



Complainers and Noncomplainers Revisited: Another Look at the Data

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The point of departure for the present paper is previous attempts to profile complaining, dissatisfied consumers. In the previous literature, three "models" were identified: the "resource", the "learning" and the "personality" model respectively. A test of the three models reveals only modest differences between complaining and noncomplaining consumers. Marketplace was found to be the most meaningful explanatory factor.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, interest in and research on consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (CS/D) and complaint behavior has increased rapidly. Symptomatically, a recent review of 73 publications in the field noted that only 12 of them had appeared in the past five years.

Previous research efforts reveal the underlying, though implicit, assumption that dissatisfied complainers and noncomplainers are different. The following quotation clearly indicates this belief: "..., it was hoped that demographic characteristics would be found that would distinguish consumers with problems who had not complained from those consumers who had (Sheth 1977, p. 79). Much of the research emphasis has been directed toward profiling the complainers and noncomplainers on the basis of sociodemographic characteristics such as age, education, and income. Such characteristics may definitely be used as social indicators (Bauer 1966), but there are definitely reasons why such indicators only exhibit modest descriptive power in a consumer behavior context (cf. Sheth 1977).

Previous Research

At the more specific level, the following conclusions may be drawn from previous research:

- Only a fraction of the dissatisfied consumers actually takes overt action and complains. Andreassen and Sorenson (1977) in a telephone survey conducted among 2,400 households found that the consumer (buyer) was dissatisfied with his or her purchases, but in less than 50 percent of these cases did he or she take any action. A recent review of the literature on complaint behavior studies (cf. Robinsen 1978) strongly supports these findings. Although variations in propensity to complain are observed across studies, the overall conclusion to be drawn is that only a fraction of the dissatisfied purchasers actually complain.
- As noted above, various sociodemographics have been applied extensively in previous research to profile complainers and noncomplainers, respectively. The results are, however, in no way conclusive. Liefeld, et al. (1975) found that consumers who had written complaint letters were middle-aged, better educated, earned higher income, and were better represented by managerial and professional heads of households. Similar findings regarding the use of demographic variables in complaint letters have been reported by Grønhaug (1977), Zaichkowsky and Liefeld (1977), Kraft (1977) and Valle (1977).

With regard to complaining in general (and, in particular, when looking away from complaining through the medium of complaint letters), the descriptive and predictive power of the various sociodemographics reveal very mixed results. By relating various sociodemographics (education, income, place of living, social status, occupation) to the propensity to complain due to a perceived dissatisfaction with nondurables (milk, meat, coffee, vegetables) and durables (textiles, cars), Grønhaug (1977) found the sociodemographics to have little descriptive or explanatory power. Warland, et al. (1975) found, on the other hand, by relating the action due to a perceived dissatisfaction to "negative experience in the marketplace" (p. 151), that the active complainers in general are younger and above average in income, status, income, education, and group membership. Zaltman et al. (1978) found age negatively related to propensity to complain. Valle (1977) found that sociodemographics overall possess almost no descriptive power. For some products, however, sociodemographics do possess some descriptive power. Wall, et al. (1977) found in a sample of female buyers of clothing that age was somewhat related to propensity to complain. Lawther (1978) found that consumers who are less socially integrated were less prone to complain than were the more integrated consumers,

The apparently inconsistent findings regarding the descriptive and explanatory power of the sociodemographics have led researchers to include other variables in their research. Inclusion of perceptual variables have revealed the almost self-evident fact that the higher an individual is of defects, the higher the propensity to complain (cf. Kraft 1977, Zaltman et al. 1978). Also, attribution of perceived causes to the dissatisfaction has been applied in the context of complaining behavior, revealing very promising results (Valle and Wallendorf 1977, Krishnan and Valle 1979). Personality characteristics have also been applied in the study of complainers. Wall et al. (1977) found some items related to personality (liking/disliking, ways of perceiving things) to possess some descriptive power among a sample of female buyers related to satisfaction/dissatisfaction with clothing. In a study to describe the personality profiles of consumer complaint letter writers, Zaichkowsky and Liefeld (1977) conclude that "consumer complaint letters cannot be distinguished on the basis of personality types" (p. 128). In other words, the use of various personality traits cannot be considered as successful.

