NEGATIVE WORD OF MOUTH: SUBSTITUTE FOR OR SUPPLEMENT TO CONSUMER COMPLAINTS?

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ABSTRACT

The predominant conceptualization of consumer complaint behavior argues that voice, private, and third party responses are related but independent complaint actions taken by dissatisfied consumers. Thus, negative word of mouth by dissatisfied consumers (a private complaint response) may occur in addition to other forms of complaint behavior rather than in place of it. This study focuses on whether or not communicating negative word of mouth about a dissatisfactory product experience replaces or supplements other forms of complaint behavior (e.g., voice or third party complaints). Over 400 U.S. carpet consumers were surveyed regarding their complaint practices after product dissatisfaction. The results indicate that negative word of mouth was greatest among consumers who had also voiced complaints to the seller, supporting the supplementary rather than substitution effect explanation.

SUBSTITUTE FOR OR SUPPLEMENT TO CONSUMER COMPLAINTS?

Identifying consumer needs and wants is a cornerstone of the marketing concept. Satisfying those needs is also a common marketing objective for many organizations. Increasing consumer satisfaction has been shown to lead to improved consumer retention rates, increased market share, and profitability (e.g., Reichheld 1994, 2001; Rust and Zahorik 1993; Rust, Zahorik, and Keiningham 1995). When consumers are dissatisfied, firms can often retain dissatisfied consumers and maintain market share if effective complaint management techniques are instituted. Companies that respond to consumer dissatisfaction and complaints with appropriate recovery strategies and satisfactory complaint resolution can turn dissatisfied consumers into satisfied ones, positively impacting repurchase rates (e.g., Bearden and Oliver 1985; Halstead and Page 1992). In effect, consumer complaints can give organizations a second chance to satisfy consumers. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of consumers' dissatisfaction and their complaint responses is needed to help firms retain consumers and stay competitive.

Using Singh's (1988) typology of consumer complaint responses, three distinct dimensions of consumer complaining behavior (CCB) have been verified: voice complaints (complaining directly to sellers), private complaints (complaining to friends or family members), and third party complaints (complaining to independent organizations such as the media, consumer groups, or legal agencies in order to seek redress, e.g., Better Business Bureau). These complaint actions have subsequently been tested in other research and been found to be robust across a variety of product categories and situations (e.g., Blodgett and Granbois 1992; Blodgett and Tax 1993; Blodgett 1994; Singh 1990b, Singh and Wilkes 1996).

Singh and others have argued that the three complaint behaviors are separate and independent actions, and that future research should investigate complaining at the individual dimension, i.e., voice, private, or third party. More recent research (Boote 1998) suggests that complaining behavior may be sequential in nature--that certain complaint actions are taken only after other complaint responses have been exhausted. For example, negative word of mouth (WOM) and third party complaining would occur only after voice complaints had been made. While this proposition seems logical regarding third party complaining, it is unclear why negative WOM communication could not occur either before or simultaneously with voice complaints. Accordingly, it makes sense to examine the nature and extent of multiple complaint behaviors for a single product category among a single consumer sample.

This study examines whether negative WOM complaints (i.e., private complaints) supplement

voice complaints or substitute for voice complaints. That is, do consumers who complain directly to sellers also complain to family and friends about their negative experiences? And if so, to what extent and in what manner do they communicate to others?

This is important for marketers due to the many documented effects of negative WOM (e.g., Huefner and Hunt 2000; Tax and Chandrashekaran 1992). Sellers have some level of control over voice complaints in terms of both preventive and recovery strategies. Word of mouth, however, is almost impossible to control, difficult to measure, and represents a distinct threat to firms with dissatisfied consumers. Accordingly, the following research questions are addressed: 1) What is the nature and extent of WOM behavior among satisfied versus dissatisfied consumers? 2) What is the nature and extent of WOM behavior among consumers who have engaged in voice complaining behavior? 3) What is the nature and extent of WOM among consumers who have not voiced complaints to sellers?

