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Another Look at Consumer Dissatisfaction as a Measure of Market Performance

ABSTRACT. In this article consumer dissatisfaction (CD) is explored in some depth on the basis of cross-national data. Two issues are focused upon. First, what is behind the figures indicating quite a lot of dissatisfaction? To what extent is CD affected by the quality of goods and services bought and present marketing practice, and to what extent by other variables such as social and cultural characteristics of the consumers? Second, what are the basic differences in the perception of CD between consumers themselves and their "ombudsmen"?

For the efficient organization of micro- as well as macro-marketing systems there is a definite need for relevant feedback from the marketing public (Fisk, 1981). How relevant are surveys about consumer dissatisfaction (CD) in this context? Ölander (1977a, b) points out that it is not known what is measured in CD surveys, i.e., what meaning to attach to subjective statements. Therefore, it has been argued, research should provide objective data on the quality of those goods complained about, on levels of service offered, on the conditions of warranties and contracts, etc. Against this, Pfaff (1977b), among others, argues "who is to say what a problem is and how it affects the individual's welfare but the affected individual?"

From the many surveys carried out since the early 70's we know a lot about consumer attitudes towards market performance and business behaviour. There are, however, blank spaces in our knowledge which mostly concern our understanding of these attitudes and the proper interpretation of CD data. What do such figures really express?

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN ASPECTS OF CD

Different empirical studies, focusing on individual products and services as well as on consumer attitudes towards the functioning of the marketing system, have consistently revealed considerable consumer dissatisfaction across a wide range of product groups and consumer segments (see, e.g., Andreasen, 1977; Barksdale & Darden, 1972; Barksdale, Perrault, Arndt, Marnhill, French, Halliday, & Zif,

in press; Greyser, 1977; Handy & Pfaff, 1975; Louis Harris and Associates, 1978; Stanley & Robinson, 1980; Westbrook, Newman, & Taylor, 1978; Wikström, 1979). In some respects this CD seems to be growing.

Thus, Andreasen (1977) reports from a telephone interview study of some 2,400 metropolitan households that one in five purchases of products and services resulted in consumer dissatisfaction with something other than price. Stanley and Robinson (1980) have examined the results of five US major studies conducted over the period 1971 to 1977 which investigated consumers' attitudes towards a set of consumer issues. They found among other things that "most consumers in growing numbers – 50 to 60 per cent – believe that product quality is not improving." Another finding was that a large percentage – 27 to 43 per cent – of consumers do not believe that adequate information is readily available upon which to base purchasing decisions. Barksdale et al. (in press) in a cross-national survey of consumer attitudes found that consumers in different countries expressed similar opinions on many topics, e.g., in expressing concern for high prices, deteriorating product quality, and insufficient post-purchase service. Thus, 70–85% of the consumers agree that high prices are the most important problem facing consumers today; that manufacturers deliberately design products which will wear out as quickly as possible (38–62% agree), and that when consumers have problems with products purchased, it is not easy to get them corrected (48–59% agree).

The research in this area has revealed a positive correlation between CD and education (Pfaff, 1977a) and between CD and standard of living (Thorelli, 1980). In the western world we have up to the late 70's consistently improved our level of education as well as our standard of living. Thus, it is logical that there should be an increase in CD.

There are also possible explanations for the correlations. An increase in educational level causes certain expectations; consumers get a greater insight into what is possible to demand from the market. They are aware of possible alternatives and realize when products fail. With a higher standard of living the number of products purchased increases. This creates a larger potential for unsuccessful transactions. Another explanation is that consumers have less time at their disposal because of the increased incidence of both partners working. Hence, they are more irritated if something goes wrong. Besides that the ever growing number of varieties create difficulties of choice.

The purpose of this article is to explore CD in more depth paying heed to:

— To what extent is CD affected by market performance and business behaviour, and to what extent by other variables? This has implications for how business should approach this issue, and for what other stakeholders should do.

