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THE USE OF SURVEY RESEARCH TO MEASURE CONSUMER SATISFACTION WITH HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS PRODUCTS

Stephen B. Ash

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO, LONDON, CANADA

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THE USE OF SURVEY RESEARCH TO MEASURE CONSUMER SATISFACTION WITH HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHING PRODUCTS

by

Stephen B. Ash
The University of Western Ontario

and

John A. Quelch
Harvard University

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ABSTRACT

A nationwide survey of Canadian consumers investigated their satisfaction and complaining behavior with respect to a comprehensive set of products and services, including twenty-three categories of housing and home furnishings. Results indicate that although the vast majority of consumers are satisfied with housing and home furnishings as a whole, there is significant dissatisfaction with individual categories such as mobile homes, sofas, chairs and other living room furniture and swimming pools. Many consumers experiencing dissatisfaction with housing and home furnishings do not complain or take formal steps to obtain redress. Thus levels of complaints about housing and home furnishing products do not properly reflect levels of consumer dissatisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Although the literature on consumer satisfaction and complaining behavior has expanded quite rapidly in recent years, few studies have so far focused on satisfaction with housing and home furnishings. The absence of extensive coverage is rather surprising given the assertion that housing constitutes one of the major problems faced by consumers (Margolius, 1975). To date, research has centered around efforts to conceptualize and measure housing satisfaction in an international comparative setting (Hempel, 1977), to define the relative habitability of housing for public tenants on the basis of four interacting subsystems (Onibokun, 1974), and to examine consumer satisfaction with housing using derived deficit scores as predictors (Winter and Morris, 1979). Another study focused on consumer satisfaction with home furnishings made from textiles (Nichols and Dardis, 1973). This paper reports on the application of subjective ratings as a measure of the performance of housing and home furnishing products. In particular, data are presented which examine levels of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior with respect to a comprehensive set of housing and home furnishing categories.

In recent years, public policy makers have assigned a relatively high priority to the development of programs designed to protect the consumer interest. To build such programs, policy makers have an interest in the acquisition of information which provides a basis for diagnosing dissatisfaction with products and services and assigning priorities for corrective action. In this regard, the limitations of conventional complaint data as a basis for guiding policy interventions are increasingly being recognized. Complaint letters may be misleading since they tend not to be representative either of the types of problems confronting consumers or of all types of people experiencing consumer problems. For example, complaint letters suffer from "big ticket" bias since they tend to focus on unsatisfactory consumption experiences with products that are unusually important to the consumer (Day and Landon, 1977, 1976, and 1975; Wall, Dickey, and Talarzyk, 1977). Volunteered complaints thus tend to underrepresent dissatisfactions with lower cost items or those which play a relatively modest role in the consumer's daily life (Day and Bodur, 1977). There is some evidence, as well, that writers of complaint letters or those who take some action to resolve their dissatisfaction are atypical of the entire population since they tend to be younger, better educated, more affluent, and more active politically than non-complainers (Stokes, 1974; Warland et al., 1975).

OBJECTIVES

Consistent with the need for better information about consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaining behavior, the primary objective of the current research is to increase understanding of the types of problems confronting consumers.

The specific objectives of this paper are:

(1) To report levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with housing and home furnishings purchased during the recall period;

(2) To compare levels of consumer dissatisfaction across the various categories of housing and home furnishings;

(3) To identify those categories which appear to have caused the greatest amounts of dissatisfaction among purchasers;

(4) To identify recurring reasons for dissatisfaction with housing and home furnishings;

(5) To describe how consumers who report dissatisfaction attempt to resolve their dissatisfaction through alternative courses of private and public action;

(6) To assess how satisfied consumers are with the way their complaints about housing and home furnishings are handled.

THE STUDY

The data for this study were obtained on an aided recall basis through a nation-wide survey of Canadian consumers conducted for the Consumer Research and Evaluation Branch, Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada. The research instruments employed in the study were similar in content and scope to those used in a similar localized study conducted in Bloomington, Indiana (Ash, 1978; Day and Ash, 1979; Day and Bodur, 1977 and 1978). The data were gathered with bilingual self-administered questionnaires using the drop off-pick up method to a national probability sample of approximately 3000 dwelling units in Canada during the spring of 1979. Approximately one third of these households received a questionnaire dealing with "Durable Products". One of the four sections in this instrument dealt with "Housing and Home Furnishings". This paper is based upon responses to the Housing and Home Furnishings section of the questionnaire by 1,030 adult Canadians, both males and females, eighteen years of age and over.

