UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER COMPLAINT BEHAVIOR FOR EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION

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Abstract:

Effective customer complaint management is key for building long-lasting profitable relationships and customer retention. The focus in this study is to investigate the complaints and categorize customer complaint behavior to find the most effective way of compensation for every complaint resolution. Content analysis was conducted on a sample of 220 complaints collected from group buying site, Grouper along with their respective resolutions. The analysed complaints were addressed via e-mail in the period between December 27, 2012 and February 17, 2015. Each complaint was categorized according to the customers' way of expression, along with his/hers expected solution. The analysis showed that based on the way of expression, there are polite and aggressive complainers. Based on the excepted solution three types of inquiries were detected: refund for dissatisfaction; expectation for solution; and complainers that did not expect something in return. The offered complaint resolutions were analyzed and accordingly answers for effective complaint management were provided for each type of complainer. The complaint resolution analyzed in this study resulted in 80% retention, i.e. 80% out of the customers that submitted complaints continued to use Grouper' online services after the expressed dissatisfaction. Given the findings, several recommendations to practitioners and academicians were provided.

Keywords: Complaint management, Online business, Types of complainers, Grouper, North Macedonia

INTRODUCTION

Customer complaint behavior refers to an action taken by an individual, which involves communicating something negative regarding a product or service to the supplier or other perceived influential party (Jacoby and Jaccard, 1981). Consumer complaint behavior is an important part of the service industry, which depends on satisfaction, and retention of customer. The concept allows a company to manage and analyze its own interactions with its past, current and potential customers and in the digital era it has been changed and looks dramatically different from it used to look like before (Bardicchia, 2020). Avoiding service failure is not always possible for companies (Ashwini and Kane, 2014) and in order to correct those failures, customer complaint is the healthy approach (Susskind, 2005). Customer

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complaint behavior can be viewed as a process that begins with consumers evaluating their consumption experience, which may or may not result in dissatisfaction. Excellent customer service therefore handles customer complaints in a manner that benefits both the customer and the firm (Ateke and Onwujiariri, 2014). Day (1984) describes a considered process resulting from a consumer's evaluation of the significance of a purchase, their perception of the cost of complaining, their assessments of chances of success, their product knowledge and knowledge of the complaint process. This evaluation shapes the consumer's attitude towards complaining and helps determine whether they will complain. Dissatisfaction with a purchase can take alternative paths to resolution. Individuals can differ significantly in their perceptions about when and how to complain (Badghish et al., 2015). Consumers may choose to complain privately by changing brands, switching suppliers, or warning family and friends; complaining publicly, either directly by making a complaint to a retailer or manufacturer, or indirectly by reporting to an authority or bringing the complaint to the media or to a consumer group; or they may do nothing (Day and Landon, 1977; Singh, 1990). Customer complaint is a customer's expression of dissatisfaction towards a product, service or purchasing situation (Nakibin et al., 2011). Customer complaint is a formal or informal customer report regarding a problem with a product or service (Tronvoll 2012). Researchers showed that the business success in the long term is affected by the way a company handles company complaints (Roberts-Lombard, 2011). If ignoring customer complaints, it will expose as an unavoidable outcome poor service deliveries (Salami and Emueje, 2016).

Poor complaint handling procedures could damage company-customer relationship and cause customer dissatisfaction (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2010). Besides possible negative word of mouth promotion that in online business is very easy to be produced, it can cause low customer loyalty and significantly chances of customer retention. Marketing researchers found that consumers appears to feel a greater dissatisfaction with services than products (Best and Andreasen, 1977) and the most frequently mentioned reason for dissatisfaction is careless and unprofessional manner of the service (Day and Bodur, 1978). Butteli (2007) in the literature review of regarding studies of complaint behaviors noted that by complaining, customers expect different possible outcomes. Customers may hope for a tangible solution of a specific problem through a refund, exchange or repair; a psychological compensation obtaining apologies; or a social benefit, "preventing the cause for their dissatisfaction from occurring to other consumers" (Day and Landon, 1977). In other situations, a complaint has an objective to express anger and frustration for stress relief. Consumers do not really expect responses from the seller or the service; it is just a cathartic means (Nyer, 2000). Complainants can be classified by their response style. Based on a large random sample survey of American households, Singh (1990a) developed a typology that clustered core characteristics of complaining styles. According to this researcher there are 3 types of complainers: passives, voicers, irates and activists. P*assives are* consistent with non-complainers and least likely to take action. *Voicers* are those likely to voice dissatisfaction and seek redress from the seller. *Irates* are engaged in negative word of mouth or switched providers in addition to making a direct complaint to the offending provider and *activists* were inclined to complain to third party agencies, not only to obtain redress but to also achieve social outcomes Singh (1990a). While not explicitly linked to personality explanations of CCB differences, there are similarities

