CONSUMER PROBLEMS WITH SERVICE INDUSTRIES
By Thomas Snyder
Vice President of the Advisory Board of the Bureau of Electronic Repair Dealers Registration

The two problems in any repair industry, and particularly in the television repair industry, are incompetence and fraud and dishonesty. Our approach in this law has been to run the crooks out of business and to let the incompetents go out of business on their own.

This is a very basic distinction between our type of law and the usual licensing law which takes the position that the way you get incompetents out is by testing them and by raising standards for admission to the industry. What it results in is sooner or later the industry has a monopoly on people that get in and the industry is potentially closed; then it can start price fixing and various other things.

There is sufficient fraud to keep us occupied. Fraud can take many forms. Now the law is set up so that we are supposed to have field investigators who go out spot-checking television repair dealers. They are supposed to run sets that have been previously checked through a shop and see whether the itemization on the bill corresponds with the work that was actually done.

The problem is that we do not have enough of these investigators, we do not have enough independent laboratories, so that in the year that we have been in business we have had to restrict ourselves to our follow-up complaints. We have not yet gone through to an on-the-spot check basis, as the law calls for, and have restricted ourselves to checking those dealers against whom there have been complaints.

The basic outline of the law is that everybody who does TV repair has to register, and in order to make the law work this has to be almost 100% effective. By registering, all you get is the name and business address and $35. But this list then enables you to conduct your spot-checks and to make sure that you know whom you are dealing with. And the public is starting to know that we exist. Very frequently, just the existence of the bureau will make the TV service dealer responsive to complaints.

A PROFILE OF CONSUMER COMMUNICATORS AND THEIR PROBLEMS
By Lillian H. Mohr
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In his book, "The Psychological Analysis of Economic Behavior," George Katona justifies a premature exposition of new research with the statement, "...a systematic presentation of a new point of view fulfills an important function at an early stage of research. Future research is bound to be stimulated..."

It is with this thought that I present some views on consumer communications and the interdisciplinary research potentials of consumer communications, based on an admittedly limited study.

The study is concerned with a particular aspect of the consumers' "right to be heard." This "Fourth Right," you may recall, was described in the First Report of the Consumer Advisory Council as the "recurring theme" of the "Special Message on Protecting the Consumer Interest" delivered to Congress by the late President Kennedy on March 15, 1962, and reiterated by President Johnson on February 5, 1964.

They emphasized the need for "new arrangements" because of the failure of governmental machinery to provide a clear-cut channel of communications for consumers. (Business has a similar problem. With the exception of certain marketing research, the "feedback circuit" for communications from consumers is informal, haphazard and devoid of possibilities for quantitative analysis.)

The Problem: Scientific Analysis of Consumer Communications

Consumers' voluntary, unsolicited, written communications to public agencies, as far as I can determine, have been:

- Handled, acknowledged or acted upon, generally on an ad hoc basis. Of course, this is highly appropriate. Most consumers are corresponding about a particular problem that requires handling in a special way.
- The recipient, or recipient organization, has used these for illustrative purposes. The president's special assistant for consumer affairs ably demonstrated this use of consumers' letters during last year's Senate hearings on the changing structure of the food marketing industry.
- Collections are used to support proposed legislation. However, because correspondence is frequently dispersed and spasmodic, it can be difficult to get an adequate collection together. The Cooperative League has a unique approach to this problem. By sending the Cooperative League a carbon copy of a letter written to our legislator regarding some proposed bill, we get a subscription to