

AN INVESTIGATION OF INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER COMPLAINT REPORTS

William O. Bearden, University of South Carolina
J. Barry Mason, The University of Alabama

Abstract

The results of a panel study of consumer problems and complaint actions are described. The ability of a number of hypothesized individual difference variables to explain consumer complaint reports was examined.

The results reiterate the difficulty of predicting specific behaviors (complaint actions) from generalized measures. Some support was provided for expanding the scope of behavioral measures in efforts to enhance predictability. Complaint reports were found related to perceived costs associated with purchase problems and demographic characteristics.

Introduction

Research on consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior has primarily focused upon one of the following research avenues: (1) attempts to isolate correlates of consumer complaining (e.g., Diamond et al. 1976); (2) identification of problem sources and reactions to those problems (e.g., Day and Landon 1976; Day and Bodur 1978; Andreasen and Best 1977); and (3) development of theory regarding the determinants of consumer satisfaction (e.g., Oliver 1980). More recent efforts report the extension of the expectations/disconfirmation/satisfaction paradigm to include complaint behavior (e.g., Bearden and Teel 1983), improved measurement procedures regarding assertiveness (Richins 1983), analysis of industry influences on quality and price satisfaction (Fornell and Robinson 1983), and examination of managerial response to consumer complaints (Gilly and Gelb 1982; Resnik and Harmon 1983).

As the research in any area of study evolves and matures, the need arises to focus upon conceptualizing and defining the relevant behaviors in need of study. Toward this end, the research of Day and his colleagues has been instrumental in identifying the types of behaviors and activities involved with consumer complaining. However, efforts to predict complaint behavior and investigations of correlates of CCB have produced typically weak relationships (cf. Richins 1983b; Gronhaug 1977). The present study is an attempt to extend our understanding of complaint behavior by a further analysis of the range of behaviors that might follow an unsatisfactory purchase. As in most research on consumer satisfaction, the focus is upon product or service users with justified complaints (cf. Jacoby and Jaccard 1981). Specifically, the objectives were twofold: (1) to examine in a single study the relationships between a number of potential influences on CCB either hypothesized or tested in a variety of different sources and (2) to investigate the predictive efficacy of expanding the domain of measurement (cf. Weigel and Newman 1976).

Consumer Complaints

Survey research has shown that many consumers fail to complain or seek redress when confronted with a problematic purchase (e.g., Andreasen and Best 1977; Day and Ash 1979; Day and Bodur 1978; Richins 1983b; Warland, Herrmann, and Willits 1975). Consumer complaining behavior is a complex phenomena influenced by a multiplicity of factors including product dissatisfaction, reputation of the manufacturer and/or retailer, ease of access of complaint channels, willingness of firms to provide redress, personality characteris-

tics of the consumer, consumer attitudes and motives, costs and benefits of complaining, socio-economic factors, importance of the situation, and prevailing social norms (Jacoby and Jaccard 1981, p. 18). Unsolicited complaint data that is available do not necessarily yield accurate pictures of the rate of perceived nonprice problems primarily because of the differential rates at which problems are communicated to sellers (Andreasen 1977).

Failure to complain prevents the consumer from achieving redress from an unsatisfactory purchase. Limited action on the part of consumers may mask marketplace problems in need of attention which could and should be corrected. If complaints are encouraged, the retailer has the chance to remedy legitimate complaints and win back lost customers who may also make positive reports to others, thus avoiding negative word-of-mouth (Richins 1983b). Even if the complaint is not settled to the customer's satisfaction, the customer is more likely to repurchase than if no complaint had been made (Richins 1983b). Further, widespread failure to express complaints limits the usefulness of complaint data as indicators of marketplace performance and areas in need of public policy actions and as prepurchase information (Gronhaug and Arndt 1980; Bearden and Teel 1983).

Legitimate complaint behavior is normally thought of as stemming from dissatisfaction which is caused by the negative disconfirmation of purchase expectations (Oliver 1980; Swan and Trawick 1981). According to this position, dissatisfaction occurs if product performance, expressed in terms of attribute/outcome evaluations, is below anticipated levels. Initially, consumer complaint responses were categorized as being either public or private reactions (Day and Landon 1977). A more recent typology categorizes consumer reactions in response to dissatisfaction in the following schema or typology (Day 1980b, p. 212).

