

# CUSTOMER GRUDGEHOLDING: FURTHER CONCEPTUALIZATION AND ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

Additional conceptualization of consumer grudgeholding looks at the intersection of grudgeholding and dissatisfaction, the creation of consumer grudges, allegiance as the polar opposite of grudgeholding, neutralizing grudges, using the three-component attitude model to understanding grudgeholding, secondary grudgeholding, and broadening the concept of grudgeholding. Data from the initial grudgeholding study were reanalyzed to obtain further insights.

## INTRODUCTION

At the Montreal (1987) CS/D&CB conference we reintroduced Dik Twedt's concept of customer grudgeholding by providing a conceptual framework and an exploratory study. In the two years that have passed since then several things have happened. First, we have had several people express their interest in the topic and in doing further research on it. The Francis/Lewis paper is the first further research. Second, further conceptualization has provided us with additional ideas we want to share regarding consumer grudgeholding. Third, further analysis of our original study brought insights missed in the first analysis.

Starting with basics, we would like to suggest that the topic be grudgeholding--one word, not two. And we would like to suggest that during the developmental period we continue to use two descriptors, consumer and customer, depending on whether we are studying only the customer who actually does the buying or all those who are involved in the actual consuming of the product or service.

Grudgeholding initiates discussion of avoidance consumer behavior in which the consumer buys from one's competitor not because of strong preference for the competitor but as a means of avoiding one's own company because of a consumer grudge based on previous experience or word of mouth.

## FURTHER CONCEPTUALIZATION AND POTENTIAL RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While it is always tempting to try to keep further research directions secret so you can explore them yourself before others do, in our case just the opposite is true. Just as with the whole of CS/D&CB, we have found the subtopic of consumer grudgeholding to be a fascinating research topic and would like to have lots of people involved in its many research dimensions.

### General Grudgeholding

As far as we know, no one has done a literature search to see what prior conceptualization and research has been done on grudgeholding as a general human behavior. It remains to someone to do that basic literature search.

### Additional Research On Consumer Grudgeholding

The findings of the early papers are intrinsically interesting but need substantial amounts of replication and elaboration because of the small sample size and being from only one community.

### Intersection Or Commonality Of Grudgeholding And Dissatisfaction

It intuitively seems that grudgeholding should be the extreme of dissatisfaction, but such might not be the case. Our work so far asked only about grudgeholding, not about dissatisfaction.

### Creation Of Consumer Grudges

So far we have little information about the conditions surrounding the creation of consumer grudges. We know from our first research project that consumer grudges can develop almost instantly resulting from a highly negative experience. But this finding was an artifact of our first research effort on the topic. We specifically asked people to tell us about such experiences. Further thinking has led us to wonder if consumer grudges might not also develop after numerous negative experiences, none bad enough to be the trigger event itself, but rather the cumulative effect causing the grudgeholding.

We speculate that a religious conversion analogy might be appropriate. One form is that instant of seeing the light, of feeling the spirit, of the sureness that fills the whole being witnessing that something is true or right. Another form is the longer term sequence of experiences, none strong enough to be a single trigger event, but eventually in some additive fashion the person arrives at the conviction.

### Allegiance - The Polar Opposite Of Consumer Grudgeholding

Until now we have spent our efforts thinking only about grudgeholding. We wonder if grudgeholding isn't part of a continuum of some sort, with grudgeholding probably being one of the polar extremes. What might the other polar extreme be? We think the opposite of consumer grudgeholding is consumer allegiance or consumer loyalty. Because there are many uses of loyalty in the consumer/marketing literature and no reference that we know of to allegiance, we think consumer allegiance is a more suitable descriptor than consumer loyalty. Just as grudgeholding signifies an ongoing negative attraction, allegiance signifies an ongoing positive attraction. It is the experience where a company has done something so good that you said to yourself, I'll always do business with this company because of this good experience. Or, as discussed in the previous section, it is the situation where over time you have had many positive experience with the cumulative affect of those experiences being a long term commitment to the company, (or product/

service). Perhaps as we explicate allegiance we will come to better understand grudgeholding, which we are supposing to be the exact opposite of allegiance.

#### **How Much Positive/Negative Will Neutralize Grudgeholding/Allegiance?**

We do not suppose that once a state of grudgeholding or allegiance exists that the consumer will maintain that state forever. What, then, leads to the decay of grudgeholding or allegiance? Do specific offsetting events have to occur? To what degree? Is it simply a time decay function in which decay is a matter of lack of reinforcement? Can it be an opposite single event which neutralizes or even reverses the polarity; a single event which outweighs all the strength of the previous G/A position, such as Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, or finding out your true love was only using you to get some other end.

