

Does Your Market Have "Tells"?

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[Wikipedia](#) says "A 'tell' in poker is a change in a player's behavior or demeanor that is claimed by some to give clues to that player's assessment of their hand. A player gains an advantage if they observe and understand the meaning of another player's tell, particularly if the tell is unconscious and reliable. Sometimes a player may fake a tell, hoping to induce their opponents to make poor judgments in response to the false tell. More often, people try to avoid giving out a tell, by maintaining a poker face regardless of how strong their hand is."

While gathering market evidence, particularly involving customer feedback methods, are there common 'tells' to watch for? This would be the change in a market or market segment's behavior, which could be used as a predictor of market response to your next product offering? I'm not aware of a formal study within the domain of Product Management, but it makes sense to me that there should be.

In poker, there are certain poker 'tells' that are universal and others that are unique. For example, a universal poker 'tell' is that the heartbeat increases when holding good hole cards. A unique tell is something like whistling. Player A might whistle when he has good cards whereas Player B might whistle when he has bad cards. Maybe in an initial study it would only focus on universal 'tells'. Are there any universal 'tells' of the market? Obviously the product managers who can pick up on market 'tells' and (not give away any of their own) have a big advantage in the long run.

The observed behavior of throwing the cards on the table and storming out of the building is not a 'tell'. The refusal to renew a software maintenance fee is not a 'tell'. The switching from a Ford to a Dodge truck is not a 'tell'. The 'tell' presented itself much earlier, when there was still time to place your bet. It was there before you released your next product. It was there while you were planning that new product. If it wasn't there then, it wasn't a 'tell'. For the behavior to be a 'tell', it must be actionable.

In "[Championship No-Limit and Pot-Limit Hold'em](#)", T.J. Cloutier states that everyone has tells.
" We've watched all the really good players

over the years--and every one of them has a tell. Even legendary players like Phil Hellmuth, John Bonetti, Stu Ungar, Doyle Brunson. If you observe enough and watch them play hands for long enough, you'll find that they all have a certain tell when they have a really big hand versus just a hand. Of course, the top players don't show tells very often, but they do do it. And that's pretty true of everybody else in poker, too. "

What do you think, does the sum of the individual 'tells' equal the 'tell' of the Market? If so then markets have a 'tell' as well. If markets don't have 'tells', then statistical analysis, and market survey methods are in trouble. I'm a believer in market 'tells'. The question is: are you in for the duration, because if so, you'd do well to learn your market 'tells'. If you believe that product management is a profession, as I do; then there should be a method of determining market 'tells' based on best-practices and not a decade of industry experience.

When is the sum of 'tells' for individual clients of a market high enough to declare it's the market's 'tell'? Is there a tipping point that could be watched, and if it ever goes over X threshold, you better do something?

Unlike many players, T.J. Cloutier looks at his cards early. He feels that this lets him focus on his opponents from that point on. I remember watching him do this in a hand against Phil Hellmuth. He was so focused on Phil that he didn't realize he got a flush on the river. Part of observation is keeping your eyes on your opponents, not your cards. Makes good sense, we must keep our eyes and ears open to market feedback. T. J. could have been a good product manager.

He stated, "I always look at my hand quickly. If you look at your hand before the action comes to you, you can never see whether anything is going on behind you. If you wait until the action gets to you to look at your hand, you will miss a lot of things. Look at your hand as soon as you get both of your cards so that you can observe the things that other players are doing when they get their cards:

- Little twitches they make when they have a hand.
- Whether they slip their cards back under their chips.
- Whether they are loading up, getting their chips ready to bet.

What market indicators or 'tells' can you as the product management team perceive. How do

you know if your gathering too much evidence? Based on your ability to perceive the 'tells', how do you place your bet? I guess I'm getting a head of myself. Lets learn to read the 'tells', then figure out the rest.

I'm looking for studies and information on topics like:

- The Tipping Point of Market Tells
- Market Tells Perceived through Text Decoding Methods
- Environmental Market Tells such as Timing, Frequency, and Event Cohesiveness
- Facial Expressions of the Market and Their Tells
- Market Tells Perceived by Listening to the Voice of The Market
- Seeing the Market Tells in Analysis Charts
- The Use of Market Tells to Extract Premium Prices From a Market

As I find stuff, I'll post it. I'm very interested in your thoughts, blog posts, and/or books on this topic as well. I believe in 'tells'; related efforts on this topic will be on how to read those 'tells' not if they exist.

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