

Determinants affecting customer's complaint intention

A study in the context of Pakistan's retail market

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to understand the factors that influence customers' complaint intention by developing a comprehensive integrated model.

Design/methodology/approach - The research adopted a convenient sampling method and carried out surveys in department stores, supermarkets, cafeterias and convenience stores in Pakistan.

Findings - The results show that perceived value, perceived likelihood of successful complaint, the attitude toward complaining and politeness all have significant effects on the complaint intention. Also, prior experience of complaining is analyzed as the antecedents.

Practical implications - The results indicate that in order to intensify customers' attitude towards complaining, firms should increase value of a complaint and perceived likelihood of complaint along with keeping degree of politeness of a customer and introduce policies that encourages more polite customers to make direct complaint

Originality/value - In this study it has be proven that perceived value of complaint, perceived likelihood of success, attitudes toward complaint and politeness significantly affects customer's tendency to make a complaint and are important determinants. This study also explores the effect of previous complaint experience on perceived likelihood of successful complaint. This research provides a more holistic view of the determinants that affect customer's complaint behavior by taking customer's politeness in view along with other complicated structural relationships.

Keywords: Customer complaining behavior, Attitude, Loyalty, Complaints, Customer Satisfaction

Introduction

The Issue of dissatisfied customers and their behavior related to complaint has result into substantial research in recent years (Richins, 1985). The term Consumer Complaint Behavior (CCB) can be defined as an area which involves analyzing and recognizing various phases comprising different behaviors of customer at the time of Product or service failure (Butelli, 2007). In this Competitive world it is very difficult for organizations to compete, although complaints from customers are perceived as dissatisfaction from a customer but at the same time these customers provide business with the opportunity of amending the blooper's n blunders they make which causes product or service failure and help organizations to bring change and compete with the rivals (Li, 2010).

When customers face dissatisfaction associated to a product or service by companies, many of the customers either tern to the companies who offer them better products or services (they mostly are their rivals) or stay silent and transfer destructive harmful information to their immediate social circle. This type of customer's behavior often causes problem for a company which are more hazardous in nature in understanding and identifying the main issues and problems related to dissatisfaction of the customers and also to mend the mistakes and retain the valuable customer (Jin, 2009).

Therefore companies need to be dynamic in complaint management system, and complaints of customers can be managed through various ways, including Listening and valuing customers' complaint, reassuring direct complaints by the customers in order to decrease problem and take initiative to solve these problems occurred in the product or service. This can be helpful in retaining customers as well, because losing a customer can have a destructive effect on a company's shares and it can be very costly. And customers can only be retained when they are satisfied with the product or service they use, or it benefit them (Ndubis & Ling, 2005).Retaining customers is basically based on satisfying customers/consumers (Ndubis & Ling, 2005).

As the fact states that due to difference in cultures different people from different ethnicity or background tend to behave differently, researches are of considerable number when we consider Complaint Behavior of Customers in western countries. There are a few number of research made on this issue in Asian countries. Not considering the complaint behavior of the customers is carrying out difficulties for the organizations to win in the market and retain their valuable customers. In the result of when experiencing uncomplimentary in, service or product negative emotions emerge in resultantand later on activates customers initiated complains (Tronvoll, 2011).

So this study focuses on investigating inclination of consumer making complaints rather than the definite complaining behavior. And discussing frequently ignored issue in Complaint behavior. And the study focuses on the theory of Hirschman (1970) so that a more unified influencing model of consumer initiated complaint can be formed and investigate each factor and its influence on consumer initiated complaint behavior in retail industry of Pakistan. Theory of Hirschman includes (Exit, Voice, and Loyalty) factors, and this theory of Hirschman was the first one to hypothesize consumer complaint intentions, through switching

(Jin, 2009). This study designates the causes for complaint Cases, in which some of the consumers leave the organization when they experience dissatisfaction (exit), some of them even after facing dissatisfaction due to failure in product or service Stay with the organization (loyalty), and others complain to the organization for the inconvenience faced (voice)(Emir, 2011; Rizwan et al., 2013).

