CS/D&CB: THE NEXT 25 YEARS

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ABSTRACT

This article looks back at several thought-provoking articles from ten and more years ago and focuses on interesting areas of research which should be focused on in the next 25 years. Thirteen different directions from a wide variety of areas are proposed, some are new research areas, and some are areas which have been mentioned in previous review articles. Hope is expressed that each researcher taking on one or two extra research topics over the next few years could make a big difference in positively impacting our field.

INTRODUCTION

In trying to apply the proverbial crystal ball to the next 25 years in CS/D&CB, it would be very helpful to see where we were 25 years ago and what we have accomplished since then (I can almost hear Santayana whispering in my ear "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it").

It is hard to imagine that when the Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior (*JCS/D&CB*) started out in 1988, there was no social media, no blogging, no internet as we know it today, PC's were still in their infancy (Motorola was the chip of choice and not Intel), and no smartphones. Research was done in the library, and questionnaires were mailed out to respondents, who would then mail them back (or not). Trying to predict how technology will impact the field is next to impossible other than to state that it will have a dramatic influence on research in the next 25 years.

What we can do is to look at some of the issues that were raised in previous years, learn from how they were handled and try to predict where we need to be headed. Very early papers on future research were fairly basic due to the paucity of research (Andreasen 1988), but 20 years ago in volume 6 of the *JCS/D&CB* several attempts were made to predict the future direction of the field. Over the past decade we also have witnessed a number of papers that have taken a broader look at where we are now and where we need to go (Davidow 2003a; Gelbrich and Roschk 2011; Orsinger, Valenti and de Angelis 2010). It would seem that we now know a lot more than we did 25 years ago.

But looks can be deceiving. If we know so much, then why are complaint rates still what they were 30 years ago (2-5%) in many countries? Why do 60% of companies (CCA 2007) not respond to customer complaints, despite it being so profitable? Why do most companies still not measure what a lost customer is worth and still treat complaint handling as a loss center rather than a profit center? We are talking about customer centric organizations today, but we have such a long way to go. Here are a baker's dozen of directions I propose that we take in the next 25 years.

Direction 1: Implementation Issues

Managers are not implementing the research. Is an implementation problem because of the measures and methodology or is the problem with the managers? This issue is not new. Swan and Trawick (1993) wondered what we do with the results once they have been gathered. Grainer et al. (2003) termed this the billion dollar sinkhole, due to the lack of results. Hunt (1993) and Woodruff (1993) both stressed a need for academics to work together with managers. How do we know where the problem is, and how can we fix it? Is implementation even an academic problem? Shouldn't we just be focusing on the research? This question may split researchers down the middle with some saying just to focus on the research and not let managers dictate what gets researched. Other researchers might argue that if it can't be implemented successfully, then what good is theory. Hunt (1993) stressed the need to improve our outreach to the managerial community, claiming that both sides needed each other, but neither side is rewarded for benefitting the other. Perhaps what is necessary is some focused multidisciplinary research, similar to what we are seeing between IT and services. There is plenty of room for improvement while looking back. Hindsight is always 20-20 vision. We need better (more effective) measures that can be implemented, and we need better communication with managers to see where the implementation issues lie. There is a key function for *JCS/DO&CB* (and the biennial conferences) in disseminating cutting edge and multidisciplinary research.

Direction 2: Kano's Two Factor Model

There have only been a few studies looking at the two factor model that Herzberg et al. (1959) used to revolutionize the field of job satisfaction. Intuitively, the idea that not all factors impact satisfaction/dissatisfaction the same way is very appealing and certainly important for understanding customer behavior (Kano et al. 1984). We all can understand that not finding a parking space can cause dissatisfaction. However, can an extra parking space be something that can cause satisfaction? We seem to have become fixated on the disconfirmation model. Can the two factor model give the disconfirmation model a run for its money? Is one better than the other? Does it depend on certain factors? What are they? Is there a contingency model where we could determine the suitability of one over the other depending on intervening factors? What does this do to the satisfaction measurement industry?