The paper is organized as follows. First, the literature on complaining behavior is reviewed, with emphasis on private complaint responses (WOM). The research hypotheses and study methodology are then discussed. Finally, results of a telephone survey of over 400 U.S. carpet consumers are presented, along with implications for managers and future research.

CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR

Most research assumes some level of dissatisfaction as a starting point for any type of complaining behavior—private, voice, or third party. Yet dissatisfaction alone may not lead to complaining. Many other factors have been found to contribute to complaint propensity including variables such as attitude toward complaining (Bearden and Mason 1984; Halstead and Droge 1991), consumer emotional states and coping strategies (Stephens and Gwinner 1998), attributions of blame (Folkes 1984), severity of the problem (Singh and Wilkes 1996), product/service costs (Kolodinsky 1993), prior complaining experience (Bagozzi and Warshaw 1990), and more. Some researchers have specifically examined the factors underlying dissatisfied consumers' decisions to remain silent (e.g., Andreasen 1984, 1985; Andreasen and Manning 1990; Stephens and Gwinner 1998).

At the same time, some researchers have noted the incidence of complaining even among satisfied consumers (e.g., Jacoby and Jaccard 1981). Kowalski (1996) argued that some consumers complain not out of dissatisfaction but in efforts to gain fraudulently from retailers or manufacturers. Some satisfied consumers might even complain about minor service problems or product defects due to organizational commitment or loyalty, or even to reinforce their earlier buying decisions. They may have a desire to see their favorite brands or companies succeed. For example, wanting a "favorite restaurant" to improve service so that future experiences are pleasurable, so that the restaurant stays in business, or so that the consumer can recommend it to others, could all be potential motives. Thus, satisfied consumers might complain about certain attributes even though overall satisfaction is relatively high.

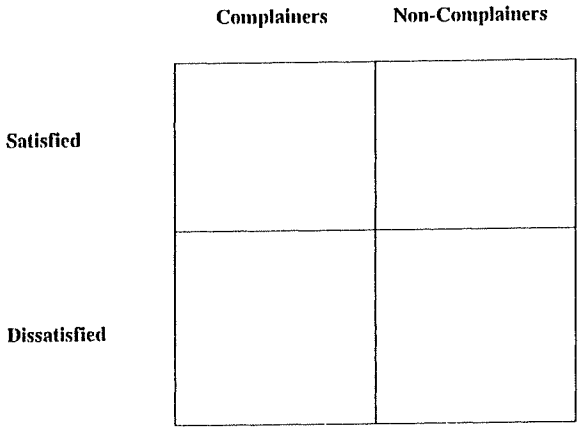
In summary, the extant literature indicates that not all complainers are dissatisfied, nor do all dissatisfied consumers complain. All of these issues suggest that any investigation of CCB should measure (dis)satisfaction levels in tandem. Accordingly, an exploratory research framework for this study is shown in Figure 1.

When dissatisfaction and other factors do lead to consumer complaint behavior, the choice of private, voice, or third party complaining still exists. In fact, some research has found that consumers engage in multiple complaint responses (a "supplemental effect") rather than choosing a single complaint option (a "substitution effect"), e.g., Day (1984) and Richins (1983, 1987). For example, Richins (1987) noted that complaint behaviors such as exit, negative WOM, and seller complaints are "separate processes influenced by different variables or in different ways by the same variables" (p. 29).

Singh and Wilkes (1996) later tested voice, private, and third party complaint response estimates in three service categories: banking,

medical care, and automotive repair services. While their research generally supports the notion of a supplemental complaint effect (i.e., multiple complaint responses), they measured consumer *estimates* of complaining, or the likelihood that a particular complaint response would be chosen under typical scenarios. Thus, actual complaint *behaviors* were not examined.

