

CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

Understanding why dissatisfied consumers complain the way they do is important from theoretical, managerial, and public policy perspectives. To a great extent, research into consumer complaining behavior (CCB) has been carried out primarily in developed countries; consequently, it has had a strong U.S. and European orientation. In order to broaden all perspectives, a conceptual model which integrates different streams of CCB is herein developed and used as the reference point for an empirical study of a segment of young adult Brazilian consumers.

The conceptual framework spawned 16 testable research hypotheses which were addressed by operationalizing a simple one-factor (two levels) between-subjects experimental design. A total of 480 graduate students enrolled at 2 major universities in Brazil were exposed to a written scenario describing a restaurant experience. Findings revealed that the level of consumer dissatisfaction, attitude towards complaining, self-confidence, and perceived likelihood of success influence complaint intentions, as well as word-of-mouth and switching intentions, but in different ways. Analysis also revealed that consumer self-confidence was the main driver of intention to complain, while dissatisfaction intensity proved to be the most relevant antecedent for both negative word-of-mouth and switching intentions. Finally, attitude toward complaining was shown to moderate the relationship between dissatisfaction intensity and the intent to complain.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars as well as practitioners have begun to recognize that the study of consumer responses to their marketplace dissatisfactions has significant implications for such key phenomena as repurchase intentions and brand loyalty (Day 1984), market feedback mechanisms and new product development (Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987) and consumer welfare (Andreasen 1984). Firms can heighten their customer retention rate, protect against diffusion of negative word-of-mouth, and minimize other problems by effectively managing post-purchase consumer dissatisfaction (Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998). Moreover, complaining sometimes *increases* long-term satisfaction by virtue of the relief brought about by the mere venting of the reason(s) for dissatisfaction (Nyer 2000).

From the point of view of most business enterprises, it is unfortunate that most dissatisfied consumers exhibit *indirect behaviors* (such as negative word-of-mouth or simple exit behaviors) in the face of dissatisfaction, rather than complaining directly to the offending firm. Empirical studies report that at least two thirds fail to inform firms of their dissatisfaction (e.g., Richins 1983; Andreasen 1984).

Consumer reactions to dissatisfaction have been found to consist of a variety of responses that they adopt in order to deal with a particular dissatisfying situation, including complaining to the seller, communicating negative word-of-mouth to friends and associates, complaining to the manufacturer,

switching suppliers and taking legal action (Singh 1990; Voorhees and Brady 2005).

Despite the potentially high strategic importance of fully understanding and predicting consumer reactions to dissatisfaction, our current knowledge is limited. Upon perusal of the non-proprietary Marketing literature on consumer responses to dissatisfaction, it appears that the focus has been placed primarily on the *identification of various determinants of consumer complaining behavior* (hereafter referred as to CCB). This is not wrong, per se, but we are of the opinion that several important gaps in our knowledge continue to exist. Specifically, we find the following gaps:

- (1) most literature focuses only on identifying determinants, not comparing their impacts;
- (2) the literature is fragmented, most studies consider only two or three determinants and, sometimes, fail to consider major ones;
- (3) the role of possibly influential individual difference variables such as personality has rarely been a central issue;
- (4) most research has tended to utilize simplistic response styles; and
- (5) most studies focus only on those clients that register their dissatisfaction, complaining directly to a firm, and do not consider those who spread negative word-of-mouth or silently switch suppliers.

Such gaps undermine the goals of systematic and cumulative research into this important area.

The study to be described in this article aims to establish the impact of several *perceptions* (i.e., attitude towards

complaining, perceived likelihood of a successful complaint), several *personal factors* (i.e., alienation and self-confidence) and several *levels of dissatisfaction* on CCB. In what follows, the terms “complaint behavior” or “complaint responses” are used to imply all plausible consumer reactions to dissatisfaction, while the terms “complaint actions” or “complaint intentions” are intended to connote complaining behavior directed to the seller or manufacturer.

Research into CCB has, with few exceptions, been carried out in developed countries; consequently, it has had a strong US and European orientation (Liu and McClure 2001; Blodgett, Hill, and Bakir 2006). This fact raises questions as to the transportability of its findings to developing country markets. Large numbers of corporations have or are currently in the process of preparing to enter the markets of developing countries such as Brazil. Indeed, Brazil has received increasing amounts of foreign investment, especially from the U.S., in recent years. Can CCB researchers confidently advise firms newly entering Brazil on what might drive dissatisfied Brazilian customers to express their complaint, to switch companies or to spread negative word-of-mouth? More generally, are dissatisfied customers in developing countries more or less likely to engage in complaining, switching, negative word-of-mouth behaviors, or to seek legal action against the offending firm? Answers to such questions as these are more important today than ever before.

To date, however, non-proprietary, published CCB research, especially empirical studies outside the U.S. and European settings, has been limited with the exception of a recent focus on highlighting Asian cultures (Chiu, Tsang, and Yang 1988; Huang 1994; Watkins and Liu 1996; Liu, Watkins, and Yi 1997; Kim, Kim, Im, and Shin 2003; Chelminski 2003). With the exceptions of Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia and Sorensen (1991), comparing voiced complaint

intentions between US and Puerto Rican consumers, and Hernandez and Fugate (2004), analyzing dissatisfied retail consumers in Mexico, a thorough literature search revealed no study focusing on Central or South American CCB. Therefore, it is of practical as well as theoretical importance to analyze CCB within a developing country of South American culture, and Brazil has been chosen for this purpose.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

This section summarizes germane literature and develops a set of research hypotheses that describe how personality, perceptual, and attitudinal variables influence complaint intentions.

