

Consumer Complaining Behaviour towards Public Services: Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

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This study aims to investigate the influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on the behaviour of consumer complaining through behavioural intention towards public services. This study used a cross-sectional design and a random sampling method was employed. Complete data was collected from 241 respondents. Data were analysed using SPSS version 22.0 and AMOS version 18.0 for structural equation modelling. Findings of this study showed that attitudes towards complaining, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control have a significant effect on consumer complaining behaviours. Among the significant components of behaviours by complainants, 'write a complaint' has the most significant influence on consumers' behaviours towards public services. The public organization should provide interpersonal communication training to their employees to enhance their interaction skill with customers.

Key words: *Consumer Complaining Behaviour, Public Services, Structural Equation Modelling.*

Introduction

Public service is the agency involved in providing services on behalf of the government (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2011), while the government can be defined as a group that exercises sovereignty over another country, state, society or other agency (Business Dictionary 2015). Many organizations encourage users to make complaints if they are not satisfied with the quality of their services. By doing so, an organization can resolve consumer dissatisfaction and mitigate against negative impressions of spreading. This will help retain customers.

However, if complaining is encouraged, it is important for the organization to have a clear understanding of the issues or causes behind user dissatisfaction in order to take action in their own way.

In an ideal situation, when consumers are not satisfied with the services offered, they would speak up so that this does not happen again, and the firm or an organization would have the opportunity to respond immediately by improving the quality of their services. However, in terms of showing dissatisfaction towards the service providers, consumers may transform their dissatisfaction into an action like complaining. A complaint by a dissatisfied consumer provides the organization with an opportunity to learn about their problems and take corrective actions. An organization that understands the roots of consumer complaint behaviour can develop an effective complaint resolution strategy, which in turn may have a positive impact on consumer retention, reduce negative word-of-mouth, and improve their performance.

Complaints can be defined as expressive speech acts that customers exhibit consciously and unconsciously on the psychological state of the organization (Tan et al. 2015). The complaints are not a single utterance but rather a combination of several utterances taken together called the speech act set. A complaint is a statement of dissatisfaction. In simple terms, a complaint occurs when an individual communicates his feelings of dissatisfaction to firms and businesses regarding the goods or services provided, and sometimes the complaint is communicated through a third party, for example consumer associations (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004). However, not all dissatisfied consumers complain. Those who do not complain assume that complaining would not change much, and it would be a waste of their time and energy. Studies even recommend encouraging dissatisfied customers to complain because if a customer is unhappy but does not complain, the provider may lose the customer (Prashanth, 2000).

According to Jones et al. (2002), the issues of consumer dissatisfaction depends on both the nature of the situation and services of the organization. For example, if a consumer is dissatisfied with a given grocery store, the consumer can readily switch to a competitor. In contrast, if parents are dissatisfied with the public school where their children attend, there is no competitor to switch to. The least they can do is to move their children, which will incur great difficulties for the consumer.

In Malaysia, public grievances towards the public sector's service delivery are often channelled to the Public Complaints Bureau (PCB), a department under the Prime Minister's Office. PCB receives and processes the complaints and facilitates efforts to rectify all channelled public grievances. PCB acts as a mediator and facilitator between dissatisfied consumers and public agencies. Table 1 shows a comparison of the change in percentage in the amount of feedback received by the PCB for the months of January to June from 2015 to 2018. This comparison is based on the amount of feedback in the previous year. Looking at the percentage change in the

complaints received, there was no continuous decline due to a decrease in complaints received in 2015, which is 22.5%, an increase of 16.1% in 2016, which is a decline in 2017 of 18.7%, and a 10.5% increase in 2018. This shows the complaints received were still not reduced continuously because there are many who are not satisfied and have not submitted their complaints. However, non-complaint feedback increased by 44.8% in 2017 and 22.1% in 2018, and decreased only in 2015 and 2016, by 17.6% and 27.5%, respectively.

In light of this, the study attempts to evaluate the factors that may influence the complainants' behaviour towards government services. The study intends to investigate whether attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control influence complaining behaviour through behavioural intention. Complaining behaviour consists of telling off, writing a complaint, and complaining to a higher level of organization.