with personality-based explanations of different complaining behaviors. In studies of consumer complaint behavior, extreme type A personalities are likely to voice complaints to the provider or a complaint agency. They are likely to openly express their complaining behavior and be straightforward about their expectations (Bennett, 1997). Extreme type B personalities are less competitive and less likely to openly express complaint behavior, and may choose to exit and complain privately (Baron and Byrne, 1984; Bennett, 1997). Aggression as a trait of type A personalities figures prominently in research into how consumers complain. Type A personalities are more likely to participate in aggressive encounters with providers than type B (Baron and Byrne, 1984; Culpeper, 2001). Bennett (1997) found that aggressive complainers do not necessarily exit a relationship more than others; but this does not mean that the complaint has been handled properly: rather, the aggression expressed is directed at relieving the feelings of the complainer. Bandura (1973) comments that "discontent produces aggression not in those who have lost hope, but in the more successful members whose assertive efforts at social and economic betterment have been periodically reinforced [and] expect that they can effect change by coercive action" (p.19). According to Bolfing's (1989) study of dissatisfied hotel guests, assertive people were more likely to complain and to stand up for their rights (Fornell and Westbrook, 1979), while submissive people preferred to remain silent. Bolfing's (1989) found that vocal complainers had more assertive personalities and more self-confidence than hotel guests who complained to friends (WOM) or did not complain at all. Assertiveness is not part of aggressiveness as it does not involve the use of violent action (Phau and Sari, 2004); assertive people only become aggressive when their mode of complaint miscarries and they adopt another tactic. Singh's (1990a) typology contrasts with others that focus on the recipient of complaint. For example, Goetzinger (2007) categorizes complaints into voicing a complaint to the seller, private complaining to family or friends, collective complaining to the public through offline/online channels, and third-party complaining to other parties and spread by them. Day and Landon (1977) categorize complaining action into public, private or no action taken. Broadbridge and Marshall (1995) support this classification. Public action covers both direct communication to a supplier seller and indirect public action such as complaining through media. Private action involves boycotting or warning family and friends; the default is taking no action.

The goal of this research is to investigate the types of complainers that addressed their dissatisfaction via e-mail to group buying site Grouper and to offer effective complaint resolution of each type of complaint. To reach the goal we use content analysis and following steps were done: (1) Categorization of the complaints received via e-mail in the period from December 27, 2012 to February 17, 2015 based on way of expression of dissatisfaction and expected solution; (2) Reasons for dissatisfaction were categorized; (3) Offered answers for the solution of declared dissatisfaction were analysed and (4) Based on all analysis scheme for appropriate answers to every type of complainer is suggested.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follow. Section 1 explains the model of group buying site Grouper and organization of complaint management. Section 2 explains data collection and methodology. Section 3 provides empirical analyses with the results regarding the categorization of types of complainers and offers solutions for effective complaint handling. The last section offers concluding remarks.

1. THE MODEL OF GROUP BUYING SITES

The new business model of group buying through daily deals, launched by Groupon, has sparked worldwide interest and has quickly spread through its clones in many countries around the world. In the Republic of Macedonia, this concept was introduced by Grouper, and then the concept is applied by other group buying websites.

There is an opinion that the Internet can reduce the number of intermediaries or skip intermediaries due to information technology, which increases the efficiency of communication and reduces the cost of transactions (Malone et al., 1987). For example, many companies have their own websites that they want to get directly to buyers.

In this sense, the new business model for group discounts for daily deals can be considered as a new type of electronic intermediary. This business model is a mediation between retailers and consumers in order to meet and trade online. It supports and coordinates the trading processes between retailers and customers through various functions. Almost all the procedures of the traditional trading process are evident in the ongoing group buying. The model acts online via website where buyers can find attractive offers for different products and services at large discounts up to 90% of the regular price. Various offers are offered on a daily basis in cooperation with companies giving the services or vendors of products that receive promotion and high visibility in front of thousands of potential buyers. The mediator - the site offering the promotional deals - earns from a commission after a sale made by the advertised company as compensation for the customers brought to his door.

By playing the intermediary role in-group purchasing activities, Grouper is responsible for coordinating the work during the entire process, including initiating, negotiating, arranging, executing and most importantly satisfying both sides, companies and end-customers.

