CUSTOMER INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS: THE IMPACT OF FIRM RESPONSE TIME TO EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS

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The ability of the Internet to provide immediate communication through email has prompted a renewed emphasis on understanding customer correspondence and its effect on customer relationships. This study investigates how elements of the communication environment influence a consumer's attitude and intentions. Using a scenario-based experiment, we examine how the email's content (e.g., importance and type of communication), firm factors (e.g., reputation and speed of response), and consumer characteristics (e.g., commitment to the firm) affect satisfaction, intentions, loyalty, and word-of-mouth. The results demonstrate that failure to respond to email, and even delaying response to email, decreases satisfaction with the firm.

INTRODUCTION

Even with the dot com crash of the year 2001, the number of commercial registrants (e.g., .com) still exceeds 41 million (Internet Software Consortium 2003). Many of these web businesses are small companies with little or no brand recognition; others are key players within their industry reaping the benefits of a well-established brand name. Regardless of firm size and reputation, customer communication media such as telephone numbers and email addresses are routinely found on the company's web page as a mechanism to provide customer service and support (Motz 1996). Although the use of toll-free numbers still persists, the convenience and anonymity consumers associate with electronic mail (e.g., email) communications is significant. Safely hidden behind an impersonal keyboard, consumers now, more than ever before, use electronic mail to contact companies for product inquiries or to voice complaints. Certainly, the speed with which a company responds to these messages could affect the firm's relationship-building ability.

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The ability of the Internet to provide seamless, immediate communication through the use of email has prompted a renewed emphasis on understanding customer correspondence and its effect on customer relationships. Customer relationship management (hereafter CRM) is an important component of relationship marketing, and is essential for online success. CRM has quickly become one of the most ambitious and potentially profitable tools of marketing for online businesses (Day and Hubbard 2003). The range and capabilities of CRM programs are vast and diverse. For example, the most advanced Internet based CRM implementations combine technological tools, such as database integration and automated email response systems, with demographic and psychological profiles in such a manner that products and services can be offered that fit customer needs (Pan and Lee 2003). While at the other extreme, emails are simply answered as they come in, similar to a call center.

From the firm's viewpoint, much of the interest in CRM lies in its ability to effectively combine disparate communications with the customer (i.e., email, telephone, and in person) into effective product bundling opportunities. However, from the customer's viewpoint, the issue begins with "How does the company respond to my communications" and ends with "What do I think of the company now?" It is this consumer-oriented perspective that is examined here.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how critical elements of the communication environment influence a consumer's behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. Specifically, through a scenario-based experiment, we examine how the content of the communication (e.g., importance and type of communication), firm-related factors (e.g., reputation and speed of response), and consumer characteristics (e.g., commitment to the firm) affect satisfaction, intentions, store loyalty, and word-of-mouth. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we review the communication environment effects of interest. Next, we present a set of hypothesis based on the literature, followed by an overview of our study. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their managerial implications.

COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

Important components of the email communication environment include the following: the communication's content; firm related factors; and, consumer characteristics. As discussed below, the communication content factors of interest are the type of correspondence (inquiry or complaint) and its importance (greater importance or lesser importance). The firm related factors of interest include the firm's reputation for service quality (well-known versus unknown) and the speed in which a firm responds (within a day, same week, no response after two-weeks). The consumer characteristic of interest is the individual's relationship with the firm (committed versus transactional).

Communication Content

Communication is viewed as an important ingredient in the development of long-term customer-firm relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994). High levels of communication imply that the relationship is strong and that needs are being addressed (Cannon and Homburg 2001). The content of communication messages however can vary. A customer may contact a company to complain, obtain product information, inquire about a position, ask the company a favor, and so forth. The communication contents of interest here are those that are transaction related messages that require action on the part of the firm. Two types of communication that fall under this description are complaints and inquiries.

The study of complaining behavior has traditionally been the mode of inquiry for customer-firm communication studies. Studies have examined the factors that cause dissatisfaction with the complaint procedure (Tax, Brown and Chandrashekaran 1998), the types of complaining behavior responses (Hirschmann 1970), and most recently, complaint handling through email (Strauss and Hill 2001). In their expose′ on email complaint handling, Strauss and Hill presented a descriptive study of actual complaints and how the firm responded or did not respond to the email, as well as response letter characteristics. Their major finding was that simply replying to an email complaint resulted in higher likelihood of repurchase, higher perceived credibility of the company, and higher perceived concern of the company for the individual. The act of complaining itself has been shown to increase satisfaction (Nyer 2000) and increased satisfaction can lead to increased purchasing and a more positive attitude toward the firm.