A five-stage stratified probability sampling plan was employed to gather the data. Although the exact <u>true</u> response rate cannot be completed with the modified probability sample drawn for this study, results have shown that the data compare favorably with Statistics Canada census information. The results reported here are based on Canadian data and may not be extrapolable to the United States, particularly since differences in industry structures and government policies may lead to variations in consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific housing and home furnishings categories. The approach used in the study should, however, be of as much interest as the detailed results.

The initial task required respondents to indicate whether or not they had purchased or used any items from the category during the three year recall period. Those who had indicated that they had purchased the product were asked to provide a rating of the relative importance of the category and of the relative extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with items contained in the category. Subjects then indicated whether or not they had been "highly dissatisfied" with any one of the twenty-three housing and home furnishing categories during the past three years and, if so, stated the frequency of dissatisfaction and named the one category which was "the most unsatisfactory of all". The remaining questions in the section provided additional data on this single most unsatisfactory product category. First, subjects were asked to complete a set of questions identifying their reasons for dissatisfaction. Next, respondents were asked whether or not financial loss resulted from their unsatisfactory experience. Then, those reporting dissatisfaction were asked to indicate what steps were taken, if any, to resolve their dissatisfaction. In line with the conceptual framework developed by Day and Landon (1977), the action options were divided into two groups, personal actions and direct or public actions. Respondents who reported taking direct action(s) were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with the way their complaint was handled.

FINDINGS

Product Category Responses

Table 1 summarizes responses denoting purchase, relative importance and level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction for each of twenty-three housing and home furnishing categories. The percentage of subjects purchasing each category within the past three years is first listed, followed by the percentages of subjects rating the item as highly important. Next, the frequency

TABLE I REGION: NATIONAL

CONSUMER SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION STUDY: DURABLES

PURCHASE; IMPORTANCE RATING; SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION RATING

SECTION: HOUSING & HOME FURNISHINGS (HHF) I

CATEGORY	PURCHASE	IMPORTANCE RATING		SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION RATING				TOTAL SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION			
	% of Respondents* having Purchased	% of Purchasers rating Important	Rank by Importance Rating	% OF PURCHASERS				% OF PURCHASERS			
				SATISFIED		DISSATISFIED		SATISFIED		DISSATISFIED	
				Quite	Somewhat	Somewhat	Quite	Total	Rank	Total	Rank
1. Single-Family or Duplex House	18.5	97.3	1	61.0	31.0	5.8	2.1	92.0	7	7.9	17
2. Condominium or Co-op Unit	1.5	66.7	8	46.7	40.0	13.3	-	86.7	19	13.3	5
3. Mobile Home	2.4	75.0	5	28.0	52.0	16.0	4.0	80.0	23	20.0	1
4. Vacation Home	4.1	65.9	10	68.3	22.0	4.9	4.9	90.3	13	9.8	11
5. Building Lot or other Land	5.1	76.5	4	56.7	32.1	7.5	3.7	88.8	15	11.2	9
6. Home Improvements	22.6	63.3	12	62.2	28.8	7.3	1.7	91.0	9	9.0	14
7. Furnace, Air Conditioning or Heat Pump	9.3	85.5	3	70.5	17.9	7.4	4.2	88.4	16	11.6	7
8. Aluminum Siding or Insulation	17.4	86.2	2	66.5	28.5	2.2	2.8	95.0	3	5.0	21
9. Swimming Pool	2.1	47.6	17	28.5	57.1	4.8	9.5	85.6	21	14.3	3
10. 'Do It Yourself' Projects	57.4	56.3	14	57.4	36.8	4.6	1.2	94.2	4	5.8	20
11. Bookcases, Shelving, Wall Units	19.5	36.9	21	57.9	35.6	5.0	1.5	93.5	6	6.5	18
12. Sofas, Chairs, Other Living Room Furniture	43.0	64.2	11	57.8	26.8	9.7	5.6	84.6	22	15.3	2
13. Dining Room or Kitchen Furniture	25.8	66.7	8	62.9	25.1	9.0	3.0	88.0	18	12.0	6
14. Bedroom Furniture, Mattresses	32.4	73.5	6	64.2	27.2	6.3	2.3	91.4	8	8.6	16
15. Baby or Childrens Furniture	12.5	71.2	7	58.9	29.5	7.0	4.6	88.4	16	11.6	7
16. Porch, Patio or Garden Furniture	14.2	18.3	23	42.2	48.3	6.1	3.4	90.5	12	9.5	12
17. Desks, Bar, Other Den or Family Room Furniture	9.6	42.7	19	49.5	36.6	8.9	5.0	86.1	20	13.9	4
18. Carpeting, Linoleum, Other Floor Coverings	41.4	62.3	13	63.9	26.0	6.8	3.3	89.9	14	10.1	10
19. Draperies or Curtains	41.6	53.8	15	62.0	33.3	2.8	1.9	95.3	1	4.7	22
20. Linens	68.7	48.3	16	63.1	32.2	3.7	1.0	95.3	1	4.7	22
21. Electric Blankets	12.3	37.4	20	68.0	22.7	7.0	2.3	90.7	11	9.3	13
22. Lamps, Clocks,...	41.7	33.6	22	54.1	36.9	6.8	2.2	91.0	9	9.0	14
23. Housewares	58.4	46.2	18	61.3	32.7	4.4	1.6	94.0	5	6.0	19

