


Perspectiva evolutiva e elementos teóricos da taxonomia do comportamento de reclamação do consumidor


Evolutionary perspective and theoretical elements of consumer complaint behavior taxonomy

Perspectiva evolutiva y elementos teóricos de la taxonomía del comportamiento de reclamación del consumidor


Leandro Divino Miranda de Oliveira

Universidade Federal de Goiás
Avenida Esperança s/n, Câmpus Samambaia - Prédio da Reitoria.
CEP 74690-900 Goiânia - Goiás - Brasil.
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0977-4865>
e-mail: leandro-miranda92@hotmail.com

Marcos Inácio Severo de Almeida

Universidade Federal de Goiás
Avenida Esperança s/n, Câmpus Samambaia - Prédio da Reitoria.
CEP 74690-900 Goiânia - Goiás - Brasil.
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9493-0644>
e-mail: misevero@yahoo.com.br

Jussara Goulart da Silva

Universidade Federal de Uberlândia
R. Vinte, 1600 - Tupã, Ituiutaba - MG, 38304-402
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1499-4811>
e-mail: jussara.goulart@ufu.br

Abstract: *This theoretical-conceptual study aims to provide an overview of the literature, identifying the existing knowledge on the taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior and proposing a simplified model. The purpose is to offer an accessible and concise update of previous taxonomies, focusing on the essential elements and contrasting them with recent approaches. Notably, the study includes online complaint channels, distinguishes between public and private actions, and excludes loyalty, previously used in Hirschman's (1970) taxonomy. As a contribution to future research, theoretical propositions are presented for testing, with the aim of consolidating the proposed model.*

Keywords: Taxonomy. Consumer Behavior. Consumer Complaint.

Resumo: Este estudo teórico-conceitual tem como objetivo estabelecer um panorama da literatura, identificando o conhecimento existente sobre a taxonomia do comportamento de reclamação do consumidor e propondo um modelo simplificado. Busca-se oferecer uma atualização acessível e concisa das taxonomias anteriores, mantendo o foco nos elementos essenciais e contrastando com abordagens recentes. Em especial, destacam-se a inclusão dos canais de reclamações online, a distinção entre ações públicas e privadas, e a exclusão da lealdade, anteriormente utilizada na taxonomia de Hirschman (1970). Como contribuição para pesquisas futuras, apresentam-se proposições teóricas a serem testadas, visando à consolidação do modelo proposto.

Palavras-chave: Taxonomia. Comportamento do Consumidor. Reclamação do consumidor.

Resumen: *Este estudio teórico-conceptual tiene como objetivo establecer un panorama de la literatura, identificando el conocimiento existente sobre la taxonomía del comportamiento de reclamación del consumidor y proponiendo un modelo simplificado. Se busca ofrecer una actualización accesible y concisa de las taxonomías anteriores, manteniendo el enfoque en los elementos esenciales y contrastándolos con enfoques recientes. En particular, se destaca la inclusión de canales de reclamaciones en línea, la distinción entre acciones públicas y privadas, y la exclusión de la lealtad, previamente utilizada en la taxonomía de Hirschman (1970). Como contribución para futuras investigaciones, se presentan proposiciones teóricas para ser puestas a prueba, con el fin de consolidar el modelo propuesto.*

Palabras clave: Taxonomía. Comportamiento del consumidor. Quejas del consumidor.

Introduction

Consumer dissatisfaction is related to negative feelings toward a company or attributes associated with a particular consumption experience. It is important to emphasize that the focal cause is not necessarily the product or service itself. It may be related to the manufacturer, the retailer, the salesperson, advertising, among other factors (Day & Landon, 1977). It is also worth noting that, in some cases, dissatisfaction may occur due to external factors that cannot be controlled by organizations, such as adverse weather conditions and the inability or improper use of specific functions of a product (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981).

The source of dissatisfaction should be identified as a complex activity composed of multiple variables, and it is important to observe that any element of the consumption experience may lead to dissatisfaction (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Richins & Verhage, 1985; Maute & Forrester, 1993). In the early 1990s, studies began to emerge showing affective factors as complementary determinants of satisfaction (Hsu et al., 2006; Oliver, 1993).

From this perspective, Oliver (1993) defined satisfaction as a consumer response resulting from prior expectations and the discrepancy between those expectations and the perceived performance of the consumed product (Oliver, 1989). From a professional standpoint, consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is important insofar as it determines present or potential behavioral outcomes. There is a multiplicity of consumer responses that may follow dissatisfaction. Thus, consumer complaint behavior is related to a range of possible responses to unsatisfactory consumption experiences (Istanbuloglu, 2017) and has been studied since the 1970s (Khamitov, Grégoire, & Suri, 2019).

