

Product Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction:
How Content are Consumers
with Products They Buy and Use?

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the percentage of households that have had any type of consumer problem. The results of the investigation indicate that about 75% of the randomly selected households have had some recent consumer problem. This finding contrasts sharply with other studies that report that only 25-40% of their subjects had marketplace problems. These findings are evidence that the business community needs to concentrate more of their efforts on consumer satisfaction after sale (often, the stock phrase is that about 99% of their customers are satisfied and therefore everything is basically okay). The consumer complaint and resolution process was also measured in this study and summary findings are provided.

INTRODUCTION

One of the more recent publications on how satisfied consumers are with the marketplace indicates that a very large percentage of consumers are satisfied. Warland, Herrmann, and Willits report out of a nationwide random stratified sample of 1215 adults that 790 or 64% of these respondents reported that they were not upset or mistreated as a consumer. It would appear from these findings that most people are satisfied with the products and services they buy and use (Warland, et al., 1975). [They may have underreported those with problems, however, because they identified those that were upset as people who had gotten good and mad, not just someone who had a problem.]

However, from doing a previous study on complaints that consumers have with durables (Shuptrine, et al., 1979), it was felt that most consumers probably have had some complaint(s) in their dealings in the marketplace. Thus, this study on consumers' relations with the marketplace was designed to see how many people have had some problem of any type. In addition, noting Day's identification of a variety of post-dissatisfaction alternatives (Day, 1976) which might be chosen by discontented consumers, an effort was made to see whether consumers who had a problem took action or simply let the problem go without protest.

METHOD

A questionnaire was designed along similar lines as a previous questionnaire used in a consumer durable complaint study. However, major emphasis was put on the first question as to whether the respondent had a recent problem (of any magnitude) with products or marketplace activities. A followup question for those who said no was a type of "how sure are you" question to see if the first response was supported.

A random sample of 225 households was selected from a group of middle-income census tracts representing a middle-sized southeastern city. A criss-cross telephone directory was utilized to randomly select names and addresses. Out of a sample of 225 households, 183 usable questionnaires (81.4%) were derived from a series of personal interviews with an adult household member.

The findings are reported in a series of five

possible sequences that these respondents might have followed in responding to the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

Sequence 1 respondents were those who had made a consumer complaint and had it answered and resolved to their satisfaction. There were 58 out of 183 or 31.7% of the respondents in this category. The most frequent product mentioned was automobiles though items such as food, record albums, shoes, furniture, clothing and other appliances were noted. The dollar value of these problems ranged from \$0.35 to \$12,000 (see Table 1). Most problems were resolved with repairs or exchanges. Of interest though was the general tendency for low-ticket items (\$200 or less) to be resolved with exchanges or refunds; whereas, the high ticket items (more than \$200) were usually resolved with repairs.

Sequence 2 respondents were those who have had a problem, but did not take any action (make a complaint). There were 45 out of 183 (24.6%) of the respondents in this category. Items ranged from small ticket items such as peas (\$.23) and scotch tape (\$.39) to large ticket items such as an auto (\$5800) and a house (\$56,000). Reasons why people did not complain were mainly that it won't do any good, too much trouble, and not worth the time. Surprisingly, 20 out of the 45 respondents would buy the same product/service again though they had a problem with it and made no complaint (see Table 2). There did not seem to be any pattern as to why people would not make a complaint by the value of the item and, likewise, no general pattern as to whether they would/would not buy the product again.

In Sequence 3 are reported those respondents who had no problems with a product or service (see Table 3). There were 47 out of 183 (25.7%) who reported no previous problems but with a little probing with an additional question, only 33 or 18.0% of these respondents reported having no problems in the marketplace.

Sequence 4 and 5 show those respondents who had a complaint, made it, but were not successful. There were 15 out of 183 (8.2%) of the respondents in Sequence 4 where a complaint was made, but it was not answered (see Table 4). Out of this group only 5 of the 15 made an additional complaint. It is not shown but only 1 of these 5 finally had his/her complaint resolved. Most simply gave up when their complaint was not answered.

In Sequence 5, there were 18 of 183 (9.8%) respondents who made a complaint, had it answered, but not resolved to their satisfaction (see Table 5). Of this group, five made an additional complaint but to no avail. Again, most of the respondents gave up (these include problems from small ticket items to large ticket items). For the low ticket items (\$100 or less) no more complaints were made, whereas, there were five out of ten who made an additional complaint for larger ticket items (\$200 to \$7600).

A classification information summary (see Appendix 1) giving information on respondents' age, education,

income, marital status, race and sex is included. The sample was upbeat education and income wise, with about 67% having some college or more and about 57% making \$15,000 or more. The sample was also older than the State's average with about 58% being 40 or older. Most of the respondents were married and white (only 36 out of 183 were black). A slightly higher proportion of females than males answered our questions.