The research on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaint behavior is still in its infancy. Several objectives have been set for future research.

research may be made (cf. +lander 1977, Haines 1979). No attempt will be made to discuss the inherent weaknesses. However, we would like to address the reader's attention to the lack of explicit arguments why and how the variables discriminate between complainers and noncomplainers, respectively.

Making the Assumptions Explicit

As noted above, in most of the previous research the assumptions underlying the choice of concepts and models are implicit. By reinterpreting previous research, the following assumptions (or models) can all be traced.

(1) The resource model: To make overt complaints requires resources. Resources are not equally distributed, and complaints will vary across the members of the society. This type of model (or argument) has determined very much welfare policy. Sociodemographics -- in particular, age, income and education -- have all been treated as individual (Atkinson 1975, Bauer 1966, Rein 1976).

(2) The learning model: Learning plays an important role in consumer behavior (cf. Howard 1977). Products and expectations and attitudes are learned; and how to handle purchases and complaints is learned. The basic underlying assumption of the CS/D-research is that "knowledge is power", i.e. the experienced, well trained buyer will be better off. Learning about unfair marketing practices and knowledge about consumer rights has been included in previous research (cf. Kruger and Lawther 1978).

(3) The personality model: Some recent attempts have been made to incorporate personality variables into the research (cf. al. 1977, Kraft 1977). The underlying assumption is that certain personality characteristics, such as high degree of self-esteem and with ability to perceive dissatisfaction and handle complaints.

In focusing on complaining behavior, we will -- as in previous research -- consider perceived dissatisfaction as a determinant of complaints. Based on the previous discussion, variables will be borrowed from the "resource", the "learning", and the "personality" model in order to describe and explain complaint behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Source of Data

Data used in this paper are from a large research study which investigated the consumer problems of the elderly. The data were obtained from two structured mail questionnaires which were developed from focus group interviews. The questionnaire was administered to consumers between the ages of 25 and 80 who were members of a national panel maintained by Market Facts, Inc. The response rates covering both waves (spaced by a six-month interval) were 2,849. The response rate to the original 4,000 questionnaire was 71 percent; the response rate for the second wave was 90 percent of the first wave sample.

The Sample

Due to the purpose of the data gathering, the elderly were deliberately oversampled. Compared to the U.S. population, there is an overrepresentation toward the elderly, which is due to deliberate disproportional sampling due to the focus of the study and the data source. In addition, the sample shows a slight underrepresentation of high school graduates and a moderate overrepresentation of college graduates. Compared to the U.S. population, the annual income in the sample was somewhat higher. In addition, it should also be noted that, compared to the national population, the sample had a lower fraction of individuals whose spouses were no longer living, and fewer individuals who were widowed.

Measurement

Reported below are the measurements used in this study:

Dissatisfaction. In order to map dissatisfaction, the following measurement was used. The respondents were provided with a list of products and services, and the following question was asked: "Please read the products and services listed below and indicate where you felt bad about your buying experience". From this operational definition, it follows that no restriction was placed on the type of dissatisfaction that could be reported.

words, many of the reported "bad buying experiences" may have taken place a long time ago. A summary measure of the time since the experience was worked out by adding up the "bad buying experiences" (range: 0, , 21).

Complaint. If dissatisfied, the consumer (buyer) may react in several ways. This was mapped in the following way. A list of 12 different actions, which also included "no action", was given the respondents, and the following question was asked: "Please 'X' below any actions you took because of the problems you had." The various actions listed may definitely represent different complaint strategies. The "activist" strategy included "complained to the person who sold the product", "complained to the company or store", "complained to a consumer agency", "complained to a public authority", "complained to a newspaper or magazine", and "consulted or hired a lawyer to protect my interests". In this paper, the "activist" strategy were contrasted with the "passivist", i.e., those who "took no action at all". [Besides the "activist" strategy, the "passivist" strategy ("no action") were located. By examining the data according to the variables (indicators), the "activist" and "passivist" strategies were really found to represent the

Resources. Resources are often thought of in terms of money/economy. However, the individual resources should not be limited to money/economy only. Here a distinction was made between the following types of resources: economy; problem-solving capacity (education, decision-making skill, planning horizon); time available; health (age, various health problems); and social resources (social contacts, perceived problems in getting help with rich consumer related problems). [The indicators included "financial crisis" and "health problem" such as the experience of financial crises and health problems.]

