

COMPLAINT INTENTIONS AND BEHAVIOR FOR PRODUCTS VERSUS SERVICES

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The purpose of this article is to compare complaint intentions and behavior for products and services. The relative frequency of complaints for categories of products and services provides insight into the diversity of customer problems. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis validate the measurement approach and indicate items that need improvement. Further, in comparing complaint behaviors, findings indicate that service complaints are more frequent and more severe than those for products.

INTRODUCTION

The nature and extent of consumer complaint behavior in an industry appears to affect social and consumer welfare (Andreasen 1984, 1985). As such, consumer complaints may have implications for societal issues as well as strategic decisions for individual firms within an industry. For example, knowledge of which product or service categories cause dissatisfaction may provide strategic opportunities for creative solutions to problems within an industry. Understanding why consumers are dissatisfied with a particular purchase forms a crucial basis for improvements in an individual firm's market offering. To implement successful strategies, marketing managers must assess the reactions of consumers after the sale as consumer satisfaction is an important element in repeat purchase behavior (Anderson 1982). While the source of consumer dissatisfaction represents critical information that may prevent errors (Anderson 1973), how consumers react when they are dissatisfied is also of central importance (Richins 1987).

Consumer dissatisfaction and resulting behaviors have received attention in the literature (Bearden and Teel 1983; Day 1984; Resnik and Harmon 1983; Richins 1983, 1987). Some researchers have addressed the issue from a practical viewpoint by offering guidance for designing programs to alleviate consumer complaints (Lewis 1982; Oliver 1981; Ross and Oliver 1984; Swan and Trawick 1981). Others have taken a

more theoretical approach in an attempt to explain and predict repurchase intentions and brand loyalty (Bearden and Teel 1983; Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Day 1984; Engel and Blackwell 1982; LaBarbera and Mazursky 1983; Oliver 1980; Richins 1983; Singh 1988; Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins 1983).

Singh (1988) reported his development and testing of a model of three complaint actions: voicing feelings toward the firm; engaging in private word-of-mouth communications with others; and communicating with third parties about the perceived transgression. These three constructs represented a continuum which ranged from fairly passive actions, voicing, to the more active task of complaining to such third parties as consumer agencies. The development of this measurement approach for four specific stimuli provides an effective method for assessing complaint behavior.

However, Richins (1987) suggested that the characteristics of the product problem were the major correlates for complaint behavior. In comparison, the inherent intangibility of many services means that consumers learn through experience, making it especially difficult to alter a negative opinion (Biehal 1983; Shostack 1977; Zeithaml 1981). Thus, if products and services represent two distinct purchasing situations their characteristics may result in variances in complaint behavior and strategic implications as well.

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to compare reported complaint behaviors for products as opposed to services. The research questions include: (1) What categories of products and services result in the most frequent complaint behavior? (2) Can the measurement model for complaint behaviors be confirmed, or

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replicated for more general classes of products and services? and (3) Are the types of complaining actions different between products and services?

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Singh (1988) analyzed classifications of consumer complaint intentions with confirmatory factor analysis. The questions were designed to assess three latent variables: VOICE, PRIVATE and THIRD PARTY. According to Singh, VOICE reflected dissatisfied feelings toward the seller. The PRIVATE construct was designed to measure communications with significant others. The final latent variable, THIRD PARTY referred to more public actions. Taken together, the three constructs represented a range of actions from less to more severe.

The product stimuli used in the Singh (1988) study were: automobile repairs, grocery items, medical services, and banking services. His results supported the three unobservable constructs based on the inventory of ten questions. The significance of this work was in the foundation it supplied for assessing complaint behavior and intentions with a brief inventory of items. Given that the general model was supported, the expectation for this research is that the model would apply equally as well for a more general context.

H₁: The model for complaint behavior will adequately explain the fit of the observed responses for products as well as for services.

In addition to testing the proposed model, descriptions of differences in complaint behavior toward products and services are also of interest to marketing managers. People who are dissatisfied with a business may express their feelings toward the institution, for example, by voicing complaints (Hustad and Pessemier 1973). Zeithaml (1981) hypothesized that consumers may complain less frequently about services than products given the interpersonal risk involved with service complaints. This expectation may be stated as a hypothesis as follows:

H₂: A greater proportion of people will complain about products as opposed to services.

Swartz and Brown (1989) also cited research which suggested that consumers are more likely to complain about products as opposed to services. They implied that while the complaints about services may be fewer in number, they would be more vehemently expressed

in comparison to product complaints, which is stated in hypothesis form as:

H₃: Complaints about services will be more severe in comparison to product complaints.