Consumer Complaining Behavior

Dissatisfied consumers engage in several different behaviors, such as negative word-of-mouth, exit, complaining to the firm, appealing to a third party, or even repeat purchasing as usual. Hirschman's work (1970) established the "Exit, Voice and Loyalty" model, where Exit means that a consumer voluntarily and actively intends to terminate an exchange relationship by switching patronage to another retailer; Voice suggests an attempt to change rather than escape from a state of affairs; and Loyalty occurs when consumers neither exit nor voice but instead "suffer in silence confident that things will soon get better" (Hirschman 1970, p. 38). Later, Day and Landon (1977) suggested that this conceptualization was simplistic and listed nine broad categories for alternative responses to unsatisfactory experiences, including complaining to friends and relatives (negative word-of-mouth) and seeking redress from third parties. They included these defining categories in a two-dimensional taxonomy of responses consisting of public (e.g., voicing complaints

directly) and private (e.g., word of mouth) dimensions. Taking it one step further, Singh (1988) published an article showing that complaint responses can be appropriately conceptualized as consisting of three distinct dimensions: voice responses, including actions directed toward the seller; private responses, that is, actions involving stopping patronage and negative word-of-mouth communication about the offending seller; and third party responses, including actions directed toward external agencies. This three-tier structure captures well the various responses to dissatisfaction, and it is supported by empirical data and externally validated by discriminant evidence (e.g., Singh 1990; Singh and Pandya 1991; Liu et al. 1997).

However, since the current Brazilian legal system established to deal with consumer complaining actions are recognized as ineffective and much too slow, Brazilian consumers do not often consider the possibility of bringing their complaints before third parties (courts). Based on the literature mentioned above (Singh 1988; Day and Landon 1977) and on qualitative research data (in-depth interviews) secured prior to conducting the study to be summarized in this article, three possible Brazilian consumer complaining responses will be considered: complaint intentions (toward the company), negative word-of mouth, and switching intentions.

It is important to highlight that the literature on CCB suggests that consumers often utilize a wide variety of responses that can be successfully categorized into the preceding three dimensions (negative word-of-mouth, switch company or complaint toward the seller) (Singh 1988). For this reason, it is desirable to explicitly recognize and consider such responses. As Singh and Widing (1991, p. 39) argued "these dimensions are not posited as mutually exclusive responses. Instead, the framework

accepts that consumers may often engage in multiple responses.”

Our study primarily focused on explaining what drives a consumer's behavior immediately following an unsatisfactory consumer experience. According to Blodgett and Granbois (1992), a dissatisfied consumer who voices his/her complaint initiates a dynamic process, or a multi-stage event, in which success or failure in obtaining perceived justice early-on determines whether and what kind of complaining behavior occurs over time. These authors focused their attention on the later stages, after a dissatisfied customer voiced the complaint directly toward the seller. They found that perceived justice resulting from early-stage voicing significantly predicted the negative word-of-mouth and repurchase intention. However, as Boote (1998, p. 146) argued, in that model “voice comes first, and all other CCB types are dependent on perceptions of justice relating to it.” So, as Huppertz (2003, p. 133) stated, it is “necessary to examine all forms of CCB responses in the first-stage [right after a dissatisfaction episode] as well as in latter-stage complaining [after the consumer's complaint or firm's complaint handling]” and analyze what drives the consumer during the first-stage (i.e., right after an unsatisfactory experience) to complain toward the seller, switch company, spread negative word-of-mouth or to do nothing after an unsatisfactory buying or consuming event. We concur.

Antecedents of Consumer Complaining Behavior

The idea of linking consumer responses to the intensity of dissatisfaction is not new. The first model proposing such a relationship was put forward by Landon (1977). More recent research agreed with Landon's contentions (Maute and Forrester 1993). Using severity of the perceived

problem as a surrogate for intensity of dissatisfaction, these scholars found a direct relationship between intensity and complaining behavior. Translating this into our study, we similarly expect that as Brazilian consumers experience higher levels of dissatisfaction, the result will be a higher probability to engage in complaint behavior. More specifically, we propose the following set of research hypotheses:

H1: The higher the level of dissatisfaction, the higher the impact on intent to complain.

H2: The higher the level of dissatisfaction, the higher the impact on spreading negative word-of-mouth.

H3: The higher the level of dissatisfaction, the higher the impact on intent-to-switch.

In contrast, proponents of what might be characterized as a process approach see perceived dissatisfaction as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for explaining or predicting consumer complaint responses. Here, perceived dissatisfaction is hypothesized to be an emotional state that motivates consumers to undergo a process (Day 1984). This process results in specific complaint responses which are proposed to depend not so much on how strongly emotions are felt but more on consumer perceptions and attitudes (Singh and Widing 1991). In partial support of this point of view, Bearden (1983) found that only 15% of complaint reports could be explained by the intensity level of dissatisfaction.

Additional factors are likely to influence such a complex behavior. In general, while scholars have found weak relationships between demographic variables and complaint responses (Gronhaug and Zaltman 1981), they have at the same time found evidence indicating the strong influence

of personal variables such as attitude towards complaining, consumer alienation from the marketplace, perceived likelihood of a successful complaint, and consumer self-confidence.

Zeroing in on attitude towards the act of complaining, we know that it has been conceptualized as an overall affective reaction towards the “goodness” or “badness” of complaining to sellers (Singh and Widing 1991). The attitude construct is not specific to a particular seller or complaint episode; it results from general cognitions or beliefs that guide behavior (Richins 1983). Two dimensions form this concept; the first corresponds to personal norms concerning complaining, while the second factor reflects the social dimension of this construct. If Brazilian consumers are anything like consumers in the U.S. or Europe, we would expect Brazilian consumers who have a more favorable attitude towards complaining to be more likely to express their complaint to the firm (Day and Landon 1977; Voorhees and Brady 2005). Therefore, we posit the following research hypothesis:

H4: The more positive the attitude towards the act of complaining, the higher the intentions to complain.

It is well documented that the likelihood of successful complaining positively influences complaint intention (Richins 1983; Singh 1990). When consumers believe that their complaints will be accepted by the firm and effectively managed, they are more likely to express their feelings to the firm and not spread negative word-of-mouth or switch suppliers (Anderson and Sullivan 1993). To the extent that Brazilian consumers are no different in this respect, we offer the following set of research hypotheses:

H5: The higher the perceived likelihood of successful complaining, the more positive the impact on complaint action intentions.

H6: The higher the perceived likelihood of successful complaining, the more negative the impact on unfavorable word-of-mouth intentions.

H7: The higher the perceived likelihood of successful complaining, the more negative the impact on switching intentions.