Literature review and hypothesis

Customer's complaint behavior

Customers complain management has secured a quite important place in the academic field of marketing research. Many previous findings answers the questions like,: what the customers do when they are dissatisfied, what actions do they take, the difference in response by different customers; why customer complains; what the complaint is aiming at; what factors contribute to customer complaint; how it would help to manage customer complaint, etc (LiYin Jin, 2010).

Usually customers show four type of complaining behaviors when they are dissatisfied. (Davidow and Dacin, 1997), namely: silent exit, negative word-of-mouth communication, direct complaint, and making complaint to a third party. silent exit, negative word-of-mouth communication and making complaint to third party is neither good for company`s image nor it helps in the improvement of the problem.. On the other side, direct complaining enables the company to gain back the customer by successfully resolving the problem and take measures to prevent the problems in future. In this study, complaint-making behavior is taken as complaining to the company directly (Rizwan et al., 2013).

According to Singh and Wilkes, direct customers` complaint is the dissatisfied customer's protest against company for compensation and these compensations can take the form of refunding, purchase return or renewal, request for service or apology, etc. (Singh and Wilkes, 1996). In reality possibility that the dissatisfied customer will complaint depends upon complaint-making tendency and contextual factors. The current study focuses on the factors in the complaint making intention of a dissatisfied customer instead of the actual complaining behavior.

Determinants of customers' complaint intentions

Developing a framework to predict and interpret customers` complaint tendency and discussing the related variables has been a hot topic among scholars.. some previous findings suggest that company`s attitude towards complaints influence possibilities of customers' complaint making (Day and Landon, 1977). Richins argues that customers` complaint tendency depends upon the severity of the problem faced by the customer regarding a product or service, price level of that product/service, and cost of making a complaint (Richins, 1980). Others are on the opinion that a customer's personality, environmental setting, and values can also make a difference. Hence there is no single answer regarding the question of customers` complaint tendency.

Perceived value of a complaint

Based on Hirschman's theory, Blodgett et al. (1993) stressed that a customer will avail the option of exit only when he fails to make direct complaint and is left with no choice, otherwise customer's tendency to complain directly to a company depends upon attitudes toward complaint, perceived value of complaint, possibility of a successful outcome. The difference between utility of gaining from a direct complaint and the cost that will be incurred on making such complaint will decide whether a customer will complain or not, and this decision depends upon the customer's subjective judgment of perceived value (LiYin Jin, 2010). Change of defected good, complimentary service, apology, refunding or discount are taken as utility by the customer where as cost includes time and energy consumed, possibility of dispute, embarrassment that a customer has to face while making a complaint (Singh, 1989). So if the perceived utility exceeds the cost, it is valuable to make a complaint, so when perceived benefits gained through direct complaint exceed the possible costs, it is valuable to make complaint hence stronger will be the customer's complaint intention, the case will be opposite if the situation is other way around. This leads us to H1 and it can be.

H1. Higher the perceived value of direct complaint is, higher will be the customer's tendency to complain.

Perceived likelihood of success

When a customer is dissatisfied and he is not sure to make a complaint call to the company, his motivation to complain highly depends on the fact that what are the chances that the complaint he will make is going to be heard and he is going to have a reward or compensation that he thinks he deserves. If there is a possibility that the complaint will be successful, if made, and customer will get the utility he expected, then customer is more likely to make complaint, (i.e. customer's complaint intention) (Singh, 1989; Richins, 1987). This argument suggests that there is a positive relationship between the perceived likelihood of success and customer complaint intention, and this fact leads us to H2 and it can be.

H2. Higher the perceived possibility of a successful outcome, higher will be the customer's tendency to complain.

Attitude towards complaint

The attitudes toward a certain behavior would influence the intention to make such a response and the final decision of whether or not to act. Similarly, a customer's attitudes toward complaint making itself will affect the tendency to complain. Such attitudes can be termed the subjective belief in the legitimacy of a dissatisfied customer's obtaining compensation from the company (Richins, 1987). Some believe that it is sensible to make complaint and tend to hold a more positive attitude toward obtaining compensation through complaining, while others think negatively and hence are less likely to make a complaint directly to company. The final decision whether to take an action or not is influenced by attitude towards those actions. Similarly, a customer's tendency to complain is influenced by attitudes toward complaint. Some studies suggest that if the customer's attitude is positive towards making complaint by keeping a positive attitude that compensation will be given than customer's

tendency of making direct complaint increases (LiYin Jin, 2010). Hence there is a positive relationship between customers` positive towards complaining and trendy to make complaint.

