

An Analysis of Consumer Interaction Styles in the Marketplace

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This study examines how consumers interact with representatives of marketing institutions by investigating the individual difference variables of consumer assertion and aggression. The development of scales to measure these variables is reported along with the validating analyses, which indicate that consumers may be divided into four groups based on the interaction strategies they use.

The exchange process is the most basic unit of marketing and consumer behavior analysis. The survival of a business organization depends on its success in consummating exchanges; and the happiness and satisfaction of consumers depends, at least in part, on their ability to make intelligent and satisfying exchanges. This study investigates one aspect of the exchange process, that of how consumers interact with representatives of marketing institutions. The emphasis is on examining behavior patterns of individuals in face-to-face interactions with retail employees.

Although interpersonal behavior patterns, or interaction styles, have been investigated for some time by psychologists, research on this topic by consumer behavior scholars is relatively scant. Understanding of interaction styles at the point of exchange would be beneficial in a number of ways. It may, for example, enable marketing institutions to deal more effectively with customers. For instance, some consumers may be reluctant to seek information about products from sales personnel for a variety of reasons. Thus the salesperson misses an opportunity to provide needed information and perhaps close a sale. Other consumers may be reluctant to express dissatisfactions to the retailer and instead quietly take their business elsewhere. Here the retailer misses an opportunity to turn dissatisfaction into satisfaction and has lost revenues from future sales. In addition, if consumers are dissatisfied with interactions or feel intimidated by marketing institution representatives, these feelings may be translated into negative attitudes toward business, and in extreme cases, into deviant consumer behavior such as shoplifting.

For purposes of this paper, "interaction style" refers to relatively consistent behavior patterns that individuals employ in interpersonal interactions with retail employees. There is considerable controversy over (1) the relative im-

pact of individual difference factors and situational factors on behavior and (2) the extent to which cross-situational consistency exists (Mischel 1968; see Kendrick and Stringfield 1980 and Rushton, Jackson, and Paunonen 1981 for recent discussions of both sides of this issue). This study examines interaction styles in several situational contexts to determine their relationship with actual consumer behavior. Two interaction styles are studied: assertiveness and aggressiveness. Both have been examined extensively by psychologists.

ASSERTIVENESS

Many definitions have been offered for assertiveness. Alberti and Emmons defined assertive behavior as (1974, p. 2):

[that] which enables a person to act in his own best interests, to stand up for himself without undue anxiety, to express his honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise his rights without denying the rights of others.

While specific definitions vary among researchers, writers in the mental health area do seem to agree on three points:

- ▶ Assertion involves making honest expressions,
- ▶ Without undue anxiety, and
- ▶ Without infringing on the rights of others.

Several investigators have listed dimensions of assertive behavior. The most comprehensive scheme is presented by Galassi and Galassi (1978), who extensively reviewed the assertiveness literature and delineated seven behavioral dimensions: (1) standing up for one's rights; (2) initiating and refusing requests; (3) giving and receiving compliments; (4) initiating, maintaining, and terminating conversations; (5) expressing love and affection; (6) expressing personal opinions, including disagreement; and (7) expressing justified anger and annoyance. Certainly, not all these dimen-

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sions apply within the buyer-seller interface, but dimensions 1, 2, 4, and 7 seem clearly applicable.

Standing up for one's rights in the marketplace might include obtaining needed information or insisting upon a remedy for a defective product. Initiating requests encompasses asking for information about or demonstration of products, while refusing requests might include the refusal to purchase or to hear a sales pitch for an unwanted product. Finally, expressing justified anger and annoyance might be appropriate in certain situations, e.g., if the customer has been treated rudely or a salesperson has made a false promise upon which the customer relied.

Psychologists have developed a number of scales to measure assertiveness, generally for use in clinical settings. Early measures were not subjected to any extensive psychometric testing. However, recent work has yielded several rather well-validated scales (see Galassi and Galassi 1978 and Hall 1978 for reviews). Typical of these scales is the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Rathus 1973), in which respondents indicate the extent to which a number of assertive and unassertive behaviors are characteristic of themselves. Almost all the items refer to interactions with friends and family, although a few relate to interactions with marketing institutions.

Studies of assertiveness in consumer interactions using existing measures have not been very productive. Fornell and Westbrook (1979) found only very weak correlations between a general assertiveness measure and consumer complaint behavior, which is one form of assertiveness in the marketplace. An additional study by Westbrook (1981) that used a consumer sample and a different, well-validated measure of assertiveness found no relationship between assertion and complaint behavior once a dissatisfaction is experienced. Finally, Zaichowsky and Liefeld (1977) found that the humble versus assertive factor on the Cattell Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire did not significantly distinguish between those who had written a letter of complaint to a consumer agency and the general population.