‘Consumer alienation’ is a consumer’s global negative affect toward the dissatisfying firm’s industry (Singh 1989) and is reflected by a negative feeling for the firm, its products/services, and even its competitors (Westbrook 1987). When consumers feel alienated they are more likely to develop feelings of helplessness and powerlessness (Allison 1978). Scholars in the U.S. and Europe have found that alienated consumers tend to exhibit negative attitudes towards complaining and, compared to those who do not feel alienated, have lower levels of perceived likelihood of successful complaints. To the extent that Brazilian consumers are similar in these respects, we posit the following research hypotheses:

H8: The more the consumer feels alienated, the more negative the impact on her/his attitude towards the act of complaining when dissatisfied.

H9: The more the consumer feels alienated, the more negative the impact on her/his perceptions of the likelihood of successful complaining.

Prior complaint experience has been conceptualized as a consumer’s past complaining experiences in the face of unsatisfactory events (Sing 1989; Singh and

Wilkes 1996). The extent (frequent or infrequent) of past complaining experiences can reinforce a consumer's attitudinal and behavioral disposition in future situations (Singh and Wilkes 1996). Prior complaint experience may influence attitude towards complaining. Such processes are consistent with the behaviorist (e.g., Sing 1989; Singh and Wilkes 1996) and/or situationist (e.g., Harris and Mowen 2001) theories that explain how past behaviors and exposure to situations shape and reinforce an individual's behavioral dispositions in future situations. Moreover, prior experiences affect an individual's cognitions about, for instance, how a manufacturer or retailer would probably respond to voiced complaints and the associated costs and/or benefits to the consumer of taking the time and effort to complain. As has been found, as consumers learn about the mechanisms, options, and positive outcomes of their prior complaint experiences, they develop more positive attitudes towards complaining. In addition, those consumers who have prior complaint experience are better able the next time around to determine how a firm might respond to voiced complaints. Thus, the perceived likelihood of successful complaints will be greater, the greater the experience of complaining is. Consequently, we posit the following research hypotheses:

H10: The greater the number of previous consumer complaint experiences, the greater the impact on her/his attitude towards the act of complaining in the future.

H11: The greater the number of previous consumer complaint experiences, the greater the impact on her/his perceived likelihood of successful complaining in the future.

According to scholars who have focused on personality factors, the consumer's intrinsic nature influences his/her complaining behaviors (Landon 1977). In general, consumers who complain after dissatisfaction tend to be more assertive (Bearden and Mason 1984) and self-confident (Gronhaug and Zaltman 1981). Although the results addressing these aspects have been encouraging, their impacts on complaint responses are not well documented or fully explored. Bearden, Hardesty and Rose (2001, p.122) argue that "consumer self-confidence is the extent to which an individual feels capable and assured with respect to his or her marketplace decisions and behaviors" and reflects subjective evaluations of one's ability to generate positive experiences as a consumer in the marketplace (Adelman 1987). To the extent that Brazilian consumers can be expected to mirror these descriptions, we should find that self-confidence will positively influence the consumer's complaint intentions. Accordingly, the following research hypothesis is posited:

H12: Higher levels of consumer self-confidence will more positively impact that consumer's complaint action intentions

The apparent absence of prior research on the relationship between consumer self-confidence and intentions to employ negative word-of-mouth communication and/or to switch companies, gives us the opportunity to use logic and common sense in order to arrive at the following: since self-confidence is related to the propensity to act, it can be inferred that a likely action might be to communicate with friends and relatives about the problem or to abandon the current supplier and switch to a new one. Based on this line of reasoning, the following research hypotheses are posited:

H13: *The higher the level of the consumer's self-confidence, the higher the likelihood that dissatisfied consumers will resort to employing negative word-of-mouth communication.*

H14: *The higher the level of the consumer's self-confidence, the more likely that the consumer will intend to switch doing business in the future to a different vendor.*

Based on attitude theory (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977), it can be inferred that the consumer's intrinsic attitudes towards the act of complaining will moderate the effects that a dissatisfying situation triggers, such as an encounter-specific dissatisfaction's impact on intent to complain. It is likely that consumers with a high predisposition toward complaining (i.e., a highly positive attitude toward voicing complaints) will be more likely to complain regardless of intensity level of dissatisfaction they experience, so, such customers would probably complain even when hardly dissatisfied at all, causing the direct effect of dissatisfaction level on complaint intention to be weaker. Alternatively, future complaint intentions for a customer with a lower general attitude towards complaining would be driven more by dissatisfaction level, and therefore the direct effect of dissatisfaction level should be delegated a stronger role. Based on this line of reasoning, we offer the following research hypothesis:

H15: *General attitude towards complaining moderates the relationship between the intensity of dissatisfaction and the consumer's intention to complain.*

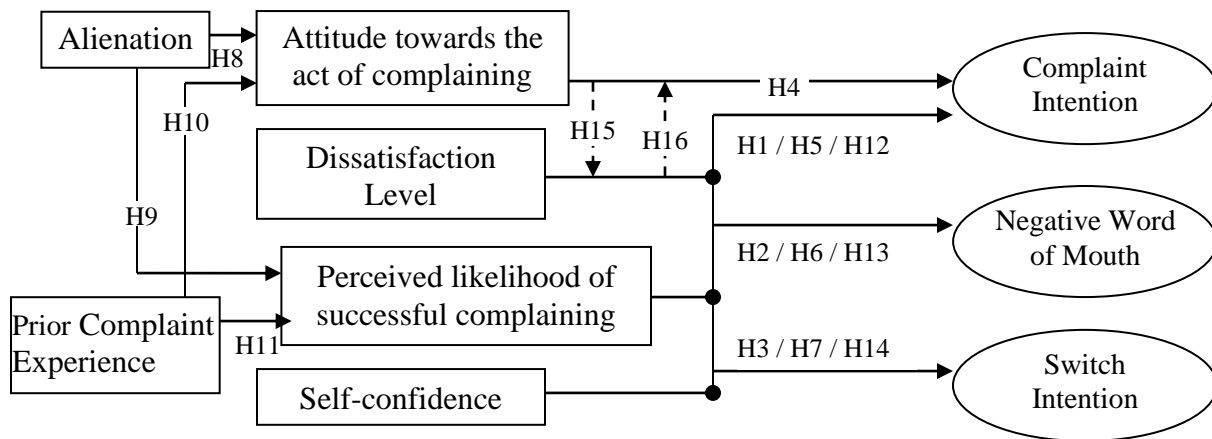
Although this last research hypothesis is logical and based on some solid theoretical background (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977), two empirical and relevant studies (Singh and Pandya 1991; Singh and Wilkes 1996) found that the opposite occurred. According to Singh and Wilkes (1996), the predictive and explanatory power of the attitude towards complaining changes with different levels of dissatisfaction. Using a critical incident approach, the authors found that the relationship between dissatisfaction level and voice varied substantially across the high and low dissatisfaction groups and, so, they provided a theoretical rationale and empirical evidence for a moderating role of dissatisfaction intensity. The reasoning here is that, being highly dissatisfied the customer will probably complain even having a negative attitude towards complaining. And only when the dissatisfaction level is low, does the impact of attitude towards complaining get stronger. The studies of Singh and Pandya (1991) and Singh and Wilkes (1996) were intended to provide impetus to future research and offered a foundation for further theorizing. Based on this reasoning, we offer an alternative to the previous research hypothesis, as follows:

H16: *The level of consumer dissatisfaction moderates the relationship between attitude towards complaining & intent to complain.*

Figure 1, below, presents a previous literature review, discussion and summarizing model that is based on the development of research hypotheses.

FIGURE 1

Framework for Understanding Impacts on Complaint Responses



RESEARCH METHOD

The investigation was carried out in two stages. In an initial, exploratory phase, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 older university students (pursuing graduate degrees) to probe their beliefs about variables included in the research hypotheses. This was a convenience sample of consumers who were screened and discovered to have real-life failure and/or complaint experiences with restaurants. An attempt was made, through these in-depth interviews, to answer questions such as: What action(s) do restaurant customers perform in response to an unsatisfactory ex-perience? Are the three dimensions of consumer reactions to dissatisfaction (i.e., complaint toward the company, negative word-of-mouth and switching company intentions) applied, or perceived? When dealing with service failures regarding a restaurant experience, do personality variables influence CCB, as foreseen in the theory? Do variables at the

macro level (attitude toward complaining, and alienation) impact intention to complain? If so, what form does this influence take? The answers to these questions greatly helped us to better understand CCB in this context, and increased our confidence in developing the questionnaire for the second stage.

Based on this work, a questionnaire was developed, carefully pretested, and administered in the final phase of the study. To empirically test the model (to entertain each of the sixteen research hypotheses), a quasi-experimental design was applied.

Service failures in a restaurant setting were manipulated at two levels of severity (low and high) via two different scenario descriptions (see Appendix A). After reading the randomly assigned scenario, each participant was immediately asked to rate, on a five-point Likert-type scale, her/his level of dissatisfaction toward that situation to which they were randomly assigned. In other words, each subject could respond based only on one situation. Past experimental studies (Levesque

and McDougall 2000; Wirtz and Mattila 2004) were consulted to assure the development of a parsimonious yet powerful design.

Following the reading and reacting to the assigned scenario, the questionnaire was then administered to the total of 480 graduate students from two universities in the south of Brazil whom served as subjects in this study.

An ANOVA test was conducted to check the manipulation of service failure levels described by the scenarios. As expected, there was a significant difference on dissatisfaction levels ($F = 162.543$; $p < 0,000$), an indication that the high severity situation produced a higher dissatisfaction than the low severity situation. Looking at the effect of our dissatisfaction manipulation on perceived level of dissatisfaction scale, $\beta = .64$, revealed our manipulation was a success. That is, the observed difference on the dependent variable was more likely to be caused by the intended between-groups differences rather than unintended differences. Prior to the data analysis, cases with missing values and outliers were deleted.

The measurement scales (see Appendix B) were taken from diverse studies. For example, complaint intentions were adapted from Day, Grabicke, Schaezle and Staubach (1981) and Singh (1989); dissatisfaction intensity was operationalized by asking respondents how they felt after experiencing the situation described by the scenario; attitude towards complaining (8 items) was drawn from Singh's work (1990); alienation (5 items) from Allison (1978); perceived likelihood of a successful complaint (3 items) from Day et al. (1981) and Singh (1990); prior complaint experiences (2 items) from Singh (1989); and self-confidence (11 items) from Bearden et al. (2001).

According to the recommendation of Bagozzi (1977), Structural Equation Modeling in experimental studies is better applied when dependent and independent variables are interval scaled, or, in the case of

any treatment variables operationalized in the experiment, at least manipulated at three levels. Accordingly, an interval scaled measure was used for the manipulation check of dissatisfaction level. Furthermore, all constructs in the questionnaire were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale.

Since the measurement scales originated from North-American studies, they were translated into Portuguese using the back translation technique. After constructing the questionnaire in Portuguese, it was submitted to Brazilian university marketing professors who evaluated everything for meaning, clarity, and consistency with the original English language scale items.

It's important to positively reinforce the benefits of using intentions data. Measuring intention to behave on an interval scale enabled us to capture intensity differences of behavioral intention. If we had used responses based on real past behavior only a dichotomous scale (action / no action) would have been applied.

RESULTS

Survey results are summarized as follows: first, a general profile of the sample will be presented. Next, the measurement model will be examined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The examination of the structural model will only be performed after the establishment of the validity and reliability of the measures used. Finally, the hypotheses positing moderating influences will be investigated.

Sample Profile

Following data collection, a total of 480 questionnaires were obtained, 240 for each scenario (low and high severity). The mean age of the respondents was 24 years-old (s.d. =6.93), and 60% of them were male. A plurality (46%) indicated a current monthly family income higher than two thousand

dollars, 31.5% indicated having a current monthly family income of from one to two thousand dollars and 22.5% of the survey participants indicated having a family income of less than one thousand dollars per month.

The majority of the interviewees are in the habit of eating in restaurants more than three times a month (56.5%), 23.4% eat in restaurants between once and three times a month and 20% less than once a month. This result supports our belief that the situation suggested in each of the two scenarios is known to be realistic, thus enabling the respondents to truly imagine themselves in it. More than half (almost 60 %) of the respondents had some truly unsatisfactory experience with some restaurant in the 12 months prior to the data collection. Of those that had one or more problems, 28.4% had complained but only complained, 17% complained, did not return, and used negative word of mouth, and 48% did not directly complain but did not return and did use negative word of mouth. These data show that a large proportion of the interviewees adopt more than one action in relation to an unsatisfactory situation, which reflects agreement with the findings of Day and Landon (1977) and Singh (1990). In short, the Brazilian consumers participating in this study exhibit post-dissatisfaction behavior that varies in multiple ways.

Measurement Model

Following the recommendations of numerous scholars (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Bagozzi 1994; Hair, Tatham, Anderson, and Black 1998), the validity of the measurement model was assessed and established by the fact that: (a) the measurement model was fairly well fitted to data, that is, within the established satisfactory adjustment levels; (b) the factor loadings of the indicators in the corresponding factors were high and significant; (c) different indicators of the

same underlying construct produced levels of reliability over 0.70 and variance extracted over 0.50; and (d) the correlation analysis between the constructs indicated discriminant validity.

For the measurement model, in line with the work of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), all observed variables were forced to load on their respective latent variables and were not allowed to cross-load. Several fit indices were evaluated to assess the fit of the measurement model to the data. Each index was adopted based on recommendations from the psychometric literature that supported their consistency and ability to assess unique aspects of model fit. When these indices are used in conjunction to evaluate model fit, values that approach .90 for the CFI, the NFI and the NNFI and values less than or equal to .08 for the RMSEA are indicative of a good fit of the model to the data (Hair et al. 1998).

Results of the confirmatory factor analysis also indicated that the measurement model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 264.31$, $df = 137$; CFI = .96; NFI and NNFI = .95; RMSEA = .06). The chi-square statistic was significant ($p < .001$), but this was expected because the chi-square statistic is sensitive to large sample sizes ($n > 200$; Hair et al. 1998). All measures included in the analysis were found to be reliable, with construct reliability estimates that ranged from .72 to .91. In addition, convergent validity was supported as all items loaded strongly and significantly on their respective factors, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent variable exceeded .50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The correlations among all constructs are all well below the .90 threshold, suggesting that all constructs are distinct from each other. Furthermore, the average variance extracted for each latent factor exceeded the respective squared correlation between factors, providing evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Results of the confirmatory factor analysis, including average variances

extracted, composite reliabilities coefficients and correlations among the latent factors are provided in Table 1. Standardized

measurement and Cronbach alpha coefficients are provided in appendix B.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Constructs	Mean (St.Dev.)	Reliability											
1. Dissatisfaction Intensity	4.0 (1.1)	.a.	.0										
2. Complaint Intention	3.3 (1.4)	.88	.50**	.76									
3. Negative WOM	3.9 (1.2)	.81	.64**	.46**	.75								
4. Switch Intention	3.6 (1.3)	.72	.51**	.41**	.52**	.54							
5. ATC – Personal Norms	3.7 (1.1)	.91	.14*	.35**	.13*	.15*	.74						
6. ATC – Social Benefits	3.9 (1.1)	.75	.11	.38**	.11*	.12	.68**	.69					
7. Alienation	2.58 (0.7)	.85	.24**	.19**	.27**	.14*	.16*	.15*	.61				
8. PLSC	2.92 (0.9)	.81	.22*	.28**	.25**	.16*	.31**	.32**	.29**	.55			
9. Prior Complaint Experience	2.59 (0.9)	.79	.12	.26**	.20**	.21**	.28**	.25**	.32**	.25**	.53		
10. Self-Confidence	3.42 (0.5)	.88	.25**	.31**	.28**	.29**	.34**	.33**	.08	.12	.38**	.67	

Notes: **denotes significant correlations at $p < .01$, *at $p < .05$ level. The diagonal elements (in bold) represent the AVE. ATC = Attitude toward Complaining; and PLSC = Perceived Likelihood of a Successful Complaint.

Finally, we confirm discriminant validity by comparing nested models for each pair of latent constructs in which we either allow the correlation between two constructs to be free or restrict the correlation to 1. Collectively, these models represent 45 individual tests of discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is supported; the χ^2 statistic is significantly lower ($p < .05$) in the unconstrained model than in the constrained model for virtually all constructs. Of the 45 tests, only 1 suggested that two of our constructs were not distinct; namely the facets of attitude toward complaining (Personal Norms and Social Benefits). These facets were then considered to be dimensions of a

higher order factor (i.e., attitude toward complaining). On the basis of these tests, we conclude that our measures are valid and operationalize nine distinct constructs.

Tests of Hypotheses

After the examination of the measures used, we focused on the theoretical structure by examining the proposed relationships between the constructs. Since dissatisfaction intensity was measured with only one item, the measured variable itself was used as the construct and allowed to co-vary with the latent variables in the structural model. The investigation of the set of research hypotheses

is made primarily through the goodness-of-fit indices of the hybrid model, which include both a structural and a measurement component (Kline 1998), and the significance and magnitude of estimated regression coefficients. Moreover, the coefficient of determination was established for each structural equation, which represents the proportion of variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables.

The findings of the structural model analysis, based on the 480 observations, are found in Table 2. The chi-square value is significant. However, knowing that this test is very sensitive to normality deviations and to samples higher than 200, the analysis of the chi-square value must be done along with other adjustment criteria (Hair et al. 1998). Dividing the chi-square value by the degrees of freedom produces a satisfactory value – 2.01, less than the maximum recommended (5). Goodness-of-fit indexes CFI, NFI, NNFI, all over 0.90, are considered sufficiently satisfactory and the RMSEA of 0.06 is also acceptable.

These results provide support for most of the nomological relationships specified in the model. These relations reflect the impact of: 1) self-confidence on complaint, word-of-mouth and switching- company intentions; 2) dissatisfaction level on complaint, word-of-mouth and switching- company intentions; 3) perceived likelihood of successful complaint on complaint, word-of-mouth and switching-company intentions; 4) attitude towards complaining on complaint intentions; 5) alienation on attitude towards complaining; and 6) alienation on perceived likelihood of successful complaining.

The impact of dissatisfaction level on switching (0.72) and negative word-of-mouth (0.65) intentions are highly significant. The perceived likelihood of success and the consumer self-confidence had a weaker, though, significant, impact on switching intentions (-0.19 and 0.12, respectively) and on negative word-of-mouth communication (-0.12 and 0.18). Note that the perceived likelihood of success has a negative impact on both responses, as predicted.

TABLE 2
Coefficients for the Nomological Relationships in the Model.

Model Relationships	Standardized Regression Coefficient ^{ab}	Hypotheses
Dependent Variable: Complaint Intention		
	R² = 0.48	
Dissatisfaction Level	0.29 (3.22)	H ₁
Attitude towards complaining	0.19 (2.18) ^c	H ₄
Perceived Likelihood of Success	0.27 (3.04)	H ₅
Self-confidence	0.38 (5.96)	H ₁₂
Dependent Variable: Switching Intentions		
	R² = 0.79	
Dissatisfaction Level	0.72 (9.84)	H ₃
Perceived Likelihood of Success	-0.19 (2.25) ^c	H ₇
Self-confidence	0.12 (2.01) ^c	H ₁₄
Dependent Variable: Negative Word-of-Mouth		
	R² = 0.75	
Dissatisfaction Level	0.65 (6.21)	H ₂
Perceived Likelihood of Success	-0.12 (2.05) ^c	H ₆
Self-confidence	0.18 (2.41)	H ₁₃
Dependent Variable: Attitude towards complaining		
	R² = 0.28	
Alienation	-0.21 (3.09)	H ₈
Prior Complaining Experience	0.03 (1.07)	H ₁₀
Dependent Variable: Perceived Likelihood of Success		
	R² = 0.08	
Alienation	-0.16 (2.26) ^c	H ₉
Prior Complaining Experience	0.08 (1.45)	H ₁₁
Goodness-of-fit statistics:		
χ ² (Chi-square)	354.654 (p<0.001)	
DF (Degrees of freedom)	176	
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	0.95	
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.91	
NNFI (NonNormed Fit Index)	0.93	
RMR (Root Mean Sq. Residual)	0.06	
RMSEA (Root Mean Sq. Error of Approx.)	0.05	

^a The estimates presented are from the IRLS (iteratively reweighted generalized least squares) using EQS.

^b T-values in parenthesis. Based on one-tailed test: t-values > 1.65 = p < 0.05; and t-values > 2.33 = p < 0.01.

^c Coefficient significant at 0.05-level. Coefficients significant at 0.01 are in bold.

With regard to the impact on complaint intentions, the results indicate significant impact of the following antecedents: dissatisfaction level (0.28), probability of success (0.25), attitude towards complaining (0.17), and consumer self-confidence (0.36). Although not as large as the negative word-of-mouth and the switching intentions coefficient, the R^2 of 0.44 reflects a reasonable strong collective effect of these variables on 'complaining direct-to-the-firm intentions.'

The results also support research hypotheses H_8 and H_9 , in which the impact of alienation on the attitude towards complaining and on the perceived likelihood of success are established. However, although statistically significant, the power of alienation to predict the perceived likelihood of success is very low ($R^2 = 0.08$). Finally, prior complaint experiences did not exert any influence on attitude towards complaining (0.03), thus not supporting H_{10} .

The moderating hypotheses (H_{15} , H_{16}) highlight possible differences in the strength of nomological relationships established between dissatisfaction intensity and complaint intention (H_{15}), due to the level of attitude towards complaining, and between attitude towards complaining and complaint intention (H_{16}), due to the intensity level of dissatisfaction. In order to test the first moderating role, we divided the sample into three sub-groups based on the level of attitude towards complaining. Then, those who indicated that their attitude was low (163) and high (186) were restrained. Those who indicated medium level of attitude were excluded to more accurately reflect the nature of the moderation, which could be blurred if intermediate values were included. The moderation hypothesis was tested by using the Multi-Group Structural Equation Analysis. This approach allows the theoretical model for each group to be

simultaneously estimated; in other words, simultaneously for both those that exhibited low and for those that exhibited high attitude towards complaining. The estimated coefficients reflect relationships among underlying theoretical constructs and are adjusted for measurement error. Thus, it is possible to test whether the estimated coefficients vary for both groups (Singh, Verbeke, and Rhoads 1996). All parameters were initially restricted as invariant for both groups. Subsequently, based on the Lagrange-multiplier test (Byrne 1994), parameters with significant indicators "are released." These restrictions were not intended to respecify the model to improve goodness of fit. Rather, they were intended to isolate differences in modeled relationships across the groups, providing a systematic basis for evaluating the fit of the hypothesized model to data.

The results summarized in Table 3 indicate different relationships between dissatisfaction level and complaint intention in the two groups of consumers. While for consumers with negative attitude towards complaining, the impact of dissatisfaction level is 0.15, for consumers with positive attitude it is 0.41. This result corroborates the idea that attitude moderates the effects of situation-triggers, such as dissatisfaction intensity. Thus, the attitude towards complaining is an important element for the translation of dissatisfaction level to complaint intention. The dissatisfied consumers with negative attitudes toward complaining are less driven by dissatisfaction level. It means that those customers will probably not complain even when highly dissatisfied. On the other hand, the consumers with positive attitude toward complaint are "freer" to act according their levels of dissatisfaction. Thus, when very dissatisfied they probably complain, while when slightly dissatisfied they probably do not.

TABLE 3
Estimated Coefficients for Theoretical Relationships
for Consumers with Contrasting Attitudes toward Complaining^a

Dependent Variable : Complaint Intention	Positive Attitude	Negative Attitude
R ²	0.62	0.31
Level of Dissatisfaction	0.41 (6.07)	0.15 (2.13)

^a The estimates presented are from IRLS (iteratively reweighted generalized least squares) using EQS.