1. Redress Seeking - A specific remedy (replacement or refund is sought directly with the seller or manufacturer or indirectly through a third party (e.g., attorney, consumer affairs office).
2. Complaining - Communications for reasons other than seeking a specific remedy for past grievances.
3. Personal Boycott - A personal decision to discontinue purchase of offending products or brands and/or to withhold patronage of the retailer or manufacturer.

This typology is less restrictive than Landon's definition of a complaint--an expression of dissatisfaction on a consumer's behalf to a responsible party (Landon 1980, p. 337)--and includes the possible range of activities and/or communications which might follow a problem purchase. Although not studied directly in this study, complaints may also involve nonmonetary losses or problems associated with nonperformance (e.g., store policies, deceptive advertising) (Gilly and Gelb 1982) and dissatisfaction stemming from prepurchase shopping experiences (Claxton and Ritchie 1981; Westbrook and Newman 1978).

Consumer complaint behavior is, therefore, one stage in the consumer's experience with a purchase of a product or service. The CCB stage begins when the consumer has evaluated a consumption experience and ends when the consumer has completed all behavioral and nonbehavioral responses to the experience (Day 1980b). An unsatisfactory purchase may result in the purchaser engaging in all or none of the above

behaviors.

Attitude-Behavior Correspondence

Low correlations between predictors of behavior and actual behavior are commonplace in both psychological and consumer research. Similar findings have been reported in CS/D and CCB research (cf. Richins 1982a, 1983b). Efforts to increase predictability have typically focused on either the inclusion of "other variables" (Wicker 1971) or increasing the situational specificity of measurement (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977). In the present study, a third alternative is pursued.

Weigel and Newman (1976) in their study of environmental attitudes and behavior (e.g., litter pick-up, recycling) demonstrated that attitude-behavior correspondence can be strengthened when single behavioral criteria are combined into more comprehensive behavioral indices intended to broaden the scope of measurement. This notion has been given some support by Bearden and Teel (1983) in their study of consumer satisfaction and complaint behavior regarding automobile repairs and services. In the present context, the complaint behavior typologies of Day and Landon (1976, 1977) and Day (1980b) provide a mechanism for combining individual actions (e.g., complaints to friends) into more comprehensive behaviors (private actions).

Influences on Consumer Complaint Behavior

Day et al. (1981) and Jacoby and Jaccard (1981), Day and Landon (1977), Landon (1977), among others, have reviewed many of the influences that either have been found related to CCB or have been hypothesized (but not examined empirically) to influence consumer reactions to unsatisfactory purchases. Supplementing these summaries, a number of recent studies have investigated a variety of correlates of complaint behavior. These sources, many of which are included in the remainder of this section, provide the primary impetus for the variables and issues considered in this study.

Again, as discussed in the studies cited above, a myriad of factors exist that may well affect complaint behavior. These factors are associated with marketplace characteristics (e.g., the firm's reputation for quality), personal or consumer characteristics (e.g., personality differences), and circumstantial factors (e.g., money involved, product essentialness to daily routine). In the present study, a total of thirteen variables representing six categories of measures and their relationships to CCB were investigated. The categories were: demographic characteristics, perceived structural restraints, consumerism characteristics, personality, attitudes-about-complaining, and costs associated with the problem experience. With the exception of the cost associated with the problem, the variables considered in this study deal with individual characteristics, attitudes, or perceptions. It is acknowledged that not all the influences on consumer complaints are incorporated in the ensuing analyses. However, substantive research does exist for considering the variables examined as potential influences on CCB.

Demographics

While some conflicting results have been presented (cf., Andreasen and Best 1977; Gronhaug and Zaltman 1981), it is generally acknowledged that public complainers are younger with higher education and income (e.g., Warland et al. 1975; Day and Landon 1976, 1977; Diamond et al. 1976; Landon 1980; Shuptrine and Wenglorz 1981). These results regarding public complainers are supported by similar descriptions of consumerist segments (Bourgeois and Barnes 1979; Branes and Kelloway 1980).

