

# CONSIDERING THE VOICE OF THE CONSUMER WHEN DEVELOPING ANTI-AGEING PRODUCTS: PRODUCT FEATURES THAT GENERATE BUYING INTENTION

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## INTRODUCTION

Schaefer market research GmbH, Hamburg, specialises in consumer research and offers a wide range of services that can help manufacturers of products for the Health & Beauty Care (H&BC) market to develop new products and to support their marketability. Further information about the scope of our services is available on our website ([www.schaefer-marketresearch.com](http://www.schaefer-marketresearch.com)).

One of these services which we are well-known for is conducting “product tests”. Two years ago at the CSC 2006 in Barcelona we presented the paper “Product tests as a valid instrument to measure consumer acceptance in the H&BC market”, introducing the wide field of applications, giving examples of sound methods and approaches, and showing some typical and also some surprising findings.

The latter do happen occasionally and underline how helpful the service provided by marketing researchers can be for the process of developing, improving or changing the formulae of fast-moving consumer goods, i.e. in the field of H&BC products. Chemists sometimes develop formulae that are in fact mild, skin-compatible and effective. But consumers mainly perceive their specific scent, have certain “feelings” about their consistency, the character of their lather – and from these sometimes deduce very different impressions and sometimes even reach surprising and un-expected verdicts.

This means that a given product characteristic may sometimes evoke the reverse response from what was expected– leading to surprisingly low quality ratings and insufficient buying intention scores.

This paper sets out to provide some information about the findings of the tests with anti-ageing products that we have conducted over the past 10 years<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Our database comprises more results, covering the wide range of products available in the facial & body, sun or hair care market – however, the focus of this conference is on “anti-ageing” products; and so we will confine ourselves to looking at this segment.

## Short review

Typically we conduct blind – monadic – in-home use tests. This means, we provide the test participants with a neutrally (white) packed/bottled product and ask them to use this at home during the next 2-3 weeks instead of their current product.

The testing period should be long enough to cover all the typical usage occasions and the individual usage patterns of the test participants in regard to the product in question. And their judgements are collected on the basis of the experience with just this one product – but of course against the background of their usual usage and attitude as the frame of reference.

“Monadic” means: test participants are typically asked to use only this (one) test product, not any other ones in addition to it or afterwards – which is typically requested in so-called paired comparison tests. We discussed this topic in our 2006 conference paper.

The target group of users of the product category is selected from our large SCHAEFER research panel (in Germany and France, as well as further countries) or recruited according to given quotas. The evaluation of the products tested typically takes place at end of the testing period, and is done with the aid of standardised self-completion questionnaires. Various techniques are now used to collect this data – reaching from face-to-face interviews through mail surveys to on-line methods, the latter becoming more and more common.

## Assessment criteria

Our standardised questionnaires ask on the one hand about “likes” and “dislikes” – open-ended questions to collect the pros and cons in the original words of the test participants. And then we ask them to judge specific product features with the aid of two types of scales:

1. **Bipolar scales** are used to find out whether
  - consistency
  - grease content
  - richness
  - intensity of the scent
  - and duration of scent ...
    - are either somewhat or even much **too pronounced** (viscous/greasy/rich/intensive)
    - or **too lacking**.

2. **Unipolar scales** are meant to assess the extent to which particular product-related features are observed when experiencing the product.

In the area of anti-ageing products we have learned that the following key statements are a sound way of describing the relevant product characteristics and benefits with the necessary level of detail to obtain all the information needed by marketing and R&D to gain an understanding of the specific strengths and possible weaknesses of such products<sup>2</sup> (**Figure 1**).

