An Overview of Consumer Complaining Behavior and the Choice of Complaint Channels in Service Industry

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An Overview of Consumer Complaining Behavior and the Choice of Complaint Channels in Service Industry

Ataul Karim Patwary[1] and Hamimi Omar[2]

ABSTRACT

In extensive view of consumers' complaint behavior research area, choosing specific complaint channels has been considered as a phenomenon. Although, existing literatures explored much on the consumption behavior of products and services, exploring on the choice of complaint channels still in infancy level. Moreover, investigation of channel-choice for complaining is not done extensively. This study provides a brief overview on complaint responses and classifications of consumer complaining behavior (CCB). Consequently, a suitable classification of complaint reactions with regard to complaint channels is discussed in details. The researchers suggested three aspects which are vital for service providers in order to retain existing consumers and seek for new consumers and acquire positive word of mouth; (1) the service providers required to encourage consumers to make complains (2) complaint channels should be easily accessible for consumers and (3) existence of smooth complaint handling process. The development of this extensive literature review, suggestions and conceptualization would be helpful for researchers while they aim for further empirical investigation of consumers complaining behavior and complaint channels.

Keywords: Consumer Complaining Behavior, Complaint Channels, and Dissatisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer complaint behaviour is an important part of the service industry which depends on satisfaction and retention of customer. Avoiding service failure is not always possible for farms (Ashwini & Kane, 2014) and in order to correct those failures, customer complaint is the healthy approach (Susskind, 2005). Several studies (Gountas & Gountas, 2007; Gursoy, McCleary, & Lepsito, 2007; & Chen, 2010; Singh, 1990) have been conducted to identify and examine why consumers

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put up complain, they discovered that some factors affect consumers' intention of making a complain, such as behavioral, demographic, and personality factors. According to Gursoy et al., (2007) and Jones et al., (2002), some other factors alike, interpersonal influence, locus of control, psychological stress, and price consciousness may trigger to a consumer's tendency towards reporting a complain.

Two key reasons are involved in order to broaden the Customer Complaint Behavior (CCB) as choosing an appropriate channel for resolving a complaint is one of the important consumer decisions. First, it is more likely for consumers not to take action to ease marketplace problems (Stephens and Gwinner, 1998). If consumers decide not to report their problem to the organization, there will be no chance to identify and address the problem (Maute and Forrester, 1993). Perceiving the complaint channel decision is subject to client's motivation on complaining, firms ought to endeavor to make both intelligent and remote complaint channels accessible. Past work on CCB has distinguished change seeking (e.g. Blodgett et al., 1997) and venting of dissatisfaction (e.g. Nyer, 1997) as two principle inspirations for buyer activities, yet no earlier study has analyzed how purchasers (once having settled on direct complaining) choose between accessible channels of complains (e.g. up close and personal or email). Earlier research has built up that consumers have three essential choices when confronted with a disappointing utilization experience (Day and Landon, 1977; Singh, 1988). To start with, clients can make private move by disassociating themselves with an administration supplier and by participating in abusing. Secondly, disappointed consumers can make circuitous move by complaining to an outsider. Thirdly, consumers can make direct move by lodging an objection with the administration supplier.

2. METHODOLOGY

In current study, the researchers relied on existing literature to explore consumers' complaining behavior and some extensive discussions on their choice of complaint channels. In this review study, which has examined the perspective of consumers' in terms of making their complaints and choosing complaint channels based on existing literature. Throughout the study, the researchers have conducted a general search for consumers' behavior, and stepwise more specifically on consumers' complaint behaviors while dissatisfaction occurs, choice of their complaint channels. Researchers gathered the information by searching in different online database sources such as Google Scholars, Springer Link, Research Gate, Wiley, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, JSTOR, Emerald, Scopus, Repository of Universiti Utara Malaysia Library, WorldCAT, and EBSCO HOST etc. During the searching of articles, the researchers have tried to figure out the most relevant articles, conference proceedings, books, published dissertations in order to provide an extensive review of the topic and as

well as to provide legitimate suggestions for future study. The review has been examined on the basis of research objectives, methods and findings of the study in accordance with previous empirical and conceptual studies on that particular subject area.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Consumer Complaining Behavior