* N = 1030

of purchasers checking each of the four satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale responses is reported. The final columns in Table 1 summarize the percentages of satisfied and dissatisfied subjects for each product category. The results indicate that mobile homes rank first in terms of percentage of dissatisfied purchasers (20.0%) followed by sofas, chairs, other living room furniture (15.3%) and swimming pool (14.3%). Three of the five product categories indicating the highest percentages of dissatisfied purchasers in Table 1 appeared in the corresponding table reported by Ash (1978). These categories were mobile home, condominium or coop unit, and swimming pool. Although differences in industry structure and government policy between Canada and the United States may be of relevance, the convergence between the two sets of results is impressive. The results covering home furnishings made from textiles may be compared to those of an earlier study which reported that 66% of the purchasers in the sample were relatively satisfied with their purchases of these products during the past years (Nichols and Dardis, 1973).

The results reported in Table 1 cover positive as well as negative aspects of consumers' reaction to housing and home furnishings and, therefore represent a balanced appraisal. In addition, they are less likely to be subject to the "big ticket" bias associated with volunteered complaint data or with studies which ask consumers to recall a single unsatisfactory experience; the instrument enables each respondent to report more than one single unsatisfactory experience. Furthermore, information on the rate of purchase of products permits the numbers of consumers expressing dissatisfaction with the category to be considered in relation to the total number of respondents reporting purchase of the category within the recall period. For example, only 2.4% of respondents reported purchasing mobile homes during the past three years, yet 20.0% of these subjects expressed dissatisfaction, the highest percentage among the twenty-three product categories. Mobile homes are not identified as a serious problem on conventional complaint lists because the absolute numbers of purchases of this product is relatively small.

Individual Satisfaction Scores

An average satisfaction score was computed for each subject based upon the satisfaction ratings provided for all 23 housing and home furnishings categories. Each of the subjects was assigned to either half of the four point satisfaction/dissatisfaction scale. Thus, if a subject had checked the "somewhat" or "very satisfied" response for all twenty-three categories, that individual would have been assigned a score of 1.000. However, if the respondent had checked the "somewhat" or "very dissatisfied" response for all categories, that subject would have received a score of 4.000. Given the probable low interdependence of these products with respect to substitutability, the additive and compensatory assumptions upon which the average satisfaction score is based may not be too unreasonable.

