

A STUDY OF CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR: VCR OWNERS IN PUERTO RICO

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates differences in complaining behavior between American and Puerto Rican VCR owners. It is proposed that in Puerto Rico, both cultural values and institutional barriers tend to impose restrictions on complaining behavior that do not exist in the U.S. Hypotheses are developed concerning the impact of cultural differences on: (1) perceptual and attitudinal antecedents to complaining in Day's (1984) model of complaining behavior, (2) the propensity to complain, and (3) the use of public vs. private actions. Results of the data analysis indicate that Puerto Rican VCR owners are less likely to complain than American VCR owners. Also, among complainers, Puerto Ricans were found less likely to take public actions than Americans. Only limited support was obtained for the predicted differences on the antecedent variables to complaining. Implications for marketers and public policy makers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The area of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction and consumer complaining behavior has received a great deal of attention by consumer behavior researchers in recent years. The increased interest in this topic seems largely due to the pressures of consumerism and a growing public disdain for shoddy product quality (Oliver 1980).

Consumer dissatisfaction, though varying by product or service category, appears to be fairly common (Andreasen and Best 1977; Day and Ash 1979; Day and Bodur 1978; Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1985). Nevertheless, a majority of dissatisfied consumers do not seek redress or complain (Andreasen and Best 1977; Day and Bodur 1978; Shuptrine and Wenglorz 1981; Warland, Herrmann and Willits 1975). Thus,

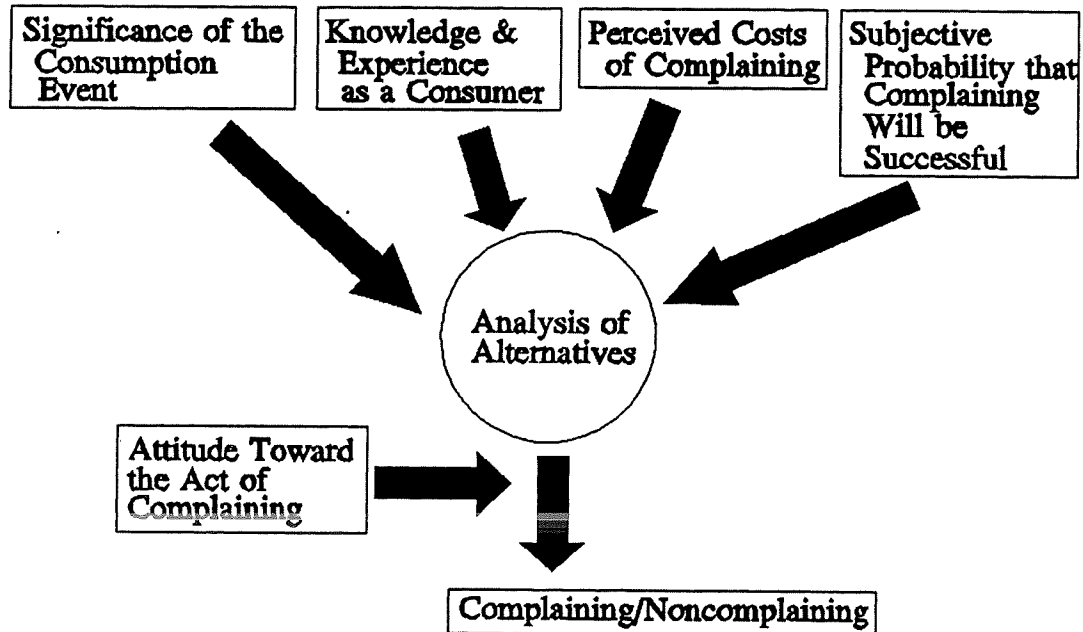
marketing practitioners may not know the reasons for these "do nothings" dissatisfaction and consequently cannot take corrective actions. On the other hand, those who express their dissatisfaction ("do somethings") may achieve redress from an otherwise unpleasant marketplace experience. This problem raises an important research question: what factors facilitate or inhibit consumer complaining behavior?

Building on the earlier conceptual work of Day (1977) and Landon (1977), Day (1984) proposed a fairly comprehensive model of the complaining/noncomplaining decision process. In his model (see Figure 1), Day related four predictor variables to the act of complaining, with attitudes toward the act of complaining as a mediating variable. Although other researchers have proposed their own models (e.g., Bearden and Teel 1983; Richins 1985; Singh and Howell 1985) Day's (1984) general approach is used here because it offers detailed suggestions about the operationalization of the variables employed. The present study will extend the investigation of aspects of this model to a Puerto Rican context.

CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

A review of the literature regarding consumer complaining behavior suggests that the preponderance of existing research has been directed at U.S. samples (Olander 1977; Robinson, 1978; Strahle, Duffy and Day 1989). In addition, only one study has been conducted to date involving a Latin American consumer sample (Villarreal-Camacho 1983). Hence, the current research investigates complaining behaviors among Puerto Rican consumers. This study assesses the impact of cultural factors on some of the constructs conceptualized by Day (1984) as

Figure 1
Conceptual Model of the Complaining/Noncomplaining Decision Process (Day 1984)



predicting or mediating consumer complaining behavior. The impact of these factors on the propensity to complain and the type of complaining actions taken is also explored.

Culture and Values

Culture can be defined as the "distinctive way of life of a group of people, their complete design for living" (Wertsch 1985). Complaining behavior might well be constrained by aspects of culture, particularly values and norms (Robinson 1978). The act of complaining and the alternative types of complaining behaviors represent states of affairs which may be considered as more or less desirable by consumers in different cultures. For instance, Villarreal-Camacho (1983) found that Mexican consumers are less likely than Americans to take remedial action when dissatisfied. To the extent that they are similar to Mexican consumers, we would expect that Puerto Rican consumers will be

reluctant to complain and unlikely to utilize certain types of complaining behavior.

Puerto Rico: Latin American People in a U.S. Territory

As a former colony of Spain, Puerto Rico shares key elements of its culture with other countries of Latin America, particularly the Spanish language and Catholicism as the dominant religion. On the other hand, Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898. As a result, the material aspects of Puerto Rican culture have been significantly affected. Between 1947 and 1959 industrialization was accompanied by a marked increase in Puerto Rican migration to the U.S., since the economic growth of the period on the Island failed to provide sufficient jobs for the rapidly declining agricultural sector. According to Mintz (1973), this migration process (which moves back and forth between the mainland and the

Island, depending on economic conditions), the expansion of the mass media and increased levels of education have all contributed to the greater acculturation of the Island people to U.S. culture. This U.S. acculturation or "Americanization" is particularly reflected in the adoption by many Puerto Ricans of U.S. consumption norms (Mintz 1973). The emulation by Puerto Ricans of the patterns of consumption of American consumers has contributed to the present position of the Island as the fourth largest market in the world for U.S. products.

Despite the significant influence of the U.S. on Puerto Rican consumption patterns, other more subtle aspects of consumer behavior may be more susceptible to imitative learning through mass media and/or personal exposure than complaining behaviors. Hence, we expect that values affecting complaining behavior in Puerto Rico are somewhat closer to the values held by Latin American consumers than to those of mainland U.S. consumers.

PUERTO RICAN VALUES AFFECTING COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR

Passive Orientation

Pedreira (1934) proposed that a psychosocial trait known as "docilidad" or docility was the major characteristic of the Puerto Rican national character (Marquez 1963). Keep in mind, however, that the works of Pedreira and Marquez have been criticized by various Puerto Rican writers not because they failed to identify an important value orientation, but because of their exclusive focus on a "negative" orientation and their suggestion that docility is an innate Puerto Rican trait. According to Ramirez (1976), both authors are also at fault for attempting to understand Puerto Rican culture apart from socioeconomic structures and the characteristics of a colonial society. In addition to "docilidad," Mexican consumers have been found to face problems in a rather passive and internal way. In a study of U.S. and Mexican children, Hereford, Selz, Stenning and Natalicio (1967) report that their Mexican sample tended to prefer less "active" responses compared to its U.S. counterpart. Holtzman, Diaz-Guerrero and Swartz (1975, p.

357) also report results in support of the hypothesis that "Americans tend to be more active than Mexicans in their style of coping with life's problems and challenges."

Docility or lack of assertiveness seems to represent a value orientation that is somewhat incompatible with many complaining behaviors, particularly public actions. Complaining behavior seems to require a rather more active and assertive orientation. For instance, Richins (1983) has found that in the U.S., individuals scoring high on an assertiveness scale are better able to stand up for their rights as consumers and are more likely to be "do somethings" than nonassertive individuals.

