CONSUMER COMPLIMENTING BEHAVIOR: EXPLORATION AND ELABORATION

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ABSTRACT

Consumers' compliments and sellers' responses to them are investigated. The Kraft and Martin motives for consumer compliments are confirmed and further elaborated using a different research method. Compliment receivers' responses are classified using Herbert's categories with the general finding that the frequencies are very different for responses to consumer compliments than for compliments in general. Consumer compliments were found to be most frequently due to (1) seeking positive response from the seller, (2) great satisfaction, and (3) enjoying giving compliments, flattery, and ingratiation.

BACKGROUND

Until recently little was known about consumer compliments. Robinson and Berl (1977) compared complimenters with complainers and noted that in the lodging and food-service industries nearly 70% of all feedback was positive in nature (reported in Robinson and Cadotte 1979). In one of their implications Robinson and Berl say "It may be that the motives for complimenting behavior are more socio-psychological than economic." (1979 p. 147)

As one of his "CS/D&CB Research Suggestions and Observations for the 1990's" Hunt (1993) observed that

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. (p. 42)

There was no congestion at the starting line.

Finally, in 2001, Kraft and Martin published their foundation article on consumer complimenting behavior. Early versions of the Kraft/Martin paper and this paper were first presented at the 2001 CS/D&CB conference. Having the advantage of knowing the Kraft/Martin findings, part of the current study elaborates on the Kraft/Martin work. Kraft and Martin identified eight motives for complimenting behavior (lettered A-H). They directly address the question raised by Robinson and Berl 22 years earlier. Our study further addresses that question.

The Kraft and Martin Compliment Motives

Kraft and Martin (2001) have provided us with an excellent introduction to consumer complimenting behavior. After discussing the relationship between dissatisfaction and complaining and between satisfaction and complimenting they identified, based on their research, eight motives for complimenting behavior.

A. Delight or great satisfaction
B. Dissonance reduction
C. Reciprocity / social norms
D. Improve relationship with a service person
E. High involvement with product or service
F. Voting behavior to continue special services or products
G. To buffer complaints and increase effectiveness
H. Flattery: to get a tangible reward

Complimenting Behavior's Home Base is in Linguistics

Our interest in compliments is based in the consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction literature. However, compliments are primarily researched in linguistics.

Holmes (1986 p. 485) defines compliments as "... a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer."

Wolfson and Manes (1980) say

By definition a compliment involves a favorable judgment or opinion, saying something nice to another individual. In the case of friends who have been out of touch or of strangers meeting at a party, for example, it is easy to see how the giving of compliments may contribute to the reestablishment or establishment of the relationships. Similarly, by showing approval and giving reassurance, compliments serve to reinforce solidarity in situations where they are used as thanks or in day-do-day interactions between colleagues, neighbours or close friends. The fact that we have recorded cases in which people who did not receive an expected compliment expressed anxiety as to whether they (or their taste, abilities, etc.) were approved of suggests the importance of compliments not only in establishing or reestablishing but also in maintaining solidary relationships. (p. 399)

An examination of the structure of compliments reveals a remarkable lack of originality both in choice of lexical items and in syntactic structure. Compliments are, in fact, formulas, although this is not immediately obvious, partly because their patterning is not limited to a single level and partly because formulaic compliments serve a number of different discourse functions and may occur at almost any point within an interaction. ...whatever their immediate discourse functions may be (thanks, greetings, etc.) the underlying function of compliments involves the creation and maintenance of solidarity and that both the formulaic nature of compliments and the fact that their formulaic nature is not obvious are intimately connected to this function. (p. 392)

They go on to say "...the theme which runs through all interactions of which complimenting is a part is the establishment of reaffirmation of common ground, mutuality, or what Brown and Gilman (1960) have termed solidarity." (Wolfson and Manes 1980 p. 395)

Wolfson and Manes (1980 p. 395) add that "A compliment may occur at almost any point within a speech event and, indeed, may be completely independent of the utterances which immediately precede it."

They add

Furthermore, the fact is that compliments despite their formulaic structure frequently are exactly what they seem: sincere and spontaneous expressions of admiration occurring in situations where they appear to serve no immediate social function. Although they undoubtedly work to maintain solidarity, their immediate function is purely and simply that of complimenting." (p. 406)

They conclude saying

The great advantage and, we hypothesize, the underlying reason for the high degree of lexical and syntactic regularity in compliments is that the use of such a formula prevents misunderstanding and minimized differences which might interfere with the solidarity-creating function of compliments. However, in order for the compliment to succeed as a social strategy it must be interpreted as sincere and spontaneous, an interpretation which would be much less likely if people were to recognize compliments for the formulas they are. It is the combination of their freedom of distribution in discourse and their spontaneous occurrence outside of ritualized use which