Consumer complaint behavior was initially viewed as a dichotomous possibility of complaining or not complaining (Kim & Chen, 2010). Early theorization on this topic was primarily limited to a few divisions, such as complain/not complain and private/public responses, among others (Day & Landon, 1977).

Over the years, consumer complaint behavior has expanded to encompass multiple aspects, thus including various forms of complaint (Singh, 1988). Consumer complaint behavior has been the subject of study and interest for decades, reflecting the importance of understanding how consumers respond to service failures and unsatisfactory experiences. Since the pioneering work of Hirschman (1970), who introduced the concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty, and Singh (1988), who presented the model of direct response, private response, and third-party response, scholars have sought to categorize and understand the diverse forms of consumer responses to problems with products and services.

However, as society advances and new technologies emerge, the landscape of consumer complaint behavior is constantly evolving. With the rise of social media and other online platforms, consumers

now have more opportunities to express their opinions publicly and to interact with companies in new ways. This adds an extra layer of complexity to the study of complaint behavior, requiring updates to existing theoretical frameworks to reflect this new reality (Agnihotri, Kulshreshtha, & Tripathi, 2021; Istanbulluoglu, 2017; Komal, 2021). Classical taxonomies have limitations, such as the excessive simplification of types of complaint behavior and the lack of consideration of the multiple complaint platforms currently available. With the expansion of social media and other digital platforms, consumers now have multiple channels to publicly express their opinions and complaints, introducing an additional level of complexity to the analysis of consumer complaint behavior (Agnihotri, Kulshreshtha, & Tripathi, 2021; Ming & Matteson, 2023; Puchnina & Puchnin, 2023).

The most recent study addressing the taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior is that of Arora and Chakraborty (2020), who propose a comprehensive taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior by integrating legitimate and illegitimate complaints. Their proposal differs from earlier approaches in terms of complexity and classification. Legitimate behavior is divided into behavioral (engaged and non-engaged) and non-behavioral (engaged), whereas illegitimate behavior is categorized into engaged (public) and non-engaged (private and public).

This study aims to establish an overview of the literature by identifying existing knowledge on the taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior and proposing a simplified model. In doing so, it seeks to provide an integrated structure of existing theories on complaint behavior, resulting in a unified ontology interpreted from a new perspective.

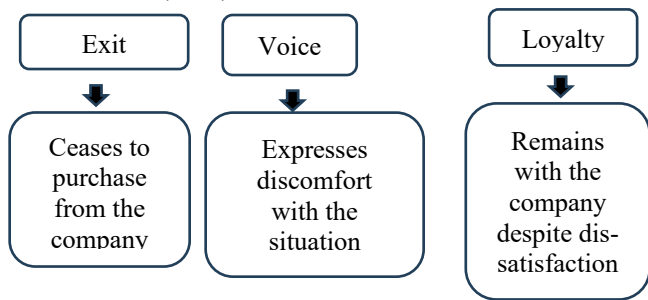
A careful selection of relevant articles was conducted, prioritizing academic publications that address both classical and recent theories of consumer complaint behavior.

Evolutionary Perspective and Theoretical Elements of the Taxonomy of Consumer Complaint Behavior

Hirschman (1970) was the first to segment consumer responses into behavioral and non-behavioral expressions of dissatisfaction. According to his framework, a dissatisfied consumer has three possible options: exit, voice, and loyalty. In this seminal work, Hirschman highlights that when faced with dissatisfaction with a product and/or service, the consumer makes one of three decisions: to stop purchasing from the company (exit), to express discomfort with the current situation (voice), or to remain silent (loyalty to the company). The author suggests that a rational individual evaluates the costs and benefits of each option, as well as their likelihood of success.

An example provided by Hirschman (1970) is that a loyal customer may decide to remain silently with the company, assuming that the costs of complaining or seeking another supplier would outweigh the probability of achieving an improvement. It is important to emphasize that Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty theory, as illustrated in Figure 1, provided a foundational theoretical framework for subsequent studies on consumer complaint behavior. Nearly all later models followed this conceptual approach by distinguishing between behavioral and non-behavioral consumer responses to service failures.