Structural Restraints

Individual perceptions of the firm's image regarding quality and reputation and of the firm's responsiveness to complaints have been hypothesized to significantly influence CCB (Day and Landon 1976; Granbois et al. 1977; Landon 1977; Jacoby and Jaccard 1981; Richins 1983b). If the retailer or manufacturer is perceived as being responsive to consumer efforts to seek redress, consumers are more likely to complain. Conversely, perceived restraints or unavailability of complaint channels inhibit consumer complaining.

Consumers complain when there is a reasonable chance of obtaining redress. Granbois et al. (1977) assert that the perception of a store's willingness to provide a remedy is clearly the most significant correlate of complaining behavior; consumers appear to complain largely when they believe their efforts are likely to meet with success (Jacoby and Jaccard 1981, p. 15). Richins (1983b) extends this premise to include both willingness to respond and the extent to which the retailer or manufacturer makes the complaint handling mechanism available.

In this study, the notion of restraints to complaining was further extended to include responsiveness of the firm, the perceived availability of complaint channels, and the time and expense associated with complaining (Richins 1982b). "Not worth the time and effort" is often the most frequently mentioned reason for not complaining publicly in efforts to seek redress (e.g., Day and Ash 1979; Day and Bodur 1978). The perceived benefits and costs of complaining (even beyond consideration of the product/service expenditures involved) have been shown to be critical components of the complaining process.

Consumer Characteristics

The consumer-related attributes of consumer alienation (Allison 1978) and consumer activism were also hypothesized as being related to consumer complaint behavior. Results regarding the role of consumer alienation and public complaining is mixed. Warland et al. (1975) described the "upset-no action" group as a more alienated group of consumers (in comparison with consumers who are "upset and take action"). Similarly, Shuptrine and Wenglorz (1981) describe noncomplainers as being separated (as in estrangement or social isolation). However, to the extent that consumer alienation represents negativism toward the marketplace, these results are inconsistent with the findings of Diamond et al. (1976) and Barnes and Kelloway (1980) that users of consumer "hot lines" and consumer activists have more negative attitudes toward business and advertising.

This inconsistency may stem from differences in the data analyzed in the studies by Warland et al. (1975) and Diamond et al. (1976). Specifically, analysis of samples comprised solely of complainers to hot lines and third parties may confuse any relationships. It is when representative groups of consumers are examined (e.g., Warland et al. 1975; Andreasen and Best 1977; Day and Ash 1979) that the realization becomes apparent that a sizable number of consumers do not complain when confronted with problems and that feelings of consumer alienation may exist among a nonvocal segment of consumers. Consumer activism and efforts to seek redress are hypothesized to be positively related. This relationship stems from earlier descriptions of consumerist segments (e.g., Barnes and Kelloway 1980; Bourgeois and Barnes 1979).

Personality

Two personality variables--assertiveness and powerlessness--are considered here. Powerlessness (Dean 1961) is one facet of alienation; powerlessness is defined as feelings held by individuals that they are unable to help determine their destiny and to control their environment. Feelings of powerlessness are posited to be inversely related to consumer complaining behavior.

Wall et al. (1977), Fornell and Westbrook (1979), and Richins (1983a), among others, have posited that consumers who complain are more assertive. Assertiveness represents standing up for one's legitimate rights without violating the rights of others (Fornell and Westbrook 1979, p. 107). The relationship between assertiveness and CCB has only recently been studied directly. Richins (1983a) concludes that the nonassertive individual has difficulty standing up for his/her rights in the consumer environment and may experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when required to do so.

Attitudes

Three attitudinal measures regarding consumer feelings about complaining were also investigated: attitudes toward complaining to responsible parties (Aact), behavioral intentions to express their complaints when an unsatisfactory purchase is next encountered (BI), and a measure of propensity-to-complain. The first two variables are general (low-specific) constructs frequently investigated in attitude research. The third variable--propensity-to-complain--has been suggested by Day and Landon (1976, 1977) as a critical personal construct influencing decisions to complain. Given the self-report nature of the measure (subsequently described), propensity-to-complain most closely resembles an attitudinal/probabilistic intentions variable. The notion of "propensity-to-complain" is an effort to summarize the personality, attitudinal, and lifestyle variables that influence whether a person will seek to obtain redress or complain when dissatisfied and that impacts the nature of the action to be taken (Day and Landon 1976).

Perceived Costs

The severity of the problem or magnitude of the loss associated with the unsatisfactory purchase is also an apparent determinant of consumer complaint behavior. Landon (1977) argues that the tendency to complain is directly related to the cost. Assuming that problem with more expensive items normally involve greater out-of-pocket losses, dissatisfaction will more likely result in complaint behavior as both the amount of loss or the importance of the purchase increases (Landon and Day 1977). Similarly, Granbois et al. (1977), Jacoby and Jaccard (1981), and Richins (1982b, 1983b) assert that complaints vary directly with the magnitude of the loss associated with the problem.

Research Hypotheses

This brief literature review provides a background for the present study and can be summarized in the following six research hypotheses:

- H₁: Consumer complaint behavior is inversely related to age and positively related to income and education.
- H₂: Consumer complaint behavior is directly related to the perceived responsiveness of the firm and inversely related to perceived constraints to complaining.
- H₃: Consumer complaint behavior is positively related to consumer activism and inversely related to consumer alienation.
- H₄: Consumer complaint behavior is positively related to assertiveness and inversely related to feelings of powerlessness.
- H₅: Consumer complaint behavior is positively related to attitudes about complaining and propensity-to-complain.
- H₆: Consumer complaint behavior is positively related to perceived costs associated with the unsatisfactory purchase.

Data were collected by multiple mailings in 1980 to 1000 members of a regional consumer panel. The initial results described are based on the usable responses to two mailings from 749 households. The use of survey procedures to collect dissatisfaction and complaint data helps mediate the problems of relying solely on volunteered complaint data.¹

Procedures

In the first mailing, data were collected on the individual characteristics, personality measures, and opinions hypothesized to be related to consumer complaint behavior. Six months after the initial mailing, data were collected regarding unsatisfactory consumer purchase problems or experiences, reasons for those problems, the monetary value of any associated costs, and complaint actions taken after the problematic experience. In the second mailing, respondents were first requested to report any significant unsatisfactory problem encountered, if any, regarding purchases of durable products in the previous six months. Similar questions were then used to collect data on the extent and nature of problems encountered with the purchase of services. If more than one significant problem was reported for either durables or services, respondents were requested to deal with only the most significant problem. The number of respondents reporting significant marketplace problems were 175 (23.4%) and 292 (39.0%) for durables and services, respectively.

Consistent with the suggestions of Warland et al. (1975), Day (1980), and Day and Landon (1977), the respondents were grouped into "no problem," "problem/public action," and "problem/no public action." Pearson correlations and multivariate analysis of covariance were used to analyze the data.²

Life satisfaction and sex were included as covariates. Given the varying nature of products and the differential frequency with which men and women are involved in different purchases, sex was used as a covariate. Inclusion of life satisfaction as a second covariate was based on the rationale that larger affective feelings (such as satisfaction with life) have been found to impact satisfaction with individual purchases and hence possible reactions to dissatisfaction (Westbrook 1980).³

¹The panel is a quota sample designed to be representative of households in urban and suburban areas with family incomes above \$10,000. The average respondent is, therefore, somewhat older and upscale economically. Even though the panel mailing improves upon reliance on unsolicited complaint data, it is possible that the respondents and non-respondents (to either mailing) differed regarding problems and experiences reported.

²Box's M multivariate test for homogeneity of dispersion matrices was computed for both MANCOVA analyses. The resulting F-values of 1.67 ($p < .05$) and 1.27 ($p < .05$) for the durable analysis and service analysis, respectively, suggest marginal significant differences between groups. However, given the large number of degrees of freedom associated with the Box's M test, the practical effect of the difference in the variance/covariance matrices was felt minimal.