Figure 1
The Proposed Research Framework
Consumer Satisfaction Level and Voice Complaining



Private Complaining through Negative WOM

Word of mouth behavior (private complaining) refers to the act of telling at least one friend, acquaintance, or family member about a satisfactory or unsatisfactory product experience (Richins 1983). The extent of WOM behavior refers to the number of people the consumer tells about the consumption experience. WOM can also be viewed as being either favorable or unfavorable depending on the nature or valence of the communication. Recent research has even suggested that negative WOM (private complaints) should be differentiated on the basis of intent. It might be a form of retaliatory action against sellers—an aggressive complaint behavior with a specific intent to hurt a business. Alternatively, it may simply be a communication mechanism to warn others of a consumer risk (Huefner and Hunt 2000).

WOM behavior has received considerably less attention than either consumer dissatisfaction or other forms of complaining behavior. It was, at first, subsumed under the more general category of opinion leadership research. However, opinion leadership research has several disadvantages when applied to the study of (dis)satisfaction and complaints. First, most research in this area considered only positive and not negative WOM. Second, the research was typically limited to new rather than existing products/services. Finally, those consumers engaging in negative WOM may not actually be opinion leaders (Richins 1983). Since early research has found that consumers seem to place more weight on negative information when making evaluations (Lutz 1975, Morris 1988, Wright 1974), an exploration of negative WOM and its relationships to satisfaction and voice complaining is needed.

In the research that *has* examined WOM as a post-purchase phenomenon, the "lack of delineation between positive and negative word of mouth" has often limited the research findings (e.g., Davidow and Leigh 1998, p. 100). Furthermore, few studies have examined WOM behavior in concert with other complaint responses, as strongly suggested by Singh (1988) when his typology was introduced.

Extent of WOM and Satisfaction

Early research for the Coca-Cola Company (TARP 1981) found that at least twice as many people heard about a consumer's unhappy experience as heard about a satisfactory one. Consumers who thought that their complaints had not been satisfactorily resolved typically told nine or ten others about their dissatisfaction. If the complainants were minimally satisfied with the company's response, however, only four or five people were told about the initial bad experience. The 85 percent who were completely happy with the company's response told four or five people

how well things were handled. This oft-cited research was later followed by other studies that confirmed this same phenomenon.

For example, Westbrook (1987) also found a negative relationship between satisfaction and WOM (as satisfaction decreases, WOM increases). A seminal study by Richins (1983) found WOM to be related to several complaining, dissatisfaction, and marketplace variables. She found the tendency to engage in negative WOM behavior positively related to: problem severity, external attributions of blame, and negative perceptions of retailer responsiveness. More recently, Johnston (1998) found that the extent of private WOM complaints increased as dissatisfaction increased. He looked at the level or intensity of consumer dissatisfaction, ranging from "slightly dissatisfied" to "absolutely furious," and found that voice complaints *and* WOM increased with increasing dissatisfaction.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, some studies have contradicted these research findings. For example, in an early study of satisfied and dissatisfied automobile repair consumers, Engel, Kegerreis, and Blackwell (1969) found no significant differences in the extent of WOM activity between the two groups. Their sample consisted of innovative consumers, however, who may be unique with respect to their WOM activities. In a few studies, satisfied consumers have been found to participate in WOM communication more frequently than dissatisfied consumers (e.g., Holmes and Lett 1977; Naylor and Kleiser 2000; Swan and Oliver 1989). But widespread differences in these studies across product categories, consumer experience levels, and even the frequency of repeat patronage could explain the conflicting results. In contrast, Anderson (1998) found that consumers who are either highly satisfied or highly dissatisfied tend to engage in WOM activities, indicating a possible U-shaped relationship between satisfaction and WOM.

In summary, conflicting evidence exists regarding the exact nature of the satisfaction/WOM relationship. It appears that logic and most of the accumulated research suggest that the extent of WOM behavior among dissatisfied consumers would exceed the WOM activities of satisfied consumers. This issue clearly needs further testing, however, so the following research hypothesis is proposed:

> H1: The extent of WOM behavior of dissatisfied consumers will be significantly greater than the extent of WOM behavior of satisfied consumers.

