

# SH!TIFICATION or the Tendency to Fix the Wrong Things

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## Abstract

When facing crucial decision-making, many managers tend to fix the wrong things, leading to a SH!TIFICATION of the products and customer experiences. This article reviews eleven SH!TIFICATION tendencies we have and provides recommendations on how to overcome them. A particular focus is given to the silent update tendency, which consists in making changes without telling customers. The changes are not supposed to have an impact on the customer experience, but the chocolate bar and the GPS navigation cases highlight how and why these silent updates present a risk for customers' health, safety, and loyalty.

**Keywords:** Shitification, nudge, chocolate, GPS, CX, ego, neurosciences,

## Introduction

When confronted with a new market, an unexpected trend, or a drop in sales, managers have to move fast, yes, but in the right direction. Reactions like "Nobody will notice it", "Others do it like that", or "We just need to nudge people" are symptomatic of a deeper SH!TIFICATION process that inevitably translates to a backlash in the market. Even great brands and high-performing managers sometimes SH!TIFY their client experience. Based on research, market observations, and latest developments in decision-making science, this article details one of the eleven SH!TIFICATION tendencies we have and provides recommendations on how to overcome it (Derval, 2020).

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## SH!TIFICATION Tendency #1 – Nobody will notice it

Most brands do not shitify on purpose. In the silent update tendency, they just believe that nobody will notice it – it being a new packaging, a change in ingredient, or an improved component. Through the examples of a chocolate bar and a GPS navigation system, we will see how a little change in ingredient or component can have a dramatic impact on the product itself and the customer experience. We will then have a discussion on how to detect this type of silent update, as a manager but also as a consumer. And, finally, we give some recommendations on how we could do better (Derval, 2020 in print).

Let's start with this chocolate bar story. As you might have heard of, many companies are busy working with different ingredients than refined sugar - which is a great approach. Several options are available, as one chocolate bar went the road of coconut sugar, gaining the loyalty of health-conscious consumers, who appreciated

Facing some business challenges, the new team in place realized it would be wiser to slightly change the ingredients, maybe by sourcing a cheaper sweetener. They made up their minds for agave syrup. Some consumers reacted negatively to it and sent some feedback to the brand. The chef in charge of the recipe didn't really understand the feedback, because in his mind you have different sweeteners and a sweetener is just a sweetener, so they are interchangeable.

But there's more to a sweetener than just the sweet taste. So even though consumers might taste something similar - between us, let's face it, this is not even true because depending on people we might have ten to a thousand one hundred taste buds per square centimeter of our tongue so the difference between people is huge and the related perception of taste also very different - but yeah, let's even assume nobody will notice it in terms of taste, sweeteners also have an impact on digestion or glycemic index (Lawrence, 2019). So for instance, our health-conscious consumers who also have a tendency toward diabetes will react completely differently to coconut sugar or to agave syrup, and if some might be comfortable digesting one it doesn't mean they will react the same way with the other. So the sales, of course, were impacted by the choice, because suddenly people felt the product was not the same anymore (Derval, 2011).

Another example is in the field of GPS navigation. These are very complex devices you are putting in the car, and of course suppliers are changing, regulations are changing, technology is changing. You want to optimize the costs. So there are a lot of silent updates going on that are supposed to be just like invisible improvements or move toward more efficiency for instance. In our case it was about a chipset. So, a new chipset was supposed to be more cost effective. As it is often the case when the update is motivated by cost savings, companies are not really communicating about the update.

Issue is even if you test a chipset on its own, this component might react differently once it's in the box with its other component friends than the initial component that was replaced. So in that case, a lot of shipped devices started behaving abnormally. And the dysfunction, when you're talking about automotive and mobility, happened to be blocking, so that some of the customers had to send back the devices and they had to be modified and reimbursed or replaced. So the impact on the loyalty but also the turnover was very negative in that case, and the cost savings were probably not there anymore (Al-Zogbi et al, 2019).

So what we see with these two examples is that silent updates can have negative impacts on health or on safety. And things are not all equivalent. If we do not understand the use case, how can we for sure say that A is the same as B. Maybe it's the same if we take the case of the sweetener in terms of taste but not in terms of digestibility or in terms of glycemic index. In the same way, two chipsets might have the same capacity to process information or to store it but not the same reaction to temperature. So many factors need to be taken into account.

**Key takeaways:**

- *Inform people.* It is always better, as a good practice, to inform people about the update. Of course, if they do not benefit directly from it in terms of increased features or price discount, it might sound like a bit too much information for them, but it's better to give a bit more information than not enough. And also, a full testing, a full validation is required – you cannot let people beta test without even noticing it.

- *Spot silent updates.* As a consumer, you have some hints that there was a silent update. These hints pertain to products that disappeared for a while and then came back and in new packaging. Often, when the content is changed, teams take the opportunity to also change the packaging. So you should be alerted by it and not hesitate, maybe, to contact the companies because if they didn't communicate openly about a change we can hope that most of them would at least acknowledge it if we would directly ask them the question.

- *Identify the use cases.* As a manager, we need to keep in mind that no update should be silent, that any change might have an impact because we didn't fully understand all the use cases. Or maybe when we are testing, we test only the two main use cases and what we think is a cost-saving operation, in the end, might have a negative impact on customer loyalty and on the bottom line. So what to do instead? What to do instead is to identify clearly the use cases and identify for each use case what are the possible substitutions if something needs to be changed.

### 10 other SH!TIFICATION Tendencies

#### #2 – *I prefer it that way*

People can have opposite perceptions and preferences. It is, therefore, a bad idea to design products and experiences according to our own liking without checking beforehand whether we represent the target customer (Derval, 2010).

#### #3 – *We did it on purpose*

When clumsy new products are suddenly renamed technological projects or companies change their communication strategy and positioning to make products gone wrong sound intentional.

#### #4 – *We just need to nudge people*

It is much easier to change customer experiences than to change people. Not to mention it is also more ethical (Entwistle, 2020).

#### #5 – *It is confidential*

*Business will benefit from shared and well-informed decisions. It is wise to protect original ideas and methods, but secret projects often mask the progress of a very bad idea that has the potential to jeopardize a whole business (Contractor, 2019).*

#### #6 – *We didn't touch anything*

*Not moving can also lead to a certain level of SH!TIFICATION. In a moving world, just maintaining things as they are requires a lot of effort.*

#### #7 – *We need to innovate*

*Some managers try too hard to innovate—choosing sometimes novelty over customer benefits. Flashnews: if a company never did something before, it does not mean it is new. Also, new does not mean it is innovative and brings additional benefits to the customers (Ettlie, 2019).*

#### #8 – *We need to follow the trends*

Not all people are following all trends, so a bit of targeting can avoid major pitfalls (Derval, 2018).

#### #9 – *Others do it like that*

It is important to check competitors but not too much. Say goodbye to benchmarking spread sheets and their ravaging damages.

#10 – *Everybody seemed ok with it*

Absurd decisions where people value harmony over effectiveness can lead to SH!TIFICATION by consensus (Morel, 2008).

#11 – *I wanted to leave my mark*

Some managers want to leave their mark taking bold risks that may or may not pay off (Petriglieri et al, 2019).

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