Internal Attribution Orientation

Villarreal-Camacho (1983, p. 69) explains that, "in terms of attribution theory, Mexicans seem to make more use of internal rather than external attributions when perceiving failure." Her findings suggest that Mexican consumers tend to blame themselves when dissatisfaction occurs while American consumers tend to blame the manufacturers.

Puerto Ricans, more like Mexicans than Americans, may well deal with dissatisfaction in a rather internal way. In fact, during interviews a large number of Puerto Rican consumers admitted having problems with their VCRs (i.e., the VCR was not working) yet volunteered that they were not dissatisfied with their equipment since their VCRs were not at fault. They seemed to blame the problem on themselves or their family members for possible incorrect use, resulting in their machines' breakdown.

Dependence Orientation

After examining existing literature on Puerto Rican culture, Mintz (1973) identified a "dependence orientation" which seemed to appear consistently across studies. According to Mintz (1973, p. 45), Puerto Ricans are "extremely dependent on the opinions of others" and they "count heavily on the opinions of others in maintaining their self-images" (1973, p. 75). He concludes that "the opinions of others seem to weigh more than any internalized abstract code of behavior" (1973, p. 80).

In a recent study of coupon use in Puerto Rico, Hernandez (1988) found that some consumers reported not using cents-off coupons because of fear of embarrassment ("miedo a pasar una verguenza"). This fear of embarrassment seemed to be related to the possibility of the coupons not being accepted or handled expediently by the store's employee resulting in the customer "losing face" in front of others.

Because consumer complaints are often expressed in a public/social context, the opinions of others may affect such actions. Along these lines Nantel (1985) has suggested a modification of Day's (1984) model of complaining behavior, recommending the inclusion of a "self-monitoring" construct as a mediating variable. Sorensen and Strahle (1990) have suggested a more direct and economical way of measuring the social pressures that may inhibit an individual's complaining behavior through the use of the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE) developed by Leary (1983). In their forthcoming study, Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia and Sorensen (1991) report that Puerto Ricans scored slightly higher on the FNE scale than their American counterparts ($F = 1.36$ $p = .03$). According to Sorensen and Strahle (1990, p. 4):

"...it would be reasonable to predict that high FNE consumers who perceive the act of complaining -- particularly in public -- to involve the possibility of being negatively evaluated by others (a store employee, perhaps) will be largely noncomplainers."

Uncertainty Avoidance Orientation

Using IBM employee data from 53 countries, Hofstede (1980) found that countries differed mainly along four value dimensions. One of these value dimensions, "uncertainty avoidance", seems particularly germane to a discussion of complaining behavior. This dimension refers to the degree to which members of a society feel comfortable with uncertainty or ambiguity in unstructured situations. These "unstructured situations" are defined as novel, unknown, surprising or different from usual (Hofstede and Harris 1988, p. 11).

Members of uncertainty-avoiding cultures

probably attempt to minimize the possibility of unstructured situations by avoidance or adopting strict codes of behavior where participation in these situations is unavoidable. Hofstede and Harris (1988) reported that samples drawn from Latin American cultures tend to score relatively high on uncertainty avoidance when compared to the U.S. sample. Although not included in this study, Puerto Rico also appears to have an uncertainty-avoidant culture. Mintz (1973) indicated that the Puerto Rican world seems basically "determinant". According to Mintz (1973, p. 38), "Puerto Ricans seem to want an orderly world in which behavior is regulated by social norms." Internalized norms such as "no causar molestias" or "uno tiene siempre que evitar causar problemas" ("don't make waves") may operate so as to minimize complaining situations. There is also evidence to the effect that Puerto Ricans tend to avoid direct confrontations, particularly between people of different social statuses who prefer instead to offer criticism to third parties and negative word-of-mouth (Buitrago-Ortiz 1970; 1973). Although no measures were developed specifically for this factor, we suspect this tendency may result in fewer complaints especially among lower class Puerto Ricans when dealing with store and manufacturer representatives who are perceived to be of higher social standing.

Institutional Barriers to Complaining Behavior

Cultural value differences alone may not fully explain variations in complaining behaviors within a given culture. For example, institutional barriers in Puerto Rico could account for the avoidance of complaining behaviors, particularly direct actions against the seller. These institutional barriers refer to characteristics of marketing institutions (retailers, distributors and manufacturers) that could discourage direct complaints from consumers.

