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## **EVALUATION OF COMPLAINT INTENTION THROUGH THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In today's intense environment of competition, it is essential to understand consumer behaviours and respond to their expectations. One of the most important ways to understand consumer behaviour and increase consumer loyalty is to grasp consumer complaint behaviours and the underlying reasons for such behaviour. This study aims to examine complaint intention through planned behaviour model. Along these lines, personal attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control have been defined as independent variables, whereas complaint intention has been defined as a dependent variable. Within the context of the study, the link between the significance of consumer complaint intention, consumer complaint behaviour and its determinants, and the planned behaviour theory and its components has been analyzed. The sample is comprised of undergraduate students enrolled in Ondokuz Mayıs University's Management program. This research concludes that personal attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control variables of the theory of planned behavior impact consumer intention to complain.

**Keywords:** Complaint Intention, theory of planned behaviour, complaint, attitude, consumer behaviour

### **ŞİKAYET ETME NİYETİNİN PLANLI DAVRANIŞ TEORİSİ TEMELİNDE İNCELENMESİ**

### **ÖZET**

Günümüz rekabet ortamında işletmeler için tüketicileri anlamak ve onların beklenlilerini karşılamak bir zorunluluk haline gelmiştir. Tüketici davranışlarını anlamaların, memnuniyet ve sadakat düzeyini artırmadanın en önemli yollarından

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birisi de tüketicilerin şikayet davranışlarını ve bu davranışların altında yatan nedenleri anlamaktan geçmektedir. Bu çalışma şikayet etme niyetini planlı davranış teorisi temelinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda kişisel tutum, öznel norm ve algılanan davranışsal kontrol bağımsız değişken, şikayet etme niyeti bağımlı değişken olarak tanımlanmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında kuramsal olarak, tüketici şikayet davranışının önemi, tüketici şikayet davranışları ve belirleyicileri ile planlı davranış teorisi ve bileşenleri arasındaki ilişkiler kavramsal olarak incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın öneklemi, Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İşletme bölümü lisans öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Bu araştırmada planlı davranış teorisinin kişisel tutum, öznel norm ve algılanan davranışsal kontrol değişkenlerinin tüketicilerin şikayeteye yönelik niyetini etkilediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Şikâyet etme niyeti, planlı davranış teorisi, şikayet, tutum, tüketici davranışı

## 1. Introduction

Marketing professionals used to think that the most vital skill was to find new customers. They used to focus on finding new customers rather than developing their relations with existing customers and therefore, they ended up serving them with less care. Today's marketing mentality is exactly the opposite. The primary goal of the contemporary enterprise is to ensure consumer loyalty and deepen the relationship with them. Losing existing customers means not only losing the next sales but also the potential income that would be generated from these customers (Kotler, 2003: 172). Transformation of marketing mentality has led to a change in business' views of customers.

Businesses may not always be able to respond to the needs and expectations of customers. It is not always expected for them to satisfy all of their customers. However, dealing with problems and complaints of the customers and succeeding in resolving these negative issues would make a big difference for businesses. The evidence of on business focus on customer service quality and dedication to improve customer service quality is reflected by whether customers are satisfied or not (Odabasi, 2009: 102). Instances that lead to customer dissatisfaction include: defective products, long waiting durations, failure to realize promises given to customers, negative attitudes of employees, underdeveloped business procedures and malpractices. When customers face one of these situations, the dissatisfaction starts (Bolkan and Goodboy, 2011: 466). If customers encounter an unfavorable situation, they easily switch to other brands, creating adverse conditions for businesses (Demirel, 2007: 150).

As far as achieving a competitive edge and being successsful are concerned, businesses need to outcompete their rivals in terms of customer satisfaction. Maintaining customer satisfaction depends on meeting customer expectations (Sevim and Sari Daldi, 2009: 95). Customer satisfaction is extremely important because it is usually a significant determinant of favorable word of mouth, repurchase behaviour and customer loyalty (Bearden and Teel, 1983: 21). Businesses consider consumer complaints to be opportunities for improving their operations (Akan and Kaynak, 2008: 3). When customers choose not the express their discontent, businesses lose the opportunity to define the source of the discontent and find a solution, ultimately leads to both customer and business dissatisfaction (Davidow and Dacin, 1997: 450). From the perspective of businesses, effective resolution of complaints is beneficial for number of reasons. A customer whose complaint has been effectively addressed is more loyal than a customer who has been provided with a regular level of service (Yuksel and Kilinc, 2003: 24). Effective resolution of complaints also impacts the financial performance of businesses. Evaluation of customer complaints provides the enterprise with the opportunity to educate the customers, improve loyalty, construct positive communication, and create a the space for improving customer services (Tronvoll, 2012: 285). As far as businesses are concerned, service improvement lead to the following benefits: lowering marketing costs, contructing customer trust, protecting justice perception and business image, and additonal costs regarding legal operations (Ekiz and Koker, 2010: 2859-2860).

## **2. Types of Complaints and Complaining Behaviour**

In general sense, complaint refers to “negative feedback of the customer” (Bell et al., 2004: 116). Barlow and Moller (2009) define complaint differently: complaint is an opportunity and a gift given by customers to businesses so that the latter can re-establish contact with their customers when a product or service fails (Barlow and Moller, 2009: 38). Complaint is an explicit manifestation of the customer dissatisfaction (Resnik and Harmon, 1983: 21) when a purchased product or service fails to meet the expectations or leads to unexpected outcomes (Kilic and Ok, 2012: 4191) during consumption. Customer complaints are activities that emerge through negative communication with businesses or third-party actors, who participate in the production and marketing of goods and services (Jacoby and Jaccard, 1981: 6). Customer complaint behaviour, on the other hand, is defined as the final outcome of dissatisfaction that stems from the negative verification of customer expectations (Defranco et al., 2005: 175).

Whether customers are satisfied or not necessitates an emotional and cognitive evaluation process. There are three ways in which customers cope with purchasing experiences that trouble them: problem-oriented, emotion-oriented,

and evasion. Problem-oriented coping practices are directly related to experiences that create dissatisfaction on the side of a customer. Emotion-based coping practices focus more on the emotional aspect than dissatisfaction. Evasion and dissatisfaction management, on the other hand, refer to physical avoidance (Baris, 2008: 39- 41).

Customer complaints are classified in various ways. Hirschman (as cited in Singh, 1990a: 2) classifies the behaviours of a dissatisfied customer as a) exit, b) voice and c) loyalty. Day and Landon (as cited in Mattila and Wirtz, 2004: 147-148) classify customer complaints in a dual hierarchical scheme. Behavioral (action) and non-behavioral (inaction) reaction are in the first level. Private action (of behavioral reaction) and public action are found in the second level of the hierarchy. Day et al. (1981) come up with nine categories which classify customer complaints, stemming from consumption practices that produce dissatisfaction (Day et al., 1981: 87-88):

1. Inaction
2. Boycotting product class at a personal level
3. Boycotting a brand at a personal level
4. Boycotting a seller at a personal level
5. Private complaints (adverse word of mouth)
6. Looking for a solution directly from a seller
7. Looking for a solution directly from a producer
8. Looking for a solution from third parties
9. Public action (seeking a legal solution to a complaint).

Singh (1988: 101) has classified complaint behaviours stemming from customer dissatisfaction into three distinct groups: expression of the reaction (asking for a solution from the enterprise), private reaction (directly in person) and reactions directed towards third parties (legal action). Singh has come up with four different groups as far as customers who have expressed their complaints (Singh, 1990b: 80-81):

1. The passive groups: Those who are not engaged with any action when they face a condition that leads to dissatisfaction,
2. Customers who express their complaints: Those who communicate their complaints to the enterprise
3. Angry customers: Those who not only communicate their dissatisfaction to the enterprise but also change the product or service provider and realize their communication in negative terms,

4. Activists: Those who communicate their complaints to third parties along with exploring an individual solution.

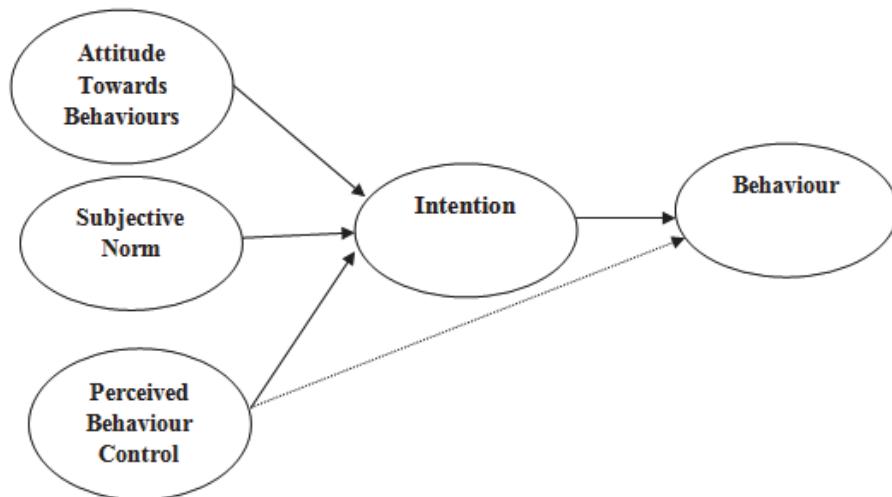
Various researchers have classified consumer complaints differently. What determines consumer behavior of complaints include demographic factors (age, gender, education, life style), psychological factors (personal values and factors of individuality, attitude towards complaint, level of self confidence), cultural factors (colectivism or individualism), social factors and situational factors (Volkov, 2004: 115-116). This study aims to examine the determinants of consumer complaint behaviours within the context of the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

### **3. Theory of Planned Behaviour and Determinants of Consumer Behaviour**

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) are theories which suggest that the individual intention along with individual behaviour are the most influential determinants in terms of behaviour realizations (Sheeran and Orbell, 2000: 534). According to TRA, behaviour stems from an individual's intention to realize a certain kind of behaviour. Intention is comprised of attitude component and subjective norm component. Attitude is defined as an individual's positive or negative reflex in terms of behavior realization, whereas subjective norm is the perception of the behaviour from the other perceive of other people (Terry et al., 1999: 226). TPB is the extended version of TRA in terms of perceived behavioural control, which determines intention towards behaviour (Armitage and Christian, 2003: 191). The intention is comprise of attitude towards behaviour, subjective norm and the estimation of perceived behavioural control (Povey et al., 2000: 121). At the fundamental level of TPB, it is accepted that the an individual would reach information systematically and makes rational decisions. TPB argues that factors that determine individual behaviour are a logical outcome of cognitive process (Turhan, 2011: 131).

The figure 1 adapted from Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour.

**Figure 1:** Theory of Planned Behaviour



**Reference:** Ajzen, I. (1991). "The Theory of Planned Behavior". *Organizational Behavior and Human Decisions Processes*, 50, p. 182

According to TPB, three factors guide human behaviour. These are *behavioural beliefs* (beliefs comprised of other features or potential results of behaviour), *normative beliefs* (beliefs comprised of one's normative expectations from others) and *control beliefs* (beliefs pertaining to the existence of factors that realize or prevent behaviour). Behavioural beliefs constitute positive or negative attitude towards behaviour. Normative beliefs form perceived social pressure or subjective norms. Control beliefs constitute behavioural control that express perceived ease or difficulty as far as realization of behaviour is concerned (Ajzen, 2002: 665).

**Attitude towards behaviour;** refers to the positive or negative evaluation of the individual's realization of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991: 188).

**Subjective norm;** whether major reference people or institutions that are important for the individual to behaviour realization would help with the realization process (Erten, 2002: 68-69).

**Perceived Behavioural Control;** refers to individuals' perception regarding their abilities and opportunities as to whether the realization of a behaviour is within their domain of control (Kocagoz and Dursun, 2010: 141). According to Ajzen, what matters as far as perceived behavioural control is the individual's thoughts regarding control (Kagitcibasi, 2013: 125). Perceived behavioural control has an influence on intention and behaviour (Ajzen, 1991: 183).

## 4. Research

The objective of this study is to examine intention to complain within the context of the theory of planned behaviour. Along these lines, personal attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control are designed as independent variables, while the intention to complain is considered to be the dependent variable. In this study, we have explored the relationship between the personal attitude, subjective norm and perceived control variables of Ondokuz Mayıs University's Management undergraduate students and their intention to complain.

The questionnaire used in this study has been formed by using previous studies in literature. The questions relevant to personal attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control had been formed by using the studies of Cheng (2003) and Sayin Kocagoz (2010). The sample is comprised of undergraduate students enrolled in Ondokuz Mayıs University's Management program. 400 survey forms have been designed and 272 of them have been analyzed. The response rate to the surveys have been 68 %. Participating students have been asked to answer the survey questions by way of considering the most recent dissatisfaction in relation to a shopping experience. The survey form is comprised of two different parts. The first part involves questions that aim to collect demographic information of the students. The second part of the survey asks participants the extent to which they agreed with the statements related to intention, attitude towards behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. The statements in this second section of the survey have been designed in line with Likert Scale. Likert scale ranging from "1: Strongly Disagree" to "5: Strongly Agree".

The hypotheses of the research have been designed as such:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a meaningful relationship between personal attitude and the intention to complain.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a meaningful relationship between subjective norm and the intention to complain.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is meaningful relationship between perceived behavioural control and the intention to complain.

Due to time and budget restrictions, we conducted this study with undergraduate students of management. This is the most significant limitation of the study.

#### **4.1. Analysis and Findings**

Thirty eight percent of the participants of the study are male, whereas 62 % are female. All the participants are aged between 20 and 30 and are pursuing undergraduate education. As far as income level is concerned, 42 % earns less than 500 TL, 29 % earns between 501-750, 12.5 % earns 751-1000 TL, 6.6 % earns 1001-1250 TL and 9.9 % earns more than 1251 TL. Upon providing demographic information regarding the participants, factor analysis of the scale is realized. Factor analysis is defined as a multi-variable statistical method aiming to produce few meaningful and definable variables from many variables that measure the same structure (Buyukozturk, 2002: 470). This study draws on the work of Cheng (2003) and Sayin Kocagoz (2010) and international literature and it ultimately subjects the questionnaire to factor analysis. Statements whose factor weight are below .40 have been excluded from the scale. Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was measured as .907 and the scale was defined as reliable. In this study, KMO value was calculated to be .908. When between .90-1.00, KMO criterion is considered to be perfect. As far as Bartlett test is concerned, then the level of meaning is .000 the relationship between variables is high (Akgul and Cevik, 2005: 428). The scale which was prepared based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour explains 64.397 of the total variance. Below, variables regarding the scale, factor weights, variance percentages and Cronbach Alpha values are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Factor Analysis Results Regarding Variables

Variables	Factor Weights	Variance Percentage	Cronbach Alfa
<b>Factor 1: Attitude Towards Behaviour</b>		45.873	.88
For me, it is the right behaviour to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.719		
For me, it is useful to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.713		
For me, it is wrong to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.648		
For me, it is wise to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.694		
For me, it is futile to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.617		
I feel better when I complain following a dissatisfaction.	.484		
<b>Factor 2: Subjective Norm</b>		9.780	.84
People whose ideas I value in my life (family, friends, colleagues etc.) support me in terms of complaining following a dissatisfaction.	.721		
People whose ideas I value in my life (family, friends, colleagues etc.) consider it the right behaviour for me to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.655		
People whose ideas I value in my life (family, friends, colleagues etc.) think that I should complain following a dissatisfaction.	.656		
People whose ideas I value in my life (family, friends, colleagues etc.) consider it a useful act for me to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.664		
<b>Factor 3: Perceived Behavioural Control</b>		8.744	.77
It is completely up to me to complain following a dissatisfaction.	.625		
I might complain following an experience of dissatisfaction.	.608		
I find myself adequate as far as expression of complaint following a dissatisfaction is concerned.	.655		
I know how to complain following a dissatisfaction	.557		

Upon the completion of factor analysis, multiple regression analysis has been done to tests to hypotheses. Multiple regression analysis were preferred as they reveal the aggregate impact of independent variables and control other variables, as well as demonstrate the impact of each variable separately (Akgul and Cevik, 2005: 238). The results with respect to the dependent variable of the intention to complain and attitude towards behavior, subjective norm and the independent variable of perceived behavioural control are listed in Table 2.

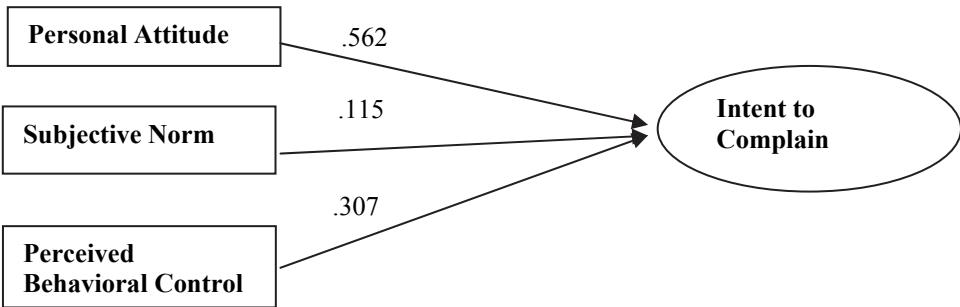
**Table 2:** Regression Analysis Results

	Non-Standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	Beta	Standart Error	Beta		
Intention	3.926	.043		91.123	.000
Attitude Towards Behaviour	.522	.043	.562**	12.105	.000
Subjective Norm	.107	.043	.115*	2.480	.014
Perceived Behavioral Control	.286	.043	.307**	6.623	.000
$R^2=.423$ ; $F= 65.515$ ; (Anova Test) $p=.000^b$					
Pearson Correlation and (Relevance)					
**. Correlation, meaningful at the level of $r= .01$ (bi-directional)					
*. Correlation, meaningful at the level of, $r= .05$ (bi-directional)					

As the table above also reveals,  $R^2= .423$  dir. This demonstrates that the regression model explains roughly 42 % of the total variance. It is seen that the attitude towards complaint on the intention to complaint is the most shifting variable ( $\beta= .562$ ;  $r< .01$ ). Second comes the perceived behavioral control variable ( $\beta= .307$ ;  $r< .01$ ), followed by the subjective norm ( $\beta= .115$ ;  $r< .05$ ). It is understood that the dependent variable of the intention to complain is influenced by the attitude towards complaint, subjective norm and the independent variable of perceived behavioral control and explains about 42 % of the model.

The model and hypothesis results of the research is as follows:

**Figure 2: Research Model and Hypothesis Results**



As a result of the analysis, a positive relationship between the intention to complain and the attitude towards behaviour has been found and therefore  $H_1(p < .01)$  hypothesis was accepted. While the relationship between the intention to complain and perceived behavioral control is not as high as the variable of attitude towards complaint, there is still a meaningful and positive relationship and therefore  $H_2 (p < .01)$  hypothesis was accepted. There is a meaningful relationship between the intention to complain and the subjective norm but not a high correlation.  $H_3$  hypothesis was accepted at the level of  $p < .05$  relevance.

Phau and Sari (2004) found out that consumers who complain have high levels of self confidence, possess an individualistic character, are willing to take risks and display a positive attitude with respect to complaining. Akan and Kaynak (2009) argue that the attitude towards complaint, the perceived value of complaint and the recognition that complaint will be successfull affect the complaint behavior. Halstead and Droke (1991) suggest that consumers' attitude regarding complaint is a direct indication of whether they will be interested in complaint behavior. Kim et al. (2003) found out that attitute toward complaints, perceived complaint value and probability of a success affect complaint intention; Keng et al. (1995) suggest that the attitude toward complaint is positive and consumers have the right to complain when they have a negative experience. Sevim and Sari Daldi (2009) conclude that consumers' negative attitude towards complaint and facilitation of complaint behavior by the enterprise are among the factors that limit compliant behaviour. This study's results are supported in the literature.

## 5. Discussion

Complaining renders a negative meaning for both businesses and consumers. However, this perception is useful for neither of these parties, as it is also stated in the literature. When businesses and consumers change their views on complaint behaviour, the former will be able to improve its products and services, while the latter will achieve a higher level of satisfaction as far as purchased goods and services are concerned.

This study examines the intention to complain in the context of theory of planned behaviour and aims to investigate the determinants of the intention to complain. Theory of the planned behavior considers the intention to be a major determining factor for behaviour. This theory accepts the attitudes of people, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control as the fundamental aspects of behavior (Akinci and Kiymalioglu, 2014: 385-411).

This study revealed that the attitude towards complaint has a positive impact on the intention to complain. The more positive individuals' attitude towards complaint and their belief to realize this attitude are, the more possible it will be for the behaviour to take place. We also discovered that perceived behavioral control positively impacts the intention to complain. Perceived behavioral control within the context of the theory of planned behavior explains individuals' levels of perception in relation to their own behavior control (Korkmaz and Ermec Sertoglu, 2013: 133). If individuals think they have more resources and opportunities, perceived less barriers and perceived behavioral control levels are higher (Akinci and Kiymalioglu, 2014: 398). The more consumers think of their belief to realize complaint and their control over this behavior, the higher their intention to complaint will be. Even though subjective norm is one of the determinants of the intention to complaint, there is no high correlation.

When businesses generally establish and facilitate channels of complaint for their customers and therefore save complaint from its negative connotation and reinstate it as a positive behaviour, their customers will be able to satisfy their needs more efficiently. From the perspective of the theory of planned behavior, this study demonstrates that a positive and strong attitude towards complaint, the existence of enough resources to realize complaint, an individual's recognition of control power, and the acceptance of an individual by reference groups will positively impact the intention to complain. Since this research was conducted only with the participation of students from Ondokuz Mayıs University's College of Business, these results cannot be generalized. That is why it is essential for the study to be replicated using different populations at a later point.

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