Figure 1
Hirschman's (1970) Model



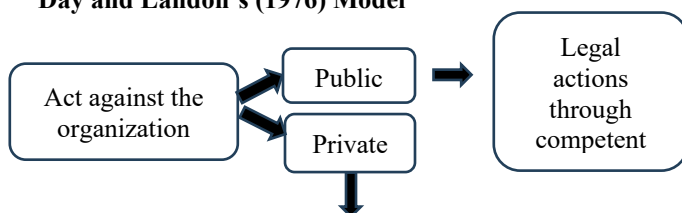
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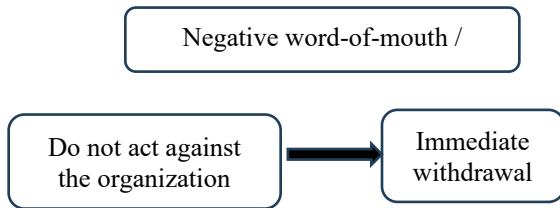
Day and Landon (1976) followed this theory and proposed a two-level hierarchical classification scheme, as shown in Figure 2. The first level distinguishes between behavioral and non-behavioral responses, in which consumers, after encountering a service failure, decide whether or not to take action against the organization. In the latter case, consumers refrain from future interactions with the organization, and the likelihood is that they will quietly switch to other brands.

On the other hand, if consumers decide to take action, they then determine whether the action will occur in the public or private domain. Private actions include boycotting the seller and/or engaging in negative word-of-mouth by advising family members and friends not to purchase from a particular organization. Public actions include approaching management to seek compensation, resorting to legal action, obtaining assistance from consumer protection agencies, requesting political intervention, and, in extreme cases, organizing protests and destroying the organization's property.

In order to improve the work of Day and Landon, Day (1984) conducted further research and reclassified the previous framework. According to the author, consumers act or refrain from acting to achieve specific objectives, namely: seeking redress (complaining to the organization or taking legal action to obtain compensation), complaining for reasons other than seeking solutions (to persuade others through negative word-of-mouth), and personal boycott. Richins (1983) also explained three dimensions of complaint behavior (negative word-of-mouth, the motive for negative word-of-mouth, and complaint and service recovery) and added a fourth possibility of taking no action (the consumer retains the unsatisfactory experience and attempts to forget it).

Figure 2
Day and Landon's (1976) Model



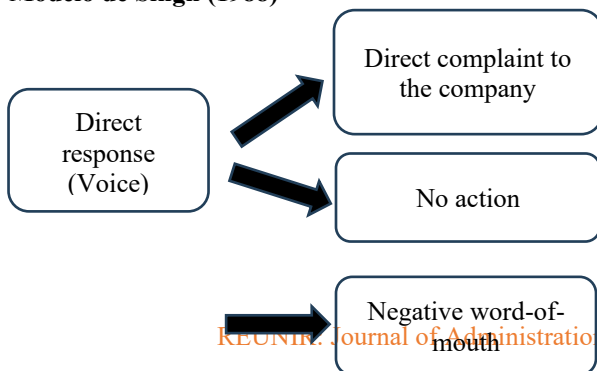


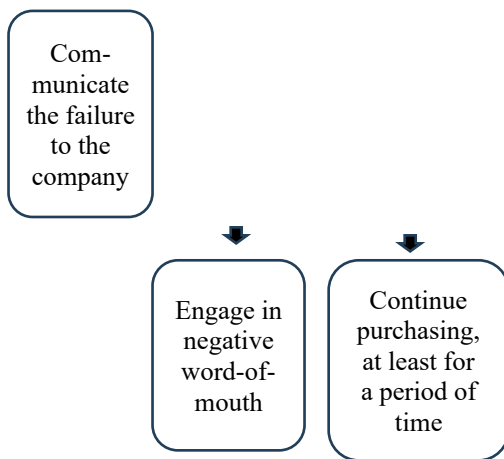
Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

According to Crié (2003, pp. 60–61), the taxonomy of responses requires establishing a distinction between the notions of *response* and *action*. In fact, the term *action* implies a very specific type of behavior, whereas the term *response* encompasses several modalities that are not exclusively behavioral, namely attitudinal change or inactivity. This distinction constitutes the first dimension, while the second dimension is represented by the entities to which the responses are directed: the public domain includes sellers, manufacturers, consumer associations, or legal action; the private domain includes family members, friends, or relatives.

Singh (1988) argues that consumer complaint behavior is related to consumers’ multiple responses, which may be behavioral and/or non-behavioral, and that some or all of these responses arise due to dissatisfaction with the purchased product and/or service. Accordingly, he proposed a framework largely similar to earlier models by adding that responses are directed toward three different types of “objects” (Figure 3). *Voice* (direct response) is directed at objects that are directly involved in the unsatisfactory experience (organizations, dealers, and retailers), that is, direct complaints to the firm or no response. Similarly, *private responses* are directed at “indirect” actors involved (colleagues, friends, family members, etc.), that is, negative word-of-mouth, and may also include simply stopping purchases from the firm. Finally, *third-party responses* are directed at formal external parties (consumer protection agencies, courts).