Table 1
Herbert's Responses to Compliments

	Herbert
1 = APPRECIATION TOKEN. A verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment, acceptance not being tied to the specific topic.* That's a great cake; Thank you**	29.38%
2 = COMMENT ACCEPTANCE. Addressee accepts the complimentary force and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.* I like your hair long; Me too, I'm never getting it cut short again.* That's a sharp looking car; Yeah, I did the body work myself.* Tina, you have a gorgeous tan; It's my Empire Lake tan, I've been working on it all week.* You have such a nice house; It's given us a lot of pleasure.**	6.59%
3 = PRAISE UPGRADE. Addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient.* Well, you have a great haircut; That's because I have the greatest hairdresser in the world; who; me; boy, talk about being modest.* Looks like a good tan this year; Thanks, kinda makes me look even more handsome doesn't it.* I really like this soup; I'm a great cook.**	.38%
4 = COMMENT HISTORY. Addressee offers a comment (or series of comments on the object complimented; these comments differ from (2) in that the latter are impersonal, that is, they shift the force of the compliment from the addressee.* That's a cute shirt; Every time I wash it the sleeves get more and more stretched out.* Those are great shorts, Wendy; They have their own little underwears [sic] in them.* I like your shoes, they're cute; I got these two years ago, my dress shoes wore out, so I went to the mall with twenty dollars and got these, and everybody was telling me how dumb I was to get clogs in the winter, but I sure did wear them a lot.* I love that suit; I got it as Boscov's.**	19.3%
5 = REASSIGNMENT. Addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or to the object itself.* Debbie's (3-year-old-daughter) hair looks so cute in braids; Oh, I didn't do it, we were at Kretsmer's today.* I like that top; Thanks, it's not mine.* That's a beautiful necklace; It was my grandmother's.* You're really a skilled sailor; This boat virtually sails itself. **	3.01%
6= RETURN. As with (5) except that the praise is shifted (or returned) to the first speaker.* You're funny; No, you're a good audience.* I like you skirt, Sharon; Thanks, Deb , I like yours too.* You sound really good today; I'm just following your lead.**	7.25%

7 = SCALE DOWN. Addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.* That's a nice watch; It's all scratched up and I'm getting a new one.* Hey, that's a really nice car; You should have seen it two years ago when it was new, it didn't have the dents then.* That's a nice tie, I like the colors; Yeah, its a little too wide, I'd like to get it narrowed down.* Super chip shot; It's gone rather high of the pin.**	4.52%
8 = QUESTION. Addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment.* Nice sweater; You like it?* That dress looks real nice on you, Deb; Are you sure it's not too dressy for this place? I never know what to wear.* That's a nice outfit; What? are you kidding?* That's a pretty sweater; Do you really think so?**	4.99%
9 = DISAGREEMENT. Addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise; the first' speaker's assertion is in error.* Your hair looks good; It's too short.* Charlie, your haircut looks nice; %@$$#%#&! She cut it too short.* You look good in that outfit; No, I don't, I should go on a diet.* Your shirt is smashing; Oh, it's far too loud.**	9.98%
10 = QUALIFICATION. Weaker than (9); addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with "though," "but," "well," etc.* Your portfolio turned out great; It's all right, but I want to retake some pictures.* You look good in a moustache; Yeah, but it itches.* I like your haircut; But I wanted it even shorter.* Your report came out very well; But I need to redo some figures.**	6.59%
11 = REQUEST INTERPRETATION. Addressee, consciously or not, interprets the compliment as a request rather than as a simple compliment. Such responses are not compliment responses per se as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech as a compliment.* That's a nice bike; Let me know if you want to borrow it.* I like those pants; Well, you can borrow them anytime.**	2.92%
14 = NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. Addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment: The addressee either (a) responds with an irrelevant comment such as a topic shift or (b) gives no response.* That's a beautiful sweater. Did you finish the assignment for today?* Love that outfit, Ed. /silence/* You're the nicest person. Have you finished that essay yet?**	5.08%
* Herbert (1986) ** Herbert and Straight (1989)	

permit the compliment formula to pass unnoticed and thereby to succeed as a solidarity-producing interactional routine." (p. 407)

How Receivers of Compliments Reply

The linguistics literature also investigates how the receiver responds to a compliment. A compliment naturally elicits some type of response. Herbert (1986) and Herbert and Straight (1989) identify categories of responses that are in general use. These responses are given to compliments across the complete spectrum of complimenting behavior. Table 1 explains and gives examples of the 14 Herbert response categories to compliments as well as the frequencies for each response category. Herbert studied the full spectrum of compliments. Our study focuses only on consumer complimenting behavior. Do responses to *consumer* compliments follow the same pattern as responses to all compliments?

METHOD

Procedure and Respondents

Twenty-eight students in an undergraduate consumer behavior class, participating in an optional class research project for class credit, solicited consumer complimenting stories from family, friends, and acquaintances, obtaining responses from three respondents in each of 3 different age groups (under 30, 30-50, over 50) with one of each sex in each set of 3 plus at least one additional story of either sex. Ages ranged from 17 to 94. Complete respondent anonymity was guaranteed. The research findings were discussed in class as part of the consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior segment of the course.

