

e-CONSUMER COMPLAINTS ABOUT ON-LINE STORES

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ABSTRACT

The development of the Internet has created a more efficient means for consumers to gather product information, compare prices, and make purchases at any time and from anywhere. The number of Internet users who are shopping on-line steadily increases. The number of consumers who complain about on-line shopping also increases. Since Internet shopping is still in its infancy, it becomes necessary to detect the consumer complaint areas in order to guarantee the welfare of both on-line business and on-line consumers. This paper examines a) the distribution of complaints according to on-line business type, b) the distribution of complaints according to on-line store type, c) the major complaint themes, d) the distribution of complaint themes according to on-line store types, and e) the categorisation of complaint themes. A total of 4019 on-line complaint letters collected from complaint web sites are content analysed, eleven complaint categories are identified, and their percentage distribution is presented. The majority of complaints are about ISPs, followed by on-line stores and on-line services, respectively. Further, it is found that consumer complaint themes show variety across different on-line store types.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the business world is experiencing a tremendous change in the way of conducting business due to the recent technological advancements and globalisation. Internet and electronic commerce (e-commerce) are the two important tools of this information and telecommunication age. The development of the Internet has created a more efficient means for consumers to gather product information, compare prices, and make purchases at any time and from anywhere. Taylor Nelson Sofres marketing research company (2002) conducted a survey-called "2002 Global E-commerce Report"- across 37 countries, and a total of 42,238 people have been interviewed. The results of that study indicate that between 2001

and 2002 the proportion of Internet users that are shopping on-line has not increased. However, an increase in number of people on-line has helped to ensure that e-commerce is growing.

Nevertheless, not only the number of on-line consumers increases, but also the number of on-line complainants significantly grows. Because of the increasing number of complaints about on-line companies, the Federal Trade Commission launched a web site-"econsumer.gov", which is accessible by 17 member countries. According to On-line Complaint Trends (www.econsumer.gov), from January 1 to December 31, 2003, a total of 5,263 econsumer complaints were received. According to the web site, "merchandise/ service never received" and "misrepresentation" are the most frequently seen complaints, and "catalogue sales/shop-at-home", "computers: equipment/software" and "Internet auctions" are the products/services categories that receive the majority of complaints.

Since Internet shopping is still in its infancy, and since there is no time and geographic restrictions for the activities of on-line companies, it becomes necessary to detect the consumer complaint areas in order to guarantee the welfare of both on-line business and on-line consumers. This is particularly important for providing the satisfaction of on-line consumers, and accordingly facilitating the survival of e-commerce. Therefore, in this paper it is aimed to find out a) the distribution of complaints according to on-line business type, b) the distribution of complaints according to on-line store type, c) the major complaint themes, d) the distribution of complaint themes according to on-line store type, and e) the categorisation of complaint themes.

In the following parts, the consumer complaint behavior literature is presented, and then the research methodology and the findings of the study are submitted. Finally, a framework that illustrates the consumer complaints about on-line stores in a three staged transaction process is given, and some suggestions regarding the complaint areas are generated.

LITERATURE ON CONSUMER COMPLAINT BEHAVIOR

Academicians interest in the field of consumer complaining behavior begins during 1970s, and shows an increasing tendency during the 1980s. This interest led to the emergence of journals related to the topic of consumer satisfaction, such as the *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*. Satisfaction of consumers is crucial for marketers since it is assumed that satisfaction leads to increased market share, repeat sales and consumer loyalty, positive word of mouth, and profitability. In other words, consumer satisfaction is the impetus for the survival of the companies.

The literature on Consumer Complaint Behavior (CCB) has six major stream research areas. The first research stream is related with the theoretical background of consumer complaint behaviour in order to understand the road that goes to the conceptualisation of consumer complaint behaviour. Anderson (1973, p. 38) considered 1. cognitive dissonance (assimilation), 2. contrast, 3. generalised negativity, and 4. assimilation-contrast as the four psychological theories that predict the effects of disconfirmed expectations on perceived product performance and consumer satisfaction. The results of the study indicated that "too great a gap between high consumer expectations and actual product performance may cause a less favorable evaluation of a product than a somewhat lower level of disparity" (Anderson 1973, p. 38). On the other hand, LaTour and Peat (1979) generalised and applied a comparison level theory to product attributes, which is borrowed from psychology. Krishnan and Valle (1979) applied attribution theory to examine the impact of attributions about responsibility for post purchase dissatisfaction in consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature. The authors found that consumers who blame themselves for dissatisfaction about a product are less likely to complain. Oliver (1980) applied the disconfirmation model to explain consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to this model, consumers have pre-purchase expectations, and consumers compare their expectations with the performance of the product/service. If the actual performance

exceeds expectations, then there is a positive disconfirmation; however, if performance fails to meet expectations, then a negative disconfirmation occurs (Oliver, 1980). The disconfirmation model was used by Swan and Trawick (1981) in a retail store context. It was found that "intentions were predicted most strongly by satisfaction, followed by inferred disconfirmation, and then by the expectations"(Swan and Trawick 1981, p. 62).

The study conducted by Bearden and Teel (1983, p. 22) concluded that "Satisfaction/dissatisfaction is, in turn, presumed to influence subsequent attitudes, intentions, and complaint behavior". Jacoby and Jaccard (1981, p. 6) defined complaint behaviour as "the action taken by an individual which involves communicating something negative regarding a product or service to either the firm manufacturing or marketing that product or service, or to some third-party organizational entity." Furthermore, Singh (1988, p. 94) gave the conceptualisation of consumer complaining behaviour (CCB) as follows: "CCB, then, is conceptualised as a set of multiple (behavioral and nonbehavioural) responses, some or all of which are triggered by perceived dissatisfaction with a purchase episode". By nonbehavioural responses, the author meant taking no action; while by behavioral responses the author meant taking action (Singh, 1988). As it is seen, it can be concluded that there is no single theory about CCB, and during the conceptualisation of CCB various theories from different fields were used (Blodgett, Granbois and Walters, 1993).

The second research stream is about the nature and extent of consumer satisfaction/ dissatisfaction. Consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction about various product/service categories, percentage distribution of reasons for dissatisfaction, percentage of consumers having complaints about the products/services that they purchased, most prevalent consumer complaint types, and the sectors that are most often complained about are among the widely studied topics by the researchers (Andreassen and Best 1977; Ash 1978; Day and Bodur 1978; Day and Ash 1979; Grainer et al. 1979; Bolfing 1989; Dolinsky 1994).

The determinants of complaint behaviour established the third research field in CCB literature. Day, Grabicke, Schaetzle, and Staubach (1981, p.