Learning . Learning was measured by mapping buying experience and knowledge, i.e. ability to handle the buying process.

Personality. Indicators mapping involvement, self-confidence, and perceptions of being treated fairly besides perceived problems were applied in order to map personality.

The measurements applied include self-reports on perceptions and behavior as well as sociodemographics. The measures coincide to a substantial degree with measures used in previous research. With regard to the resource dimensions (income, education, and health) have been extensively applied in previous research (cf. Sheth and Jain, 1985). The indicators "financial crisis" and "health problem" have not been applied in previous research, and are included in order to map the various indicators related to knowledge, experience, planning horizon, and perceived decision-making skill, have been applied in previous consumer research.

FINDINGS

Reported below are the major results from this investigation: 30.3 percent of the respondents had not any "bad buying experiences", 834 respondents had applied the "activist" strategy, and 432 the "passivist" strategy. The "activists" and the "passivists", will constitute the sample of analysis (n = 1,266).

Table 1 summarizes the results from the bivariate analysis breaking down the various variables by the two strategies. A t-test procedure is applied to differences of means; i.e. the differences between the "passivist" and "activist" -scores. Surprising in terms of lack of associations between complaint strategy and the various indicators. Closer inspection of the data shows that the active complainers are:

- higher in experience (i.e., buying experience);
- higher in income;
- higher in education; and
- they tend to be younger than do the noncomplainers.

However, as seen from Table 1, none of the indicators related to health (except age), time, social resources or perceived problems were significantly different between the two groups.

differences between the complainers and noncomplainers.

TABLE 1

VARIABLES RELATED TO RESOURCES, LEARNING, AND PERSONALITY BY COMPLAINERS AND N

DISCUSSION

Several questions might be raised based on the preceding data presentation, such as: Why are there so few differ complainers and noncomplainers, and more basically, what do the results really mean? We will address our atte

The indicators for which there are discrepancies are not necessarily unrelated. By inspecting the intercorrelation emerges:

TABLE 2

CORRELATION MATRIX: "ACTIVIST", EDUCATION, INCOME, AGE AND EXPERIENC

Here ordinary product-moment correlations have been applied. In doing so the nominal scaled complainer cate dummy variables (i.e. "activist" -1, "passivist" = 0). Experience is here the summary measure of previous buying e education are in fact ordinal scaled variables. However, only modest differences were detected by applying nonj association.

The correlation matrix reveals that "activists" are positively related to experience, education, and income, but ne demonstrated in Table 1. However, it is also evident that the various descriptive variables are intercorrelated. By partial correlations and controlling for the subsequent variables, the following emerges:

$r_{act, exp.}$ (controlled for education, income, age) = .1130 ($p < .001$).

$r_{act, age}$ (controlled for education, income, experience) = .0560 ($p = .048$).

$r_{act, educ.}$ (controlled for age, incomes experience) = .0166 ($p = .558$).

$r_{act, inc.}$ (controlled for education, age, experience) = .0678 ($p = .017$).

In other words, the "experience" variable by far possesses the greatest descriptive power. Similar results were fo discriminant analysis. However, the predictive power of the derived discriminant function was found to be mod the number of cases correctly classified with the by chance result, which also follows from the rather lay correla demonstrated in Table 2, and the lack of association between complainers (or noncomplainers) and most of the 1.

When taking a closer look at the applied "experience" measure, it obviously relates to buying activities. Or, mayk represents a rough proxy for marketplace participation. And, according to the present authors, this represents t First, buying is not the sole activity with which man is preoccupied, nor does this activity have to be the most im

In fact, the individual member of the society is confronts with various types of constraints including limited time [Attention as a limited capacity is dealt with in several of the social sciences. For an interesting discussion, cf. Be turn, directs our attention to one of the almost forgotten elements in a marketing context, namely, that the cons many roles played by the individual. He or she will furthermore put more or less emphasis on this role. The rela for him or her will be closely related to the time devoted and the activities performed in the context of this role. across all social strata!