Extent of WOM and Voice Complaints

WOM responses to satisfaction/dissatisfaction are considered private complaint actions according to both Day and Landon's (1977) original taxonomy and Singh's (1988) classification. As noted earlier, however, CCB is generally conceptualized as a set of multiple responses, in which some combination of voice, private, and third party complaints is made. Thus, negative WOM may occur *in addition to* other forms of complaining rather than in place of it. Each type of complaint represents an independent dimension of CCB. Each of these may also meet different objectives of the consumer. For example, voicing complaints to a retailer or manufacturer in order to obtain redress may provide the consumer with some monetary value or other benefits (e.g., a brand new replacement product). Or it may simply provide the consumer with the opportunity to vent his or her displeasure. Privately complaining to others may also allow this venting, but would not provide any monetary value. Of course, negative WOM would usually have a detrimental impact on sellers' future sales as well. To the extent that dissatisfied consumers use private complaints to retaliate (e.g., Huefner and Hunt 2000), they may choose this CCB response over a voice complaint. Thus, the choice of one form of complaining behavior may impact or even prevent other forms of CCB.

Richins (1983) found that a majority of dissatisfied consumers participates in WOM as opposed to taking no action or engaging in voice complaints, indicating a "substitution effect" among dissatisfied consumers. Several earlier studies documented the notable absence of voice complaints by consumers despite widespread

dissatisfaction (e.g., Andreasen 1984, 1985; Best and Andreasen 1977; Day and Landon 1977). These studies point to a possible substitution hypothesis as well. Richins (1983) summarized this by noting that most researchers accept that the incidence of (voice) complaints is much lower than the incidence of negative WOM.

At the same time, a "supplementary effect" would not be surprising given the similarity in some of the underlying dimensions of both voice and private (WOM) complaints. Of prime importance is that both behaviors likely have dissatisfaction as one antecedent. Both are also overt behavioral responses intended to exert some influence on others. In the case of voice complaints, it may be to obtain a refund or replacement product. Negative WOM may be communicated in order to dissuade others from buying the same brand. Thus, commitments of time, physical energy, cognitive and emotional effort, and a willingness to confront or admit to dissatisfaction are required for both (as compared to an exit response).

Finally, voice complaints may lead to greater private complaints simply because the consumer's total product experience has been expanded. That is, the consumer has more to talk about than just the initial product dissatisfaction. The consumer may now tell others of a firm's service policies, the friendliness of the staff, or perhaps of the detailed warranty knowledge he/she gained. The complaining process itself may also become part of the WOM communication—resulting in not only a supplementary effect but perhaps a greater amount of WOM as well. That is, if consumers talk about their voice complaints to others, the extent of their WOM communication is likely to be greater than the WOM of other consumers.

Empirical support for a strong supplementary effect exists as well. For example, contrary to Richins' (1983) earlier arguments, Singh (1990a) found that widespread overlap in voice and private complaints (negative WOM) occurred. Although voice complaints were more frequent than WOM complaints in two of three service industries (grocery stores and auto repair, but not medical care), consumers in all three industries engaged in both voice and private complaining. In fact, Singh expanded the range of possible dissatisfaction responses to include exit as well, and found that multiple complaint responses occurred in all cases. Thus, a supplementary rather than a substitution effect is proposed. Furthermore, this effect should be greater among complainers due to their expanded product/service experience. Thus:

> H2: The extent of WOM behavior of consumers engaging in voice complaints (complainers) will be significantly greater than the extent of WOM behavior of consumers who do not engage in voice complaints (non-complainers).

Favorability of WOM and Satisfaction

WOM favorability refers to the valence of the WOM comments that consumers make to others about their product experiences. It seems logical that dissatisfied consumers would be more likely to engage in negative WOM, whereas satisfied consumers would engage in favorable WOM activity. Theories of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) and even attitude theory (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) would explain how consumers' communication behaviors should correlate with the cognitive and affective components of satisfaction judgments. Some empirical evidence also indicates that dissatisfied consumers are more likely to engage in negative WOM as compared to satisfied consumers (Johnston 1998; TARP 1981).