Results covering the average satisfaction scores for the twenty-three product categories are divided into four sections of housing and home furnishing items and are reported in Table. 2 They show that an overwhelming majority of 95.5% of subjects had average scores in the satisfaction range for the entire set of twenty-three categories. However, comparisons between the four sections of housing and home furnishing categories indicate that the lowest fraction of subjects in the dissatisfaction range were found in the case of housewares and accessories (categories 18-23) whereas the highest proportion of purchasers in the dissatisfaction range were associated with furniture (categories 11-17). These levels were 4.6% and 10.8% respectively. The table also reveals a relatively high percentage of subjects in the dissatisfaction range in the case of housing (categories 1-4). On balance, however, it would seem that as far as housing and home furnishings categories are concerned, "consumers see far more good than bad in their experiences." (Day and Bodur, 1977, p. 264.)

TABLE 2

ALL RESPONDENTS CLASSIFIED BY
AVERAGE SATISFACTION SCORES ON HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS

SECTION	MEAN SATISFACTION SCORE					
	Satisfaction Group		Dissatisfaction Group		Total[a]	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Housing (categories 1-4)	221	90.6	23	9.4	244	100.0
2. Home Improvements (categories 5-10)	646	93.5	45	6.5	691	100.0
3. Furniture (categories 11-17)	635	89.2	77	10.8	712	100.0
4. Housewares,Accessories (categories 18-23)	852	95.4	41	4.6	893	100.0
TOTAL SECTION	919	95.5	43	4.5	962	100.0

NOTE: [a] Total sample is less than 1030 due to missing data.

Instances of Consumer Dissatisfaction

Subjects were then requested to indicate whether they had had one or more experiences during the previous three years with housing and home furnishings with which they were highly dissatisfied; 19.7% of subjects responded affirmatively. To organize the analysis on reasons for dissatisfaction and actions by dissatisfied consumers, subjects who had reported high dissatisfaction were asked to indicate the one product category which was the most unsatisfactory of all.

Table 3 shows the percentages of highly dissatisfied purchasers of housing and home furnishings who cited each of the twenty-three categories as most unsatisfactory. Purchase of a mobile home registered the highest percentage, purchase of a building lot and bookcases, shelving etc. were tied for the lowest with no purchasers reporting that they were highly dissatisfied in either case. The results suggest that housing categories such as mobile homes and condominiums or coop units appear to generate an intense level of dissatisfaction more frequently than is the case for home improvement, furniture and household accessory items. In addition, the table indicates that a relatively high percentage (14.3%) of swimming pool purchasers reported being highly dissatisfied with their acquisition.

Reasons for Dissatisfaction

Subjects were asked to check reasons for dissatisfaction with the one product category named as the most unsatisfactory of all. Multiple reponses were permitted. From among a list of twenty-five reasons, respondents checked an average of 2.62 items. Table 4 reports the percentage share of reasons for each of the mentions. The most frequently cited reasons were: "the quality

TABLE 3

CONSUMER SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION STUDY: DURABLES
ITEMS CITED AS THE MOST UNSATISFACTORY
PURCHASE EXPERIENCE BY PURCHASERS

SECTION: HOUSING & HOME FURNISHINGS

CATEGORY/ITEM	NO. OF PURCHASERS	PURCHASERS CITING EACH ITEM AS THE MOST UNSATISFACTORY	
		NO.	%
1. Purchase of a single-family or duplex house for use as your home.	190	4	2.1
2. Purchase of a condominium unit or co-operative apartment for use as your home.	15	2	13.3
3. Purchase of a mobile home for use as your home.	25	5	20.0
4. Purchase of a cottage, house, condominium unit, or mobile home for use as a vacation home.	42	2	4.8
5. Purchase of a building lot or other land for your own use.	52	--	--
6. Home improvements: adding a garage or room, driveways, patios, fences, tennis courts, major landscaping.	232	3	1.3
7. Installation of a new furnace, central air conditioning unit or a heat pump for your home.	95	5	5.3
8. Installation of aluminum siding or insulation for your home.	179	4	2.2
9. Purchase or installation of a swimming pool for your home.	21	3	14.3
10. Building materials for "do-it-yourself" projects, such as paints, wallpaper, or self-installed insulation.	590	13	2.2
11. Bookcases, shelving, display cases, wall units.	201	--	--
12. Sofas, upholstered chairs, chaises lounges, reclining chairs, rocking chairs, other living room furniture.	442	35	7.9
13. Dining room tables and chairs, buffets, china cabinets, kitchen furniture.	266	8	3.0
14. Bedroom furniture, mattresses and box springs, water beds.	334	17	5.1
15. Baby furniture, children's furniture.	129	6	4.7
16. Porch, patio and garden furniture.	146	7	4.8
17. Desks, bar units, den or family room furniture.	99	3	3.0
18. Carpeting, linoleum and other floor coverings.	427	12	2.8
19. Draperies and curtains.	429	10	2.3
20. Linens: bedspreads, sheets, pillowcases, blankets, comforters, quilts, pillows, tablecloths, towels.	707	12	1.7
21. Electric blankets, heating pads.	126	5	3.9
22. Lamps, clocks...	429	16	3.7
23. Housewares	601	24	3.9