— What aspects of the CD do people from business and government agencies notice, what aspects do they overlook? This is an important issue since most of the decisions being made on behalf of the consumers are rarely based on more extensive surveys about consumers' view of their problems, needs, and attitudes, but rather on the assessments of these "ombudsmen."

THE CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON: STRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

By comparing CD and actual market performance in two different countries, it should be possible to determine to what extent CD is explained by market performance and to what extent by other variables. For the comparison we have used the US and Sweden. Both nations have a high standard of living and a high level of education. It is also the case that consumer protection by public consumer policy is well developed in both countries. In other aspects there are differences, however, e.g., when it comes to social and cultural variables.

Comparative structural characteristics of the two countries pertaining to CD are shown in Table I, macro-environmental factors in Table II.

As can be seen from the tables there are more similarities than dissimilarities between the countries. The economic situation seems, however, somewhat more favourable in the US; private consumption is higher and inflation lower. Consumer policy in the US seems also more multi-faceted compared to Sweden where public consumer policy predominates, mostly in the form of consumer protection.

CD IN THE US AND SWEDEN: SURVEY DATA

How, then, do consumers in the US and Sweden perceive the performance of the market? When CD is examined in this paper, data from US and Swedish surveys on a broad spectrum of related issues are used (Greyser, 1977; Louis Harris and Associates, 1978; Wikström, 1979).

Both the US and Swedish surveys were based on personal interviews with a representative sample of the population. The US survey

(Greyser, 1977) was based on a stratified sample reflecting within one percentage point the actual proportion of those adults living in different regions and in different size localities. The interviews included 1,510 adults and were carried out during November and December 1976. This US survey was replicated in the summer of

TABLE I
Structural Factors Affecting CD in Both Countries

Factors considered ^a	US	Sweden
Population (millions in 1978)	218.5	8.3
Percentage of the population in the active work force (1979)		
men	57.4	57.1
women	38.5	44.7
Average size of household (1975)	2.94	2.47
Private consumption of the population (billion US\$ 1978)	1,340	48.1
Per capita income (US\$ 1977)	7,686	8,369
Private consumption value per inhabitant (US\$ 1978)	6,134	5,086
Average annual rate of inflation		
1970–1975	6.78	7.97
1975–1978	6.6	10.6
Full-time school enrolment (children aged 15–19, 1977)	75%	56% ^b (1976)
Number enrolled in higher education as percentage of population aged 20–24 (1977)	52%	30% ^b (1976)
Radio receiver ownership per 1000 inhabitants (1975)	1,882	584 ^c
Television receiver ownership per 1000 inhabitants (1975)	571	363 ^c (1976)
Number of telephones in use per 1000 inhabitants (1977)	744	714 ^d

^a Sources: Statistical Abstract 1979, Statistisk årsbok 1975, Statistical Yearbook 1978, Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1980.

^b These figures are rapidly increasing.

^c Number of licences. One licence covers all receivers in the household.

^d In 1982, the Swedish figures exceeded those of the US.

TABLE II
Macro-environmental Factors

Factors considered ^a	US	Sweden
Market conditions	Strong buyers' market	Buyers' market
Product return privileges	Very satisfactory	Satisfactory
Product safety regulation ^b	Very strict	Rather strict
Consumer education programmes	Fairly extensive	Limited
Importance of self service retailing	Very great	Very great
Role of voluntary consumer protection associations	Powerful	Very limited
Government involvement in consumer protection ^b	Extensive	Extensive
Misleading advertising ^b	Strictly controlled	Strictly controlled
Product labelling	Rather extensive	Extensive
Standardization and quality control	Extensive	Extensive

^a Assessments based on literature, interviews, and author's own experience from both countries.

^b The consumer protection legislation is in some aspects more strict in US than in Sweden, but less enforced.

1978 (Louis Harris and Associates, 1978). The Swedish survey was based on a representative sample of 532 adults aged 18 to 70. The non-response rate was 15 per cent. The interviews were carried out in September and October 1978. The leadership samples were in both countries selected from different membership lists. The US interviews were carried out in January and February 1977, the Swedish in October and November 1978.