Figure 3
Modelo de Singh (1988)





Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Huefner and Hunt (1994) suggest that three additional types of responses should be included within the group of private responses in Singh’s (1988) taxonomy: exit/retaliation, avoidance, and repugnance. They argue that customer exit is a vague concept because it does not indicate the duration of the consumer’s withdrawal. Accordingly, they define *exit/retaliation* as a short-term action, *avoidance* as a medium-term response, and *repugnance* as the most extreme response, which may last for years or even decades. Keaveney (1995) categorized responses as reluctant responses, failures to respond, and negative responses. In the same study, it was found that more than seventy percent of respondents reported switching providers due to unethical behavior by service providers, including dishonesty, intimidating conduct, unsafe practices, and conflicts of interest. Boote (1998) recognizes that the most widely used taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior is that of Singh (1988) and argues that it is limited in two respects: (1) it overly simplifies the main types of complaint behavior—for example, negative word-of-mouth does not necessarily have to be a purely private action; and (2) it fails to recognize that complaint behavior often occurs in two stages, since certain types of complaint behavior (such as third-party actions) can only be initiated after other forms of complaint behavior have failed to generate a satisfactory level of perceived justice. Accordingly, Boote proposes a two-factor taxonomy that addresses these issues, classifying complaints in terms of whether they are primary or secondary and whether they are involved or uninvolved.

Stephens and Gwinner (1998) further expand the understanding of consumer complaint behavior by proposing a cognitive–emotive process model, emphasizing the role of consumer emotions in unsatisfactory experiences and their influence on coping strategies. The model presents cognitive appraisal as the key element in evaluating threats and harm to the consumer, which may subsequently result in psychological stress. Stressful appraisals are suggested to provoke emotional reactions that, together with cognitive appraisal, influence the type of coping strategy employed by the consumer. Three coping strategies are identified: problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidance.

Subsequently, Liu and McClure (2001) categorized responses using the keywords *talk*, *persuade*, *avoid*, and *buy from another company* as private responses. Unvoiced complaints are those in which consumers, following an unsatisfactory experience, do not complain and quietly exit and/or switch to other brands (Huang, Tsang, & Chou, 2011). Malhotra, Oly-Ndubisi, and Agarwal (2008) and Kitapci and Dortyol (2009) divided complaints into private and defection categories, with word-of-mouth considered one of the most destructive strategies used by consumers to reduce post-purchase dissonance

(McQuilken & Robertson, 2011; Ng, David, & Dagger, 2011).

Larivet and Brouard (2010) identified characteristics of the consumer complaint process, which consists of three stages: causes of complaints, complaint intention, and post-complaint behavior. Causes of complaints include failures in products/services, billing, scheduling, slow service, employee behavior, purchase regret, defective products, among others (Estelami, 2000). However, having a reason to complain may not be sufficient to motivate consumer action. Complaint intention is influenced by factors such as perceived value, prior complaint experience, and attitudes or cultural norms regarding complaining (Kim et al., 2003; Liu & McClure, 2001; Maute & Forrester, 1993; Sharma et al., 2010; Singh, 1988; Voorhees & Brady, 2005). If the consumer decides to complain, subsequent behavior will be affected by how the complaint is handled.

Istanbuluoglu (2017) presents a systematic review of 210 studies, providing a conceptual analysis of the consumer complaint behavior literature. This study proposes an integrated taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior, enhancing the understanding of complaint behavior in the twenty-first century by clarifying ambiguities and overlapping constructs found in earlier taxonomies. As a result, consumer complaint behavior is understood to develop through a focus on complaint actions, their characteristics, and what these actions offer firms in their attempts to manage complaints (i.e., target audience and the amount of information available). The author highlights that although this theory is mature, this is the first work to offer a comprehensive taxonomy that explains consumer complaint behavior by addressing new developments in computer-mediated communications. Practitioners can use the integrated CCB taxonomy to structure complaint-handling processes in order to maximize customer feedback, improve products and services, and address customer complaints more effectively. Overall, consumer complaint behavior is conceptualized as a set of multiple responses (behavioral and non-behavioral), some or all of which are triggered by perceived dissatisfaction with a purchase episode (Singh, 1988).