H3. Higher the positive attitude toward complaining is, higher will be the customers` tendency to complain.

Politeness

Politeness has been defined as a verbal style used by a speaker to maintain the listener's face (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Clark and Schunk, 1980; Lakoff, 1973, 1977). According to Goffman (1967) face is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself." Dawn Lerman,2006 has argued that complaining in its very nature is a face-threatening act and a customer who is more polite tends to show less or no complaining intention as a polite customer do not want to engage in an action which threatens his or someone other`s face. He maintained that a customer will be less likely to complaint if he has the fear that the retailer or the company will refuse to take corrective actions and will insult him. Customers` complaint intention depends upon the level of politeness that a customer possesses. (Dawn Lerman, 2006).

H4. Higher the politeness of a customer less will be the customers` tendency to complain.

Above mentioned hypothesis suggest that customer`s intentions to make direct complaint is influenced by customers` perceived value, perceived likelihood of success and attitude towards complaining, but it is important to explore further antecedents in these three variables. LiYin Jin, (2010) has argued that prior experience of complaining is a strong antecedent of aforementioned variables. So the effect of this event is also studied in this study.

Previous experience

If a customer has prior experience of making complaints, it will intensify the perceived likelihood of success (LiYin Jin, 2010). Jin, 2010 further argued that more prior experiences means knowledge and communication skills acquired through similar complaining scenarios previously experienced by the customer hence increasing the confidence in making a complaint.

Ursic (1985) argued that a customer who more often complains is likely to hold positive perceived likelihood of success than the customer who don`t complaint that often or never complaints. But what should be kept in mind is that, if the outcomes of the previous complaint experiences were positive, only than there will be a positive impact of previous experience on perceived likelihood of success. On the other hand, unfavorable previous experience can negatively affect customers` complaint behavior. Based on the above arguments, we present following hypotheses:

H5 Higher the previous experience of complaining higher will be the perceived likelihood of success of a complaint.

Research Methodology

Sample

The data for current study was gathered through customer survey about the retail industry. Retail industry is not differentiated in manufacturing or service industry, question were asked that best suits the matter of dissatisfaction regardless of product or services because dissatisfaction leads to complaint in both scenarios. The cause of problem lies in the dissatisfaction may lies in a product or the services related to that product, so gathering responses about retail regardless of product or services provides wider range of data than taking into account only product or service dissatisfaction.

A questionnaire is designed based on the review of existing findings, sample of 300 respondents was taken and responses from 232 respondents were received. In the first part of the questionnaire was about respondents` profile. As previous experience of making a complaint plays important role in customer`s tendency to make complaint so second part of the questionnaire is composed of question regarding prior complaint experience. Third part included questions regarding perceived likelihood of success of a complaint as prior complaint experience influence this variable. In fourth part questions about perceived value of a complaint, attitude towards complaint and politeness were asked. In this part questions regarding politeness were asked in a way that measures the impoliteness of a customer because it makes sense that if a customer is impolite and he agrees that he makes complaint then a customer who is polite will avoid complaining. In the last part of questionnaire questions regarding tendency to make complaints were asked form the respondents.

After the design of questionnaire the author surveyed over 20 customers in Pakistan`s department stores as a pre-study so that problems in the questionnaire can be checked. Survey was carried out in convenience stores, department stores, cafeterias in Pakistan and customer`s co-operation was requested. 300 questioners were distributed, 68 questioners were excluded due to incomplete or invalid response. 44 percent respondent were male and remaining were of opposite gender; age of 64.2 percent respondents was between 20-25 because of greater percentage of youngsters in Pakistan`s population, while only 1.3 percent of respondent were over the age of 40; 41 percent respondents hold a four-year bachelor degree; 48.5 percent hold post-graduate degree and 1.3 percent respondents were PHDs`; 55.2 percent have the income level between 10,000-15,000 PKR monthly; and among 232 respondents 29 percent complained to the company directly.

