

CS/D&CB RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FOR THE 1990'S

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ABSTRACT

It is emotion, not cognition, that drives CS/D&CB. Tripartite attitude theory suggests the importance of studying action tendency along with cognition and emotion. We need to study positive as well as negative disconfirmation. Our richest base for understanding CS/D&CB lies in consumers' stories of their own experiences. CS/D&CB researchers need to team with TQM researchers to better understand what leads to market success. We need to broaden from "consumer" satisfaction/ dissatisfaction to general satisfaction/ dissatisfaction. We also need to study complimenting, not just complaining, behavior. Perhaps the new acronym should be S/D&C/CB: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction and Complaining/ Complimenting Behavior. We seek increased academic/industry interaction but to little avail.

INTRODUCTION

Research productivity usually requires singlemindedness in pursuing a research topic, for example, consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior. We literally pit our minds against the boundary of knowledge trying to push it back and increase our understanding of our favorite research questions.

Sometimes it is useful to back off from that expansion of knowledge to look about in wonderment at where we are and ask the simple question of whether we are getting to where we think we ought to be. Sometimes our magnificent research efforts remind me of football players pushing tackling dummies around the practice field, where fulfillment is in the pushing and moving, not in getting anywhere.

As I back off from the fray and stick my head above the dust and confusion, the following observations come more clearly into focus for me. If I can keep these observations more clearly in mind as I butt back into the research endeavor perhaps the next time I stick my head up I will think I and we have made "progress."

IT IS EMOTION, NOT COGNITION, THAT DRIVES CS/D&CB

The more we approach CS/D&CB from a variety of perspectives the more obvious it becomes that CS/D&CB are emotion driven, not cognition driven. Think of our key terms: negative word of mouth, positive word of mouth, loyalty, repatronage, grudgeholding, retaliation, avoidance. The more deeply we come to understand these concepts the more we find they are emotion driven. We are so locked into and comfortable with our cognitive confirmation/ disconfirmation paradigm that we fail to remember that confirmation and disconfirmation don't become action topics until coupled with emotion. The evidence is now overwhelming that emotion is the critical element in CS/D&CB.

This is not to say that disconfirmation shouldn't be studied. Far from it. Disconfirmation or confirmation is a critical part of the paradigm. However, not much happens, positive or negative, until the disconfirmation or confirmation is energized with emotion.

ACTION TENDENCY

Tripartite attitude theory suggests that in addition to studying affect and cognition we also need to consider action tendency. Also, we need to study all three components at the same time, not separately. It is seldom that CS/D&CB research is solely theory. We study CS/D&CB because of consumer behavior. Action tendencies are closely linked to that consumer behavior. We seek to understand not just the emotion or cognition but also what action will tend to be taken. Indeed, retaliation, avoidance, grudgeholding, repatronage, and word of mouth are all action terms, not emotion or cognition terms.

POSITIVE DISCONFIRMATION

We need to focus more of our efforts on understanding positive disconfirmation. Negative disconfirmation is the equivalent of failure. Positive disconfirmation is the equivalent of

success. Let's focus more of our efforts on studying and creating success. Reading back over the tables of contents of the CS/D&CB Journal volumes and proceedings it appears we should be calling our efforts CD&CB. We have seldom given any attention to consumer satisfaction.

The past five years have seen an increased interest in customer retention, in repatronage, in long term relationships, and in what we call consumer satisfaction. The CS/D&CB community of scholars, perhaps because of its roots in consumer protection, has focused most of its efforts on studying what goes wrong which in turn causes dissatisfaction and complaining. Shifting to focus on what maintains satisfaction at a high level will have substantial benefit to theory and to practice.

STORYTIME

As little children most of us loved to listen to stories and tell stories. Too many of us set storytelling aside as childish as we "mature" into adults and scholars. I propose that it is only in the story context that the richness of CS/D&CB comes into focus. We can pass out all the questionnaires we want, but we will not really understand "what happened" or "what they think" until we hear consumers' stories in their own words.

We need to write the stories down. The stories then become case histories. From a multitude of stories we can draw inferences about human behavior, inferences in which we are confident because we have heard (or read) that story theme so many different times that it is accepted as valid. We can repeatedly seek the key insights to be gained from the stories. Ten or twenty years from now the stories will still be there. As we learn more and understand more we will gain additional, fresh insights from those same stories.