Instrument

Each respondent received a packet containing a cover letter and instructions for providing a story. Responses were returned by regular mail or by email. The cover letter from the professor and students is found in Appendix 1. In addition to the cover letter instructions, shorter instructions were repeated at the start of each questionnaire as shown in Appendix 2.

Coding

Two of the authors served as coders, reading all the stories twice before doing any coding. During the second reading of the stories a code sheet was prepared for coding the information in the stories. Then the coders individually coded each of the stories. Finally, the coders, together, reconciled any coding differences. The code sheet is shown in Appendix 3.

Some stories were about compliments, some stories were about gratitude statements, and some stories were about both compliments and gratitude statements. This article focuses solely on consumer complimenting behavior and analyzes the compliment stories (whether or not a gratitude statement was present). We were not expecting to receive gratitude statements, especially so many of them, singly or in combination with compliments. We do not yet have a framework for thinking about gratitude statements.

Later in the paper when discussing the regression findings and in the coding form we use *comp/grat* to refer to any combination of compliment and gratitude statement. The coding protocol was the same whether for a compliment or for a gratitude statement. Variables 9 and 10 identified whether the story was about one or the other or both. The data were subsequently entered in an SPSS data file which was accessible only to the authors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents

A total of 209 complete stories were returned. However, only 169 qualified as consumer behavior complimenting stories. The 169 consumer compliment stories came from 96 females and 73 males ranging in age from 17 to 93 with a median age of 35.

Our Expanded Set of Kraft and Martin Motives for Complimenting

After reading our set of 169 complimenting stories we decided to use an extended and revised set of complimenting motives based on Kraft and Martin's (2001) set but expanded. We developed a set of 16 motives. Other than a little rewording, our complimenting motives (numbered 12-28 to match with the coding form in Appendix 3) include all the Kraft and Martin motives (A-H) listed earlier plus six additional motives suggested by the readings of the 169 stories.

k/mB: Dissonance reduction.
our15: Compliment reassures self they made a good choice - dissonance reduction.

k/mD: Improve relationship with a service person.
our19: Compliment intended to improve current relationship with seller.

k/mE: High involvement with product or service.
our24: Subject of compliment was high involvement, extraordinarily important.

k/mF: Voting behavior to continue special services or products.
our25: Compliment was a vote to continue special service or product.

k/mG: To buffer complaints and increase effectiveness.
our26: Compliment paired with complaint to buffer complaint.

Based on the attention in recent years to "delight" as being something more than great satisfaction we chose to use two motives, 12 and 13, in place of A, with motive 12 requiring an explicit expression of surprise coupled with great satisfaction and 13 requiring only great satisfaction. It is important to remember that 12 and 13 both involve great satisfaction but differ on whether surprise was present.

k/mA: Delight or great satisfaction.
our12: Compliment caused by delight (surprise plus great satisfaction).
our13: Compliment caused by great satisfaction but lacking surprise.

Based on our readings of the stories it seemed there was enough of a difference to warrant dividing C into motive 17 which was a compliment responding to a seller's positive comment and motive 18 which was a polite response, socially acceptable, courteous thing to do.

k/mC: Reciprocity / Social Norms.
our17: Compliment responding to seller's positive comment.
our18: Compliment was a polite response, socially acceptable, courteous thing to do.

Based on the reading of our stories it seemed that some flattery/ingratiation was intended for gain while other was solely because the complimenter was a "natural" flatterer or ingratiator. We divided H into 27 for flattery and ingratiation as a personal style and not for gain and 28 for flattery and ingratiation done hoping for gain.

k/mH: Flattery: to get a tangible reward.
our27: Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, just because person is a flatterer or ingratiator, not for gain.
our28: Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, hoping for gain (not reciprocity).

Our reading of the stories led us to think the following motives, not included in the Kraft and Martin motives, ought to be included in the set.

our14: Compliment because seller tried so hard to serve me.
our16: Compliment seeking positive response from seller.
our20: Compliment intended to improve future relationship with seller, to be recognized by the seller.
our21: Compliment given to improve future

Table 2
16 Complimenting Motives

Motives	Frequencies
12. Compliment caused by delight (surprise plus great satisfaction)	66
13. Compliment caused by great satisfaction but lacking surprise.	74
14. Compliment because seller tried so hard to serve me.	135
15. Compliment reassures self they made a good choice - dissonance reduction	4
16. Compliment seeking positive response from seller.	9
17. Compliment responding to seller's positive comment.	2
18. Compliment was a polite response, socially acceptable, courteous thing to do.	8
19. Compliment intended to improve current relationship with seller.	9
20. Compliment intended to improve future relationship with seller, to be recognized by the seller.	10
21. Compliment given to improve future service for others.	1
22. Gave compliment to be a role model for other people.	0
23. Complimented because giver enjoys giving compliments.	9
24. Subject of compliment was high involvement, extraordinarily important	47
25. Compliment was a vote to continue special service or product.	10
26. Compliment paired with complaint to soften complaint.	1
27. Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, just because person is a flatterer or ingratiator, not for gain.	9
28. Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, hoping for gain (not reciprocity)	5

service for others.
our22: Gave compliment to be a role model for other people.
our23: Complimented because giver enjoys giving compliments.