Direction 3: Satisfaction Measurement in General

Is there a difference between the theoretical satisfaction construct and the managerial satisfaction construct? Woodruff (1993) felt that we needed phenomenological research into the construct, and translational research to focus on the implementation. Where does the IPA (Importance Performance Analysis) matrix come into play?

It seems logical that a good satisfaction measure should take into account those features that are important to me (or my customer segment, in general). This means determining what customers' value (for instance, using value maps). Different segments have different needs and different features that are important to them. It is not logical that one size fits all. For some consumers, speed may be more important, for other consumers it may be gas mileage. Different segments have different priorities, and therefore will reveal satisfaction differently.

Can we assume that every item of the satisfaction index has equal weighting? Implicit in using a multi item scale to measure satisfaction is that each item is of the same importance. This is usually not the case. If I am using a multi item scale, I should ask customers to assign weights to each item (for instance using a constant sum scale dividing 100 'importance' points among the items).

Isn't satisfaction a relative term? I am happy with the performance today, but tomorrow a new supplier offers a better deal or a better service, and suddenly I am less satisfied. The performance hasn't changed, but my perception has, and that changes my satisfaction. Shouldn't satisfaction surveys also be relative?

Lastly, I would suggest looking at the scale. Most questionnaires use a 5 point rather than a 7 or 9 or 10 point scale. This causes problems in determining whether the scale is interval based (7, 9 or 10 point scales tend to exhibit interval scale properties) or ordinal based (5 or fewer point scales). Alternatively, implementation of Thurstone scaling (Case 5) has been shown to adjust data derived from ordinal scales to exhibit interval scale properties.

There is a huge difference in the calculation and computation of an ordinal scale. For instance a consumer gives a 4 (out of 5) on a satisfaction scale. Does that score mean slightly above average (3) or slightly below excellent (5). We don't know for sure, thus there is a potential bias in the answers. By using a 7 point scale (or better yet a 9 or 10 point scale), we can better deal with the problem. For example, slightly above average is 5 (out of 7), slightly below excellent is 6 (of 7). There is a clearer delineation of the opinions of the respondent which is arguably non-existent in a 5 point scale. This topic has been discussed before in the literature, it is not a marketing or service problem. But it is a problem in analyzing results. An ordinal scale cannot use metric analysis such as average and standard deviation. Have we let expediency trump excellence?

Direction 4: Intervening Variables

There are a number of intervening variables that may influence satisfaction or dissatisfaction and complaining behavior that need to be looked at in more depth. Among them are the following: *trust* (Garbarino and Johnson 1999), *commitment* (Gustafsson, Johnson and Roos 2005), *engagement* (Van Doorn et al. 2010), *involvement* (Goodman et al. 1995), and *social bonding* (Oliver 1999).

Intuitively, these variables would all seem to have a positive relationship with satisfaction. Could they be confounding variables? Their existence would magnify the satisfaction, while the lack of their existence would have no effect. Which of them would have the biggest impact (if any)? Can we differentiate between them? Do they moderate or mediate relationships between satisfaction and repeat purchase/loyalty? Do they increase our understanding or our company's performance?

Direction 5: Social Media, Complaint Behavior and Satisfaction

What about social media and social influence (Malafi et al. 1993)? Does espousing a position in social media lock consumers in to a position or attitude (Davidow 2003b)? If I tell everyone about how great a company is, does that make me more loyal to the company? Does using social media cause a consumer to exaggerate the case to make the consumer more of a "good guy"?

We need to focus more on the communication channels customers will be using to communicate with companies, and will there be different (separate) channels for complaints. For instance, early social media research (Grainer et al. 2003) found that complainers used telephone (over 60%) much more than internet and e-mail (about 2%). The expectation was that as time went on, more consumers would be using internet and e-mail as opposed to telephone. However the latest CCA research (2007) showed that telephone has remained steady at 62%, while internet and e-mail have only increased to around 6%. Evidently, consumers feel more comfortable getting a real-time response and dialogue that they believe they cannot get elsewhere.