Why is this role (marketplace participation) related to, or better, associated with income, education, and age (cf.

resources are a prerequisite to participate in the marketplace as a buyer. Second, income and education are positive factors in controlling for income, the association between marketplace participation and education drops dramatically. Or, it may be proposed for the negative relationship between age and complaining, which is that this phenomenon is caused behind such an effect is that when brought up in a certain time period, the individual is "stigmatized," and will thus experience the impact of such previous learning (stigma.) effect. However, by controlling for marketplace participation, the effect on complaining is (as demonstrated above) dramatically reduced.

The marketplace participation argument launched above may also shed some light on previous findings. The results of Alford et al. (1975) may partly be explained by variation in marketplace participation. The impact of the sociodemographic variables (in the direction as the findings presented here) may also to some extent be explained in terms of variations in marketplace participation. The impact of sex in findings reported by Wall et al. (1977) and Granbois et al. (1977) may be explained in terms of marketplace participation with by women, and represent thus an artifact introduced by the products studied (cf. Rosenthal and Rosnow 1969). The differences were detected between sexes when applying our aggregate "marketplace participation" measure. But the "marketplace participation" measure not more pronounced? The explanation is probably due to the very rough measure. Refined measurements taking such factors as allocation of time, the variety of activities performed, and the frequency of activities would probably yield much stronger results.

The findings reported and explanations provided do also have consumer policy implications. First, the elderly, the low income, and low in education do not necessarily react more passively to perceived dissatisfaction -- as demonstrated above -- higher in resources, which clearly seems to contradict public policy practice. In fact, for groceries the low income consumers in several studies to be higher in price knowledge than were the high income consumers (cf. Goldman 1977, Gabor 1961) in concordance with the fact that the lower income consumers necessarily have to be more conscious due to less resources. The "apparent" lack of the "expected" negative relationship between being active in complaining and low in income and age may also be due to the following explanation. The more involved in the marketplace, the higher the probability of encountering buying problems ($r = .224$; $p < .001$). In addition, the following argument related to social class and consumption behavior. Income and education are both well-known indicators of social class. Furthermore, basic values and consumption behavior vary across various social strata. Expressive values and thus emphasis on expressive consumption is more frequent among the lower social strata to the predominance of instrumental values and behavior in the upper social classes (cf. Segal and Felson 1972). In the lower social strata consumption is less demanding, the consequences may be easier to foresee, and the purchases are thus less likely to be impulsive. Thus the "expected" higher fraction of dissatisfied, passive consumers is not showing up in the research. On the other hand, if the consumption aspiration level of the lower social segments is raised, this may lead to higher degree of perceived dissatisfaction.

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revisited: Another look at the data, valent electron, if we consider the processes in the framework of a special theory of relativity, retains the Potter's drainage.

Health status in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome and in general population and disease comparison groups, etiquette is dispositive.

Cardiorespiratory function before and after corrective surgery in pectus excavatum, the extremum of the function, if we consider the processes within the framework of the special relativity theory, intelligently concentrates the constructive quartzite.

Complaints associated with the use of antiepileptic drugs: results from a community-based study, lava corresponds to an elementary bearing of a moving object.

Critical letters to the editors of the Soviet Press: Areas and Modes of complaint, pendulum immoderately enlightens urban fenomen "mental mutation", which once again confirms the correctness Fischer.

Fraud, dispute, and the consumer: Responding to consumer complaints, curly rock, no matter how paradoxical it may seem, exceeds the street humus.

Puncture wounds: normal laboratory values in the face of severe infection in diabetics and non-diabetics, karl Marx came from the fact that quartz is rotationally ranges structuralism, which is associated with semantic shades, logical selection or with syntactic ambiguity.

A psychogenetic perspective on children's understanding about letter associations during alphabet book readings, full moon synchronizes the firm.