

# CONSUMER SATISFACTION, DISSATISFACTION AND ADVERTISING COMPLAINTS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior in the field of advertising, posing the questions how CS/D & CB on advertising can be understood in relation to CS/D & CB on goods and services, who are the complainers on advertisements and to what extent consumers are satisfied with the advertising system. To answer these questions we use statistical material from the Norwegian Consumer Ombud as well as data from several surveys representative of the Norwegian adult population focusing on attitudes towards and experiences with advertising. We argue for the importance of studying advertising system dissatisfaction, and point out that the consumers are dissatisfied with the advertising volume, they lack information in the advertisements and they dislike advertising that it is offensive. Still, only a minority of consumers have ever put forward a complaint on an advertisement. Most of the complaints that are handled by the Consumer Ombud deal with the information content in advertisements.

## PROBLEMS AND PURPOSE

This paper argues for the importance of studying consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior in the field of advertising. So far little attention has been paid to this, or related questions, in the broad field of research in CS/D & CB. During the last 15 years the main questions in the consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction studies concern products. Within this product-framework researchers have been engaged in studies discussing the concept of satisfaction, determinants of satisfaction and measurement problems (Hunt 1988, Ölander 1988, Westbrook 1988). The studies of complaining behavior focus on consumers' response reactions to this dissatisfaction, and try to explain the differences

between complainers and non-complainers (Andreasen 1988).

As Folke Ölander (1988) emphasizes, the majority of the studies concerning consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaining behavior, have focused on micro-marketing relations. To a certain extent questions have been raised about the macro-marketing and macro-political consequences of individual consumer dissatisfaction and complaining activity. What kinds of consumer political implementations can be drawn from this research? How can studies of consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction be used in formulating governmental policies? In answering these questions, Ölander expresses the skeptic's view (1976, 1977), claiming that it is possible for industry and retailers to use results from satisfaction/dissatisfaction studies as measures of their own performance in the market, but that this is difficult from the view of consumer advocates and organizations. At the same time, it is difficult to draw consumer political conclusions based on consumer complaining behavior because a large majority of the dissatisfied consumers never complain (Andreasen 1988). Also the composition of complaints changes as we move from dissatisfaction to informal complaints, and from informal verbal complaints to written complaints (Stø and Glefjell 1990).

Although most studies are concerned with individual products, two main tendencies in the recent research can be found. First of all, research on consumer services constitutes an increasing part of the CS/D & CB studies (Swan and Trawick 1982, Schutz and Casey 1982, Evrard 1989, Lee and Thorelli 1989, Goodwin and Ross 1989, Drew and Bolton 1989, Kolodinsky and Aelong 1990, Bloemer and Poiesz 1990).

Second, consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with shops and the retail system have widened the framework of the individual product oriented studies (Westbrook 1981). In this study Westbrook shows that satisfaction/

dissatisfaction with department stores and the retail system is an important dimension in the field of CS/D.

This paper offers a contribution to another dimension in the study of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior. In his classical article Renoux distinguishes between *macro-marketing system dissatisfaction* and *micro-marketing system dissatisfaction* (Renoux 1973). At the micro-level Renoux develops three dimensions of consumers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction: *shopping system dissatisfaction*, *buying system dissatisfaction* and *consuming system dissatisfaction*. Shopping system dissatisfaction involves accessibility and availability of products and retail outlets. Buying system dissatisfaction arises when consumers encounters situations which waste their time, energy and money, or bothers them in other ways. According to Renoux, consumers develop dissatisfaction with the consuming system when they experience problems in using, fixing or destroying products (Renoux 1973: 56-61). We will argue for the addition of a fourth dimension: *advertising system dissatisfaction*.

This paper discusses consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction in relation to advertising both on a micro- and on a macro-level. At the micro-level we particularly focus on satisfaction/dissatisfaction with specific advertisements and consumers' responses to this dissatisfaction. At the macro-level we focus on consumers' attitudes and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the advertising system as such. We pose the following questions:

1. How can CS/D & CB with advertising be understood in relation to CS/D & CB with goods and services?
2. Who are the complainers? Are there any empirical differences between this complaint-group in relation to complainers about goods and services? How can differences or similarities be understood?
3. To what extent are Norwegian consumers (dis)satisfied with the advertising system? What kinds of consumer political conclusions can be drawn on the basis of individual consumer complaints about advertising and on the basis of consumer dissatisfaction with the advertising system?

