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Applying Communication Theories toward Designing Compliance-Gaining Techniques in Customer Dissatisfaction

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Resumen: El propósito de este trabajo es aplicar tres teorías de la comunicación (la teoría de la argumentación, la técnica Foot-in-the-Door y la técnica Door-in-the-Face) a la formulación de las quejas que se comunican con eficacia a empleados de empresa y la compensación de producción para el consumidor. Los autores demuestran que la queja no es un procedimiento casual, si las teorías de la comunicación se aplican correctamente. Además, también se hace hincapié en la importancia de la auto-eficacia, como un componente psicológico, para ilustrar la necesidad de que los demandantes tengan suficiente y verdadera confianza en sí mismos a fin de llevar cada una de estas teorías a la práctica.

Palabras clave: Argumentación; Consumidores; Insatisfacción; Confianza en sí mismo; Servicio.

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to apply three communication theories (namely, Argumentation Theory, the Foot-in-the-Door Technique, and the Door-in-the-Face Technique) to the formulation of complaints that communicate effectively to company employees and yield compensation for the consumer. What the authors demonstrate is that complaining is not a haphazard procedure if communication theories are applied properly. In addition, also emphasized is the importance of self-efficacy, as a psychological component, to illustrate the necessity for complainers to have sufficient and true self-confidence in order to carry out each of these theories in practice.

Key-words: Argumentation; Consumer; Dissatisfaction; Self-confidence; Service

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Introduction

This paper applies three communication theories to the formulation of complaints: (1) Argumentation Theory (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Mayberry & Golden, 1996; McGuire, 1968; Miller & Levine, 1996), (2) the Foot-in-the-Door Technique (FITD) (Freedman & Fraser, 1966), and (3) the Door-in-the-Face Technique (DITF) (Cialdini et al., 1975). The main objective is to help consumers formulate complaints so they can communicate efficiently to company employees. By the same token, thanks to the theories, employees can yield better compensation for the consumer. In many areas of the hospitality and tourism industry, consumers frequently deal with difficult and inopportune experiences of receiving substandard products or services. These incidents, associated with deficient customer service delivery (possibly a result or poor-quality human resource training or practice), can be seen in hotels, restaurants, airline services, cell phone services, and retail stores. For this reason, a thorough examination of the three theories and multiple case studies on consumer complaints were provided.

Even though a certain number of articles identify strategies to shape complaints (Singh, 1990), investigate interactive styles of complaints (Garrett et al., 1991), and examine efficacy and outcome expectations in regards to customer complaints about service experiences (Singh & Wilkes, 1996; Susskind, 2000), no single document to date uses the three aforementioned communication theories as methods for verbalizing consumer complaints. Furthermore, Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) (Bandura, 1982, 1986, 1991) is presented as a precondition for applying each of the three theories. Since only three theories are examined in this paper, the discussion section identifies other relevant communication theories that could be applied in a similar way by future researchers. These theories include Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) and Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles & Smith, 1979). The discussion section also encourages further exploration of this topic for scholars of various disciplines of the social sciences, such as the application of other communication theories to the development of consumer complaints.

Self-Efficacy Theory: Preliminary. Need for Effective Complaining

As a consumer, product defects and poor service can lead to customer dissatisfaction (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Garrett, Meyers, & Camey, 1991). When these incidents befall consumers, they are faced with the options of communicating complaints to influence the service delivery process, receiving compensation (Garrett, Meyers, & West, 1997), or terminating the service exchange without having their service expectations met in a satisfactory manner (Singh, 1988). In any event, complaints sometimes arise that are directed at the offending companies (Meyers & Garrett, 1993). Complaints can either be crafted swiftly with haphazard preparation or slowly with meticulous design. Although it is obvious that previous exposure to the complaint procedure can prepare an individual for complaining effectively about future dissatisfying experiences (Singh & Wilkes, 1996), examining specific communication theories may prove more helpful and beneficial in devising consumer complaints. Additionally, according to Breen and Matutzitz (2004), since complaints commonly occur in certain sectors (i.e., airline companies, cell phone companies, retail stores, restaurants, and hotels), this paper will use theories that analyze how complaints can be devised in order to target these sectors.

