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### Evaluation of Consumer Complaints in Five-Star Hotels: The Case of Eskişehir

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#### Abstract

Complaints arise when a company does not satisfy the expectations of consumers who buy its products or services. From a consumer's perspective, complaining is a negative act. It is thus very important for enterprises to solve problems derived from CC. Based on these premises this study aims to assess complaints and complaint-associated behaviors of consumers who visited Eskişehir. This study is descriptive, and the questionnaire used for data collection is adapted from the questionnaire developed by Kılıç & Ok (2013) in their study "Consumer Complaints & Evaluation of Complaints in Hotels". The research population is sampled from tourists staying at five-star hotels in Eskişehir. Data collection is based on convenience sampling. It is found that tourists who stayed at Eskişehir are mostly complaining about low service quality and lack of hygiene and sanitation.

**Keywords:** Complaint behavior, Tourist, Eskişehir.

Jel Classification: M1, M19, M39.

## INTRODUCTION

Complaints are described as negative consumer feedback (Bell, Menguc & Stefani, 2004: 116). They arise when a company does not satisfy the expectations of consumers who buy products or services from that company (Lapre & Tsikriktsis, 2006: 352). From a consumer's perspective, complaining is a negative act. Fornell & Westbrook (1979: 105) describe complaints as a customer's way of showing his/her frustration when faced with a disappointing product or service or unfair business practices. Jacoby & Jaccard (1981:6) explain complaints as a consumer's negative behavior with regard to a product/service, behavior that can be aimed at its manufacturer, retailer or wholesaler or at third parties such as public or legal associations or even other consumers.

Complaint behavior (CB) is a fairly complex process, resulting from a number of different factors (Singh & Widing, 1991: 33; Usta, 2002: 108; Sariyer, 2003: 6). These factors include (1) dissatisfaction with the product, (2) manufacturer's or seller's reputation, (3) manufacturer's or seller's accessibility, (4) manufacturer's or seller's readiness to exchange the product, (5) consumer's personal traits, attitudes and motivations, (6) expected value of time, (7) information asymmetry, (8) consumer's socio-demographic profile, (9) consumer's readiness to assume the label of complainant, (10) expectations with regards to the product, (11) consumer's tendency to believe in positive or negative rumors about the product and (12) society's tendency to complain (Kılıç, 1992: 49).

It is very important for enterprises to solve problems derived from CC. Preventing complaints or providing prompt satisfactory solutions to complaints underlies profitability and consumer loyalty (Barış, 2006: 54-55). It has been shown that consumer satisfaction is higher following suitable handling of complaints than when no service error has been experienced at all (Gilly & Hansen, 1985: 5-16; McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000: 122). Enterprises' efforts at handling CC and improving their level of service increase consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Successful service improvement increases consumer satisfaction, re-purchasing/re-visiting and the tendency to speak positively about the company. Inversely, unsuccessful service improvement causes a second negative effect, compounding the effect of the first failure (Ekiz, Araslı, Farivarsadri & Bavik, 2008: 44).

Consumers conduct a cost-benefit analysis before

deciding to complain; that is, they compare the costs derived from complaining with the benefits. The perceived value of complaining will determine whether it is worthwhile to the consumer (Kim, Kim, Im & Shin, 2003: 354; Eşkinat, 2009: 90). Based on a review of the literature, factors that increase the tendency to complain include the following (Barış, 2006: 71):

- thought of obtaining satisfactory results after complaining,
- feeling that the enterprise is enthusiastic about handling the problem,
- positive attitudes toward complaining behavior,
- importance of the product to the consumer,
- low cost of complaining,
- expectation that the problem is temporary,
- thought that if the consumer does not complain, others may be harmed,
- belief that complaining is beneficial to society, and
- perception that the problem can be controlled..