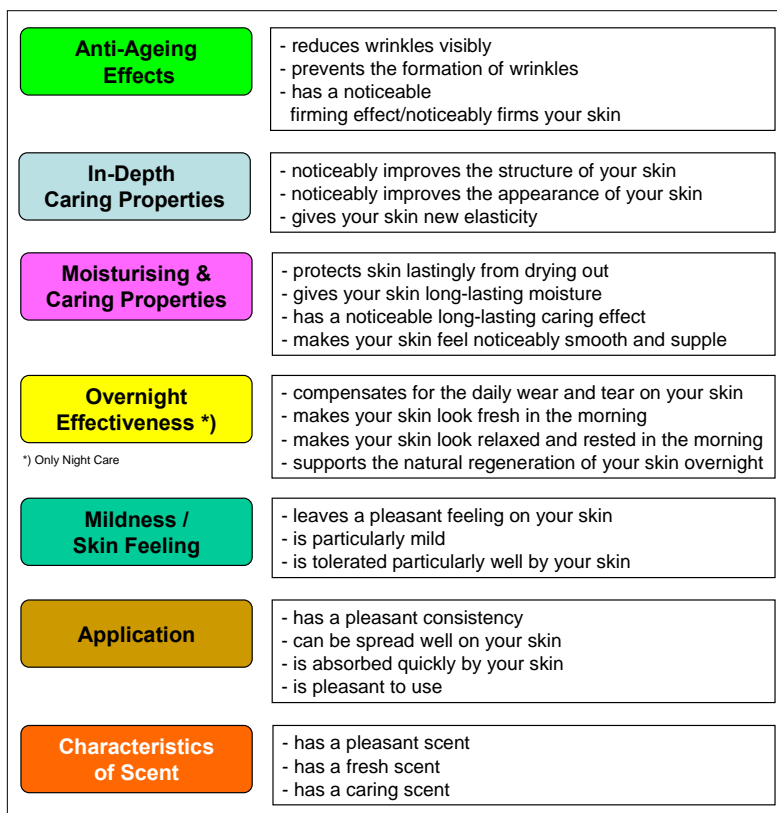
The above statements are grouped on the one hand with the help of a statistical tool known as 'factor analysis'; and on the other hand in accordance with our general experience with the test results from various tests in this product category.

'Factors' describe product-related dimensions and can be interpreted as the first and the "bigger" set of screws that need to be adjusted if the quality rating of a given product is inadequate, or the buying intention is lower than expected for long-term success.

### Benchmarks

Since we have already collected test results for various anti-ageing products we do already have a database, and from that we can derive "benchmarks".

For example, we know that any newly developed anti-ageing product should achieve a score of at least 5.3 for "buying intention" in order to be considered "average". But it is more likely to be successful on the market if this rating is above the 5.5 mark. In that case, the product belongs to the upper quartile, meaning it is among the 25% best products we have tested so far. And since important and representative products from this specific market have been tested – either as test products or as their competitors – these figures reflect the market as it is at present.



**Figure 1**

Besides these benchmarks regarding overall acceptance measures, we can provide additional ones for all the previously mentioned factors or "product dimensions" (**Figure 2**).

This diagram (**Figure 2**) indicates that a newly developed anti-ageing product should achieve a score of at least

- 5.0 for "anti-ageing effects"
- 5.4 in regard to "in-depth caring properties"
- 5.8 regarding the basic moisturising & caring effects, and
- 6.0 for its "mildness & skin feeling".

One can easily see that it is more difficult to achieve "high" scores in regard to the first aspect, whereas nearly excellent scores are a "must" for the last two ones! If a newly developed product ranges anywhere in the "average" zone, then of course, one can dig deeper into the results and examine the specific outcome in regard to the different items that are subsumed under each "factor":

<sup>2</sup>Further items are possible, and in fact used, for specific purposes and depending on the objectives of the test.

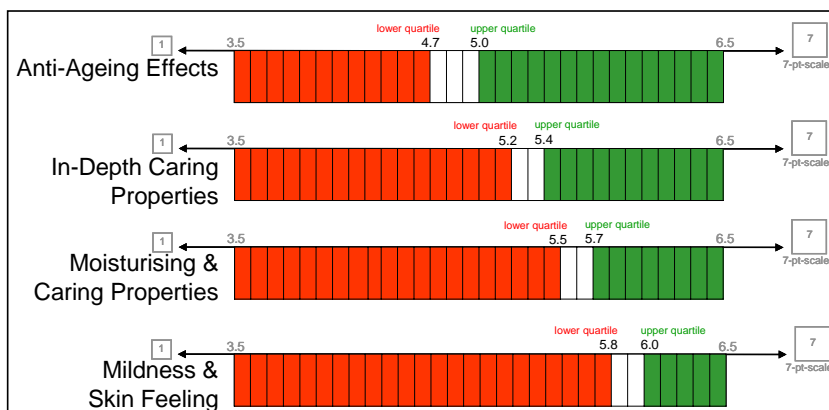


Figure 2

Sometimes the product really **does have** the necessary ingredients and the formula has been proven in lab-oratory tests, showing that the desired effects are actually measurable. In that case, there may be other reasons preventing consumers from perceiving them, accepting them, and giving correspondingly high acceptance ratings. Here too, our database helps to provide answers.