Conversely, though the use of email easily lends itself to inquiries, and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a major component of customer communications (Jupiter Research 2003), little research has been conducted to examine the resolution of customer inquiries. As previously noted, traditional research concerning customer correspondence has focused on complaining, with a somewhat smaller interest in praise communications (Martin and Smart 1989, Smart and Martin 1992) and even less research has investigated the handling of customer inquiries (Bowman and Narayandas 2001). Bowman and Narayandas (2001) found that in customer initiated communications, response, as compared to no response, to inquiries resulted in a more positive change in satisfaction. Therefore:

H_{1a}: Regardless of communication type, those that receive a response from the firm will have greater satisfaction than those that do not receive a response.

In addition to satisfaction, another important customer response is what they say about the company to others, that is, word-of-mouth communications. Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be positive or negative. Therefore:

> $\mathbf{H_{1b}}$: Given that a response was received, those that receive a response from the firm for an inquiry (vs. a complaint) will have more positive satisfaction, and engage in less negative WOM and more positive WOM.

A related component of the type of communication (i.e., a complaint or inquiry) is the importance of the product which the communication addresses. Importance in this instance relates to the relative value in which the individual places on the product (Bloch and Richins 1983; Blodgett, Wakefield and Barnes 1995). Blodgett, Wakefield and Barnes (1995) suggest that complaints that are considered important will result in greater negative WOM. Though a relationship concerning inquiries has not been expressed, we would expect a similar outcome.

> $\mathbf{H_{2a}}$: Given that there is no response, inquiry communications will result in less satisfaction if the communication is about something important than if the content is not considered important.

> $\mathbf{H_{2b}}$: Given that there is no response, complaint communications will result in less satisfaction if the communication is about something important than if the content is not considered important.

Firm Factors

When a firm receives communication from a customer, the reputation, or the beliefs and expectations concerning the company, can influence how the customer expects the firm to react (Clark and Montgomery 1998). Firm reputations have been examined in a number of settings such as their signaling effects on perceived service quality (Rao, Lu and Ruekert 1999; Wirtz, Kum and Lee 2000) as well as new product introductions (i.e., Robertson and Eliashberg 1995). Our focus is on the firm's reputation and its ability to signal service response expectations. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) note that individuals that perceive a firm to have high service quality are more likely to use the service provider, speak highly of them and return. Similarly, Boulding et al. (1993) suggest that consumers will form expectations about what should happen, in part based on the formed reputation of the firm given previous interactions. Additionally, because reputations are perceptions, individuals will view actions of the firm through the lens of its overall established goodwill (Herbig and Milewicz 1994). A hiccup in performance (or failure to respond to a communication in our case) from a firm with a solid reputation is likely to be viewed as an aberration and not affect future intentions nor create negative WOM.

> $\mathbf{H_3}$: Given that no response is received, firms with a well-known reputation (vs. unknown) will have less negative word-of-mouth, and a greater likelihood to be used again in the future.

Once a communication is sent to a firm, the sender knows that it is the firm's decision when and how to respond. Sharma and Patterson (1999) note that communication effectiveness is a primary driver of relationship strength. However, Strauss and Hill (2001) found that even when a firm communicates through a response to a complaint email, the longer it takes the firm to respond, the lower the perceived satisfaction with the response and the lower the perceived concern of the firm. However, we would expect the reputation of the firm to moderate the effects.

> $\mathbf{H_4}$: As the time to respond increases, satisfaction will decrease and negative word of mouth will increase, however the decrease in satisfaction (increase in negative word of mouth) will be less for well-known firms than unknown firms.

Customer Characteristics

Characteristics of the customer may also influence how communication efforts affect attitudes and behaviors. An important characteristic of a customer's behavior is their propensity to stay with one company for a long period of time. Customers can be described as falling somewhere on a continuum of highly committed to transactional. The focus of CRM is the creation of long-term relationships with existing customers. Long-term relationships are viewed as both more profitable and preferred over one-time transactions. Customers who desire a long-term relationship are viewed as more committed to the company, more loyal to its offerings, and are likely to voice positive recommendations and be more forgiving of lapses in service that may occur (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Recently, Tax et al. (1998) suggested that satisfaction with complaint handling is related positively to the customer's commitment to the firm, indicating that transactional customers will be less forgiving of the firm if they fail to respond quickly. For a service failure, (i.e., when no response is made at all), both types of customers will recognize the failure equally.

