

REDRESS SEEKING AS PLANNED BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Subjective factors associated with redress seeking were studied in a simulation experiment with two conditions. Attitudinal, normative and control influences on redress seeking were measured using a questionnaire based on planned behavior theory. The scenario for the first condition described the failure of a product (shoes); in this condition the intention to seek redress from the supplier was related most to normative influence and was particularly associated with confidence, the prospect of getting a replacement product, the influence of friends and the assertion of consumer rights. The scenario for the second condition carried additional information about the supplier's reluctance to accept complaints and was intended to reduce the likelihood of seeking redress. In this condition respondents emphasized their rights and showed no less intention to seek redress; thus the scenario manipulation failed to produce its intended effect. However the effects that were produced were of interest and the measurement of responses within the planned behavior format widens our understanding of redress seeking.

INTRODUCTION

Many companies are keen to receive complaints about their products. One reason for this is that an effective response by the company may reduce negative comment to other potential customers. A second reason is to gather information about products so that weaknesses can be corrected. However most dissatisfied consumers do not complain. Best and Andreasen (1976) found that 86% purchasers took no action over unsatisfactory low cost items; Andreasen (1988) in the US, and Stø and Glefjell (1990) in Norway, found in both cases that 60% of dissatisfied customers did nothing. Thus we need to understand the factors associated with complaining which may help us to elicit complaints from dissatisfied consumers. This study is designed to measure the range of factors that may play a part in complaining.

Factors Affecting Complaining Behavior

Redress seeking, along with negative comment to others, change of loyalty and formal grievance actions, are usually associated with dissatisfaction with the good or service. Though dissatisfaction is a necessary condition for most complaining there is little evidence that the degree of dissatisfaction has much bearing on the likelihood of complaint (Day 1984; Oliver 1987; Malafi, Cini, Taub and Bertolami 1993); this issue is reviewed by Singh and Howell (1985). This indicates that, in addition to dissatisfaction, other influences are needed if people are to complain and three types of influence are identified:

Expected outcomes - gains and losses, including opportunity costs, that follow complaining (or not).

Normative influences - what reference persons or groups think the agent should do.

Control factors - that make it more or less easy to register a complaint.

Expected outcomes. Hirschman (1970) suggested that complaining was related to expected returns and opportunity costs and generally these expected outcomes have received most attention. Positive outcomes may include replacement, apology, and better goods or service in the future, while negative outcomes may include lost opportunities, wasted time and embarrassment. Redress and the perceived likelihood of success in obtaining redress has been found to be associated with complaining in a number of studies (Day and Landon 1976, Granbois, Summers and Frazier 1977, Richins 1983, 1987, and Singh 1990); other outcomes have been researched by Richins (1980). The expected returns are dependent on the importance of the product purchased and Richins (1985) found evidence that product importance was related to the likelihood of complaining.

Normative influences. The explicit approval or disapproval of others may also be an expected outcome. Such anticipated exchanges with others

are distinguished from the internalized normative influence of referent persons or groups who may never be aware of the respondent's behavior. Normative influences on redress seeking have not been studied systematically though Richins (1981) noted instances where consumers felt that they 'ought' to complain.

Control factors. These are knowledge, skills and other resources that can make complaining easier or harder. Examples are the ease of access to key personnel, an understanding of the working of the organization causing dissatisfaction, and confidence about complaining. Control factors help us to distinguish between those who complain and those who do not. Two studies (Caplovitz 1967, and Warland, Herrmann and Willits 1975) found that non-complainers seemed powerless and had less knowledge of the means of redress; also Gronhaug (1977) found that there were more complaints to a Norwegian consumer protection agency from citizens who lived closer to it.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

The three types of influence identified above are those used in the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991); this theory is a development of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980) and is illustrated as a diagram in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that intention is the principal determinant of behavior; perceived control may also affect behavior directly (as shown by the dotted line) when people have limited ability to

achieve their goal (Madden, Ellen and Ajzen 1992). Intention is explained by reference to attitude to the behavior (A_B), subjective norm (SN) and perceived control of behavior (PC) which are each measured as a whole (called a **global** measure) and as a **summation** measure of the corresponding outcome, referent or control beliefs. The relative importance of A_B , SN and PC in predicting intention (indicated by w_1 , w_2 and w_3) may be determined by regression or by structural equation analysis. A further level of explanation is reached when we identify the specific outcomes, referents and control beliefs that have most association with intention. Different behaviors will depend upon different factors but, with enough studies, we may find that there are some factors that are particularly important in many complaining situations.