Consumer's complaint is considered as a vital aspect while measuring the healthiness of a service provider. "Recovery cannot occur without a complaint" (Singh & Wilkes, 1996, p. 353). Singh (1990) recognized consumers complain behavior as one of the reaction styles when dissatisfaction occurs. In this manner, complains are really the reactions occur once the disappointment faced. These sorts of activities may be incorporated with others, switching to another company, advising loved ones and whining to an authorized agency. The reactions styles can be arranged in two categories, such as the group of people who complains (action) and do not complain (no action) (Mason & Himes, 1973). The consumers who complain with the expectation of getting some remedies are categorized in action group, and others, are named no activity bunch. As categorized by Warland et al. (1975), consumers' complaint behavior comprised of two types of action, upset action and upset no action. They contended that consumer would not report any complain although they are not satisfied with the service; they see them as upset but not taking any action category. Else, they are in the category of dissatisfied. This classification still remains relevant and basic to the study of consumer complaint behavior till today, even though subsequent researchers have different labels for these styles, such as complainers and non-complainers and activists and non-activists (Singh, 1990).

Figure 1: Taxonomy of Customer Complain Behavior
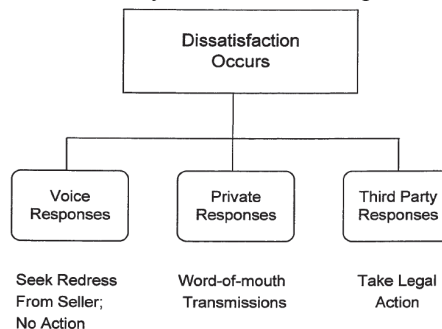
Source: Singh, (1990)

Day and Landon (1977) put forward a schema for CCB which classifies in the two-level hierarchy order. Non-behavioral responses (no action) and behavioral

(action) is divided in the first level, whereas the difference between public actions (e.g. consumer advocate group receiving a complain) and private actions (e.g. WOM) are identified and highlighted in the second level. Day (1980) recommended that a different typology can be provided through complaint intentions (personal boycott, complaining and redress seeking) as an addition to the primary model. Richins (1983) identified that the behavior of complaining consists of minimum three activities which can be complaining to the seller, sharing purchase/consumption experience with others and also switching.

Singh (1990) in the end classified complainers into four different types:

> (1) Passives – not r eally any or little action oriented people.
> (2) Voicers – Active complainer to service provider.
> (3) Irates – Private responders.
> (4) Activists – formal third party complainer.

The literature points out that, achieving the best possible satisfaction through avoidance of failure of service should be the main objective or goal of the company. Then again, service failure is an obvious incident that happens in real world, however, to attain a second chance one must acquire the skill to manage the occurrence. A consumer is not only complaining to the service provide but also spread the information like fire in the woods to that particular person's relative, family, friends, complaining to consumer council and by letter to the higher management, stopping patronage and also diverting to mass media (Heung and Lam, 2003). Complaint letters, writing to the newspaper or reporting to council of consumer, writing comment card and also verbal complain to retailer/manufacturer all these can be the public actions that a consumer can do (Heung and Lam, 2003).

3.2 Consumer Complaint Channels

Consumers choose different channels with which to express their dissatisfaction with a service or product. Susskind (2006) has categorized these types of complaint, (1) face-to-face with manager, (2) face-to-face with employee, (3) written (letter, e-mail, Internet), and (4) reporting complain on the comment card. According to Berry et, al. (2014), as observed by the researchers and marketers, the latest method of making the complaint is in social media, as it is growing widespread rapidly. Day and Landon's (1977) work can be expanded by embodying channel choice into the model (look into the proposed 4th level of the model, after a decision have been made to go for an action of formal complaint, depending on the level of interaction related with that specific channel any consumer can select in between a medium of complaint. Example of interactive channel can be over phone calls or complaining on the spot or through face-to-face sit-up interviews and e-mail or letter postage are the forms of communication which are in written format. The service providers address the issues and solve almost 64.8 percent of complains made by the consumers. In the