³Tests for the homogeneity of regression coefficients were conducted. Only one of these tests for treatment by covariate interaction was marginally significant (i.e., sex x group for services). This indicates that it is correct to use life satisfaction and sex as covariates (and not as treatment variables).

Operational Measures

Demographics and Covariates--Age was defined in terms of number of years; income and education were assessed via two categorical seven-place items (e.g., less than seven years education to graduate training). Life satisfaction was operationalized using the ten-item index developed and validated by Adams (1969) and revised by Edwards and Klemmack (1973).

Structural Restraints--First, a single 9-place statement was included to assess consumer perceptions of the responsiveness of firms and manufacturers to the complaints of consumers. Second, respondent perceptions regarding the likelihood of external constraints inhibiting their decisions to complain about unsatisfactory purchases were operationalized using three bipolar seven-place scales labeled likely-unlikely.

Consumer and Personality Characteristics--An index of consumer activity was formed by summing the number of times each respondent had performed one of nine consumer related activities during the two years prior to the first wave in this study (Bloom and Ford 1979). Consumer alienation was operationalized using the 35-item measure developed by Allison (1978). Assertiveness was measured using the 19 items developed by Alberti and Emmons (1974) and recently applied by Fornell and Westbrook (1979) in their study of complaining behavior. Powerlessness was operationalized as the sum of the nine items comprising Dean's index (Dean 1961; Robinson and Shaver 1973).

Attitudes About Complaining--Attitudes toward complaining were operationalized as the sum of two seven-place items labeled foolish-wise and bad-good following statements such as "Complaining about unsatisfactory purchases to the people responsible is" Similarly, behavioral intentions was assessed using three items labeled likely-unlikely, possible-impossible, and probable-improbable. Propensity-to-complain was operationalized using three nine-place scales such as "Do you frequently return goods or ask for refunds in your shopping?" (Often-Seldom) or "As a consumer, would you describe yourself as inclined to complain or not complain about products and services?" (Complainer-Noncomplainer).

Perceived Costs--In the second mailing, those respondents reporting an unsatisfactory purchase in the prior six months also indicated the costs associated with the purchase experience. Each respondent was requested to indicate the "out-of-pocket" costs, if any, associated with the purchase. A twelve category Likert type scale ranging from zero dollars to over \$300 was provided.

Complaint Behavior--The behaviors examined in this study are "behavior old" measures or self-reports of behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Aronson and Carlsmith 1968). Difficulties with predicting behavior from general attitudes and response tendencies are well recognized (e.g., Wicker 1971; Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). This difficulty is further confounded by the self-report nature of the data analyzed here which was collected six months after the first mailing in which the hypothesized predictor variables were assessed.

For both the durable and service responses, the extent of four private and four public complaint responses were collected. These distinctions parallel the categories examined in the studies reported by Day and Ash (1979) and Day and Bodur (1978) in their study of consumer dissatisfaction with durables and services. For both the durable and services analyses, these single criteria measures were also combined into three behavioral indices: (1) private actions, (2) public actions, and (3) a combined overall behavioral index. This summing of behaviors is consistent with the procedures suggested by Weigel and Newman (1976) in which the domain of the dependent variable is allowed to more closely reflect the

breadth of the attitudinal and other predictor variables investigated.

Results

Reliability Estimates

Test-retest and coefficient alpha estimates were used to assess measurement reliability. The test-retest correlations are based on the responses of 35 undergraduate students to a three-week interval administration of the first wave survey. The internal consistency estimates ranged from .56 for assertiveness to .89 for consumer alienation. The test-retest estimates were all significant ($p < .01$) and ranged from .61 for the single item responsiveness measure to .83 for the assertiveness and consumer alienation measures. Examination of the mean scores gives some indication of the nature of the sample (see Tables 1 and 2). The relatively high mean scores for the life satisfaction measure suggests a generally high level of satisfaction. This is supported by the upscale nature of the demographic composition of the sample. The median family income and education categories for both groups were \$30-39,000 and 13-15 years, respectively.