TABLE 2

Sequence 2^a
Had a Product/Service Problem? --Yes
Complaint Made? --No

Product (Service)	\$ Dollar Value	Why Complaint Not Made	Buy Product/Service Again?	
			Yes	No
Peas	.23	Too much trouble		X
Potato Chips	.30	Too much trouble		X
Coke	.30	Not worth the time	X	
Scotch Tape	.39	Not worth complaining about	X	
Biscuits	.49	Price too low	X	
Light Bulbs	.50	Not worth the time	X	
Zipper	.70	Not worth the time	X	
Screwdriver	1.00	Not worth the time		X
Bathroom Cleaner	1.00	Won't do any good		X
Corn Oil	1.30	Too much trouble	X	
Bologna	2.00	Waste of time		X
Can of Spot remover	2.00	Waste of time		X
Bug Spray	2.50	Not worth the time		X
Grease/Stain remover	3.00	Not worth the trouble		X
Rake	5.00	Decided to buy new one	X	
Roach Killer	5.00	Waste of time		X
Record Album	6.00	Not worth the time	X	
Record	6.00	Not worth the time	X	
Watch	12.00	Not under warranty	X	
Door Knob		Too much trouble		X
Dog Food	14.00	Too much trouble	X	
Can Opener	14.00	Too much trouble		X
Belt to dryer	15.00	Don't complain about things		X
Electric Can Opener	15.00	Would do no good		X
Portable fan	19.00	Too much trouble		X
Sneakers	21.00	Waste of time	X	
Shoes	23.00	Waste of time	X	
Electric Frypan	24.00	Not worth the trouble		X
Tennis Shoes	25.00	Won't do any good	X	
Auto Repair	25.00	Won't do any good		X
Auto Repair	25.00	Won't do any good	X	
Rocking Chair	32.00	Not worth the effort		X
Shoes	35.00	Too much trouble		X
Auto Service		Waste of time		X
Auto	100.00	Car is too old	X	
Exhaust Fan	100.00	Not under warranty		X
Apartment Service	160.00/mo. rent	Still working on it		X
Washing Machine	200.00	Won't do any good		X
Component Set	200.00	Sale item	X	
Tires	200.00	Won't do any good		X
Mini-bike	200.00	Won't do any good		X
Magnovox TV	800.00	Warranty expired		X
Auto Insurance	900.00	Not worth the complaint	X	
Auto	\$,800.00	Too much trouble	X	
House	56,900.00	No one to complain to	X	33

^aThere were 45 out of 183 (24.5%) respondents in this sequence.

TABLE 1

Sequence 1^a
Complaint Made? -- Yes
Complaint Answered? -- Yes
Complaint Resolved? -- Yes

Product (Service)	\$ Dollar Value	How Resolved?
Calculator Battery	.35	Exchanged
Bread	.60	Exchanged
Rice	.69	Exchanged
Cereal	.75	Exchanged
Cottage Cheese	.79	Exchanged
Coffeemate	1.00	Exchanged
Drug Container	2.00	Exchanged
Shoes	4.00	Exchanged
Record Album	5.00	Exchanged
Record Album	6.00	Exchanged
Ham	14.00	Refund
Pants	15.00	Exchanged
Iron	15.00	Repaired
Thermos Jug	18.00	Refund
Hair Dryer	19.00	Repaired
Blow Dryer	20.00	Refund
Shoes	25.00	Refund
Blouse	25.00	Refund
Hair Dryer	26.00	Repaired
Hair Dryer	30.00	Exchanged
Earring	40.00	Refund
Battery	45.00	Exchanged
Fire Screen	75.00	Exchanged
Skirt	75.00	Repaired
Vacuum Cleaner	90.00	Refund
Rug	175.00	Price Reduced
Heater	200.00	Repaired
Paving	200.00	Repaired
Auto Repair	220.00	Repaired
TV	250.00	Repaired
Refrigerator	250.00	Repaired
Oven	300.00	Exchanged
Couch	300.00	By Complaint Bureau
Washing Machine	300.00	Repaired
Stove	400.00	Repaired
TV	400.00	Repaired
Radial Tires		Replaced
Auto	500.00	Repaired
Refrigerator	500.00	Repaired
TV	500.00	Repaired
TV	549.00	Repaired
Washer/Dryer	550.00	Repaired
Carpet	800.00	Exchanged
Refrigerator	990.00	Repaired
Auto	4700.00	Repaired
Auto	5000.00	Price Reduction
Auto	6000.00	Repaired
Auto	6100.00	Repaired
Auto	6500.00	Repaired
Auto	6500.00	Repaired
Auto	7000.00	Repaired
Auto	7000.00	Repaired
Auto	7800.00	Repaired
Auto	8000.00	Repaired
Auto	9000.00	Repaired
Auto	9000.00	Repaired
Auto	10,000.00	Repaired
Auto	12,000.00	Repaired

^a39 out of 183 (21.7%) respondents were in this sequence.

