

# The Kano Model

Strategic Prioritization for Product Excellence

## Why use the Kano Model?

In a world of infinite possibilities but limited resources, knowing *what* to build is just as important as knowing *how* to build it. The Kano Model offers a strategic framework to distinguish between features that simply prevent dissatisfaction and those that create genuine delight.

### Key Strategic Benefits

- **Precise Prioritization**  
Stop guessing. Distinguish between essential "Musts" and differentiator "Exciters" to allocate resources where they create the most value.
- **Avoid Feature Bloat**  
Identify "Indifferent" attributes early. Developing features that customers don't care about adds cost and complexity without adding value.
- **Maximize Satisfaction**  
Ensure baseline expectations are met to prevent churn, while simultaneously targeting specific opportunities to surprise and delight users.
- **Competitive Differentiation**  
Highlight specific "Exciters" that can serve as the cornerstone of marketing campaigns and unique value propositions.
- **Lifecycle Awareness**  
Understand that delight decays over time. What creates a "wow" moment today (Exciter) becomes a basic expectation (Must) tomorrow.
- **Drives Innovation**  
The Kano model prevents teams from just building "more of the same." It explicitly helps you find Delighters—the features that differentiate you from competitors and create a loyal fanbase.
- **Prevents Wasted Investment**  
It filters out Indifferent features, saving time and money that would otherwise be wasted on things users don't care about. It also identifies Reverse features that actually annoy customers.

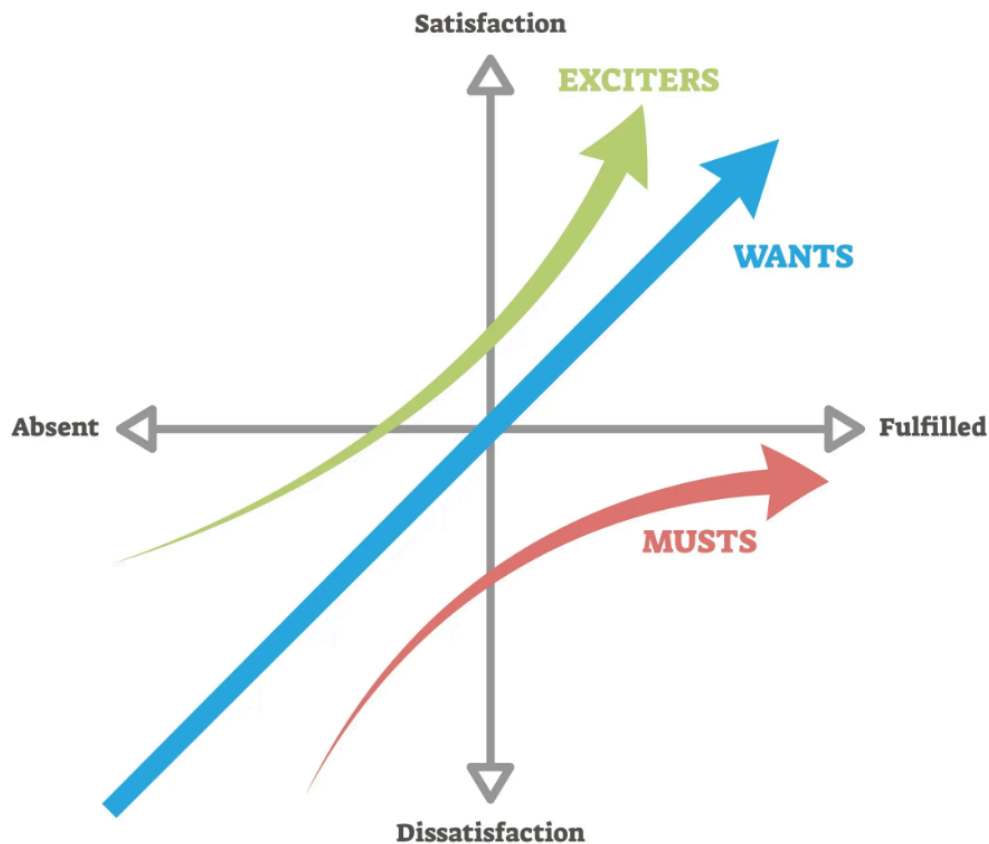
**Critical Insight:** The Kano model teaches that **Delighters eventually become Must-Bes**. Wi-Fi in a coffee shop was once a Delighter; now it's a Must. This forces constant innovation to stay ahead.

# Understanding the Framework

## What is the Kano Model?

Developed by Dr. Noriaki Kano in the 1980s, this theory challenges the assumption that customer satisfaction is always linear. Instead, it shows that different features impact satisfaction in fundamentally different ways, following distinct curves on a graph from "absent" to "fulfilled."

## KANO MODEL



Understanding these curves is critical for strategic decision-making. The **Musts** curve shows exponential dissatisfaction when absent but quickly plateaus when present—you can't win by over-delivering here. The **Wants** curve is diagonal, showing proportional returns. The **Exciters** curve demonstrates asymmetric value: no penalty for absence, but significant satisfaction gains when present.

## The Five Feature Categories

The Kano Model classifies all product features into five distinct categories based on their impact on customer satisfaction:

### **MUSTS** Basic Needs

The "price of entry." If absent, customers are furious. If present, they are merely neutral. You get no credit for these, but you fail without them.

*Example:* A hotel room having a bed and a lock on the door.

### WANTS Performance (One-Dimensional)

A linear relationship. The faster, bigger, or cheaper it is, the happier the customer. These are typically the specs you see in comparison charts.