AGGRESSIVENESS

Research on aggressiveness has a longer and more varied history than assertiveness research. Like assertiveness, a number of definitions and several measures exist. The definition by Buss (1961, p. 1) is most frequently cited: "A response that delivers noxious stimuli to another organism." According to this definition, rudeness, raising one's voice, or abusive language are aggressive behaviors in which a consumer may engage. Like assertive behavior, aggression may have verbal and nonverbal components. A related formulation of aggression has been developed by Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma (1973), who suggest that aggression is essentially the use of coercive power. In their analysis of social power, French and Raven (1959) defined coercive power as the use of threats or punishment to gain compliance. Accordingly, threatening to speak with the manager about a problem or to take a complaint to the Better Business Bureau would be considered aggressive

behavior. Several researchers have noted that assertion and aggression are distinct and separate constructs (Alberti and Emmons 1974; Hollandsworth 1977), but because they are both active rather than passive behaviors, they may at times overlap.

Aggression measures have been developed by a number of researchers, again with varying levels of validation work. Perhaps the measure of aggression most widely used in psychology was that developed by Buss and Durkee (1957). It consists of eight subscales: assault, indirect hostility, irritability, negativism, resentment, suspicion, verbal hostility, and guilt. As is typical of aggression scales, the Buss-Durkee measure was developed for use in a clinical setting, and its usefulness in the consumer context is yet to be established. Fornell and Westbrook (1979) included 10 items from the Buss-Durkee aggressiveness scale; as with assertiveness items, their relationship with complaint behavior was weak. Westbrook (1981) also found no relationship between aggression and complaint behavior.

In the consumer behavior area, aggression as a personality trait has received limited attention. Cohen (1967) developed a scale to measure the three response styles identified by Horney (1945), who suggested that individuals may be grouped according to their dominant mode of response to others as (1) compliant (moving toward people), (2) aggressive (moving against people), or (3) detached (moving away from people). Noerager (1979) and Ryan and Becherer (1976) have discussed some of the limitations of Cohen's scale. Many of the items on this scale (such as those concerning the desirability of being "able to own an item before most of my friends are able to buy it" and the desirability of "using pull to get ahead") do not seem to tap the same construct as many other accepted aggressiveness scales, although they may measure the aggressive orientation as described by Horney. The Cohen scale has not been used to examine consumers' interactions with marketing institution representatives.

RESEARCH SCOPE

The above mentioned research examining assertion and aggression in interactions with representatives of marketing institutions has shown little if any relationship between psychological measures of these constructs and consumer behavior. There are two possible explanations for such findings: either situational variables are stronger in influencing behaviors in such interactions than are individual difference variables, or the psychological measures used in these studies are inappropriate for use in consumer contexts.

There are some reasons for questioning the use of existing psychological measures in the consumer context, at least with respect to assertiveness. Several studies (Hersen, Eisler, and Miller 1973; Lawrence 1970; McFall and Lillesand 1971) have shown that assertiveness tends to be a situation-specific trait. Thus, individuals scoring high on an assertiveness scale containing items relating to family and acquaintances may not necessarily behave assertively in the marketplace.

A second possible problem is that most existing measures of assertion and aggression were developed using clinical populations or for use in therapy. Kassarian has noted that weak or nonexistent relationships are not surprising when personality measures are used in consumer research, and has criticized the frequent use of "tests validated for specific uses on specific populations, such as college students, or as part of mental hospital intake batteries" (1971, p. 415). He recommends that consumer behavior researchers develop their own construct definitions and instruments to measure personality variables relevant to consumer behavior, rather than using tools designed for clinical purposes.

One objective of the present study is to determine whether consumers do vary in levels of assertiveness and aggressiveness in dealing with representatives of marketing institutions; another is to develop a scale measuring such interaction styles. To address the situation-specific nature of assertiveness and aggressiveness, the scale developed here was designed to apply to a specified set of interaction situations. While such a scale is not expected to assess assertiveness and aggressiveness in all consumer situations, it is expected to apply, at the least, to situations involving typical face-to-face interactions with representatives of marketing institutions. Correlates of these interaction styles are also examined. Study objectives may be summarized as follows:

1. To determine the extent to which the interaction styles of assertiveness and aggression apply in face-to-face interactions with representatives of marketing institutions.
2. To develop measures of these interaction styles that possess acceptable levels of reliability and validity, and
3. To examine the demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral correlates of consumer assertion and aggression.

CONSTRUCT SPECIFICATION

Because consumer interaction styles have yet to be extensively investigated, identifying their domains was deemed to be especially important. To determine whether the definitions of assertion and aggression used in psychology are satisfactory when applied in the buyer-seller interaction context, exploratory work using depth interviews of adult consumers was undertaken. Nine adults (four men and five women) were interviewed in their homes by a fieldworker trained in depth interview techniques. Respondents were asked about their interactions with employees of retail establishments. Specifically, they were asked to report (1) both satisfactory and unsatisfactory experiences; (2) their responses to unsatisfactory interactions—how they feel they "ought" to have responded, and how people they know respond in such situations; and (3) about 11 different assertive and aggressive behaviors, indicating how frequently the behaviors were performed, whether such behaviors were viewed as desirable, and the reasons they might not engage in the listed behaviors.