Because of institutional and conceptual differences the US study could not as a whole be replicated in Sweden. The following three areas were, however, made comparable:

- Consumer problems compared to other societal problems.
- Attitudes towards government regulation.
- Attitudes towards business and towards the marketplace.

Some of the results will be presented under these headings. Then in a separate section we will relate the differences in observed CD to the structural and environmental conditions of the two countries.

Consumer Problems Compared to Other Problems

This is to give a frame of reference for the study of CD: How important is the CD problem? The statement was: "Compared with other problems in the average family, consumer problems are comparatively insignificant."

As can be seen from Table III, the public in both countries have the same view of the importance of consumer problems. About a third is of the opinion that consumer problems are significant compared with other problems.

The government consumer affairs representatives in both countries think consumer problems are important to a much higher degree than the public. The US business representatives are more aware of the importance of consumer problems than the Swedish.

TABLE III

The Question Asked Was: "Compared with Other Problems in the Average Family, Consumer Problems Are Comparatively Insignificant."

	USA			Sweden 1978		
	1978	1977				
	Total public	Government consumer affairs	Business executives	Total public	Government consumer affairs	Business executives
N =	(1500)	(99)	(85)	(532)	(26)	(36)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree	49	23	44	58	25	77
Disagree	30	59	37	33	59	19
Not sure, don't know	21	18	19	9	16	4

Attitudes Towards Government Regulation

As was shown in the previous section, a considerable proportion of consumers think that there are considerable consumer problems in the marketplace. Where, then, do they look for support in their frustrations? As we can see from Table IV, US consumers do not believe in more government regulation of business, rather the opposite. Another question in the US study showed that the US consumers ranked competition as the best means of keeping prices down and getting better products.

TABLE IV

The Question Asked Was: "Do You Think There Should Be More Government Regulation of Business, Less, or the Same Amount as There Is Now?"

	US public		Swedish public
	1977	1978	1978
N =	(1,510)	(1,500)	(532)
	%	%	%
More regulation	31	24	38
Less regulation	27	30	11
Same	30	29	32
Not sure	12	17	19

The Swedish consumers are not unambiguously regulation-oriented either. A special question in the Swedish study illustrates this. When Swedish consumers were faced with the question: "What is the best way to help the consumer when it concerns the purchase of different goods, more government *regulation* to protect the consumer or *education* and *information* to make it easier for the consumer to value goods themselves?," 8 out of 10 preferred more education and information.

For CD, government regulation is one way out. The US figures indicate, however, that there is a diminishing belief in this method. The debate concerning the ineffectiveness of regulation, its costs and side effects, starting in the US in 1976, has been lively. In the late 70's this shift in climate also appeared in Sweden. In the early 80's the number of people in favour of regulation is probably even lower.

Attitudes Towards Business and Marketplace

We have noticed that the consumers in the US and Sweden have a similar view of the importance of the consumer problems, but a somewhat different view about government regulation as a remedy. What, then, are their attitudes to business and the marketplace?

As is shown in Table V, the US consumers are much more critical than the Swedish. US criticisms also focus upon somewhat different issues, high prices and poor product quality being the most important, followed by a negative attitude to existing marketing practices.

In Sweden, the most critical issues are detrimental additives (not shown in the table) and dangerous products, closely followed by the concern about high prices. On a substantially lesser level there is

criticism about post-purchase product performance and service, and about marketing practices. There is in both countries a relatively low CD expressed about before-purchase issues.

TABLE V

Excerpt from Surveys about Problems Which Concern the Consumers a Great Deal.

Question to the public: "The following list of things are of concern to some consumers. For each one, how much has it worried you personally -- a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all? Think about your own experience as a consumer."

Question to the decision makers: "I am going to read you a list of things which are of concern to some consumers. Tell me for each one, how much it worries most consumers -- a great deal, somewhat, a little bit, or not at all. Do not think of your own experiences as a consumer but of that of the majority of the public."

	USA			Sweden 1978		
	Total public 77/79	Business executives 1977	Government consumer affairs 1977	Total public (532)	Business executives (26)	Government consumer affairs (36)
Things which N = (1510/1500) worry consumers a great deal:	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Before-purchase experience</i>						
The difficulty of choosing among so many products	11/12	1	5	13	8	14
The absence of reliable information about different products and services	26/30	6	28	14	0	3
<i>User experience with product and price</i>						
The high prices of many products	77/83	70	73	37	15	33
The poor quality of many products	48/57	30	64	10	12	11
Too many products which are dangerous	26/36	2	14	38	8	6
<i>User experience with post-purchase</i>						
Too many products breaking or going wrong soon after you bring them home	35/39	20	37	25	12	8

(Table V, continued)

	USA			Sweden 1978		
	Total public 77/78	Business executives 1977	Government consumer affairs 1977	Total public (532)	Business executives (26)	Government consumer affairs (36)
Things which N = (1510/1500) worry consumers a great deal:	%	%	%	%	%	%
The poor quality of aftersales service and repairs	38/45	22	53	22	12	50
Inadequate guarantees or warranties	30/35	3	35	22	4	19
Failure of companies to handle complaints properly	29/35	14	48	15	0	14
<i>Marketplace structure/ performance</i>						
The failure of many companies to live up to claims made in their advertising	44/52	17	48	18	8	22
Misleading packaging or labelling	34/39	7	33	20	12	6
The feeling that it is a waste of time to complain about consumer problems because nothing substantial will be achieved	32/34	16	38	19	4	22
The feeling that many manufacturers don't care what the consumer thinks	36/43	30	38	23	— ^a	— ^a
Average percentage	36/42	18	40	21	8	17

^a Question not asked.

CD AND THE REALITY

As we have seen, the surveys indicate that the US consumers are twice as critical towards business and market as the Swedish. What

could be the reasons for the differences in attitudes? Let us first examine structural and macro-environmental differences (Tables I and II).

From Table I it is clear that both countries are rather similar when it comes to levels of education and income, and communication devices. Sweden has a more even income distribution and a considerably higher rate of inflation. Therefore, the Swedes should be more price conscious and more bothered by high prices. This is not the case, US consumers are much more bothered by high prices (83% compared to 37%).

When it comes to public consumer policy and consumer protection the two countries have more similarities than dissimilarities. The aims are the same. The means and organization are, however, different. There are two noticeable differences: First, there is a stronger buyers' market in the US combined with firmer product safety regulation. This speaks for the US having a better functioning market and more satisfied consumers. Second, the US has more extensive consumer educational programmes and powerful voluntary consumer protection associations. This may affect CD in two ways. On the one hand, more educated consumers and pressure from active consumerism foster a high level of market performance. On the other hand, an open and critical debate, and consumers with a feeling for what is right and what is wrong, tend to create more critical and demanding consumers, increasing the CD scores.

The structural and environmental differences listed, taken together, speak for higher pressure on business in the US compared to Sweden and thereby for better performance and lower CD. The measured CD is quite the opposite.

We have, therefore, supplemented the survey data by interviewing a handful of marketing managers with professional experience from both countries, representing different industries. The findings have also been discussed with a US consumer policy maker and a journalist, both with the experience of living in Sweden. The opinions collected in this way can be summarized as follows.

— The US business firms seem more sales oriented than the Swedish and are tougher in their *marketing practices*. Doing business and selling is a more acknowledged activity in the US. Advertising is taken for what it is, a one-sided sales argument. In Sweden, business behaviour is much more careful and moderate. Selling arguments are concentrated more on facts about products and less on prestige and persuasion. Swedish business firms are user-oriented in their production, not, however, in their marketing.

— *Price and quality relations* also seem to differ: The US supply offers a wider price and quality range than in Sweden. The lowest

US price and quality classes are seldom represented on the Swedish market.

— *Product information.* The US product information is more mixed with persuasive elements and therefore more difficult to use as a purchasing aid. The Swedish product information is more precise and user-oriented.