Negative WOM also appears to be more powerful than positive WOM, particularly in terms of its impact on other post-purchase variables such as purchase behavior (Morris 1988). Earlier, Arndt (1967) found that only 54 percent of consumers exposed to favorable WOM bought a product while 82 percent of those who had heard unfavorable comments did not buy it. Given the greater incidence and effects of negative WOM communication, both the valence and the extent of WOM communication should be examined.

Favorability of WOM and Voice Complaints

Complainers (voice complainers) are also more likely to engage in more negative WOM communication. Not only might complainers be dissatisfied enough to engage in both forms of complaining (voice and private), but some satisfied complainers may participate in WOM as well. This may occur because they are upset about the need to complain or even the complaining process itself. Of the four possible combinations represented in the research framework (see Figure 1), it is obvious that dissatisfied voice complainers should engage in the most negative WOM communication ("most" in this case refers to WOM that is more negative than positive in terms of content). Similarly, satisfied non-complainers should make the most favorable comments (in terms of content).

Of the two remaining groups, however, the nature of their WOM communication is less obvious. Dissatisfied consumers who do not voice complaints should engage in more negative WOM behavior than satisfied complainers. This is because they are more likely to be frustrated by the lack of emotional release that voice complaining often provides. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed:

H3: The WOM communication of dissatisfied consumers will be less favorable than the WOM communication of satisfied consumers.

H4: The WOM communication of complainers will be less favorable than the WOM communication of non-complainers.

H5: The WOM communication of dissatisfied non-complainers will be less favorable than the WOM communication of satisfied complainers.

RESEARCH METHOD

Sampling and Data Collection

A nationwide study was conducted among over 400 household consumers in the U.S. The telephone surveys, conducted by an independent marketing research firm, queried respondents about their recent carpet purchases. The sampling frame consisted of new owners of a nationally advertised carpet brand who had completed and returned product warranty cards (the warranty card return rate was 25 percent). The owners had to have purchased their carpet within the last 12 months to be included in the study.

Stratified random sampling was conducted within two major groups to ensure widespread variability in (dis)satisfaction levels and other post-purchase variables. Specifically, one segment consisted of consumers who had never reported a problem with their new carpet (non-complainers, n = 208). Another group consisted of those consumers who had complained about a carpet problem in the last year and either had the problem resolved or the carpet replaced due to defects (complainers, n = 196). Focus groups were conducted prior to the telephone survey in order to tap into consumers' attitudes and behaviors with respect to carpet purchase and usage experiences. The mean satisfaction levels are shown in Table 1.

Measures

Independent Variables. *Consumer satisfaction* was assessed using a 4-point bipolar scale and the question, "Overall, how satisfied are you with your _____ carpet?" Those consumers who reported being very or somewhat dissatisfied were combined to form the Dissatisfied consumer group. Those reporting being very or somewhat satisfied were combined to form the Satisfied group. Consumers were also classified into the two *complainer* and *non-complainer* segments as discussed earlier.

Dependent Variables. *WOM extent* was measured as the "number of people told about the carpet consumption experience." This variable was operationalized as an ordinal measure (i.e., consumers indicated that they told one, two, three, or four or more people about their carpet experiences). *WOM favorability* was assessed

Table 1
Sample Sizes and Satisfaction Levels of Consumer Groups in the Research Framework

Consumer Group	N	Mean Satisfaction Level*
Non-complainers	208	3.78
Complainers	196	2.06
Satisfied Consumers	275	3.73
Dissatisfied Consumers	129	1.26
Satisfied Complainers	72	3.46
Satisfied Non-complainers	203	3.83
Dissatisfied Complainers	124	1.24
Dissatisfied Non-complainers	5	1.80
TOTAL	404	2.95

*1=very dissatisfied
2=somewhat dissatisfied
3=somewhat satisfied
4=very satisfied

using a five-point scale ranging from 1 = "very negative" to 5 = "very positive."

RESULTS

T-tests and Chi-square analysis were performed to measure the differences in WOM extent and WOM favorability across the various groups. Results on the extent of WOM hypotheses (H1 and H2) are presented in Table 2. Table 3 shows the findings related to WOM favorability (H3 – H5).