Our 16 complimenting motives and their frequencies are shown in Table 2. Kraft and Martin did not provide frequencies for their eight motives.

Exploring the Kraft and Martin Compliment Motives

Having expanded the set of complimenting motives from eight to 16, the question was then whether there was enough overlap between some of the 16 motives to warrant condensing the set. A correlation matrix showed that there was substantial correlation between some of the motives. Motive 22 had a frequency of zero. The remaining 15 motives were submitted to a principle components factor analysis. The rotated varimax solution yielded 8 factors. We used a criterion of .5 for factor loading inclusion. As shown in Table 2, motives 15 (4), 17 (2), 21 (1), 26 (1), and 28 (5) had low frequencies but were included in the analysis. The eight factor rotated matrix is in Table 3.

Table 3
Factor Structure - Rotated Component Matrix*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
12	-.078	-.897	-.139	-.008	.127	.122	-.124	-.040
13	-.025	.922	-.084	.019	.069	.089	-.077	.050
14	-.246	.026	-.369	-.439	.101	.441	-.097	-.003
15	-.078	-.111	-.036	-.211	.755	-.077	.004	.021
16	.771	.035	.010	.004	.126	.030	-.100	-.037
17	-.098	.184	.331	-.359	-.098	.099	-.534	-.295
18	-.110	.135	.216	-.216	-.099	.021	.770	-.115
19	.851	.044	.070	-.011	.079	.031	-.031	-.012
20	.234	.158	.273	.386	.641	.062	-.074	-.013
21	-.043	.074	-.001	-.068	.016	.069	-.029	.897
23	.212	-.070	.716	.160	.075	.002	.215	.085
24	-.015	-.106	-.315	.057	.278	.313	.335	-.304
25	-.134	.030	.047	.808	-.059	.053	-.095	-.083
26	-.047	.014	-.079	-.049	.076	-.889	-.012	-.066
27	-.047	.079	.830	-.021	.033	.024	-.082	-.061
28	.808	-.039	.059	-.046	-.210	-.079	.090	.020

*The numbers in the left column correspond to the complimenting motives from the coding protocol. See Table 2.

Understanding the factors

Motives 19, 28 and 16 load on factor 1, *seeking positive response from seller,* which explains 13.7% of the variance.

19 (.851) Compliment intended to improve current relationship with seller.
28 (.808) Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, hoping for gain (not reciprocity).
16 (.771) Compliment seeking positive response from seller.

Motives 13 and 12 load on factor 2, *great satisfaction,* which explains 11.1% of the variance. Great satisfaction did not exist for every respondent. However, if great dissatisfaction did exist it would be coded either 12 or 13 depending on whether surprise was mentioned; thus, subjects would have opposite answers for 12 and 13, as seen in the positive and negative loading of variables 12 and 13 on factor two.

13 (.922) Compliment caused by great satisfaction but lacking surprise.
12 (-.897) Compliment caused by delight

(surprise plus great satisfaction).

Motives 27 and 23 load on factor 3, *enjoys giving compliments, flattery, ingratiation,* which explains 10.7% of the variance.

27 (.830) Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, just because person is a flatterer or ingratiator, not for gain.
23 (.716) Complimented because giver enjoys giving compliments.

Motive 25 loads on factor 4, *continue special service or product,* which explains 7.8% of the variance.

25 (.808) Compliment was a vote to continue special service or product.

Motives 15 and 20 load on factor 5, *unnamed,* which explains 7.4% of the variance.

15 (.755) Compliment reassures self they made a good choice - dissonance reduction.
20 (.641) Compliment intended to improve future relationship with seller, to be recognized by the seller.

Motive 26 loads on factor 6, *buffer complaint,* which explains 7.1% of the variance.

26 (-.889) Compliment paired with complaint to soften complaint.

Motives 17 and 18 load on factor 7, *reciprocity and social norms,* which explains 6.9% of the variance.

17 (.770) Compliment responding to seller's positive comment.
18 (-.534) Compliment was a polite response, socially acceptable, courteous thing to do.

Motive 21 loads on factor 8, *improve future service for others,* which explains 6.4% of the variance.

21 (.897) Compliment given to improve future

service for others.

Motive 14, Compliment because seller tried so hard to serve me, loaded between -.439 and .441 on five of the eight factors. Due to the consumer setting of this study many compliments had something to do with substantial efforts by the seller to provide excellent service or product to the consumer resulting in this motive loading on several factors.

Motive 24, Subject of compliment was high involvement, extraordinarily important, loaded between -.315 and .335 on six of the eight factors. Remembering compliment situations with high involvement and extraordinary importance was common across all factors.

Motive 22, Gave compliment to be a role model for other people, had a frequency of zero.

Confirming The Kraft and Martin Motives

We were hoping that one or two factors might match up with the Kraft and Martin motives. To our delight (surprise coupled with great satisfaction) five of the factors were direct matches with Kraft and Martin motives and a sixth factor matched with half of a complex motive.

