

# Reprisal, retribution and requital: Investigating customer retaliation <sup>☆</sup>

Venessa Funches <sup>a</sup>, Melissa Markley <sup>b,\*</sup>, Lenita Davis <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> PO Box 244023, Auburn Montgomery, Montgomery, AL 36124, United States

<sup>b</sup> PO Box 870225, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, United States

<sup>c</sup> 132 Alston Hall, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487, United States

Received 1 June 2007; received in revised form 1 November 2007; accepted 1 January 2008

## Abstract

Customers, regardless of context or culture, will go to any extreme to retaliate against an offending service provider. Retaliation is an action taken in return for an injury or offense [Huefner, J.C. and H.K. Hunt, “Consumer retaliation as a response to dissatisfaction,” *J Consum Satisf Dissatisfaction Complaining Behav*, (2000); 13, 61–82.]. To date, research has had only a limited discussion of customer’s use of anti-consumption behaviors as an expression of retaliation. This study uses qualitative methods to demonstrate that the motivations for retaliation extend beyond simply “getting even,” customers retaliate to teach the service provider a lesson or to save others from the same fate. The research identifies specific roles taken by customers as they retaliate, the emotions of customers and store issues that are at the root of these behaviors. In addition, the authors categorize a range of retaliatory behaviors as follows: cost/loss; consumption prevention; voice, exit and betrayal; and boycotting.

© 2008 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Retaliation; Qualitative methods; Personal interviews; Customer behavior; Anti-consumption

Revenge is profitable, gratitude is expensive. (Gibbon, 1776)

## 1. Introduction

One day in 1997, Richard Hatch rode to his local Wal-Mart at 7 a.m. to be the first in line to buy a new batch of Tamagotchis — a popular Japanese electronic “pet”. During the purchase he got into a shouting match with a Wal-Mart employee and as a result was banned from the store. In retaliation, Hatch hired a Web design expert and launched [Walmartsucks.com](http://Walmartsucks.com), a site devoted to attacking this retailer. The site became a popular

public forum for disgruntled Wal-Mart customers and employees. Wal-Mart was so threatened by the site that its attorneys sent a letter to Hatch threatening “necessary action” unless the site was taken down within 48 hours. Hatch ignored the threat and the complaint site has since been used by millions and featured in the popular press. The success of [Walmartsucks.com](http://Walmartsucks.com) has inspired other disgruntled shoppers, and sparked the creation of a variety of brand and retailer complaint websites ([www.businessweek.com/](http://www.businessweek.com/)).

While Hatch’s retaliation was motivated by revenge, some customers engage in retaliatory behaviors for more noble reasons such as protecting others from harm. For example, a group of disgruntled business people retaliated against a hotel, whose night clerk gave away their guaranteed room reservation. The group retaliated by drafting a scathing PowerPoint presentation about their experiences. The presentation outlined the inadequacies of the frontline staff and the cost of not addressing this problem to the hotel management. When the business people sent the presentation to hotel management they also forwarded it to friends and relatives so that they would be protected from a similar fate (<http://www.hyperorg.com>). The

<sup>☆</sup> All authors contributed equally to this paper. The authors thank Micki Kacmar and Bruce Weinberg for their help in reviewing this paper. They also thank the guest editors and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [vfunches@aum.edu](mailto:vfunches@aum.edu) (V. Funches), [mmarkley@cba.ua.edu](mailto:mmarkley@cba.ua.edu) (M. Markley), [ldavis@cba.ua.edu](mailto:ldavis@cba.ua.edu) (L. Davis).

presentation was spread virally throughout the Internet and was featured in several national publications and news outlets. These sorts of incidences demonstrate the damage an angry customer can inflict, and the importance of having corporate reputation strategies that manage retaliation — specifically Internet complaint sites (Bailey, 2004).

Oftentimes scarcity prevents customers from ending their consumption practices; there are no alternatives, so they retaliate by making transactions difficult or costly. For example, a Brazilian man gained notoriety by retaliating against a store in Rio de Janeiro. Ernesto Do Couto waited in line for almost six hours to have his credit checked, only for it to be rejected. Mr. Couto then saved 32,052 coins over two years to pay for his next purchases at the shop. The transaction required 11 shop assistants and lasted three hours. After the incident Mr. Couto said “I spent two years putting all the coins together, it was a lot of work, but I feel that I’ve got my revenge now.” (<http://www.int.iol.com.za>).