— *Post-purchase service.* The responsibility for post-purchase service is considered to be lower in the US. It is mostly “sold out” to independent repair firms with a varying quality of performance.

— *Complaints handling.* US business is considered to be better trained in dealing with consumers. This does not, however, mean that consumers are given a better deal. Rather the opposite holds true. In the US a dialogue between business and active consumer groups is more common, while in Sweden most of the dialogue takes place between the National Board for Consumer Policies and industry associations.

On the whole, business behaviour is more heterogeneous in the US. There are a number of highly consumer-oriented and responsible firms, although the majority of companies seem to restrict themselves mainly to what is required of them by law. There are also a varying number of smaller firms in the different industries operating on the borderline of the law or outside it if possible. In Sweden most firms operate on about the same level.

If the presented picture of differences in business behaviour is true, some of the CD variations are explained, others not. Cultural differences expressed in differences in consumer behaviour, and in basic values and attitudes also have an impact. Such aspects also have to be taken into consideration. A better understanding is gained if we look upon the market as an interplay between supply and demand. Let us have a look, then, at the differences in some of the more vital CD variables.

Most US consumers (83%) — more than twice as many as in Sweden — worry a great deal about high prices. The actual price levels give no reason for these differences. On the contrary: The rate of inflation during the actual period was about 40 per cent higher in Sweden. Price competition also seems considerably higher on the US market. The differences in CD thus seem more dependent upon cultural variables. The US society appears much more price and consumption oriented than the Swedish.

CD with poor product quality comes as the second largest issue in the US and seems closely related to the concern for high prices and the intense price consciousness. With high price competition and price conscious consumers, product quality tends to suffer. Most probably, price and quality levels are lower than in Sweden and fall

within a greater range. There is, for instance, a market for low quality products in the US which could not exist in Europe as pointed out in the marketing manager interviews.

A small proportion of Swedish consumers (10%) are concerned about poor quality. They are instead worried about dangerous products. It does not seem realistic to believe that this is indeed a more serious problem in Sweden than in the US, even if the US legislation is more protective. Most likely, the Swedish figure mirrors the intense debate which was going on in the 70's about environmental pollution, harmful additives, and pesticides.

To sum up, what can be learned about CD from this exploration of cross-cultural differences? This author's conclusion is that only to a certain extent does CD measure business behaviour and market performance. The Swedish consumers have expressed less CD, and apparently business behaviour in most aspects is more in tune with what they want. There is, however, a suspicion that some of the contentment has to do with cultural traits: lower aspirations and less inclination to complain. These differences have been pointed out in the journalist and consumerist interviews (see also Peterson, 1982). There are also some negative aspects of the fairly low Swedish CD figures which will be taken up again in the concluding section.

WHAT BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES OVERLOOK REGARDING CD

It has been stated that surveys on CD are of little value because business and government agencies are already knowledgeable about it (Wieken, 1977). The US and Swedish studies discussed have, however, shown that there are manifest differences between the perception of business and government agencies and the actual views of the consumers themselves (see Table V). *Business* is aware of only half or less of the CD which the consumers perceive. US business assumes that 18% of the consumers worry a great deal about different consumer issues, but the actual figures are 36 to 42%. In Sweden, where the CD level as stated is lower, the inability of business to perceive CD is equally great: 8% compared to the actual 21%.

What problems does business particularly overlook in *both countries*? Three issues seem to surface:

- The information problem. The absence of reliable information about products and services.
- Product risks. Too many products which are dangerous.
- Inadequate guarantees or warranties.

Other issues which US business particularly tends to overlook are:

- The problem of choice and the difficulty for the consumers to choose among so many products.

- Overselling. The failure of many companies to live up to the claims made in their advertising.

- Misleading packaging and labelling.

US business apparently has difficulties in seeing the negative consequences of their tough business policy and marketing strategy.

Swedish business overlooks other dimensions:

- The failure to handle complaints properly.