The biggest problem for companies is consumers' tendency to stop using its product or service without making any complaint (Phau & Sari, 2004: 409). According to Barış (2006: 54-55), 96% of dissatisfied consumers choose not to complain and select alternative approaches, including abandoning that company. Some reasons consumers choose not to complain include (Kozak, 2007: 141) (1) lack of time and competency to complain, (2) lack of knowledge about where and how to complain and (3) belief that there is nothing to be done.

CC is mostly product-based for manufacturing companies. For service-providing companies, however, CC is triggered by staff, the consumer him/herself and/or various environmental factors (Sujithamrak & Lam, 2005: 296). Services have specific characteristics such as not being stocked and being intangible. These characteristics make it hard to obtain information about the service, to recall deficient services or to return a service. Therefore, enterprises in the service sector have to be more sensitive to consumer complaints (Bayraktaroğlu, 2003: 322).

The perception that complaining is a safe, harmless, friendly, helpful, and necessary action should be encouraged. Negativity and criticism should be welcomed and facilitated, and an award should even be given for negativity and criticism. It should be acknowledged that unless complaining is encouraged, only the most fierce, unpleasant and hostile consumers will provide feedback, in which case, much precious information will be lost (Kaya, 2004: 96).

### METHODOLOGY

This study uses a survey method. A self-created questionnaire was used to collect data. In total, 30 items were included in the questionnaire. Five of these items are open-/closed-ended and multiple-choice questions covering demographic data. Eleven items are related to the accommodation process. Fourteen items pertain to the scale that is used. The original scale was developed

components. Factor analysis applicability was measured with the Bartlett test of sphericity, and adequacy of sample size was determined with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value. Additionally, to understand the relationship between variables, correlation and regression tests are executed. The test results are given below.

As seen in Table 1, 47,8% of participants are female and 49,7% are male; 2,5% did not answer that question. Approximately 39% of the participants' ages range between 18 and 29 years. The smallest group in the age category is 50-59 years (7,2%). Nearly half of the participants' marital status is single (46,3%). Additionally, nearly half of the participants have a bachelor's degree (45,9%), and nearly half earn approximately €700-1700 per month (45,9%). Approximately a quarter of the participants have visited the same hotel more than once. Many of the participants (43,4%) found the hotel on the internet.

**Table 1.** Demographic Findings

		n	%			n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	153	47.8	<b>Monthly Income (TL)</b>	2000 and less	115	35.9
	Male	159	49.7		2001-5000	147	45.9
	Missing value	8	2,50		5001 and more	44	13.7
			Missing value		14	4,4	
<b>Age</b>	18-29	125	39.1	<b>Number of visiting this company</b>	1	16	5
	30-39	90	28.1		2	36	11.3
	40-49	52	16.3		3	19	5.9
	50-59	23	7.2		4	7	2.2
	60 +	24	7.5		5 and more	11	3.4
	Missing value	6	1,9		Missing value	231	72,2
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	99	30.9	<b>Where did you know this company?</b>	Recommendation	83	25.9
	Single	148	46.3		Tv Programmes	26	8.1
	Divorced	62	20.0		Internet	139	43.4
Missing value	9	2,8	Experience		19	5.9	
<b>Education</b>	High School	68	21.3		Travel Agency	59	18.4
	Undergraduate	54	16.9		Fairs	24	7.5
	Graduate	147	45.9				
	Postgraduate	31	9.7				
	Missing value	20	6,3				

by Kılıç & Ok (2012) in their study "Consumer Complaints and Evaluation of Complaints in Hotels". The questionnaire was fielded between November 2013 and December 2013 to 320 participants, who were tourists staying at two five-star hotels in Eskişehir. The participants were selected using the convenience sampling method. Data analysis was performed with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20 for Windows. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with the methods of varimax rotation and principal

The most common causes of complaints are (1) low service quality (30%), (2) lack of hygiene and sanitation (27,2%), (3) lack of F&B services (19,7%), (4) inconsistency between advertisement and service provided (19,4%) and (5) unfriendly behavior of the staff (18,1%) / communication problems with the staff (18,1%).