Arora and Chakraborty (2020) address in their study the integration of several perspectives related to consumer complaint behavior by identifying the antecedents of legitimate and illegitimate complaints. They observe that both sets can be conceptualized within a similar classification framework and primarily advocate the incorporation of illegitimate complaints into the main models and taxonomies of consumer complaint behavior. The taxonomy proposed by the authors differs considerably from previous ones, both in terms of complexity and in the number of dichotomies and classifications considered. First, legitimate behavior is considered, which is divided into behavioral and non-behavioral behavior. Behavioral behavior is subdivided into involved and uninvolved, in which involved behavior culminates in the public domain, representing customer voice, and uninvolved behavior culminates in the private domain, representing exit and negative word-of-mouth. Non-behavioral behavior is categorized as involved and is subdivided into private responses and inaction. Second, illegitimate behavior is considered, highlighting that customer complaints are not always legitimate. This dichotomy is divided into involved behavior, which is public and considered unjustified voice, and uninvolved behavior, which is subdivided into private and public, with the private category representing malicious negative word-of-mouth and the public category including false negative comments.

The study by Cadimi et al. (2021) examines classical taxonomies of consumer complaint behavior, highlighting the lack of attention given to this concept and to complaint response structures. Significant conceptual and methodological variation across studies is observed, which may lead to contradictory classifications and misleading results. In addition, classical taxonomies are considered inadequate to withstand the test of time, especially given the multiple complaint platforms currently available to consumers. In light of these changes, the need for integrated models is suggested to guide research and

assist practitioners in developing efficient complaint-handling systems. From a managerial perspective, the importance of incorporating complaints into the customer satisfaction process is emphasized in order to obtain a more comprehensive view and improve satisfaction data and analyses through robust recovery systems. Table 1 identifies the elements addressed in the seminal and recent theories of consumer complaint behavior discussed in the theoretical framework. The table is organized by author/theory and highlights the main elements of each perspective.

Table 1
Elements of Seminal Theories on Consumer Complaint Behavior

Author	Theoretical perspective	Main theoretical elements
Hirschman (1970)	Exit, Voice and Loyalty Theory	Service failure leads to consumer responses; Segmentation into behavioral and non-behavioral responses to dissatisfaction; Three consumer options: exit, voice, and loyalty; Evaluation of costs, benefits, and probability of success; Example of a loyal customer who remains silent.
Day and Landon (1976)	Hierarchical Classification	Distinction between behavioral and non-behavioral responses; Possibility of acting against the organization or not; Private actions (boycott, negative word-of-mouth) and public actions (approaching management, legal action, etc.).
Day (1984)	Actions for Specific Objectives	Consumers act to seek redress, persuade others, or boycott; Includes the possibility of taking no action.
Richins (1983)	Dimensions of Complaining	Three dimensions of complaining; Possibility of taking no action.
Singh (1988)	Multiple Responses	Relationship between behavioral and non-behavioral responses; Responses directed toward three types of “objects”: voice, private responses, and third-party responses.
Singh (1990)	Four-Group Model	Four groups of individuals based on their style of involvement in complaining; Groups: talkers, passives, irates, and activists.
Keaveney (1995)	Response Categories	Categorization of responses as reluctant responses, failures to respond, and negative responses; Switching behavior due to unethical conduct by service providers.
Boote (1998)	Two-Factor Taxonomy	Boote’s two-factor taxonomy classifies types of complaints as primary or secondary and as involved or uninvolved.
Liu and McClure (2001)	Categorization of Private Responses	Categorization of private responses using keywords; Inclusion of unvoiced complaints.
Larivet and Brouard (2010)	Stages of the Complaint Process	Three stages of the complaint process: cause, intention, and subsequent behavior; Causes include failures in products/services, among others.
Istanbulluoglu (2017)	Integrated Taxonomy	Proposal of an integrated taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior; Emphasis on complaint actions, their characteristics, and their impact on firms; Use of the taxonomy to improve complaint-handling practices by professionals.
Cadimi et al. (2021).	Evolution of Consumer Complaint Behavior	Highlights the need for updated models that consider the evolving landscape of consumer complaints, including the impact of social media and the integration of complaints into the satisfaction process.
Arora and Chakraborty (2020)	Legitimacy and Illegitimacy	Through an exhaustive aggregation, legitimate and illegitimate antecedents of consumer complaint behavior identified in the literature are compiled and a classification scheme is developed. Deficiencies observed in existing consumer complaint behavior taxonomies are addressed, and a refined taxonomy incorporating illegitimate consumer complaint behavior is proposed.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Proposed simplified taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior

In recent years, research on consumer complaint behavior has been limited, with earlier models focusing primarily on traditional complaints. The emergence of online complaints and their amplified impact has been underexplored (Enes, 2015; Loquen, 2023). Only a small proportion of dissatisfied consumers formally register complaints, often choosing to switch providers rather than complain. Recent models have begun to incorporate the digital environment, but they still face challenges in categorizing online complaints (Arora & Chakraborty, 2020; Cadimi et al., 2021).