- The alienation problem. The consumer feels that it is a waste of time to complain about consumer problems because nothing substantial will be achieved.

Both aspects have to do with an undeveloped ability to handle consumer relations which was pointed out when discussing market-place differences.

When it comes to the perception of *government officials*, it is quite close to the consumer's on average. There are, however, deviations on some issues. In both countries the consumer affairs professionals:

- underestimate the consumer fear of dangerous products

- overestimate the poor quality of after-sales service and repairs.

The *US* government representatives do not seem to be aware of the consumer problem of choosing among the many products on the market. On the other hand, they heavily overemphasize the companies' failure to handle complaints.

The *Swedish* government representatives overlook the product quality in the sense of products breaking or going wrong soon after they are brought home. They also do not see problems concerning misleading packaging or labelling.

These comparisons indicate that consumer policy-makers also need a better feedback from the consumers in order to be their real spokesmen.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article we have aimed at reaching a deeper understanding of CD. Two main questions have been addressed. First, to what extent is CD a measure of market performance and business behaviour and to what extent of other conditions affecting consumer perception? Second, to what extent are business people and government agencies good spokesmen for the consumers? How much of the CD are they aware of?

The analysis has been based on data from two similar surveys in the US and Sweden about consumer and "ombudsmen" attitudes

towards a wide spectrum of consumer issues in the late 70's. By comparing structural and macro-environmental factors with CD in both countries, it has become obvious that only part of the CD can be explained by actual market performance. Cultural variables and national characteristics seem to affect the consumer perception of the market supply considerably. Thus, in this case, the twice as high CD in the US compared with that of Sweden is only partly explained by a poorer market supply. Cultural characteristics seem to have a considerable impact. It is more accepted and legitimate for US consumers to complain and to voice their CD. They also seem more demanding and optimistic about what business should be able to offer, being in some degree perhaps too optimistic which may cause frustration. This holds particularly true when it comes to price/quality relations. US consumers are considered to be extremely price conscious and eager to get value for money. Value is what looks good: appearance, design, and other qualities giving immediate satisfaction.

On the other hand, Swedish consumers seem more patient and oriented towards matter-of-fact. They are also price conscious, but at the same time they are quality-oriented: interested in durability, product performance, maintenance, and other qualities contributing to long range utility. Swedish consumers do not seem to complain and voice their demands as easily as US consumers. They are much more content with what is offered. Most of the contacts between business and consumers are routine economic transactions that seldom require any form of dialogue.

National characteristics, however, also appear to influence CD in a more direct way. There is a greater heterogeneity in the US than in Sweden when it comes to income and education. Thus, there is in the US a considerable number of people with low income and poor education, and they are easily exploited by business.

The cross-national comparison also indicates that CD may play quite different roles in different markets. In an open and dynamic market, CD may imply a positive state of affairs: Consumers and consumer activist groups voice their CD, and because of intense competition business has to react. In a static market with little interaction, CD does not unconditionally signify a desirable state of affairs: If there are no working channels for voicing the CD and the market is highly oligopolistic, there is nothing else for the consumers but to adapt (which eventually will lead to a lowering of the CD level!).

Ölander (1977a) puts it in this way:

When *satisfaction* is reported, one simply does not know whether it is primarily a sign of a well-functioning consumer environment or of the fact that consumers are ill-informed

or resigned. When *dissatisfaction* is reported, one does not know whether it is a sign of a badly functioning consumer environment or of the fact that consumers are optimistic and set on improving a system which already functions fairly well (p. 132).

This ambivalence has come out clearly in the analysis of CD in the US and Sweden. The higher CD scores in the US can be explained partly by market conditions, partly by more demanding and optimistic consumers. On the other hand, the lower CD score in Sweden seems due to more homogeneous market supply as well as to less demanding consumers.

Another important issue when assessing CD as a measure of market performance is whether business and government agencies are aware of the discontent. If CD is fed back to the decision makers, its role is positive, but if not, the problems behind CD will most probably remain.