94) mention that "the factors that influence a dissatisfied individual's propensity to complain can be grouped into three categories: (1) circumstances which determine what is at stake in the situation and what the likely costs and benefits of redress seeking or other actions will be; (2) the characteristics of the individual and the situation which determine the purely psychological costs and benefits of alternative actions and mediate action tendencies; and (3) the market conditions, legal climate, and other circumstances which determine the probability of a successful outcome if the action is taken". Gronhaug and Zaltman (1981, p. 85) determined that "active complainers are higher in experience (i.e., buying experience), higher in income, higher in education and they tend to be younger than do the noncomplainers". The propensity to complain has been found to vary according to the demographic and psychological characteristics of consumers. Complainers have typically been found to be younger, well educated, and have professional jobs and higher income (Warland, Herrman and Willits, 1975; Singh 1990a). They have also been found to be more assertive and self-confident compared to non-complainers (Singh, 1990a). Morganosky and Buckley (1986, p. 224) find that "complainers tend to be the most highly and financially successful segments in the marketplace. Due to their relatively high educational levels, they may be more aware of alternative modes for gaining satisfaction such as the calling the Better Business Bureau, etc." In addition, Morganosky and Buckley (1986, p. 225) reported that the "complainer values uniqueness, individuality or a sense of independence". Kolodinsky (1993) found that older persons and women are less likely to have complaints resolved; and even if their complaints are resolved, women are less likely to repurchase the same service when they are dissatisfied. Kolodinsky (1995) identifies constraints (availability of time, and availability of resources) and learning (previous complaining experiences) as factors influencing consumer complaining behaviours.

In addition to demographic and psychological variables, cost/benefit variables such as income and price also have an impact on a consumer's propensity to complain (Kolodinsky 1993; Kolodinsky 1995; Oster 1980). The industry type

and structure also have an impact on the consumer complaining behaviour. For example some industry types called "loose monopolies" can cause consumers to show different complaining behaviours when compared to more competitive markets (Day et al. 1981; Kolodinsky 1993).

Classification of consumer reactions to dissatisfaction is a fourth research area under the topic of CCB. Some academicians try to categorise response styles of dissatisfied consumers into groups. Day and Landon (1977) presented consumer complaint behaviour as a two step process, where the first level distinguishes behavioral responses from nonbehavioral responses, and the second level groups behavioral responses into two: public and private responses. Over the years, some efforts have been done in order to make some modifications on the actions of dissatisfied consumers. For instance, Singh (1988, p. 104) showed that "CCB is a three-faceted phenomenon consisting of voice, third party, and private actions". "Voice CCB is directed to objects that are external to the consumer's social circle (i.e. informal relationships) and are directly involved in the dissatisfying exchange (e.g. retailer, manufacturer). The no-action responses are included in this category tentatively because they appear to reflect feelings toward the seller" (Singh 1988, p. 104). Private actions involve negative word-of-mouth communication to friends and relatives and exit behaviours (switch brand/seller); and third party actions involve actions directed toward external agencies such as the Better Business Bureau and legal options (Singh, 1988).

Singh (1990a) took a further step, and classifies consumer response styles into four clusters: "passives", "voicers", "irates", and "activists". Passives are the least likely to take any action, while voicers are the highest who actively complain to the service provider to obtain redress (Singh, 1990a). Furthermore, Singh (1990b) examined variations in voice behaviour across different service categories. Broadbridge and Marshall (1995) investigated post purchase dissatisfaction levels of consumers of domestic and major electrical appliances, and found that electrical goods generate a high ratio of public to private complaints. Hogarth, Hilgert, Kolodinsky and Lee (2001) conducted a study about complaining behaviours of consumers using credit

cards and found that less than one out of six households reported a problem; of those, nearly all took some sort of private or public action.

Fifth, consumer complaint behaviour literature heavily investigates the nature and extent of the problems encountered by the consumers, the antecedents and determinants of consumers' complaint behaviour, and the reactions of dissatisfied consumers. However, less emphasis is given to the area of how complaints are handled until 1990s. Consumer complaint handling can give companies the opportunity to make strategic decisions related to their marketing activities. According to Mitchell (1993, p. 9), some of the advantages companies can gain from effectively handling their complaints include: use in strategic planning as well as operational decisions, reduced likelihood of legal proceedings, increased brand loyalty; improved marketing intelligence, increased ease of complaining, internal marketing benefits, reduced warranty and servicing bills, customer perception of quality, objective quality gains, cross-selling to satisfied complainants, and reduced negative word of mouth. Moreover, Plymire (1991, p. 62) showed consumer complaints as opportunities and asserts that "... the surest road to a customer-focused culture is through increased complaints". Furthermore, Nyer (2000) found that consumers who are encouraged to complain reported greater increases in satisfaction and product evaluation compared to consumers who are not explicitly asked to complain. Likewise, the changes in satisfaction and product evaluations are found to be related to the complaining intensity. On the other hand, Schibrowsky and Lapidus (1994) mentioned that only recording and filing complaints is not enough for an effective complaint management. The authors recommended that these complaints must be analysed in a way that allows the firm to make the changes necessary to eliminate the causes of the complaints. Lam and Dale (1999) discussed that lack of management support, lack of employee motivation, poor internal and external communication, poor employee attitudes, and inadequate quality culture are among the elements that lead to unsuccessful complaint handling systems.

Finally, the sixth and the most recent research

area of academicians who are interested with CCB is related to Internet and consumer complaining, and satisfaction (Harrison-Walker 2001; Szymanski and Hise 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study reviews the consumer complaints, which are collected from the consumer complaint web sites about on-line shopping. Due to several reasons complaint web sites are chosen as the data source of this study. The first reason is that most people do not prefer to go to governmental agencies or consumer organisations. Secondly, since these web sites have advanced and large databases of complaints from different parts of a country about different companies and their distinct products, the problems experienced by the consumers also show diversity. Finally, it becomes very easy for consumers to make complaints on-line as a result of the convenience and time saving features of the Internet.

These web sites usually act as mediators between the complainants and companies. Once a complaint web site receives a complaint from a consumer, it sends this complaint to the company and asks for a resolution. It depends on the company whether or not to bring a resolution to the problem encountered by the consumer. The complaint web sites receive lots of complaints about both off-line companies and on-line companies. These web sites not only allow consumers to read the complaints of other consumers about the companies, but also write their own complaints about a specific company. Therefore, they have large databases of complaints about different companies, and their distinct products and services, from different states and regions of a country. However, this study covers only on-line stores where products are bought and sold, and excludes complaints about other on-line businesses such as on-line travel services or Internet service providers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the scope of this study is limited to the consumer complaints about on-line stores.

Research Design and Data Collection

Since exploratory study is appropriate for the

research areas, which are relatively fertile and under-investigated, in this study it becomes beneficial to employ an exploratory research design. Hence, the complaint web sites are reviewed in order to gain insight about major on-line shopping complaint areas of consumers from on-line companies. In this study, the researcher downloaded the consumer complaints from complaint web sites, and reviewed each of these complaints. In other words, "free and publicly searchable complaint web sites" constitute the study setting of this research. The use of the Internet as a medium of commerce has been a relatively recent way of conducting business. In this regard, consumer complaints about on-line shopping emerged within the past few years. Moreover, the establishment of the complaint web sites is also a current way of mediating between the consumers and companies. The foundation of most of on-line consumer complaint web sites begins by 2000. Therefore, complaint letters that were downloaded from these web sites cover the years 2000-2003.

The data collection method used in this study depend on on-line research, particularly "on-line computer search". First, the on-line search engines, namely "Google" and "MSN Search" are used to determine the web addresses of consumer complaint web sites. The terms used during the search were "complaint", "consumer", and "consumer organisations". The researcher obtained a list of eight complaint web sites. It has to be noted that the complaint web sites not only contain complaints about on-line shopping but also complaints about off-line shopping. Furthermore, some of these web sites collect compliments about the companies as well as complaints and questions.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size of Web Sites and Complaints

The sampling technique used in this study is "non-probability sampling", which involves personal judgement somewhere in the selection process. Furthermore, the type of non-probability sampling of this research is a "judgement sample". "Judgement samples are often called *purposive samples*; the sample elements are handpicked because it is expected that they can serve the

research purpose" (Churchill, 1999, p. 503). Out of eight complaint web sites, two were chosen purposively by the researcher. For the sampling purposes of this study, three criteria were used. First, some of these web sites do not share their complaints publicly. Second, some of the web sites do not have a large database of complaints. In other words, being publicly available is the first criterion, and having a large database of complaints-representativeness, is the second criterion. The credibility of the web site as a data source is the third criterion.

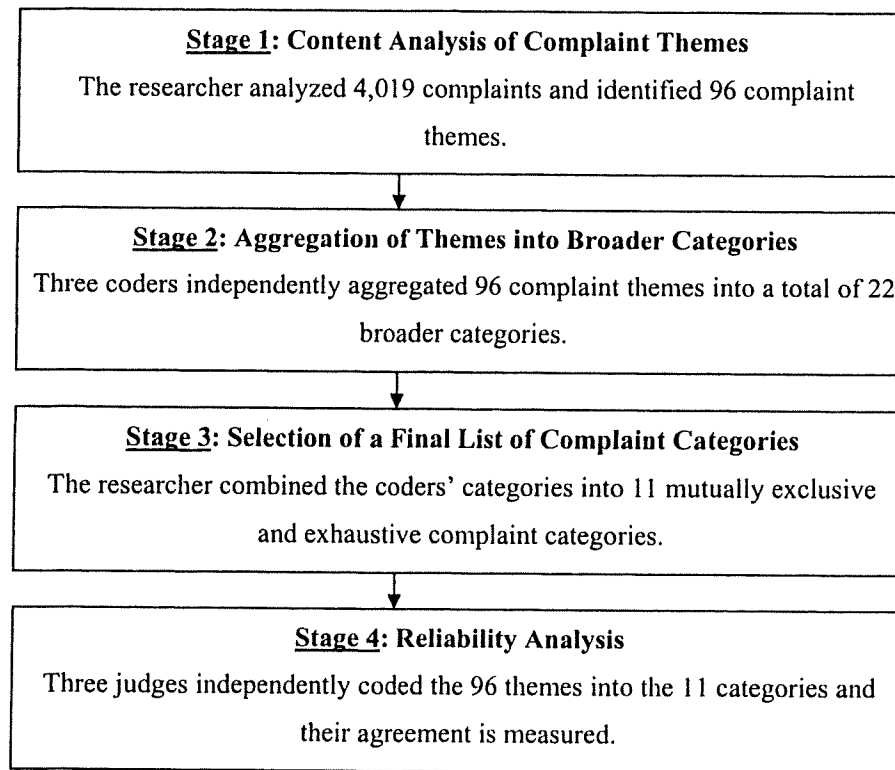
After determining the complaint web sites, the next step is to collect complaints about Internet related activities of companies. These complaint web sites have "search engines" on their web pages, which makes it possible for the consumers to read other complaints as well as to write their own complaints. Moreover, these web sites have large databases of complaints which are classified according to company names or business sectors. Since this study is concentrated on on-line shopping related complaints, each of these web sites are searched for the words "e-commerce", "e-business", "on-line shopping", and "Internet". A total of 17,608 complaints about Internet related businesses were found within the given time frame. In the findings section, more details are given about the distribution of these complaints according to Internet related business areas. However, since the scope of this study includes only complaints about on-line stores where products are bought and sold, the research population becomes 4,602 complaints. The researcher deleted the complaints, which were a) repeated within the same complaint site, and/or b) written to both web sites by the same consumer. Therefore, a total of 4,019 complaints remained as the population of this study.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Research Analysis and its Stages

In this exploratory research design, a total of 4,019 complaint letters were content analysed. The four stage content analysis model of Zimmer and Golden (1988) was adapted, which is demonstrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1
Stages in the Data Analysis



The Distribution of Total Complaints According to On-line Business Areas

The distribution of the total of 17,608 complaint letters according to on-line business areas is presented by Table 1. The researcher, depending on how these businesses define themselves, identifies 11 different on-line business areas. It has to be noted that during the classification of on-line businesses, several search engines, such as Google, have been also examined.

Table 1 clearly shows that on-line stores/shopping sites (from now on referred to as on-line stores) is the second on-line business area that receives the majority of consumer complaints. Out of 17,608 complaints, 4,602 complaints are related about on-line stores, which is the main research area of this study. However, as it is stated before, of the

4,602 complaints, a total of 4,019 are useable for this research.

The Distribution of Complaints According to On-line Store Type

The on-line stores are classified into 18 different categories. This categorisation also takes into account the classifications on the aforementioned search engines. While classifying these stores, the way they define themselves and the major product groups that they sell are the two criteria that were used by the researcher. Some of these stores can be pure click stores (e.i.amazon.com), while others can be click with a brick store (i.e. sears.com). Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of 4,019 complaints according to on-line store type.

Table 2 shows that the highest number of

Table 1
The Distribution of Total Complaints According to On-line Business Areas

On-line Business Areas	Frequency of Complaints	Percentage of Complaints
ISPs and Web Hosting Providers	6,369	36.17%
On-line Stores/Shopping Sites	4,602	26.14%
On-line Services	2,588	14.70%
On-line Reward Programs	1,218	6.92%
Web Portals and Search Engines	905	5.14%
On-line Auction Sites	710	4.03%
On-line Entertainment Sites	425	2.41%
On-line Lotteries and Gambling	222	1.26%
On-line Tickets and Events	195	1.11%
On-line Media and News	138	0.78%
Miscellaneous Web Sites	236	1.34%
	17,608	100%

Table 2
The Distribution of Complaints According to On-line Store Type

On-line Store Category	Frequency of Complaints	Percentage of Complaints
1. Auto Parts and Accessories Stores	87	2.16%
2. Baby Stores	52	1.29%
3. Beauty and Health Stores	283	7.04%
4. Book and Music Stores	346	8.61%
5. Clothing Stores	123	3.06%
6. Department Stores	380	9.46%
7. Drugstores	71	1.77%
8. Electronics and Computer Stores	859	21.37%
9. Flower and Gift Shops	501	12.47%
10. Food and Grocery Stores	84	2.09%
11. Home, Garden and Furniture Stores	212	5.27%
12. Jewelry and Watch Stores	46	1.14%
13. Mass Merchandise Stores	528	13.13%
14. Office and Business Product Stores	106	2.64%
15. Pet Stores	73	1.82%
16. Sporting Goods Stores	109	2.71%
17. Toy Stores	80	1.99%
18. Other	79	1.97%
Total	4,019	100%

complaints is received by electronics and computer stores with a percentage of 21.37%. This is followed respectively by mass merchandise stores, flower and gift shops, department stores, and book and music stores.

Stage 1. Content Analysis of Themes

The researcher as the first step of the content

analysis, reviews all on-line store related complaints, and as a result 96 different complaint themes are found. However, in a single complaint letter, more than one complaint theme can be detected. For example, in the following complaint letter the consumer was sent a wrong product, and then incurs shipping cost to return the wrong product:

"...I ordered item number 30418-00 stair treads

set of 6 green in color. What was sent to me was a set of stair treads in blue. When I called in to complain, I was told to ship them back and that the correct green treads would be sent to me. The problem is that the shipping to return this item is almost \$17.00. The item cost \$19.95. Why should I have to [pay] the return shipping when the mistake was on your end not mine? ..."

Therefore, even though the number of complainants is 4,019, the frequency of complaint themes is 6,714.

Table 3, in the far right column, shows the frequency of complaint themes; 4,019 consumers have experienced 6,714 incidences of complaint themes for an average of 1.7 occurrences (6714/4019) for complainants reporting problems. This table covers each complaint theme even if it does not constitute 1% of complainants, such as "disgusting web site content", "socially unacceptable, controversial advertising", or "billing and charging sales tax on the product even though the state of the consumer is tax exempt". The main reason of this is that some of these complaint themes may not be prevalent at the time of the research, but may indicate the upcoming problems, which will affect the success of e-commerce.

The Distribution of Complaint Themes According to On-line Store Types

The frequency distribution of complaint themes gives a general idea about the most frequently encountered problems while shopping on-line. However, one of the research objectives of this study is to explore whether the frequencies of these complaint themes differ according to on-line store types. Hence, in Table 3 a cross-tabulation is presented in order to show the frequencies of aforementioned complaint themes across on-line store types. The on-line store categories, which are previously mentioned, are denoted by Roman numerals:

- I. Auto Parts and Accessories Stores,
- II. Baby Stores,
- III. Beauty and Health Stores,
- IV. Book and Music Stores,

- V. Clothing Stores,
- VI. Department Stores,
- VII. Drugstores,
- VIII. Electronics and Computer Stores,
- IX. Flower and Gift Shops,
- X. Food and Grocery Stores,
- XI. Home, Garden and Furniture Stores,
- XII. Jewelry and Watch Stores,
- XIII. Mass Merchandise Stores,
- XIV. Office and Business Product Stores,
- XV. Pet Stores,
- XVI. Sporting Goods Stores,
- XVII. Toy Stores, and
- XVIII. Other.

The rows of Table 3 show the frequencies of complaint themes. That is to say, row 1 represents the "failure of the company to honour refund and/or exchange the product", row 2 represents the "e-mail and/or phone customer service not responding to messages", and so on. The interpretation of Table 3, gives us feedback about frequently encountered complaint themes among different types of on-line stores.

Table 3 shows that "failure of the company to honour refund and/or exchange the product" as a complaint is highest among electronics and computer stores; approximately 25% (117/471) of all complaints related to refund/exchange is seen in electronics and computer stores. However, this can be attributable to the volume of total complaints in this store type; 21% of the 4019 consumers complained about electronics and computer stores. In addition, consumers who complain about electronics and computer stores usually reported problems about "e-mail and/or phone customer service not responding to messages". The reason for this is that consumers usually need technical help about electronics and digitals, therefore they ask their questions either via e-mail or phone. When consumers can not receive answers to their questions in a timely and responsive manner, they complain about these services. Almost half of "unsatisfactory repair, maintenance and technical support" related complaints are seen in the category of electronics and computers stores. This seems meaningful, because, since high tech products are sold in these stores, consumers usually need help either during the

installation/assembly of products or during the maintenance of the products.

One of the significant findings of the study is that the highest occurrence of the complaint themes of “non-delivery of the product” and “failure to honour the shipping and delivery period” are seen in the category of flower and gift shops. The periods of Christmas, Saint Valentine’s Day, and Halloween’s Day and other special days, are usually very busy for flower and gift shops, and when stores can not honour their delivery related statements, they can not meet the expectations of consumers. Furthermore, 39% of the complaints about the theme of “product not as agreed on, described, or seen on the web site of the company” comes from flower and gift shops.

Another interesting result is that the fifth highest complaint theme, “failure of the company to honour the rebates, gifts, coupons, and other promotions”, is most frequently seen in the department store category. On-line department stores usually use several promotion methods such as rebates, free shipping, and gift certificates in order to increase their sales. However, when the consumers can not receive these promotions as they expected, they complain about these stores.

“Low Quality/performance of the products” is at the top for flower and gift shops, and then is followed by electronic and computer stores. This type of complaint is equally important within beauty and health stores. Moreover, “misleading/ deceiving advertising” and “selling harm giving/ unsafe/ dangerous products” are at the maximum level in beauty stores. This can be explained by the fact that most of the products sold in these stores are very sensitive products and usually are directly related with human health. For instance, nutritional products, cosmetics, and vitamins are the products sold in these stores. Moreover, advertisements of nutritional products or cosmetics sometimes receive criticism due to exaggerated claims and statements.

Another crucial finding of Table 3 is that book and music stores receive most of the complaints about “order process system not permitting consumers to use promotional coupons, rebates and gift certificates”, and “incorrect billing due to double charging, overcharging, and/or unauthorised charging”. Being one of the most frequently

purchased items on the Internet, books and CDs are generally accompanied with promotional tools such as gift certificates. Moreover, besides large companies, small sized companies can sell books and CDs on-line, since it does not necessitate a great amount of investment. Hence, despite having an inadequate order process system, many companies try to sell books via Internet, and also offer some promotional coupons. However, consumers can not use these coupons and certificates while they are giving their orders on-line. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that from time to time, even large companies can experience such problems.

“Problems occurring because of the business partners/affiliates of the company” has a frequency of 50 among all complaint themes, and 17 of them are encountered in mass merchandise stores where a wide range of non-food merchandise and grocery items are sold. Mass merchandise stores usually sell the products of different brands and they usually work with multiple business partners, hence it is an expected result to have highest problems about business partners/ affiliates in this store category.

Stage 2. Aggregation of Themes into Broader Categories

Three coders with different educational backgrounds are used in order to classify 96 complaint themes into broader categories. Three coders independently aggregated 96 complaint themes into a total of 22 broader categories. The categorization of coders is presented in Table 4.

Stage 3. Selection of a Final List of Complaint Categories

In this stage, the researcher creates 11 categories from the 22 broader categories of coders. Table 5 gives the classification of complaint themes under 11 categories.

Stage 4. Reliability Analyses

In this section, the aforementioned 96 complaint themes are placed under the 11 complaint categories. Three judges, with doctorate degrees in marketing, are asked to assign each of the 96 complaint themes

Table 3
The Frequency Distribution of Complaint Themes According to On-line Store Type

Complaint Themes	On-line Store Type																		Row Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	
1	14	13	34	38	24	47	3	117	36	2	35	9	62	9	3	19	2	4	471
2	3	10	30	19	13	46	8	76	50	11	31	6	38	10	9	22	10	9	401
3	5	2	35	34	21	27	5	36	75	14	23	8	47	6	5	14	14	11	382
4	1	0	16	43	7	23	3	53	79	15	29	3	14	7	3	8	11	4	319
5	1	0	20	24	3	111	13	63	19	3	6	2	16	26	0	4	2	2	315
6	11	2	33	1	3	15	0	35	55	4	24	4	22	1	3	4	1	1	219
7	1	4	7	27	8	20	5	35	23	2	3	2	17	8	4	8	7	5	186
8	2	2	8	14	9	16	2	18	22	14	11	4	19	6	6	10	9	11	183
9	6	2	6	16	7	13	1	41	22	4	11	2	24	5	1	1	2	7	171
10	6	1	17	11	6	11	1	47	24	3	10	0	13	4	4	4	3	4	169
11	5	0	17	29	8	10	7	29	13	3	5	4	17	4	2	6	4	3	166
12	7	3	21	16	3	14	2	36	30	0	5	1	12	6	1	3	1	3	164
13	4	5	12	12	7	9	0	24	22	8	15	0	18	4	3	4	3	4	154
14	6	0	19	5	2	12	0	51	7	1	16	1	23	1	2	3	1	1	151
15	1	4	6	25	6	11	7	31	13	6	3	3	12	0	3	3	1	5	140
16	2	2	3	13	3	13	9	36	9	0	3	1	12	4	0	4	0	3	117
17	3	0	7	9	4	2	1	34	9	3	6	1	12	6	5	5	0	1	108
18	5	1	1	3	0	11	0	52	1	0	11	3	12	0	1	5	0	0	106
19	0	4	7	6	1	7	0	40	7	0	6	4	16	2	0	0	0	3	103
20	3	0	5	2	2	3	1	16	40	2	7	2	17	0	2	0	0	1	103
21	0	4	6	8	1	15	0	22	11	0	12	1	3	3	1	2	3	3	95
22	0	3	10	16	5	4	3	8	15	1	2	3	6	5	2	0	5	0	88
23	1	0	12	4	2	7	2	17	4	2	3	0	15	3	5	1	5	3	86
24	1	0	25	3	1	5	6	9	4	1	2	0	18	6	2	0	2	1	86
25	1	0	7	16	2	2	1	20	5	1	1	2	5	1	1	5	1	2	73
26	1	1	4	4	3	9	3	10	11	1	2	0	15	0	2	2	3	1	72
27	1	0	2	6	1	2	0	12	11	1	13	0	15	0	0	2	0	1	67
28	0	1	1	1	2	1	0	23	17	1	4	0	14	0	0	2	0	0	67
29	4	1	2	4	0	2	0	24	5	0	4	0	10	1	5	1	1	2	66
30	0	0	5	12	4	7	0	10	5	0	0	0	18	1	1	2	0	1	66
31	0	0	1	5	2	2	0	20	11	4	2	1	7	1	0	2	2	2	62
32	0	0	2	9	2	4	0	17	7	1	4	1	9	0	2	0	1	2	61
33	0	1	0	8	3	3	2	21	1	2	3	1	11	2	0	2	0	1	61
34	1	1	5	5	2	9	0	15	5	5	4	0	2	0	1	2	1	2	60
35	3	0	2	8	7	2	0	15	5	3	0	1	9	2	0	1	0	1	59
36	2	0	9	10	4	1	1	2	6	3	4	0	5	1	2	1	0	2	53
37	1	0	2	4	0	1	3	9	12	2	4	0	7	0	2	1	1	2	51

38	0	0	2	7	1	1	0	8	8	0	1	0	17	2	1	1	0	1	50
39	0	1	10	4	1	1	1	9	3	0	0	0	6	4	0	4	2	2	48
40	0	3	2	3	0	2	5	10	3	0	2	1	3	6	0	2	2	2	46
41	1	0	5	7	1	2	0	4	3	1	1	0	12	1	1	4	3	0	46
42	3	0	4	4	2	1	2	1	10	2	2	0	4	0	4	0	5	1	45
43	1	1	4	4	1	1	0	21	5	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	45
44	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	21	1	0	2	0	17	0	0	1	0	1	45
45	1	0	3	3	3	2	0	20	2	0	0	1	4	1	0	0	0	3	43
46	0	1	3	3	1	2	0	21	1	0	1	0	8	0	1	0	1	0	43
47	0	1	1	1	1	3	0	18	0	0	0	1	4	6	0	5	1	0	42
48	2	0	3	1	0	1	0	20	1	0	4	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	42
49	0	0	0	0	6	4	1	2	5	0	0	0	16	0	5	0	2	0	41
50	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	27	0	2	0	4	0	2	0	0	0	40
51	2	2	1	6	1	3	0	7	2	0	1	0	2	0	1	4	1	6	39
52	0	0	4	6	0	0	0	15	4	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	39
53	3	0	12	5	1	0	0	4	1	1	1	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	36
54	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5	5	2	0	1	13	2	0	1	1	1	36
55	0	0	5	1	1	1	0	8	9	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	33
56	0	2	4	8	0	0	0	4	0	1	5	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	32
57	1	0	4	1	2	3	0	7	5	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	31
58	0	0	3	4	0	2	0	9	2	0	1	0	6	0	1	1	1	0	30
59	0	0	4	5	0	0	0	3	2	2	2	0	9	1	0	2	0	0	30
60	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	0	1	30
61	0	0	0	5	0	4	0	11	3	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	29
62	0	0	0	3	2	2	0	12	4	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	29
63	1	0	12	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	26
64	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	10	0	0	1	0	8	0	0	1	1	0	25
65	1	0	0	2	0	3	0	10	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	1	0	24
66	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	10	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	0	22
67	0	2	1	4	0	6	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	22
68	0	0	1	2	1	2	1	3	2	1	0	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	19
69	0	0	2	7	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	18
70	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	6	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	1	17
71	0	0	0	1	3	4	0	2	1	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	16
72	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	2	3	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	16
73	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	8	0	0	0	16
74	0	0	0	2	2	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	15
75	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	7	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	15
76	0	0	1	0	4	1	0	4	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	14
77	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	2	0	5	0	0	1	14
78	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	1	0	13
79	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	1	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	13