### How to improve quality ratings?

- maybe the product has quite good firming effects
- but fails to prevent the formation of **new** wrinkles
- and there was no effect in **turning around** the process.

... in that case, a sufficient average score on “Anti-Ageing Effects” is unlikely.

But the product might be able to at least provide very good in-depth caring effects. The experienced product developer will know why the product has “only” this very adequate caring efficacy – which makes it a good caring product, but not what is indispensable in order to really market it as an **anti-ageing** product.

We regularly conduct another set of statistical analyses that can help to answer “what-if” questions. These are called regression analyses.

The typical situation for this kind of analysis is that one has a specific product feature, as for example the “anti-ageing effects”, and wants to know to what extent better ratings on this product dimension would lead to a better impression of the products’ overall quality.

Regression analyses produce pictures see **Figure 3**.

The steeper the “regression curve” the more a better anti-ageing effect will lead to the desired outcome: higher quality ratings.

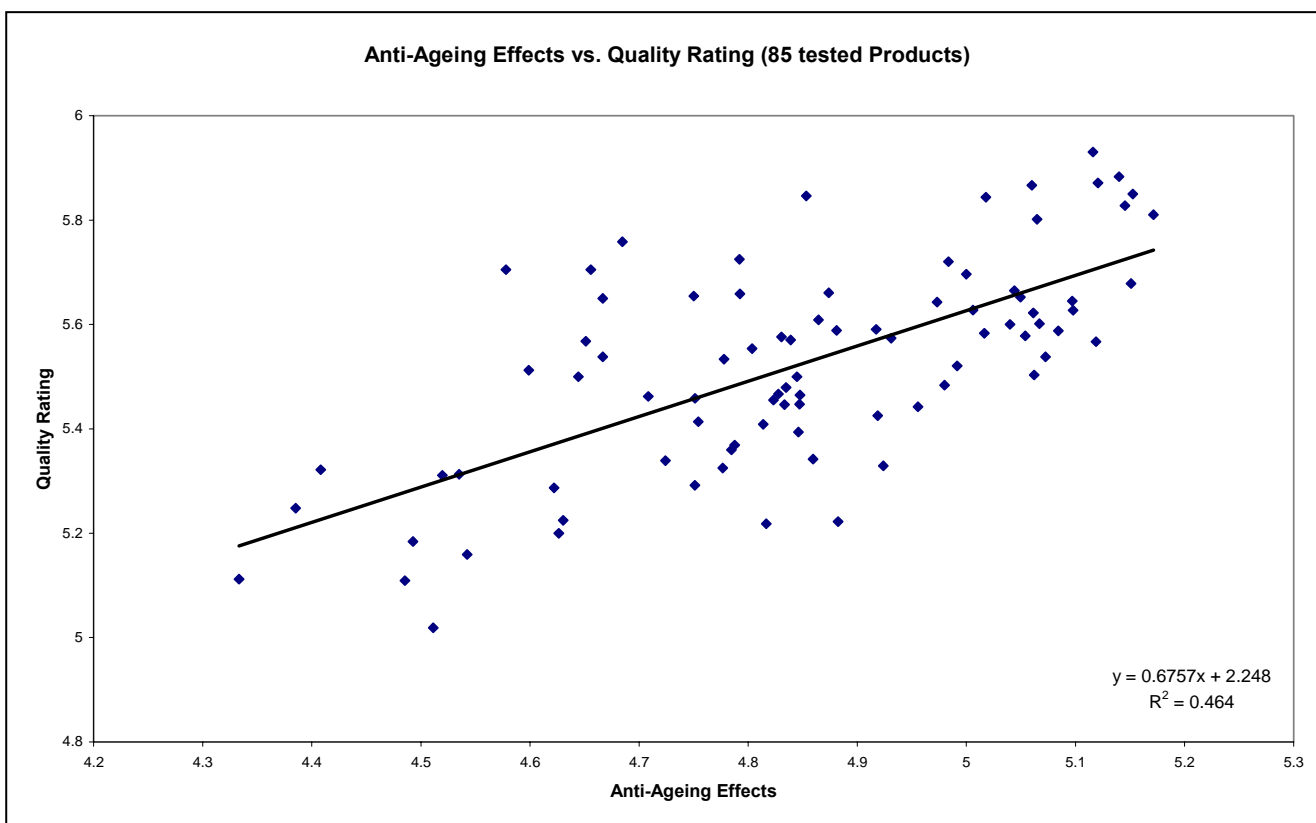


Figure 3

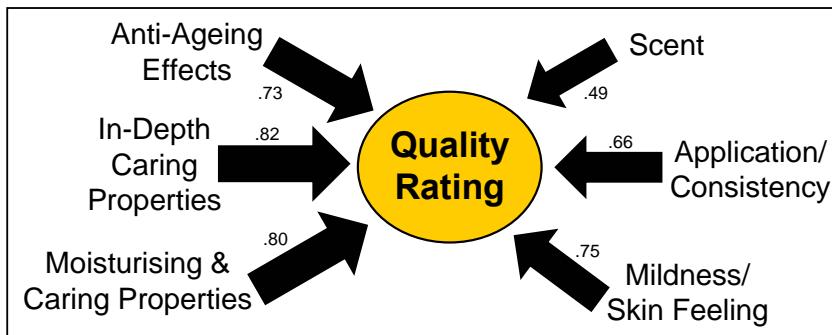


Figure 4

The influence of the above-mentioned 6 main factors in the area of anti-ageing products on quality rating see **Figure 4**. The main and most important factor is – “In-depth Caring Properties”!

This means, if a product developer is able to improve his product in particular on just this aspect (or group of aspects) then he has the greatest chance of obtaining a better overall acceptance rating.

The factor “Moisturising & Caring Properties” is almost as important. The product-specific “Anti-ageing Effects”, which are surely expected, come third. This may seem surprising, but in the end it is not:

- The actual consumers, and particular users of this type of products, know what they can expect. And if this expectation is largely fulfilled then they will accept it.
- However, if – aside from the must-have efficacy – the product also provides an excellent skin feeling or a superb moisturising effect – then this is a clearly beneficial situation.

**In-depth analysis**

We have seen that the factor “Anti-ageing” subsumes three specific items

- has a noticeable firming effect
- reduces wrinkles visibly
- prevents the formation of wrinkles.

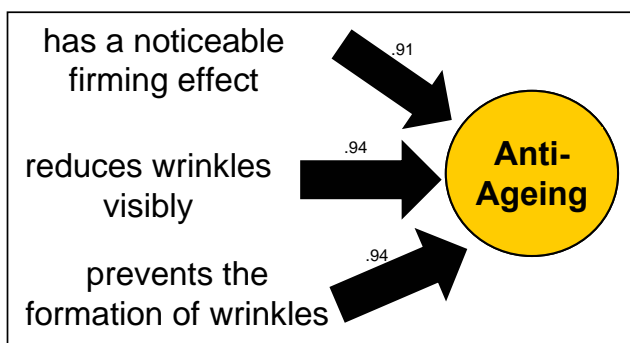


Figure 5

This is part of the outcome provided by the factor analyses mentioned earlier. These items correlate strongly with each other and thus form this specific factor – as the statistical analysis shows. The naming of the factor is a literary rather than a scientific exercise. This factor does not “exist” as such, but from the fact that these 3 items are correlated we deduce that there must be some specific, underlying product feature “behind” them. And because of this we have named this

underlying dimension “Anti-ageing Effects”.

Once we have this factor we can also define it as a “function” of the 3 items that describe it (see **Figure 5**).

Again we can calculate the influence that lower or higher ratings on these 3 separate items will have on the perception of an “Anti-ageing Effect”. In fact the proportional influence of these three items is comparably high – in the 0.9 range.

**Interaction of different product features**

Not only product characteristics that are directly related to a specific factor can influence the perception of the latter. Mildness and skin feeling can also have such an effect. Or the consistency of a product can influence it: if the product is more viscous, then people may have the feeling that the product is “rich”. And the richer a product is, the higher its expected efficacy. That is our experience.

Or the scent: a light and fresh scent may be attributed to a day cream; in contrast to that, one might assume that an anti-ageing product should be more “flowery” or “perfumistic”. Who can really know before having tested it?