This analysis has indicated that it is important for the understanding of CD to analyze it from a broad perspective, taking economic, social, and cultural variables into consideration. Without this broad framework, CD figures give little information about actual market performance.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine weitere Untersuchung zur Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit als Maß für die Leistungsfähigkeit des Marktes. Daten aus einer international vergleichenden Untersuchung bilden die empirische Grundlage des vorliegenden Beitrags. Er fragt einmal danach, was hinter den Indikatoren einer recht hohen Unzufriedenheit steht. In welchem Ausmaß beruht Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit auf mangelnder Qualität von Gütern und Dienstleistungen oder auf bestimmten Marketing-Praktiken und in welchem Ausmaß hängt sie andererseits eher von bestimmten Eigenschaften der Verbraucher (sozialer und kultureller Art) ab? Zum andern geht der Beitrag der Frage nach, wodurch sich die Wahrnehmung von Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit der Verbraucher selber von der ihrer "Funktionäre" unterscheidet.

Zwei vergleichbare Umfragen haben in den USA und in Schweden Einstellungen sowohl von Konsumenten als auch von ihren Funktionären gegenüber einem größeren Spektrum von Konsumentenfragen erfaßt. Beide Umfragen wurden in den 70iger Jahren durchgeführt. Der Vergleich beider Umfrageergebnisse führt zu der Vermutung, daß nur ein Teil der Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit durch mangelnde Leistungsfähigkeit des Marktes erklärt werden kann. Vielmehr dürften kulturelle Variable und nationale Besonderheiten das Urteil der Konsumenten über das Marktangebot stark beeinflussen. Ein doppelt so hohes Ausmaß von Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit in den USA gegenüber Schweden kann wohl nur teilweise durch ein schlechteres Marktangebot erklärt werden. Vielmehr ist es für amerikanische Konsumenten offenbar in höherem Maße üblich, Reklamationen und Beschwerden vorzubringen. Auch haben sie vermutlich höhere Ansprüche an die Leistung eines Anbieters, vielleicht sogar überhöhte Erwartungen, was dann zu Enttäuschungen führen muß. Dies gilt besonders für die Beziehung zwischen Preis und Qualität. Amerikanische Verbraucher gelten als sehr preisbewußt und wollen einen hohen Gegenwert für ihr Geld. Diesen Gegenwert sehen sie vor allem in dem Äußeren des Produktes und in solchen Eigenschaften, die eine sofortige Befriedigung bringen.

Schwedische Konsumenten sind dagegen offenbar nachsichtiger. Auch sie sind preisbewußt, dabei aber stärker qualitätsorientiert; sie legen Wert auf lange Lebensdauer, Leistungsfähigkeit des Produktes und auf solche Eigenschaften, die einen längerfristigen Nutzen stiften. Schwedische Konsumenten haben anscheinend eine geringere Neigung zu Reklamationen und Beschwerden.

Gelegentlich wird behauptet, empirische Erhebungen von Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit seien von geringem Wert, weil Anbieter und staatliche Stellen über das Ausmaß von Unzufriedenheit ohnehin Bescheid wüßten. Tabelle V zeigte dagegen, daß es starke Wahrnehmungsunterschiede zwischen den Anbietern und öffentlichen Stellen einerseits und den Verbrauchern selbst andererseits gibt. Anbieter nehmen nur knapp die Hälfte der

Unzufriedenheit wahr, die von Verbrauchern empfunden wird. Dieser Befund zeigt, daß auch Vertreter der Verbraucherpolitik mehr Informationen über die Konsumenten haben sollten, um deren echte Vertreter zu sein.

Darüberhinaus zeigt sich, daß es für das Verständnis von Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit notwendig ist, die Analyse des Phänomens mit einem breiten Blickwinkel vorzunehmen, der ökonomische, soziale und kulturelle Variablen einbezieht. Ohne einen breiten Bezugsrahmen sagen statistische Erhebungen von Verbraucher-Unzufriedenheit wenig über die tatsächliche Leistungsfähigkeit des Marktes aus.

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