H_{5a}: For complaining behavior; regardless of the time lag before a response is sent, committed customers will be more satisfied, more loyal and have more positive WOM toward the firm than transactional customers.

H_{5b}: Overall, when a firm fails to respond, there will be no difference in satisfaction between transactional and committed customers.

DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

To test the relationships hypothesized, we constructed scenarios that manipulated the communication content, as well as firm and individual characteristics. The scenarios were based on anecdotal discussions as well as the authors' experiences with online communications. The scenario template is provided in Appendix A. The use of scenarios has precedence in prior literature in the services domain (Bitner 1990; Surprenant and Solomon 1987).

The hypotheses were tested in a full factorial design. The between-subject variables were based on a 2 (commitment of customer) x 3 (speed of response) x 2 (firm reputation) x 2 (type of communication) x 2 (importance of the communication's content)full factorial design. Commitment of the customer was either high or low (e.g., transactional). Speed of response was either same day, within a week, or no response at all by the end of two weeks. Speed of response levels were chosen based on a pretest of 34 subjects in which 40 percent received a response the same day, 10 percent within a week and 50 percent had not received a response after over a week. Firm reputation was either well-known reputation or unknown reputation. Type of communication was either a product complaint or inquiry. And importance of the communication's content was either important or unimportant. A total of forty-eight completely crossed scenarios were developed. Four questions were used to assess manipulations (Table 1). Type of communication was not assessed via a manipulation check. For each of the other four manipulated variables, manipulations were in the expected direction and significant ($p < .05$).

Undergraduate students at a large southern United States university comprised the sample. A total of 753 student subjects participated in the study. During a regularly scheduled class, scenarios and questionnaires were handed out. Subjects were randomly assigned to any of the 48 potential cells. Subjects were instructed to read the scenario. After reading the scenario subjects answered questions pertaining to the manipulation checks as well as dependent measures. In addition, demographic and Internet usage was also collected. Participants were rewarded with extra credit points on an exam. The completion of the survey took approximately ten minutes.

Measures

Satisfaction with the decision to use the online retailer was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from Oliver (1980). All items were on

TABLE 1
Manipulation Checks: Means and Standard Deviations

Manipulation Check	**Manipulation Levels[a]**		
Bookvillage responded to your email quickly.	Same day	< 1 week	+2 week
(Speed of Response)	5.9*	2.4*	1.7*
	(1.5)	(1.5)	(1.5)
	n=251	*n=255*	*n=240*
You Shop at Bookvillage most of the time.	High Commitment	Low Commitment	
(Commitment)	5.6*	2.9	
	(1.9)	(1.4)	
	n=376	*n=370*	
Bookvillage is a well known company.	Well-known	Unknown	
(Firm Reputation)	5.7*	2.2	
	(1.6)	(1.3)	
	n=373	*n=375*	
You consider your email very important.	High Importance	Low Importance	
(Importance)	5.7**	5.5	
	(1.4)	(1.6)	
	n=373	*n=374*	

[a] 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation
* p<.001
** p<.05

a 7-point Likert scale anchored by "Strongly disagree" (1) to "Strongly agree" (7). Reliability of the scale was 0.94. *Loyalty* was assessed with a single relative change question asking "Your commitment will now be…" anchored with weaker (1) no change (4) and stronger (7). *Word-of-mouth* was assessed using responses to a single item. For positive WOM subjects responded to; "How likely are you to recommend…" and negative WOM was assessed through "How likely are you to complain…" both anchored by "Very unlikely" (1) and "Very likely" (7).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The sample was 64 percent male and 36 percent female. Respondent average age was 21 years old. Almost 90 percent of the respondents use email at least once a week, with 40 percent having used email to complain and over 70 percent have used email to ask for product information. Additionally, over 95 percent of respondents use the web at least once a week and almost 50 percent of subjects had purchased in the last six months over the Internet.