Variables measurement

The current study introduces measures by foreign scholars to examine various items of the model: to measure the prior complaint experience, 3 items were adapted from Boldgett et al. (1993). Attitude toward complaint was measured through 6 items and these items were adapted from adapted from Blodgett, (1994); Richins, (1982, 1983b, 1987); Singh, (1989, 1990b); Singh and Wilkes, (1996). Perceived value of complaint was measured through 3 items, adapted from Bagozzi, (1982); Richins, (1980); Singh, (1989, 1990b). To measure perceived likelihood of success successful complaint, items were adapted form Day et al.,

(1981); Richins, (1983a); Singh, (1990a, b). Complaint intention was measured through the adapted items from Day et al., (1981); Singh, (1989) and politeness was measured from the scale of Dawn Lerman, (2006), which included 6 items. All the items in the questionnaire are measured in a five-point Likert scale.

Table 1: Scales of the Study

No	Variables	Items	References
1	Previous experience	1. You complained to a retail store in the last six months 2. You complained directly a lot to the company 3. You have complained several times directly to the company	Blodgett et al. (1993)
2	Perceived value of complaint	1. If you believe the retailer will take appropriate action (e.g. exchange, refund, apology, reward), will you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer? 2. If you believe the retailer will take appropriate action and give better service in the future, will you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer? 3. If you believe the retailer will give better service in the future and this will also benefit other consumers, will you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer?	Bagozzi, (1982); Richins, (1980); Singh, (1989, 1990b)
3	Perceived likelihood of successful complaint	1. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will take appropriate action (e.g. exchange, refund, apology reward) 2. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will take appropriate action and will give better service in the future 3. If you complain about your dissatisfaction to the retailer, the retailer will give better service in the future and this will also benefit other consumers	Day et al., (1981); Richins, (1983a); Singh, (1990a, b)
4	Attitude towards complaint	1. It is my duty to complain about unsatisfactory products or services 2. People should complain when firms sell unsatisfactory products or services 3. I complain when products or services are unsatisfactory 4. I don't use the unsatisfactory product and require exchanging the	Blodgett, (1994); Richins, (1982, 1983b, 1987);

		product or getting a refund. 5. I feel comfortable when I complain directly about dissatisfactory product or service to the company 6. I feel obliged to complain directly about dissatisfactory product or service to the company	Singh, (1989, 1990b); Singh and Wilkes, (1996)
5	Politeness	1. When making a request, I am as direct as possible 2. It's OK for people to be forceful in order to get their way 3. I am comfortable asking people whom I barely know personal questions 4. I feel free to express my opinion when I disagree with someone 5. I am forceful in order to get my way 6. If asked whether or not I like something, I will frankly say if I do not like it	Dawn Lerman, (2006),"
6	Tendency to make complaint	1. I don't easily forget the unpleasant problems without complaining protesting 2. I absolutely complain on site (or in the next visit) to the staff or manager 3. I absolutely ask for problem solving on site (or in the next visit)	Day et al., (1981); Singh, (1989)

Reliability analysis

Cronbach's coefficients are more than acceptable value of 0.50 by Nunnally (1970), this shows that the items were reliable and measured the opinion of the customers reliably.

Table 2: Reliability of Scales

Scales	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Prior complaint experience	3	0.812
Attitude towards complaint	6	0.633
Perceived value of complaint	3	0.630
Perceived likelihood of successful complaint	3	0.685
Politeness	6	0.621

Complaint intention	3	0.625
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Result and Analysis

Profile of the Respondents

Demographic and personal information of the respondents like gender, age, income, education and status are presented in the following table.

Table 3:

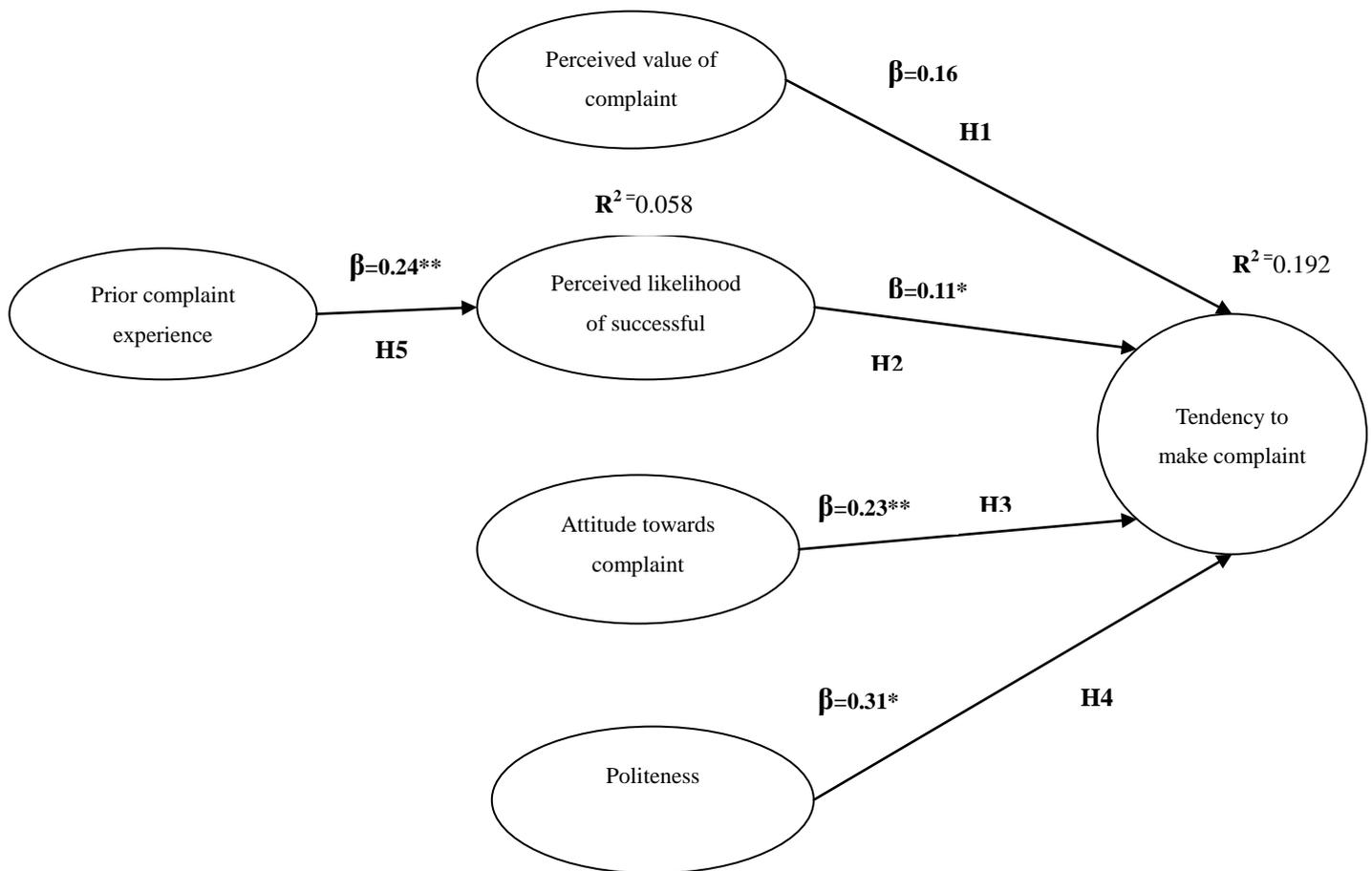
	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Variable			
Gender	Male	102	44.0
	Female	130	56.0
Age	15-20 Years	57	24.6
	20-25	149	64.2
	25-30	18	7.8
	30-35	2	.9
	35-40	3	1.3
	Above 40	3	1.3
Income	Below 15000	128	55.2
	15000-25000	40	17.2
	25000-35000	35	15.1
	35000-45000	9	3.9
	45000-55000	11	4.7
	Above 55000	9	3.9
Education	Matriculation	9	3.9
	Inter	11	4.7
	Bachelor	97	41.8

	Masters	89	38.4
	MS	23	9.9
	PHD	3	1.3
Status	Student	191	82.3
	Employed	26	11.2
	Business Man	5	2.2
	Un-employed	3	1.3
	House wife	7	3.0