circumstance that the students text, call or meet in person they can also complain to them as well. On the other hand, through social networking platform such as My Space or Facebook and by using email the students can share their experience. Lastly, with the use of traditional medium complain can be made by student. Traditional methods like posting flyers throughout the campus, an article in the local newspaper, launching law suits, hate webpages, through Facebook public groups, also by evaluation websites from professor (e.g., RateMyProfessor.com) and sending bulk emails. Roughly or commonly speaking, students complain can be addressed to friends, school and either in person or using the web and others. To refer to the conventional methods of complain such as text messaging, phone conversations and local newspaper articles all of the above can be phrased into "in person". And the phrase "using the web" refers to all Internet and web technologies including instant messaging, e-mail, website, online evaluation of professor, participating in a social networking website like creating, posting or reading blogs and tweets
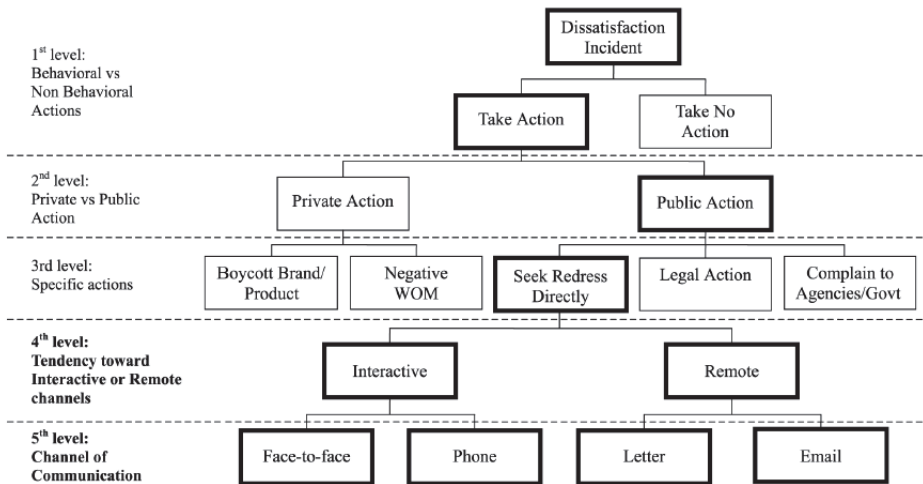
Source: *Adapted from Day and Landon (1977) and expanded by Mattila and Wirtz (2004)*

Figure 2: *An extension of Day and Landon's (1977) classification of consumer complaining behavior*

Therefore, the decision of whether to file a complaint with the provider or not is restricted by the aforementioned rules and allows the consumers little choice. Hirschman (1970) has made the classification for consumers' responses when service failure occurs, main aspects of this classification are voice, exit or loyalty. Voice is referring to active action; usually it happens when consumers express their voice immediately to report the complaint. Exit refers to the situation where consumers do not make any complaint and simply stop purchasing from that specific provider. Loyalty is a passive is sort of response which is done passively, in where the consumers do not make any complain

although they are not happy with the services they received, and still they are willing to keep patronizing with the provider.

4. DISCUSSION ABOUT THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This study explored more on consumers complaining behaviours and choice of complaint channels. From consumers' perspective, the decision of starting the complaint will next lead to the seeking the site to report the complaint. As agreed with previous research, there are various alternative channels available where consumers tend to report or possibly report for their dissatisfied experience, such as the service provider, government agencies, consumer organizations, mass media, and even going to court (Garín-Muñoz, et, al. 2015). This research also highlights the indication of consumers' intention while they experience dissatisfaction, consumers tend to voice the complains to other people rather than reporting it to service providers (e.g. Blodgett et al., 1995; Mittal et al., 2001; Oliver, 1986; Richins, 1983). However, it should be taken into consideration that, it is more harmful for a company is not receiving the complaints from dissatisfied consumers. The service providers ought to encourage the consumers to report the complaint, otherwise the consequence of their dissatisfied experience might lead to manifest in several negative behaviours, such in negative behaviours such as badmouthing, complaints to third-parties, boycotts, and/or exits. Easy and accessible complaining channels for the consumers would encourage to proceed with upcoming steps in order to report the complaint.