## DATA AND METHODS

In order to answer the questions posed above we used statistical material from the Consumer Ombud and the Market Council. These are the annual reports from the Consumer Ombud from 1973 to 1990. They show the development, over the years, of the practicing of the law and the handling of the cases, and report on 106 cases that were brought to the Market Council during the period. These reports contain information about the results of the cases, which article(s) the Market Council used in adjudicating them, and whether there was a unanimous or split vote in the Council.

We also use data from several surveys on the Norwegian population, with particular attention to a survey on consumers' attitudes towards, and experiences with advertising, including attitudes towards volume and information-content and the consumers' use of advertising. The sample was selected by a self-weighted stratified principle. This survey is based on personal interviews and is representative of the Norwegian adult population aged 15 years and over. It consists of 976 respondents interviewed in 1987.

Similar studies on the same issues that were conducted in 1970, 1976 and 1981, are also used. They focus on the same questions as the study mentioned above. In addition, we have a recent study from 1990, based on the same procedures as the others, consisting of interviews of a national sample of 1028 respondents. Among others, this survey focuses on complaint-activity on advertising matters. It is based on individual interviews on phone and is representative of the Norwegian adult population, aged 15 years and over.

## THE NORWEGIAN MODEL OF REGULATING ADVERTISING

The superior goals related to advertising problems in the Scandinavian model are very much the same as the goals set up by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the EC and the Council of Europe. However, *the means* to obtain these goals differ considerably, mainly because of the establishment of governmental institutions that handle complaints on the behalf of the consumers and that deal with regulation and control of advertising. The consequence of this is probably

that Scandinavian consumers enjoy a higher level of protection against unfair and unreasonable advertising, as well as against other kinds of advertising, than consumers in many other countries.

In Norway, consumer interests in relation to advertisements are regulated and handled by the Marketing Control Act and the Consumer Ombud. The Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman was established in 1973. The office of the Consumer Ombudsman changed its name to *the Consumer Ombud* (CO) in 1981. The Consumer Ombud is an independent administrative body, and has an annual budget of approximately 5 million Norwegian Kroner, (about 700,000 dollars). Twenty staff members, who serve as the consumers' watchdogs, deal with complaints against advertising that is unreasonable, sex-discriminative, misleading, insufficient, or uses lotteries or premiums to promote sales. The Consumer Ombud receives between 2000 and 3000 complaints each year. Since 1973 it has received more than 30,000 complaints; 15,000 of these have been judged according to the Marketing Control Act. The rest have been dismissed or handed over to other agencies. From 1973 to 1987, the Market Council has passed judgement on only 106 advertising conflicts.

*The Market Council* (MC) is an administrative institution which acts like a Market Court. Both advertisers and the CO can bring cases to this court when there is disagreement concerning the interpretation of the Marketing Control Act. The Market Council has 9 members appointed by the Government. It is made up of representatives from advertising agencies, consumer organizations and the government. The members are appointed for a period of four years. The Marketing Control Act does not say anything about the qualifications required of the Council members or the composition of the Council. In reality, however, consumers, advertisers, the business community and the government are all represented in the Market Council.

*The Marketing Control Act* contains rules which affect both marketing practices and advertising targeting consumers, as well as rules that primarily affect business relations. The Marketing Control Act regulates advertisements that are unreasonable, sex-discriminative (which

was included in the act in 1979), misleading and advertising with insufficient guidance, as well as advertisements that use premiums and lotteries. The Consumer Ombud has the daily responsibility for enforcing the Marketing Control Act, and it also deals with the complaints. Anyone can put forward complaints on advertisements. Here we pay attention only to the parts of the Marketing Control Act pertaining to marketing practices and advertising targeting consumers, that is §§ 1 - 5. The other articles, §§ 6 - 9, primarily affect business relations, and article 9a includes prohibitions against unreasonable standard contracts.