2.1. Complaint Management – Grouper

From an operational point of view, the complaint management process can be divided into 3 dimensions (Johnston 2001): availability for complaint, interaction between seller and buyer, and compensation policy. Completing the complaint takes away the customer's time, effort to communicate, and complain about dissatisfaction. Customer should believe that when something goes wrong there is someone who will solve the problem, or he has where to submit his complaint and express his dissatisfaction. This is especially important for loyal customers who have already built trust with the site to complain and request a solution in order to remain loyal.

Availability for complaint

Receiving a small number of complaints can lead companies to the wrong view that customers are mostly satisfied; while dissatisfied buyers may have turned to competition without ever expressing dissatisfaction (Stephens and Gwinner 1998; Goodmann 1990). It is therefore of great importance availability for the customers to send a complaint or dissatisfaction in a ease way. Communication channels through which customers can send a complaint to Grouper are: phone, Facebook message on

inbox or public comment on the Fan Page, Twitter, Grouper forum available for every transaction and email. For the purpose of the research, the "e-mail" complaints channel was selected for detailed observation and analysis of one channel for complaints. In addition, the public comments that customers leave on forums and on social media are of a different nature and can be treated differently and considered word of mouth unlike a private message that the customer directs to customer support in order to adequately solve the problem or dissatisfaction. Comments of a public nature that do not always require a solution are more appropriate forms for analyzing customer satisfaction from a particular company and brand.

Interaction between seller and buyer

Customers also appreciate the knowledge that the customer support shows because they feel that the person is competent and able to solve their problem (Gruber et al. 2006). In the case of telephone conversations with dissatisfied buyers, this is especially pronounced immediately upon the first contact, while in the case of complaints analysis by e-mail and their solution to the problem comes in a different form and formal language used by the company.

Compensation policy

Compensation for customer dissatisfaction should be a solution to its problem and aims to compensate the customer for the loss suffered and re-establish trust in the company (De Ruyter and Brach 1993).

Resolution of customer complaint in Grouper

As Grouper, is online mediator between the companies that promote themselves through deals offering discounts and customers who buy the coupons. Coupon redemption is made in the companies that made the offer: service or product. When the customer is dissatisfied with the service or product delivered by the company, or other problems, the complaint is addressed to the mediator Grouper. Upon receiving the complaint, the customer's support reads the message and, depending on the nature of the complaint, directs it to the responsible person for that type of complaint. If the complaint concerns the company offering the deal, customer support will redirect the complaint to the agent who is responsible for that cooperating company who further on discuss the problem with the company. If the nature of the complaint is technical, it will be redirected to the IT person responsible for the analysis and solution thereof. Once the person in the first line or the customer's support receives an answer from the relevant person, formulates a response and takes action to resolve the case, depending on whether it is a written response that solves the problem or refund and notification to the customer, the customer support closes the case. All complaints are handled immediately.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In collecting the data, we used secondary data from documentation of complaints taken from the online group buying site Grouper. The population in this research is all the consumers who have been expressing their dissatisfaction by complaining about the products or services. This research uses the purposive sampling method, a type of non-probability sampling where the units that are investigated are based on the judgment of the researcher. 227 complaints addressed to Grouper via e-mail in the period from December 27, 2012 to February 17, 2015 in Grouper are subject to analysis. Out of these 227 complaints, 7 were complaints that were repeated or sent with the same content by the same customers several times, so the duplicates were removed and we had 220 complaints. After compiling the complaint mails taken from the Grouper web site we used content analysis as a method for summarizing each form of content by collecting the various aspects of the content. In 1952, Berelson defined content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). In order to make the method applicable both in a quantitative and a qualitative approach, and without specifying the depth of analysis, Krippendorff (2004) defined content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). Downe-Wambolt (1992) underlines that content analysis is more than a counting process, as the goal is to link the results to their context or to the environment in which they were produced: "Content analysis is a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena" (p. 314). "Content analysis is a research method used to quantify and analyze words, concepts and relationships in text" (McAlister and Erffmeyer, 2003, p. 345).

 A single reserch may analyze various forms of text in its analysis. To analyze the text using content analysis, the text must be coded, or broken down, into manageable code categories for analysis (i.e. "codes"). Once the text is coded into code categories, the codes can then be further categorized into "code categories" to summarize data even further. Our research uses conceptual content analysis. Based on research question and a sample text in the complaints via process of selective reduction is coded into manageable content categories. By reducing the text to categories we can focus on and code for specific words or patterns that inform the research question. After reading all the complaints based on the description of the message, we crated categories based on the similarities of the messages. For this research parameters that resulted in reading all messages as relevant for evaluation are: the reason for the customer dissatisfaction, the language and way of complaining, the expected solution of the problem and how it was resolved. In determining the reason for the customer dissatisfaction where in the complaints were identified several reasons, the strongest reason for the dissatisfaction was taken. The complete mail conversation was analized to detect types of complainers, are they angry or polite and what type of compensation dissatisfied customer is looking for. Also very important for the analysis is the type of compensation-dissatisfied customer got in the end for resolution of the problem. Content analysis was also made on the responses given to each complaint in order to resolve it, in order to categorize the manner of dealing with each customer.

 To determine if the complaint resolution was good and customer continued to buy each complainer was connected to his database of bought coupons before and after the

complaint. Analyzing the content, although essentially is a qualitative method, but analyzing written words, through categorization allows it to be a quantitative method. The results of the analysis of the content are expressed in numbers and percentages.

4. RESULTS

In order to determine the profiles of complainers, that expressed their dissatisfaction content analysis considering: the language used, the way of expression used by the user in the e-mail message, the elements of threat and the nature of the user expectations is done. The analysis resulted in 6 types of profiles of complainers that express dissatisfaction. Firstly based on language used and way of expression all complainers were divided in polite and aggressive. Additionally the complainers were categorized by the expected resolution in three groups: asking for refund, asking for solution and not asking/expecting anything. This is in line with Day and Landon (1977) categorization of complaints expectation in 3 types of compensation: material solution; a psychological compensation obtaining apologies; and a social benefit. Table 1 shows the codes of categorized complaints, together with the number of occurrences of each specific user profile. The largest number, or 46% of the total number of dissatisfied users, by nature were polite complainers who shared dissatisfaction in order to get a solution to the problem.

Table 1 Profiles of complainers that express their dissatisfaction and frequencies

Code	Profile of complainer	Freq.	Perc.
1	Politely asks refund	36	16.4
2	Politely addresses dissatisfaction and seeks solution	101	45.9
3	Politely addresses dissatisfaction and doesn't except nothing	25	11.4
4	Aggressively asks refund	31	14.1
5	Aggressively addresses dissatisfaction and seeks solution	11	5.0
6	Aggressively addresses dissatisfaction and threatened with inspection or leaving the company	16	7.3
	Total	220	100.0

Source: Grouper, Authors' calculations.

All complaints were answered and appropriate solution was offered to resolve the problem occurred. As the web site, Grouper is intermediary between the retailers and consumers it is of great importance to see the type of problems customers addressed. Based on the similarities, content analysis categorized six reasons for the dissatisfaction of customers. Table 2 shows the categorization of the reasons of dissatisfaction and frequency of each. The most common reason why customers expressed dissatisfaction is difficulty in obtaining the service, i.e. the service provider has made it difficult for the customer to make upon coupon redemption. Difficulties caused by the company that create the dissatisfaction can be: refusal to make a reservation i.e giving priority to non-coupon customers, inability of the company to service the customer, etc.

Table 2 Frequency of identified reasons for dissatisfaction

Code	Reason for dissatisfaction	Freq.	Perc.
1	Difficulties during coupon redemption by the service provider	107	48.6

2	Not satisfied with the quality of the company's service	74	33.6
3	Not satisfied with the attitude of the employees, the customer felt Degraded because is with coupon	16	7.3
4	A problem with the reliability of the information given in the deal	19	8.6
5	Complains about showing an unrealistic discount	3	1.4
6	Technical problems with the site	1	0.5
	Total	220	100.0

Source: Grouper, Authors' calculations.

Crostabulation was used for the analysis of the profile of the complainer associated with the reason of dissatisfaction. Table 3 shows that most of the problems of dissatisfaction are companies that provide services and customers politely ask for refund or solution of the problem.

Table 3 Reason for dissatisfaction * Profile of the complainer, Crosstabulation

		Profile of complainer						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Reason for dissatisfaction	1	22	63	3	9	1	9	107
	2	9	25	21	13	4	2	74
	3	3	3	1	4	4	1	16
	4	2	9	0	2	2	4	19
	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total		36	101	25	31	11	16	220

Source: Grouper, Authors' calculations.

The way in which any dissatisfaction and complaint was resolved and compensated was determined by analyzing the response that was returned to each customer. Three ways of resolution of the problems notified in the complaints are categorized and the frequencies are shown in Table 4. Most of the complaints were resolved with explanation and solution of the case (124, 56.4%). Almost 36% of the complainers got refund of the money to resolve the occurred dissatisfaction. 7.7% of the complaints were resolved with gratis service, replacement or repair.

Table 4 Frequency of the ways of complaint resolution

Code	The way of complaint resolution	Freq.	Perc.
1	Answer with explanation and solution of the case	124	56.4
2	Reimbursement of the money	79	35.9
3	Replacement of the product or offered a gratis service or repair thereof	17	7.7
	Total	220	100.0

Source: Grouper, Authors' calculations.