In order to test H₁₆, the same procedure was used, but in this case the sample was divided into three sub-groups based on the level of dissatisfaction. Those who obtained low (178) or high (196) dissatisfaction scores were restrained, so the effect of attitude towards complaining on complaint intention in those two different groups could be better captured and compared. The results indicated no improvement to the model by adding the moderator impact, leading us to say that H₁₆ is not supported in contraindication of the findings of Singh and Pandya (1991) and Singh and Wilkes (1996). One explanation for this contraindication is that the previous authors dealt with complaint behaviors in response to actual experiences of consumer dissatisfaction instead of consumer's intentions or propensity to complain, as did the present study. Moreover, this difference may be explained to some degree by the origin of the current sample, a developing, South-American country.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

From the scholarly point of view, our research examined some relevant questions

in the field of knowledge considered. Among them, the following four were deemed especially important: (1) the consideration of the consumers' reactions to dissatisfaction in terms of a series of *intentions*: complaint, word-of-mouth, and switching intentions; (2) examination of the relationship between intensity of dissatisfaction and post-dissatisfaction complaint behaviors; (3) assessment of the impact of *attitudinal* (attitude toward complaining), *perceptual* (dissatisfaction level and perceived likelihood of success) and *personality* (consumer self-confidence) variables on the post-dissatisfaction intentions; and (4) examining the applicability of North American/European measures in the Brazilian context.

With some exceptions, such as Day and Landon (1977), Folkes (1984) and Singh (1988), early research efforts on evaluating post-dissatisfaction complaining behavior did not deal with the multiplicity of possible consumers' responses. Richins (1983), for example, investigated word-of-mouth communication, Singh (1990) examined complaining directly to the firm, and Gilly and Gelb (1982) emphasized the switching-company intention. More recent research (Boote 1998; Halstead 2002) suggests that complaining behavior may be sequential in

nature and certain complaint actions are taken only after other complaint responses have been exhausted. These more recent studies examined the myriad of actions a U.S. consumer might take in response to an unsatisfactory experience. Consequently, a study that investigates the variety of consumer complaining behaviors in a developing country such as Brazil, integrates extant CCB research streams and examines CCB in a different culture is not merely interesting, but necessary to advance the field of knowledge.

Our research focused on the impact of attitudinal, perceptual and personality variables on complaint behavior among Brazilian consumers (graduate degree-seeking students attending two different universities in southern Brazil). The majority of the antecedents' impacts was expressive and predicted a good part of the variance of the dependent variables, as the research hypotheses posited. The hypothesized relationships were empirically tested, and the results confirmed that complaint reactions are influenced by dissatisfaction level, consumer self-confidence and perceived likelihood of success, but in different intensities.

It is important to mention once again that our study revealed that dissatisfaction level significantly and substantially enhanced negative word-of-mouth and switching intentions, but its effect on intent to complain directly to the firm is not in the same intensity. This finding meshes with some authors' ideas (Bearden 1983; Day 1984; Singh and Widing 1991) that the relationship between dissatisfaction level and voice is tenable, but not encouraging from the point of view of the firm.

Indeed, in the current study the intent to complain directly to the firm was strongly influenced by consumer self-confidence. Perceived likelihood of success also played a relevant role in predicting complaint intentions directed toward the firm. Also of note is the fact that the R^2 indicated that the

four antecedent variables were found to explain almost half (48%) of the total variance in complaining directly to the firm intentions. Although that is a considerable amount of variance explained, it obviously suggests the existence of other factors that could help to predict complaint intentions, such as attribution of failure, company/consumer relationship (degree of loyalty felt by the consumer to the company) and other emotions felt by the dissatisfied customer.

Another interesting result pertained to the impact of personal antecedents (alienation and prior complaining experience) on attitude towards complaining and also on perceived likelihood of success. In agreement with some of Kim et al.'s (2003) findings, alienation significantly and negatively influenced attitude towards complaining and perceived likelihood of success. Kim et al. (2003) also found significant influence of prior complaining experience on attitude towards complaining and on perceived likelihood of success. Neither of these last two findings was replicated in the present study. One explanation for this could be the fact that enterprises in Brazil do not behave homogeneously, that is, there is as yet no common pattern companies follow when endeavoring to handle consumer complaints. As a result, Brazilian consumers do not expect from a company a positive response just because they had a positive outcome after complaining to a different company at some other time.

Regarding complaining directly to the firm intentions, we identified a moderator (attitudinal) variable that strengthened the relationship between dissatisfaction level and complain direct to the firm intention, enhancing its prediction from 48% (overall sample) to 62% (sample with positive attitude towards complaining). This calls for two remarks. First, the higher the attitude towards complaining scores, the more likely the customers are to complain, even if they felt

only a little dissatisfied. Second, dissatisfactions are more likely to be transformed into complaining if customers have a positive attitude towards the act of complaining. This result supports a key argument made by Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) that attitude moderates the relationship between cognitive appraisals and coping behaviors.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Several findings from this study appear to be especially relevant to marketing practitioners. It appears that effective focus on maintaining long-term relationships and avoiding negative word-of-mouth communication depends on enhancing post-purchase systems. Otherwise, dissatisfied customers will defect and spread negative word-of-mouth about the company. Moreover, the company should not try to hide failures and wait for the customer to register complaints, because customers who perceive the likelihood of complaint success as low and are not self-confident probably will not complain but will remain dissatisfied.

The presence of a linear, but weak, relationship between dissatisfaction level and voice poses several implications and challenges for practitioners, since dissatisfaction can be managed only if consumers voice their complaints. The implication to be drawn from this study is that customer's complaint intention is likely to be dependent of several factors (e.g. personality, attitudinal variables) which can convert dissatisfaction level to voice intention. The knowledge of such factors is important for successful dissatisfaction management.

Another managerial implication is that firms should realize that a consumer's perception of likelihood of complaint success and favorable attitude towards complaining can heighten voice intention. Both aspects can be enhanced by educating consumers about the options and the mechanisms of

complaining. Companies could also simplify the exchange and refund procedures, show to consumers they are willing to admit failures, provide employees education regarding quick and efficient complaint handling, motivate them to facilitate customers' expressions of complaint and teach them to increase their willingness to listen to customers. That the "customer is king" is fairly well established in the U.S. and in Europe, it is not so much in developing countries such as Brazil. Finally, the high impact of consumer self-confidence on complaint intention shows that the company, when handling complaints, is dealing with self-confident consumers. Customer-contact employees should be trained to pay attention when dealing with this type of consumer.