The first hypothesis relates to the measurement of the three constructs by the ten questions provided in the Singh (1988) study. The next two hypotheses concern application-oriented issues that reflect expected differences in the way that consumers react to dissatisfaction with products as opposed to services. Each of these issues has implications for research as well as for practical applications of the proposed taxonomy of complaint intentions and behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design

Data for the study were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire mailed to respondents in several cities within a Southern state. The sampling frame for the study consisted of all residential subscribers to a regional electrical utility. The questionnaires included a cover letter and were addressed to a specific member of the household. In addition, self-addressed stamped envelopes were included to ease the return of completed forms.

Of the 2,000 questionnaires which were mailed to a random sample of subjects, 225 were returned. With three questionnaires insufficiently complete to be included, the response rate was 11.1% for this general population. While a second mailing was cost prohibitive, late responders were not different from early responders for demographic variables (Early responders were those questionnaires received within one month; Late responders were those received thereafter). Consequently, there is little reason to expect that non-response bias would change the composition of product/service complainers for this study. However, the reader is cautioned that self-selection bias does exist in that reports of problems and subsequent complaint behavior may be higher for respondents who recently experienced difficulties and for those who tend to respond to questionnaires.

The Questionnaire

As far as possible, the questionnaire was designed to reflect the measurement approach used to develop the original model, with one exception. Rather than restrict the product stimuli to automobiles, groceries, medical

or banking services, respondents were asked to write-in any problem experienced within the past six months. If a product problem had been experienced, respondents answered 10 questions related to their complaint behavior and 10 questions related to their expected or intended behavior if the problem were experienced again in the future. The same questions were asked for service problems. The complaint behavior questions were dichotomous, coded yes or no, reflecting whether or not the respondent had complained in specific ways. For the intention questions, 6-point Likert scales were used where respondents indicated their agreement/disagreement with the complaint intentions statement. Thus, respondents indicated their complaint behavior for the last time a problem was experienced and then, for those same questions, rated the extent they felt they would engage in those same behaviors if another problem were experienced. Several demographic questions then concluded the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Of the two hundred twenty-two usable questionnaires which were completed, 40.5% reported no problems, 14.9% experienced problems with products, 17.6% experienced problems with services, and 27.0% reported problems with both products and services. The categories of products and services are shown in Table 1, while demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 2. The largest proportion of product complaints were for personal items such as

clothing or shoes, large appliances, and automobiles or parts. Customers also complained frequently about electronic items which included games as well as answering machines and radios. The largest proportion of service complaints reflected problems with automobile repairs, appliance repairs and physician visits. Carpet/house cleaning services and banks also resulted in a large number of dissatisfied consumers.

For product complainers, 56% were female, 70% married, 29% had some college education, 70% aged 35 or over, 70% home owners and 25% with incomes in excess of \$45,000. Characteristics of the service complainers were similar with 59% female, 68% married, 31% with some college education, 72% aged 35 or over, 65% home owners, and 27% with incomes of \$45,000 or more. Census estimates for the population in the sampling area are provided in Table 2 as well and indicate a fairly close match between the sample and the area. The major exception was education, where respondents in the sample held higher educational levels than the general population.

The major findings of the study are presented to coincide with the research questions of interest: First, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis are presented and compared to prior research to assess replication of the model for these more general stimuli. Once the adequacy of the model is assessed, the practical question of the severity of complaints are described.

TABLE 1
COMPLAINT CATEGORIES FOR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Products		Services	
Personal items (clothing, shoes)	18.3%	Automobile repair	20.2%
Large appliances	12.9%	Appliance repair	13.1%
Automobiles or parts	10.8%	Physician visit	11.1%
Electronic items	9.7%	Carpet/house cleaning	7.1%
Small appliances	8.6%	Banking service	6.1%
Yard/garden items	8.6%	Restaurant	5.1%
Grocery items	7.5%	Hair styling	5.1%
Mechanical items/tools	3.2%	Hotel	4.0%
Miscellaneous (gasoline, bicycle...)	20.4%	Dentist	3.0%
		Car wash/wax	3.0%
		Insurance	3.0%
		Airline	2.0%
		Miscellaneous (rentals, landscaping)	17.2%
	100.0%		100.0%