Nevertheless, before a complaint can be filed, the complainant's self-confidence, or self-efficacy, must be sufficient and accurately appraised for successful engagement of complaining. As such, Self-Efficacy Theory (SET), as posited by Bandura (1982; 1986; 1991) and Chung and Elias (1996), can be understood as one's confidence in one's capacity to be effective in particular situations. In another way, self-efficacy is "concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Metaphorically speaking, SET is best described as a bridge that must be crossed between possessing knowledge or proficiencies and comfortably engaging in such behavior with some reasonable expectation of success. Self-efficacy can also be learned or developed through direct experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1986). Finally, self-efficacy is an important psychological component that enables an individual to feel sufficiently

confident to engage in any given behavior, especially complaining.

Consumers in particular must be true and honest to themselves about their self-efficacy in order to remain effective in the heat of a complaint. In other words, dissatisfied consumers must be genuinely self-assured that complaining is in fact an action they can handle and undertake. To support this claim, Bandura (1982) stated that because acting on misjudgments of personal efficacy can cause unfavorable corollaries, correct appraisal of one's own capacities has tremendous functional value. For example, if an individual begins the execution of a complaint with an insincere self-efficacy, then prematurely withdraws from the complaint because his or her fake personal efficacy collapses, the complaint outcome could be compromised and, in turn, consumer credibility could be lost. Since people tend to avoid situations that surpass their coping capacities and since they confidently engage in those that they judge themselves capable of handling (Bandura, 1977), it is important that dissatisfied consumers correctly assess the efficacy of their own abilities when it is time to execute the complaint.

When a consumer experiences poor service or a defective product, the consumer may be able to formulate all the right words and expressions for a specific complaint, as well as appropriate recriminations to rebuttals from the company employee. Nevertheless, all of this preparation is futile unless the dissatisfied consumer possesses the self-efficacy to execute the complaint itself. Since consumer complaints often-times involve poignant disputes, surprise and unfamiliar employee personalities, a wide variety of unexpected responses from receiving employees, and possible rejections or refusals to compensate (Singh, 1988; Singh & Wilkes, 1996; Walker et al., 2004), an "aid to good performance is a strong sense of self-efficacy to withstand failures coupled with some uncertainty to spur preparatory acquisition of knowledge and skills" (Bandura, 1982, p. 123). By the same token, self-efficacy, according to the definition posited by Bandura (1982), is quite applicable to the context of consumer complaints and, as argued, is crucial to the success of a complaint and its subsequent compensation. The reason lies in the fact that self-efficacy mentally prepares an individual for initiating and successfully completing any deliberate action, particularly a consumer complaint targeted at a company employee.

The above section identified Self-Efficacy Theory as an essential component in the production and execution of a consumer complaint. As it was explained, adequate

self-confidence – or self-efficacy – and honest self-appraisal of such personal efficacy are pivotal to a consumer's willingness and ability to successfully address a complaint. Self-efficacy will be added to each subsequent section as a prerequisite for engaging in complaints using each of the three other theories outlined in this paper.

Three Communication Theories that Aid in Complaint Formation

In this section, Argumentation Theory, the Foot-in-the-Door Technique, and the Door-in-the-Face Technique are three relevant communication theories that explain how to formulate complaints that communicate efficaciously to company employees and yield compensation for the consumer. In addition to analyzing each theory in this way, the two authors provide a few examples per theory on how to execute complaints in common sectors where disservice usually occurs (Breen & Matusitz, 2004).

Argumentation Theory

Argumentation Theory (AT) and its guidelines (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Mayberry & Golden, 1996; Miller & Levine, 1996) are applicable to the production of consumer complaints. Before providing a description of this theory, a definition of "arguing" needs to be addressed. As such, arguing involves a deliberate communicative act that seeks to engender, transform, or strengthen the beliefs and attitudes of another individual (Mayberry & Golden, 1996). Although other definitions of arguing exist, this version is most relevant to this context. Argumentation Theory (AT) postulates that effectual arguments should be designed by observing three major principles: (1) arguments should be based on sound investigation (i.e., designed by considering the dispositions of the receivers toward the information presented); (2) sub-arguments supporting the primary argument should be meticulously designed bearing in mind their strength of support; and (3) potent arguments should be brief, presenting only relevant and persuasive information and omitting less important facts or details (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Miller & Levine, 1996).

Before executing these three particular steps, the complainer must be self-confident that such an action can be comfortably taken. In other words, the complainer's self-efficacy must be sufficient in order for the person to feel confident, prepared, and strong when complaining. Then, by taking

these three precepts into consideration, consumer complaints directed at company employees can be devised as effective arguments, rendering compensation for the dissatisfied consumer. The following paragraphs will provide examples as to how a dissatisfied consumer should develop a complaint using the principles outlined by the referenced Argumentation Theory.