80	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	13
81	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	12
82	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	5	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12
83	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	11
84	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10
85	0	0	2	3	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	10
86	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	10
87	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	10
88	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	9
89	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	9
90	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	7
91	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	5
92	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	5
93	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
94	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
95	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
96	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Column Total	123	84	500	613	219	562	105	1487	821	148	372	78	840	172	120	194	135	141	6714

Table 4
Classification of Complaint Themes by Coders

Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3
• Logistics	• Order and Delivery	• Shipping
• Order Management	• Web Site and Infrastructure	• Company-Consumer Relations
• Inventory	• Customer Service	• Usage and After Sales
• Ethical	• Pricing and Cost	• Initial Selling Factors
• Customer Service	• Product and Quality	• Virtual Shop
• Payment/Pricing	• Firm Policy	• Charging
• Product/service		
• After Sales		
• Content/Web Site		
• Service Representatives		

to the category that fits best to its content. Table 6 shows the pairwise judgement percentage agreements.

According to Zimmer and Golden (1988, p. 292), the probability by chance alone of two judges assigning 96 themes to the same category when there are 11 categories can be calculated by using the formula for a binomial probability. This formula is:

$$P(k \text{ successes}) = [N! / k! \times (N-k)!] \times [p^k \times (1-p)^{N-k}]$$

When this formula is applied, the probability that two judges will assign a theme to the same category by chance will be $p = 1/11 = 0.090$, and $N = 96$ themes, the probabilities of 91, 82, and 82 matches respectively, can be represented as follows:

$$\text{Judges A and B: } p(91) = [96! / (91! \times 5!)] \times [(1/11)^{91} \times (10/11)^5] = 6.49 \times 10^{-88}$$

$$\text{Judges A and C: } p(82) = [96! / (82! \times 14!)] \times [(1/11)^{82} \times (10/11)^{14}] = 2.54 \times 10^{-70}$$

Table 5
Categorisation of Complaint Themes

Complaint Category	Frequency	Percentage
Delivery Related Issues	1259	19%
Customer Relations and Services Related Issues	1161	17%
Product and Product Supporting Services Related Issues	708	11%
Return/Exchange and Refund Policy Related Issues	690	10%
Order Process Related Issues	667	10%
Billing and Payment Related Issues	614	9%
Promotion and Advertising Related Issues	579	9%
Web Site Content and Technology Related Issues	564	8%
Pricing Related Issues	264	4%
Company Related Issues	127	2%
Privacy Related Issues	81	1%

Table 6
The Percentage Agreement of Judges

Judges	Number of Matching (out of 96)	Percent Matching
A and B	91	94.79%
A and C	82	85.41%
B and C	82	85.41%

Judges B and C: $p(82) = [96! / (82! \times 14!)] \times [(1/11)^{82} \times (10/11)^{14}] = 2.54 \times 10^{-70}$

It is evident that the probability of the results obtained due to chance alone is extremely small. A normal approximation to the binomial quantifies the significance of this result. A z-score is calculated for the probability of obtaining 82 (since 82 is the lowest match) or more matches according to the following formula:

$$z = (k - E_k) / \sqrt{np \times (1-p)}$$

Where E_k (expected number of matches) = $96 \times (1/11) = 8.72$. When this data is placed to the above formula for the judges with the lowest match (in this study either for judges A and C or for judges B and C, since they have the same amount of match):

$$z = (82 - 8.72) / \sqrt{[96 \times (1/11) \times (10/11)]} = 26.016$$

The probability that 82 or more complaints would be assigned to the same categories by chance is very low, because the z-score that corresponds to

an alpha of .01 is 2.33. Since the z-score of this study is 26.02, the number of matches achieved for all three pairs of judges is significantly greater than would be attributable to chance alone. Hence, the matches for all pairs of judges are significant ($p = .01$).

The percentage agreement for reliability usually receives criticism from several researchers due to its inadequacy (Rust and Cooil, 1994; Grayson and Rust, 2001). The reason for this criticism is that "simply using percentage agreement between judges is not so good because some agreement is sure to occur, if only by chance, and the fewer the number of categories, the more random agreement is likely to occur, thus making the reliability appear better than it really is" (Grayson and Rust, 2001, p. 71). Therefore for the robustness of the reliability of this study, Cohen's κ is calculated according to the directions in the study by Grayson and Rust (2001):

$$\kappa = (p_a - p_c) / (1 - p_c) \text{ where,}$$

p_a is the proportion of agreed on judgements, in

other words:

$$p_a = (n_{11} + n_{22} + \dots + n_{1111}) / n_{++}$$

p_c is the proportion of agreements one would expect by chance, that is to say:

$$p_c = (e_{11} + e_{22} + \dots + e_{1010} + e_{1111}) / n_{++} \text{ where,}$$

$$e_{11} = (n_{1+} / n_{++}) \times (n_{+1} / n_{++}) \times (n_{++})$$

$$e_{22} = (n_{2+} / n_{++}) \times (n_{+2} / n_{++}) \times (n_{++})$$

In this study, there are 11 categories and 96 complaint themes; and 3 independent judges assign 96 complaints into these 11 categories. Hence the Cohen's κ results are as follows:

Cohen's κ for Judges 1 and 2: 0,942

Cohen's κ for Judges 1 and 3: 0,837

Cohen's κ for Judges 2 and 3: 0,837

When interpreting the Cohen's κ results, it has to be noted that the results that are closer to 1 indicate higher agreement between the pair of judges. "If κ equals one, this indicates perfect agreement among all the judges. If κ equals zero, this means the extent of agreement is exactly what would be expected by chance. If κ is negative, then there is even less agreement than would be expected by chance. κ can not exceed one, and under some conditions, may not reach one even if there is perfect agreement" (Rust and Cooil, 1994, p. 2).

Assignment of Complaint Themes into Complaint Categories

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage distribution of complaint categories. Even though "failure of the company to honour refund and/or exchange the product" and "e-mail and/or phone customer service not responding to messages" are the top two complaint themes, when all complaint themes are classified, delivery related issues become the top complaint category. Moreover, delivery related issues consist of the complaint areas, which are placed among the top ten complaint themes. These complaint themes are respectively: "non-delivery of the product/failure to honour the delivery, "failure to

honour the shipping and delivery period", and "delivery of a wrong or unwanted product". Interestingly, the second highest complaint category is purely related with services; the complaint areas under the category of "customer relations and services related issues" are the supporting services, which add value to the core product. The third complaint category is related with products and product supporting services.

Another finding is that despite the discussions about the privacy related issues in both academic and business environments, consumers' level of complaints about privacy is around 1% of the total complaints. This can be because of the consumers' unawareness about the methods used to violate their privacy. For instance, one of the consumers writes a complaint about a bookstore and asks some questions:

"... Do they keep all information that I gave them last year? I don't know how this happened. Is it possible? When I entered their web site, I see all information about me...yes you guess it! even my credit card info..."