These effects and the answers to these questions can be derived from further analyses using our database. As an example, here are some results demonstrating the different beneficial influences of the above-mentioned product features in evoking an impression of a given anti-ageing effect (**Figure 6**):

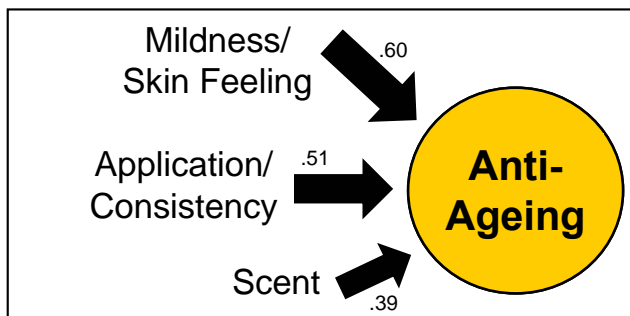


Figure 6

### Very important: a suitable scent

In our experience, a good and appropriate scent is a particularly important factor for underlining the typical product characteristics of any skin care product.

First of all, it should convey a “caring” impression. Numerous attempts have been made by professional perfumers to compose perfumes that exactly fulfil this demand.

In general we cannot give clear recommendations about the success of one direction or another. Very often this depends on the specific product (category) in question and differs from country to country. What women in Germany like and associate with their ideal of “care” is often different from what French or American women like.

But one thing can be generally said: if the scent can be described as being “caring” (whatever that is!)<sup>3</sup> and achieves this in an “unobtrusive” but nevertheless “perceivable” way – then there is a good chance that one has a well-accepted scent at hand that helps to emphasise the desired **caring** profile of the given anti-ageing product. Consequently we measure whether the product

- evokes a perception of “care”
- is unobtrusive
- and “fresh” (which describes: it is distinctive).

The unobtrusiveness of a scent on hand and its distinctiveness must be well-balanced. The more people who rate a scent’s intensity as being “just right”, the higher its overall liking score.

If the scent is too intense, this drops dramatically. But scents that are too faint might also fail, because if consumers do not smell anything then they feel “something” is missing and – in consequence – very often they also do not “feel” the efficacy of the product as such (Figure 7).

Due to the fact that the scent has quite a strong influence on the perception of the anti-ageing effect<sup>4</sup> one might be tempted to work along the lines of the motto: “the more the better”. But a scent that lasts long enough with a tendency of being somewhat too brief should not be changed.

The following graph (Figure 8) shows that the likeability of a specific scent drops much more quickly if it lasts rather too long than if it lasts too briefly.

<sup>3</sup>See also Alfred Politz’s experience that the cigarette which is accepted best should taste “full of tobacco”, Rena Bartus: Founding of Research, JAR, Juni1977.

<sup>4</sup>This influence is higher if the scent fails to be appropriate for this kind of product – in our database most of the products have had scents that were accepted quite well.

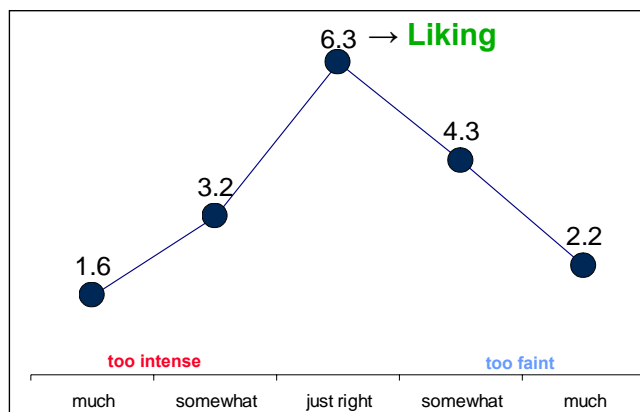


Figure 7

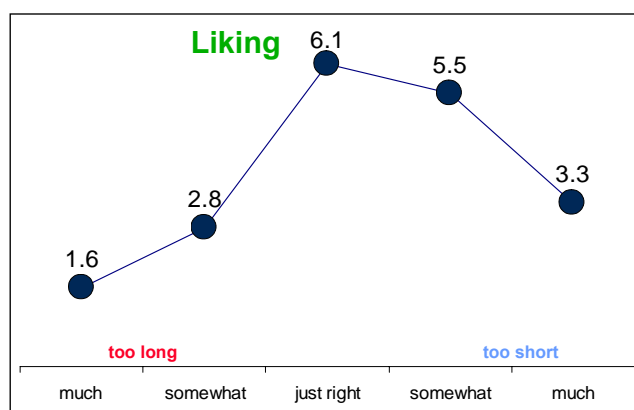


Figure 8

### Consistency & grease content

The other set of product features that can be changed to achieve better results in regard to anti-ageing effects is the viscosity and the grease content.