Marketing institutions in different countries vary in terms of their receptivity to negative feedback from customers. In particular, retailers in Puerto Rico tend to operate more with a "buyer beware" orientation than similar institutions in other countries. For instance, store return policies in Puerto Rico are not as liberal as those in

comparable stores in the U.S. where customers often can return products without any question, even when they do not have their purchase receipts. These policies mean that Puerto Rican customers probably have a harder time than Americans in returning their VCRs.

Other seller policies concerning VCR warranties seem to discourage Puerto Rican consumers from complaining. It has been reported that in Puerto Rico, the consumer has the "right" to complain to the seller for product failures only until the product warranty expires. This problem is compounded by the existence of a large "gray market" for electronic products that include VCRs. Puerto Rican consumers buying their VCRs from "unauthorized" distributors may have a harder time in obtaining any form of redress from the seller when the product fails.

Another institutional barrier involves the location of the seller. Some Puerto Rican consumers buy their VCRs from retailers on the U.S. mainland. The logistics of obtaining redress for these consumers are considerably more costly than for other consumers.

One important aspect of the Puerto Rican institutional environment is the presence of the Department of Consumer Affairs, better known as DACO, which has been in operation since 1973. Among its various services, DACO provides mediation, arbitration and, if necessary, legal representation for consumers failing to obtain redress after complaining to a seller. Although these services provide consumers the opportunity for public complaining through a third party, they may not have a significant impact on removing institutional barriers to direct complaining.

To sum, it seems that in Puerto Rico both cultural values and institutional barriers may impose restrictions on complaining behaviors that do not exist in the other markets. Institutional barriers in Puerto Rico appear to parallel those cultural values and norms that discourage voicing complaints. Similarly, cultural values seem to support existing institutional barriers.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the above discussion, the four value orientations and institutional barriers are expected to reduce the likelihood that Puerto

Ricans as a whole will complain. However, public actions against the seller appear to be particularly incompatible with these value orientations and barriers. On the other hand, private actions, such as "stop buying the type of product or brand", and "negative word of mouth" seem more compatible with Puerto Rican value orientations and less affected by institutional barriers than public actions against the seller.

Indeed, in a forthcoming cross cultural study Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia and Sorensen (1991) found that American consumers are more likely to complain than Puerto Ricans ($\chi^2 = 6.01$, prob = .014) and to do so publicly ($\chi^2 = 9.95$, prob = .002). Nevertheless, based on prior research in the U.S. we would predict that within the Puerto Rican culture and value systems, complainers (DS's) will also differ from those who do not express their dissatisfaction by complaining (DN's) in terms of their assertiveness and their fear of negative evaluation in a possibly confrontational complaint episode.

H1: DS's are likely to be more assertive than DN's.

H2: DN's are more likely to be afraid of negative evaluations than DS's.

Consistent with Day's (1984) model, we would also predict that within the Puerto Rican culture and value systems, DS's will also hold a more favorable attitude towards the act of complaining than the DN's.

H3: DS's are likely to have more favorable attitudes towards complaining than DN's.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Product Selection

The product to be used in a study of complaining behavior in another culture needs to be selected carefully. In the first place certain types of products are less likely than others to be the subject of consumer complaints (Day and Landon 1977; Richins 1985). Generally, consumers are less likely to complain about low cost, frequently purchased products (Andreassen

and Best 1977; Thorelli and Puri 1977). The selection of the VCR is consistent with this criteria. Second, the ideal of "product equivalence" must be at least approximated in a study such as this to lay the groundwork for future cross-cultural research. According to Cavusgil and Kaynak (1980, p. 83), in order...

"to ensure reliable comparisons, these products and services should have existed in respective societies for similar periods and should enjoy comparable popularity."

The VCR also seems to reasonably meet this criteria, as they have been available for over a decade in both countries. Based on a door-to-door count in four residential areas of the San Juan SMSA in Puerto Rico, the VCR ownership rate ranged from 31 percent in one area of low socioeconomic status to 61 percent in an area of a higher socioeconomic level. The combined household ownership rate for VCRs was 50 percent in all Puerto Rican households contacted, a figure that compares favorably to the VCR penetration rate observed in the U.S. and other western countries.