*Example:* Battery life in a smartphone—10 hours is better than 5; 20 hours is better than 10.

### EXCITERS Attractive (Delighters)

Unexpected features that cause positive surprise. Absence doesn't hurt, but presence creates immense value and loyalty.

*Example:* A free warm cookie upon checking into a hotel.

### INDIFFERENT No Impact

Features that customers simply don't care about. Investing here is a waste of resources.

*Example:* The color of the wiring inside a toaster.

### REVERSE Annoyances

Features that actually decrease satisfaction when present. These annoy customers and should be avoided.

*Example:* Excessive security steps or "Clippy" style assistants that interrupt work.

## When the Kano Model Helps Make Decisions

The Kano Model shines in situations where you need to make strategic trade-offs. Here are three scenarios where it provides clarity:

### Situation 1: Launching an MVP

You have a limited budget and tight timeline. The Kano Model tells you exactly which features are **Musts** (non-negotiable for Version 1.0) versus **Exciters** (save for Version 2.0 to differentiate). This prevents both over-building and under-delivering.

### Situation 2: Competing on Features

Your competitor just added a new feature. Should you match it? If it's a **Must** or **Want**, yes. If it's **Indifferent**, don't waste resources. If it's a **Reverse**, you've just gained an advantage by *not* copying them.

### Situation 3: Justifying Marketing Budget

You've built something innovative but need buy-in to promote it. Identifying it as an **Exciter** (high satisfaction when present, no penalty when absent) justifies spending on awareness campaigns—customers can't value what they don't know exists.

# Kano Model in the Real World

## The Modern Smartphone

A mobile manufacturer planning their next flagship device needs to prioritize features across a competitive landscape.

### Making Calls & Wi-Fi Connectivity

MUSTS

If a phone cannot make calls or connect to Wi-Fi, it fundamentally fails as a product. These are table stakes—customers don't praise you for having them, but they'll immediately reject your product if they're missing or unreliable. Even minor call quality issues can tank reviews.

### Battery Life & Storage Capacity

WANTS

More is always better. A 24-hour battery is good; 48 hours is twice as good. 256GB storage beats 128GB. These specs appear directly in comparison charts and heavily influence purchase decisions. Customers will pay premium prices for incremental improvements in these areas.

### Foldable Screens & On-Device AI

EXCITERS

If a phone doesn't fold, no one complains—but if it *does*, it creates viral "wow" moments. AI features that predict your needs or edit photos intelligently generate excitement and brand loyalty. These are your marketing differentiators and justify premium positioning.

### Custom Boot Animations

INDIFFERENT

Most users never notice or care about startup screens. Engineering effort here yields zero competitive advantage or customer satisfaction gains. Resources are better spent elsewhere.

### Excessive Pre-installed Apps

REVERSE

Bloatware actively frustrates customers. Every unremovable app consumes storage and clutters the interface. What manufacturers see as "value-add partnerships" customers experience as annoyance, driving negative reviews and returns.

# Kano Model in the Real World

## Hotel Experience

A hospitality chain analyzing which investments will drive guest loyalty and positive reviews.

### Clean Rooms & Hot Water

Non-negotiable basics. You will never earn a 5-star review for having clean sheets, but you'll absolutely get 1-star reviews for dirty ones. Hot water, functioning locks, and basic cleanliness are the price of entry—fail here and nothing else matters.

MUSTS

### Wi-Fi Speed & Room Size

Business travelers are proportionally happier the faster the Wi-Fi. Families value room size linearly—320 sq ft is noticeably better than 280 sq ft. These attributes directly impact satisfaction scores and justify price premiums in competitive markets.

WANTS

### Warm Cookies at Check-in

Unexpected and memorable. DoubleTree's cookie costs pennies but generates social media posts and emotional loyalty. Guests don't expect it, so there's no penalty for omission—but when present, it creates disproportionate delight and word-of-mouth marketing.

EXCITERS

### Branded Pen & Notepad

In the smartphone era, most guests never touch the desk supplies. Fancy letterhead and branded stationery don't influence booking decisions or satisfaction scores. The budget spent here produces zero ROI.

INDIFFERENT

### Aggressive Upsell Calls

Calling rooms to push spa packages or restaurant reservations irritates guests who value their privacy. What revenue teams see as "service" guests experience as intrusive sales tactics. This actively damages satisfaction and drives negative reviews.

REVERSE

# Apply the Kano Model to Your Product

## Quick Start Guide

Ready to use the Kano Model for your own product? Here's a simple framework to get started with AI-assisted analysis or customer research.

### Input Parameters

**Product:**

The product or category you want to evaluate for features

**Market:**

The type of users or market segment you want to probe for feature prioritization

#### ✨ Analysis Prompt Template

"Do the Kano model for **[product / category]** and for **[this market]**. Include the 5 Categories of features: Must-Be (Basic Needs), Performance (One-Dimensional), Attractive (Delighters), Indifferent, and Reverse."

## Example Application

"Do the Kano model for **cheese** for the **US market**. Include the 5 Categories of features: Must-Be (Basic Needs), Performance (One-Dimensional), Attractive (Delighters), Indifferent, and Reverse."

## What You'll Get

- **Must-Be features** that are non-negotiable for your market
- **Performance features** where more = better (competitive battlegrounds)
- **Attractive features** that will differentiate and delight (innovation opportunities)
- **Indifferent features** to avoid wasting resources on
- **Reverse features** that might actually harm your product

**Pro Tip:** Run this analysis for different market segments separately. What's a "Must" for enterprise customers might be an "Exciter" for consumers, and vice versa.