

Complaint Behaviour between Generations and Its Transmissions: An Exploratory Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

Despite the abundance of marketing literature on consumer complaint behaviour, little is done to explicate such behaviour from generational perspectives. How the older and younger groups complain, and whether the latter learn or inherit behavioural values from the former remain unknown. Using theories pertinent to complaint behaviour and social learning theory as the basis, the present study aims to look into complaint behaviour between two generations, namely the mothers and the daughters. A qualitative approach using dyad interview was employed in Malaysia to gain insights not only about their respective complaint behaviour but also its similarities and differences simultaneously. Subsequently, five pairs of mothers and daughters were interviewed. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using content analysis. The findings show that while the mothers would most likely seek redress in person, complain to others verbally and take no action, the daughters tend to seek redress and tell others about it using electronic media. There is apparent similarity in seeking redress and ranting on between the mothers and daughters but the younger generation tends to do it via social media. The study thus serves as a precursor to future investigation on complaint behaviour by different generation cohorts in the same family and the potential transmission of behavioural values between them. Practical implications are provided.

Keywords: complaint behaviour, dyad interview, generation, transmission, qualitative

1. Introduction

Consumers become dissatisfied when the products (including goods and services) they purchase or use do not meet their expectations. However, the manners of which the consumers react due to dissatisfaction differ from one person to another (Metehan & Yasemin, 2011). Some would seek redress from the sellers in person, some choose to avoid any confrontation, and some would rant on to tell others about the product and the company (Mellor, Martin, & Bradley, 2014). All these reactions are related to complaint behaviour which is a process where consumers evaluate their dissatisfaction after purchasing the products. It is generally concluded that consumers can get upset relatively easy due to the quality and price of the product and the manner the service is purveyed (Carnoy, 2015).

While consumer complaint behaviour (CCB) is a well-studied topic in marketing literature, little is known whether such behaviour is different by generations and whether it is transmittable between two generations. Such consideration is necessary because many consumers today still purchase the products with their family members and make purchase or post-purchase decisions jointly. If the parents are unhappy with certain products or services, their negative responses would likely affect their children to a certain degree. In fact, generational transmission between the parents and the children has been looked into in past studies (Cipriani, Giuliano, & Jeanne, 2007; Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011), and it is something well-established in biological and anthropological research. Nevertheless, generational transmission is relatively less researched in consumer behaviour, let alone complaint behaviour. It is assumed that children's patterns of behaviour are learnt through direct experience and by observing the behaviours of their parents (Bandura, 1971).