Measures

Three scales suggested by Richins (1983), Day (1984) and Sorensen and Strahle (1990) were included in the questionnaire as measures for: 1) respondent assertiveness, 2) the attitude toward the act of complaining, and 3) the fear of negative evaluation. The various types of complaining behaviors were operationalized in terms of a dichotomous scale that has been previously developed by Strahle and Day (1985). The questions in this scale pertain to various private and public actions that the consumer may or may not take as a result of dissatisfaction with the operation of his/her VCR.

Questionnaire Development and Method of Administration

The questionnaire itself was developed by Sorensen and Strahle (1990) for a study on the social aspects of complaint reporting among American VCR owners. In order to carry out a

similar study in Puerto Rico, the English questionnaire was translated into Spanish. A bilingual translator back-translated the Spanish version into English and discrepancies were identified and reworded in the Spanish version in an attempt to make it more conceptually equivalent to the English one. Once this process was completed the questionnaire was pretested in person and via self-administration with a small Puerto Rican sample. Potential difficulties were identified and adjusted in the Spanish version. The final form of the questionnaire was administered to Puerto Rican VCR owners in August 1989. Data in the sample were acquired using personal interviews and the drop-off pick-up technique developed by Day (Day and Ash 1979; Day and Bodur 1978; Leigh and Day 1978; Strahle, Duffy and Day 1989).

Sample Selection and Characteristics

Nonprobability methods were used in selecting households for the Puerto Rican sample. Individuals were included in the sample who answered the following questions in the affirmative: 1) "Do you currently own a VCR?" 2) "Have you had any trouble with your VCR or have you ever been disappointed with its performance in the past year?" 3) "I have to talk to the person in this household who is primarily responsible for buying VCRs, stereos, and television sets. Are you that person?" 4) "Will you please be the spokesperson for your household?" and 5) must not have replied "not at all" to the question: "Approximately how many times during the past twelve months have you been highly dissatisfied with the performance of your VCR?".

Approximately one-half (47%) of the Puerto Rican sample was selected by one of the authors who canvassed dwelling units in four residential areas located in Bayamon, a city located within the larger San Juan SMSA. The remaining half (53%) of the households in the sample were selected from households in the San Juan SMSA by collaborating college students.

A total of 100 Puerto Rican consumers were interviewed. Respondent characteristics for the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Puerto Ricans (n=100)
Percent Female	51
Median Age	25-34
Median Household Size	4
Percent Professional/ Managerial	34
Median Years of Schooling	16
Median Household Income	\$20,000 to \$29,000

RESULTS

DS's vs DN's

In order to test the hypotheses, the sample was subdivided into two groups - those respondents who indicated they had taken some action with respect to their product dissatisfaction ("do something's", or DS's) and those who did not ("do nothing's", or DN's). The results presented in Table 2 suggest interesting differences between these two groups.

DS's seem more likely to be female, single ($x^2 = 7.98 p = .046$) and somewhat younger in age than the DN's. They tended to purchase their VCR more recently (median year = 1987 versus 1986), but were less likely to have done so in a department store or to have invested more time and effort in its purchase compared to their DN counterparts. However, DS's apparently use their VCR more frequently and feel that it's more important in terms of their lifestyle and how others view them than the DN's. DS's also seem more likely to have encountered a greater number of minor problems with their VCR's performance - but these nagging, minor problems also apparently caused them to feel much more inconvenienced and to be more frequently dissatisfied with their VCR ($F = 2.18 p = .008$) than the DN's.

Subsequent difference of means tests and contingency table analyses suggest why they may have felt this way. In the first place, DS's were more likely to use their VCR in the presence of

family members ($x^2 = 3.84 p = .050$) or guests ($F = 1.90 p = .031$). A product failure under these circumstance represents a higher social cost than that involved with solitary use. In the second place, DS's on average paid a higher price (\$412.82 vs \$377.38) for their VCR than DN's ($F = 1.81 p = .060$). Hence, because of higher monetary and social costs, DS's were more likely to be embarrassed by a malfunctioning VCR than their DN counterparts ($F = 4.05 p = .00$).