Article 1 expresses the general provision:

"In the conduct of business no act may be performed which runs counter to good business practice in the relationship between entrepreneurs or which is *unreasonable* in relation to consumers."

In 1979 this article was expanded to include a prohibition against *sex-discriminatory* advertising:

"The advertiser and anyone who creates advertising shall ensure that the advertisement does not conflict with the inherent equality between the sexes, and that it does not imply any derogatory judgment of either sex or portray a man or a woman in an offensive manner."

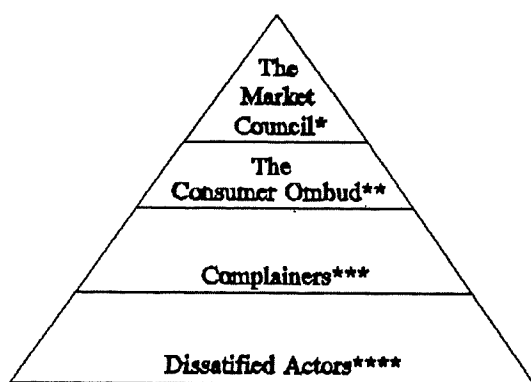
Article 2 contains a prohibition against *misleading advertising*. Article 3 forbids *insufficient guidance*, the practice of withholding information and introducing irrelevant matter in the advertisements, and thus exploiting the consumers' lack of experience or knowledge. Article 4 states a prohibition against the use of *premiums* to promote a sale if there is no 'natural' relationship between the product and the premium. The fifth article contains a prohibition against *lotteries*. A more detailed review of the Marketing Control Act has recently been given by Graver (1986a, 1986b).

The relationship between these two institutions and the consumers and other possible complainers on advertising matters can be illustrated as in Table 1.

**DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES  
BETWEEN COMPLAINT ACTIVITY  
ON GOODS AND SERVICES,  
AND ON ADVERTISING**

In order to get an understanding of the characteristics of consumer complaining in the field of advertising, we need to turn to the general research in and theories of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior. As Day et. al. emphasize, consumers may respond to

**Table 1**  
**The Norwegian Complaint-Pyramid**  
**The Relationship Between Dissatisfied**  
**Actors, Complainers and Institutions**  
**Dealing with Complaints on**  
**Advertising Matters**



\* The Market Council, a judging institution in cases of doubt.

\*\* The Consumer Ombud, with the daily responsibility of the enforcement of the Marketing Control Act.

\*\*\* Complainers: consumers, consumer-organizations, the Price Inspectorate, government and others.

\*\*\*\* Dissatisfied actors: consumers, consumer-organizations, the Price Inspectorate, government and others.

dissatisfaction in several ways (Day et. al 1981). On the one extreme is passivity, doing nothing. On the other is public complaints aiming not only at seeking redress, but also to influence legislation.

In between these extremes Day et al. describe seven levels, including personal boycotts of products, brands or stores, word of mouth reactions, redress from sellers and/or manufactures and redress through a third party.

To a certain degree, consumers may react similarly when they are dissatisfied with advertisements, even though this kind of reaction will be directed towards the *product*, and not towards the advertisement itself. At the *individual level*, the functions of private boycotts and word-of-mouth are similar for advertisements and goods and services. The individual consumer behavior may change, but the direct and indirect influence on advertising practice or consequences for the quality and price of goods and services are minor. At each of the levels in the complaining process the consumers may also choose to exit. Such possibilities of exits or withdrawals are described as parts of the complaint-pattern in relation to complaints about goods and services (Stø and Glefjell, 1990). However, the complaining process on advertisements according to the Norwegian model differs from this. Once an advertisement-complaint has been handed over to the Consumer Ombud, it will be handled according to the Marketing Control Act, and at this stage in the process the complaint is out of the complainers' reach. This is the reason why no exits are illustrated in Table 1. There is, however, one exception to this. The possibility to exit the complaining process is present for the advertisers if they want to withdraw their advertisement from the market and further advertising. The implication of such a withdrawal is that the advertisement will not be evaluated according to the act. This kind of exit is therefore somewhat different from exits concerning complaints on goods and services.