Group Differences

Differences between the complaint groups regarding the hypothesized influences on complaint behavior were first examined using multivariate analysis of covariance. Regarding durable purchases, the group sizes were: no problem ($n=574$), problem/public action ($n=112$), and problem/no public action ($n=63$). The corresponding group sizes for the services analyses were 457, 210, and 82. The MANCOVA results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The overall Wilks Lambda statistics were .94 ($F=1.04$, $df=24$, 1466, $p < .01$) for the durable analyses and .94 ($F=1.91$, $df=24$, 1466, $p < .01$) for the services analyses.

TABLE 1
Multivariate Analysis of Covariance Results: Durables

Variables	Encountered Problem (n=175)					
	No Problem (n=574)		Public Action (n=112)		No Public Action (n=63)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Covariates						
Life satisfaction	27.97	2.06	27.72	2.23	27.63	2.36
Sex	.50	.50	.56	.79	.49	.50
Demographics						
Age	50.47	12.80	47.62	12.26	51.46	12.15 ^a
Income	5.43	1.46	5.81	1.49	5.57	1.55 ^a
Education	5.44	1.27	5.47	1.26	5.54	1.26
Structural Restraints						
Responsiveness	6.39	2.14	5.81	2.24	5.84	2.49 _b
Constraints	12.98	5.28	14.11	4.67	14.10	4.82
Consumer Characteristics						
Activism	8.71	5.10	10.62	7.14	10.02	6.85 ^a
Alienation	102.42	17.77	104.56	17.40	105.14	16.71
Personality						
Assertiveness	84.36	12.42	85.32	12.32	85.46	10.99
Powerlessness	32.99	10.52	32.38	9.53	34.08	12.05
Attitudes						
Act	13.05	1.62	13.25	1.39	12.56	2.46 ^a
BI	18.59	3.14	19.11	2.62	18.29	3.61
Propensity	16.39	5.28	17.38	5.26	15.78	6.05

^a $p < .05$.

^b $p < .10$.

TABLE 2
Multivariate Analysis of Covariance Results: Services

Variables	Encountered Problem (n=292)					
	No Problem (n=45)		Public Action (n=213)		No Public Action (n=82)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<u>Covariates</u>						
Life satisfaction	27.98	2.12	27.87	2.05	27.62	2.25
Sex	.53	.58	.46	.50	.54	.50
<u>Demographics</u>						
Age	50.34	12.96	46.59	11.57	52.89	13.56 ^a
Income	5.46	1.50	5.67	1.39	5.35	1.53 ^a
Education	5.41	1.30	5.52	1.28	5.46	1.04
<u>Structural Restraints</u>						
Responsiveness	6.07	2.18	5.82	2.16	6.30	2.29
Constraints	12.97	5.28	13.70	4.73	13.65	5.58
<u>Consumer Characteristics</u>						
Activism	8.48	6.15	10.44	6.76	9.21	6.02 ^a
Alienation	102.65	17.44	104.88	17.93	99.98	17.63 ^b
<u>Personality</u>						
Assertiveness	84.25	12.46	85.16	12.24	85.11	11.43
Powerlessness	33.60	10.59	34.21	10.51	34.46	10.23
<u>Attitudes</u>						
Act	13.04	1.62	13.14	1.67	12.77	2.01
BI	18.48	3.28	18.90	2.83	18.93	2.86 ^b
Propensity	16.25	5.34	17.29	5.46	16.51	5.00

^a₂ < .05.

^b₂ < .10.

Three of the variables exhibited significant differences in both analyses. As hypothesized, those respondents reporting a significant problem and taking public action were younger with higher incomes. Also, in both analyses, those respondents reporting some direct action reported more participation in consumer-related activities. Regarding the durable purchase data, respondents not reporting any significant problems perceived less constraints to complaint expressions while those respondents experiencing a significant problem but not taking public action expressed less positive attitudes toward complaining. For the services analyses, those respondents encountering a significant problem and taking some public action scored higher in consumer alienation and propensity-to-complain.

Differences in perceived costs were also examined for those respondents reporting action and those not taking public action. These results are provided in Table 3. In both comparisons, the sample members indicating some public action perceived greater costs associated with the problem.