TABLE 4

REGION: NATIONAL

CONSUMER SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION STUDY: DURABLES

MAJOR REASONS FOR CONSUMER DISSATISFACTION

SECTION: HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS (HHF) I

REASONS	FREQUENCY OF MENTION				PERCENT OF DISSATIFIED CASES MENTIONING EACH REASON
	ALL REASONS		MOST IMPORTANT REASON		
	NO. OF MENTIONS	SHARE OF MENTIONS	NO. OF MENTIONS	SHARE OF MENTIONS	
1. The quality of materials was inferior	116	21.2	67	33.5	57.1
2. The quality of workmanship was inferior	84	15.4	34	17.0	41.4
3. The product had drawbacks that I was not told about when I bought it	40	7.3	14	7.0	19.7
4. The cost of using the product is higher than I was led to believe	8	1.5	4	2.0	3.9
5. The item that was delivered was different from the one I bought	6	1.1	-	-	3.0
6. The product was damaged when delivered	19	3.5	7	3.5	9.4
7. I had to wait a long time before the product was delivered	14	2.6	5	2.5	6.9
8. The product was misrepresented to me by the salesman	18	3.3	3	1.5	8.9
9. The product did not correspond to the general impression created in an advertisement	29	5.3	6	3.0	14.3
10. The product did not perform as well or last as long as advertising claims led me to believe	58	10.6	18	9.0	28.6
11. The credit terms were misrepresented to me	1	0.2	-	-	0.5
12. The warranty (guarantee) did not cover all of the things that went wrong	14	2.6	3	1.5	6.9
13. The warranty (guarantee) was not as extensive as the general impression created in advertising	10	1.8	1	0.5	5.0
14. Repairs or services under the warranty (guarantee) were unsatisfactory	20	3.6	2	1.0	10.0
15. The warranty (guarantee) was not honoured	6	1.1	2	1.0	3.0
16. The store was unwilling to provide a refund or an exchange	23	4.2	8	4.0	11.3
17. The dealer misrepresented his ability to provide parts and service for the product	10	1.8	4	2.0	5.0
18. I was tricked by a salesman into buying a more expensive model than I needed	4	0.7	-	-	1.9
19. The price that was charged was higher than what I had agreed to pay	2	0.4	-	-	1.0
20. The price that was charged was higher than the advertised price	2	0.4	1	0.5	1.0
21. The product was unsafe	8	1.5	1	0.5	3.9
22. The product advertised as a "special" or "bargain" was unavailable at the store	15	2.7	3	1.5	7.4
23. The product wasted energy resources	7	1.3	1	0.5	3.5
24. The instructions for using and taking care of the product were incomplete or impossible to read	11	2.0	3	1.5	5.4
25. Other reasons not listed above	22	4.0	13	6.5	10.8

of workmanship was inferior." Both of these reasons for dissatisfaction were predominant in the corresponding table reported by Day and Ash (1979). The relative importance of these two reasons reflects the problems of insuring quality control in housing and home furnishing organizations when quality is dependent not only upon physical product characteristics but upon the workmanship of individual employees of the supplier organization. Consistent with the results of earlier studies (Mason and Himes, 1973; Wall et al, 1977), significantly fewer subjects were dissatisfied because of marketing practices, such as selling techniques and advertising claims.

Because several of the reasons cited for dissatisfaction were related to a greater or lesser degree to particular housing and home furnishing categories, the percentages of dissatisfied subjects mentioning each reason were examined in terms of four groupings: (i) housing, (ii) home improvements, (iii) furniture, and (iv) housewares. These results are presented on Table 5. Review of the table indicates that the home improvement, furniture and household aggregate results reflect the reasons cited by subjects reporting dissatisfaction with furniture products more so than housing, home improvement and houseware products. The results suggest that insuring quality control may be the most serious problem facing furniture manufacturers. Another important result of the analysis is that, in the case of home improvement products, 72.2% of dissatisfied purchasers indicated that the product did not perform as well or last as long as advertising claims had led the consumer to believe. One possible explanation for this result is that purchasers of home improvement products in Canada may not be taking into sufficient account, the

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF REASONS FOR DISSATISFACTION BETWEEN HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHING CATEGORIES

[1]n = 39 [3]n = 189
[2]n = 69 [4]n = 233

REASONS	Percentage of Dissatisfied Subjects Naming Each Reason for Dissatisfaction			
	Housing[1] (Categories 1-4)	Home Improvements[2] (Categories 5-10)	Furniture[3] (Categories 11-17)	Housewares[4] (Categories 18-23)
1. The quality of materials was inferior.	7.7	18.8	27.0	18.9
2. The quality of workmanship was inferior.	12.8	10.1	21.7	12.0
3. The product had drawbacks that I was not told about when I bought it.	15.4	5.8	5.3	8.6
4. The cost of using the product is higher than I was led to believe.	-	1.5	2.1	1.3
5. The item that was delivered was different from the one I bought.	-	-	0.5	2.1
6. The product was damaged when delivered.	-	5.8	3.7	3.4
7. I had to wait a long time before the product was delivered.	-	4.3	1.6	3.0
8. The product was misrepresented to me by the salesman.	5.1	5.8	2.6	2.6
9. The product did not correspond to the general impression created in an advertisement.	5.1	5.8	2.6	7.3
10. The product did not perform as well or last as long as advertising claims led me to believe.	10.2	72.2	10.6	12.0
11. The credit terms were misrepresented to me.	2.6	-	-	-
12. The warranty (guarantee) did not cover all of the things that went wrong.	5.1	1.5	3.7	1.3
13. The warranty (guarantee) was not as extensive as the general impression created in advertising.	10.2	2.9	-	1.7
14. Repairs or services under warranty (guarantee) were unsatisfactory.	5.1	1.5	3.7	3.4
15. The warranty (guarantee) was not honoured.	2.6	-	0.5	1.7
16. The store was unwilling to provide a refund or an exchange.	2.6	1.5	4.2	5.6
17. The dealer misrepresented his ability to provide parts and service for the product.	-	4.3	1.1	1.3
18. I was tricked by a salesman into buying a more expensive model than I needed.	2.6	1.5	-	0.9
19. The price that was charged was higher than what I had agreed to pay.	2.6	1.5	—	—
20. The price that was charged was higher than the advertised price.	—	1.5	—	0.4
21. The product was unsafe.	—	—	1.6	2.1
22. The product advertised as a "special" or "bargain" was unavailable.	2.6	5.8	1.6	3.0
23. The product wasted energy resources.	2.6	2.9	0.5	1.3
24. The instructions for using and taking care of the product were incomplete or impossible to read.	—	1.5	1.6	3.0
25. Other reason not listed above.	5.1	8.7	3.7	3.0

impact of the Canadian climate on the useful life of items such as swimming pools and furnaces. On the other hand, various suppliers of home improvement products may be guilty of artificially raising consumers' expectations through deceptive advertising. More focused research is necessary to understand why consumer expectations appear to be outpacing perceptions of product performance in the case of home improvement goods.

Responses to Consumer Dissatisfaction

Of the 191 subjects who reported being highly dissatisfied with one or more product categories, 106 (or 55.5%) reported that they had taken personal and/or direct actions as a result. A summary of the actions taken by dissatisfied purchasers of housing and home furnishing products is presented in Table 6. On average, respondents cited 2.62 actions. Personal actions accounted for 55.4% of total actions and among such actions, word-of-mouth warning to family and friends was the most frequently mentioned item. It is important to note that neither housing/home furnishing suppliers nor consumer protection agencies would be directly aware of these types of actions. Direct actions accounted for the remaining 44.6%. Among the direct actions, considerably more emphasis was placed upon complaints to the store (18.9%) as opposed to formal efforts to seek redress including returning the product to the seller for a replacement or refund. These results may be compared to those of another study which reported that just over one-fourth of the dissatisfied consumers in the sample registered complaints (Nichols and Dardis, 1973).

A summary of the actions taken by dissatisfied purchasers of categories contained in each of the four groupings of housing and home furnishing products

TABLE 6

REGION: NATIONAL

CONSUMER SATISFACTION/DISSATISFACTION STUDY: DURABLES

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN RESPONSE TO DISSATISFACTORY PURCHASE EXPERIENCE

SECTION: HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHING (HHF) I

RESPONSE/TYPE OF ACTION TAKEN	FREQUENCY OF SPECIFIC ACTION TAKEN			PERCENT OF DISSATISFIED CASES* TAKING SPECIFIC ACTIONS
A. PERSONAL ACTION	NO. OF MENTIONS	SHARE OF PERSONAL ACTIONS	SHARE OF TOTAL ACTIONS	
1. I decided not to buy that brand of the product again	46	29.1	16.1	22.7
2. I decided to quit using that kind of product	21	13.3	7.4	10.3
3. I decided to stop shopping at the store where I bought the product	26	16.5	9.1	12.8
4. I warned my family and friends about the brand, product or store	50	31.6	17.5	24.6
5. Other personal action not listed above	15	9.5	5.3	7.4
A. TOTAL PERSONAL ACTION	158	100%	55.4 %	77.8
B. DIRECT ACTION	NO. OF MENTIONS	SHARE OF DIRECT ACTIONS	SHARE OF TOTAL ACTIONS	
1. I returned the product to the seller for a replacement or refund	38	30.0	13.3	18.7
2. I contacted the store to complain	54	42.5	18.9	26.7
3. I contacted the manufacturer to complain	7	5.5	2.4	3.4
4. I contacted the manufacturers' industry association to complain	2	1.6	0.7	1.0
5. I contacted the Better Business Bureau to complain	6	4.7	2.1	3.0
6. I contacted a governmental agency or a public official to complain	6	4.7	2.1	3.0
7. I contacted a private consumer advocate or consumer organization to complain	1	0.8	0.4	0.5
8. I contacted a lawyer, went to Small Claims Court, or otherwise took legal action	4	3.1	1.4	2.0
9. Other direct action not listed above	9	7.1	3.2	4.4
B. TOTAL DIRECT ACTION	127	100%	44.6 %	62.5
A&B TOTAL ACTION SUMMARY	285	--	100%	--

*N dissatisfied = 203

TABLE 7

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO DISSATISFACTION

WITH HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS

Type of Action Taken	Percentage of Dissatisfied Subjects Taking Some Form of Action				
	Housing[1] (Categories 1-4)	Home Improvements[2] (Categories 5-10)	Furniture[3] (Categories 11-17)	Housewares[4] (Categories 18-23)	TOTAL
PERSONAL					
1. I decided not to buy that brand of the product again.	3(16.7%)	5(10.9%)	15(17.2%)	21(19.3%)	44(16.3%)
2. I decided to quit using that kind of product.	2(11.1%)	5(10.9%)	1(1.1%)	12(11.0%)	20(7.4%)
3. I decided to stop shopping at the store where I bought the product.	-	5(10.9%)	9(10.3%)	9(8.3%)	23(8.5%)
4. I warned my family and friends about the brand, product or store.	3(16.7%)	6(13.0%)	19(21.8%)	7(6.4%)	45(16.7%)
5. Other personal action not listed above.	3(16.7%)	1(2.2%)	1(1.1%)	10(9.2%)	15(5.5%)
TOTAL PERSONAL ACTIONS	11(61.1%)	22(47.8%)	45(51.7%)	59(54.2%)	147(54.4%)
DIRECT					
1. I returned the product to the seller for a replacement or refund.	-	5(10.9%)	9(10.3%)	21(19.3%)	35(12.9%)
2. I contacted the store to complain.	2(11.1%)	8(17.4%)	24(27.6%)	19(17.4%)	53(19.6%)
3. I contacted the manufacturer to complain.	1(5.5%)	1(2.2%)	3(3.4%)	2(1.8%)	7(2.6%)
4. I contacted the manufacturers' industry assocation to complain.	-	-	-	2(1.8%)	2(0.7%)
5. I contacted the Better Business Bureau to complain.	-	2(4.3%)	2(2.3%)	2(1.8%)	6(2.2%)
6. I contacted a governmental agency or a public official to complain.	1(5.5%)	2(4.3%)	2(2.3%)	1(0.9%)	6(2.2%)
7. I contacted a private consumer advocate or consumer organization to complain.	-	-	-	1(0.9%)	1(0.4%)
8. I contacted a lawyer, went to Small Claims Court, or otherwise took legal action.	1(5.5%)	3(6.5%)	-	-	4(1.5%)
9. Other direct action not listed above.	2(11.1%)	3(6.5%)	2(2.3%)	2(1.8%)	9(3.3%)
TOTAL DIRECT ACTIONS	7(38.9%)	24(52.2%)	42(48.3%)	50(45.8%)	123(45.6%)
TOTAL ACTIONS	18(100%)	46(100%)	87(100%)	109(100%)	270(100%)