Customers, regardless of context or culture, will go to extremes to exact their revenge. Acts of anti-consumption and the solicitation of social support are the key tools used in retaliation. This behavior is done by the withholding of consumption, the seeking of unlimited amounts of social support through negative word of mouth, and/or the creation of public displays of protest. These incidences also show that the motives for retaliation go beyond simply getting even.

Acts of customer retaliation are somewhat common. Customer/employee altercations comprise thirty percent of workplace violence incidents according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health ([www.crimelibrary.com](http://www.crimelibrary.com)). The stories cited earlier illustrate that customer retaliation can be damaging; therefore, it represents a significant threat to service providers. Given that customer retaliation can result in significant material loss, psychological damage to employees,

or a thrashing of brand image (Fullerton and Punj, 1997; p. 336), further examination of this relationship is warranted.

Retaliation typically occurs in response to a perceived injustice and is a way to restore one’s sense of justice (Murphy, 1993). Retaliation can be fueled by a customer’s lack of patience, dissatisfaction with a product or service, discourteous service from the provider, and/or mistakes or promises that are not kept ([www.crimelibrary.com](http://www.crimelibrary.com)). While there has been some work on categorizing retaliatory behaviors, little is known about the motivations or cognitive processing that customers use to choose a particular behavior.

Huefner and Hunt (2000) identify six categories for customer retaliation as a response to a dissatisfying service experience - cost/loss, vandalism, trashing, stealing, negative word of mouth, and personal attack (see Table 1).

The current research builds upon this prior work by looking at situational and emotional antecedents of retaliation and how these precursors affect the types of retaliatory behavior used by customers against service providers. This research will ultimately guide service providers to better anticipate and diminish either the occurrence, or the severity, of customer’s retaliatory behaviors, in addition to calling on researchers to expand the range of emotions, behaviors, and intent considered when developing anti-consumption theory.

## 2. Retaliatory behavior

Retaliation is “an action taken in return for an injury or offense” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000), while a retaliatory customer is one who works to get even with a service or retail provider. Retaliation is studied in a variety of disciplines and contexts including strategy and management (Kuester et al., 1999) where the research shows that it is a common occurrence. However, some researchers incorrectly

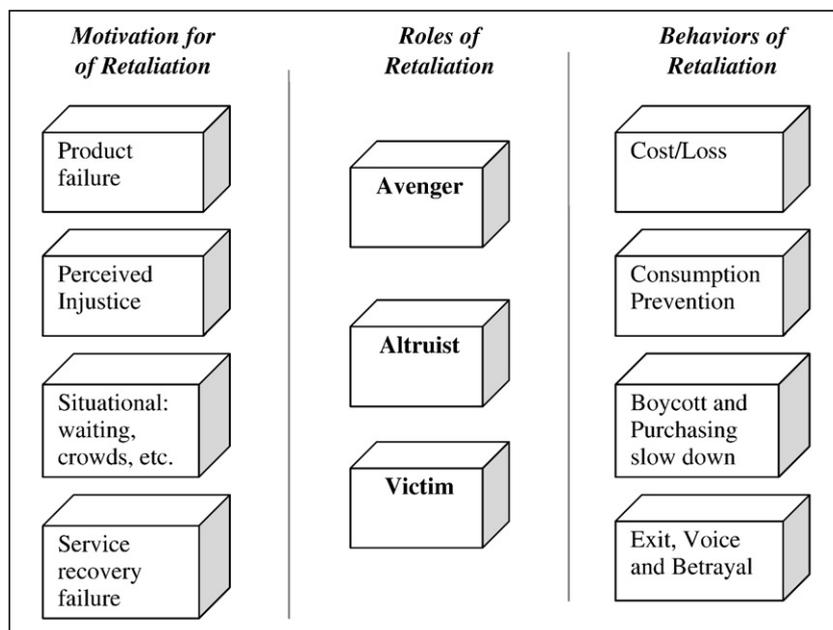


Fig. 1.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات