature and hence will lie only at the back end of the mind.

But then the Service - Scape is not one that could be something offered as an addendum to the product offered. It is the place, an aesthetic, comfort enhancing and enabling a great experience for the customer, alone or as a group of companions visit and experience. Here the food is a core - product which is greatly enhanced in terms of value by offering the product in – a certain place, certain ambiance, certain value - enhancing location which is viewed by the customer as a product + a big value together. And the big value offered together is seen first, when the customer thinks of repeat purchase, and much before the product the value that is added additionally is seen and the actual **core** product takes the back seat.

Food marketing is more seen as a Hospitality activity which includes several things such as how the customer is welcomed, treated and made to enjoy spending time during which *he also consumes food*. So the Core product – food has over it several layers of values and experiences which go together to make that ‘exalted product’. Eating food at a particular restaurant is seen as a much better choice than



eating tasty food – as food alone. **Foods are core products within the augmented products. And only in the food marketing, the augmented features seem to sink into the area of ‘actual product’**

Getting business in Restaurants in the current day situation is easy and also difficult. If the marketer enthruses the guests, it is easier, but it would be difficult if the marketer cannot do that. Winning in competition to grow and the winning in competition to stay in business today is possible only through meeting the guests’ choices. Meeting those needs that the guests look for is mandatory therefore.

To illustrate the food - marketing with and without the ‘experience’ that is offered to the guest, the features of Casual dining and Fine - dining would themselves speak about it. While there are several classifications done about restaurants, the most generic classification is Casual Dining & Fine Dining. “They have differences in the foods offered, style, serving, preparation methods and in Dining will look friendlier and informal, while the fine - dining will look more elegant and formal atmosphere. The food and the pricing, of course, would be different.

**Casual Dining** – The food served is moderately priced food and the food is served in a casual atmosphere. Casual dining could be placed in between a ‘fast - food dining and fine dining. Relaxed Decor & Casual Dress Code will be significantly seen. Table cloths may or may not be used. Dress code is casual. There won’t be certified chefs. Waiters and Waitresses are normally not - trained. Quality of food would be quite good.

Casual Dining		
Food – Quality	Value for money	Feature of Product Profile delivering the Value for money
Accepted Ingredients, preparation - Taste – Hygiene – Price	Product Usage / Satisfaction (Just adequate) with just - required facility support	Core Product + Actual Product + Minimum Product Augmentation

In Casual Dining the product profile is built with just the accepted features – Core product, Actual Product & a very minimal augmentation in the product profile The customer’s realized value for money experience is just SATISFACTION

**Fine Dining** – is a formally styled one. Exceptional food and expensive too. Surprisingly not so expensive alternatives are of common place. Food is served by the trained front office / Service personnel. But ambience is the crucial factor in a fine dining restaurant. Guests come here for an experience and not for food alone. Lighting, table settings, staff, style, design and architecture of the building all come into play to blend together to create the ambience. “A fine dining experience should create a blissful feeling that fills your heart, your body, and your soul with inner peace and satisfaction. Food is the fuel of your body and soul and fine dining the is spark that ignites the fire in your life” It is “**moving from what you buy to ‘how you buy’**”, **more precisely where you buy and the kind of time that is**

**absorbed in the process, which embeds the food as the product consumed.**

Fine Dining		
Food – Quality	Value for money	Feature of Product Profile delivering the Value for money
Greatly enhanced Ingredients, preparation - Taste – Hygiene + Service - Scape	Enjoyable Experience Beyond Delightful Product Usage / Consumption	Enhanced Core Product Profile + Enhanced Actual Product Profile + Enhanced Augmented Product

In Fine Dining the product profile is built with the well enhanced product features – Core product, Actual Product & a greatly enhanced augmentation in the product profile. The customer’s realized value for money is DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE. Delightful experience enables a great product to prevail and the customer holds on to the product / service with great loyalty.

Ref.6

#### 4. Conclusion

From what has been brought into the paper, it is more than visible in the product / service marketing that in order to gain and retain the customers’ loyalty, marketers work initially on the Core & Actual product profile areas to enhance the features. While about products, the features are added in Core product and Actual product areas of the product profiles, the service - marketing has a greater scope compared to the product - marketing in enhancing the profile area of the Augmented product to deliver “customer delight and much enhanced enjoyable experience”. While in product marketing also, experience could be brought in as a benefit, in Service marketing it would be much greater, and sometimes the customers’ minds would start looking at the experience as higher value derived for money than what the product delivered in service, provides. In fact, in service, where greater and enjoyable experience is delivered, the service profile will be looked at as a more integrated product and the augmented profile features tend to blur the other profile areas and appear to be overwhelming in their benefit - delivery to the customers. In food as a product, the limitation will be that beyond an extent it will be difficult to add features in core and actual product profile areas, the feature addition and product differentiation could be extended in the augmented area. All the acts that the marketers do to woo the customers (and then retain them in their fold) through various marketing strategies could only be a jugglery – working on the product profiles – which happen in the area of **actual product** & the **augmented product**. And more in service, enjoyable experience is chosen as a strong feature to emerge from the augmented product profile area, which totally becomes a game - changer for service - marketing in winning competition and to continuously retain the customer, till the other challenging brands work to give competition again at that level. In the later part of the paper, where the Casual dining and Fine - dining restaurants’ marketing strategies are discussed, it is

brought out clearly and conspicuously that the actual game changer between them is only the 'enjoyable experience' that is delivered by the Fine - dining restaurants, which gives the winning edge to the latter market player, as the core and actual product features are same or almost similar in both the cases. On the augmented product profile space only required differentiation is worked upon to win increased share and space in the market. Thus it is more than proven that in service - marketing, augmented product profile features speak louder and attract more to win respectable position in the market shares and profits.

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