Limitations

While this study considers several important factors, one of its weaknesses is that it fails to take into consideration consumer emotions as a determinant of complaining behavior. Previous research has also considered the impact of attributions on complaining behavior (e.g., consumer holding the service provider responsible for the failure or when the problem is seen as being stable or controllable), but some authors indicate that attributions are antecedents of dissatisfaction level (Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2003) or perceived likelihood of successful complaining (Blodgett and Anderson 2000), rather than immediate antecedents of complaining behavior. Future research should focus on the place of attributions and emotions in order to expand the theoretical model of CCB. A further limitation is the sampling of only one service category (restaurants) and the use of graduate-degree seeking university students as participants. Future research is needed to validate our findings across a wider sample base. Consumer complaining behavior in other developing countries besides Brazil should

also be explored. Future research may also utilize different methodological approaches. Despite meticulous care in designing and pre-testing the service failure scenarios, all of the subtleties of a real-world complaint experience may not have been captured by this methodology.

Finally, dissatisfaction intensity was measured using a single item scale. Single items provide less reliable measures than multiple-item scales (happily, though, the high *standardized regression coefficient* and

the expected signs on significant coefficients indicate support for the validity of our approach in this particular inquiry. Moreover, since the dissatisfaction level was directly derived from the scenario description, we had more control over measurement and sampling error.). However, future experimental and non-experimental research (e.g., one-shot cross-sectional surveys and longitudinal studies) should measure dissatisfaction level using a multiple-item scale that generates high Cronbach reliability scores.

APPENDIX A

SCENARIO DESCRIPTIONS

Below is a situation that you might experience concerning a restaurant dinner.

Please assume that the situation has just happened to you.

We would like to know how you would react to it.

[Note: What follows is the High Severity Failure Scenario.]

You and another person go to a restaurant for dinner to celebrate a special occasion.

You reserved a table with an excellent location, however, when arriving at the restaurant, you were informed that the restaurant was crowded and the table was already occupied. After five minutes, you were moved to another table. You are seated. The waiter comes to take your order. You place your order and the waiter informs you that the dish you requested is unavailable. You choose another option and the waiter arrogantly informs you that it is also unavailable. You finally choose a third and available alternative. After one hour, the waiter brings your order.

[Note: What follows is the Low Severity Failure Scenario.]

You and another person go to a restaurant for dinner to celebrate a special occasion.

You are seated at your table. The waiter comes to take your order. You place your order and the waiter informs you that the requested dish is unavailable. You choose another and available option. After forty minutes, the waiter brings your order.

APPENDIX B

OPERATIONAL MEASURES USED FOR STUDY CONSTRUCTS

Notes:

¹ Measured using a five-point Semantic Differential Scale² Reverse Coded Items.³ Measured using a five-point Likert scale anchored by Strongly Disagree / Strongly Agree.

	Coefficient Alpha	Factor Loadings
Dissatisfaction Intensity¹		
1. How did you feel after experiencing the situation described above?		
Complaint Intention – Complaint Directed Toward the Seller¹	.91	
How likely is it that you would:		
1. definitely complain to the restaurant manager?		.78
2. call the waiter immediately and ask him to take care of the problem?		.89
Complaint Intention – Negative WOM Communication¹	.94	
How likely is it that you would:		
3. speak to your friends and relatives about your bad experience?		.91
4. convince your friend and relatives not to go on that restaurant?		.95
Complaint Intention – Switching Company¹	.74	
How likely is it that you would:		
5. forget the unsatisfactory experience and do nothing. ²		.88
6. decide not to go to that restaurant again.		.94
Attitude towards Complaining – Personal Norms³	.88	
1. People should not complain because firms sometimes sell unsatisfactory products or services. ²		.69
2. It bothers me quite a bit if I do not complain about an unsatisfactory product or service.		.89
3. It sometimes feels good to get my dissatisfaction and frustration with a product or service off my chest by complaining.		.75
4. It is my duty to complain about unsatisfactory products or services.		.78
5. I don't like people who complain to stores, because usually their complaints are unreasonable. ²		.72

Attitude towards Complaining – Social Benefits³	.72	
6. By making complaints about unsatisfactory products or services, in the long run their quality will improve		.91
7. By complaining about defective products or services, I may prevent other consumers from experiencing the same problem.		.85
8. People have a responsibility to tell stores when a product or service they purchase is defective.		.56
	Coefficient Alpha	Factor Loadings
Consumer Alienation³	.85	
1. Most companies care nothing at all about the consumer.		.75
2. Shopping is usually an unpleasant experience.		.70
3. Business firms stand behind their products and guarantees. ²		.55
4. The consumer is usually the least important consideration to most companies		.80
5. As soon as they make a sale, most businesses forget about the buyer.		.51
Perceived Likelihood of Successful Complaint³	.74	
1. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will take appropriate action (e.g. exchange, refund, apology, reward).		.67
2. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will take appropriate action and will give better service in the future.		.76
3. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will give better service in the future and this will also benefit other consumers.		.73
Prior Complaint Experience	.67	
1. How many times have you complained about your dissatisfaction to a retailer within the last six months?		.83
2. Overall, how satisfied were you with the way the complaint(s) was (were handled)? ¹		.89
Self-Confidence¹	.83	
1. I know where to find the information I need prior to making a purchase		.93
2. I know where to look to find the product information I need.		.89
3. I am confident in my ability to recognize a brand worth considering.		.91
4. I trust my own judgment when deciding which brands to consider.		.94

5. I often wonder if I've made the right purchase selection.	.87
6. My friends are impressed with my ability to make satisfying purchase.	.90
7. I impress people with the purchase I make.	.87
8. I can tell when an offer has strings attached.	.87
9. I can see through sales gimmicks used to get consumers to buy.	.90
11. I don't like to tell a salesperson something is wrong in the store.	.88

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