From a strategic perspective, which organizational department should handle the social media? If it is not the complaint handling department, then how do (or should) organizations make sure that social media is on the same page as complaint handling. If social media gives customers who complain more than the complaint handling department, it stands to reason that consumers will not complain to the complaint handling department but to the social media department. How do we justify two departments doing the same function? These are important issues which need to be addressed.

Direction 6: Multi-Cultural Research

With the rise in social media, and the global economy, there is a perception that everybody will look at things the same way. This is obviously not true, and an effort must be made to see how different cultures see CSD&CB in different ways. There have been a few studies looking at multicultural effects, but they have been few and far between. Can we develop a multicultural framework, developing specific guidelines as to what the main variables are, and how changes in those variables could change the results? We are not there yet, but it would be an interesting challenge going forward. I look forward to seeing more multicultural studies in the future (e.g., taking advantage of the increasing global presence in the biennial CS/D&CB conferences) looking at complaint behavior differences between different cultures. A major (3 country or more) multi-cultural study could help us focus on the strong variables (applicable across most or all cultures) and the weaker variables (varies widely between cultures). What about differences between individualistic and collectivist societies?

Direction 7: New Methodologies

Given the changing complexity of the marketplace, and technology, can we develop new ways of looking at CSD&CB that could help us triangulate past results, as well as offer us new insights into consumer behavior that current methodologies are unable to do? On the one hand, we are talking about advanced statistical methods, neural networks, and perhaps different uses of current analytical techniques (e.g., conjoint analysis, Logit, etc.), while on the other hand, using new methods of qualitative research, and even case studies to look at problems in a different light. Hunt (1993) has been calling for an increased use of stories in CSD&CB research, citing the example of "bothered" being a better choice of word than dissatisfied to capture consumer feelings. I would also add qualitative questions to satisfaction measures to better capture what is going on behind the numbers.

I would like to see more combined dyadic studies, for instance, looking at consumer reactions to perceived organizational responses and matching their response to objective data from how the company actually responded. This would allow us to see how consumers evaluate the objective organizational response on a case by case perspective. Too many times companies rely on their own objective measures without taking into account consumer's subjective responses. This would apply to measurement of satisfaction as well, and this would also mean a significant increase in the level of cooperation between managers and researchers which would be a nice value add.

Direction 8: Internal S/D&CB

This would be a subset of CS/D&CB. If we are looking at consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction, then one of the critical antecedents would be employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This would be a direct extension of Hunt (1993). How do we handle internal measurements as opposed to other fields such as Organizational Behavior (OB) or Human Resources (HR). Can we link between the two measures? Can we show that an improvement in employee satisfaction will improve customer satisfaction, loyalty and repurchase? How do we handle complaints in the workplace? Again, can we offer any value add to what is already known in OB or HR? Should this be multidisciplinary research? Our journal and conferences are mostly multidisciplinary anyway; can we leverage that into a major strength?

Direction 9: Consumer Wellbeing

Can making informed choices regarding satisfaction and dissatisfaction improve consumer wellbeing (Sirgy et al. 2007)? Granbois (1993) felt that it was becoming clear that consumers should complain and seek redress for their own good. The marketplace would be optimal <u>only</u> if consumers actively provide feedback to sellers. This active feedback is what enables companies to make the adjustments necessary to respond properly to complainants and not lose market share. Hunt (1993) felt that we should expand our focus to include many more aspects of S/D&CB, specifically mentioning government, B2B (also supported by Swan and Trawick 1993), and others.