Analysis of interview transcripts yielded a list of 46 different interaction situations. All except two of these could

be clearly grouped into three interaction situations: requesting information or assistance, resisting requests for compliance, and seeking remedy for dissatisfaction. The remaining interaction situations were somewhat unusual and unlikely to be relevant to the majority of consumers.

The depth interviews also yielded information about consumer interaction strategies. Some individuals used strategies that might be classified as nonassertive (e.g., making excuses for not buying an unwanted product pushed by a salesperson; apologizing for bothering the salesperson by returning a defective product). These individuals rarely appeared to engage in either assertive or aggressive behavior, and thus would be expected to score low on measures of these two traits. Other respondents used more assertive strategies (e.g., firmly telling the salesperson one is not interested in the product and leaving the situation; politely requesting remedy for a dissatisfaction), but rarely displayed aggression. Such respondents would tend to score high on measures of assertion but low on aggression measures. A few individuals reported primary use of clearly aggressive strategies (e.g., purposely being rude to salespeople). These respondents would score high on an aggression measure, but would not necessarily score high on assertion. A more common strategy than clear aggression is to begin with an assertive manner and, when this fails, switch to aggressive actions. Such persons would probably score high on both assertion and aggression measures.

Based on analysis of the literature and of the depth interviews, three interaction situations and four response styles were identified. The domains are requesting information or assistance, resisting requests for compliance, and seeking remedy for dissatisfaction. The interaction styles or strategies are assertive, nonassertive, aggressive, and resort-to-aggressive.

SCALE DEVELOPMENT

To measure the styles listed above, two scales were developed: a measure of assertiveness and a measure of aggressiveness. One goal was to develop short scales that could be administered easily in any data collection format: personal interview, mail, or phone.

Using the exploratory work previously described as a base, 79 Likert scale items reflecting assertive or aggressive behavior across the three situations were generated. In initial screening, redundant and ambiguous items and those with a strong potential for social desirability were removed, leaving 59 items.

Initial Administration

The 59 remaining items were administered to 118 undergraduate and graduate students at a western university in an urban area and to 59 adult consumers from the same metropolitan area. Analysis included examination of item-total correlations, calculation of coefficient alpha, and preliminary principal components analysis using scale development principles described by Churchill (1979) and

Nunnally (1978). Items with item-total correlations below 0.35, with loadings greater than 0.50 on more than one factor in the principal components analysis, and with no loadings above 0.50 on any factor were eliminated. Analyses for assertion and aggression items were performed separately.

The final version of the assertiveness scale contained 15 items that met the selection criteria, with five items in each of the three situation domains. Coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951) was 0.85 for the entire scale, and all item-total correlations were greater than 0.35. The aggression scale contained six items that were not domain specific. Item-total correlations were above 0.40 for all items, and alpha equalled 0.73. Because the magnitude of alpha is limited by the number of items in a scale, a corrected alpha for 15 items was calculated (Nunnally 1978, p. 243) and equalled 0.87. Assertiveness and aggressiveness items are listed in the Appendix.

To assess test-retest reliability, the two scales were administered twice to a group of 112 college students with a two-week interval between administrations. The test-retest correlations for assertiveness and aggressiveness items were 0.83 and 0.82 respectively—well within acceptable limits.

Finally, a principal components analysis was conducted on the initial sample of 177, using both the assertiveness and aggressiveness items. Factor loadings are shown in Table 1. Four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were derived and accounted for 51.1 percent of scale variance. The increase in amount of variance accounted for after the fourth factor dropped off sharply (scree test, Cattell 1966), suggesting that four factors are appropriate. The factor composition clearly reflects the domains and constructs. Factors 1, 3, and 4 consist of assertiveness items that reflect resistance to compliance requests, seeking remedy, and requesting information or assistance, respectively. The second factor shows high loadings for the six aggressiveness items. This factor structure provides evidence for the content validity of the measures.

Discriminant and Convergent Validity

To examine the validity of consumer assertion and aggression as distinct psychological constructs, discriminant and convergent validity were assessed using the multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) approach described by Campbell and Fiske (1959). As is common in consumer behavior research, scales meeting the precise requirements for this approach were not available (see Cohen 1979). Since previously validated measures of consumer assertiveness and aggressiveness were not available to provide the necessary variety in measurement methods, measures developed in psychology were used in the analysis. Nor were there acceptable assertiveness and aggressiveness scales using the same response format as each other but different from the Likert format used in the consumer scales. The scales finally chosen for the MTMM analyses are the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Rathus 1973) and the irritability, assault, and verbal hostility subscales of the Buss-Durkee (1957) scale.

