

H. Keith Hunt, Brigham Young University

ABSTRACT

The other papers have outlined the needed developments for further advances in consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior research. This paper simply reminds us that the field is only in its 10th year and has made more progress than even the most optimistic would have predicted in 1972.

A POINT OF VIEW

I have had the good fortune to either read each of the other papers presented in this session or else have had them explained to me. As I reflected on what I could say in the vein of those papers, I had to admit that I had nothing to add. I agree with them. And, I don't think my repetition would add significantly to the quality of the session or the proceedings.

I do, however, have a point of view not presented so clearly in the other papers which I would like to share with you. I can remember quite clearly when there was very little published information on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior. I can remember hustling the grant proposal for the first consumer satisfaction conference and having to explain what consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction was and how it could potentially be of use if it was more fully developed. Today it is a rare marketing or home economics conference which doesn't have at least one paper, often one full session, on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and/or complaining behavior. Just 10 years ago only 7 papers had been published on the topic. My perspective is one of wonder as I reflect on all we have accomplished in 10 years.

A "10" BASED ON EXPECTATIONS

If, in 1973, when the Federal Trade Commission first expressed interest in some type of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction measure, someone could have polled people even slightly knowledgeable in the general topic area and asked them what they thought consumer satisfaction research could become by 1982, ten years later, I think even the most optimistic prediction would have been far short of what has actually been accomplished. By my count of actual hard-core main-line consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and/or complaining behavior papers listed in the 1982 GE/D & C Bibliography, there are 560 papers. Through 1972, there had been only 7 papers published on the topic. So in terms of numbers alone, we would have to say that our most optimistic expectations have been exceeded beyond what anyone could have imagined.

If, in 1973, someone had polled the experts asking what level of application of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior methodology would be achieved by 1982, only the most optimistic might have predicted that a national study would have been done using a great breadth of consumer product/service categories. And only the more internationally sophisticated would have expected that national study would be done in Canada. The methodology worked. And it worked better than anyone in 1973 could have imagined possible.

If, in 1973, someone had polled the experts asking the level of sophistication in consumer satisfaction,

dissatisfaction and complaining behavior research methodology expected to be developed by 1982, no one would have predicted we would be any farther along than we are and most would not have guessed we would be so successful. I'm not talking about "desired" or "what ought to be," just what the experts in 1973 would have thought possible by 1982.

So, in terms of quantity, application, and methodological rigor, I have to give the field a "10" based on what was expected in 1973 and what was accomplished in 1982.

A "3.6371" NORMATIVELY

The preceding speakers have clearly pointed out that our methodology and theoretical rigor still have vast room for improvement. Indeed, what impresses us most is that, as with most topic areas, the farther we get into the topic the more we see inadequacies in our theory and methodology. But that is the natural development of every research topic. The problems we have discussed in the previous papers very likely could not have been recognized without the work we have done during the past few years. So it is a bum rap to say that the field is undeveloped. It has developed to a point where we can see what needs doing next. And when we learn how to do that we will see still further development which is needed.

But, oh, what a ways we have to go. The more we work with the topic area the more we become aware of (a) the increased depth needed to truly understand consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior and (b) the interrelationships consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior have with so many other topics, not just in marketing and consumer science but in the general realms of psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and organizational behavior. From the normative view, the "ought" and "need" side of the discussion, even a "3.6371" might be a high rating.

50-

So, as we spend our time considering all that needs doing in the development of better theory and methods, and as we urge replication of key studies to be sure they are true information, let's not lose track of where we've come from and the fact that we have already accomplished more in the field than any of us would have said was probable had we been asked in 1973. I think we will be able to say the same if we have this discussion again in 1993.