TABLE 3

Sequence 3^a

No Problems with a Product or Service Followup question—Are you positive that you never had a problem with a Product or Service?*

	Yes	No
47	33	14

*This followup question was used to check to see how sure people were that they never had a problem. As can be seen, with some additional prompting, 14 of the original 47 admitted to having some problem in the past.

^aThere were 47 out of 183 (25.7%) of the respondents in this sequence.

TABLE 4

Product/Service	\$ Dollar Value	Sequence 4 ^a		Make Any More Complaints?
		Complaint Made?	Complaint Answered?	
		--Yes	--No	
		Yes	No	
Coffee Cream	.60			X
Meat	3.00			X
Shirt	15.00	X		
Christmas Tree (artificial)	20.00	X		
Small Appliance	20.00			X
Blouse	25.00			X
Pocket Calculator	27.00			X
Kitchen Shutter	60.00			X
Washing Machine	300.00			X
Auto	600.00	X		
Auto	2000.00			X
Auto	1200.00			X
Auto	5500.00	X		
Ford Van	9000.00	X		
Real Estate Agent	20,000.00			X
		5		10

^aThere were 15 out of 183 (8.2%) respondents in this sequence.

TABLE 5

Product/Service	\$ Dollar Value	Sequence 5 ^a		Make Any More Complaints?
		Complaint Made?	Complaint Answered?	
		-- Yes	-- Yes	
		-- No	-- No	
		Yes	No	
Can Spray Paint	2			X
Suntan Lotion				X
Fire Device	12			X
Power Bill	25			X
Electric Mixer	50			X
Drill	50			X
Auto Insurance	65			X
Electric Gas Service	100/mo.			X
Hotdog Machine	200	X		
TV	400	X		
TV	300			X
Furnance	550	X		
TV	700			X
Auto	2000			X
Furnance	2000	X		
Truck	4500			X
Auto	6000			X
Auto	7600	X		
		5		13

^aThere were 18 out of 183 (9.8%) respondents in this sequence.

CONCLUSIONS

Though these results are not generalizable to all households, this study does provide evidence that most households are likely to have had some problem(s) in the marketplace. A summary of the five sequences in the study are provided (see Appendix 2). From this summary, one can see that 25.7% of the respondents had no complaints or problems (Sequence 3) while 74.3% did report having some kind of problem (even though it might have been a minor one). This result is very important in that many other studies have reported only 20 - 40% of their respondents having a recent marketplace problem (Warland, et al., 1975; and Shuptrine, et al., 1979).

For all 183 respondents, 58 or 31.7% made a complaint, but did not have it resolved for one reason or another (Sequence 4 and 5).

Looking only at the 91 respondents who had a problem and complained (Sequence 1, 4 and 5), we see that 58/91 (63.7%) were successful and 33/91 (36.3%) were unsuccessful. For our sample, covering all types of goods and services, it appears that the consumer has about a

three out of five chance of being satisfied if she/he will only complain when a problem exists. This chance might be even higher if the consumer knew how to complain (to whom, when, where, and so on).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Classification Information

Age		No.	No.
15 - 19	40 - 49	4	26
20 - 29	50 - 49	41	28
30 - 39	60 and over	29	45

100/174 = 57.5%
40 or above

Educational Background

Educational Background		No.	No.
Grade School	Some College	4	31
Some High School	College Graduate	18	61
High School	Post Graduate	31	21

113/116 = 67.3%
Some College or more

Income

Income		No.	No.
0 - \$ 4,999	\$15,000 - \$19,999	11	21
\$ 5,000 - \$ 9,999	\$20,000 - \$24,999	24	20
\$10,000 - \$14,999	\$25,000 and over	29	43

84/148 = 56.8%
\$15,000 or more

Marital Status

Marital Status		No.
Single	Married	35
Widowed		121
		14

Race

Race		No.
Black	White	36
	Other	144
		0

Sex

Sex		No.
Male	Female	59
		104

Appendix 2

Summary

Sequence 1	Complaint made and was resolved to the satisfaction of the consumer.	58 out of 183	<u>31.7%</u>
Sequence 2	No complaint made though a problem existed.	45 out of 183	<u>24.6%</u>
Sequence 3	No Complaints with a product/service.	47 out of 183	<u>25.7%</u>
	However, with prompting 14 of these remembered having a complaint.	14 out of 183	<u>7.7%</u>
		<u>25.7 - 7.7 = 18% with no complaints</u>	
Sequence 4	Made a complaint, but it was not answered and resolved.	15 out of 183	<u>8.2%</u>
Sequence 5	Made a complaint and it was answered, but not <u>resolved</u> .	18 out of 183	<u>9.8%</u>

REFERENCES

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