TABLE 1
PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS ANALYSIS WITH VARIMAX
ROTATION: ASSERTIVENESS AND AGGRESSIVENESS ITEMS

Assertion item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
1	<u>.64</u>	.15	.12	.25
2	<u>.75</u>	-.06	.19	.18
3	<u>.51</u>	-.13	.24	.32
4	<u>.66</u>	.19	-.02	.16
5	<u>.62</u>	-.14	.27	.04
6	<u>.52</u>	-.18	.24	.38
7	.20	.06	.09	<u>.65</u>
8	.44	-.02	.11	<u>.56</u>
9	.32	.16	.04	<u>.45</u>
10	.15	-.06	.37	<u>.51</u>
11	.07	-.02	<u>.72</u>	.10
12	.34	.01	<u>.69</u>	.02
13	.05	.09	<u>.64</u>	.27
14	.12	.20	<u>.65</u>	.32
15	.35	.05	<u>.55</u>	-.18
Aggression item				
1	.34	<u>.61</u>	.22	-.22
2	.12	<u>.74</u>	.05	-.01
3	-.14	<u>.61</u>	-.05	.19
4	-.15	<u>.60</u>	-.19	.25
5	.04	<u>.67</u>	.33	.09
6	-.04	<u>.66</u>	.02	-.17

NOTE: Factor loadings of 0.45 and greater are underlined.

The consumer assertiveness and aggressiveness scales and the psychological measures were administered to a sample of 83 college students. The resulting MTMM matrix is shown in Table 2. Method 1 is the Likert scales; Method 2 consists of the psychology scales for assertiveness and aggressiveness. Evidence for convergent validity is provided by the diagonal in the lower left set of coefficients. The correlations of 0.68 and 0.42 for the assertiveness and aggressiveness measures, respectively, are significant at the 0.01 level and are acceptably large. Because the psychological and consumer scales were developed to assess assertiveness and aggression in different contexts—and because these traits do not show high cross-situational consistency—higher levels of convergent validity were not expected. The matrix also provides evidence for discriminant validity. Entries in the diagonal are higher than the correlations in the same row and column in that set of coefficients; they are also higher than the correlation between assertiveness and aggressiveness as measured by the Likert scales. (The third test for discriminant validity cannot be performed because only two traits were incorporated in this analysis.)

While the MTMM approach has been criticized as a validation tool by some (Cohen 1979; Peter 1981), the analysis of the consumer interaction scales does provide some evidence of discriminant and convergent validity. At the least, it clearly shows that assertion and aggression are distinct variables.

TABLE 2
MULTITRAIT-MULTIMETHOD MATRIX

		Method 1		Method 2	
		Asser- tion	Aggres- sion	Asser- tion	Aggres- sion
Method 1	Assertion	.85 ^a			
	Aggression	.16	.73 ^a		
Method 2	Assertion	.68 ^b	.34 ^b	.86 ^a	
	Aggression	.12	.42 ^b	.24 ^c	.77 ^a

^aCronbach's alpha. All other values are correlation coefficients.

^b $p < 0.01$.

^c $p < 0.05$.

Response biases are a concern in assessing the validity of a measure. One important potential bias, social desirability, was tested for the assertiveness and aggressiveness items. A total of 93 college students completed both scales and a shortened version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1960, 1964). The correlation between this scale and consumer assertiveness was 0.13 ($p > 0.10$); the correlation for consumer aggressiveness was -0.28 ($p < 0.01$). While this latter correlation is statistically significant, its magnitude is relatively small, with social desirability accounting for only about 8 percent of scale variance.

Validation Samples

To support the evidence for reliability and content validity developed on student samples and to examine correlates of consumer interaction styles, the scale was administered to adult consumers. A questionnaire containing scale items, measures of complaint behavior and attitudes, attitudes toward business, and demographic characteristics was mailed under the auspices of a state university to three groups, which received identical cover letters and questionnaires. A total of 400 were mailed to a random sample of residents of a Western SMSA. Questionnaires were also mailed to 212 members of a consumer protection group residing in the same area and to 198 individuals in the area who had, within the previous year, registered a complaint with a government agency or a private consumer protection group. This mailing and a reminder postcard resulted in 365 responses, 356 of which were usable, for a response rate of 44 percent.

Cronbach's alpha on this new sample was 0.80 for the assertiveness items and 0.76 for the aggressiveness items (0.89 corrected), very close to the magnitudes for the student administration. Principal components analysis was also performed on the new sample, and the four factors obtained accounted for 51.6 percent of scale variance. The resulting structure and loadings were very similar to those obtained for the student sample, except that factors 1 and 3 appeared in reverse order. To determine how closely the factor structure for the consumer sample replicated that for the student sample, the 21 factor loadings in each factor were correlated

across the two samples (Rummel 1970, p. 460). The correlations for the four factors were 0.77, 0.89, 0.65, and 0.63 (all significant at $p < 0.001$), indicating the initial factor structure was replicated. These analyses provide additional evidence for the scales' reliability and content validity.