Purposes of the Study

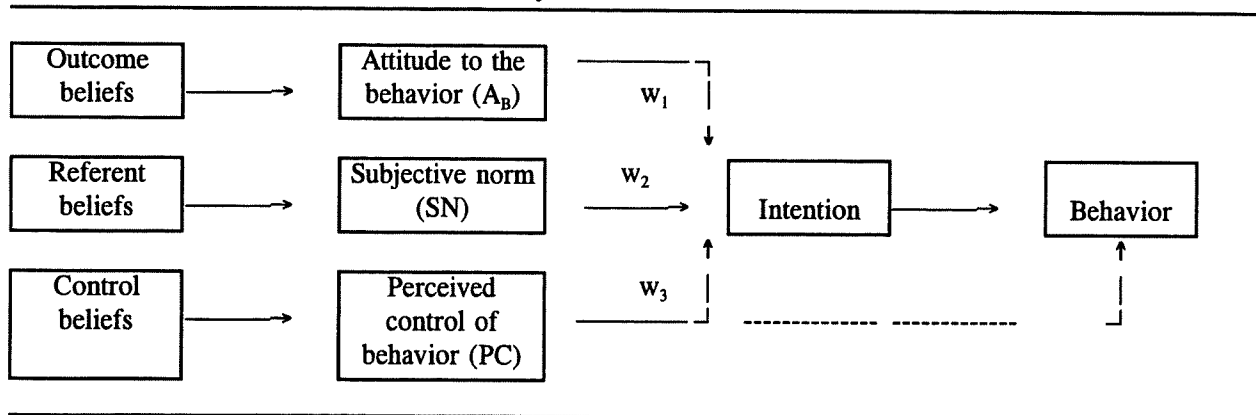
From this review we note that:

More attention has been given to attitudinal outcomes than to other factors that may affect complaining

Studies have failed to measure **all** the different influences within a common format so that the relative importance of different factors can be assessed. Planned behavior methods provide this format.

The factors controlling complaining are likely

Figure 1
Theory of Planned Behavior



to vary from context to context so that a number of different studies are required before general conclusions can be drawn. This present study begins this process. To focus the study and to explore the scope for simulation two scenario versions were used; the second scenario was intended to diminish the likelihood of obtaining redress, as compared with the first. The objectives were:

1. To evaluate planned behavior theory and measurement as a means of studying complaining.
2. To identify the specific factors most associated with redress seeking in the situation investigated.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

To establish the content of the questionnaire, outcome, referent and control beliefs were elicited from thirty students who were given the basic scenario, shown below. The elicitation procedure is described by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Beliefs that were supported by several students were included in the questionnaire which was then drafted using the NEWACT program (East, 1991). This procedure tends to include some marginal beliefs and three items (two outcome, one control) were dropped from the analysis because they showed no significant relationships with relevant variables.

The questionnaire was headed: QUESTIONNAIRE ON COMPLAINING ABOUT POOR GOODS. Those receiving the first scenario (Condition 1) then read:

Please imagine that you have bought a pair of leather shoes for £40 from a local shop. You use them about half the time and six weeks after you bought them you notice that the stitching is going on one of the shoes. This questionnaire is about how you feel about taking the shoes back to the shop where you bought them.

The scenario for Condition 2 was identical

except for an additional sentence (in bold) inserted after the second sentence:

You recall that when you were in the shoe shop another customer was complaining to the manager about some shoes and eventually left without any compensation.

The questionnaire was framed around taking the shoes back to the shop and covered: intention, attitude, subjective norm, perceived control, outcome beliefs (*getting a refund or new pair of shoes, standing up for my rights, having an argument, being embarrassed, wasting time*), referent beliefs (*family, friends*), control beliefs (*keeping the receipt, being confident about complaining*). Responses to these items were measured on seven point scales precoded 1 to 7. In addition respondents were asked about their frequency of taking goods back (an experience measure), their age and their sex. The full questionnaire is available from the author.

Computed Measures

All belief items were measured as the product of two scale responses; for example the influence of *getting a refund or a new pair of shoes* was found by multiplying the evaluation of this outcome by its likelihood. Similarly the effect of a referent is found by multiplying the normative belief about the referent's wishes by the motivation to comply with those wishes, and the control belief effect by multiplying the power of a factor to assist action by access to that factor. Scale ranges may be treated as unipolar or bipolar. When bipolar scales are used the sign of the measures affects the products and their correlations (Bagozzi 1984, Evans 1991) and it is customary now to use the ranges that give the highest correlation between the summation measure and the global measure. This procedure was illustrated in detail by East (1993). In the present study the alternative scale ranges were restricted to -3 to +3 and 1 to 7. The optimal scalings were found to be: outcome beliefs, 1 to 7, evaluation -3 to +3; normative beliefs, -3 to +3, motivation to comply, 1 to 7; belief about the power of a factor to affect action, 1 to 7, and access to that factor, -3 to +3.

Respondent Groups

Respondents for the first questionnaire were 84 students on different business courses at Kingston University in 1993. Respondents in the second condition were 91 students on business courses in 1994. This procedure falls short of random assignment of subjects and a crosstabulation was conducted to see whether the two groups were the same on criteria that could not have been affected by the manipulation. A χ^2 test showed near equivalence between the groups with respect to sex, age and experience of complaining ($p = 0.4, 0.5, 0.4$ respectively).

RESULTS

Scenario Check

The effects of the scenario manipulation were assessed. The second scenario was intended to reduce the perceived likelihood of getting a refund or a new pair of shoes and was expected to increase the likelihood of having an argument with shop staff, being embarrassed and wasting time. If these effects occurred it was anticipated that the intention to seek redress would decline.

Subjects in the second condition did think that an argument with the shop staff was more likely ($p < 0.05$). However there were no significant effects on the likelihood of obtaining redress, being embarrassed or wasting time, and intention did not change. Furthermore, subjects in the

second condition were significantly more likely ($p < 0.05$) to have **higher** scores on subjective norm and perceived control and it seemed that they had reacted to the implied constraint on their freedom to obtain redress by emphasising their consumer rights.

The Applicability of Planned Behavior Theory

The first objective of the study was to evaluate planned behavior theory and measurement in this context. The regression analysis (Table 1) shows adjusted R^2 levels of 0.25 and 0.27 for the two conditions. In most planned behavior studies R^2 figures are higher than this but in both Conditions there was a strong bias to the positive end of the intention scale which reduced variance. In Condition 1, SN was the principal correlate of redress seeking but the change in the scenario had a strong effect since, in Condition 2, PC was dominant and SN was insignificant. Thus A_B was not the strongest predictor of complaining in either Condition.

More detailed analysis also shows the value of the comprehensive range of measures used in planned behavior theory. Table 2 shows the correlations between the different factors, the summation measures, the global measures and intention for both Conditions. The associations implied by the theory of planned behavior are shaded. In Condition 1 it is noted that, exceptionally, *standing up for rights* and *being embarrassed* are related more to SN and PC

Table 1
Regression Analysis. Prediction of Intention from Global Measures.

| | Condition 1 | | | Condition 2 | | |
|--------------------|-------------|-----|-------|-------------|-----|-------|
| Multiple R | .54 | | | .52 | | |
| Adj R ² | .27 | | | .25 | | |
| S.E. | 1.31 | | | 1.17 | | |
| F | 11.0 | | | 10.5 | | |
| Sig F | .0000 | | | .0000 | | |
| | Beta wt | t | sig t | Beta wt | t | sig t |
| A_B | .31 | 3.2 | .002 | .05 | 0.5 | .63 |
| SN | .41 | 4.3 | .0000 | .14 | 1.4 | .18 |
| PC | .15 | 1.6 | .11 | .45 | 4.5 | .0000 |

Table 2
Spearman Correlation Coefficients

| Factor | Condition 1 | | | | Condition 2 | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|------------|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | A _B | SN | PC | Intention | A _B | SN | PC | Intention |
| Get new pair | .33 | .22 | .16 | .38 | .10 | .22 | .30 | .18 |
| Stand up for rights | .12 | .25 | .15 | .31 | .14 | .20 | .31 | .46 |
| Argue with shop staff | .38 | -.22 | -.05 | -.08 | .30 | -.08 | .21 | .07 |
| Be embarrassed | .18 | .03 | .39 | .24 | -.01 | -.02 | .21 | .20 |
| Waste time | .42 | -.05 | .21 | .14 | .18 | -.10 | .12 | .18 |
| <i>Sum attitude factors</i> | .60 | -.02 | .23 | .29 | .27 | .04 | .36 | .35 |
| Friends | -.10 | .78 | .18 | .34 | .06 | .60 | .34 | .29 |
| Family | -.10 | .60 | .05 | .24 | .11 | .41 | .28 | .30 |
| <i>Sum referent factors</i> | -.14 | .72 | .09 | .29 | .10 | .55 | .33 | .35 |
| Keep receipt | -.04 | .24 | .24 | .30 | .15 | .16 | .13 | .20 |
| Be confident | .16 | .14 | .23 | .42 | .20 | .15 | .44 | .54 |
| <i>Sum control factors</i> | .01 | .26 | .30 | .45 | .22 | .17 | .35 | .44 |
| A _B | 1.00 | -.05 | .19 | .25 | 1.00 | .20 | .00 | .04 |
| SN | | 1.00 | .12 | .49 | | 1.00 | .39 | .31 |
| PC | | | 1.00 | .30 | | | 1.00 | .54 |

Significant (p < .05) correlations in bold

respectively than to A_B. This cross-relationship reflects the multiple implications that factors often have and the difficulty of assigning such factors correctly on the basis of the elicitation. This helps to explain why A_B is not dominant; two key 'attitude' factors exert their influence through other global variables. There is one significant negative association indicating that the more the cost of arguing with shop staff, the more respondents believe that their significant others think that they should complain; morally correct actions can be costly.