Table 2

	DN's (1986)	DS's (1987)
Year Purchased	24.4%	27.4%
Where Purchased	(Department Store)	
	40.0%	31.4%
Frequency of Use		
Daily	15.9	27.0
2 or 3 Times/Week	31.8	39.7
Once a Week	36.4	11.1
Several Times a Month	36.4	22.2
Lifestyle Importance (1=Not, 7=Very)	3.89	4.95
Importance How Others See You (1=Not, 7=Very)	2.53	3.85
Time and Effort Spent Buying (1=Little, 7=Lot)	3.54	2.09
Inconvenience Caused by VCR Experience (1=Minor, 7=Major)	3.67	5.39
A Few Minor Problems	27.3%	50.0%
Sex:		
Male	53.5%	48.4%
Female	46.5%	51.6%
Age:		
20 or Under	2.4%	4.8%
21 to 24	11.9%	22.2%
25 to 34	23.8%	33.3%
35 to 39	19.0%	9.5%
40 to 49	28.6%	12.7%
50 to 64	14.3%	15.9%
Over 64	0.0%	1.6%

The Hypotheses

Table 3 presents the results of the tests of hypotheses. As predicted, "do something's" in

Puerto Rico are more assertive than their "do nothing" counterparts, and are less likely to be afraid of the negative evaluations of others than the DN's. However, contrary to predictions, DS's do not have a more favorable attitude toward the act of complaining than the DN's. While this result suggests there are no attitudinal differences between the groups, a more likely explanation involves the veracity of the measure suggested by Day (1984). A reliability analysis shows that while the assertiveness and fear of negative evaluation scales have acceptable Cronbach alphas ($\alpha = .76$ and $\alpha = .77$ respectively), the alpha for the attitude measure is quite low ($\alpha = .21$). This suggests that future researchers may wish to develop and validate their own attitudinal indicator if using the Day model.

Table 3

Hypothesis	Expected Relationship	Result	F-Test	Significance
H1 DS's are likely to be more assertive than DN's	DS > DN	DS > DN	1.80	$p = .05$
H2 DN's are more likely to be afraid of negative evaluations than DS's	DS < DN	DS < DN	1.76	$p = .04$
H3 DS's are likely to have more favorable attitudes towards complaining than DN's	DS > DN	DS > DN	1.01	$p = .43$

Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Of the fourteen reasons for dissatisfaction listed in Table 4, any of which respondents could have indicated, the one most frequently given for both "do nothings" (N's) and "do somethings" (DS's) was the VCR "broke." For the DN's, the second most frequently cited reason for dissatisfaction involved obsolescence, with "poorer quality than expected" and "unclear or incomplete instructions for use" being less frequently indicated. For the DS's on the other hand,

"quality poorer than expected" (45.3%), "the amount received was less than it was supposed to be" (37.5%), and "unclear or incomplete instructions for use" (12.5%) suggest that these consumers may well have felt deceived by the manner in which the VCR they purchased was marketed.

Table 4
Reason for Dissatisfaction

Reason	Do Nothing's		Do Something's	
	Frequency of Mention (%)	Rank	Frequency of Mention (%)	Rank
"I was charged a higher price than the one that was advertised"	2.3	7	9.4	7
"The quality was poorer than expected"	6.8	3	45.3	2
"The advertised 'special' was out of stock when I went to the store to buy it"	4.5	4	7.8	8
"The VCR was damaged or spoiled"	0.0	13	6.3	10
"The amount I got was less than it was supposed to be"	2.3	7	37.5	3
"The VCR did not correspond to the general impression created by an advertisement"	4.5	4	10.9	5
"The container was damaged, unsealed or faulty"	0.0	13	1.6	13
"A salesclerk made false or misleading claims about the VCR"	2.3	7	7.8	8
"The store was unwilling to provide a refund or exchange"	2.3	7	10.9	5
"The instructions for using the VCR were unclear or incomplete"	4.5	4	12.5	4
"The package was misleading"	0.0	13	1.6	13
"Store personnel were discourteous or unfriendly"	0.0	13	4.7	10
"The VCR is now obsolete"	9.1	2	6.3	11
"The VCR broke"	59.1	1	60.9	1

Perceived Disadvantages of Complaining

Respondents were asked on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = "strongly agree" and 7 = "strongly disagree") how strongly they agreed or disagreed with seven general statements concerning the costs of complaining (Table 5). It is quite clear for both

DS's and DN's that complaining is seen to take its toll more from the disruption of daily routine than in terms of its social costs. That is, complaining seems to be more costly in terms of "time and effort," "disruption of daily activities" and "out-of-pocket expenses" than in terms of it being a "hassle" or a cause of "embarrassment." While somewhat surprising in terms of our previous discussion of "no causar molestias" or "uno tiene siempre que evitar causar problemas," this result is perhaps better understood in terms of the social context of the interview *per se* (Sorensen and Strahle 1990). As pointed out earlier, Puerto Rican respondents tended to score higher than their mainland counterparts on the FNE scale.

Table 5
Perceived Disadvantages of Complaining in Time and Effort

Disadvantages	Do Nothings		Do Somethings	
	Mean Rank in Score Agreement		Mean Rank in Score Agreement	
"Seeking redress or complaining when I am dissatisfied with a consumer experience would--				
take a lot of my time and efforts"	3.1	2	3.6	1
disrupt my daily activities"	2.9	1	3.8	2
require a substantial amount of out-of-pocket expenses"	3.9	3	4.6	3
be very difficult for me because of my poor health"	6.4	6	6.3	6
require a lot of time and effort to find out who to contact or where to go"	4.5	4	5.0	5
be a hassle I really don't need"	5.2	5	4.8	4
cause me embarrassment"	6.7	7	6.4	7

1=Strongly Agree, 7=Strongly Disagree

Admitting that they were reluctant to complain specifically because of a fear of being embarrassed may have been a negative evaluation itself by the interviewer that they wished to avoid.

Attitudes Toward Complaining

In a similar vein, and probably for similar

reasons, Puerto Rican respondents tended to largely disagree with the specifically worded statement "I am embarrassed to complain regardless of how bad the product was" (Table 6).

Table 6
Attitudes Toward Complaining

Statement	Do Nothings		Do Somethings	
	Mean Rank in Score Agreement		Mean Rank in Score Agreement	
"Complaining just leads to more frustration"	3.4	3	3.3	4
"Complaining about anything to anyone is distasteful to me"	4.0	2	4.1	2
"Most businesses will cheat you if you don't stand up for your rights"	3.3	3	3.6	3
"Complaining is mostly done by people with little else to do"	3.0	7	2.8	6
"I am embarrassed to complain regardless of how bad the product was"	2.1	9	2.5	8
"Complaining is a consumer's right, not an obligation"	1.9	10	1.8	10
"Most of the people I know who complain about things they buy are neurotic"	2.3	8	2.4	9
"Complaining isn't much fun, but it must be done to keep business on its toes"	5.0	1	5.0	1
"I always complain when I am dissatisfied because I feel it is my duty"	3.1	6	2.6	7
"It really feels good to get my dissatisfaction and frustrations off my chest by complaining"	3.2	5	3.2	5

1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree

Yet DN's and DS's alike indicated that they felt that while "complaining isn't much fun" and is "distasteful," it is necessary (an obligation not a right) because "most businesses will cheat you if you don't stand up for your rights." However, as we shall see, the type of action taken tended to be private rather than public or involve third parties.

Actions Taken When Complaining

For the sixty-four "do somethings" in our sample, most seemed inclined to enact private complaining options rather than public or third party actions (Table 7). About sixty percent (59.4%) decided "not to buy that brand of VCR

again," half (50.0%) "warned family and friends" and about a quarter (26.6%) simply decided to "quit using that kind of VCR altogether." While these figures are clearly bad news for manufacturers who need such feedback to address dissatisfaction, about a third (34.4%) did elect to "contact the store to complain" even though store policies are more restrictive than on the mainland, and only a minority felt it necessary to contact a government agency (4.7%), the Better Business Bureau (3.1%), a "private consumer advocate" (1.6%) or lawyer (1.6%).

Table 7
Types of Actions
"Do Somethings" Only

<u>Action</u>	<u>% Frequency of Mention</u>	<u>Rank</u>
"I decided not to buy that brand of VCR again"	59.4	1
"I decided to quit using that kind of VCR altogether"	26.6	4
"I decided to stop shopping at the store where I bought the VCR"	18.8	5
"I warned my family and friends about the brand, product or store"	50.0	2
"I returned the VCR to the seller for a replacement or refund"	9.4	6
"I contacted the store to complain"	34.4	3
"I contacted the manufacturer to complain"	9.4	6
"I contacted the Better Business Bureau to complain"	3.1	9
"I contacted a government agency or a public official to complain"	4.7	8
"I contacted a private consumer advocate or consumer organization to complain"	1.6	10
"I contacted a lawyer, went to small claims court or otherwise took legal action"	1.6	10

Reasons for No Action Taken

As can be seen from Table 8, most of the forty-four "do nothings" in our sample had their own reasons for not taking any action. These ranged from "I didn't want to do anything because of my friendship with the salesman" (1 respondent) to "I had no recourse because the warranty was no longer any good" (17 respondents, or 48.6% of all

DN's). The fact that none of the Puerto Rican respondent's "didn't know what to do about it or where I could get help" reflects favorably on the efforts of DACO and suggests that other governments might wish to follow suit by establishing similar organizations.

Table 8
Reasons for Not Taking Action
"Do Nothings" Only

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Frequency of Mention (%)</u>	<u>Rank</u>
"I didn't think it was worth the time and effort"	8.6	5
"I wanted to do something about it, but never got around to it"	14.3	3
"I didn't think that anything I could do would make any difference"	11.4	4
"I didn't know what to do about it or where I could get help"	0.0	6
Other	(65.7)	(2)
"I couldn't because the warranty was no longer any good"	48.6	1

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study indicate a number of important differences between dissatisfied Puerto Rican VCR owners who complained and those who did not. As expected, respondent's assertiveness and their fear of negative evaluation mediated the relationship between dissatisfaction and complaint behaviors. That is, those more assertive and less fearful of negative evaluation by others tended to complain while their counterparts did not. This is strong evidence for the robustness of the mediating role of these two factors in the models as it occurred in spite of the prevalent Puerto Rican cultural norms of "no causar molestias" or "und tiene siempre que evitar causar problemas" ("don't make waves"). Instead, these norms impacted the nature of the actions taken. That is, those who did complain seemed more inclined towards taking private actions rather than more public ones.

"Do something's" also tended to be younger, single VCR owners who seemed to be plagued by a series of minor problems and to have been misled by the manner in which their purchase was marketed. Perhaps because they were less likely

than the "do nothings" to shop around for the best deal, they also ended up paying more for their VCR. Further adding to their sense of dissatisfaction, "do somethings" were also more likely to use the VCR in a social context and, therefore, more likely to be embarrassed when a problem occurred. No wonder they complained. To what extent they received a satisfactory settlement remains an open question.

From a methodological point of view, the unexpected findings regarding the specific "embarrassment" questions can be understood in terms of the respondent's fear of negative evaluation by the interviewer. They also reconfirm the need for researchers to be able to assess the impact of the data gathering situation itself on reports of complaint behaviors and the rationale offered to account for them (Sorensen and Strahle 1990). The unacceptable Cronbach's alpha for the attitude measure suggested by Day (1984) also suggests that reliance on measures with apparently a great deal of face validity is insufficient in and of itself. While the model itself seems theoretically sound, and research such as this tend to confirm portions of it, a more complete test of the entire model may well be contingent on our ability to develop and validate more adequate measures of its constructs.

Finally, the number of "do nothings" in this study should be some cause for concern among VCR manufacturers, as should the propensity of DS's for taking private actions. To minimize the pernicious effects of negative word-of-mouth and resell dissatisfied owners, VCR manufacturers and middlemen doing business in Puerto Rico should increase the accessibility of their complaint receiving mechanisms to their Puerto Rican customers. Manufacturers and large distributors could use a toll-free telephone number in order to facilitate customers' feedback on any problems that they experience with their VCRs. Retailers could show their receptivity to customer complaints through store signs, inserts in monthly customer billings, and by positive employee attitudes. Just to handle complaints effectively may not be enough in order to get as much feedback as can be obtained from American customers since Puerto Rican customers are less likely to complain in the first place (Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia and Sorensen 1991). A broad based communication

effort may be needed on the part of VCR firms in Puerto Rico in order to convince their customers that they are genuinely interested in their satisfaction.

While the Puerto Rican Department of Consumer Affairs (DACO) seems to perform an important role in providing third party complaint services to dissatisfied Puerto Rican consumers, such services only become available after the consumer has failed to obtain redress from the seller. The problem is that Puerto Rican consumers are less likely to complain to the seller in the first place. Hence, DACO's consumer complaint services may not have a significant impact in encouraging direct complaints. DACO and similar organizations in other countries may need to develop consumer education programs directed at informing consumers that to complain to the seller because of a product failure is an appropriate and desirable consumer activity. DACO also needs to investigate possible institutional barriers to complaining (e.g., retailers' product return policies and expired warranties) which might require enactment of new consumer protection legislation.

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