Factor eight is from a new motive not part of the Kraft and Martin motive set. Thus, there is a direct match in six of the seven possible matches. And, there is a partial match with the remaining factor. Motives 27 and 28 come from Motive H. Motive 27 loaded on factor 3 and is a match, while Motive 28 loaded on factor 1 and is not a match. Thus. of possible matches, our study confirms the Kraft and Martin motive structure in 6.5 out of 7 possible matches, a remarkable confirmation and totally unexpected.

Regression

We ran a multiple regression for each of the 8 factors for the dependent variables and regressed 15 independent variables on each factor using a stepwise approach. The results of the analysis produced few cases of significance. Where significance occurred, it supported the factor structure.

Table 4
Matching Factors with Kraft and Martin Motives

Factor	1-16 Motives (this study)	A-H Motives (Kraft and Martin)
1	19 28 16	D H new
2	13 12	A A
3	27 23	H new
4	25	F
5	15 20	B new
6	26	G
7	18 17	C C
8	21	new

For example, for factor 1, *seeking positive response from seller*, whether or not the compliment was focused on the business, employee, or person was highly predictive (ß= -.688, p< .020). The focus of the compliment accounted for an R^2 of .105 (p<.020).

An index of variables (involvement with the contact person, purchasing from the person or business, the intention of purchasing from the person or business, giving positive word of mouth about the person or business, becoming a loyal customer, and becoming friends with the contact person) which was compiled to explain the range from none to great satisfaction after the compliment was given, significantly predicted (ß=.122, p<.004) factor 2, *great satisfaction*. The strength of the compliment was also significantly predictive of great satisfaction (ß=.637, p<.013). The index and strength of compliment variables accounted for an R^2 of .245, (p<.001).

For factor 3, *enjoys giving compliments, flattery, ingratiation*, the following five variables:

the reason for interacting with the seller (ß=.145, p<.024); the focus of the compliment (ß=.417, p<.013); the number of times the compliment was given (ß=.763, p<.008); the motivation of the giver of the compliment (ß= -.400, p<.028); and whether or not the nature of the compliment was hedonistic (ß=.687, p<.044) were all significantly predictive. The above variables accounted for an **R^2** of .436 (p<.000).

For factor 4, *continued special service or product*, no variables were significantly predictive.

Factor 5, *left unnamed*, was highly predictive from the motivation of the giver of the compliment (ß=.490, p<.031), which accounted for an R^2 of .302 (p<.031).

For factor 6, *buffer complaint*, the focus of the compliment was highly predictive (ß=.213, p<.038), yielding an R^2 of .292 (p<.038).

For Factor 7, *reciprocity and social norms*, the number of times the compliment was given (ß=.954, p<.009) and the focus of the compliment

(ß=.478, p<.023) were highly predictive (R²=.205, p<.004).

For Factor 8, *improve future service for others*, the purpose for interacting with the seller was highly predictive (ß= -.019, p<.017) and accounted for an R² of .332 (p<.017).

Of the 15 key variables regressed on the eight factors, seven were significant on at least one factor. The regression tests predicted 11% for seeking positive response from the seller, 25% for great satisfaction, 44% for enjoys giving compliments, flattery, ingratiation, 30% for our unnamed factor, 29% for buffer complaint, 45% for reciprocity and social norms, and 33% for improve future service for others. According to Cohen (1977), an R² of .26 or above indicates a large effect size. Four of the effect sizes in this study were above this standard.

Exploring the Herbert Response Categories for Consumer Compliments

Our 169 consumer complimenting stories had very different response category frequencies than occurred in the Herbert studies. We propose that this difference occurred because Herbert's compliments were from the whole range of compliments while our 169 stories were strictly consumer compliments. Also, even though we explicitly prompted the respondent asking "How did the person or store react to the compliment?" only 64 of the 169 stories included any information regarding how the receiver responded to the compliment. Future studies focusing more directly on responses to consumer compliments may find that their frequencies more closely approach those of Herbert. Such studies would need to have receivers tell about their response to the compliment rather than have the compliment giver report the response.

Herbert and Straight (1989 p. 40) categorized responses to compliments into three categories shown below. Their percentages for responses to general compliments are in parentheses. Our percentages for responses to consumer compliments are in brackets. In general, two-thirds of sellers' responses to consumer compliments fall in the "Accepting" category.

Only after puzzling over this finding did we notice while confirming some of the wording of the response categories that Herbert (1986 p. 82) explained that "...acceptance, especially appreciation tokens, should be most common among strangers, that is, those who do not share solidarity; indeed, acceptances are the dominant pattern within this group." To the extent that most compliments are given to sellers who are relative strangers (no shared solidarity), our finding matches with Herbert's explanation.

Also, the "no acknowledgement" response is not countable in our data set because we did not ask whether the seller gave a response. We have no way of knowing how many of those who did not respond to the compliment were "no acknowledgement" and how many gave a response that was not remembered. The differences are large enough that the 5% "no acknowledgement" found in Herbert and Straight would not substantially alter our findings.