Hypothesis Tests

To test the hypothesis we used SPSS 10 ANOVA, MANOVA and univariate tests. In H1a we suggest that those who receive communications from a firm will have a greater satisfaction with their decision to use the firm than those that do not receive a response. The Oneway ANOVA findings indicate that there is a difference between the three groups ($F(2,740)=183.81$, $p<.001$) and it is in the expected direction (Table 2). Bonferroni follow up analysis indicates a significant difference between all pairwise comparisons ($p<.001$).

TABLE 2
Analysis for H_{1a}

Oneway ANOVA for H_{1a}

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Satisfaction	Response Speed	716.42	2	183.81	.00
	Error	2158.52	740		

Means and Standard Deviations for H_{1a}

	Response Speed[a]		
Dependent Variable	Same day	< 1 week	+ 2 week
Satisfaction[a]	5.5*	3.8*	3.2*
	(1.3)	(1.4)	(1.5)
	n=249	*n=254*	*n=240*

[a] 1=Low Satisfaction, 7=High Satisfaction
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation
* p<.001

TABLE 3
Analysis for H_{1b}

MANOVA Analysis for H1b

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Satisfaction	Type of Communication	112.50	1	48.31	.00
	Error	1166.61	501		
Positive WOM	Type of Communication	140.10	1	42.52	.00
	Error	1650.97	501		
Negative WOM	Type of Communication	141.25	1	44.08	.00
	Error	1605.31	501		

Means and Standard Deviations for H_{1b}

	Type of Communication		
Dependent Variable	**Complaint** *n=252*	**Inquiry** *n=250*	**p-value**
Satisfaction[a]	4.2	5.1	<.001
	(1.6)	(1.4)	
Positive WOM[b]	3.9	5.0	<.001
	(1.9)	(1.7)	
Negative WOM[c]	4.0	3.0	<.001
	(1.9)	(1.6)	

[a] 1= Low Satisfaction, 7= High Satisfaction
[b] 1= Very Unlikely to Recommend, 7= Very Likely to Recommend
[c] 1= Very Unlikely to Complain, 7= Very Likely to Complain
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation

TABLE 4
Analysis for H_{2a} & H_{2b}

GLM Analysis for H_{2a} & H_{2b}

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Satisfaction	Type of Communication	57.34	1	29.76	.00
	Importance of Communication	1.08	1	0.56	.45
	Type X Importance	0.21	1	0.11	.74
	Error	457.78	236		

Means and Standard Deviations for Satisfaction[a]

Type Of Communication	Importance of Communication: Important	Unimportant	Total
Complaint	2.8 (1.2) *n=60*	2.6 (2.6) *n=59*	2.7 (1.2) *n=119*
Inquiry	3.7 (1.7) *n=61*	3.6 (1.4) *n=60*	3.7 (1.6) *n=121*
Total	3.2 (1.5) *n=121*	3.1 (1.4) *n=119*	

[a] 1=Low Satisfaction, 7= High Satisfaction
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation

TABLE 5
Analysis for H_3

MANOVA Analysis for H_3

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Negative WOM	Firm Reputation	2.64	1	0.69	.20
	Error	910.87	239		
Future Intentions	Firm Reputation	19.18	1	6.59	.01
	Error	716.89	239		

Means and Standard Deviations for H_3

Dependent Variable	Firm Reputation: Well-known *n=121*	Unknown *n=120*	p-value
Negative WOM[a]	4.9 (1.9)	4.7 (2.0)	.20
Future Intention[b]	3.2 (1.8)	2.7 (1.6)	.01

[a] 1= Very Unlikely to Complain, 7= Very Likely to Complain,
[b] 1= Very Unlikely to Use Again, 7= Very Likely to Use Again
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation

TABLE 6
Analysis for H_4

MANOVA Analysis for H_4

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Negative WOM	Firm Reputation	3.93	1	1.39	.12
	Speed of response	329.70	1	116.42	.00
	Firm X Speed	0.69	1	0.22	.63
	Error	1413.08	499		
Satisfaction	Firm Reputation	31.60	1	17.57	.00
	Speed of response	351.51	1	195.52	.00
	Firm X Speed	0.008	1	.00	.94
	Error	897.13	499		

Means and Standard Deviations for H_4

Dependent Variable		Response Speed: Same Day	Response Speed: Within a week	p-value
Negative WOM [a]	Well-known	2.5	4.2	<.001
		(1.6)	(1.8)	
		n=122	*n=126*	
	Unknown	2.8	4.3	<.001
		(1.5)	(1.8)	
		n=127	*n=128*	
Satisfaction [b]	Well-known	5.8	4.1	<.001
		(1.2)	(1.4)	
		n=122	*n=126*	
	Unknown	5.2	3.6	<.001
		(1.3)	(1.4)	
		n=127	*n=128*	