**Table 2.** Reasons of CCB

Reasons of CCB	n	%
Lack of Physical Apperiance	50	15.6
Low service quality	96	30
Lack of Hygene&Sanitation	87	27.2
Lack of F&B	63	19.7
Lack of Information	34	10.6
Failure on keeping promises	29	9.1
Incimpability between advertisements-given service	62	19.4
Communication problems of staff	58	18.1
Unkind behaviours of the staff	58	18.1
Lack of quantity of the staff	57	17.8
Lack of Security	29	9.1
Noisy environment	35	10.9
Problems of extra services like being expensive	29	9.1

As seen in Table 3 (answers to multiple-choice questions about complaint attitudes), participants are complaining mostly about the housekeeping (41,3%) and F&B (40,3%) departments. Furthermore, their first

According to Table 4, the KMO value shows that the sample size is adequate (KMO = 0.909). In addition, the results of the Bartlett test of sphericity ( $X^2=3701581,031 / p<0,001$ ) show that factor

**Table 3.** Complaining Attitudes of Consumers

	n	%
<b>Department related with your complaint</b>	Housekeeping	132 41.3
	F&B	129 40.3
	Front Office/Reception	96 30,0
	Other	23 7.2
<b>Reaction after CCB</b>	Newer visit same hotel again	191 59.7
	Warn family and friends	140 43.8
	Change the hotel	85 26.6
	I do nothing	25 7.8
<b>Complaining to...</b>	Hotel management	196 61.3
	Related department's staff	149 46.6
	Other customers	58 18.1
	Media	35 10.9
<b>What do you expect after CCB?</b>	I don't	22 6.9
	An effort on problem solving	152 47.5
	Get the Money back	111 34.7
	Coax	89 27.8
	A free accomodation	84 26.3
	Gifts	33 10.3

reactions are "I won't visit that hotel again" (59,7%) and "I will warn my family and friends about that hotel" (43,8%). They generally address their formal complaints to hotel management (61,3%) and related department staff (46,6%). They mostly expect from the hotel "an effort at problem solving" (47,5%) and to "get the money back" (34,7%).

analysis can be implemented. The results of factor analysis show that variables are grouped into two factors and explain 64,324% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha value for each factor is satisfactory (Factor 1  $\alpha=0,934 /$  Factor 2  $\alpha=0,795$ ).

**Table 4.** Factor Analysis

Scale Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
I took positive feedback from hotel administration about my complaints	0.854	
I saw that, hotel administration encourages complaint notification about problems that I encountered during my stay	0.844	
Hotel staff worked in coordination about solving problems that I complaint	0.819	
Hotel staff listens me carefully when I am telling problems that I encountered during my stay	0.804	
Hotel administration produced effective solutions about problems that I encountered during my stay	0.804	
I reached the complaining forms easily when I want to transmit my complaint about problems that I encountered during my stay	0.796	
My complaints are cleared completely at the right time	0.782	
Hotel administration showed efforts and made compliments for compensate problems that I encountered during my stay	0.748	
I found respondents about problems that I encountered during my stay	0.747	
Hotel's efforts on taking my complaints into consideration are made effects on my recommendation this hotel to my relatives and friends		0.852
Hotel's positive attitudes on complaints can make positive effects on my re-visit.		0.799
Hotel's attention about my complaints that I noticed during my stay can make this hotel my first choise in my next visit this destination		0.791
Hotel's attitude of taking my problems into consideration and producing effective solutions is an importing factor on my assessment of hotel's service quality		0.713
I choose this hotel even if the other hotels working in this destination give same service with lower prices		0.404
<i>Eigen values</i>	6.625	2.381
<i>Explained Variance Values of Factors (%)</i>	47.324	17.009
<i>Cronbach's Alfa</i>	0.934	0.795
<i>Explained Total Variance (%)</i>	64.324	
<i>KMO adecuacy of sample size</i>	0.909	
<i>Barlett Test of Sphericity</i>	<i>Chi-SquareValue (<math>\chi^2</math>): 3701.581</i>	Sig. (p): 0.000