1. Accepting (36%) [65.6%]
    Appreciation Token (29.4%) [40.6%]
    Comment Acceptance (6.6%) [25%]

2. Deflating, deflecting, rejecting (31.4%) [12.6%]
    Reassignment (3%) [1.6%]
    Return (7.3%) [4.7%]
    Qualification (agreeing) (6.6%) [0%]
    Scale Down - Praise Downgrade (disagreeing) (4.5%) [6.3%]
    Disagreeing (10%) [0%]

3. ˌQuestioning, ignoring, reinterpreting (32.7%) [21.9%]
    Question (query or challenge) (5%) [0%]
    Praise upgrade (often sarcastic) (.4%) [9.4%]
    Comment history (19.3%) [12.5%]
    No acknowledgement (5.1%) [0%]
    Request interpretation (2.9%) [0%]

So What

The combination of our work and that of Kraft and Martin confirms not only that consumer

Table 6
Herbert's Categories of Responses to Compliments

	Herbert	Current
1 = APPRECIATION TOKEN. A verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment, acceptance not being tied to the specific topic.	29.38%	n=26 40.63%
2 = COMMENT ACCEPTANCE. Addressee accepts the complimentary force and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.	6.59%	n=16 25%
3 = PRAISE UPGRADE. Addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient.	.38%	n=6 9.38%
4 = COMMENT HISTORY. Addressee offers a comment (or series of comments on the object complimented; these comments differ from (2) in that the latter are impersonal, that is, they shift the force of the compliment from the addressee.	19.3%	n=8 12.5%
5 = REASSIGNMENT. Addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or to the object itself.	3.01%	n=1 1.56%
6= RETURN. As with (5) except that the praise is shifted (or returned) to the first speaker So's yours.	7.25%	n=3 4.69%
7 = SCALE DOWN. Addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.	4.52%	n=4 6.25%
8 = QUESTION. Addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment.	4.99%	n=0
9 = DISAGREEMENT. Addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise; the first' speaker's assertion is in error.	9.98%	n=0
10 = QUALIFICATION. Weaker than (9); addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with "though," "but," "well," etc.	6.59%	n=0
11 = REQUEST INTERPRETATION. Addressee, consciously or not, interprets the compliment as a request rather than as a simple compliment. Such responses are not compliment responses per se as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech as a compliment.	2.92%	n=0
14 = NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. Addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment: The addressee either (a) responds with an irrelevant comment such as a topic shift or (b) gives no response.	5.08%	n=0

compliments occur but that there are eight motives underlying the giving of consumer compliments. Furthermore, in some cultures, such as the United States and United Kingdom, once a consumer compliment is given, a response from the seller is expected, indeed it is required, by social practice. Failure to respond to the compliment is usually interpreted as rejection of the compliment and is a negative nonverbal response (rejection) of the consumer's compliment. (Herbert 1986) It is possible that a consumer who experiences satisfaction with a consumer-seller interaction might compliment the seller, only to receive back no response or an inadequate response signaling rejection of the compliment, with the end state being dissatisfaction, and the change being due solely to the seller's inappropriate response to the consumer's compliment. (Wolfson and Manes

1980 p.399) Further research on this fascinating interchange is encouraged.

From a philosophical and human kindness perspective, compliments assure others of their self worth, of their contribution, that they are an "okay" person, and of their solidarity with others. Others' compliments similarly reassure us. In our world where negative comments, signals, and symbolic expressions abound, every truthful compliment accentuates the positive and may offset the negative in another person's life. As each of us become authentic compliment givers, we, by our individual complimenting actions, increase the joy and happiness of those who receive our compliments.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on 169 consumer compliment stories we have confirmed the eight motives introduced by Kraft and Martin (2001). We also found that, for our 169 stories, comments from sellers in response to compliments do not match the standard response frequencies found in Herbert's research. We think the disparity is due to our stories being nonintimate stories which Herbert says are usually in the "accepting" category rather than spread through all the categories. Regression of 15 key variables on the variable scores of the eight motive factors found some significance but did not add understanding beyond what was already obvious in the factor analysis.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Appendix 1
Cover Letter

CONSUMER COMPLIMENTS STUDY

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR STUDENTS, FALL SEMESTER, 2000

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

There are lots of stories told about consumers complaining to stores or companies or sales people about something that the consumer didn't like. Often the complaints are very justified.

We don't hear very many stories about consumers complimenting stores or companies or sales persons.

Our class research project this semester is to gather consumers' stories about when they personally have complimented a store or company or sales person or manager.

Please tell us one, two, or three stories of your own personal experience when you have complimented a store or company or sales person or manager.

Please include lots of detail in your story so we can fully understand everything that happened. For example:
Were you buying something? or returning something?
Were you shopping for something?
What happened that led you to give the compliment?
Did you give the compliment face-to-face? by phone? by letter?
Tell us in detail about the compliment you gave.
How did the person or store react to the compliment?
What kind of involvement have you had with the person or store since you gave the compliment?
Tell us everything you can remember about the complimenting experience.