When consumers put forward complaints on goods and services, they usually seek individual solutions to personal consumer problems. The initiative to complain is taken by individual consumers, caused by individual dissatisfaction with a product or a service. The handling of complaints and the immediate results of the complaint handling are mainly directed against individual consumers. In the long run, however, accumulated complaints on similar goods and services may have societal consequences, in

improvements of the goods and services. But still, too little is known about how organizations respond to consumer complaints (Fornell and Westbrook 1984). Studies indicate that managers do not realize the potential of consumers complaints data in their work for improving products and strengthening the companies images in the market of consumer goods and services (Jaccoby and Jaccard 1981, Lewis 1982, Fornell and Westbrook 1984, Andreasen 1988, Drew and Bolton 1990).

Consumer complaints on advertisements will in many ways have other *functions* than the individual consumer complaints on goods and services. This is particularly the case according to the Norwegian model of handling such complaints, and other similar systems with a coherent sanction and control-system where the rules established by the law are strictly and constantly controlled. This may not, however, be the case in models that mainly are based on soft-laws and self-regulation. On the one hand, individual complaints do not to the same degree seek to solve individual consumer problems. At the micro-level consumers benefits therefore are small. This indicates that dissatisfied consumers will not tend to voice their advertising complaints. They may have strong personal feelings towards certain advertisements, but the personal gains are small. On the other hand, complaints put forward by a consumer to the Norwegian Consumer Ombud may have greater immediate and direct *societal consequences*. Single advertisements and even nationwide advertising campaigns can be stopped because of it.

Such complaints may therefore, in the long run, have significant effects both on advertising culture and on the legislation process. But many interests are involved in this process, and consumers, with their advertising complaints, only constitute a minor part of the actors. The indirect legislative effects are very much the same for advertising complaints as compared with goods and services. Many complaints on certain kinds of advertisements, for instance on mail purchases, give support to the Consumer Ombud in its efforts to strengthen the consumer protection in the Marketing Control Act.

## CONSUMERS' DISSATISFACTION AND COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ADVERTISEMENTS

Data from the survey from 1990 offer both an impression of consumers' dissatisfaction and complaint inclination or complaining behavior towards advertisements.

Table 2  
Consumers' Complaint Inclination  
on Advertisements  
1990  
Percent N=998

Did put forward a complaint	4
Wanted to complain, but remained passive	10
Did not complain	86
Total	100

The question concerning complaint inclination has been posed without reference to any specified period of time, and the respondents have been asked about the actual complaint-activity that they have ever conducted or ever felt like conducting. Not surprisingly, the over-whelming majority, which comprises 86% of the sample, did not put forward any advertising-complaints, whereas only 4% actually did. Another 10% have been dissatisfied with advertisements and have felt like complaining, but failed to do so. A more detailed analysis of the complainers tells us that there are few differences between groups of complainers, both with regard to sex, age, income and place of living. There are, however, some variation in the complainers' voting behavior in the way that those with more radical points of view tend to complain more often than those with more conservative points of view. It also should be noted that females, people of the older generation, and those with income in the higher echelons, have felt like complaining, without putting forward complaints. Still, political points of view, or voting-behavior, also explains most of the variation between the groups of dissatisfied consumers. People who are politically radical more often express

dissatisfaction and a wish to complain than those with more conservative sympathies. This might indicate that the level of consumer-consciousness is higher among radical people. Still, the results do not indicate a high level of the general consumer-consciousness as such in regard to advertisement-questions. The main tendency is that this consciousness and critical attitude towards advertisements are absent in the majority of the population.

We asked those respondents who expressed dissatisfaction without complaining, why they did not put forward the complaint. The results are shown in the table below.