At this conference Dev Pathak told how the word "bothered" came to the fore in his research efforts. As people talked about their experience with pharmaceutical products they weren't dissatisfied, they were "bothered." Asked if they were dissatisfied, consumers answered with fuzzy, unclear responses. Changing dissatisfied to the consumers' word "bothered" allowed them to respond more directly with less interpolation and

transformation to try to bring their life experience (story) into the configuration of our asked question. We pick up these word choices when we listen to people tell their CS/D&CB stories in their own words.

TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

In its many manifestations, TQM is a major topic today. In most TQM presentations there is some version of (1) PRODUCT DESIGN being produced by (2) PRODUCTION/OPERATIONS leading to (3) CUSTOMER SATISFACTION resulting in (4) SUCCESS. It is interesting how much attention is paid to design and production and how little is paid to satisfaction. CS/D&CB research efforts will become more valued as they become relevant to the ongoing development of TQM. CS/D&CB researchers need to team up with TQM researchers to better understand the interaction of steps (2) and (3).

WHAT ABOUT THE "C" IN CS/D&CB?

What we know as CS/D&CB was originally interested in consumers, although we would occasionally see papers on business to business marketing. The consumer focus came from CS/D&CB's origin in the Federal Trade Commission and the Office of Consumer Affairs, both having a strong consumer focus. Almost all the early studies dealt with consumers.

The time is long past when we should have broadened our focus to all interactions. The first shift is from solely a consumer focus to one including business to business transactions. Then we can make the more important shift to broaden out to include all interactions (see the opening comments in the Perkins bibliography in this volume). Having served as an elected city council member for the past eight years I have seen that what we call CS/D&CB has direct application in citizen/city interactions. Several papers over the years have reported studies of student S/D&CB.

At the very least we have to open CS/D&CB up to business to business interactions. We will be better served if we make the total leap and expand what we know as CS/D&CB into the general topic of S/D&CB -- Satisfaction/ Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior.

WHY ONLY COMPLAINING? WHY NOT COMPLIMENTING BEHAVIOR? C/CB?

Almost all our attention has focused on complaining behavior to the total exclusion of complimenting behavior. Yet, if you will think about your own personal experience, you probably hear as many complimenting communications as you hear complaining communications. We hear of good restaurants, good movies, good books, good stores, good churches. But we never study these positive, complimenting communications. Now is the time to start.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

If we change from *consumer* satisfaction/dissatisfaction to general satisfaction/dissatisfaction, the "C" is no longer needed in the name.

If we change from *complaining* behavior to complaining and complimenting behavior do we double the "C" in CB to call it C/CB?

Do we become S/D&C/CB?

It is poor communication to continue with our CS/D&CB acronym expecting people to know that the meaning is broader than consumer and broadened to include complimenting. Do we become the Journal of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction and Complaining/Complimenting Behavior (formerly Journal of Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior)? Surely that would be the longest journal name in history.

ACADEMIC/INDUSTRY INTERACTION

Do we flatter ourselves thinking we are relevant to industry? The academics have long felt our work had relevance to industry. And, from time to time, an industry person would hear of our work, sometimes even come to our conferences, and say how important our work was if industry only knew about it. But, overall, there has been little interaction.

The March 2, 1992 American Marketing Association newsletter, *Marketing News*, included a section titled "Directory of Customer Satisfaction Measurement Firms" which listed 170 research firms, several with multiple offices bringing the

total to approximately 200 locations. Each location had a contact person's name. I sent a letter to the customer satisfaction contact person at each location explaining about the Journal and our CS/D&CB conferences and inviting them to become involved with us. I received 20 responses. Several expressed interest in the conference but none attended.

The 1993 CS/D&CB conference had a special session titled "The Practitioner View of Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior: Problems and Issues" which featured L. Rob York from Kraft Foods, Charlene Stocker from Procter and Gamble Company, Bala Subramanian from The Promus Companies, and Andrew R. McGill recently with Sandy Corporation and now with University of Michigan's Michigan Global Business Partnership. The discussion focused on the importance of customer satisfaction.

We need to continue our outreach efforts to increase our relationships with industry.

Lest we be discouraged with our past interactions and pessimistic about potential future interaction, we need to remember that academics and industry managers live in substantially different environments. Neither is rewarded for benefitting the other. No industry manager is rewarded and promoted by the company for producing cutting edge scholarly research. And no academic is rewarded and promoted by the university for helping industry managers solve problems and manage firms. While liking to think they have much in common, indeed they have little in common, except when one or the other steps outside their professional domain.

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