[a] 1= Very Unlikely to Complain, 7= Very Likely to Complain, [b] 1=Low Satisfaction, 7= High Satisfaction
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation

For H_{1b} we suggest that for those that receive a response, satisfaction and WOM will be more positive for inquiries vs. complaints. MANOVA results (Table 3) indicate that inquiries that get a response result in greater satisfaction (F(1,501)=48.31, p<.001), more positive WOM (F(1,501)=42.52, p<.001), and less negative WOM (F(1,501)=44.08, p<.001).

H_{2a} and H_{2b} were examined using GLM and t-tests (Table 4). Though in both cases, the values are in the expected direction, with important emails resulting in less satisfaction, there is no statistical difference (p >.10). Post-hoc, we can also see that the main effect for type of communication shows that satisfaction is more positive for inquiries than complaints (F(1,236)=29.76, p<.001), even when no response is received.

For H_3, MANOVA results indicate that when there is no response, a firm's reputation has a non significant impact (F(1,239)=069, p>.20) on negative WOM. Further analysis (Table 5) also shows that there is a greater likelihood of using the firm again for well-known firms than when the reputation is unknown (F(1,239)=6.59, p=.01).

H_4 is not supported. Though the satisfaction and negative WOM does move in the expected direction and it is significantly changed, the magnitude of the

TABLE 7
Analysis for H_{5a} & H_{5b}

MANOVA Analysis for H_{5a} & H_{5b}

Dependent Variable	Factor	SS	df	F	p
Satisfaction	Commitment	29.92	1	20.43	.00
	Speed of response	436.05	1	148.90	.00
	Commitment X Speed	3.32	2	1.13	.32
	Error	534.45	365		
Loyalty	Commitment	3.26	1	2.04	.08
	Speed of response	541.36	1	169.58	.00
	Commitment X Speed	0.56	2	.018	.83
	Error	582.59	36		
Positive WOM	Commitment	64.32	1	34.01	.00
	Speed of response	622.52	1	164.58	.00
	Commitment X Speed	0.52	2	0.14	.87
	Error	690.29	365		

Means and Standard Deviations

Dependent Variable		Commitment to the Firm: High Commitment	Low Commitment	*p-value*
Satisfaction [a]	Respond same day	5.6	4.7	
		(1.0)	(1.3)	<.001
		n=62	*n=62*	
	Respond in week	3.4	3.0	
		(1.4)	(1.1)	.02
		n=64	*n=64*	
	No Response	2.9	2.5	
		(1.3)	(1.0)	.04
		n=60	*n=59*	
Loyalty [b]	Respond same day	4.7	4.5	
		(1.4)	(1.6)	.24
		n=62	*n=62*	
	Respond in week	2.4	2.1	
		(1.2)	(1.2)	.10
		n=64	*n=64*	
	No Response	1.8	1.7	
		(1.0)	(1.0)	.32
		n=60	*n=59*	
Positive WOM [c]	Respond same day	5.5	4.8	
		(1.3)	(1.6)	<.001
		n=62	*n=62*	
	Respond in week	3.2	2.3	
		(1.6)	(1.2)	<.001
		n=64	*n=64*	
	No Response	2.5	1.7	
		(1.5)	(1.0)	<.001
		n=60	*n=59*	

[a] 1= Low Satisfaction, 7= High Satisfaction, [b] 1= Weaker Commitment, 7= Stronger Commitment,
[c] 1= Very Unlikely to Recommend, 7= Very Likely to Recommend
Value in parenthesis is the standard deviation

change (Table 6) is equally strong for both levels of firm reputation.

MANOVA results for H_{5a} and H_{5b} indicate a significant main effect for commitment on satisfaction ($F(1,365)=20.43$, $p<.001$) and positive WOM ($F(1,365)=34.01$, $p<.001$) but not for the individuals loyalty ($F(1,365)=2.0$), $p=.07$. Follow up analysis (Table 7) indicates that for all levels of the speed of response, subjects in the committed condition exhibited greater satisfaction and more positive WOM. H_{5a} is partially supported and H_{5b} is not supported.