Table 5 shows the results of correlation analysis. According to these results, a strong relationship is observed between satisfaction and company's attention (r=0,490). Additionally, the relationships between

According to the results, the model predicts that the relationship between CC and satisfaction is significant (p<0,001). It is found that CC has an effect on consumer satisfaction (r= 0,498) and that CC explains

**Table 5.** Correlation Analysis

	x	s.s.	Satisfaction	Company's attention	Recommendation
<b>Satisfaction</b>	5.08	1.996	1		
<b>Company's attention</b>	2.79	0.986	0.490**	1	
<b>Recommendation</b>	3.05	0.885	0.278**	0.393**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

recommendation and company's attention (0,393) and satisfaction and recommendation (r=0,278) are observed to be somewhat strong. Regression analysis is then conducted to understand the effect of CC on consumer satisfaction (Table 6).

24,4% percent of customer satisfaction. According to the model, the company's attention factor has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction. The recommendation factor, however, does not have any significant effect (p>0,05).

**Table 6.** Regression Analysis

Variable	B	Standart Error	$\beta$	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	1.842	0.385		4.788	0.000		
Company's Attention	0.908	0.108	0.451	8.432	0.000	0.843	1.186
Recommendation	0.224	0.121	0.099	1.856	0.064		
<b>R= ,498</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup>= 0.248</b>	<b><math>\Delta</math>R<sup>2</sup>= 0.244</b>	<b>Durbin-Watson= 1.677</b>				
<b>F<sub>(2,312)</sub>= 51.580</b>		<b>p&lt; 0.001</b>					

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the authors assess the reactions of consumers and the relationships between complaints and satisfaction, recommendation and company's attention. It is seen that low service quality is the first cause of CC. In the reference study, Kılıç & Ok (2013) found a noisy environment to be the first cause of CC. Eskişehir, however, is a quieter city. Consequently, in this study, a noisy environment is only the ninth cause of CC. After low service quality, the other causes of CC are lack of hygiene and sanitation, lack of F&B, inconsistency between advertising and service provided and unfriendly behavior of the staff. From this perspective, the service quality factor is found to be the leading cause of CC. Other striking results involve the departments that receive CC. The departments receiving most complaints are the housekeeping and F&B departments. These results are consistent with the main observed causes of CC.

The chief consequences in terms of consumer responses are "leaving the hotel" and "warning family and friends about the hotel". This presents a real danger to enterprises' economic sustainability. In the first case, the hotel loses paying customers. In the second, the hotel acquires a bad reputation due to adverse word-of-mouth marketing. In several studies, "switching away from the enterprise" is found to be the first response adopted by consumers (Le Claire, 1993; Sujithamrak & Lam 2005; Kitapcı, 2008; Kılıç & Ok 2013). An effective solution to CC is considered one of the key factors to generating consumer satisfaction and loyalty. As seen in Table 3, consumers complain to department staff. Training group work with department staff regarding CC can be useful. Additionally, staff can be informed regarding consumer expectations after complaints, because most consumers expect an effort from the hotel in solving the problems that gave rise to the complaint. In factor analysis, there are two factors that have a significant effect on CC. One of the factors is named "company's attention to complaint", and the other is named "recommending company to other customers". These two factors are

strongly correlated with each other. The results also show that consumer satisfaction is highly correlated with these two factors. This means that consumer satisfaction, recommending the hotel to other consumers and the company's attention to CC bolster each other.

Based on the results, the hotels operating in Eskişehir need to improve their service quality. Most complaints arise from service quality, hygiene and sanitation and food quality. Hotels intending to continue their activities need to find solutions to these problems. An in-depth investigation into the causes of low service quality at Eskişehir hotels could open a path to solutions to the problems observed in this study..

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