Table 1: Comparison of the percentage change in the amount of feedback for January - June from 2015 to 2018 in Malaysia

Comparison	Year			
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of complaints received	↓ 22.5%	↑ 16.1%	↓ 18.7%	↑ 10.5%
Number of non-complaint received	↓ 17.6%	↓ 27.5%	↑ 44.8%	↑ 22.1%

Source: i-Aduan System 2018, Public Complaints Bureau

Literature Review

Consumer complaining behaviour towards public services is expected to be influenced by attitude towards complaining, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. The association between the selected main factors and consumer complaining behaviour are illustrated below.

Consumer Complaining Behaviour

Consumer complaining behaviour refers to actions taken by individuals that involve the delivery of something negative about the product or service to another provider or organization (Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981). This act of public complaint indicates that consumers can file complaints, take legal action, return goods or make requests for improvement to sellers, manufacturers, service providers, official organizations and associations (Heung & Lam, 2003). However, complaints do not always result from dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction does not always lead to complaints. This indicates that dissatisfaction is a necessary, but inadequate,

cause to complain (Tronvoll, 2007). Thus, understanding consumer complaints behaviours is important in today's service industries because effective management of complaints behaviours may serve as a competitive advantage (Azmi et al. 2015).

Attitude towards Complaining

A positive attitude shows the bright side of life, is optimistic, and expects the best to happen. It is clear that it is well worth developing and strengthening the mind to act (Ryckman, 2004). Complainers may believe that by complaining, they are exercising their right or they may consider complaining to be the right thing to do when they encounter dissatisfaction. The attitude towards complaining is measured by the *Good in Attitude* towards complaining or attitudinal belief which determines the consumers' view and their perception about the complaining, *Expectation* towards complaining, which refers to what a consumer expects to gain by complaining, and *Attitude Outcome* of complaining, which refers to a consumer's assessment of the benefits and costs resulting from the complaining.

Subjective Norms

Subjective norms refer to individual perceptions of the social acceptability of their action in either complaining or not complaining (Ajzen, 1991). The resulting intention to complain is also influenced by the motivation to comply with social norms. The impact of subjective norms was found to be significant among Koreans (Park, 2005), while Hee (2000) indicated that subjective norms did not influence the complaining behaviour. Park (2005) also studied subjective norms among Korean policemen and found that support from family members was reflected through the strong feeling of collectivism in the Korean society, which motivated close relatives to complain in the face of dissatisfaction. This study has revealed that Subjective Norms play an important role in predicting the intention of someone who frequently complains or is a whistle blower (Colgate et al. 2007).

Perceived Behavioural Control

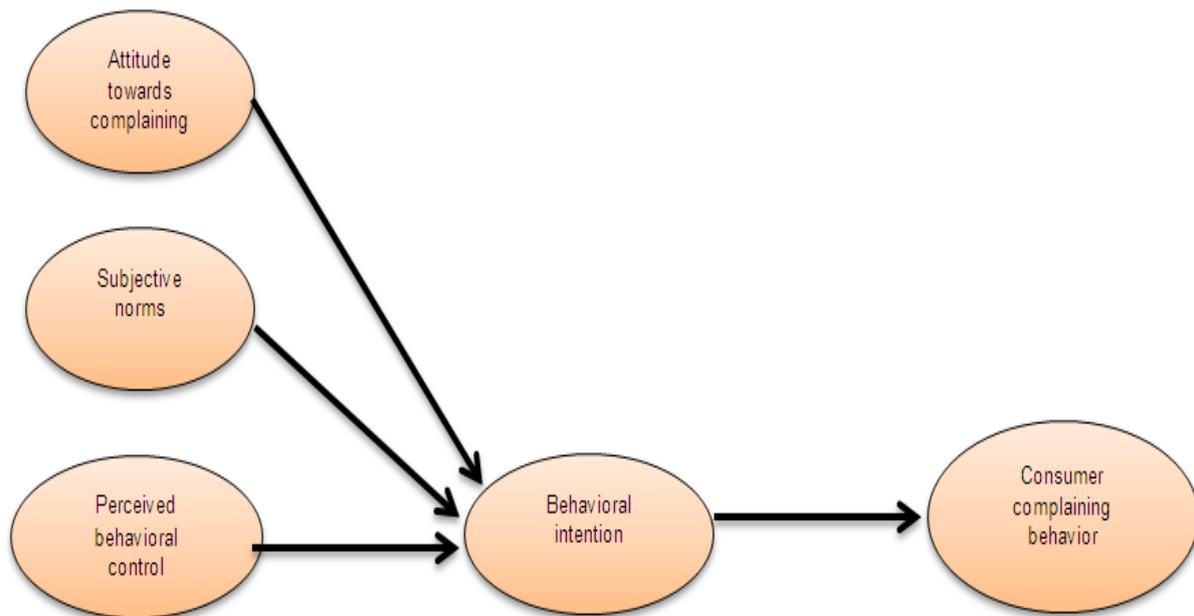
Perceived behavioural control is a construct measuring the ease or difficulty with which person can execute an act (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Perceived behavioural control was found to be critical in the study of the decision to purchase dairy products (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2005). The results of the study reported that perceived behavioural control strongly influenced the intention to purchase a quality dairy product because consumers were confident and believed that the behaviour would have a positive impact on the environment. The antecedents for PBC are *Self-Efficacy*, *Experience*, and *Control Ability*. *Self-efficacy* refers to a belief in one's own capabilities to organize and execute the complaining behaviour, while *Experience* refers to a person who has had experience in complaining; be it a direct experience, in which a person