The proposed simplified taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior in this study preserves the essence of Hirschman's (1970) model, in which the concept of "Exit and Voice" is maintained. Voice refers to consumers expressing their discomfort with the company, and the form of this expression is public, as proposed by Day and Landon (1976). The authors emphasize that these are actions taken publicly by consumers, meaning that they can be observed by others or involve interactions with entities external to the firm or organization (Day & Landon, 1976). Public actions in this model include in-person complaints made directly to the company, legal action (recourse to the courts), and complaints made through online channels (social media or complaint platforms). The latter is the least explored in existing taxonomies, and therefore the possibility of public action that explicitly considers the digital environment is incorporated.

Online complaint channels are vital to business strategies, directly affecting consumer behavior (Cadimi et al., 2021). Monitoring social media and complaint websites is crucial for responding quickly to customer feedback (Natascha, 2015; Song, 2016; Yao, Li, & Guo, 2024), enabling firms to assess satisfaction and identify areas for improvement (Văduva & Tasește, 2023). With the growing prevalence of digital complaints, companies must develop effective online complaint management processes (Carmen & Pop, 2012), integrating these channels into taxonomies of consumer complaint behavior (Arora & Chakraborty, 2020).

The models proposed by Hirschman (1970), Day and Landon (1976), and Singh (1988) incorporate the concept of exit, in which customers, after experiencing a service failure, choose to stop purchasing from the firm and may engage in negative word-of-mouth. Singh (1988) classifies this action as private, including negative word-of-mouth, which is retained in the proposed model. Private actions are discreet and may not be externally visible, such as speaking negatively about the firm to friends or simply discontinuing purchases without explicitly communicating the reason (Singh, 1988).

In Hirschman's (1970) seminal work, loyalty to the firm is included as part of the theoretical framework. However, consumer loyalty following a service failure, as proposed in Hirschman's (1970) taxonomy, is less convincing, as loyalty is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a combination of rational and emotional factors. The extent to which consumer loyalty is meaningful in such situations may vary depending on the specific circumstances surrounding the service failure and the subsequent actions taken by the firm (Denti & Giordano, 2010; Yolton & Long, 1988).

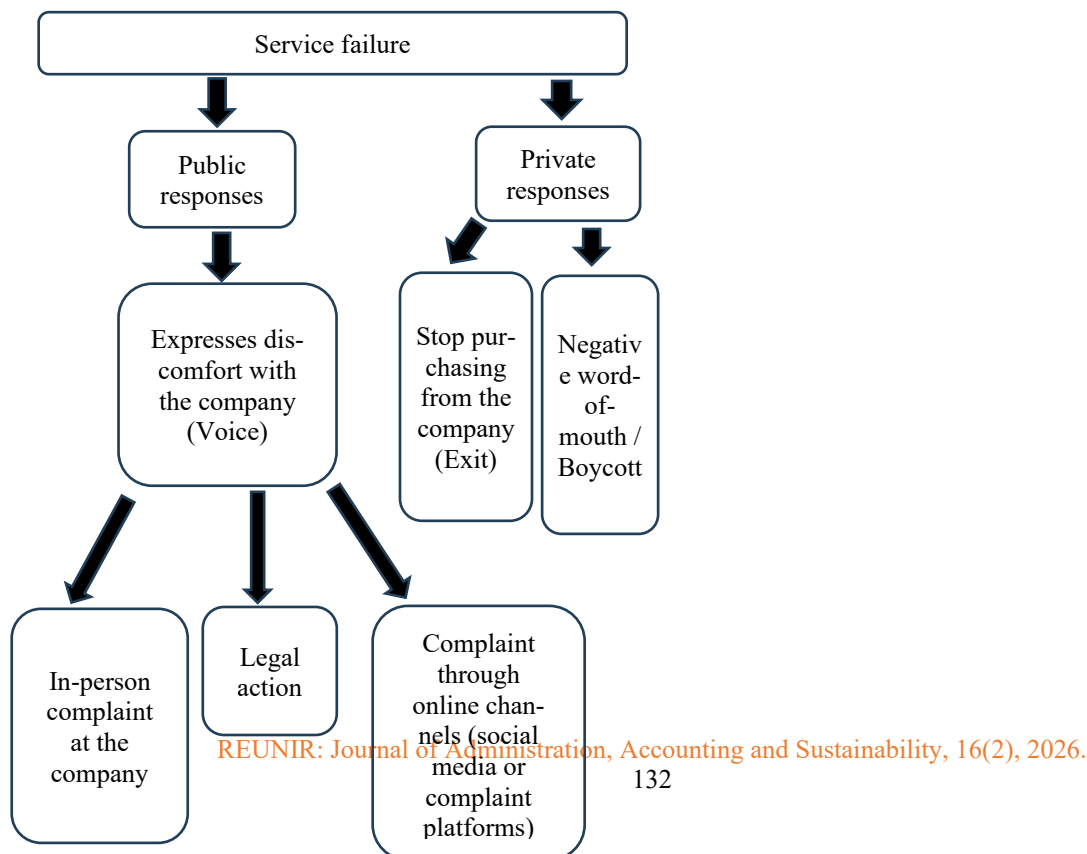
Loyalty is not always rational, as it may be influenced by emotional responses and perceptions of justice in the service recovery process. This implies that consumer loyalty may depend not only on the failure itself but also on how the firm addresses and resolves the problem (Yolton & Long, 1988). In addition, the concept of loyalty in the presence of service failure is complex, as it may involve a combination of cognitive and emotional responses. Customers may weigh their prior experiences with the firm, the perceived value of the service, and the effort required to resolve the failure when deciding whether to remain loyal. Therefore, the assumption that a failure occurs and the consumer continues purchasing and remains loyal to the firm, as proposed in Hirschman's (1970) model, is flawed.