#### **Is Grudgeholding/Allegiance Adequately Framed Within The Three-Component Attitude Model?**

It seems to us that grudgeholding/allegiance is an excellent fit with the three-component model of attitude -- cognitions, affect, conation toward an object -- because in each case of grudgeholding/allegiance there are cognitions, affect is strong, and the grudgeholding/allegiance is the conation, action tendency, or behavioral intention. Others might argue that we would better understand grudgeholding/allegiance if we separated the three components looking separately at cognitions, at affect, and at behavioral intention. To us it seems that the three tie inseparably together in the grudgeholding/allegiance application.

#### **Secondary Grudgeholding**

By secondary grudgeholding we mean having a grudge or allegiance without having ever tried the product/service yourself. We recognize from our own experience and from limited conversations with others that consumer grudges can be formed and held based on negative word of mouth. One type, usually the first to come to mind, is general negative word of mouth from friends, acquaintances, or just overheard in passing. Of specific interest to us is the intergenerational socialization process between parents and children. To the extent that parents and other family members vocalize their own consumer grudges in the presence of their children, to what extent do the children internalize those grudges?

#### **Advertising Effects**

To what extent does advertising lead to the creation of consumer grudgeholding and consumer allegiance? Does advertising, by itself, with no product/service experience, lead to either grudgeholding or allegiance, or is product/service experience always required?

#### **Broadening The Concept Of Grudgeholding/Allegiance**

We wonder if the grudgeholding/allegiance continuum

holds for interpersonal relationships as well as for our interactions with institutions/organizations and objects.

#### **REANALYSIS OF OUR ORIGINAL DATA**

Further work with the initial consumer grudgeholding data set led us to additional observations not discussed in the original paper. We'd like to share those with you.

We recoded several of the variables in order to better facilitate analysis. Age was recoded into three categories, price was recoded into three categories, degree of emotional upsetness was recoded into two categories, the number of people told was recoded into three categories, and how long ago was recoded into two categories. This recoding was necessary because of the low number of cases in the study.

We separated the variables into three categories: (1) demographic (age, sex), (2) situational (product or service, frequent or infrequent purchase, treatment by sales/service people or with the performance of the product, price, whether alone or with others), and (3) response (whether complained, whether bought from another source, how long grudge lasted, number of people told, whether the person was upset). The response variables were used as dependent variables, the situational variables as well as the degree of upsetness were used as independent variables. The demographic variables as well as the degree of upsetness were used as control variables. No tests of significance were used to test the results of the analysis because the study was neither random nor large enough. However, several differences are large enough to be worth comment.

Let us emphatically state that (1) we are dealing with very small cell sizes, (2) to get even our current small cell sizes we had to combine some categories which maybe ought not to have been combined, and (3) we are referring to cases, not individuals, as some individuals have more than one case reported. This is solely exploratory research. Still, some observations and comments seem to be in order and will be listed following each table and identified by table and item within the table. For example, 1-a is the first item in Table 1.

We want to emphasize before discussing the following Tables that the respondents in our study all reported consumer grudges. These are not just dissatisfied consumers. These are people who for at least one product, service, or store were so dissatisfied with it that they said "I'll never buy that product again," and they haven't bought it again.

Table 1

	<u>UPSET</u>		<u>NOT UPSET</u>	
	<u>Product</u>	<u>Service</u>	<u>Product</u>	<u>Service</u>
1-a. COMPLAINED				
YES	61.3	47.4	50.0	16.7
NO	38.7	52.6	50.0	83.3
	n=31	n=19	n=20	n=6
1-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE				
YES	80.6	68.4	80.0	100.0
NO	19.4	31.6	20.0	00.0
	n=31	n=19	n=20	n=6
1-c. HOW LONG AGO				
0-3 Years	38.5	46.7	47.1	40.0
4-20 Years	61.5	53.3	52.9	60.0
	n=26	n=15	n=17	n=5
1-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD				
Few/None	38.7	63.2	70.0	66.7
A Lot	61.3	36.8	30.0	33.3
	n=31	n=19	n=20	n=6

1-a. Those who complain are more likely to complain about a product than about a service. Whether for a product or a service, those who are upset are more likely to complain than those who are not upset.

1-b. Dissatisfaction with a product sees 80% buying from another source next time. Dissatisfaction with a service gives counterintuitive findings, with upset people buying from another source 68% of the time but those not upset buying from another source 100% of the time.

1-c. Is it possible that it takes time for a grudge to mature? Whether upset or not, there are more grudges reported in the 4-20 year range than in the 0-3 range.