CORRELATES OF CONSUMER INTERACTION STYLES

Correlates of the four consumer interaction styles—non-assertive, assertive, aggressive, and resort-to-aggressive—were examined to establish the validity of the assertion and aggression scales and of the interaction style classification developed. Attitudinal, behavioral, and demographic correlates were investigated.

Attitudinal Correlates

The first attitudinal correlate investigated was attitudes toward business. Two measures were used. The questionnaire for the consumer administration ($n = 356$) contained six Likert scale items taken from scales measuring attitudes toward business (Allison 1978; Lundstrom and Lamont 1976), which were summed. Cronbach's alpha for the six items was 0.74. The second measure was a summation of seven Likert scale items measuring perceptions of business responsiveness to consumer complaints ($\alpha = 0.72$). Because aggressive individuals are generally more hostile and have more negative perceptions of others, it was hypothesized that aggressive individuals would have more negative attitudes toward business than nonaggressive consumers. This hypothesis and those which follow were tested by dividing respondents for the consumer scale administration into four groups, based on whether they fell above or below the median on each of the two scales. Two-way analysis of variance with assertiveness and aggressiveness as factors was performed for each hypothesis. Results of these analyses using the consumer sample are shown in Table 3.

As hypothesized, in the two-way analysis of variance with attitudes toward business as the dependent variable, the main effect for aggression was significant ($F = 20.8$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$), with more aggressive individuals reporting more negative attitudes toward business than less aggressive individuals. The main effect for assertion was also significant ($F = 10.4$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$), with more assertive individuals reporting more positive attitudes toward business.¹ The analysis with perceptions of business responsiveness as the dependent variable followed a similar pattern (aggression $F = 10.8$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$; assertion $F = 23.1$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$). The reason for the main effect due to assertion in these two analyses is unclear. One may postulate that assertive individuals more frequently request remedies when a problem arises with a business and perhaps are more adept at doing so than

¹In this and all other analyses of variance, no interaction effect was significant at $p < 0.10$.

TABLE 3
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ATTITUDINAL
AND BEHAVIORAL CORRELATES OF CONSUMER
INTERACTION STYLES^a

Variable	Group ^b			
	A n = 83	B n = 90	C n = 70	D n = 113
Attitudes toward business	19.05 (3.37)	20.26 (3.57)	17.17 (3.75)	18.52 ^{c*} (4.01)
Perceptions of business responsiveness	23.35 (3.06)	24.74 (4.17)	21.14 (4.53)	23.93 ^{c*} (4.24)
Perceived social acceptability of complaining	15.00 (1.94)	15.79 (2.42)	16.14 (2.07)	16.48 ^{d*} (2.07)
Enjoyment of complaining	1.86 (.61)	1.79 (.81)	2.22 (.85)	2.40 [*] (.94)
Number of complaint actions	1.02 (1.08)	1.51 (1.18)	1.40 (1.22)	2.01 ^{c*} (1.21)

^aStandard deviations in parentheses.

^bA = low assertion, low aggression (nonassertive)

B = high assertion, low aggression (assertive)

C = low assertion, high aggression (aggressive)

D = high assertion, high aggression (resort-to-aggression)

^cMain effect for assertion significant at $p < 0.001$.

^dMain effect for aggression significant at $p < 0.05$.

^{*}Main effect for aggression significant at $p < 0.001$.

are consumers low in assertiveness. Since retailers usually do comply with reasonable requests by consumers, assertive individuals would have, over the long run, more positive experiences with retailers which would then translate to more positive attitudes. An alternative explanation is that consumers who have had repeated difficulties with retailers may adopt an unassertive approach, perhaps because assertive behaviors are perceived to be "not worth the effort."

The second attitudinal correlate investigated was attitudes toward complaining. Four Likert scale items on the questionnaire measured respondents' perceptions of the social appropriateness of complaining and were summed for the analysis ($\alpha = 0.62$). It was hypothesized that both assertive and aggressive individuals would perceive complaining as more socially appropriate than individuals scoring low on these traits. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was confirmed. Main effects for assertion ($F = 6.0$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.05$) and aggression ($F = 15.1$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$) were significant in the hypothesized direction. The aggressive and resort-to-aggressive groups were the most likely of the four to perceive complaining about dissatisfactions as socially acceptable behavior. The questionnaire also contained an item asking whether the respondent actually enjoyed making complaints on occasion. For this analysis the main effect for aggression was significant ($F = 32.9$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$) but that for assertion was not ($F = 0.44$, $df = 1/353$, $p = 0.51$).