DISCUSSION

Overall our findings suggest important implications for managers as well as future research opportunities. We found further evidence to support the belief that the failure to respond to email, and even delaying response to email, decreases satisfaction with the firm regardless of all else. This may suggest that incorporating an automated response such as "Thank you for your email..we will be back with you shortly," is a good course of action.

We also showed that the type of communication, an inquiry or a complaint does influence satisfaction and WOM. A response to an inquiry will generally result in a more positive satisfaction level than responding to a complaint. This does not mean that firms should only focus on non-complaint email, but rather they should not ignore non-complaint email or delay responding. Our non significant findings for H_{2a} and H_{2b} could be interpreted as a consumer's belief that all of their emails are considered important and the failure to respond to them will equally reduce satisfaction, suggesting that delaying responses to *any* emails is not a good strategy.

The findings for H_3 suggest that though a response may not be received, firms with well-known reputations are more likely to be given a second chance than firms with unknown reputations. Additionally, committed customers may be more willing to accept the failure on the firms' part to communicate promptly. We found that committed subjects were more satisfied overall with the firm than the transactional subjects regardless of the response time. This would suggest that committed customers have a vested interest in the firm and are willing to overlook some weaknesses or oversights of the firm.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Currently, over 31 billion email messages are sent each day and this number is predicted to rise to over 60 billion by the year 2006 (idc.com 2002). Many of these messages will be headed to companies. How and when the company chooses to respond can have far reaching effects on how their company is perceived and whether or not customers will choose to continue doing business with the company.

The results illustrate that regardless of the type of customer a firm has, the speed of the response is especially critical in maintaining customer goodwill and loyalty. In the past it was believed that committed customers will be more forgiving of mistakes or service failures than transactional customers. However, the findings here suggest that though they have higher levels of positive outcomes, the levels are not overall positive. In general, we find that individuals have communications expectations and will not tolerate communication failures by any type of firm.

The findings here, similar to Strauss and Hill's (2001), suggest that non response to messages will result in dissatisfaction with the firm is expanded to also examine responses that are separated by a matter of days. Simply responding to an email is not enough. Firms must be aware that customer expectations of instantaneous communication require them to respond promptly.

Future research opportunities could include the investigation of actual firms. The study's findings are limited in their generalizability. This study utilized scenarios employing a fictional company with the desire to eliminate pre-established attitudes and purchasing history. A logical step would be to investigate these hypotheses with actual companies and their customers' preexisting levels of commitment and perceptions of the firm's reputation.

Another potentially interesting extension of this study could be the investigation of the content of the reply. Martin and Smart (1988) investigated customer correspondences using the postal service as the delivery vehicle and Strauss and Hill (2001) note the personalization of a response may influence the consumer's attitude toward the firm. However, how far should personalization go? Should the signature on an email match the gender and ethnicity of the customer? Of course each firm must decide who (or what) will answer emails. These decisions will likely prove to be more difficult as the use of email as a means to communicate with a company diffuses through society.

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Appendix A
Scenario Manipulations

You need a book for a class project. The book is (**Importance**) helping you complete your project successfully. You have decided to purchase the book from an online retailer called *Bookvillage.com*.

Bookvillage.com is a (**Reputation**). You have (**Commitment**).

A few days after placing your order with *Bookvillage.com*, the book arrives. After opening the package, (**Communication Type**).

(**Speed of Response**) *Bookvillage.com* has responded with an email addressing your request.

Manipulation	Level	
Importance	Low	… optional and not critical in terms of …
	High	… required and very important towards …
Reputation	Unknown	… relatively unknown, recent start up firm with an unknown reputation in terms of delivery and service programs.
	Well-known	… well-known, established online firm with a reputation of having one of the best delivery and service programs of all online companies.
Commitment	Low	… no real opinion of *Bookvillage.com*. You have purchased only a few books from them and you often shop at variety of different bookstores or online retailers.
	High	… a high opinion of *Bookvillage.com*. You have purchased most of your books from them and you rarely shop anywhere else.
Communication Type	Complaint	… you notice that there is a problem with the book. You quickly send an email to *Bookvillage.com* describing the problem.
	Inquiry	… you notice a flyer indicating that a supplement to the book will be available. You quickly send an email to *Bookvillage.com* asking them for further information.
Speed of Response	Fast	Within a day …
	Slow	About a week goes by before …
	No Response	Two weeks have passed and *Bookvillage.com* has not responded.