

CONSUMER GRUDGE HOLDING: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF MOTHER AND DAUGHTER CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify possible determinants of grudge holding among mother and daughter clothing consumers. Discriminant analysis failed to produce a significant function that could classify consumers into grudge holders and non-grudge holders using the following discriminating variables: generation; fashion involvement; wardrobe management; attitudes toward comparative shopping; store services used; source of clothing acquisition; method of payment; and annual clothing expenditure. Also, reported grudge holding was not related to overall satisfaction with the clothing wardrobe.

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Hunt, Hunt, and Hunt (1988) conducted an exploratory study of consumer grudge holding to determine whether grudge holding did exist and to identify factors that influence grudge holding. Consumers' descriptions of their own grudges were examined. It was found that products were more often the cause of grudge holding than were services, that grudge holders were emotionally upset as a result of the incident, grudges existed for a long time, grudges were based more on customer treatment, grudges were based on infrequent purchases, and that older consumers reported a greater number of grudges than did younger consumers. Additionally, nearly all grudge holders considered the seller at fault (even though only about half complained) and engaged in a very high rate of negative word-of-mouth behavior while continuing to purchase the product from another vendor. Based on these findings, it was concluded that grudge holding is an extreme case of dissatisfaction.

Hunt, et al. (1988) noted a need for research to identify specific variables associated with grudge holding behavior within product and service categories. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to identify possible determinants of grudge holding among clothing consumers. Because grudge holding may be affected by age of the consumer (Hunt, et al., 1988), grudge holding behavior of two generations (mothers and daughters) was investigated.

Clothing was selected as the product category for several reasons. Hunt, et al. (1988) reported that grudges were based more often on infrequent rather than routine purchases and were more often attributed to the product seller. Clothing as a product category, as well as specific clothing items (e.g., suits, coats), is considered by most consumers as an infrequent purchase. In addition, clothing satisfaction has been shown to shift following performance during care procedures (Francis & Dickey, 1984). It was believed that negative care experiences could form the basis for subsequent grudge holding against a specific fiber content, fabric finish, or recommended care

procedure. Further, it was expected that consumers might overgeneralize such negative experiences into grudges against a brand, designer, or manufacturer or even the seller.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed to measure grudge holding, the group variable, and the discriminating variables: generation; fashion involvement; wardrobe management; attitudes toward comparative shopping; store services used; source of clothing acquisition; method of payment for clothing purchase; and annual clothing expenditure.

Two parallel forms of the questionnaire were developed for use with a sample of daughters and a sample of mothers. Mothers and daughters were surveyed regarding their clothing purchases in order to assess generational differences in grudge holding. Daughters were university students enrolled in an undergraduate course. Seventy questionnaires were returned by mothers of 86 students who were raised by their natural mothers for a response rate of 81 percent. The final sample consisted of 70 mother/daughter pairs.

Grudge holding was measured by asking consumers, "Have you ever had such a negative experience with an item of clothing that you vowed never to purchase a similar item again and you never have?" Based on their responses, consumers were assigned to two groups: (1) Grudge holders; and (2) Non-grudge holders.

A 5-point Likert type scale with end points defined as "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" was used to measure responses to attitudes toward 18 clothing and shopping items. Factor analysis of these 18 variables generated 3 factors (see Francis & Davis, 1989, companion paper): (1) Fashion Involvement; (2) Wardrobe Management; and (3) Comparative Shopping.

A 4-point scale with end points defined as "always" and "never" was used to measure method of payment for clothing purchases, 12 store services, and sources of clothing acquisition including department store, specialty store, discount store, off-price store, mail catalog, garage sale, used clothing store, home construction, and gifts. Consumers also provided an estimate of the total dollars spent on clothing and accessories for themselves during the year prior to the study.

Discriminant analysis was used to develop a linear combination of discriminating variables which could be used to classify consumers into two groups: (1) Grudge holders; and (2) Non-grudge Holders. Chi² was also used for further clarification of several specific variables of particular interest to the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 140 consumers, 31 (22 percent) reported that they held a grudge. Problems during care procedures were the basis for 8 (26 percent) of the 31 grudges

reported. The next most frequent basis for grudges was poor quality, reported by 5 (16 percent) of the grudge holders. Five grudge holders also reported problems with shoes. Mail order purchases, fiber content, and becomingness of the garment were each the basis for 2 grudges. Fit and store were the basis for grudges reported by one individual each. Only one respondent gave an impulse purchase as the basis for her grudge.

No significant function was derived as a result of the discriminant analysis conducted (canonical correlation = .46, $p > .10$). That no combination of the variables analyzed was useful in discriminating clothing grudge holders from non-grudge holders lends further support to the notion held by previous researchers (Francis & Dickey, 1981; Francis & Dickey, 1984; and Swan & Combs, 1976) that, because of the influence of fashion, clothing is a unique product category. Consumers rarely purchase the same clothing styles repeatedly due to fashion changes. Perhaps the operational definition of grudge used here, that one would never purchase a similar item again, is characteristic of nearly all clothing purchases, including satisfactory ones, because of the influence of fashion.

Alternately, perhaps intent to repurchase or not to repurchase is not a useful determinant of grudge holding for frequent or routine purchase categories for which relatively low levels of expectations are held. Francis & Dickey (1981) reported that about one-third of the dress purchasers studied were dissatisfied with some specific aspect of their purchases even though about 90 percent indicated that, despite problems, they would repurchase the same garment because they could not expect to do any better.

In order to further explore this possibility, a χ^2 was conducted to analyze the distribution of overall clothing satisfaction between grudge holders and non-grudge holders. Although the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.98$, $p > .10$), the data are of conceptual interest. Of the 31 grudge holders, 4 (13 percent) indicated that they were very satisfied with their clothing wardrobes overall compared to 23 percent of non-grudge holders. Also, of the 31 grudge holders, 24 (77 percent) indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with their clothing wardrobes overall compared to 66 percent of the non-grudge holders. The only consumer who indicated that she was not at all satisfied with her clothing wardrobe was a non-grudge holder. These results seem to support the finding by Hunt, et al. (1988) that grudge holders continued to purchase the product, but use an alternate vendor. Contrary to the assertion by Hunt, et al. (1988) that grudge holding is an extreme case of dissatisfaction, the results suggest that grudges are very specific and do not affect satisfaction with general product categories.

In order to further explore the relationship between generation and grudge holding, a χ^2 was performed on generation (mother/daughter) and grudge holding (yes/no). About 29 percent of mothers held a grudge compared to about 18 percent of daughters. However, the difference was not significant ($\chi^2 = 2.34$, $p > .10$). This finding is contrary to the finding by Hunt, et al. (1988) that older consumers reported more grudges than did younger consumers, and that grudge holding can be considered a phenomenon of the 30+ year old consumer.

In summary, the findings of the present study revealed that consumers hold grudges with regard to clothing. About one-fourth of the consumers surveyed reported that they had had such a negative experience with an item of clothing that they vowed never to purchase a similar item again and never had. However, the variables analyzed were not found to be useful in classifying consumers into grudge holders and non-grudge holders.

Additionally, grudge holders and non-grudge holders did not differ in their overall satisfaction with their clothing wardrobe. This finding suggests that there are unique aspects of women's clothing as a product category which contribute to the behavior reported.

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