

# **Examining Self-Monitoring, Perceived Control, Self-Efficacy and Machiavellianism in the Context of Complaint Behaviour**

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines personality characteristics, such as self-monitoring, perceived control, self-efficacy and Machiavellianism, within the realms of complaint behaviour. As such, these variables are examined in relation to attitude toward complaining, propensity to complain and in relation to previous complaint behaviour. Data were gathered via self-administered survey from 200 university students. The results indicate significant relationships between self-monitoring, perceived control and self-efficacy with attitude to complaining while self-efficacy and Machiavellianism was significantly related to propensity to complain. In the context of previous complaint behaviour, “complainers” rated significantly higher than “non-complainers” on the basis of self-monitoring and perceived control.*

Keywords: Complaint Behaviour, Personality, Attitudes.

## **Introduction**

The concept of attitude has been extensively studied within the field of consumer and marketplace behaviour (Bagozzi, 1996; Blodgett et al., 1997), in addition to psychology (Bagozzi, 1996). Moreover, several well known studies have examined the relationship between attitude and complaining behaviour (Bearden and Teel, 1980; Blodgett et al., 1997; Keng et al., 1995). More specifically, academics have linked attitude to complaining to individual confidence, perceived risk and attitude towards the situation (Bearden and Teel, 1980). In this sense, a person's reluctance to complain is often associated with a lack of confidence, risk perceptions concerning publicly complaining and being put in the uncomfortable situation of making a complaint. On the other hand, Richins (1981) found that attitude towards complaining was dependent on the amount of effort involved in making a complaint, the individual's beliefs concerning complaining and the social benefits from taking complaint action.

However, attitudes remain an essential means of understanding the causes of behaviour and, for the purposes of this study, complaint behaviour. However, there are numerous other factors that contribute to the complex nature of complaining behaviour, that are unrelated to the physical factors associated with the service encounter. One such important area is that of personality characteristics (Jacoby and Jaccard, 1981; Landon, 1977) as it is argued that personality characteristics have the potential to influence the actions taken by consumers when dissatisfied with a service outcome (Bearden and Mason, 1984). This study, therefore, examines four personality characteristics (self-monitoring, perceived control, self-efficacy and machiavellianism) within the realms of complaint behaviour within services. As such, these personality characteristics provide the foundation for the hypotheses of this study and are further discussed accordingly.

## Literature Review

*Self-monitoring* is a personality trait that has been argued to affect consumer and marketplace behaviour (e.g., Browne and Kaldenberg, 1997; O’Cass, 2000; Snyder, 1987). In this sense, people frame the way they behave in a manner conducive to their own self-concept, in an effort to communicate or conceal their inner emotions, given a particular situation (Graeff, 1996; Snyder, 1974). Snyder (1987) suggests that this occurs because of an interest in maintaining a socially desirable image of one’s self in front of others.

Those individuals that are considered high self-monitors show considerable adaptability in adjusting their behaviour to external, situational factors (Browne and Kaldenberg, 1997; O’Cass, 2000). On the other hand, those individuals who are considered low self-monitors are relatively insensitive to social cues and tend to present themselves in the same light in every situation (Browne and Kaldenberg, 1997). Generally, complaining is perceived to present negative connotations and, as such, those who complain frequently are perceived more negatively than those who withdraw from expressing their dissatisfaction (Kowalski, 1996). Therefore, when considering self-monitoring and complaint behaviour, it could be suggested that because the behaviour of low self-monitors does not rely on the social approval of others, they would be more likely to complain than would high self-monitors. On this basis we hypothesise that:

*H1a: Self-monitoring will have a significant negative relationship with attitude to complaining.*

*H1b: Self-monitoring will have a significant negative relationship with propensity to complain.*

*Perceived control* is defined as “the expectation of having the power to participate in making decisions in order to obtain desirable consequences and a sense of personal competence in a given situation” (Rodin, 1990, p. 4). In this sense, perceived control is viewed as the ability of a person to control events, of which, the control does not have to be present, so long as it is perceived to be present (Endler et al., 2000). In the context of services, perceived control was found to play a key-determining role during the service encounter process, as it was seen to influence the emotional feelings of consumers (Hui and Bateson, 1991). For example, consumers may have greater feelings of anxiety for services that are perceived to be more complex and ambiguous. In addition, perceived control has been previously examined in relation to complaining behaviour. The findings revealed that consumers’ feelings towards product failure influenced their willingness or desire to repurchase and complain (Folkes, Koletsky and Graham, 1987). Therefore, it could be expected that complaint behaviour may be affected by the degree to which a person maintains either a high or low level of perceived control. In this sense, it could be suggested that people who are withdrawn and passive and shy away from action and making decisions, would be less likely to complain. On the other hand, those people who maintain a far greater control over the day-to-day events and activities in their lives and display characteristics such as competence and achievement may be more likely to complain as they would see complaining as a means of retaining control and power over a situation. On this basis, it is hypothesised that:

*H2a: Perceived Control will have a significant positive relationship with attitude to complaining.*

*H2b: Perceived Control will have a significant positive relationship with propensity to complain.*

*Self-efficacy* is defined as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (Wood and Bandura, 1989, p. 408). In this sense, self-efficacy is viewed as an individual’s ability to evaluate their own thought processes and experiences, potentially changing their behaviour and thinking patterns (Bandura, 1991; Christensen, Fogarty and Wallace, 2002), as a means to achieve certain levels of performance (Gibson, 2001; Sadri, 1996). High self-efficacy refers to the ability of individuals to solve conceptual problems with ease, manage time better, initiate tasks and sustain an effort to achieve task accomplishment (Christensen et al., 2002). Luthans and Peterson (2002) report that the higher the person’s self-efficacy, the more persistent he or she is when faced with setbacks or failure. In contrast, low self-efficacy is attributed to an individual’s feelings of fear, anxiousness or his or her inability to effectively achieve task accomplishment (Appelbaum and Hare, 1996). Therefore, when considering self-efficacy and complaining behaviour, it could be suggested that because the behaviour associated with low self-efficacy is, in part, attributed to feelings of fear and anxiousness, where the task set is unlikely to be achieved, individuals may be less likely to complain. In fact, because high self-efficacy dictates high levels of persistence and task accomplishment regardless of failure, individuals exhibiting this trait may be more likely to complain. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*H3a: Self-efficacy will have a significant positive relationship with attitude to complaining.*

*H3b: Self-efficacy will have a significant positive relationship with propensity to complain.*

*Machiavellianism* is defined as “a process by which the manipulator gets more of some kind of reward than he would have gotten without manipulating and, someone else gets less, at least within the immediate context” (Christie and Geis, 1970, p. 106). Machiavellianism (mach) is a personality trait that recognises that individuals who engage in some form of immoral or unethical behaviour are likely to be rewarded through personal gain (Siu, 1998). As such, high Machs are more likely to engage in behaviour, whereby they are likely to benefit even at the expense of others (Macrosson and Hemphill, 2001). On the other hand, those who are considered low Machs are more reluctant to be placed in vulnerable situations, which may require them to behave unethically or engage in some form of deceptive conduct. Machiavellianism has been applied to marketing in relation to consumer behaviour in terms of purchasing, sociability, bargaining (e.g., Hunt and Chonko, 1984), consumer ethics and politics (e.g., Kenhove et al., 2001), culture (e.g., Rawwas, 2001) and interpersonal interactions (e.g., Wrightsman, 1991) but has not been examined in the context of complaint behaviour. In this context, it could be suggested that because high machs are considered to be highly opportunistic and willing to engage any behaviour to get what they want, they would be more likely to complain in the event of service failure. Conversely, it could be suggested that because low machs are conservative and distance themselves from interpersonal situations that involve actions in which the person must initiate discussion and responses, they would be less likely to complain. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posed:

*H4a: Machiavellianism will have a significant positive relationship with attitude to complaining.*

*H4b: Machiavellianism will have a significant positive relationship with propensity to complain.*

The previous discussion postulates relationships between self-monitoring, perceived control, self-efficacy and Machiavellianism with attitude toward complaining and propensity to

complain. On this basis, and to provide a thorough examination of these personality characteristics within the realms of complaint behaviour, it would be expected that consumers who (based on past behaviour) fall into the categories of “complainers” and “non-complainers”, will differ across these characteristics. Thus, it is hypothesised that:

*H5: There will be a significant difference between groups of “complainers” and “non-complainers” on the basis of: (a) self-monitoring (b) perceived control (c) self-efficacy (d) machiavellianism.*

## **Research Design**

This study was based on the development and administration of a self-administered survey collected from 200 third-year marketing university students. Machiavellianism was measured via 11 items from Christie and Geis (1970) and self-efficacy was measured using 10 items from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) scale. Perceived control was measured using 11 items of James’ (1957) LOC scale (all items were reversed scored to reflect internal LOC which is what was being measured here), while self-monitoring was measured via 8 items from Snyder (1974). In terms of the complaint variables, four items measuring propensity to complain came from three different sources (eg., Folkes et al., 1987; Bennett, 1997; Blodgett et al, 1997) and four items measuring attitude to complaining were generated via panel of experts for this study. The categorical measurement used to segment groups of “complainers” and “non-complainers” asked respondents (when thinking of past behaviour) to choose one of the following statements: (1) In most situations, *I tend* to complain to the service provider when I am unhappy with the service, rather than doing nothing; (2) In most situations, *I don’t tend* to complain to the service provider when I am unhappy with the service.