Claiming that, after a failure, the customer may choose loyalty is complex and depends on a combination of factors, including the firm’s response, the severity of the failure, customer satisfaction, trust, and the overall quality of the services and products provided (Letsa & Asimah, 2018; Ofori, Boakye, & Narteh, 2018; Omoregie et al., 2019; Purnomo, 2022). These factors are not detailed in Hirschman’s (1970) taxonomy. Consequently, loyalty is not included in the proposed new taxonomy model.

The model consists of two types of responses following a service failure: public and private. In public responses, consumers may express their discomfort with the firm (voice) by lodging in-person complaints at the company, using online channels (social media) or complaint platforms, or by pursuing legal action; in private responses, consumers stop purchasing from the firm (exit) and engage in negative word-of-mouth. It is important to note that in public responses, actions are not mutually exclusive, and individuals may react to dissatisfaction by engaging in multiple actions simultaneously (Singh, 1988), for example, complaining in person at the firm while also using online channels and complaint platforms at the same time.

In light of everything that has been discussed, the proposal of a simplified taxonomy for consumer complaint behavior in this study (Figure 5) represents an update of previous taxonomies, aiming to summarize and simplify them without losing the essence of the pioneering models in this field. It is worth noting that although the recent study by Arora and Chakraborty (2020) addresses some similar aspects, it does so in a more complex manner, with a greater number of elements and dichotomies. The proposed model resembles the pioneering studies in the field, which were simple and easy to understand. Thus, the present study offers a model that maintains a focus on what is truly important, in a simplified and accessible way.

Figure 5
Proposed simplified taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Research propositions grounded in the taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior

This section presents theoretical research propositions to be tested in future studies, with the aim of consolidating the proposed model. According to Yin (2005), propositions help the researcher maintain focus and establish criteria for data selection, in addition to supporting the organization of the study and the analysis of alternative explanations.

Contemporary consumers value practicality and convenience in their interactions with companies, highlighting online complaint channels as efficient means of expressing dissatisfaction. The propensity to express discomfort on online platforms is linked to the convenience and speed these consumers seek to resolve issues effectively, adapting to the fast-paced rhythm of contemporary society. Preference for such channels reflects a conscious choice for a more agile and simplified consumption experience (Kokila & Krishnan, 2020; Mol & Varghese, 2020; Li & Wu, 2021; Abgelina et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2024). Therefore, based on the arguments presented, the following research proposition is proposed:

P1- The propensity to express discomfort with the company (voice) through online complaint channels is associated with customers who seek convenience and practicality in their interactions.

Some consumers, when interacting with companies, seek more than practical solutions to their problems. Expressing discomfort in person, such as complaining directly to the company, reflects a need to vent and share frustrations. For these customers, complaining face-to-face is a way of feeling heard and validated in their concerns (Hong & Lee, 2005; Prasetyo et al., 2016). In light of this, the following research proposition emerges:

P2- The propensity to express discomfort with the company (voice) in person within the organization itself is related to customers who seek not only a resolution, but also a space to vent personally.

Some consumers seek more than practical solutions when interacting with companies. Complaining in person reflects the need to vent and share frustrations, serving as a way to feel heard and validated in their concerns (Hong & Lee, 2005; Prasetyo et al., 2016). In view of the above, the following research proposition is presented:

P3- The tendency to express discomfort with the company (voice) through legal actions is associated with the severity of the service failure.

In situations of dissatisfaction resulting from service failures, a notable difference in customer behavior can be observed: customers who have not yet developed a loyal relationship with the company are more inclined to stop purchasing compared to already loyal customers. This variation suggests a significant relationship between customer loyalty and reactions to service failures (Lam et al., 2010; Setyo Widodo, 2021; Karman & Lipowski, 2024). Therefore, based on the review conducted on this topic, the following research proposition is proposed:

P4- The exit rate (ceasing to purchase from the company) after a service failure increases more among non-loyal customers than among loyal customers.

In situations where customer complaints arise due to service failures, a difference is observed in

the propensity for negative word of mouth based on the severity of the failure. Customers who experience more severe service failures tend to share negative experiences more frequently than those who face less severe failures. This variation suggests a relationship between failure severity and customers' propensity to express dissatisfaction negatively to others (Shao, 2017; Cho, Im, & Hiltz, 2023). In light of this, the following research proposition is presented:

P5- The rate of negative word of mouth after a complaint increases more among customers who experienced a severe service failure than among customers who experienced a failure of lower severity.

This study offers a robust theoretical framework on consumer complaint behavior, exploring how different forms of complaints are linked to consumer motivations. This not only enriches the academic literature but also provides practical guidance for small business managers and entrepreneurs. The proposed customer service strategies are adaptable to the severity of service failures and to consumers' communication preferences, aiming to improve customer experience and increase brand loyalty.

Final considerations

This study aimed to establish an overview of the literature by identifying existing knowledge on the taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior and proposing a simplified model. The analysis highlighted the urgent need to review and update existing taxonomies that explain this behavior.

Over the past decades, few studies have comprehensively addressed the topic, leaving significant gaps in the understanding of interactions between consumers and companies, especially in a constantly evolving digital context. The new taxonomy proposed in this study seeks to fill this gap by incorporating key elements that reflect contemporary reality. In particular, the inclusion of online complaint channels as a distinct category proves to be crucial, given the growing relevance of these means in the relationship between consumers and companies (Arya, 2010; Carmen & Pop, 2012; Mjaku, 2020).

Although recent studies, such as those by Arora and Chakraborty (2020) and Istanbuloglu (2017), have already addressed the inclusion of the digital environment in taxonomies of consumer complaint behavior, many models still do not fully account for this new dynamic. The simplified proposal presented here seeks to update and make previous taxonomies more accessible, without losing the essence of the pioneering models. It differs, for example, from the model of Arora and Chakraborty (2020), which, although similar in some aspects, presents greater complexity and level of detail.

Online complaint channels constitute a powerful tool for consumers to express their concerns quickly and with broad visibility, exerting a strong impact on corporate reputation and image. Ignoring or underestimating their importance can lead to serious consequences, making it essential to adopt a proactive approach to monitoring and responding effectively to such manifestations (Văduva & Tasește, 2023).

In addition, this study reinforces the importance of following the distinction proposed by Day and Landon (1976) between public and private actions in complaint behavior. While public actions, such as online complaints and legal proceedings, have high visibility and immediate effects on reputation, private actions, such as negative word of mouth, also exert considerable influence on consumer perceptions.

It is further acknowledged that consumer loyalty after service failures is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors. Thus, the exclusion of loyalty as a response in the proposed taxonomy model should be understood in light of this complexity and the nuances present in interactions between consumers and companies (Yolton & Long, 1988; Denti & Giordano, 2010).

In summary, the new taxonomy of consumer complaint behavior represents an advance in the

understanding of the dynamics between consumers and companies in the digital era, offering support for organizations to improve their service processes, strengthen relationships with customers, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Finally, it is strongly recommended that future studies conduct empirical validations of the proposed model in order to verify its applicability across different sectors, cultural contexts, and types of service failure. Methodological approaches such as structured surveys with PLS-SEM modeling, experimental studies to test reactions to simulated failure scenarios, and secondary data analyses from online complaint platforms may provide robust evidence and enhance the reliability of the model. These investigations will contribute to its refinement and consolidation as a theoretical and practical reference in the field of consumer complaint behavior.

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