First Element: Investigation

Based on AT, the first element to an argument, or in this case, a consumer complaint, requires that the consumer first investigate the dispositions of the individuals likely to be receiving customer complaints (i.e., in the customer service departments) – or before actually establishing contact with a representative who will hear the complaint. For example, if the consumer purchased a product from a hardware store, the consumer can first visit the area where the customer service agents work, and then observe who they are and what kind of personalities they have. Learning about the attitudes and interactive styles of the customer service employees will be helpful in shaping the complaint. To clarify this claim, the consumer can measure the appropriate non-verbal (eye contact, vocal tones) and verbal communication (choice of words) that will mirror the disposition of receiver and will thus render a connection. Establishing this kind of connection with a customer service employee will increase the probability of a positive interaction and compensation will be granted.

Second Element: Meticulous Design of Complaint

The second element to an argument (consumer complaint) requires that the sub-arguments supporting the primary argument be designed while bearing in mind their strength of support (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Miller & Levine, 1996). In the case of a consumer complaint, the main argument needs to be bolstered through the use of supporting sub-arguments. For example, if a consumer receives a tardy delivery on a purchase order (PO), and the PO specifically states that the delivery should have occurred two days before the actual arrival date, then the main complaint that would be addressed first would simply be that the product was late. The sub-arguments to support this claim would be that (1) the PO is a legal document and it explicitly states that the delivery date would be two days before the actual product arrival and (2) business as usual was hindered due to the sender's failure to deliver on

time. The consumer could go even further by mentioning – as sub-arguments – the inconvenience that was suffered as a result of the delayed delivery. All these sub-arguments are relevant and support the primary claim that the delivery was late. The chief claim and sub-arguments also facilitate the chances of the complaint bringing compensation to the consumer.

Third Element: Straightforward Communication

The third element to an argument (consumer complaint) requires that for the complaint to be effective, it should be brief. In other words, it should present only relevant and persuasive information and omit less important facts or details – in other words, the complaint must be straightforwardly communicated. As such, the complaint will identify only what really needs to be said versus a rant that includes unnecessary verbiage (Meyers, 1989a, 1989b). Providing a concise complaint will likely show the employee that it is indeed valid and that the complainant is reasonable. For example, a consumer who is complaining (and expecting compensation) about a leaking and defective carpet shampooer can effectively communicate this message to a company representative by concisely stating that (1) he or she is a customer, (2) he or she has been dissatisfied with the shampooer that was rented out to him or her, (3) he or she was inconvenienced by the machine's defect, and (4) he or she wishes to be compensated for the troubles experienced. As one can see, this complaint is brief, sums up everything, and ends with a request for compensation. Additionally, it follows the recommendation of Argumentation Theory (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Mayberry & Golden, 1996; Miller & Levine, 1996).

Case Study

When examining 89 small businesses in the U.K. hospitality industry – including hotels, guest houses, restaurants, and other similar attractions – Kyriakidou and Gore (2005) applied the key principles of Argumentation Theory (AT). More precisely, they taught participants (i.e., managers) how to find success in introducing changes to the customer complaint processes which improve efficiency and boost levels of customer satisfaction. What the authors found was that both customer satisfaction and employee efficiency (in dealing with complaints) can only be accomplished through the full tra-

ining of front line staff and other members of personnel in “complaint resolution.” The study concluded that AT principles remain the same: investigation of the situation, careful complaint design, and direct communication.

Other Examples of AT Application

Another way to utilize Argumentation Theory to form a consumer complaint could involve a dissatisfying experience as a customer of an airline flight (Breen & Matusitz, 2004). In this case, there is a significant delay in the departure time (due to engine trouble) and the airline company mishandles the customer’s most important piece of luggage (due to negligence), resulting in tardiness for a future appointment because of a missed connection flight. In the first step of AT, the customer visits the service desk of the airline company (within the airport itself) and then observes who the employee is, what kind of personality he or she has, and what he or she can offer. Once this is established, the consumer can assess the proper communicative style that makes the best connection between the two parties involved. As such, this connectivity will increase the probability of a positive interaction, contribute to an amiable complaint and, in turn, yield compensatory restitution (i.e., food voucher).