TABLE 2
SAMPLE COMPOSITION

	Product Complaints		Service Complaints		U.S. Stat
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Abstract
Gender					
Male	41	44.1%	41	41.4%	48.7%
Female	<u>52</u>	<u>55.9%</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>58.6%</u>	51.3%
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	
Marital Status					
Single	28	30.1%	32	32.3%	37.1%
Married	<u>65</u>	<u>69.9%</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>67.7%</u>	62.9%
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	
Education					
Grade School	3	3.2%	1	1.0%	63.0%
Some High School	2	2.2%	4	4.1%	
Completed High School	21	22.6%	22	22.2%	
Some College	27	29.0%	31	31.3%	17.1%
Completed College	19	20.4%	14	14.1%	
Some Graduate Work	8	8.6%	11	11.1%	
Graduate Degree	<u>13</u>	<u>14.0%</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>16.2%</u>	19.9%
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	
Age					
Under 25	10	10.8%	12	12.1%	69.5%
25-34	17	18.2%	16	16.2%	
35-49	33	35.5%	33	33.3%	
50 and over	<u>33</u>	<u>35.5%</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>38.4%</u>	30.5%
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	
Own or Rent					
Own	65	69.9%	64	64.7%	64.0%
Rent	26	28.0%	32	32.3%	34.3%
Missing	<u>2</u>	<u>2.1%</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3.0%</u>	
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	
Income					
Less than \$10,000	13	14.0%	9	9.1%	41.8%
\$10,000-\$14,999	5	5.4%	10	10.1%	
\$15,000-\$19,999	3	3.2%	5	5.1%	
\$20,000-\$24,999	13	14.0%	10	10.1%	18.1%
\$25,000-\$29,999	12	12.9%	12	12.1%	
\$30,000-\$34,999	5	5.4%	4	4.0%	
\$35,000-\$39,999	8	8.6%	10	10.1%	40.1%
\$40,000-\$44,999	6	6.4%	8	8.1%	
\$45,000 and over	23	24.7%	27	27.3%	
No answer	<u>5</u>	<u>5.4%</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4.0%</u>	
	93	100.0%	99	100.0%	

Evaluation of the Model

The first step in the analysis was conducted to be consistent with Singh's (1988) work. Thus, the variables are modeled as a three-dimensional, congeneric structure. The model represents a confirmatory factor structure for the three exogenous variables: VOICE, PRIVATE and THIRD PARTY complaints.

The reliability of the measures, as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha is shown in Table 3 for the product and service questions. As shown, the reliabilities for the VOICE (.669, .801) and PRIVATE (.699, .732) constructs are higher for service complaint intentions than for the product intentions. While reliability for the THIRD PARTY (.861, .819) construct measures are similar for products and services, they are slightly

higher for the product questions. In general, these figures exhibit acceptable levels of reliability for the measures (Nunnally 1978).

Parameter Estimates

To replicate the confirmatory analysis on these measure, maximum likelihood estimates were obtained using the LISREL VI software package (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1983). As shown in Table 4, the overall results supported the model and measurement proposed by Singh (1988). For example, almost all of the coefficients between the three exogenous variables and their measures for product complaint intentions are rather high with T-values much larger than two. The only exception is the coefficient relating decisions not to use the service again to the PRIVATE construct. The

TABLE 3
QUESTIONS TO ASSESS COMPLAINT INTENTIONS

How likely is it that you would:	Cronbach's Alphas	
	Product	Service
VOICE		
1. Forget about the incident and do nothing?		
2. Complain to the store manager on your next trip?		
3. Go back or call the (store where you bought the product/service provider) and ask them to take care of your problem?	.669	.801
PRIVATE		
4. Decide not to use (the product/the service) again?		
5. Speak to your friends and relatives about your bad experience?		
6. Convince your friends and relatives not to use (the product/the service)	.699	.732
THIRD PARTY		
7. Complain to a consumer agency and ask them to make the (product manufacturer/service provider) take care of your problem?		
8. Write a letter to the local newspaper about your bad experience?		
9. Report to the consumer agency so that they can warn other consumers?		
10. Take some legal action against the (manufacturer/service provider)?	.861	.819

TABLE 4
ESTIMATED MAXIMUM LIKELIHOOD PARAMETERS OF THE MODEL

Model Estimates (T-Values)	PRODUCTS		SERVICES	
λ_1	.553	(3.59)	.740	(5.49)
λ_2	.791	(4.82)	-.747	(-5.75)
λ_3	.645	(4.22)	-.935	(-7.49)
λ_4	.320	(2.45)	.367	(2.74)
λ_5	.813	(6.39)	.493	(3.26)
λ_6	.789	(6.34)	1.287	(5.15)
λ_7	.901	(8.37)	.715	(6.96)
λ_8	.716	(5.82)	.458	(4.46)
λ_9	.963	(9.27)	.936	(9.21)
λ_{10}	.658	(5.52)	.702	(6.25)
φ_{2-1}	.416	(2.64)	.149	(1.48)
φ_{3-1}	.252	(1.64)	-.283	(-2.08)
φ_{3-2}	.742	(8.48)	.135	(1.41)
Model Fit				
chi-square	44.76		43.92	
p	(.066)		(.078)	
d.f.	32		32	
GFI	.871		.883	
AGFI	.778		.799	
RMSR	.077		.102	
Null Model				
chi-square	271.23		280.79	
d.f.	45		45	
Nonnormed Fit Index				
Product-Null	p1-0		-.92	
Service-Null	p2-0		-.93	
Product-Service	p1-2		.005	

loading of .32 for this item has a corresponding T-value of 2.45, which is not as high as it should be for final scale development work.

The size of the coefficients, reflecting loadings on the three exogenous variables (factors), does seem to reinforce the viability of the measurement approach for complaint behaviors. The next step is to assess the relationships between the constructs of the model. The estimated relationship, ϕ (φ), between the VOICE and THIRD PARTY constructs for *products*, .252, has a corresponding T-Value of 1.64. In Singh's (1988) study, the correlation between VOICE and THIRD PARTY for the grocery (e.g. product) category was .21 with a

T-Value of 1.97, showing a similar effect. In contrast, the estimated relationships (and T-values) in the Singh study for these two constructs for the auto repair, medical and banking *services* were .44 (2.87), .45 (3.60) and .37 (2.82), respectively. In the current study for the service complaint questions, the estimated correlation is -.283 ($T = -2.08$).

These findings suggest that the underlying relationship between VOICE and THIRD PARTY may vary based on the product/service nature of the problem. The constructs do not appear to be as closely related for products as for services, and actually appear to exhibit an inverse relationship for service intentions. Thus, the

expectation that service problems may result in more severe actions (VOICE as well as THIRD PARTY) may be well-founded or may mask the idea that if people VOICE their service dissatisfactions they may be less likely to go to a THIRD PARTY to seek redress.

The relationship between VOICE and PRIVATE complaint intentions also shows variability between the two stimuli. For *product* complaints, VOICE and PRIVATE latent variables resulted in a ϕ of .416 ($T = 2.64$) while the related figure for *service* complaints is lower, .149 and not significant ($T = 1.48$). Finally, the relationship between PRIVATE and THIRD PARTY complaint intentions is estimated for *products* to be strong, .742, while it is not different from zero ($T = 1.41$) for *service* complaint intentions. In a similar manner, the results reported by Singh (1988) also showed a stronger correlation for PRIVATE and THIRD PARTY constructs for grocery than for the three service categories, auto repair, medical or banking.

While the individual estimates provide interesting points to consider, the major goal of the first hypothesis is to assess the overall fit of the proposed model for services in comparison to products as a whole.

Fit of the Models

Several measures were used to assess the degree of fit of the proposed model to the observed measures in the product and service groups. These results are also shown in Table 4. For product complaints, a chi-square value of 44.76 ($p = .066$) suggested that the model should not be rejected. The chi-square for the service complaint model was similar with a value of 43.92 ($p = .078$). The goodness of fit indices and root mean square residuals also reflected an adequate fit of the model to the observed results. Thus, on the basis of these results, the first hypothesis was supported. Since the null hypothesis would not be rejected, both models, for products and for services, fit the data fairly well. However, due to the small sample size, the chi-square results should be viewed with suspicion.

Nonnormed Fit Index

Since chi-square has been reported to be sensitive to variations in sample size (Boomsma 1985), a supplementary measure provides an additional test for the explanation provided by the model (Bollen 1986). According to this approach, each of the substantive models, for product and service data, is compared to a null model which posits that no latent constructs are needed to explain the variation in the data. The null

model should represent a "worst case" situation so that the improvement in explanation from the substantive constraints can be assessed.

With this method, improvement in explanation is gauged by a nonnormed fit index, $\rho(p)$ (Bentler and Bonnett 1980; Tucker and Lewis 1973). As shown in Table 3, for the product and service models, ρ was computed to be .92 and .93, respectively. These figures indicated that a substantial improvement in explanation was provided by the three construct model when compared to a model with no latent variables, the null. In addition, the ρ computed when the results of the product model are compared to those of the service model, .005, suggested these models were fairly similar with little variation in overall explanation provided. Again, these results support the first hypothesis of the adequacy of the fit between the model and the observed measures in this sample for both the service data as well as the product complaints.

