Situational Factors Affecting Customer Complaining Propensity to Firm
Tülin DURUKAN¹, Ismail GÖKDENİZ² & Ibrahim BOZACI³

Abstract
Importance of keeping customer in hand has increased with recent changes in global market like intense competition, diverse and changing customer wishes and preferences. Under these conditions subject of gathering customer complaints which occurs in transactions is an important issue that has to be investigated. Customer complaints can be cured and managed with the least effort only by making customers transfer their problems to firms. However, the majority of customers exhibit harmful behaviors for companies like remaining silent, breaking relations with firm, exhibiting negative word of mouth communications etc. The main goal of this study is clarifying the situational factors that affect the customer’s propensity to transferring complaints to firm. In this context, the situational factors that prevent the transmission of customer problems are identified and relationships of these factors with the complaining propensity are scrutinized. Accordingly, primary data were collected with a survey conducted on undergraduate students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Kirikkale University. As a result, there is found meaningful relationships between complaining tendency to firm and some situational factors like expectations from complaining process, attributions about source of problem, perceived dissatisfaction and customer loyalty.

Key words: Customer Complaints, Complaint Behavior, Customer Complaint Tendency

INTRODUCTION
The part of the customer complaints which is transferred to firm is stated as friendly complaints. At this point firm has to change customer problems to customer complaints and struggle to ensure the transfer of complaints to firm (Prim and Pras, 1999). When customers don’t transfer complaints to firm, not only the chance of determining and solving problems is lost, but also some negative results occurs for both company and customer like changing firm, applying legal actions, complaining to public and private bodies etc. (Davidow and Dacin, 1997). Therefore understanding the factors that affect customers’ propensity to complain to firm is necessary for the success of firms.

From the point of customers, it is asserted that low complaining propensity to firm resulted from not knowing to complain to whom, the idea of not taking into consideration of problems by firm appropriately, rude, accusatory behaviors of employees and previous negative experiences etc. In addition to these, customers see complaining process more difficult than leaving the firm and they think response of complaint is given too late if written complaint is performed (Whiteley, 1995; 21). Previous studies investigate the propensity to complain in terms of customer expectations about realization possibility of complaint expectations, attitude toward the complaints, importance of products, customer controllability perceptions of problem (Blodgett et. al., 1993). Present study argues the effects of situational factors on customer complaining tendency namely perceived dissatisfaction, customer loyalty, expectations from complaining process and attributions about source of problem.

Situational factors that affect customer propensity to complaint to firm
At this part of the study the variables is explained theoretically which is thought as important in complaining propensity like perceived dissatisfaction, expectations form complaint process, attributions toward problem, customer loyalty and nature of sector and product.

Perceived dissatisfaction
Perceived dissatisfaction, which is expressed as unattained part of consumer expectations, is closely related with the complaining propensity. Charles, Moshe and Isabelle (2005) research the complaining behavior, its reasons and the role of emotions in complaining behavior by the help of cognitive-emotive

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model of Lazarus (1991). In this regard, the redress propensity is explained by following steps; primary cognitive appraisal (importance of problem and frequency), secondary controllability appraisal (source of problem, controllability, evaluations about self sufficiency to solve problem, continuity of problem), occurrence of emotions like anxiety-surprise, anger-disgust, sadness-resignation, and complaint coping behavior. Encountered stressful situations of customers increase stress as a result of first and second appraisals. As a result, it is seen that the effects of negative emotions are balanced with the complaining behavior of customer (Chebat et al., 2005).

A study conducted in financial sector shows that increasing perceived customer dissatisfaction leads customers to take higher precautions, communicate with higher level managers and behaving negatively for firms (Cunliffe and Johnston, 2008). Depending on the dissatisfaction level of customers, negative emotions are arisen toward companies (Akan and Kaynak, 2008) that are closely related with the customer complaining behavior.

**Expectations from complaint process**

Customers want to reach the point which provides maximum utility. In this context, they make complaining decision, if possible perceived values that are obtained from complaining behavior is sufficiently higher than costs of complaining behavior as a kind of cost utility analysis.

Possible costs of complaining behavior are; economic costs of conveying problems to firm, uncomfortable, embarrassing, stressful, irritating company activities and employee behaviors about the complaining process and so on. Most of these costs would be minimized by facilitating and monitoring the complaint process. By this way perceived complaint value can be increased and firms can have customers who convey their problems to them easily (Bernd and Seidel, 2004). For example there may be costs like necessity of long travels, long and strict procedures and possibility of maltreatments etc. (Singh and Wilkes, 1996). Beliefs and expectations of customers about firm and personnel are also closely related with the complaining tendency (Oh, 2004). To summarize, customer compares the expected gains that obtained from firm and employees (redress, apologize, better goods in future) with time, emotional, opportunity costs (East, 1996) and making complaining decision.

**Attributions toward problem**

Attribution Theory is seen useful for explaining the after purchase behaviors of customers. According to this, customer makes an analysis to understand the reasons of dissatisfaction and makes a conclusion about whether firm or customer is responsible for the source of the problem (Erevelles et al., 2003). Attribution Theory argues perceived reason of dissatisfaction or problem is related with the complaining behavior. And customers leave the company and makes negative word of mouths if they see the source as stable and controllable by firms Blodgett et al., 1993). Likewise, Weiner (2000) investigates consumer behavior under the attribution theory framework and states that customers conduct an attribution appraisal and takes complaining decisions as result of this process.

**Customer loyalty**

Concept of loyalty is usually expressed by such words like dedication, commitment, reliability, stability, perseverance, patience and it is used in subjects like sport team, family member, faith etc. Furthermore using income, that earned in difficult conditions, for purchasing certain products or by purchasing certain company is called as customer loyalty Brooks, 2010).

In marketing literature the role of effective complaint management on customer loyalty is a current subject. In this context Yaping, Shaolong and Xing (2009) researches effect of the service recovery (explaining, communication, feedback, and redress) on perceived justice and customer loyalty.

On the other hand the effect of customer loyalty on complaint behavior is not taken similar attention. Fornell and Wernerfelt (1988) assert that loyal customers who experienced dissatisfaction tend to complain more often than non-loyal (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1988). It can be claimed that loyal customers prefer to solve their problems with firm instead of leaving firm immediately (Oztopcu, 2006). So customer loyalty is researched under the scope of this study.

**Product features and characteristics of sector**

Customers generally seek solution when experiencing a problem about the products that are important to them (Andreasen and Best, 1977). In other words the value and importance of product enhance the perceived dissatisfaction and negative emotions when the consumption is problematic.
In a given situation, perceived level of importance and interest toward a stimulus is varies for different people. Some customers give high importance to a product than others. In other words every good not carry the same importance for every person. For example haircutting service has different importance levels for an artist and construction worker. If importance of a product is high and the want of customer is not realized, the propensity to complain to firm will be high. But the lack of alternative substitute products may decrease the propensity to complain despite high level of customer interest (Baris, 2006). For example the scarcity of alternatives in health sector has negative impact on complaint behaviors. Besides, as the economic value of a product keep important part in the total income, the state of consumer will be worsen and complaining propensity will increase. In addition, some features like product type, price, quality, confusion, expected life time are closely related with complaining propensity (Liu and Zhang, 2007). For example it can be asserted that solution seeking tendency is more when customer face problems about high priced and long life products.

In the complaint management literature, facing with the studies is possible which investigates the competitiveness level of sector and customer complaining propensity (Prim and Pras, 1999). As competition in the sector increases, the struggles of firms for developing quality, solving problems and learning from them increases. Furthermore, costs incurred to win customer increases as competition increases because of higher advertising, promotion and sales power costs. What is more, loyal customers do more consumption and have less price sensitivity (Estelami, 2000). Sectors differ from each other because of certain characteristics. It is seen that complaining propensity differs depending on sector features. For example in health sector in which customer demand elasticity is low, the complaining propensity of patients to hospital management is extremely low since the intention of preventing possible negative future services hospital staff (Powers and Bendall-Lyon, 2002). Similarly findings of Andreasen (1983)'s study suggest the idea of complaining propensity of customers in this kind of sectors are lower since thought of complaints are not beneficial for customers and also the switching possibility is not exist.

AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE SITUATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMER COMPLAINING PROPENSITY TO FIRM
Situational factors that affect the customer complaining propensity to firm are investigated at this part of the study with a survey which is conducted on undergraduate students of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Kirikkale University. Obtained data were analyzed with SPSS and findings were interpreted.

GOAL AND IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH
Main goal of this research is, clarifying the situational factors which affect complaining tendency of customers to firm since it is important for firms to eliminate customer dissatisfactions, prevent future dissatisfactions, reveal sources of problems and preventing other negative behaviors of customers. Moreover contributing the welfare of people is another target by facilitating the transference of problems to firms and management of customer problems.

METHOD, POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE RESEARCH
Descriptive research method is conducted which is used to define the variables, relationships between variables and conditions about a problem (Altunısık et al., 2007). The population of the research is specified as undergraduate students of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of Kirikkale University because of technical, cost and time facilities. This constraint prevents to generalize the results of research to all customers. Moreover the research is conducted for only mobile communication sector which prevents to generalize the findings to all sectors and to compare the differences among sectors. But it gives important clues about the complaining tendency for a sector in which customer complaints faced generally.

MODEL OF THE RESEARCH
Dependent variable of the research is specified as “complaining propensity to firm” and other independent situational factors as; “external attribution level toward reason of problem”, “perceived
dissatisfaction”, “customer loyalty” and “expectations from complaint process”. Descriptive information is produced first and relationships between variables are scrutinized.

HYPOTHESES OF THE RESEARCH
Hypotheses are mentioned below to reach the goals of the study;

H₁: Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with customer loyalty.
H₂: Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with perceived dissatisfaction.
H₃: Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with external attribution level toward problem.
H₄: Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with expectations from complaint process.

DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH
The survey questions are constructed by the help of the previous researches. First questions are used to gather demographic information and some basic information. Other questions is shaped with 5-point Likert scale and designed as “strongly agree”, “agree”, “undecided”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree” to measure the research variables. Gursoy, McCleary and Lepsito (2007)’s study and Chebat, Davidow and Codjovi (2005)’s study is benefited for constructing the questions to measure the complaining propensity of customer. To measure the external attribution level toward the reason of problem questions in Oh (2004)’s study was helpful. Moreover in designing the questions about customer expectations from complaining process Hansen, Wilke and Zaichkowsky (2009)’s research is benefited. Furthermore to measure the perceived dissatisfaction, the questions in the Chebat, Davidow and Codjovi (2005)’s research were adapted. At last questions in the Sun and Liu (2009)’s study was benefited to measure the customer loyalty.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH
General Findings
It is seen that % 58 of the research attendants (197 people) is female and %42 of the attendants (145 people) is male. Furthermore great majority of the research attendants (%86, 294 people) are between the age of 1 and 24. Moreover % 90 of the attendants has a monthly income of less than 750 TL. Most of the students (%63, 215 people) prefer the mobile operator of Avea, who don’t have regular income. The rate of attendants who face problems with the services in last year is % 80 (273 people). % 31 (109 people) of the customers convey their problems to firms. This quantity consists of % 40 of the problem experiencers. Moreover % 86 of the customers shares his/her dissatisfactions and problems with friends. This value shows that negative word of mouth is an important subject that has to be consideration by firms.

Reliability Coefficients of Variables
Cronbach alpha coefficients for each variable are seen in the following table which shows the reliability of the survey form;

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES
To test the hypotheses correlation analysis was conducted which shows the linear relationships between variables. Correlation analysis determines the relationship level between dependent variable and independent variable by using correlation coefficient (r) (Gegez, 2005). According to correlation analysis there is seen a low, meaningful and positive relationship between customer loyalty and complaining propensity to firm. This result indicates that customer loyalty, which is defined as a want of not changing preferred firm easily and continuing purchasing from same firm, is related with complaining propensity. So the hypothesis of “Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with customer loyalty” is accepted.

Moreover there is seen a meaningful relationship between perceived dissatisfaction and complaining propensity to firm. This result shows that perceived customer dissatisfaction, which refers to level of feeling negative emotions with a deficient product or service like stress, disappointment, frustration, worry, astonishment, disgust, anger etc., is related with complaining propensity to firm. So the
hypothesis of “Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with perceived dissatisfaction.” is accepted.
Furthermore there is seen a statistically significant relationship between external attributions level and complaining propensity to firm and the hypothesis of “Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with external attribution level toward problem.” is also accepted.
At last “expectations from complaining process” is also another important situational factor that meaningfully related with complaining propensity. So the hypothesis of “Complaining propensity to firm is meaningfully related with expectations from complaint process.” is accepted also. This variable is related with the customer thoughts about quickness and fairness of complaining process. Table- 2 summarizes the correlation analyses results;

Insert table 2 here

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS
Depicting and eliminating the factors that leads to customer dissatisfaction is possible only by ensuring customers to convey their dissatisfaction to firm. By this way, not only reaching economic targets, but also achieving social targets of companies would be easier. Firms which know the reasons and conditions that lead customers to transfer their consumption related problems to firm and take necessary precautions by taking into consideration of such information, can decrease and prevent occurrence of future customer problems, customer losses and adverse behaviors of dissatisfied consumers if gained customer problems managed and solved appropriately.
All in all, the situational factors, which are related with “customer complaint propensity to firm”, are determined as “customer loyalty”, “perceived dissatisfaction”, “external attributions toward problem” and “expectations from complaint process”. In addition to these variables, the complaining propensity of male customers is more than female ones but this difference is not meaningful. Moreover it is seen that customers who have positive complaining experience with firm have greater complaining propensity to firm. In other words, positive relationships and experiences with company lead customers to solve problems primarily with the firm instead of applying other solutions.
Firms had better understand these factors and take necessary facilitating precautions for customer complaining propensity to firm. In this sense, creating good relationships with customers, supporting and increasing thought and feeling of problems may be resulted from company, increasing expectations of customers from complaint management processes by providing realistic contracts, decreasing the economic and spiritual costs of complaining process by training employees and developing consumer oriented complaining procedures would be helpful.

REFERENCES


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### Table 2. Situational Factors and Complaining

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<th>Variables</th>
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<tr>
<td>Customer Loyalty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>External Attribution toward Problem</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations from Complaining Process</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.