And, very important, tell us about your feelings during this complimenting experience.

For each story, tell us how old you were at the time of the store and how old you are now.

How long should the story be? As long as it takes you to tell us all about it. SMILE. If you are wondering whether to include some bit if information, definitely include it.

Thank you for your help.

Cordially,

Professor H. Keith Hunt and the students in the Consumer Behavior Class.

If you have any questions please contact Professor Hunt at:
Phone:
Fax:
Email:

Appendix 2
Instructions

CONSUMER STUDY

INSTRUCTIONS

You have probably heard or read stories about things consumers have done to stores, to sales people, to service people, and others to retaliate for poor customer service and poor product satisfaction.

No one seems to be telling stories about nice things consumers have done for companies or company employees that have pleased them.

Will you please share two or three stories with us.

Each story should tell of a specific instance when you did something nice for a company, for a sales person, or for a service person and why you did it.

It helps us most in our story gathering if you will tell us 2-3 quite different stories about three different companies or people, rather than three stories that are about the same.

We will appreciate as many stories as you are willing to tell us.

Return your stories to the student who asked you to participate.

Notice that your name does not appear on the story sheet. Your stories are anonymous once the student who obtained them puts them into the general pool.

Be sure to tell us as much of the story as you can because there is no way for us to come back to you for clarification or additional information.

Student's Name _____

This is my story of something I did nice for _____.

My age when I did the nice thing ____.
My current age ____.
Circle One: Male   Female

MY STORY

Remember as you tell your story to explain in detail what you did and explain why you did it.

_____

_____

_____(26 lines were provided, filling the sheet)

_____

Appendix 3
Code Sheet for Complimenting Stories

I. ID / DEMOGRAPHIC

___ ___ 1. student ID (01-28, 28 student participants)
___ ___ 2. respondent ID (01-??)
___ 3. story number, used for multiple stories from same respondent
___ ___ 4. age when happened
___ 5. sex of respondent
    1=female
    2=male
___ 6. respondent's relationship to student
    1=self
    2=immediate family [parents, siblings]
    3=extended family [grandparents, in-laws, aunts/uncles/cousins]
    4=non-family [friends, coworkers, etc.
___ 7. sex of receiver of comp/grat
    1=female
    2=male
    3=can't tell
    4=company or organization
___ 8. sex of third party
    1=female
    2=male
    3=can't tell
    4=company or organization

II. PRESENCE OF COMPLIMENT OR THANKS/GRATITUDE

___ 9. Was there a compliment?
    1-no
    2-yes
___ 10. Was there a thank you or gratitude statement?
    1=no
    2=yes

II/III. IS THIS A CONSUMER BEHAVIOR STORY?

___ 11. Consumer behavior includes the mental, emotional, and physical activities that people engage in when selecting, purchasing, using, and disposing of products and services to satisfy needs and desires.
    1=no
    2=yes

III. KRAFT/MARTIN VARIABLES

    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
___ 12. Compliment caused by delight (surprise plus great satisfaction)
___ 13. Compliment caused by great satisfaction but lacking surprise.
___ 14. Compliment because seller tried so hard to serve me.
___ 15. Compliment reassures self they made a good choice - dissonance reduction.
___ 16. Compliment seeking positive response from seller.
___ 17. Compliment responding to seller's positive comment.

Appendix 3 (cont.)

__ 18. Compliment was a polite response, socially acceptable, courteous thing to do.

__ 19. Compliment intended to improve current relationship with seller.

__ 20. Compliment intended to improve future relationship with seller, to be recognized by the seller.

__ 21. Compliment given to improve future service for others.

__ 22. Gave compliment to be a role model for other people.

__ 23. Complimented because giver enjoys giving compliments.

__ 24. Subject of compliment was high involvement, extraordinarily important

__ 25. Compliment was a vote to continue special service or product.

__ 26. Compliment paired with complaint to soften complaint.

__ 27. Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, just because person is a flatterer or ingratiator, not for gain.

__ 28. Compliment was flattery, ingratiation, hoping for gain (not reciprocity)

IV. VARIABLES SUGGESTED IN INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

__ 29. Why were you interacting with the seller?
   1=buying something
   2=returning/exchanging something
   3=shopping for something
   4=complaining
   5=correcting mistake by seller
   6=returning for repair

__ 30. Was the comp/grat given to the contact person or to a 3rd party?
   1=given to contact person
   2=given to third party
   3=given to both (contact person and third party)

__ 31. How did the person receiving the comp/grat respond?
   Herbert categories (see Table 1 for Herbert categories)

__ 32. If a third party was involved, how did the third party respond?
   Herbert categories

__33. How great was the imposition on the person receiving the comp/grat?
   1=no imposition, just doing job
   2=small imposition
   3=moderate imposition
   4=substantial imposition

__34. How much effort did the giver go to to give the comp/grat?
   1=no effort
   2=very little effort
   3=some effort
   4=substantial effort

__35. To what does the comp/grat statement refer?
   1=gift given
   2=something special, not part of job, more than normal for job
   3=reward given
   4=service given as part of job
   5=favor given

__36. How did person respond to comp/grat statement?
   1=not accepted
   2=accepted

__37. For comp/grat given to contact person, did you give the comp/grat face-to-face, by phone, by letter? (this includes the oral or written code)
   1=face-to-face
   2=by phone
   3=by letter or email

Appendix 3 (cont.)