As a second step, the customer creates sub-arguments that support the main argument that disservice was received. The sub-arguments here are that work as usual was hindered because an important business appointment was missed due to a delayed departure, a missed connection flight, and a lost piece of luggage. Also, the missed appointment may have caused the customer to lose his or her credibility in the eyes of his or her business associates, a serious consequence created by the airline company. Therefore, the dissatisfied customer knows that he or she can go even further by emphasizing the inconveniences that were suffered, thereby, bringing sub-arguments to the table that will increase the odds for greater compensation (such as a full refund for the ticket purchase, a free round-trip ticket, or a 100-dollar travel voucher).

As a third step, and while taking the previous steps into consideration, for the complaint to be effective, it should be straight to the point and not too verbose. Knowing what the inconveniences are, the customer will argue as a complaint process, using brief but relevant and persuasive information (Breen & Matusitz, 2004; Corbett & Connors, 1999). In doing so, the customer will form the complaint, including only the

necessary statements as listed above, as opposed to a delirious, long-winded babble. This will also show the service employee that the procedure to obtain compensation is legitimate, easy to handle, and worthy. So, the complaining customer about the dissatisfaction with the airline company can effectively communicate his or her message to a representative by concisely stating that (1) he or she is a customer, (2) he or she has been dissatisfied with the disservice and the consequences thereof, and (3) he or she wishes to be fully compensated for the troubles experienced.

The above section identified Argumentation Theory (Corbett & Connors, 1999; Mayberry & Golden, 1996; Miller & Levine, 1996) as one of many frameworks for developing consumer complaints. However, self-efficacy must be sufficient for the complainer to carry out this process with success. Furthermore, by following the guidelines outlined by AT, the complaint process – from the initial investigation of the customer service employees to the final words in the complaint transaction (between the complainant and the company employee) – can be successfully executed.

The Foot-in-the-Door Technique

The Foot-in-the-Door Technique (FITD) and its guidelines (Dillard, 1991; Dillard, Hunter, & Burgoon, 1984; Freedman & Fraser, 1966) are applicable to the production of effective consumer complaints. According to Freedman and Fraser (1966), FITD is a method of inducing compliance. More specifically, according to Dillard et al (1984), by persuading or inciting an individual to agree to a small, even insignificant, initial request, the probability of compliance with a subsequent, greater request will increase. In other words, this theory can be understood as “a sequential-request compliance technique” (Dillard, 1991, p. 1). Due to the nature of this theory, it can be applied to the development of compensatory consumer complaints. Nonetheless, the complainer must feel, as it was for Argumentation Theory, self-assured and self-confident to such a point that executing this compliance technique can be done well and with ease. Put differently, the complainer’s self-efficacy must be adequate for the individual to be apt and enabled to execute this strategically designed complaint.

First Example of FITD

For example, if a consumer is a guest at a restaurant and a number of service problems occur (such as cold food, slow service, dirty table, and lack of silverware), the

consumer can ask to speak to a manager and explain all of the service issues that took place. Once the consumer has lodged the complaint itself, the first request, according to FITD, would involve a requisition for minor compensation to get “the foot-in-the-door” (i.e., 15% discount on the bill, a gift card for future dining experiences, etc.). Once the manager agrees to the consumer’s initial request, the consumer can then – as the second stage to FITD – reverse his or her decision and instead request full compensation for the poor service. Since the manager has already been convinced that the consumer has been unsatisfactorily serviced, and since he or she has already agreed to and extended an offer for compensation, the subsequent, greater request for compensation should likely be accepted without resistance.

Second Example of FITD

By the same token, a similar pattern that depicts this theory could be a complaint about a shirt that is falsely advertised. If a consumer purchases a shirt that is advertised as 100% wool, yet the consumer later discovers that the fabric is a mixture of silk and wool, he or she could first complain to the store manager and identify the misleading advertisement. Once the manager agrees that the consumer has in fact been deceived, the consumer can request a small discount (20% off) to compensate for the inconvenience. Then, when the manager accepts the first request for a discount, the consumer can subsequently reverse his or her decision and suggest that greater compensation be merited given the blatant deceptive practice by the store’s advertisement. Since the complainant has already inserted his or her foot in the door, and since the predictions of FITD suggest an increased likelihood for a subsequent, bigger request to be accepted, the store manager should agree to this second request without reservation.