went through the process of complaining in the face of dissatisfaction, or an indirect experience, in which a person may have just heard about how other consumers have complained.

Theoretical Framework

The study developed a framework for interpreting the tendency of consumer complaints to public service in Malaysia. The framework of this study is a continuation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) combined with selected elements of the Huppertz Model (Huppertz Model, 2003). The theoretical framework for this study is shown in Figure 1. Complainant attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were the independent variables in this study. Further, behavioural intention is the mediating variable between complainant attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control over public complaints behaviour.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



Methodology

This study aims to examine how the selected factors affect consumer complaining behaviour towards public services through behavioural intention. This study employed a cross-sectional design. Primary data was collected in Klang Valley at the National Registration Department, the Immigration Department and Public Service Department, through a structured self-administered questionnaire. The target population comprises a total of 405 complainants. A

random sampling method was then employed to select a total of 241 complaints using a random number generator.

The instrument that was used in this research was the 7-point Likert scale questionnaires. Likert scale is the easiest way to build based upon the supposition that each statement on the scale has an attitude value, importance or weight in reflecting the attitude towards the issue in question. There are also multiple-choice items in this questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part of the questionnaire includes demographic questions based on personal information such as gender, age, ethnicity, income, and highest education. The second part of the questionnaire involved latent factors including attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, behavioural intention and complaining behaviour.

The data analysis starts with the descriptive analysis, followed by the exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis and structural equation modelling.

Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

This section of the chapter outlines the socio-demographic profiles of the 241 complainants as tabulated below. The male and female respondents of the survey represented 59.8% and 40.2%, respectively. Pertaining to the age distribution of respondents, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents (31.5%) were aged between 26 years and 35 years. While 29% were within the age range of “36 – 45” years, 23.2% were between 46 and 55 years and the remaining 15.8% of respondents were aged 25 years and below. The majority of the respondents are Malays (71.8%), who are followed by Chinese and Indian at 14.9% and 10%, respectively. 3.3% of the respondents belong to the Others ethnic group. Majority of the respondents (66%) were single followed by 31.1% who were married. Another 2.9% of the respondents were either divorced or widowed. The majority of respondents (38.6%) had a Bachelor’s Degree. 30.3% of the respondents surveyed owned a Diploma and 22.4% held other qualifications such as SPM and STPM. 7.9% had a Master’s Degree and the remaining 0.8% had completed their Ph.D.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to uncover the latent structure or dimensions of a set of variables. As noted in Table 2, the value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for all variables exceed the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974) and the Bartlett’s test of sphericity is significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). Both results of KMO and Bartlett’s test suggest that the data was adequate for the factor analysis procedure.