1-d. Consumers that are not upset don't tell as many people as consumers that are upset. This is not a surprising finding and is mentioned here only because it focuses attention on the importance of keeping dissatisfied consumers from getting upset or, alternatively, of defusing the upset as quickly as possible.

Table 2

	<u>UPSET</u>		<u>NOT UPSET</u>			
	<u>Treat ment</u>	<u>Per form ance</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Treat ment</u>	<u>Per form ance</u>	<u>Both</u>
2-a. COMPLAINED						
YES	59.4	38.5	80.0	50.0	25.0	100.0
NO	40.6	61.5	20.0	50.0	75.0	00.0
	n=32	n=13	n=5	n=12	n=12	n=2
2-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE						
YES	75.0	69.2	100.0	83.3	83.3	100.0
NO	25.0	30.8	00.0	16.7	16.7	00.0
	n=32	n=13	n=5	n=12	n=12	n=2
2-c. HOW LONG AGO						
0-3 Years	34.6	63.6	25.0	50.0	40.0	50.0
4-20 Yrs	65.4	36.4	75.0	50.0	60.0	50.0
	n=26	n=11	n=4	n=10	n=10	n=2
2-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD						
Few/None	46.9	53.8	40.0	58.3	75.0	100.0
A Lot	53.1	46.2	60.0	41.7	25.0	00.0
	n=32	n=13	n=4	n=12	n=12	n=2

2-a. Upset consumers are more likely to complain about a negative experience than are consumers who are not upset. Further, consumers who are upset about their treatment are more likely to complain than consumers upset about performance.

2-b. Our data show a higher percentage of "not upset" consumers buying from another source. At first glance this is counterintuitive. Maybe we have missed an obvious explanation. Or maybe future research will not find this again.

2-c. Upset consumers report more in the 4-20 year time frame than in the more recent 0-3 year time frame. If negative experiences occur at some regular rate we would expect this finding that more negative experiences occur in 17 years than in 3 years.

2-d. no comment.

Table 3

	UPSET			NOT UPSET		
	Reg ular Purch	Infreq uent Purch	First Time Purch	Reg ular Purch	Infreq uent Purch	First Time Purch
<b>3-a. COMPLAINED</b>						
Yes	37.5	62.5	100.0	25.0	52.9	00.0
No	62.5	37.5	00.0	75.0	47.1	100.0
	n=16	n=32	n=2	n=8	n=17	n=1
<b>3-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE</b>						
Yes	81.3	75.0	50.0	100.0	76.5	100.0
No	18.7	25.0	50.0	00.0	23.5	00.0
	n=16	n=32	n=2	n=8	n=17	n=1
<b>3-c. HOW LONG AGO</b>						
1-3 Years	50.0	37.0	50.0	25.5	61.5	00.0
4-20 Yrs	50.0	63.0	50.0	75.5	38.5	100.0
	n=12	n=27	n=2	n=8	n=17	n=1
<b>3-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD</b>						
Few/None	50.0	50.0	100.0	87.5	58.8	100.0
A Lot	50.0	50.0	00.0	12.5	41.2	00.0
	n=16	n=32	n=2	n=8	n=17	n=1

3-a. For both the upset and not upset conditions it is interesting to note that for regular purchases consumers don't complain as much as for infrequent purchases. This is more striking for the upset condition, but holds for both. Complaining, especially when upset, occurs for infrequent purchases. This could be due to frequent purchases being less costly and infrequent purchases being more costly, with cost being the critical variable. Or it could be that consumers have more experience with regularly purchased items, most of it positive, so a negative experience is not viewed as critical enough to complain about.

3-b. Whether upset or not upset, dissatisfied consumers bought from another source, pointing out again the critical importance to business of identifying and defusing dissatisfaction.

3-c. It appears that if a dissatisfied consumer is not upset the grudge wears off (decays) more rapidly than if the consumer is upset.

3-d. Regular purchasers who are not upset don't spread as much negative word of mouth as do those who are upset.

Table 4

	AGE					
	15-30 Years		31-45 Years		46-70 Years	
	Not Upset	Upset	Not Upset	Upset	Not Upset	Upset
<b>4-a. COMPLAINED</b>						
Yes	40.0	53.8	42.9	63.2	44.4	50.0
No	60.0	46.2	57.1	36.8	55.6	50.0
	n=10	n=13	n=7	n=19	n=9	n=18
<b>4-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE</b>						
Yes	60.0	76.9	100.0	89.5	100.0	61.1
No	40.0	23.1	00.0	10.5	00.0	38.9
	n=10	n=13	n=7	n=19	n=9	n=18
<b>4-c. HOW LONG AGO</b>						
1-3 Yrs	42.9	22.2	50.0	38.9	44.4	57.1
4-20 Yrs	57.1	77.8	50.0	61.1	55.6	42.9
	n=7	n=9	n=6	n=18	n=9	n=14
<b>4-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD</b>						
Few/None	70.0	61.5	57.1	42.1	77.8	44.4
A Lot	30.0	38.5	42.9	57.9	22.2	55.6
	n=10	n=13	n=7	n=19	n=9	n=18

With the exception of 4-c which confirms the often observed phenomenon of seeming lower dissatisfaction as age increases, there is nothing of striking interest in Table 4.