When we look at Condition 2 we note that three of the 'attitude' factors correlate better with PC than with A_B. This is consistent with the assumption that subjects reacted to the change in the scenario by relating their responses to perceived control. We see this effect again when we examine the summation measures; in Condition 2 the attitude factor summation correlates better with PC than with A_B. Thus in Condition 2 the planned behavior method shows some theoretically unexpected relationships.

Specific Factors Affecting Complaining

The second objective was to identify factors most strongly associated with redress seeking in the context studied. Here we should attach more importance to Condition 1 since it is not affected by the specific scenario change. We note from Table 2 that the intention to seek redress is strongly associated with *confidence*, *replacement of the product*, the normative influence of *friends* and the need to *stand up for one's rights*. In Condition 2, *confidence* and *standing up for rights* again figure strongly.

DISCUSSION

Scenario Problems

It is difficult to study complaining behavior when it occurs. Its natural incidence is erratic and there are ethical problems about artificially creating the sort of dissatisfaction which would induce complaint. As a result much of our knowledge comes from surveys of reported practice but these studies may lack focus when

they cover a spread of complaining behaviors produced under a variety of circumstances. One way of focusing an investigation is to provide respondents with a scenario and ask them to state what they would do in such a situation. Scenarios have been used in a number of studies on complaining behavior, for example Langmeyer and Langmeyer (1979), Folkes (1984) and Malafi, Cini, Taub and Bertolami (1993).

Scenario methods raise a number of problems. The scenario may be interpreted in a variety of ways and may not achieve its intended effect. Subjects in a simulation miss out on real life cues and may make inferences that are related to aspects of the experimental design. As a result there is no guarantee that people will do in normal settings what they say they will do in a simulation. For these reasons it is important to evaluate the effect of manipulations and the planned behavior method is a means to this end.

The effect of the scenario manipulation for Condition 2 may be explained as a priming effect. Fazio, Powell and Herr (1983) and Fazio (1986) have described a process in which attitude has a central role in the coordination of beliefs and behavior. The process starts when an object or situation is perceived, stimulating an appropriate attitude which then selectively activates related beliefs, and sometimes behavior. A variety of attitudes may be aroused depending on details of the situation and it seems likely that, besides outcome attitudes, it is possible to prime normative and control dispositions. The findings of the study are consistent with this interpretation: that the change in the scenario in Condition 2 primed the control perspective and, as a result, beliefs were mobilized in relation to control. One element in the present study which may create artificiality is the need to answer questions immediately after the scenario presentation; this could heighten priming effects and produce reactions which would not occur over the longer periods that are more relevant to redress seeking.

Planned Behavior

Planned behavior theory provides a well specified and comprehensive instrument for exploring the factors associated with complaining. In this instance the overall explanation of the

intention to seek redress was rather lower than that typically obtained; this probably arose from a lack of variance in the intention measure. With improved measures we may expect the R^2 values found in other applications of planned behavior theory (Madden et al 1992 reviewed ten studies and found an average R^2 of 0.42).

Studies of complaining have focused on a limited number of individual factors that might correlate with complaining. It is argued that this approach is too piecemeal. We need instruments that embrace all (or at least most) of the possible determinants so that the relative importance of different factors can be established. The present study showed that the attitude component was not the most important of the global factors despite the emphasis that has been given to this type of correlate in previous work; such a finding was only possible because a comprehensive measuring instrument was used.

Factors Associated With Redress Seeking

This research revealed a number of specific factors associated with redress seeking. In a real setting most of these factors are likely to have little association with the degree of dissatisfaction and this helps to explain evidence that the latter has limited connection with the likelihood of complaining. The intention to seek redress is strongly affected by normative and control factors and some supposedly attitudinal factors such as *standing up for rights* and *embarrassment* exert their effect through non-attitudinal paths. Comparison between the Conditions shows that quite small changes in the scenario could switch the way in which beliefs were connected with behavior. In particular *standing up for rights* was related to intention via SN in Condition 1 and via PC in Condition 2. The second connection via PC may occur because norms such as *standing up for rights* are shared understandings and provide the basis for agreement between customer and supplier; if both share the norm redress seeking is assisted.

This study showed that the importance of factors changed with alteration of the scenario and suggests that small variations in the situation in which redress is sought could have considerable effect. This makes it unlikely that redress seeking

will have a consistent set of correlates across a range of situations. Nonetheless further research using planned behavior methods may lead us to generalisations about the way in which some factors often affect complaining. This study suggests that embarrassment is a barrier rather than a cost and that complaining will be stimulated by providing procedures that people can confidently use; it also seems likely that complaining will be increased when suppliers publicly endorse consumer rights so that customers are more confident that their complaints will be sympathetically received.

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