Table 2: The Results of Measure of Sampling Adequacy

	Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
		Approx. Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
Behaviour	0.701	729.357	45	0.000
Behavioural Intention	0.686	457.567	55	0.000
Attitude towards Complaining	0.758	731.856	55	0.000
Subjective Norms	0.885	741.789	45	0.000
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.892	1466.979	136	0.000

The behaviour construct, which consisted of 9 measured-items, had been factored into three subscales as a result of EFA. The three subscales are 'Tell off', 'Higher Level', and 'Write Complain'. The Behavioural Intention construct, which consisted of 11 items, had also been factored into three subscales namely 'No Intention', 'Have Plan', and 'Intent to Complain'. Meanwhile, the Attitude towards Complaining construct, which consisted of 11 items, had been factored into three subscales, 'Expectation', 'Good in Attitude', and 'Attitude Outcome'. The Subjective Norms construct, which consisted of 10 items, had been factored into two subscales namely 'Referent Relatives' and 'Referent Beliefs'. The - construct, Perceived Behavioural Control, which consisted of 17 items, had been factored into three subscales, which were renamed as 'Self-Efficacy', 'Experience', and 'Control Ability'.

Reliability Analysis for EFA

Reliability test was performed to test the internal consistency of the behaviour, behavioural intention, attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, and perceived behaviour control factors. The result in Table 3 indicates that the measurement instrument for the study is reliable since the Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.657 – 0.905, which are considered acceptable (Zainudin, 2010).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

Factors	Subscales	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Behavioural Intention	No Intention	4	0.789
	Have Plan	4	0.754
	Intent to Complain	3	0.726
Behaviour	Tell Off	5	0.657
	Higher Level	2	0.731
	Write Complain	2	0.695
Attitude towards complaining	Positive Attitude	5	0.698
	Expectation	3	0.711
	Attitude Outcome	3	0.729
Subjective Norms	Referent relatives	6	0.815
	Referent beliefs	4	0.830
Perceived Behavioural Control	Self-efficacy	7	0.880
	Experience	6	0.720
	Control ability	4	0.905

Assumption for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Assessment of Normality: In the normality assessment, the study needs to observe two criteria, which is the measure of skewness and the multivariate kurtosis. As for all indicators, skewness values were between -1 to 1, which indicated that the data distribution for the respective items did not depart from normality. The assumption of the multivariate normality is satisfied since the value of multivariate kurtosis or Mardia's statistic was lower than 50.

Outliers: The Mahalanobis distance shows that there were no serious outliers in the data set.

Structural Equation Modelling

The research hypothesis was designed to investigate the relationships between all factors and consumer complaining behaviour, through behavioural intention, towards public services. The standardized regression weights as well as the significance of the estimates for the measurement models of behaviour, behavioural intention, attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are described in Table 4. The results indicate that all exogenous components have significant effects on each respective construct, which are attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, perceived behaviour control, behavioural intention, and behaviour. Below are some discussions on the hypotheses tested.

H_{1(a)}: Positive attitude has a significant influence on attitude towards complaining.

H_{1(b)}: Expectation has a significant influence on attitude towards complaining.

H_{1(c)}: Attitude outcome has a significant influence on attitude towards complaining.

The results demonstrated that *positive attitude*, *expectation*, and *attitude outcome* were the components of attitude towards complaining. The two paths that were positively and significantly ($p < 0.10$) associated with attitude towards complaining are *positive attitude* and *expectation*, while *attitude outcome* did not significantly influence attitude towards complaining. *Expectation* ($\beta = 0.903$) played the most important role in influencing attitude towards complaining among the complainants of the public services in the Klang Valley area. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

H_{2(a)}: *Referent beliefs* has a significant and direct influence on *subjective norms*.

H_{2(b)}: *Referent relatives* has a significant and direct influence on *subjective norms*.

The study confirmed that *referent relatives* and *referent beliefs* were components of subjective norms. In the final model, the two paths were directly and significantly ($p < 0.10$) associated with subjective norms. *Referent relatives* ($\beta = 0.926$) played the most important role in influencing subjective norms among the complainants. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

Table 4: The Standardized Regression Weight and the Corresponding Probability

Construct	Path	Subscales	Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	P
Attitude towards complaining	-->	Positive attitude	0.835	-	-	-
		Expectation	0.903	0.273	4.200	***
		Attitude outcome	0.018	0.103	3.219	0.026**
Subjective Norms	-->	Referent relative	0.926	0.172	5.428	***
		Referent belief	0.896	-	-	-
Perceived Behavioural control	-->	Self efficacy	0.715	-	-	-
		Experience	0.800	0.224	6.362	***
		Control ability	0.596	0.183	4.776	***
Behavioural Intention	-->	No intention	0.379	0.222	3.407	***
		Have plan	0.809	-	-	-
		Intent to complain	0.587	0.273	4.215	***
Behaviour	-->	Tell off	0.910	-	-	-
		Higher level	0.592	0.143	5.142	***
		Write complain	0.929	0.183	2.593	0.010**

*** Indicates highly significant, p -value <0.001

** Indicates moderate significant, p -value <0.05

H_{3(a)}: *Self-efficacy* has a significant and direct influence on *perceived behavioural control*.