## **Results**

Preliminary analysis involved conducting factor analysis via principal components with varimax rotation. A similar method used by Shi and Wright (2001) was adopted for this study, whereby factors that possessed eigenvalues greater than one were identified and factor loadings of less than .35 were removed (Comrey and Lee, 1992). In addition, those items that had cross-loadings of greater than .40 were deleted from the data analysis (O’Cass, 2002). At this point 4 items (machiavellianism), 3 items (perceived control) were deleted due to low correlations and 3 items (self-efficacy) were removed because cross-loadings of these items were greater than .40. The reliability of the items of the scales were then examined via Cronbach’s alpha and all computed statistics were above the recommended level of .70 (Sureshchander, Rajendran and Anantharaman, 2001). Prior to conducting the analysis to address the hypotheses, composite variables were computed to reduce the data. In order to address hypotheses 1 to 4, bivariate correlations were computed to examine the proposed relationships. As shown in Table 1, self-monitoring, perceived control and self-efficacy all had significant relationships with attitude to complaining, while self-efficacy and machiavellianism showed significant relationships with propensity to complain. On this basis, H1a, H2a, H3a, H3b and H4b were all supported, whereas H1b, H2b and H4a were not.

**Table 1 Correlations and Hypotheses Results**

		Correlation	Signif.	Hyp.
Self-Monitoring	Attitude to Complaining	-.15*	.030*	✓
	Propensity to Complain	-.06	.390	x
Perceived Control	Attitude to Complaining	.17*	.020*	✓
	Propensity to Complain	.05	.500	x
Self-efficacy	Attitude to Complaining	.26*	.000*	✓
	Propensity to Complain	.18*	.009*	✓
Machiavellianism	Attitude to Complaining	.09	.167	x
	Propensity to Complain	.15*	.038*	✓

To explore differences between groups of “complainers” (n = 120) and “non-complainers (n = 80), t-tests were conducted, the results of which appear in Table 2. The results indicate that H5a and H5b were supported, whereas H5c and H5d were not.

**Table 1 Correlations and Hypotheses Results**

		Mean	St Dev	t	Signif	Hyp.
Self-Monitoring	Complainers	3.72	0.96			
	Non-Complainers	3.99	0.81	-2.07	.040*	✓
Perceived Control	Complainers	4.94	1.03			
	Non-Complainers	4.44	1.04	3.32	.001*	✓
Self-Efficacy	Complainers	5.53	0.78			
	Non-Complainers	5.35	0.66	1.65	.100	x
Machiavellianism	Complainers	3.57	0.97			
	Non-Complainers	3.65	1.00	-.599	.550	x

### Discussion

The results clearly indicate that there is a difference in the way in which personality characteristics relate to attitudes and propensity, in the context of complaint behavior. For example, three of the traits studied (self-efficacy, self-monitoring and perceived control) all had a significant relationship with attitudes and yet it was machiavellianism and self-efficacy that have a significant relationship with propensity to complain. However, in terms of past behaviour it appears that “complainers” are low self-monitors and rate high on perceived control. This is an interesting finding as it exhibits the strong relationship between attitude and actual behaviour. For example, perceived control (positive) and self-monitoring (negative) were both found to have significant relationships with attitude to complaining and also both were found to be significantly different between “complainers” and “non-complainers”. However, in terms of propensity to complain it was self-efficacy and Machiavellianism that were strongly related. In terms of self-efficacy, the belief in one’s capabilities to motivate oneself, use the necessary cognitive resources and take appropriate courses of action in any given situation, would indicate that they believe they also have the ability to control outcomes. Similarly, those individuals exhibiting Machiavellian traits would also be expected to believe in their ability to control situations because manipulation and persuasion is all about controlling outcomes. However, it does not necessarily mean that these beliefs in oneself equate to actual behavior as shown by the findings here in relation to

complaining behavior. Thus, the findings contradict the well-established relationship between intentions and behaviour and, in terms of complaint behaviour, the attitude, intentions and behaviour relationship made need to be more closely examined.

## **Conclusion**

The need to understand consumers, within a rapidly-changing marketplace, has never been greater. This being the case, we need to not only determine what it is that consumers want, but also what it is that they don't want. One way of doing this is to openly encourage our customers to complain when things go wrong. It is, therefore, on this basis that this study of consumer complaint behavior is justified. In fact, until we determine the factors, which influence or impede consumer complaint behaviour, we will be no closer to truly understanding the needs of our customers or achieving sustainable success.

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