We know that a higher or lower viscosity can influence the spreadability and the likeability of the absorption. These can also be influenced by different levels of grease content (see left side of Figure 9).

A skin cream should be liquid rather than viscous – but in the context of anti-ageing, it is preferable that products should rather provide (somewhat) too much than too little grease. This is not very easy to accomplish, and there forefinding the right balance is an important task for a product test!

The “chain of relationships” can then be continued. Looking at the effect of well-accepted spreadability and absorption on the skin feeling provided, we find a correlation of  $r=.73$ . This means 50% of the perception of an appropriate skin

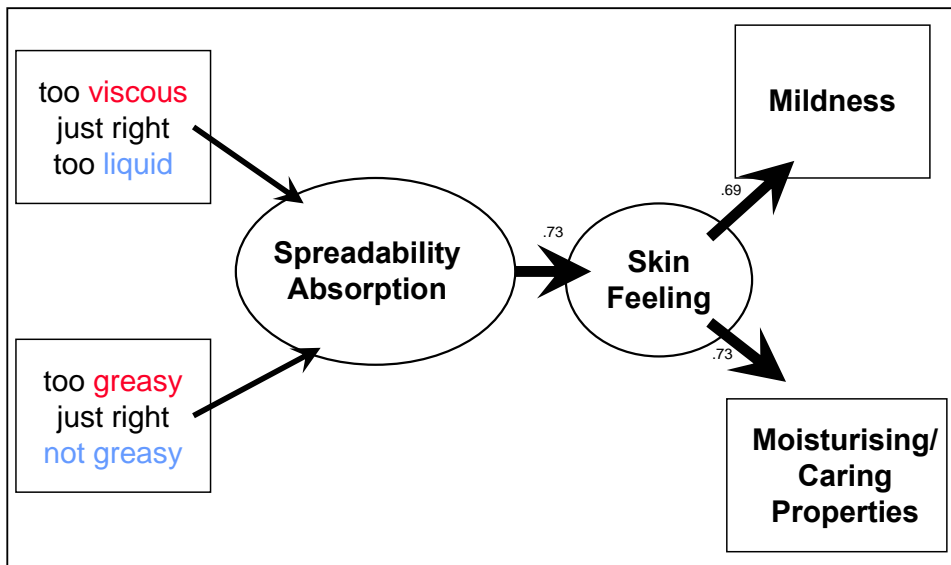


Figure 9

feeling is directly attributed to the product's spreadability and absorption.

The next step shows that good "skin feeling" directly affects the perception of mildness on the one hand – and in addition produces a feeling of being well-cared-for. If it really does provide this "acceptable" skin feeling; that is – if it does not, then the latter cannot be expected at all.

For example, if the skin feels "smooth and supple" after applying a skin cream, consumers believe that this is the consequence of its good performance – in terms of "care". Consumers cannot "feel" caring efficacy. But they can deduce from a specific skin feeling – based on a given grease content, viscosity, spreadability and absorption – that the product will most likely have this caring effect.

We have seen that this basic feeling of care is an important precondition for believing in more in-depth caring effects as well, i.e. in the anti-ageing effect such a product is meant to have. Our "chain of relationships" shows that we can provide answers as to the specific point in which a product was successful – or failed to provide the necessary performance which in the end will make people believe its benefits and make them buy it.

### Summary & outlook

Due to the fact that over time we have been able to collect test results for various anti-ageing products that have been tested in Germany and France, we can actually calculate all these relationships in great detail; and also separately for different products and countries.

Thus whenever a manufacturer of anti-ageing products, and particularly its R&D department, wants to know which are

the main "drivers", in order to develop a good – or a better – anti-ageing product, we can delve into our database and provide help.

Any additionally tested product helps us – and our clients – to broaden the basis.