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Exploring consumer conflict management in service encounters

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Abstract

Consumer researchers have yet to examine how consumers frame and deal with conflict. Understanding how consumers manage conflict is essential for service providers seeking to effectively recover instances of service failure, and avoid the costs associated with increasing instances of consumer anger. Using a modified grounded theory approach, we develop a model of consumer conflict management drawing on 39 informant accounts of service failures. The emergent model proposes that consumers' conflict style is related to whether conflict is framed in task or personal terms. Task-framed conflicts resulted in more productive conflict styles than those framed in personal terms. Self vs. other orientation moderated the relationship between conflict frame and conflict style. These findings help us better understand the nature of consumer conflict and identify the importance of carefully targeting service recovery efforts to reduce instances of anger.

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Dispute Resolution, Mediation, Arbitration | Customer Relationship Management | Mediation and Conflict Management | Consumer Behavior | Counseling Psychology | Peace and Conflict Studies | Service Recovery Dynamics in Customer Experience Management

Notes

1. To facilitate articulation of unconscious meanings and motivations, simple projective techniques were employed; informants were shown pictures from

magazines including depictions of people, nature scenes, and products. Pictures included that of an eye, people having coffee, two women kickboxing, and approximately thirty others. Probes were based on informants' own accounts and concepts from the literature (e.g., disconfirmation, forgiveness, and switching).

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