

# Consumer dissatisfaction — does the consumer seek redress?

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Consumer dissatisfaction and redress needs have been the subject of a number of research studies in the USA. The same cannot be said for South Africa. This article reports the findings of research into the South African consumer's dissatisfaction with beauty and health-care products and her actions in seeking redress. Utilizing a successful technique developed by Diener and Greyser, extent of product use, product problems, degree of dissatisfaction, and action in seeking redress are examined.

The article concludes that general dissatisfaction with the products concerned is low, but that the problems are of little importance to the consumer. She is also lax in seeking redress, and expects a more positive reaction from the manufacturer than the retailer, although the sample were not inclined to seek redress from the manufacturer. It is apparent that the consumer seeks redress in the easiest alternative — brand switching, and also by means of word-of-mouth. The implications for brand management and product policy are obvious.

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Verbruiker ontevredenheid en die behoefte aan herstel van onreg is die onderwerp van 'n aantal navorsingstudies in die VSA. Dit is egter nie die geval in Suid-Afrika nie. Hierdie artikel doen verslag oor die resultate van 'n navorsingsondersoek na die Suid-Afrikaanse verbruiker se ontevredenheid met skoonheid- en gesondheidsprodukte en haar aksies in die herstel van onreg. Deur middel van 'n suksesvolle tegniek ontwikkel deur Diener en Greyser word omvang van produkverbruik, produkprobleme, graad van ontevredenheid, en aksies in die herstel van onreg ondersoek.

Daar word tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat algemene ontevredenheid met die betrokke produkte laag is, maar dat die probleme vir die verbruiker redelik onbelangrik is. Sy is ook laks in die soeke na herstel van onreg, en verwag 'n meer positiewe reaksie van die vervaardiger as die kleinhandelaar, alhoewel die steekproef nie geneig was om herstel van onreg by die vervaardiger te soek nie. Dit is duidelik dat die verbruiker herstel van onreg in die maklikste alternatief soek — handelsnaamverandering, asook mondelings. Die implikasies vir handelsnaambestuur en produkbeleid is duidelik.

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## Introduction

Marketers, public policy makers, and private consumer advocates are becoming increasingly interested in the nature of consumer dissatisfaction. The adoption of the marketing concept by many firms has led to them becoming more aware of the dissatisfied consumer's impact on company marketing policy. Consumer pressures for public safety, reliability, durability, and utility have also led to enhanced media awareness and support for the consumers need for redress. This is born out in the works of Schiffman & Kanuk (1978), Feldman (1980), & Williams (1982) among others.

While some studies have been conducted in the United States of America on most of the aspects pertaining to dissatisfaction in the purchase decision process (Westbrook, Newman & Taylor, 1978) & (Diamond, Ward & Faber, 1976), the same cannot be said for South Africa. Many marketing experts are of the opinion that it is minority groups, certain race groups, and the lower socio-economic classes who are particularly susceptible to unscrupulous marketing practices (Cohen, 1981). If this is true then research in consumer dissatisfaction in South Africa, with its highly heterogeneous market, is particularly warranted.

The objective of this article is to report the results of a pilot study conducted by the authors during 1983 on the subject of consumer dissatisfaction and on whether consumers seek redress in South Africa. We are of the opinion that the findings merit consideration by marketers and consumer groups alike, and that the subject is deserving of further research in the future.

## The nature of consumer dissatisfaction and redress needs

Only the consumer can decide whether he or she is dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction is felt and appears to be justified by the circumstances. Essentially, dissatisfaction can occur any time a consumer's expectations are not met (Day & Landon 1977). A redress need is a post-purchase complaint requiring some form of compensation or satisfaction (Diener & Greyser 1978). Typically the need for redress can be activated by poor or defective products, misleading warranties, inadequate service, and the ill-effects of product use.

## Methodology

The field research was undertaken by the authors in 1983. The sample used was 100 female university students who were approached personally by interviewers (also female university students) and requested to complete the questionnaire. As can

be expected, response under these conditions was optimal. The questionnaire was designed by the authors and based on a research design similar to an American study conducted by Diener & Greyser in 1978. The sample of 100 females was not tested statistically as this was meant to be a pilot study. Products considered were common categories of beauty/health-care products. While the research was obviously subject to limitations (notably sample size and design) the findings merit consideration by marketers and consumer groups.

**Findings**

Responses to the questions were:

(i) Do you use any of the following products regularly (i.e., weekly or more often)?

Products	Used by %
Deodorant	97
Mascara	89
Hair spray	11
Eye shadow	86
Nail hardener	11
Nail polish	70
Face powder	19
Lipstick	91
Shampoo	100

(ii) Have you experienced any problems during the past year with any of the following products?