Thus, aggressive individuals are more likely to report that they enjoy making a complaint than nonaggressive individuals.

Behavioral Correlates

Two behaviors expected to be related to consumer interaction styles were investigated: actual complaint behavior and resistance to attempts to gain compliance. The preceding analysis had shown that individuals with different interaction styles had different attitudes toward complaint behavior; further analysis was performed to determine whether the same relationships held for actual complaint behavior.

The questionnaire asked respondents to indicate which of a number of different actions they had taken within the previous few months in response to dissatisfaction. Five of the actions were forms of complaint behavior. The number of actions taken was summed for each respondent and used as the dependent variable in another analysis of variance test. As shown in Table 3, the main effects for aggression ($F = 13.6$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$) and assertion ($F = 15.0$, $df = 1/353$, $p < 0.001$) were both significant. The pattern of findings was similar to that for attitudes, with the resort-to-aggressive group reporting the greatest number of complaint behaviors and the nonassertive group reporting the fewest.

Being able to refuse requests is another domain of assertive behavior. Thus one would expect that assertive individuals would more ably resist attempts to gain compliance than their nonassertive counterparts. Also, one might expect that aggressive individuals would not experience a great deal of difficulty resisting such attempts.

Resistance to compliance attempts can be measured in a number of ways. In this study, respondents were given space at the bottom of the last page of the mail survey to write their names and telephone numbers if they were interested in participating in future research; 44 percent of the respondents did so. Female respondents who fell in the top and bottom thirds of the distributions for the assertiveness and aggressiveness items and who gave their names were chosen for a follow-up study. These individuals were divided into four groups identical to those shown in Table 3, with eight respondents per group.

Subjects were called in random order several months after the mail survey by a female experimenter who introduced herself as a representative of a company selling craft kits. The experimenter attempted to set up an appointment with the respondent to show her the kits, using a standard introduction and a list of statements to meet respondent objections. These statements emphasized the kits' low price, their usefulness as gifts, and other features. Under no circumstances did the experimenter terminate the call, regardless of respondents' statements. She continued to meet objections until the respondent either said goodbye or hung up the telephone.

Craft kits were chosen for two reasons. First, the product class is relatively inexpensive and is one for which respon-

dents could exercise choice without consulting other family members. Second, respondents were not expected to be interested in purchasing craft kits, especially in response to a telephone solicitation. Thus they would be motivated to resist the attempt to gain compliance. This assumption was borne out in that only one respondent expressed any interest in setting up an appointment. This individual, originally in the low assertion/low aggression condition, was eliminated from the analysis and another respondent substituted. A pilot study ($n = 62$ consumers) showed insignificant relationships between expressed interest in craft kits and the two assertion and aggression scales (r 's = 0.06 and -0.10 , respectively, $p > 0.10$), suggesting that the four groups were approximately equally motivated to resist the compliance attempt.

Two measures of resistance were collected: (1) the time elapsed from the time the respondent was identified by name at the beginning of the call to the time she terminated the conversation, which gauges degree of resistance, and (2) the number and type of objections the respondent gave the experimenter, a measure of the resistance strategy used. This latter measure bears elaboration. As noted in the discussion of assertiveness, individuals low in assertiveness tend to become anxious in interaction situations and have a difficult time standing up for their rights. One way to deal with this anxiety is to comply with requests, even if they are somewhat unreasonable. Another way is to apologize for not complying with the request or make excuses for not complying (Cotler and Guerra 1976). Thus excuses made by the respondent about why she would not want to buy the product are not assertive, while straightforward statements that she was simply not interested in the product would be considered more assertive behavior. Prior to collecting the data, the experimenter was trained to distinguish excuses and apologies from other statements. In this categorization task, inter-rater agreement of 96 percent was achieved. During the course of actual data collection, the experimenter tallied the number of excuses and apologies respondents made as well as the number of other statements made. The measure used for analysis was the ratio of the number of excuse statements divided by the total number of statements.

Results of the two-way analysis of variance for the resistance measures are shown in Table 4. Means for the duration measure followed the hypothesized pattern, with those low in both assertion and aggression taking the longest time to get off the phone and those high on both variables the shortest. Both main effects but not the interaction were statistically significant (aggression $F = 4.3$, $df = 1/28$, $p < 0.05$; assertion $F = 7.1$, $df = 1/28$, $p < 0.05$). The hypothesized pattern did not, however, occur for the second measure. In this analysis the main effect for assertion was significant ($F = 6.8$, $df = 1/28$, $p < 0.05$) but that for aggression was not ($F = 0.38$, $df = 1/28$, N.S.). Again, the interaction was not significant. The lack of significance for the aggression effect is not surprising, since the second measure assesses assertiveness in resisting compliance attempts rather than resistance itself. Aggressive

TABLE 4
RESISTANCE TO COMPLIANCE ATTEMPTS BY ASSERTION
LEVEL AND AGGRESSION LEVEL^a

		Assertion ^b	
		Below median	Above median
Aggression ^c	Below median	57.1 .53	28.3 .22
	Above median	32.6 .68	21.1 .26

^aNumbers in regular type face represent duration of conversation in seconds. Underlined numbers represent ratio of nonassertive responses to total responses.