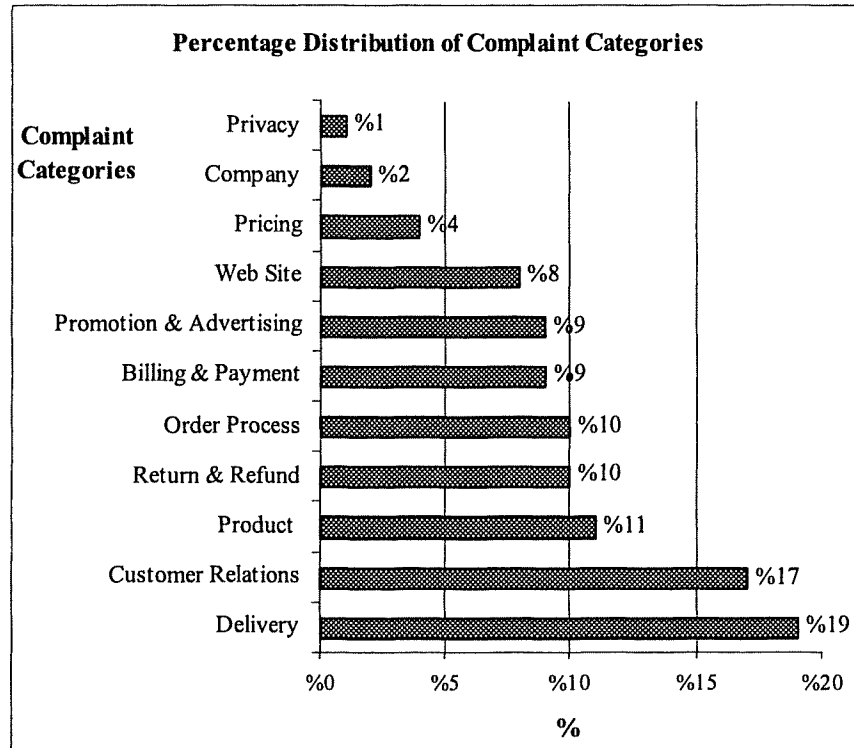
Web site content and technology related issues constitute 8% of all complaints. The complaints about "web site content and technology" are problems that are unique to the Internet environment, hence they carry special importance. Moreover, some of the complaints are not accustomed under traditional business environments.

Finally, the pricing related complaint category is expected to be high, but in contrast, it only constitutes 4% of all complaint frequencies. Consumers' access to better information about products and greater selection of products on the web, combined with lower operating costs of Internet businesses lead a reduction in prices, hence this can be the reason of low rates of price related complaints.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Nowadays, both academicians and practitioners rediscover the importance of consumer satisfaction due to increased competition, globalisation, and new forms of conducting business-such as electronic

Figure 2
The Percentage Distribution of Complaint Categories



commerce and mobile commerce. In this study, it is aimed to explore the consumer complaints about on-line stores. It is found that among all on-line business areas, Internet service providers and web hosting companies receive the majority of complaints. On-line stores and on-line services related complaints are respectively, the two other on-line business areas that receive most of the consumer complaints. The scope of this study is limited to complaints about on-line stores, and after the review of on-line complaint letters, which are collected from on-line complaint web sites, 96 different complaint themes are identified. The distribution of complaints among on-line stores shows that electronics and computer stores receive the majority of the complaints. Mass merchandise stores and flower and gift shops are the other two most frequently complained store categories.

The distribution of consumer complaint themes

reveals great variance according to the type of on-line store. For instance, complainants from electronics and computer stores usually mention "failure of the company to honour refund and/or exchange the product" "e-mail and/or phone customer service not responding to messages", and "unsatisfactory repair, maintenance and technical support" as the top three complaint themes. However, "misleading/ deceiving advertising" and "selling harm giving/unsafe/ dangerous products" are more common complaint themes for beauty stores.

Another purpose of this study is to classify the complaint themes into categories. It is found that 96 complaint themes can be grouped under 11 categories. By taking both complaint themes and complaint categories as two bases, some suggestions are developed for each complaint category in order to increase customer satisfaction from on-line

companies.

Suggestions About Delivery Related Issues.

State shipping and delivery terms and conditions on the web site at an easily seen place in a comprehensive way; deliver on-time, and state delivery periods which are not impossible to achieve; extend delivery periods during peak times (such as on holiday season-Christmas); use high quality shipping containers; integrate company's delivery system with the system of delivery carrier company; provide alternative delivery methods and options (for delivery methods: delivery to post office close to the consumer, enable consumers to pick up products from brick and mortar store; for delivery options: overnight delivery, two day delivery, ground delivery, etc.); integrate the company's internal divisions to a) each other, b) delivery carriers, and c) customers (i.e. interface inbound logistics with sales department, and sales department with outbound logistics, etc.); provide alternative delivery carriers; install a system where consumers can follow their orders through the help of web cameras and see the delivery conditions on time; in order to deliver the right product to the right place and person, use advanced computer systems.

Suggestions About Customer Relations and Services Related Issues.

Select staff who are responsive and competent, and have a courteous attitude against consumers; give regular training to all staff; inform customer service representatives about changes in company policies; provide toll-free numbers; provide virtual operators, and on-line chat environments; do not exceed the stated time range for returning messages of consumers; give to-the-point and accurate answers to specific queries of consumers; decrease waiting time on the phone by allowing consumers to leave messages to the telesecretary of the customer service representatives, who will call back consumers; do not prevent consumers if they want to talk with managers and supervisors, be transparent and give names and extensions of the managers; send notifications and updates via e-mail or phone to the consumers about their membership situations; make it possible to assign the same representative to the same customer, so that they do not have to describe the problem for

several times; use effective complaint handling and provide a link on the web site so that consumers can write their complaints, questions, or suggestions; make infrastructure investments in order to integrate customer service department with other departments (such as inbound logistics, marketing and sales, production, etc.).

Suggestions About Product and Product Supporting Services Related Issues.

Use total quality management in order to decrease ratio of defective products; provide a wide range of products for on-line store; use high quality packaging and wrapping; avoid selling harmful/dangerous products, and fake and counterfeit products and inform consumers about refurbished products; provide consistent and adequate labelling of the products, provide after sales service such as repair, maintenance, and technical support, provide on-line technical support or assistance; choose suppliers and partners that can support product warranty and guarantee; provide product documentation within package, or if possible on the web site.

Suggestions About Return/Exchange and Refund Policy Related Issues.

Provide easily seen, clear and comprehensive information about return and refund policy of the company on the web site; honour return and refund as it is stated on the company policy; do not demand a) shipping and handling fees and b) restocking fees for returned products, if the fault belongs to the company (for instance if wrong, incomplete, or defective product is sent, or if the stated delivery period is not honoured by the company); make it easy to obtain prepaid return labels (i.e. put it in the product package, or send via e-mail); make it possible to return products to the brick and mortar store of the company; in order to do this integrate the system of on-line store with that of brick and mortar store.