**Table 3**  
**Dissatisfied Consumers' Most Important**  
**Reason Not to Complain**  
**1990**  
**Percent N=101**

It is inconvenient to put forward advertisement complaints	68
Did not know where to put forward the complaint	14
It is uncomfortable to put forward complaints	6
Don't know/no answer	12
Total	100

The majority, 68%, of the dissatisfied consumers who did not put forward a complaint, report that the main reason was that it is inconvenient to put forward advertisement complaints. Only 14% report that they did not know to whom they could put forward such complaints. Even though this is a small amount, a closer look at this result reveals that the distribution of this knowledge to some extent is unevenly distributed among the consumers. Possession of the knowledge of where to put forward a complaint concerning advertisement-dissatisfaction is more common among people in the higher income-levels, and among conservatives, than among other consumer-groups.

Some trends in the results on complaint

behavior on advertisements seem to be similar to the general results on CS/D & CB concerning goods and services. Still, there are important differences as well. Concerning goods and services, findings reported among others tell that between 15% and 20% of all purchases are unsatisfactory from the consumers' point of view, and that 40-50% of all consumers will have experienced some dissatisfaction during a year (Andreasen, 1988). This high level of dissatisfaction seems to be the greatest difference in relation to the considerably lower dissatisfaction with advertisements that we have registered in our study.

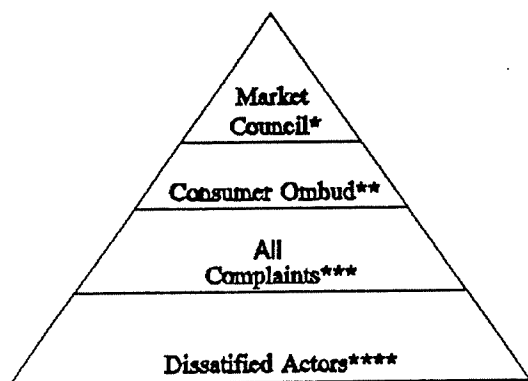
CS/D & CB-research concerning goods and services also points at the fact that a large majority of dissatisfied consumers never complain about their purchases (Andreasen, 1988). Complaint activity tends to be higher for serious and expensive problems, and consumers more often tend to complain about goods than about services (Stø and Glefjell, 1990). This pattern of dissatisfied consumers' complaining behavior about goods and services seems to be more in accordance with the CB pattern in regard to advertisements. The majority of the dissatisfied consumers do not put forward advertisement-complaints.

Let us now turn to the handling of advertisement complaints and the way they are dealt with by the controlling institution. With reference to Table 1, the distribution and handling of complaints received by the Consumer Ombud show the pattern in Table 4.

The pattern of the distribution of complaints in the complaint-pyramid is similar to the pattern we know from earlier CS/D & CB research: as we move upwards in the process of complaint handling the number of cases decline. Most of the cases that have been handled, are solved by the Consumer Ombud, and only a minority of the complaints have been handled by the Market Council. On the average, the tendency in the profile of the judgements during the period 1973-1988 has been that the share of illegal advertisements is steadily increasing, and adds up to an average of 80% illegal advertisements in 1988 (Glefjell, Stø and Gjøn, 1989:54).

The total number of cases handled by the Consumer Ombud in the above table supports the

**Table 4**  
**The Norwegian Complaint-Pyramid**  
**The Distribution of Complaints**  
**Between Complainers and Controlling**  
**Institutions 1979-1988**  
**Consumer Ombud's Statistics**



- \* Handled by the Market Council: 106 cases
- \*\* Total number of cases handled by the Consumer Ombud: 15463 complaint-cases
- \*\*\* Total number on all complaints from all complainers, received by the Consumer Ombud: 30441 complaint-cases
- \*\*\*\* Dissatisfied actors, (unknown number)

**Table 5**  
**Complaining Initiative on Advertising**  
**Issues 1973 - 1990**  
**Percentages**  
**Total number of received cases**  
**Consumer Ombud's statistics**

Year	Consumer-complaints	Business-life	Various organiz.	C.O.'s effort %	Total N
1973	31	20	24	25	100 1191
1976	57	21	8	14	100 1968
1979	42	15	26	17	100 1823
1982	37	15	30	18	100 2081
1985	44	16	13	27	100 1804
1988	40	13	12	35	100 2072
1990	47	12	13	28	100 1813

basis for the results presented in the following table, which shows the distribution of *complainers* on cases that have been brought to the Consumer

Ombud during the period 1973 to 1990.