Table 5

	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
	<u>Not Upset</u>	<u>Upset</u>	<u>Not Upset</u>	<u>Upset</u>
5-a. COMPLAINED				
Yes	43.8	50.0	40.0	62.5
No	56.2	50.0	60.0	37.5
	n=16	n=26	n=10	n=24
5-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE				
Yes	93.8	69.2	70.0	83.3
No	06.2	30.8	30.0	16.7
	n=16	n=26	n=10	n=24
5-c. HOW LONG AGO				
1-3 Years	46.7	33.3	42.9	50.0
4-20 Years	53.3	66.7	57.1	50.0
	n=15	n=21	n=7	n=20
5-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD				
Few/None	75.0	42.3	60.0	54.2
A Lot	25.0	57.7	40.0	45.8
	n=16	n=26	n=10	n=24

As is often the case with sexual differences, some of these differences are unexpected and unexplained. Upset females complain more and buy from another source more and tell more people than do upset males.

5-b. Males who are not upset are more likely to buy from another source than are males who are upset. This is counterintuitive and the opposite of the findings for females.

Table 6

	<u>Not Upset</u>		<u>Upset</u>	
	<u>Alone</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Alone</u>	<u>Others</u>
6-a. COMPLAINED				
Yes	33.3	50.0	55.6	56.3
No	66.7	50.0	44.4	43.7
	n=12	n=14	n=18	n=32
6-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE				
Yes	83.3	85.7	61.1	84.4
No	16.7	14.3	38.9	15.6
	n=12	n=14	n=18	n=32
6-c. HOW LONG AGO				
1-3 Years	50.0	41.7	56.3	32.0
4-20 Years	50.0	58.3	43.8	68.0
	n=10	n=12	n=16	n=25
6-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD				
Few/None	75.0	64.3	38.9	53.1
A Lot	25.0	35.7	61.1	46.9
	n=12	n=14	n=18	n=32

6-a. Dissatisfied consumers are less likely to complain if they are shopping alone than if they are shopping with others.

6-b. Those shopping alone are more likely to buy from another source if they are not upset than if they are upset. We have seen this same counterintuitive finding in earlier tables.

6-d. We again see that if the consumer is not upset fewer people are told.

Table 7

	<u>Not Upset</u>			<u>Upset</u>		
	<u>\$0-</u> <u>\$15</u>	<u>\$16-</u> <u>\$99</u>	<u>\$100-</u> <u>75,000</u>	<u>\$0-</u> <u>\$15</u>	<u>\$16-</u> <u>\$99</u>	<u>\$100-</u> <u>75,000</u>
7-a. COMPLAINED						
Yes	30.0	50.0	50.0	46.2	66.7	52.6
No	70.0	50.0	50.0	53.8	33.3	47.4
	n=10	n=12	n=4	n=13	n=18	n=19
7-b. BOUGHT FROM ANOTHER SOURCE						
Yes	80.0	83.3	100.0	76.9	88.9	63.2
No	20.0	16.7	00.0	23.1	11.1	36.8
	n=10	n=12	n=4	n=13	n=18	n=19
7-c. HOW LONG AGO						
1-3 Years	44.4	50.0	33.3	40.0	38.5	44.4
4-20 Yrs	55.6	50.0	66.7	60.0	61.5	55.6
	n=9	n=10	n=3	n=10	n=13	n=18
7-d. HOW MANY PEOPLE TOLD						
Few/None	80.0	75.0	25.0	53.8	50.0	42.1
A Lot	20.0	25.0	75.0	46.2	50.0	57.9
	n=10	n=12	n=4	n=13	n=18	n=19

Remember that grudge incidents ranged from very inexpensive items to property transactions involving thousands of dollars. Table 7 reports the findings by money categories. No notable findings are uncovered.

Table 8

	<u>AGE</u>		
	<u>15-30</u>	<u>31-45</u>	<u>46-70</u>
8-a. HOW LONG AGO			
1-3 Years	31.3	40.0	50.0
4-20 Years	68.8	60.0	50.0
	n=16	n=25	n=24

While not a strong finding, it is interesting to note that older people report more recent grudge incidents than do younger people.

## REFERENCES

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