

Title: Aggression against Computers

Contribution: Lecture

Author: Drs. Marleen Brinks

Address: E-Mail: marleen.brinks@web.de

Focus: Interactive market and social research: Online-Surveys

Keywords: Aggression Frustration Computers

Abstract text

Several studies of PC-manufacturers and software companies show that computers are beaten and sworn at in a considerable extent. Hardly any research on the phenomenon “aggression against computers” has been done so far in the academic field; the studies on this theme are of non-traceable quality.

The objectives of this study are getting an impression of the extent and the variety of this phenomenon and finding theoretical explanations for it. Furthermore, the causes and consequences of computer-frustration and -aggression are described and suggestions for reduction are made.

The research-questions are answered both through a literature-search and an online-survey. The questionnaire was online in June 2003 and had 480 respondents.

From the literature, the theory was derived that states that computer-aggression is caused by suboptimal usability, poor software and insufficient handling-skills. Furthermore, in order to really feel provoked by ones pc, one must have the feeling to be in real interaction with it. Stress is mainly caused by being under time-pressure while trying to reach important goals (missing deadlines or not being able to keep promises). The theory was tested by means of an analysis of the data which were collected in the online-survey.

The survey-data confirm the level of aggression described in the literature. 62% of the respondents indicate to have sworn or yelled at their PCs; 31% have hit the mouse on the table or thrown with it, 15% have hit the display or kicked the case. In accordance with the literature, computer-frustration correlates significantly with work- and life-satisfaction (resp. 0,30 and 0,26).

The most aggressive towards the PC are persons, who have a personal relationship with it, who are rather young, do not deprecate violence in general and who have colleagues, which also behave

aggressively towards their PCs. These findings correspond with the hypotheses derived from the theory. A correlation between frustration and aggression was not found, which is most likely due to shortcomings in the operationalisation.

PC aggression is a real phenomenon, which deserves more attention in the academic field. PC-frustration and aggression are causing damage, both on personal as well as on micro- and macroeconomic level.