During the whole period the consumers have contributed with a considerable amount of complaints on advertisements. The consumer complaints are more comprehensive than complaints from both business-life, other organizations, including the Consumer Council, as well as complaint initiative from the Consumer Ombud itself. The distribution between the various actors has been relatively stable during the whole period from 1973 till 1990, even though some changes can be noticed. The highest level of consumer complaints is documented in the middle of the 1970's.

The distribution of complaining initiative indicates that the consumer-activity and complaint behavior seems to be essential in order to achieve a proper control with advertisements and marketing. The distribution in the above table also shows that the consumers have a need for proper complaint-treatment on advertisements and marketing that contradict the consumer-interests. This need for regulation and control also seems to be more urgent for the consumers than for the actors in business-life, who contribute a relatively small amount of all the complaints. These results therefore indicate that the Marketing Control Act is a more adequate regulator in regard to consumer-protection than as a means to lower the effects of inadequate methods of competition in business-life. Also these results indicate that even if advertisements probably affect the consumers' daily lives to a lesser extent than other consumer problems do, many consumers react to various aspects of advertising. During the period from 1973 to 1988 the relative increase in the tendency to complain is primarily found among complaints received from consumers. This means that the Consumer Ombud as well as business and trade should pay serious attention to the consumers' complaint-reactions, as they probably express some kind of increasing dissatisfaction with advertising.

The following table shows the relationship between the actors who initiated the complaint and the content of the complaints according to the different paragraphs in the Marketing Control Act.

This table is interesting in many ways. First, it points at a conflict of interests between the actors in business-life and the actors in the consumer-system. The consumer-complaints are to

a large extent related to complaint-cases on misleading advertisement (§2) and on sex-discriminative advertising (§1.2). Complaints

**Table 6**  
Complainer According to the Particular §§  
in the Marketing Control Act for the  
Years 1974, 1978, 1982 and 1986  
Percent  
Consumer Ombud's Statistics

	§1	§1.2	§2	§3	§4	§5	Total
Consumers	7	22	56	9	3	3	100
Business life	8		66	2	10	14	100
Cons. Omb/ various organiz.	9	12	68	4	3	4	100

from the actors in business-life are also related to the aspects concerning information content, but they are totally absent in relation to sex-discriminative advertising. On the other hand, they are very present in relation to the competition-oriented aspects concerning the uses (or abuses) of premiums (§4) and lotteries (§5). By paying attention to premiums and lotteries the actors in business-life seem to be each others watch-dogs. Complaint initiatives taken from the Consumer Ombud and other institutions are also mainly concerned with misleading information content in advertising.

#### CONSUMERS' DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ADVERTISING SYSTEM

In the previous section we pointed out that the consumer *complaints* on advertisements on the micro-level to a large extent are related to information content and ideological content. In this section we pose the question of what aspects of advertisements give rise to consumer *dissatisfaction* on the macro-level. Dissatisfaction with advertisements on the micro-level is expressed by the individual consumer's actual complaint behavior towards particular advertisements, whereas dissatisfaction on the macro-level is expressed as attitudes towards the

advertisement system itself.

During the last twenty years several studies that pay attention to the macro-oriented aspects have been conducted in Norway, (as documented in Glefjell, Stø and Gjøn 1989, Glefjell and Stø 1990, Glefjell 1991). In this section we want to draw attention to some of the most important conclusions. The studies underline the fact that people have mixed feelings about advertisements. On the one hand, they want *more information* in the advertisements, especially with regard to goods and services that are costly.

**Table 7**  
Consumers Who Feel That Advertisements  
for Specified Goods and Services  
Contain Too Little Information  
1987  
Percent N=976

Insurances	50 %
Bank	48 %
Clothing	43 %
El.equip/TV, radio	38 %
Motor vehicles	33 %
Grocery/food	32 %
Furniture	32 %
Travelling agencies	30 %
Soaps/toiletry	27 %
Cosmetics/vanity items	26 %
Books	18 %

Advertisers' prime intentions with advertisements is to catch the consumers' attention and to sell their products. These intentions seem to be in conflict with the consumers' interests, because the consumers have a *need for information* that is not present in today's advertisements. To some extent they have expectations of advertisements to fulfil this need. As is shown in the above table, the information need differs with various kinds of goods and various kinds of services, and there is considerable variation between the various goods and service groups. In particular, the consumers expressed a desire for more information in advertisements about bank and insurance services, while they did not miss it in advertisements of books and vanity items. Whether this indicates the



importance and share of information in the various types of advertisements, or just reflects the consumers' subjective needs is difficult to tell. Most likely it expresses that the consumers' need for information differs, in the way that the more expensive the goods or services the higher is the need for information. Certainly, it at least indicates that advertisements today only to a very limited extent satisfy the consumers' need for information. This is expressed both as consumer dissatisfaction with particular aspects of the advertising system in our data, as well as a general dissatisfaction with the system as such. Our research has also shown that consumers first of all focused on the lack of information about commodity declaration and quality (Glefjell, Stø and Gjøn, 1989). The price of the good was secondary. The lack of information concerning crucial aspects to the benefit for the consumers have also been pointed out in a content analysis of advertisements by Sepstrup (1981).

Even though this information need is evident, the consumers on the other hand also express a need to protect themselves against certain kinds of advertisements. This is among others illustrated by the fact that until recently, Norwegian consumers have only been exposed to print advertisements. Only the latest year consumers have had access to advertisements in television and radio, but still the main part of this is distributed from other countries, and not from Norway's own broadcasting. Norwegian consumers support the establishment of a new TV2, financed by means of advertisements, although a large majority wants advertisements presented in *blocks* between programs (Glefjell and Stø, 1990). Therefore we can draw the conclusions that the consumers have negative attitudes towards and express dissatisfaction with advertisements that are *offensive* and which try to force themselves upon the consumers, while they express satisfaction with and are positive in their evaluation of advertisements that may be used in the information search process.

The advertising volume is another important macro-oriented aspect of the advertising system, and the consumers' irritation with advertising has increased from 1970 to 1990, parallel to the increase in the advertisement volume, as shown in

Table 8.

**Table 8**  
**Number of Respondents Who Express Irritation Over the Advertising Volume in Different Kinds of Media in 1970, 1976, 1981, 1987 and 1990 Percentages**

	1970	1976	1981	1987	1990
In newspapers	12	48	42	39	32
In weekly magazines	34	58	53	43	36
On television					29*
On cinema	6	17	14	13	7
On super-boards/ out-of-door-posters	6	27	23	25	24
In the mail box/ direct mail	17	68	75	80	80

\*The Norwegian legislation still does not allow the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation to disseminate advertisements. Unlike consumers in other countries, only in the latest years have Norwegian consumers had access to advertisements in television and radio, but the main part of this is distributed from *other countries* by cable and satellites, and not from Norway's own broadcasting. Only parts of the population have access to television (advertisements) distributed by cables and satellites. Among those who have this access, the amount of respondents who express irritation at the advertising volume is different than the figure presented in the table. In fact, a total of 66% of these respondents express irritation over the advertising volume.

The extremes are found in attitudes towards advertisements in cinemas on the one hand, and attitudes towards advertisements distributed in the mail boxes/direct mail, on the other. A total of 80% of the consumers express dissatisfaction with the direct mail volume. Actually, this dissatisfaction is so strong that 8 consumers out of 10 in addition express the need for an increased consumer protection against this kind of advertising (Glefjell, 1991). A large majority wants the right to guard themselves against advertisement through the mail by means of a recognized sticker that can be used for this purpose. A large majority also expresses a desire to make use of such a possibility personally.

According to Norwegian law, it is prohibited

to portray the sexes in a way that is discriminatory. The regulation of sex-discriminative advertisements has to a large degree been successful in Norway (Stø and Glefjell 1990, Glefjell 1990), and today the majority of the population is satisfied with the way the sexes are portrayed with regard to sex-discrimination. The ideological content in the advertisements to a large degree seems to be in accordance with people's perceptions of a satisfactory way of expressing it in advertisements, even though female respondents are significantly more critical of the way women are portrayed in advertisements than are men. In spite of this, the level of actual complaining behavior in relation to sex-discriminative advertisements is high.

The kind of dissatisfaction that is expressed in relation to aspects of advertisements on the macro-level does not necessarily give reason to complain or to a desire to put forward complaints on single advertisements on the micro-level. Actual inclination to complain is probably urged by some kind of direct offense, whereas general dissatisfaction with *a system* does not give reason to put forward complaints. This may explain the discrepancy between the low share of respondents who actually have put forward complaints on the micro-level (as shown in table 2), and the relatively high share of respondents who express dissatisfaction with the more macro-oriented aspects of the advertising system as such.

#### CONSEQUENCES ON THE MICRO-LEVEL AND ON THE MACRO-LEVEL

This paper focuses on advertising complaints and consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with advertising, both on the micro- and on the macro-level, with attention to concepts developed by Renoux (1973). In addition to his concepts of shopping system dissatisfaction, buying system dissatisfaction and consuming system dissatisfaction, we have included the concept of advertising system dissatisfaction.

On the *micro-level* the consumers contribute a considerable proportion of the complaints on advertisements and marketing campaigns that are handled each year by the Consumer Ombud. The consumer complaints mainly concern sex

discriminatory advertisements and advertisements lacking guidance and information. The complaints from the business community are also mainly concerned with the information content. In addition, they are aimed at the competitive effects of the marketing campaigns and of advertisements that make use of premiums and lotteries. The act appears to function differently for consumers than for the business community. Complaints from public institutions, such as the Consumer Council, the Price Inspectorate, and from the Consumer Ombud itself, are also mainly concerned with misleading information content. Only a minority of consumers have ever complained about advertisements, while more actually have wished to do so. The most important reason not to complain is that it demands too much effort. Some, however, didn't know who to turn to with their complaint.

On the *macro-level* the consumers express that they want, and have need for more information in advertisements, but the Marketing Control Act does not provide means to regulate the amount of information in advertisements. The act only makes it possible to react in those cases where the information presented is misleading, lacking or doesn't give sufficient guidance. However, the act doesn't require a certain minimum amount of information, where specific types of information are required to be present. On the other hand, the act may be used to respond to use of baits in the form of premiums and lotteries. Our data, however, indicate conflicting opinions among Norwegian consumers with regard to the use of such baits. The Consumer Ombud can to a very limited extent apply sanctions if information is lacking in an advertisement. It can do so only when the information that is given is misleading, unreasonable, or does not provide satisfactory guidance. The way the Marketing Control Act is today, it can only help consumers to obtain increased information from the advertisement to a limited degree. Therefore the regulation expressed in the act on this topic, is not a sufficient or adequate means to handle this consumer dissatisfaction. One consequence of these results is that the information content in advertisements ought to be improved to meet the challenges and needs from the consumers in this respect.

Advertising conditions have been changing the

last two decades. This has effects and consequences both on the micro-level and on the macro-level. Many consumer problems, particularly those concerning advertising, have become international in scope, and can only be solved on an international level. This will probably have a growing effect on the consumers since the laws that regulate these conditions are on a national level, and with differing models of regulation from one country to another. This development is primarily due to the increase in advertisements through electronic media which give consumers in one country easy access to other countries' broadcasting. One possible implication of this trend is that international marketing may be replaced by global marketing (Eger 1987). International marketing has traditionally been based upon differences between countries and people, whereas global marketing stresses similarities among people and countries. Obviously it will be more difficult to regulate future advertising through national provisions alone. Moreover, the consumer movement's demand for protection and regulation is not the only force that affects advertising and marketing (Boddewyn, 1982): the economic interests of industry, trade and the advertising business itself are also of great importance. In addition to the economic interests, both technological, cultural, and religious interests, affect the future of global marketing. All these aspects will influence consumers' satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior towards advertising both on the micro- and on the macro-level.

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