Third Example of FITD

A third example of FITD could easily be applied in the event that a customer suffers a disservice at a respectable rental car company (Breen & Matusitz, 2004). In this case, a customer rents a compact vehicle that has several problems, including an off-centered steering wheel, a noxious odor coming out of the air conditioning vents, and ineffective breaks. Once the customer reports the defects to the manager, and if the manager acknowledges the flaws and notices that the vehicle has, in fact, not been properly checked before being displa-

yed for rental, the customer can request a small discount (i.e., 25% off) to compensate for the car problems. Soon afterwards, when the manager agrees to the first request for a discount, the customer can change the manager’s decision by soliciting larger compensation, given the fact that the manager has already agreed to the initial request. This will likely change the manager’s mind for better compensatory restitution (i.e., 40% discount or even full refund for services). As in the other two examples, what the customer did was, first, propping his or her foot in the door and, second, making a subsequent request for better compensation. As one can see, the tenets offered by FITD suggest an increased likelihood for a later, more sizable request to be accepted. The manager, in turn, will probably agree to this second request without manifesting any significant reluctance.

The above section identified the Foot-in-the-Door Technique (FITD) (Dillard, 1991; Dillard et al., 1984; Freedman & Fraser, 1966) as one of many frameworks for developing consumer complaints. Nonetheless, self-efficacy must be present for the complainer to act out this process and be successful. Additionally, by following the guidelines outlined by FITD, the complaint process – referred to as a sequential-request compliance technique (between the complainant and the company employee) – can be successfully executed.

The Door-in-the-Face Technique

The Door-in-the-Face Technique (DITF) – also a sequential-request compliance persuasive technique – and its guidelines (Cialdini et al., 1975; Dillard, 1991; Dillard et al., 1984) are applicable to the production of effective consumer complaints. Contrary to propositions of FITD, DITF stipulates that the first request be too large so the recipient is likely to object and refuse it (Dillard et al., 1984). Then, when the second request is made, it should be smaller. The second request is designed to increase the likelihood of acceptance. Cialdini et al. (1975) identified a bargaining metaphor to clarify the nature of DITF: “you should make concessions to those who make concessions to you” (p. 206). Additionally, in studies conducted by Cialdini et al., (1975), their findings indicated that subjects who rejected a substantial, initial request were twice as likely to agree to a smaller, subsequent request.

In a case study, Cialdini et al. (1975)

asked volunteers to provide guidance to juvenile delinquents for two hours per week during two years. Although the latter initially refused, they were asked to accompany juvenile delinquents at the zoo for one day. Half of the volunteers agreed, in comparison to only 17 percent of them who initially accepted to provide guidance for two hours per week during two years. Given the design of DITF, it can apply to the development of consumer complaints. Besides providing this recipe to carry out a complaint, self-efficacy must first be existent in the complainer. In other words, the complainer must feel optimistic and confident with his or her abilities to such a point that executing this compliance technique can be done perfectly and without significant effort. Put another way, the complainer's self-efficacy must be adequate for the individual to be comfortable and confident executing the complaint strategy.

First Example of DITF

For example, if a client is staying at a hotel and the room has a few problems (i.e., the room is cold and the next room is noisy due to poorly insulated walls), the client can first express a complaint to the hotel manager identifying the negative experiences. Once the complaint itself has been lodged, the first request for compensation would be designed to be a too large and, thus, unreasonable request (such as a full refund for the night's stay). If the manager responds with a refusal to compensate for the entire stay, then the next stage, based on the tenets of DITF, would be to lower the request and ask for a suitable discount for the particular flaws of the room (i.e., 20%-40% discount). At this point, the client and hotel manager begin a bargaining process, and, as predicted by DITF, the manager would likely be more inclined to accept this subsequent request for a moderate discount.

Second Example of DITF

Another relevant example that depicts this theory could be a complaint about a waiter who is slow in refilling a customer's glass of water. First, the customer would need to express – at the end of the waiting service – to the restaurant manager that the service was slow in that regard and caused dissatisfaction in the experience. Once the manager acknowledges the disservice and agrees with the customer, the customer can make an unreasonably hefty request that the bill be erased. If there is disagreement with the request (thinking that the request is too large), the customer can then ask for smaller compensation, such as a mild dis-

count on the meal or a nominal gift card for a future meal. Based on the predictions of DITF, the manager is likely to accept this second offer and provide compensation accordingly.