H1 was supported in that dissatisfied consumers engaged in significantly more WOM than satisfied consumers ($X^2 = 17.88$, $p < 0.001$). For example, dissatisfied consumers were significantly more likely to tell four or more people about their carpet experience (92.7 percent) than satisfied consumers (where only 74 percent told four or more). In addition, satisfied consumers were much more likely than dissatisfied consumers to report having told only one, two, or three people about their carpet experience. This finding supports earlier research that found WOM communication to be much higher among dissatisfied consumers.

H2 proposed that a supplementary complaining effect would occur (i.e., voice complainers will engage in significantly more extensive WOM complaints than non-complainers). Table 2 shows that this hypothesis was supported as well ($X^2 = 25.81$, $p < 0.001$). Over 90 percent of complainers engaged in WOM communication with at least four other people, whereas only 69 percent of non-complainers engaged in WOM to this extent. However, it should be noted that the reverse is true for those who told one, two, or three people, where complainers (9.2 percent) actually engaged in less WOM than non-complainers (30.7 percent). This suggests that the relationship between voice complaints and private complaints may not be uniformly strong.

H3 and H4 argued that the WOM communication of dissatisfied consumers and of complainers would be less favorable than the WOM of satisfied consumers and non-complainers, respectively. In both cases, as expected, these hypotheses were supported (see Table 3). A more interesting result is found with

Table 2
Extent of WOM (Private Complaints)

Frequency (Row %) Expected Fr Cell X^2	Number of People Told			
Consumer Group	One	Two	Three	Four or More
Non-complainers	7 (4.2%) 4.8 1.75	19 (11.5%) 12.3 3.61	25 (15.1%) 15.7 5.54	115 (69.3%) 133.7 2.63
Complainers	2 (1.1%) 4.7 1.58	7 (3.8%) 13.7 3.25	8 (4.4%) 17.3 5.04	167 (90.8%) 148.3 2.37
X^2= 25.81, 3 df, p < 0.001				
Satisfied Consumers	8 (3.5%) 5.8 0.801	23 (10.1%) 16.9 2.23	28 (12.3%) 21.4 2.03	168 (74.0%) 182.9 1.21
Dissatisfied Consumers	1 (.8%) 3.2 1.48	3 (2.4%) 9.1 4.12	5 (4.1%) 11.6 3.75	114 (92.7%) 99.1 2.24
X^2 = 17.88, 3 df, p < 0.001				

H5, which proposed that the WOM of dissatisfied non-complainers would be less favorable (i.e., more negative in valence) than the WOM of satisfied complainers. This hypothesis was supported (t = 2.45, p < 0.006, one-tail test). Thus, it appears that a consumer's dissatisfaction level has a more dominant effect on the negativity of subsequent WOM communication than whether or not a consumer complained.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study support previous research in that dissatisfied consumers engaged in significantly more WOM behavior than satisfied consumers by telling more people about their dissatisfactory experiences. Preventing consumer dissatisfaction therefore continues to be of paramount importance due to its effect on the extent of WOM communication in the marketplace. Negative WOM can affect consumer expectations, brand or company image, and

Table 3
Favorability of WOM Among Consumer Groups

Consumer Group	Mean*(sd)	T	df	P-value
Non-complainers	4.50 (0.69)	12.52	274.5	0.0001
Complainers	3.04 (1.41)			
Satisfied Consumers	4.36 (0.84)	-13.56	177.3	0.0001
Dissatisfied Consumers	2.57 (1.33)			
Satisfied Complainers	3.89 (1.11)	2.45	68.0	0.006
Dissatisfied Non-complainers	2.50 (1.01)			

*1=very negative
2=somewhat negative
3=neutral comments/neither negative nor positive
4=somewhat positive
5=very positive

eventually future sales and profits. Service businesses must be especially sensitive to WOM comments. Personal sources of information play a much greater role when consumers evaluate and purchase services as compared to physical goods (Zeithaml and Bitner 2002). In addition, personal sources of information such as WOM tend to be used more than non-personal sources of information such as advertising when consumers evaluate services (Robertson 1971; Zeithaml and Bitner 2002).