Modification indices also provide additional insight. These values are shown in Table 5 and indicate that most of the measures exhibit little covariation with constructs that are supposed to be distinct.

For product complaint data, no modification index is larger than five, suggesting that discriminant validity is also evident. Specifically, the variables do not appear to correlate to a large extent with constructs that are, by definition, assessed by other measures. However, for service complaint data, two measures, defined to assess the PRIVATE construct may also relate to aspects of the VOICE latent variable. For this sample of subjects, speaking to friends and relatives and convincing them not to use the service again seems to show a relationship with measures for voicing complaints to the store. Thus, while the overall model fits both situations fairly well, services still exhibit a tendency to be distinct from product problem situations.

Frequency and Severity of Complaint Behavior

Given that the measurement approach was confirmed, the next step of the analysis involved asking whether product or service complaint intentions were different in frequency and severity. This step provides an initial linkage between the proposed taxonomy and the practical usage of the concept for marketing managers.

Frequency of Complaints

The second hypothesis of this research projected that complaints about products would be more frequent

TABLE 5
MODIFICATION INDICES FOR THE MODEL PARAMETERS

	PRODUCTS			SERVICES		
	Σ_1 VOICE	Σ_2 PRIVATE	Σ_3 THIRD	Σ_1 VOICE	Σ_2 PRIVATE	Σ_3 THIRD
λ_1	0	.5	.35	0	0	.28
λ_2	0	.44	.24	0	2.31	.23
λ_3	0	.003	.001	0	1.61	
λ_4	.81	0	.56	0	.19	
λ_5	4.43	0	.19	7.59	0	2.14
λ_6	3.04	0	.88	5.44	0	.83
λ_7	.03	.06	0	.01	2.48	0
λ_8	0	1.52	0	1.40	3.28	0
λ_9	.73	.18	0	1.03	2.24	0
λ_{10}	4.09	.03	0	.79	.58	0

than complaints about services. In this study, 14.9% of the total sample had problems with products, while 17.6% experienced dissatisfaction with services. An additional 27% of the sample reported problems with both products and services. Thus, the proportion of people who reported having problems with services was slightly higher. Based on a t-test of the number of complaint actions taken in each group, the frequency of service complaint actions was higher ($t=-2.58$, $p=.011$) than that for products. Thus, the second hypothesis is not supported for this sample. Rather, the frequency of complaint actions was higher in the service category.

Severity of Complaints

The third hypothesis proposed that service complaints would be more severe. To assess this question, a summed score was computed for behavioral actions related to products and for behavioral actions related to services. The T-Value with 221 degrees of freedom was -2.58 ($p=.011$). This suggested that complaints from service patrons in this sample were more severe than the incidence of product complaints in general. The information in Table 6 reinforces the impression that service complaints were more severe. As shown, for two of the three constructs, VOICE and THIRD PARTY, differences were significant with complaints about services exhibiting the higher mean.

For this sample of subjects, then, it appeared that dissatisfied consumers were likely to take some complaint-oriented action. Further, the proportion of con-

sumers who reported they complained about products was about the same as the proportion who complained about service problems, for the last time they experienced difficulty. However, the severity of the type of action taken for service problems seemed to be greater than the type of actions considered for product dissatisfactions. Specifically, it seemed to be more likely in this sample that service complaints would be communicated to third party participants.

LIMITATIONS

Prior to discussing the implications of these findings, some limitations should be considered. Although Singh (1988) suggested that a lower response rate was expected for dissatisfaction research, specific steps designed to increase responses may be essential in this line of study. The small sample size suggests these results should be viewed as suggestive rather than definitive. While the present study by itself may be limited, as a replication and extension of the approach it lends support to the viability of this work. While non-response did not appear to be a problem, the proportion who returned the questionnaire represents a possible self-selection bias in that people with complaints may not have returned the forms. Further, those who returned the questionnaire may be those with the most recent complaints, underestimating the proportion of people in general who experienced dissatisfactions with products or services. Thus, answering the questions of whether product or service complaints are more frequent may be affected by non-respondents.