Suggestions Order Process Related Issues.

Provide order tracking system and make technological infrastructure investments; send order status notification about delays, cancellations, or order confirmation; provide order cancellation option prior to shipment and easy to understand cancellation information; design an order system

that does not permit the completion of an order process when the product is unavailable due to being out of stock, backordered, or discontinued (for instance give an alerting message before acceptance of the order if the product is unavailable); use integrated logistics systems, electronic data interchange, just in time, and shared technological infrastructure programs with the suppliers of the company in order to control inventory levels immediately and reflect changes to the consumer instantaneously; provide effective communication and coordination among different divisions of a company in order to prevent failures during order process (such as shipment of an order that is cancelled by the consumer); integrate the company's internal divisions to a) each other, b) to suppliers, c) to delivery carriers, and d) to customers through information and communication technologies; obtain approval from consumers prior to sending substitutes when the product is unavailable; provide option to change order information (such as amount or content of the order, credit card information, delivery date and place) prior to shipment; do not permit completion of order process if something is invalid, incorrect or missing (establish a sensitive order system that will not accept orders and will give an alerting message when the coupons and certificates used by the consumer are invalid, or some part of the credit card information is missing, or when the price given is wrong).

Suggestions About Billing and Payment Related Issues. Provide alternative payment methods; integrate accounting department with order taking, inbound and outbound logistics, and customer service departments through information and communication technologies (particularly through EDI-electronic data interchange) to prevent charging and billing the consumer for a) the non-delivered product or non-delivered portion of an order, b) order cancelled by the consumer, and c) his cancelled membership; bill and charge consumers upon shipment of the products; prior to billing and charging send a notification to the consumer about the amount and date of payment so that if something is wrong (for instance, if overcharging or double charging occurs) it can be corrected; payback overcharges and double charges immediately to

consumer's account; to prevent billing and charging the consumer for someone else's purchase or unwanted/not ordered products send notification and request approval of the consumer.

Suggestions About Promotion and Advertising Related Issues. Honour rebates, gift certificates, coupons on a timely manner; avoid misleading/deceiving advertising; avoid false demonstrations about products; avoid false claims about products and company policies; avoid bait and switch tactics; avoid controversial, socially unacceptable advertising, and represent accurate, clear and comprehensive information about promotional terms, conditions, and offers.

Suggestions About Web Site Content and Technology Related Issues. Provide easily accessible company web site and links; design easy to download web pages; give consumers text, small or large graphic image alternatives of the web page; design easy to navigate and user friendly shopping environment; give accurate and plenty of information on the web site about the company, its policies, and products and services; do not use disgusting content on the company web page; update web site regularly for stock changes, typographic errors, and provide fresh information; establish inter-organisational information systems with suppliers through the use of EDI, and integrate company's web site with the web sites of the suppliers so that accurate inventory information can be reflected to the consumers in a timely manner; provide subscribe/unsubscribe option on the web site; use most recent encryption methods to provide web site security; enable consumers to view shipping and tax charges on the web site; provide appropriate product categorisation on the web page; incorporate web site with promotional tools, so that print out or download of rebates, coupons, and certificates can be possible; and enable consumers to use promotional tools, such as rebates, coupons, and certificates during ordering without difficulty.

Suggestions About Pricing Related Issues. Avoid unreasonable shipping and handling fees; avoid unfair pricing (such as excessive and discriminatory pricing), and consider value pricing;

honour the price match/guarantee policy that is stated on company web page; avoid price irregularities and inform consumers about price changes; do not make price changes during the transaction; charge shipping and handling fee on the basis of the weight of the products; avoid inconsistent pricing between a brick and mortar store and on-line store of the same company; provide automated system that charges right sales tax for the right state/country, and enable consumers to view all additional fees prior to the end of ordering (for instance give estimated shipping and tax fees during the beginning of order process).

Suggestions About Company Related Issues.

Inform consumers about changes in company policies in a visible and understandable way; improve internal marketing (hence increase employee satisfaction); choose highly reputed, well-known business partners, and take the responsibility if they fail due to bankruptcy, or mergers and acquisitions; be liable to your consumers during acquisitions and mergers.

Suggestions About Privacy Related Issues.

Use permission marketing and opt-in vs. opt-out options while sending e-mails or newsletters to consumers, so that unsolicited mails can be prevented; state terms and conditions about the privacy policy of the company explicitly on the web site, and be sensitive of privacy of all consumers; state terms and conditions about the use of consumer data explicitly on the web site, and confirm that all personal data about consumers is encrypted.

Today companies that use the Internet to buy, sell, distribute and maintain products and services are realising significant cost savings and increased sales opportunities. However, these benefits can increase if and only if the number of satisfied on-line consumers increases. The complaints of consumers can be a guide for on-line companies in order to improve their processes and prevent complaint areas during these processes.

FURTHER RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Academicians have lagged behind in their study

of on-line consumer complaining behaviour, and post purchase complaining behaviour of on-line consumers with regard to understanding satisfaction/dissatisfaction. In order to understand why consumers show a resistance against on-line shopping, it is crucial to learn what makes them dissatisfied. The present study identifies 11 complaint categories that are consisted of a total of 96 complaint areas; however an empirical test of these findings is not conducted. Moreover, "what type of action do dissatisfied customers take against on-line companies?" is the question, which has to be reinvestigated for the on-line consumers. Therefore, it is highly recommended to revise past studies about consumer complaining behaviour for on-line consumers.

The impact of dissatisfied (or satisfied) on-line consumers on potential consumers is also a research area, which receives scant attention from researchers. This is particularly important because "word of mouth" (WOM) has changed as "web of mouth" through the usage of Internet as a communication device. On-line boards, newsletters, product rating web sites, and on-line communities are major tools that are used for web of mouth. Therefore, the impact of web of mouth should be investigated from different perspectives.

The present study includes complaints about on-line stores; however, on-line business is constituted of several business areas such as Internet service providers (ISPs), on-line services, on-line auctions, etc. As mentioned earlier in the findings part of this study, there are eleven on-line business areas, and this study is concerned with one of these business areas, namely with on-line stores. The complaints may show differences across these different business areas, hence to make generalisations from the findings of this study to all on-line business areas may be inappropriate.

Consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is a continuum, but this study only deals with the consumer dissatisfaction end of this continuum. In other words, what makes consumers dissatisfied about on-line stores is examined, but what makes consumers satisfied about on-line stores is not investigated. Another limitation of this study is that demographic information about the complainants, such as age, sex, income and education level, can

not be obtained. Hence a deep analysis of consumer complaining behaviour depending on the demographic indicators can not be done.

The future of e-commerce depends on its reputation and positive image, which can be achieved through highly satisfied consumers.

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