

Consumer Comfort with Service Providers: A Proposed Scale

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Abstract

We first provide our rationale for the importance of consumer comfort in the development and maintenance of relationships with service providers. Previous research in the areas of environmental psychology, social work, communication, and economics suggested the importance of comfort in successful interactions. While comfort can be described in relation to either the physical or psychological human experience, we focus on the psychological aspect of comfort as it relates to interactions with service providers.

Secondly, we report findings from our qualitative study that reinforced the importance of comfort in relationships with service providers. Informants in the study recounted experiences with service providers that revealed something about the nature of comfort in these interactions. We provide illustrative comments from the qualitative research to reinforce our findings.

Thirdly, we report the steps we have taken to produce a valid scale of consumer comfort. Such a scale is necessary to further understanding of this construct and its impact on successful relationships with service providers. We define the construct and outline each step of the scale development process. This multi-step process included steps to judge the content, internal, and construct validity of the scale. Further, we assessed composite reliability, as well as convergent and discriminant validity, using structural equation modeling techniques across two samples. These assessments resulted in a scale of comfort that exhibited reliability and validity.

The introduction of comfort into the marketing literature may provide an expanded understanding of the nature of customer relationships. The development of the comfort scale will allow empirical research to follow that could address the domain, properties, and consequences of comfort in the context of customer relationships. This research comes at a timely juncture where researchers have shown increasing interest for studies that focus on relationships customers have with a variety of businesses.

Note: For more information about this paper, please contact the authors.