Why don't more customers complain if it is so beneficial to them? (In a similar vein, we could look at blood donations, an activity with positive social and physical benefits, where consumer engagement is also very low). Despite many attempts to answer this question, we still do not have a definitive answer. Is it simply cost/benefit, or is there another reason, such as emotion or time related? After 30 years of research, we still report only 2-5% of dissatisfied consumers actually complaining (CCA 2007).

Direction 10: Multifaceted Satisfaction

Can we link satisfaction with the employee versus satisfaction with the company or service? The employee did a great job maneuvering between the company policies to get me a solution that I should have been able to get without any problem. In this case, I am very happy with the employee, but not so happy with the company. What happens to the company when an employee leaves? Hairdresser, advisor, trainer, service provider? What industries are more vulnerable than others? What can be done? This might be similar to transaction satisfaction as opposed to overall satisfaction. Can we construct a percentages tree showing all the different and relevant connections between the various components of satisfaction, with relative strengths? We could then determine what percentage each type of satisfaction is relative to overall satisfaction.

Direction 11: Venus and Mars in Satisfaction

The 8/80 principle, based on research cited in Meyer and Schwager (2007), states that while 80% of managers think they are giving their customers a great experience, only 8% of customers would agree. Why does this happen (managers are from Mars, consumers are from Venus?!?) and what can managers do about it? Again, while this might appear to be an implementation issue, perhaps there is a theoretical reason why managers would evaluate the customer experience differently from the consumers? Is this context specific? Is there any way to bridge the gap between managers and customers? What are the implications for managers, and what could they be doing differently?

Direction 12: Do We Really Know What We Think We Know?

In his comprehensive review of the literature, Davidow (2003a) listed seventeen propositions for future research in the field. Ten years later, very few of the propositions have been tested. Can an organization respond too fast? Do managers and customers view apologies in a different fashion? What is the role of facilitation in complaint handling? Which response dimension is the most critical in handling a customer complaint? There are major holes in what we think we know about complaint behavior, with researchers seemingly moving forward and beyond in search of new directions, leaving behind critical unanswered questions. We need to solidify our hold on what we think we know while at the same time reaching to the stars for new areas of research.

Direction 13: Satisfaction, Word of Mouth, and Delight

Given the growing importance of delight in the new business model in order to maintain existing customers and encourage them to be apostles for bringing in new customers, we need to focus on the factors that raise a customer from mere satisfaction to delight. At what point does a customer start talking (communicating) with his friends and community about a specific company. Assuming a U shaped curve (customers will talk more about negative and positive experiences than they will about average experiences), can we determine how much above (or below) average we need to be to start the feedback loop? How do we measure delight? Is delight the new satisfaction? How do we push a customer from satisfaction to delight? Is it just a matter of doing more, or is it doing different things? This would tie in very nicely with direction 2 towards Kano's two factor model, as well as answering Hunt's (1993) call for more satisfaction research.

CONCLUSION

Writing this article has brought into focus that certain things never change. I would like to stress the tremendous impact that H. Keith Hunt has had on the field, not only from an organizational and administrative aspect, but mainly from an academic perspective. His ideas have been the basis for much of the research that has been undertaken and even more of which is still in progress. His exhortation “If it isn't fun, don't do it!” also continues to inspire scholars.

JCS/D&CB has been doing an incredible job of publishing cutting edge topics before they become mainstream. While polished, comprehensive literature reviews seem to go to journals with larger circulations, this journal has been one of the first to look at innovative topics (see for example the companion piece by Debra Perkins in this journal). By focusing on cutting edge research, and multidisciplinary research the journal is well situated to continue to innovate through the next 25 years.

Several of the topics in this article were stressed 20 years ago as areas of future research. In some cases, the research has not gathered much momentum (Implementation, Consumer Wellbeing), and in other cases it has not had the hoped for benefits (Industry outreach, the role of emotions). In addition to this, several new topics have been highlighted in this article. It is my hope that if every reader would take one or two topics to think and write about, in addition to their regular research topics, then we could make a huge impact on the field. Together, we can make this dream into a reality!

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