^bMain effect for assertion significant for both measures at $p < 0.05$.

^cMain effect for aggression significant only for duration measure at $p < 0.05$.

individuals may have no problem resisting persuasion but seem to do so differently from assertive persons.

Demographic Correlates

Further insight into consumer interaction styles may be obtained by examining correlations of scale scores with demographic characteristics. Analysis indicated that these relationships are weak. The assertiveness scale correlated 0.21 ($p < 0.01$) with education and 0.12 ($p < 0.05$) with income, but variance accounted for is very low. Aggressiveness items correlated -0.15 ($p < 0.01$) with age, and there was a sex difference such that males scored higher than females on these items ($\bar{X}_m = 16.1$, $\bar{X}_f = 14.5$; $t = 3.23$, $p < 0.001$).

The relationship between demographic characteristics and interaction style was also investigated. Chi-square analysis showed a significant relationship between sex and interaction style ($\chi^2 = 11.8$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$). Males had a disproportionately low representation in the assertion group and more males than expected were in the resort-to-aggression group. Females were underrepresented in the aggression group.² There was also a relationship between education level and interaction style ($\chi^2 = 22.3$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.01$). More educated individuals were likely to use assertive and resort-to-aggressive strategies, while those with lower educational levels were slightly more likely to rely on unassertive or aggressive strategies.

The demographic relationships found in this study are in the direction expected based on research on consumerism, attitudes toward business, and complaint behavior; however, their low magnitude indicates that variables other than demographics play a much greater role in influencing consumer assertiveness, aggressiveness, and interaction styles.

²The relationship between sex and interaction style raises the concern that the analyses reported in Table 3 might be confounded with sex of the respondent. To test this possibility, the analyses of Table 3 dependent variables were repeated using a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design, using assertiveness, aggressiveness, and sex of respondent as factors. In no case was the sex factor significant at $p < 0.10$, nor was the pattern of main effects for assertion and aggression altered.

Finally, the three consumer sample groups—consumer protection group members, third party complainants, and members of the general population—were compared on the assertion and aggression measures using one-way analysis of variance and posterior Scheffé tests. The general population ($\bar{X} = 56.5$) was significantly lower than the rest of the sample on assertion ($F = 3.26, p < 0.05$). Consumer protection group members and third party complainants were about equal ($\bar{X} = 58.9$ and $\bar{X} = 58.1$, respectively). There were also significant differences on the aggression measure ($F = 5.63, p < 0.01$). The third party complainant group scored considerably higher on aggression ($\bar{X} = 16.5$) than either the general population ($\bar{X} = 14.5$) or consumer protection group members ($\bar{X} = 14.7$). These differences between groups, while significant, are not large, with differences between groups not greater than 2 points on the aggression scale (with a possible range of 6 to 30) and 2.4 points on the assertion scale (with a possible range of 15 to 75).

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the validity of different consumer interaction styles and reports the development of scales measuring these styles. The scales possess acceptable levels of reliability, and the tests of scale correlates provide some evidence for both criterion-related and construct validity.

Four consumer interaction styles were identified. The nonassertive individual has difficulty standing up for his rights in the consumer environment and may experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when it is necessary to do so. This consumer has a relatively good perception of business and business responsiveness, but calls on business to show its responsiveness less frequently than other groups by complaining about dissatisfactions less frequently. These individuals may be more likely to overlook those dissatisfactions they do experience because of their more positive perceptions of business, because they tend to believe complaining is not socially acceptable behavior, and because of the anxiety involved in confronting a business representative with the dissatisfaction. This group is also relatively low in resistance to attempts to gain compliance.

Assertive individuals are more able to stand up for their rights as consumers. They have positive perceptions of business and business responsiveness, but complain more frequently and are more resistant to compliance-gaining attempts than are nonassertive individuals.

Resort-to-aggression consumers use both assertive and aggressive strategies in dealing with representatives of marketing institutions. When rights are not granted by firm requests, these individuals may turn to such aggressive behaviors as rudeness or making threats. When compared with the assertive and nonassertive groups, these consumers have a slightly more negative perception of business in general, but they do believe businesses are responsive to complaints. They complain more often than any of the other groups and are most likely to report that they enjoy doing so. They are also quite resistant to attempts to gain compliance.