The profile of the complainer was analyzed associated with the way of problem resolution shown in Table 5. It can be concluded that most of the ways of resolution for

all the types of complainers is with explanation and finding solution of the problem that occurred dissatisfaction. Most of the answers to the dissatisfied customers that sent a mail to complain were: "we are sorry about the problem occurred".

Table 5 The way of complaint resolution * Profile of complainer, Crosstabulation

		Profile of complainer						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
The way of complaint resolution	1	6	73	17	17	6	5	124
	2	28	20	5	11	4	11	79
	3	2	8	3	3	1	0	17
Total		36	101	25	31	11	16	220

Source: Grouper, Authors' calculations

As a result of this analysis, we offer what is most effective way to deal with the dissatisfied customer, ie. managing the dissatisfaction of each individual user profile. In the offered answers for the different types of users, the user relationship is taken into account, i.e. the manner of expression in the complaint and the cause of his problem. The way in which the dissatisfaction of the user will be compensated primarily depends on the cause of his problem, which is considered individually. However, based on the other factors of the complaint, generalized answers are offered that can be applied in order to make compensation (material or non-material) and reach a solution to the user's case (Table 6).

Table 6 Types of complainers and ways to deal each of them

1	Politely asks refund	The best solution to neutralize the situation with this type of customer is to give an apology with a free service / product in order for the company to correct the mistake. If the customer refuses to visit the company, and the dissatisfaction is objectively justified, the last step is to make a refund.
2	Politely addresses dissatisfaction and seeks solution	A solution should be found for this buyer in cooperation with the service provider company depending on the reason for the dissatisfaction. The most common problem of this type of user is the difficulty in obtaining the service or making a reservation.
3	Politely addresses dissatisfaction and doesn't t expect nothing	This user should be informed that his / her opinion is of great importance and that it helps in deciding whether to cooperate with that company again.
4	Aggressively asks refund	It is necessary to carefully understand and offer him a solution or compensation, and if he does not accept it, to refund the purchased service / product.
5	Aggressively addresses dissatisfaction and seeks solution	It is best for this user to be compensated for the dissatisfaction with a certain free product or service from the company that is the cause of the dissatisfaction. If this is not accepted by the user,

		refunding the funds is the best solution for this type of dissatisfied user.
6	Aggressively addresses dissatisfaction and threatened with inspection or leaving the company	This user should first be neutralized by pointing out that the company is on his side. The best solution is to give him a refund indicating his incorrect attitude so that the user does not think that he received compensation for the threat that he would not otherwise have received.

In both types of users who expect a solution (polite and aggressive user), the answer is similar, and the difference is in the way of presenting the solution by the customer support representative who gives the answer. The same goes for the polite and aggressive user who seeks a refund, with the only difference being that the calm user can be offered several other alternatives before the refund is made as a last resort. It is important to mention that all complaints were timely managed. As an indicator of the successfully managed complaints is that 80% of the complainers continued to use Grouper's services.

CONCLUSION

By examining 220 complaint data of expressed dissatisfaction of services/products addressed via e-mail to group buying site Grouper this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of customer complaint management as an important aspect in building profitable customer relationship. This result has implications for how e-businesses' customer service centers should manage customer complaints effectively. Specifically, this study suggests that e-businesses should give timely feedback responses in an accurate and kindly manner. All complaints were treated timely and equally and according to the customer's problem, a solution was offered in the form of an explanation, which is, remedying the problem, refunding of funds or a complementary product service which compensates dissatisfaction. The most common reason for customer dissatisfaction or 82% of the complaints were addressed to difficulty in obtaining the service and dissatisfaction with the quality of the service provided. This increases the responsibility and difficulty in managing complaints as the expectations of the customers are directed directly to the intermediary, which in turn depends on the companies whose services it promotes. The analysis resulted in categorization of 6 types of profiles of complainers that express dissatisfaction. Firstly based on language used and way of expression all complainers were divided in polite and aggressive. Additionally the complainers were categorized by the expected resolution in three groups: asking for refund, asking for solution and not asking or expecting something in return. Finally, the results of this study offer guideline for effective complaint management by suggesting tailored answers to each type of complainer, meaning that for some of the profiles different solution than the obviously required may be applied. Appropriate online complaint management facilitates repeat business and customer loyalty. 80% of the complainers continued to use Grouper' services. Efforts toward the effective resolution of customer problems serve as the basis for long-term successful customer relationship. The findings in this research contribute to complaint management literature and provide recommendations for practitioners and academics.

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