Correlational Analysis⁴

The results of correlating the hypothesized predictor variables with the individual complaint actions and the summed behavior indices were equivocal. These correlations were based on the 175 and 292 respondents reporting a significant problem in the follow-up mailing with the purchase of either a durable or service, respectively.

In general, the correlations were small in magnitude. The correlations demonstrate the difficulty of predicting a specific behavior with general constructs when the behavior is most likely to be influenced by situational and individual differences (e.g., nature of problem, attributions of blame, perceived risk from complaining). The only consis-

TABLE 3
Perceived Costs and Complaint Reactions:
Durables and Services^a

Variables	Public Action		No Public Action	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<u>Durables</u>				
<u>Covariates</u>				
Life satisfaction	27.72	2.23	27.53	2.36
Sex	.56	.79	.49	.50
Perceived costs of problem	9.69	6.35	7.79	6.43 ^b
<u>Services</u>				
<u>Covariates</u>				
Life satisfaction	27.87	2.05	27.62	2.25
Sex	.46	.50	.54	.50
Perceived costs of problem	7.79	5.72	6.37	5.91 ^b

^aThe group sizes for durables were 112 (action) and 63 (no action); for services, the group sizes were 210 (action) and 82 (no action).

^b₂ < .05.

tent correlate across the different actions and the categories of behavior was the perceived amount of costs associated with the problem. In this case, higher costs elicited more complaint related behaviors as anticipated.

The intercorrelations between the two summed categorical indices (i.e., private actions and public actions) were .51 ($p < .01$) and .18 ($p < .18$) for the durable and service responses, respectively. These correlations suggest a tendency to engage in multiple complaint behaviors. This is supported by mean scores for the combined behavioral measure of 2.45 (1.54) and 2.47 (2.41) for the durable and service responses.

Averaging the correlations across the different levels of complaint report measurement (i.e., (1) individual actions, (2) private or public actions, and (3) combined behavioral index) gives some support to the notion of expanding the dependent variable context. The average correlations across the domains of measurement were .082, .093, and .105 for the durables and .059, .079, and .095 for the service analyses.

Discussion

This study has investigated the relationships between a number of hypothesized influences on consumer complaint behavior and self-report incidences of problems and complaint behavior regarding purchases of durables and services. Emphasis was placed upon examining those characteristics of consumers who take public action. The study is not without limitations and several caveats are in order. First, only a subset of the potential influences on consumer complaint behavior were considered. While the study did employ multiple mailings and a generally representative sample (although older and somewhat upscale), the findings are still based on self-reports and are subject to problems associated with memory and retrieval of experiences occurring over a six month period. The focus of the study has also been upon post-purchase and use problems. However, dissatisfaction can and does arise in prepurchase shopping (cf., Claxton and Ritchie 1981; Westbrook and Newman 1978). Further, while statistically significant findings were reported, the magnitude of effects and the strengths of relationships were certainly modest. Consequently, care is urged in avoiding overstating the findings.

⁴Tables depicting the resulting correlations are available from the authors.

Little support was provided regarding the personality measures and perceptions of restraints to complaining or the general responsiveness of firms to consumers' complaints. It may be, however, that structural restraints and perceived firm responsiveness are critical on a product by product basis (cf. Richins 1982a, 1983b).

The inability of the two personality measures (i.e., assertiveness, powerlessness) to predict behavior is consistent with prior research results in which generalized trait measures have often proven inadequate as predictors of specific behaviors (Kassarjian and Sheffet 1981). Landon (1977) has suggested that personality mediates consumer complaint behavior. Future research might use personality constructs as moderator variables similar to the analyses used by Becherer and Richard (1978) in their study of self-monitoring, personality and private brand proneness. It does appear, however, that complaint behavior is related to general consumerism activity and attitudes about complaining. In general, the results are consistent with the profiles of the consumerist segment (cf. Bourgeois and Barnes 1979; Hustad and Pessmier 1973). Further, these later findings suggest the potential benefits of getting consumers involved in consumer activities (cf. Bloom and Ford 1979).

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