Third Example of DITF

A third and last example where DITF could well be applied is in the case of a poor experience at a movie theater (i.e., distorted sounds from the speakers, trash on the seats and floors, and poor image quality of the trailers). After the film has ended, the moviegoer approaches the supervisor and mentions the problems that occurred. In the process, the moviegoer requests a form of compensation that the supervisor finds mind-boggling: a full refund for the movie ticket and two free tickets for other movies. Given this extreme request, the supervisor rejects it. The moviegoer, then, asks for smaller compensation, like a full refund only (or a free ticket only). According to the predictions of DITF, the supervisor should be inclined to accepting the second offer.

The above section identified the Door-in-the-Face Technique (DITF) (Cialdini et al., 1975; Dillard, 1991; Dillard et al., 1984) as one of many frameworks for developing consumer complaints. Also, as stated previously, the complainer must have decent self-efficacy to accomplish this process. Furthermore, by following the guidelines outlined by DITF, the complaint process – also considered as a sequential-request compliance technique (between the complainant and the company employee) – can be successfully carried out.

Discussion and Future Directions

We all know that product flaws and substandard service can result in customer dissatisfaction, and that complaints can either be crafted swiftly with offhanded preparation or slowly with careful design. What this paper has demonstrated is that complaining is not a haphazard procedure if communication theories are properly applied. As such, in order to obtain satisfactory compensation, the two authors have used three theories (that is, Argumentation Theory, the Foot-in-the-Door Technique, and the Door-in-the-Face Technique) to develop effective step-by-step arguments. As described, these theoretically grounded arguments serve as applicable frameworks for devising consumer-driven complaints. The detailed prescription of each theory is indispensable if both consumers and employees want to develop effective and adequate complaint resolution in

ways that both consumers and employees understand. Practitioners can benefit from this analysis as they will find a successful match between the key tenets of the three theories and the situations in which these tenets can be applied.

As we have seen, Argumentation Theory (AT) not only offers arguments that the receivers should consider when faced with a complaint, it also offers subarguments that support the primary argument to maximize impact and compensation. By and large, AT draws attention to various interesting and important points about complaint building, notably the fact that all the statements should be brief, straightforward, relevant, and persuasive. The Foot-in-the-Door Technique (FITD), on the other hand, is more of a method of inducing compliance. By persuading or inciting an individual to agree to a small initial request, the probability of compliance with a subsequent, greater request will increase. The Door-in-the-Face Technique (DITF), as opposed to FITD, indicates that the first request needs to be purposely excessive so the recipient is likely to object and refuse it. Then, the complainant will make a second request that is smaller and designed to increase the likelihood of acceptance.

What this paper has also emphasized is the importance of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982; 1986; 1991), as a psychological component, to illustrate the necessity for complainers to have sufficient and true self-confidence in order to carry out each of these theories in practice. Nevertheless, although only three theories were selected for this study, several other theories are just as relevant and can be applied when expressing consumer complaints. As such, for future research, it might prove interesting to explore other communication theories such as Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978; 1987) and Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Powesland, 1975; Giles & Smith, 1979) when devising consumer complaints. Based on the tenets of Politeness Theory, politeness strategies should be developed in order to save the face of the receiver (i.e., manager of a restaurant or customer service representative). In that event, the receiver will maintain self-esteem in public (or in private situations), and, therefore, be more likely to compensate the dissatisfied customer. In other words, the customer will try to avoid embarrassing the manager or making him or her feel uncomfortable. Based on the premise of Communication Accommodation Theory, when speakers interact, they adjust their speech, their vocal

patterns, and/or their gestures to accommodate others. As such, in order to achieve optimal restitution, the dissatisfied customer will frame his or her complaint style in an accommodating fashion.

In any event, future researchers, especially in of the areas of Consumer Psychology, Language and Social Interaction, Business Communication, and Organizational Communication, should look at all the possible theories that can frame consumer complaints. One of the objectives of this paper is to encourage such exploration. Future research should continue using the three theories and look for ways to determine how a preference-based complaint-formulation technique can be designed for decision making where arguments support not one option, but different options. For example, going back to the third element of Argumentation Theory (i.e., straightforward communication), there should be investigations on methods that can help practitioners design a brief, direct, and persuasive communication procedure that can lead to several options at the same time. In doing so, the customers would be able to choose from several alternatives, not just one. Whatever magical blueprint customers and employees alike can come up with, it is the authors' hope that psychology and communication scholars who experience poor service can consider such interdisciplinary theories when preparing their own complaints against companies.

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