H_{3(b)}: *Control ability* has a significant and direct influence on *perceived behavioural control*.

H_{3(c)}: *Experience* have a significant and direct influence on *perceived behavioural control*.

Self-efficacy, control ability and experience are components of *perceived behavioural control*.

In the final model, the three paths were positively and significantly ($p < 0.10$), associated with *perceived behavioural control*. *Experience* ($\beta = 0.800$) played the most important role in influencing *perceived behavioural control* among the complainants. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

H_{4(a)}: *No intention* has a significant and direct influence on *behavioural intention*.

H_{4(b)}: *Have a plan* has a significant and direct influence on *behavioural intention*.

H_{4(c)}: *Intent to complain* has a significant and direct influence on *behavioural intention*.

EFA analysis indicated that *no Intention, have a plan and intent to complain* were components of *behavioural intention*. In the final model, the three paths were statistically significant ($p < 0.10$) and positively associated with *behavioural intention*. The subscale of *have a plan* ($\beta = 0.809$) played the most important role in influencing *behavioural intention* among the complainants of public services. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

H_{5(a)}: *Tell off* has a significant and direct influence on *behaviour*.

H_{5(b)}: *Higher level* has a significant and direct influence on *behaviour*.

H_{5(c)}: *Write a complaint* has a significant and direct influence on *behaviour*.

The EFA analysis indicated that *tell off, higher level and write a complaint* were components of *behaviour*. In the final model, the three paths were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.10$) and positively associated with *behaviour*. *Write a complaint* ($\beta = 0.929$) played the most important role in influencing *Behaviour* among the complainants of public services. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

Table 5: The Standardized Regression Weight and the Corresponding Probability

Construct	Path	Construct	Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	P
Attitude towards Complaining	-->	Behavioural Intention	0.189	0.051	2.634	0.080*
Subjective Norms	-->		0.578	0.087	4.261	***
Perceived Behavioural Control	-->		0.923	0.191	4.632	***
Behavioural Intention	-->	Behaviour	0.803	0.259	4.726	***

*** Indicates highly significant, p -value <0.001

*Indicates significant, p -value <0.10

Furthermore, the study also investigated whether attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were factors that affected consumer complaining behaviour through behavioural intention. The standardized regression weights as well as the significance of the estimates are described in Table 5. Below are some discussions on the hypotheses tested.

H₆: *Attitude towards complaining* has a significant influence on *consumer complaining behaviour* through *behavioural intention*.

H₇: *A subjective norm* has a significant influence on *consumer complaining behaviour* through *behavioural intention*.

H₈: *Perceived behavioural control* has a significant influence on *consumer complaining behaviour* through *behavioural intention*.

The study found that attitude towards complaining, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were positively and significantly related to consumer complaining behaviour through behavioural intention ($p < 0.10$). Among these factors, it was found that perceived behavioural control had the highest impact ($\beta = 0.923, p < 0.000$). Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.

H₉: *Behavioural intention* has a positive influence on *behaviour* in Consumer Complaining Behaviour Model.

Results showed that behavioural intention had a positive and strong impact on consumer complaining behaviour ($\beta = 0.803, p < 0.000$). Thus, the proposed hypothesis is supported.



Conclusion and Recommendation

The main purpose of this study was to determine the components of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, and to investigate the influence of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control on behaviour of consumer complaining through behavioural intention. Among the significant components of behaviour by complainants, *write a complaint* had the most significant influence on the consumer's behaviour towards public services in the Klang Valley area. This shows how the complaint in writing is still used and is a priority for the complainant. In identifying the factors influencing the consumer complaining behaviour through behavioural intention, perceived behavioural control had been the most significant predictor then attitude and subjective norms.

The public organization in Malaysia should provide interpersonal communication training to their employees to enhance their interaction skill with customers. This training can improve their employees' relationship with their customers. Therefore, consumers will feel at ease engaging their services. It is recommended that the government organize campaigns and exhibitions on the ethics of making complaints and the proper channels of making complaints in accordance to the established procedures of the government.



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