TABLE 6
DIFFERENCES IN PRODUCT AND SERVICE COMPLAINT BEHAVIORS

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Value	Probability
Product VOICE	1.18	.65	-3.23	.002
Service VOICE	1.53	.70		
Product PRIVATE	1.35	1.13	-.67	.507
Service PRIVATE	1.45	1.06		
Product THIRD PARTY	.08	.38	-2.21	.031
Service THIRD PARTY	.22	.52		

While a sampling frame based on electrical power billings may overcome limitations of a list of households with phones, some members of the population may still not have had a chance of being included. Specifically, those without power or those who had power connected within a short period of time before the research study would not be included.

IMPLICATIONS

Reliability of the measures, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha were higher for the VOICE and PRIVATE constructs were higher for service intentions than for product complaint intentions. Reliability for the THIRD PARTY construct measures were similar for both products and services, but slightly higher for the product questions. While these findings represent an improvement over Singh's (1988) study, future researchers may also want to revise question wordings or add additional items in an attempt to improve the measure for practical applications. For example, one of the VOICE questions suggests the person will take no action. While the analysis groups this question in the VOICE construct, logically the question does not reflect voicing an opinion.

In general, the results supported the fit of the proposed models to the data in the sample. Further, a nonnormed fit index showed that a substantial improvement in explanation was provided by the three construct model over the null case of no latent variables. This index between the product and service situations suggested little variation in overall explanation. Consequently, the first hypothesis is supported. The model appears to work equally well for services as for products. However, the invariant structure of the constructs has not been reinforced by this study. The differences in coef-

ficients between the product and service samples suggest that greater attention is needed for psychometric development of the measures. While most of the coefficients between the exogenous variables and their measures for product complaint items were rather high, the coefficient relating decisions not to use the service again to the PRIVATE construct was not sufficient. These results do suggest that marketing managers may assess complaints with the parsimonious scale originally developed by Singh (1988).

The second hypothesis was not supported for this sample of subjects. The frequency of reported problems with products and services showed very little difference--the incidence was only slightly greater for services. However, the frequency of complaint actions was higher for services than for products. Customers in this sample expressed their problems with services to a greater extent than for product difficulties. The third hypothesis was supported in this sample. Complaints from dissatisfied service patrons appeared to be more severe than the incidence of product complaints in general. For two of the three constructs, VOICE and THIRD PARTY, differences were significant. Based on the mean scores for these groups, complaints about services were more severe than those in the product complaint sample.

Although Zeithaml (1981) proposed that interpersonal risk would cause customers to complain about products more frequently than services, customers in this sample did not conform to these expectations. While this result may be an anomaly for this sample, it may also indicate adaptation to the large service sector over the past decade. As such, service providers are once again provided with evidence which indicates a need to solicit feedback from their constituencies.

Despite the need to continue to improve established measures, the correspondence of these results for more general categories of products and services than those in the original study reinforces the viability of the proposed constructs. It seems interesting to note the similarity in behavior and intentions based on the consumer's perspective of such diverse products as groceries and washers or dryers, as well as services such as repairs or physicians. While researchers may assume that automobiles would be more "involving" for the customer, these results reinforce the idiosyncratic nature of customer perceptions of problems important to them. Thus, complaint actions occur for a wide variety of products and service providers and should be measured over time by each company.

These findings have implications for future research and for marketing practitioners—particularly those concerned with the marketing of services. Additional research can be justified for at least two reasons: 1) the importance of services to the overall economy, and 2) the likelihood that consumer complaint actions may be more frequent and more severe for services than products. Thus, these results suggest continued work is necessary particularly for service problems in order to optimally impact marketing plans as well as to fully understand complaint behaviors.

The expectation that service problems may result in more severe actions may be well founded or may mask the idea that if people VOICE their service dissatisfactions they may be less likely to go to a THIRD PARTY to seek redress. If this is also found in future studies, marketing managers should seek to ease the complaint process for products and for services by providing clear directions of how to voice a complaint. Actions which facilitate feedback for problems may thus prevent customers from engaging in more visible, and potentially harmful, complaint actions.

Further, the categories of products and services resulting in higher proportions of complaints may offer strategic insight for firms in these industries. For example, automobile repairs have a reputation for creating dissatisfied customers which is reinforced again in this study. With changes in the medical field, a significant number of complaints about physicians in an area may indicate an opportunity to open a competitive alternative such as a walk-in clinic. Thus, the practical implications reflect the need for each business to monitor the complaint behavior of its customers. Further, marketers should also monitor relative complaint frequencies for categories of products and services to gain a clearer picture within diverse geographic areas.

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