As discussed earlier, company should have the goal of maximizing effective complaint channels, such as interactive and remote channels, and simultaneously the anonymity of respondents needs to be maintained wherever required. Garín-Muñoz, et, al. (2015) added that, in order to retain the consumers, it is compulsory for service providers to promote customer complaints and make the proper solutions upon it. According to Pearce, (2005), in the field of tourism and service related research, researchers are heavily lying on theories from consumers' consumption behavior. In this circumstances, unique characteristics of tourism and service industry have been skipped lightly (Ekiz et, al. 2012). CCB has received wide attention since the seminal work by Hirschman (1970): the exit, voice and loyalty theory. According to this theory, a consumer facing dissatisfaction with a good (product or service), takes one of three possible actions: stop buying from the firm (exit), express discomfort with the current situation (voice), or remain silent (loyalty). Hirschman implied that a rational individual would choose his or her response following a thorough reasoning process that involves evaluating the costs and benefits of each action and its probability of success: for example, a loyal customer would choose to silently remain with the firm, believing that the costs of either complaining or searching for another supplier, would outweigh the likelihood of an improvement. Social media allows consumers to communicate directly with the company (Vinerean,

Dumitrescu, & Tichindelean, 2013). Its usage has been demonstrated to have a relationship with the fi rm's ability to manage relationships with customers (Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Complaining on social media has increased and it is expected to go on increasing in the future (Tripp, Gregoire, & Business, 2011).

Beforehand disclosing the reasons prompting the choice of consumers to make complain (or not to complain), it might be valuable to clear up that a complaint ought not be translated as being something negative for service providers. Despite what might be expected, Reichheld and Sasser (1990) contend that a set number of complaints ought to be considered as an early cautioning signal. Ndubisi and Ling, (2006) added by agreeing with that, nonattendance of complaints makes it more troublesome for the administration supplier to know when and why clients are despondent. Complaining to the organization from the individuals who complain through different channels, in any case it is not measured or even distinguished that much by previous authors which are the channels.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE WORK

The perspective might urge the complaint behaviour while evolving or inhibiting it on the grounds that, for instance, a complaint channel has been missed out or presently, the complaint procedure is excessively confused. The connection comprises of all conditions encompassing the client in the complaint procedure, from the underlying negative occurrences. This incorporates the physical environment, market circumstances, organization related issues, and so on. According to Best and Andreasen, (1977); Grainer et al. (1979), there is adequate exploration on the antecedents of negative informal, consumers' inclination to specifically complain to service providers used to receive insufficient consideration. In the context of marketing research, many scholars attempted to figure out or investigate on why people used to choose certain channels to express their dissatisfied experience, however these researches mostly done in shopping sector.

Since the burst of the internet bubble multi-channelling has gained attention in the field of marketing, because: Predictions that nimble, virtual sellers will replace inefficient brick-and-mortar retailers are fading as analysts realize that markets of the future will contain a mix of channels (Balasubramanian, 2005). Generally, the reason of building up a new channel of communication with consumers, the main goal of service providers will be understanding the consumers, their preferences easily and effectively (Lipsman, Mudd, Rich, & Bruich, 2012). In order maintain constructive relation with consumers and having goal of retaining them, service providers need to concern not only to the factors related with customer satisfaction, but also the way consumers used to interact

and express their voice social media pages and other sources (Pinto & Mansfi eld, 2012). In line with previous researches, these three aspects are suggested for service providers in order to retain existing consumers and seek for new consumers and acquire positive word of mouth; (1) the service providers required to encourage consumers to make complains (2) complaint channels should be easily accessible for consumers and (3) existence of smooth complaint handling process. Further study requires providing some empirical evidence based on these aspects and would investigate the relationship between consumers' complaint behaviour and complaint channels. Future study needs to investigate these aspects empirically in order generalize the findings with appropriate measurement.

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