Products	% Experiencing problems
Deodorant	39
Mascara	31
Hair spray	3
Eye shadow	19
Nail hardener	0
Nail polish	11
Face powder	8
Lipstick	14
Hair shampoo	0

(iii) At this stage the respondent was aided in recall: *If you don't mind, could we go through that again? You may have experienced problems with packaging, the product itself, the way it worked, or any other problem.*

Product	% after aided recall
Deodorant	56
Mascara	42
Hair spray	5
Eye shadow	19
Nail hardener	0
Nail polish	12
Face powder	8
Lipstick	16
Hair shampoo	0

(iv) Let's consider these problems more carefully, if you've experienced them. Mark off the problem, if you've experienced it, against the appropriate product type.

Products	Skin irritation, itch, rash %	Product doesn't live up to claims %	Packaging breaks, leaks %	Stains clothing %	Appearance, smell, feel %	Other
Deodorant	5	11	23	15	3	Defective nozzle
Mascara	3	11	11	-	3	-
Hair spray	-	3	-	-	2	Defective nozzle
Eye shadow	3	-	11	-	7	-
Nail hardener	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nail polish	-	-	4	3	3	Colour change/thickens
Face powder	3	-	4	6	4	-
Lipstick	-	-	3	2	3	Colour change
Hair shampoo	-	1	-	-	-	-

(v) Respondents were then asked which problem they remembered most clearly and then: *When you had the problem with (the product) would you say that you were: very annoyed, somewhat annoyed or only mildly annoyed?*

Problem	Very annoyed %	Somewhat annoyed %	Mildly annoyed %
Skin irritation	6	3	11
Product performance	3	6	11
Packaging	9	23	14
Stained clothes	3	14	6
Look/smell/feel	3	-	3

(vi) Did you consider doing something about the problem?

	%
Yes	31
No	69

(vii) If you answered YES to the previous question, did you actually do it?

	%
Yes	51,6
No	48,4

(Based on % answering Yes to (vi))

(viii) Did you:

(a) Complain	%
To friends	50
To the store	8
To the manufacturer	-
Another party e.g., newspaper	-

(b) Return the product	%
To the store	15
To the manufacturer	-

(ix) Assuming you bought a product and were mildly dissatisfied with it. Would you give the product a second chance?

	%
Yes	39
No	61

(x) Assuming you were somewhat dissatisfied. Would you give the product a second chance?

	%
Yes	11
No	89

(xi) Assuming you were very dissatisfied. Would you give the product a second chance?

	%
Yes	3
No	97

(xii) The next question was the only open one used in the questionnaire. It asked: *Assuming the most serious problem which you mentioned, and which appeared in this questionnaire, occurred again. This time you write to the manufacturer. What do you think his reaction will be?*

The answers were very broadly categorized as follows:

Manufacturer's reaction	% Mentioned
Do nothing	35
Letter of apology	19
Replace product	16
Money-back offer	14
Don't know	12
Letter of apology, replace product, free samples/gift	4

(xiii) *What do you think of the following statement: 'A South African manufacturer of beauty and skin care products would most probably ignore a complaint concerning one of his products.'*

	%
I agree	19
In some cases	61
I disagree	20

(xiv) *What do you think of the following statement: 'I would obtain little satisfaction by complaining to a retail store concerning a defective product.'*

	%
I agree	58
In some cases	22
I disagree	20

### Implications of this study

That the study has sample size and design problems has been pointed out. Nevertheless the findings should be of interest to both manufacturers and retailers, and also to consumer interest groups. From the responses gathered, it is possible to generalize and postulate that problems with feminine personal-care products are low in frequency and in importance to the consumer. The consumer is also lax in seeking redress or reduction in dissatisfaction — she is not really prepared to complain to either manufacturer or retailer.

A comparison of the responses to questions (xiii) and (xiv) leads to the interesting conclusion that the consumer expects a generally more positive reaction from the manufacturer as opposed to the retailer. However the responses to question (viii) indicate that in no instances *did* the consumer actually complain to the manufacturer or return the product to him. The implications for manufacturer brand policy are obvious — product quality, product performance and assurance of backup (probably in the form of money-backs or advice on product use) are essential features of these products. Apparently the consumer feels that there is enough competition within the brand categories and so she does the obvious thing — she switches brands. This the manufacturer should remember — brand switching is the most facile, least vexatious form of redress available to the consumer.

It is also apparent that consumers' primary recourse with complaints is a friend's ear — again the responses to question (viii). The impact of the word-of-mouth effect has never been underestimated by marketers. When it comes to dissatisfaction and the need for redress, this effect is probably at its most powerful. Marketers may forget this at their peril. Obviously, more research in this area is needed.

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