1 based on 11 respondents, 8 of whom reported taking action.

2 based on 27 respondents, 18 of whom reported taking action.

3 based on 75 respondents, 37 of whom reported taking action.

4 based on 78 respondents, 43 of whom reported taking action.

is presented in Table 7. As we review the table, it becomes clear that a relatively greater percentage of dissatisfied purchasers of housing products prefer to take personal rather than direct action to resolve their dissatisfaction. On the other hand, a comparatively greater proportion of dissatisfied purchasers of home improvement products prefer to take direct rather than personal action(s) in order to deal with their dissatisfaction. The divergence of results suggests that better understanding of consumer responses to dissatisfaction with products and services may be possible only through highly focused research aimed at the individual category.

Subjects who took direct actions were also asked how satisfied they were with the way their complaint was handled. The results are presented in Table 8 and indicate that approximately one-half of the consumers remained dissatisfied. These results parallel those reported by Nichols and Dardis (1973) who found that over 50% of the complainers identified in their study were not satisfied with the action taken by the retail stores. When the results are divided into four groups of housing and home furnishing categories, the table shows that over three-quarters of the consumers who took direct action with home improvement products remained dissatisfied with the way their complaint was handled. These results suggest that various home improvement suppliers need to be more attentive to the consumer complaint handling process.

Summary and Conclusions

In general, consumers appear satisfied with housing and home furnishings. An overwhelming majority of 95.5% of subjects had average satisfaction scores across the twenty-three categories in the satisfaction range. Only 19.7%

of 1030 respondents stated that they had been highly dissatisfied with housing and home furnishings during the recall period. Although the overall picture looks favorable, significant differences in levels of consumer satisfaction among the individual housing and home furnishing categories were identifiable. In addition, since a substantial minority of dissatisfied consumers took no action, it is evident that volunteered complaint data may underrepresent levels of consumer dissatisfaction. Since public policy makers are increasingly likely to use dissatisfaction data rather than complaint data in setting priorities for consumer programs, it is essential that suppliers of housing and home furnishings monitor levels of consumer dissatisfaction using approaches similar to those described in this paper.

TABLE 8

HOW SATISFIED CONSUMERS ARE WITH COMPLAINT-HANDLING

HOUSING AND HOME FURNISHINGS

	Percentage of Subjects Reporting Satisfaction With The Way Complaints Were Handled				
Level of Satisfaction	Housing[1]	Home Improvements[2]	Furniture[3]	Housewares[4]	Total[5]
Very Satisfied	1(16.7%)	1(6.7%)	5(17.2%)	10(29.4%)	17(20.2%)
Somewhat Satisfied	2(33.3%)	2(13.3%)	12(41.4%)	9(26.5%)	25(29.8%)
Somewhat Dissatisfied	–	7(46.7%)	5(17.2%)	4(11.8%)	16(19.0%)
Very Dissatisfied	3(50.0%)	5(33.3%)	7(24.2%)	11(32.8%)	26(31.0%)
	6	15	29	34	84

1 based on 11 respondents, 6 of whom took direct action

2 based on 27 respondents, 15 of whom took direct action

3 based on 75 respondents, 29 of whom took direct action

4 based on 78 respondents, 34 of whom took direct action

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