Perhaps the most interesting of the four interaction style groups is the aggressive consumer. Aggressive consumers are low in assertion but high in aggression. Of all four groups, they possess the most negative perceptions of business and business responsiveness. They make a moderate number of complaints, and report enjoying this almost as much as the resort-to-aggression consumers do. Aggressive consumers may make fewer complaints than resort-to-aggression individuals because they are inhibited by the inconvenience of doing so and tend to expect that such complaints would not pay off. Aggressive consumers are moderately resistant to attempts to gain compliance.

Further research identifying additional correlates of consumer interaction styles would be useful in fully understanding consumers. Questions such as whether any one group is more or less likely to experience dissatisfaction, how groups differ in responses to dissatisfaction other than complaint behavior, and how they differ in shopping patterns and search efficiency need to be addressed. Correlations between interaction styles and other personality traits also need further investigation.

The aggressive group deserves special examination. What aggressive behaviors are these consumers likely to engage in besides those investigated here? Are these individuals more prone to deviant consumer behavior (Mills and Bonoma 1979) such as shoplifting and destroying merchandise? Do individuals experience changes in levels of consumer aggression across time or is this a stable trait? How do aggressive consumers influence other consumers?

The scales described in this study might be used in other consumer behavior research as well—for instance, as a covariate in studies of consumer responses in the marketplace. Numerous studies (e.g., Bearden and Teel 1980; Granbois, Summers, and Frazier 1977; Richins 1980) have investigated the influence of various product, consumer, and situational variables on complaint behavior. If the interaction style measures—especially the complaint subscale of the assertion measure—are used as covariates in such studies, the effects of other variables will be more clearly shown. The scales might also be used as covariates in experiments on communications and sales presentation effectiveness. Source and other effects can be more clearly shown if individual difference variables in consumer interaction styles are statistically controlled for.

Another interesting area of inquiry is the relationship between consumer interaction styles and consumer efficiency (Sproles 1980). As consumers' time resources shrink with increasing competing demands for time, and as more and more women enter the workforce, efficient utilization of time becomes important. By interacting assertively in the marketplace—e.g., by asking questions when information is needed and reducing the time spent listening to unwanted persuasive sales pitches—efficient use of time will be increased. Assertive behavior can also lead to more efficient utilization of economic resources. Resisting persuasive messages for unwanted products and remedying product problems when they occur will allow consumers to save money which can then be spent on products that are

more desirable, resulting in higher overall consumer satisfaction. Identifying demographic and cultural groups low in assertiveness and informing them that various assertive behaviors are both socially acceptable and beneficial to the consumer will thus have beneficial social effects. Such informational services might be provided by consumer organizations, by the public schools via consumer education, and by particularly socially conscious business organizations.

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APPENDIX

Assertiveness and Aggressiveness Items

Assertiveness subscale items and aggressiveness items were not segregated in scale administration. Response format was a five-point Likert scale, where "strongly agree" was scored 5 and "strongly disagree" was scored 1. Asterisks denote reverse scoring items.

I. Assertiveness Items

Resisting Requests for Compliance

1. I have no trouble getting off the phone when called by a person selling something I don't want.
- *2. I really don't know how to deal with aggressive salespeople.
- *3. More often than I would like, I end up buying something I don't want because I have a hard time saying no to the salesperson.
4. If a salesperson comes to my door selling something I don't want, I have no trouble ending the conversation.
- *5. If a salesperson has gone to a lot of trouble to find an item for me, I would be embarrassed not to buy it even if it isn't exactly right.

Requesting Information or Assistance

- *6. I sometimes don't get all the information I need about a product because I am uncomfortable bothering salespeople with questions.
- *7. I am uncomfortable asking store employees where products are located in the store.
- *8. In signing a sales contract or credit agreement, I am reluctant to ask for an explanation of everything I don't understand.
9. If a store doesn't have the size or color of an item I need, I don't mind asking the salesperson to check for the item at other store locations.
10. If a cashier is talking with friends while I am waiting to be waited on, it would not bother me to interrupt the conversation and ask for assistance.

Seeking Redress

- *11. If a defective product is inexpensive, I usually keep it rather than put up a fuss or complain.

- *12. I'd rather do almost anything than return a product to the store.
13. I am probably more likely to return an unsatisfactory product than most people I know.
- *14. I often procrastinate when I know I should return a defective product to the store.
15. I would attempt to notify store management if I thought service in a store was particularly bad.

II. Aggressiveness Items

1. I have on occasion told salespeople I thought they were too rude.
2. On occasion, I have tried to get a complaint taken care of by causing a stir which attracts the attention of other customers.
3. I get a certain amount of satisfaction from putting a discourteous salesperson in his place.
4. Sometimes being nasty is the best way to get a complaint taken care of.
5. I'll make a scene at the store if necessary to get a complaint handled to my satisfaction.
6. Salespeople need to be told off when they are rude.

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