Hypothesis Testing

According to the results of this study our proposed relationship between the variable are validated to be true on the basis of strength and significance of the relationships. Prior complaint experience and perceived likelihood of success do have a positive relationship with ($\beta=.249$) and ($\text{Sig}=0.00$), which can be translated as, perceived likelihood of success is determined 24.9 percent by prior complaint experience, hence validating H5. The relationship between perceived value of complaint, perceived likelihood of successful complaint, attitude towards complaint and politeness with tendency to make complaint is positive and significant. Perceived value of complaint determines tendency to make complaint by 16 percent with ($\beta=0.160$) and ($p=0.030$) and validating H1. Perceived likelihood of successful complaint contributes 11 percent to tendency to make complaint with ($\beta=0.112$) and ($p=0.004$) thus validating H2. Attitude towards complaint accounts 23 percent for tendency to make complaint with ($\beta=0.232$) and ($p=0.000$) validating H3, and politeness is the major determinant of tendency to make complaint with ($\beta=0.310$) and ($p=0.000$) and thus H4 is validated.

Research Model Results



** p < 0.01 * p < 0.05

Discussion and Managerial Implication

In this study it has been proven that perceived value of complaint, perceived likelihood of success, attitudes toward complaint directly affects customer's tendency to make a complaint whereas politeness negatively affects customers' tendency to make complaint and are important determinants. In this study authors have measured the effect of impoliteness on the tendency of customer to make a complaint which shows that politeness is negatively related to customers' tendency to make complaint. Readers should not be confused by the measurement of politeness through measuring impoliteness because, if there is a positive relationship between impoliteness and customer's tendency to make complaint, it in turn means that there is a negative relationship between politeness and customer's tendency to make complaint, thus less polite customers tend to show complaining behavior more than polite ones, this argument supports the author's claim that more polite a customer is, less will be his tendency to make complaint. This study also explores the effect of previous complaint experience on perceived likelihood of successful complaint. This research provides a more holistic view of the determinants that affect customer's complaint behavior by taking customer's politeness in view along with other complicated structural relationships. Instead of studying mere behavior, this study focuses on the tendency to make complaint excluding

environmental factors which enables us to make a generalized conclusion.

On the basis of the finding of this research company should scrutinize its customer relationship management by keeping following recommendations in view. Firstly Companies should enhance customer`s perception about likelihood that a complaint is going to reap some reward for the customer and this can be done by providing an experience that encourages the customer to make direct complaint. Previous experience of a complaint can be in favor of company only if company do it right every time. To increase the perceived value of a complaint along with perceived likelihood of success and attitude towards complaint, many operational practices can be taken into account, like guarantee and warranty system, letting customers know about the progress of the complaint they made, improving functional quality of customer care centers, etc. secondly company can provide improved service quality, setting a reasonable reward system and making the reward system public, which in turn will enhance perceived value of complaining directly to the company thus increasing the complaint utility. Thirdly, to ensure that customers has positive attitude towards complaint, customer satisfaction oriented marketing policies should be introduced and market in a way that enables customer to hold a positive attitude towards making a direct complaint to the company, encouraging them to let the company know if customer feels and dissatisfaction regarding products or services instead of using any other option like leaving or complaining to third party. Finally, customer politeness is much neglected by the company in a way that companies usually don't split their customers into polite and less polite customers and it is clear from the finding of this study that impolite customers tends to complaint more and vice versa, so company should take politeness of a customer into account and make a mechanism that enables and helps more polite customer to feel ease at complaining by reducing the threat to their faces and this can be done by providing online complaint facility in which customer don't have to make a complaint to someone in person, training employees to avoid face threatening attitude and understanding what customer wants to complaint about.

Limitations and Future research

Following are the limitations of this study. Firstly, real behavior and tendency to make complaint are different among which former is more important, so in future studies real behavior should be taken into account. Secondly this study is conducted on the retail industry of Pakistan and its implication on other industries in not checked. Thirdly there are many other variables that can influence the customer`s tendency to make complaint and these variables can be personality of customer, customer awareness about company`s complaint handling procedure, customers` value and customer protection policy. Fourthly sample was relatively small and was not heterogeneous in nature, so the further researches can increase the sample size in order to get a better understanding of the stated topic.

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