With respect to the *amount of WOM* among voice complainers, this study found that the WOM communication of voice complainers was significantly greater than the WOM of non-complainers, confirming a "supplementary" effect rather than a substitution effect. That is, just because consumers complain directly to sellers does not indicate a lack of complaining to friends and family.

This has several interesting implications for managers. Current theory and practice suggest that consumer complaining should be facilitated, even solicited in order for companies to take corrective action. Complaint information is analyzed and used to assist companies in diagnosing product and service failures, preventing future failures, and eventually offering recovery to the consumer to ensure repeat patronage. This information may only be part of the picture, however. If WOM behavior is not tracked simultaneously, important information may be missed or opportunities for satisfying consumers may be lost. Accordingly, Singh's suggestion that multiple complaint responses be included in CCB research is strengthened by these findings.

For managers, the findings on the *nature of the WOM* comments must be considered as well since only negative WOM is truly detrimental to future business. When the favorability of WOM is examined, the results suggest that the WOM of consumers who engage in voice complaints is significantly more negative than the WOM of non-complainers. Overall, WOM was most favorable among satisfied non-complainers (m = 4.55 out of 5), followed by satisfied complainers (m = 3.89 out of 5). The most negative WOM communication (in terms of the valence of the comments) occurred among dissatisfied non-

complainers (m = 2.5 out of 5, see Table 3). This finding adds further support to the idea that companies should encourage customers to articulate complaints, but does so for a different reason. The usual rationale is that complaints represent valuable feedback to companies that subsequently allows them to take corrective action vis-à-vis product or service defects. While this is certainly true, these findings also suggest that complaint articulation may lessen the negativity of customers' WOM transmissions, thereby causing less damage to the firm's reputation.

For managers, the double impact of more WOM activity combined with greater negativity in the communication suggests that private complaining must be minimized—clearly more so than voice complaining. Voice complaints at least provide managers with opportunities to provide redress. Private complaints are not only more negative but are largely out of the control of the manager.

According to Singh's suggestion, multiple complaint responses were included in this research—voice, private, and even third party complaints. An interesting finding here was the complete lack of third party complaining reported by over 400 consumers (zero responses). Since almost 200 dissatisfied consumers were included in the sample and the product category was very expensive, this result was surprising. Although third party complaining is a component of CCB typology, it is difficult for researchers to measure third party complaint behavior in any significant manner (as compared to third party complaint intentions, for example). Third party complaints can be difficult to measure due to their infrequent occurrence (as compared to other complaint types) and their proprietary nature. Few companies wish to release their third party complaint data for examination, and sample sizes large enough to include enough third party complainers are often cost prohibitive. While some data are available from secondary sources (e.g., DOT reports for the airline industry, for example), it is likely that these legal and consumer agency complaints will continue to be underrepresented in the CCB research.

Some limitations of this research should be considered when evaluating the research findings. For example, using product warranty cards to identify the sampling frame likely introduced some selection bias. Although the warranty card return rate was over 25 percent, a preferred alternative would be to maintain a database of all consumers and draw the sample accordingly. In addition, the extent of WOM variable was measured using an ordinal scale, thus limiting the analysis to Chi-square tests. While this is not ideal, the scale was developed after both focus groups and pre-tests found limited or incomplete consumer responses regarding the number of people told.

Finally, the cell size for the dissatisfied non-complainers was only five, which represents a serious limitation on any conclusions drawn about this group. It should be noted that the heavily promoted and highly successful consumer warranty program associated with this brand encouraged even the most dissatisfied and most reluctant buyers to voice complaints and seek redress via the warranty. As noted by Singh (1990a), "episodic variables are the major factors in consumers' dissatisfaction response styles" (p. 92). A comprehensive warranty program could be considered just such an episodic variable. Future research should therefore be conducted using non-warrantied products or services as well as products with less comprehensive warranty programs.

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