    4=face-to-face plus phone
    5=face-to-face plus letter/email
    6=phone plus letter/email
    7=other

__38. For comp/grat given to third party, did you give the comp/grat face-to-face, by phone, by letter?
    1=face-to-face
    2=by phone
    3=by letter or email
    4=face-to-face plus phone
    5=face-to-face plus letter/email
    6=phone plus letter/email
    7=other

__39. Meant to give comp/grat but never did.
    1=meant to comp/grat face-to-face
    2=meant to comp/grat by phone
    3=meant to comp/grat by letter

__40. How strongly did the person or store react to the comp/grat?
    1=no reaction
    2=mild reaction
    3=moderately strong reaction
    4=strong reaction
    5=gushing super-strong reaction.
    6=can't tell from story

__41. How did the person or store react to the comp/grat?
    1=no reaction
    2=acknowledged it but that was all
    3=thanked for comp/grat, other mild response
    4=strong thank you
    5=stronger than strong thank you
    6=can't tell from story

__42. Had any involvement with contact person after the comp/grat was given?
    1=no
    2=yes
    3= can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes

__43. Have purchased from the person/business after giving the comp/grat?
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes

__44. When the opportunity next arises do you intend to purchase from this person/business?
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes

__45. Have given positive word of mouth about person or business after giving the comp/grat?
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes

Appendix 3 (cont.)

__46. Have become loyal customer of person or business after giving the comp/grat.
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes
__47. Have become friends with person after giving the comp/grat.
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes
__48. Were any feelings during the comp/grat experience reported in the story?
    1=no
    2=yes
    3=can't tell
    4=almost certainly no
    5=almost certainly yes
__49. If feelings were reported, how positive or negative?
    1=very positive
    2=somewhat positive
    3=slightly positive
    4=slightly negative
    5=somewhat negative
    6=very negative

V. OTHER CODES

__50. Was comp/grat given with the intent to make the person receiving the comp/grat perform their job better?
    1=no
    2=yes right now
    3=yes in the future
__51. Pollyanna, was comp/grat given to "make her day a little brighter," not because of actual comp/grat-able behavior.
    1=no
    2=yes
__52. Hedonism - Was the comp/grat given to make the giver feel good about them self?
    1=altruistic, no self benefit
    2=slightly
    3=somewhat
    4=very much
53. deleted
__54. Was comp/grat for one time or for repeated times?
    1=one
    2=more than one
    3=can't tell
__55. Was comp/grat for service only, combined service and product, or product only?
    1=not relevant
    2=service only
    3=mostly service, some product
    4=equally combined service and product
    5=mostly product, some service
    6=product only

Appendix 3 (cont.)

__56. In the story, did the giver say they expected a gracious reply?
    1=no
    2=yes
__57. How strong was the comp/grat?
    1=neutral
    2=slightly strong
    3=somewhat strong
    4=very strong
    5=can't tell
__58. How motivated was the giver of the comp/grat?
    1=not relevant
    2=not at all motivated
    3=slightly motivated
    4=somewhat motivated
    5=very motivated
    6=can't tell
__59. Overall, the focus of the comp/grat was
    1=Not relevant
    2=primarily on the business, quality of product/service
    3=primarily on the employee, quality of service
    4=primarily personal, friendliness
    5=altruistic, to make person feel good, not tied to quality
    6=can't tell
60-to-end. What was category setting for which the comp/grat was given?
note: each statement is an independent variable and receives a 0 or 1 coding.
note: there will usually be only one code for each story
note: format - needs to all be on one coding page
    1=no
    2=yes
__60. Auto/vehicle purchase
__61. Auto/tires, parts purchase
__62. Auto/vehicle repair
__63. Restaurant
__64. Fast food
__65. Grocery store
__66. Hardware / home repair
__67. Department/clothing store
__68. Discount store (Kmart, WalMart, Fred Meyer, Target, etc)
__69. Electronics / computer / video store
__70. Financial - bank, insurance, charge card
__71. Jewelry store
__72. Specialty store (sports, shoe, kitchen, book, scrapbook, pet, yarn, dry cleaner, bakery, music, guitar, Post Office, etc.)
__73. Appliance/furniture purchase
__74. Appliance/furniture repair
__75. Wedding clothing
__76. Wedding supplies
__77. Hotel / motel
__78. Health related (doctor, eyes, nurse, hospital, pharmacist)
__79. Communications (TV, cable, phone)
__80. Purchase by phone or internet or catalog
__81. Home remodel and repairs
__82. Transportation (airlines, reservations, taxis)
__83. Personal service (hair, nails, massage, trainer, coach, photographer, etc.)
__84. Other - describe: