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CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOUR AT PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICES

ABSTRACT

This paper examines two specific questions. What types of distinct response styles do the consumers utilize to communicate their dissatisfaction? Do the consumers use different response styles at various types of service guarantees? Since much research indicates that a majority of the consumers do not complain, the service guarantee provides benefits by serving as an effective forum for listening to the voice of the consumer. Implementing a service guarantee also helps the providers understand why it may have failed because the expense of the guarantee provokes remedial action to investigate service failure. We review the complaining behaviour literature and focus on potential reasons consumers choose not to complain.

This article was carried out in the postal clients in the west part of Hungary and was based on one questionnaire. In general, the clients had less complaints situation in case of postal services with specific guarantees than at postal services with unconditional guarantees. The type of service guarantee influences significantly response styles of the consumer's dissatisfaction in case of postal services. We have got three clusters with distinct response styles: "passives", "voicers", and "irates". Otherwise, the activist cluster could not be recognised on the score of our survey. At postal services offering specific guarantees, the rate of passives significantly differs from another one.

Certain limitations of this paper should be noted. The results are based on one-sectional data collected from respondents in the west part of Hungary.

Finally, we present some organizational strategies necessary to encourage non-voicers to complain to the organization allowing effective and efficient complaint management.

Our research reported here has attempted to address some of the preceding gaps in the public utility literature.

Key words: Consumer Complaining Behaviour, Service Guarantees, Complaint Handling, Satisfaction

CONSUMER COMPLAINING BEHAVIOUR AT PUBLIC UTILITY SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

In the competitive sphere, the measurement of service quality is a widespread routine, but that is even less applied in the public utility sector. An increasing number of service companies offer a guarantee, because of expecting to increase the service quality, and the consumer's satisfaction (Hart, 1988). The service guarantees play an important part in service quality and attracting consumers. Furthermore, the guarantee not only influences satisfied consumers, but also dissatisfies customers. A guarantee provides consumers with clear bases for performance assessment and promises compensation if standards are not met. This increase the strength of the belief that complaining if dissatisfied with performance. Past research showed that consumers who complain are less dissatisfied, less likely to engage in negative word-of-mouth.

The main idea of our research is how guarantees of public utility services influence to consumers' evaluations after service has been experienced. This paper aims to analyse the complaint situation, and complaint experiences in connection of different types of service guarantees. In our research, we also analyse how specific guarantee differs from unconditional one in the consumer complaining behaviour. In our research, we also study how the consumers evaluate the satisfaction with complaint handling. We use the concept of consumer complaining behaviour (e.g. Crosby at al, 1990) to measure the satisfaction with complaint handling. It is important to analyse the relationship between the satisfaction level of complaint handling, and the overall satisfaction, too. We can examine in practise of theoretical questions, relationships based on our primary survey. Limitations and implications are presented at the end of the paper. We can get useful results in case of little price relatively services.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Consumer Complaining Behaviour

Many companies still regard customers' complaints as unpleasant and as a waste of time and money. According to Tax and Brown (1998), only 5-10 % of dissatisfied customers decide to complain to the company and most of them are dissatisfied with the way companies resolve

their complaints and have more negative feelings about an organization after they go through the service-recovery process. In addition, current research indicates the impact of complaint management not only on customer satisfaction and loyalty but also on employee satisfaction (Tax and Brown 1998).

Previous researches developed several concept of the consumer complaining behaviour (CCB). Based on CCB research (Blodgett, J.G. – Granbois, D. H. 1995, Singh, J. – Wilkes, R. E. 1991), these process-oriented models with two aspects – static or dynamic – are proposed. The different individuals may perceive different amounts of dissatisfaction in very similar episodes. It is interesting to analyse that the level of dissatisfaction (low, medium, high) has direct impact on the nature and kind of complaint responses chosen by the consumer (voice, negative word – of – mouth, exit, third party complaints, no voice). Furthermore, the attitude toward the act of complaining moderates intention to complain at different individuals. That is, prior experience of complaining is thought to influence the attitude. The nature of the prior experiences may be bad or good and the frequency may be often or sometimes. Because significant variation in complaint responses has been consistently observed across industries, it is postulated that consumers' affect toward the act of complaining is industry specific. However, less systematic attention has been directed to understanding why consumers respond the way they do once they attain a state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Namely the cognitive (expectation – evaluation) or/and the affective approach result in specific complaint response. Likely, the expectancy – value construct is episode specific. It should be pointed out that consumers are not restricted to one type of complaining behaviour. Rather, some consumers might seek redress and complain to friends. There are some indirect variables in connection with consumers' complaining behaviour (for example, personality characteristics, environmental influences, cost, and utility).

2.2. Service Quality focus on the Service Guarantees

Companies that provide service guarantees have found that committing to total customer satisfaction actually helps them focus on providing it (Hart, 1988). Guarantees force firms to focus on what their customers want and expect from each element of the service. Guarantees set clear standards, both for the customers and the employees of the organization. The danger of having to compensate customers for poor service will encourage managers to take guarantees seriously, because they are directly linked to the financial costs of service failures.

Guarantees reduce the consumer's risk of the purchase decision and build long-term loyalty (Heineke, 1998).

A review of the literature revealed lack of consensus regarding the definition of a service guarantee. For instance, Hart, Schlesinger, and Maher (1992) define a service guarantee as "...a statement explaining the service customers can expect (the promise) and what the company will do if it fails to deliver (the payout)." A review of the literature revealed lack of consensus regarding the definition of a service guarantee. This inconsistency is resolved by considering a service guarantee as comprised of two elements, a service promise, and a compensation offer. Two types of service guarantees are examined in this paper: specific and general. Specific guarantees promise superior firm performance on specific attributes (e.g. delivery), while general guarantees promise performance on all aspects of service. Compensation offers may include full or partial refunds and token awards for punitive damages.

It is important to mention that not all service guarantees work properly. Some of them have too many exceptions and conditions, while some others require that the customers manoeuvre through a complicated procedure in order to collect on the guarantee. In order for a service guarantee to work effectively, it must be unconditional, easy to understand, easy to invoke and easy and quick to collect on.

In an article summarizing past research, Wirtz (1998) proposed that well designed service guarantees should be unconditional, easy to understand and communicate, meaningful to customers, easy to invoke, easy to collect on and credible. McDougall, Levesque, and VanderPlaat (1998) found that survey respondents preferred a specific service guarantee to an unconditional guarantee when their attention was focused on invoking the guarantee. In this study, specific guarantees were preferred on three dependent measures: risk reduction, ease of obtaining refunds, and confidence in dealing with the firm. Chu (1998) derived optimal refund policies for service firms under different conditions of salvage value, complaining costs, customer dissatisfaction, frequencies of use during trial, and price. In a study, Lassar, Marmorstein and Sarel (1995) found that the honest communication and the reasonable compensation improve the positive impacts of service guarantee.

The evidence suggests that both, specific and unconditional guarantees have positive effects on customer evaluations. However, their efficacy differs depending upon the task facing the customer, and size, type, and procedures for claiming compensation. Firms should decide refund policies based upon the level of customer opportunism and would do well to

compensate customers for inconvenience as well as basic exchanges or repairs (Tax and Brown 1998).

Service guarantees expedite service recovery. Callan and Moore (1998) used attribution theory to explain how customers evaluate service quality and failure. However, they did not discuss how service guarantees affect customer evaluations in the event of failure (or success) and how firms can design guarantees to assist in service recovery. Tax, Brown and Chandrashekharan (1998) have used social justice theory to explain how customers evaluate service complaint experiences. However, their work did not focus on service guarantees per se. In summary, previous research has identified theoretical approaches that explain how customers evaluate service failure and recovery.

3. CURRENT RESEARCH

We introduce our research is divided into three parts. First, we look over the topical questions, the model of our research, and hypotheses after literature view. Next, there come methodology of empirical study, and our results.

3.1. Research Questions, the Model of our Research, and Hypotheses

Our research aims to examine the service guarantee and the customer satisfaction at the public utility services.

Our questions are following:

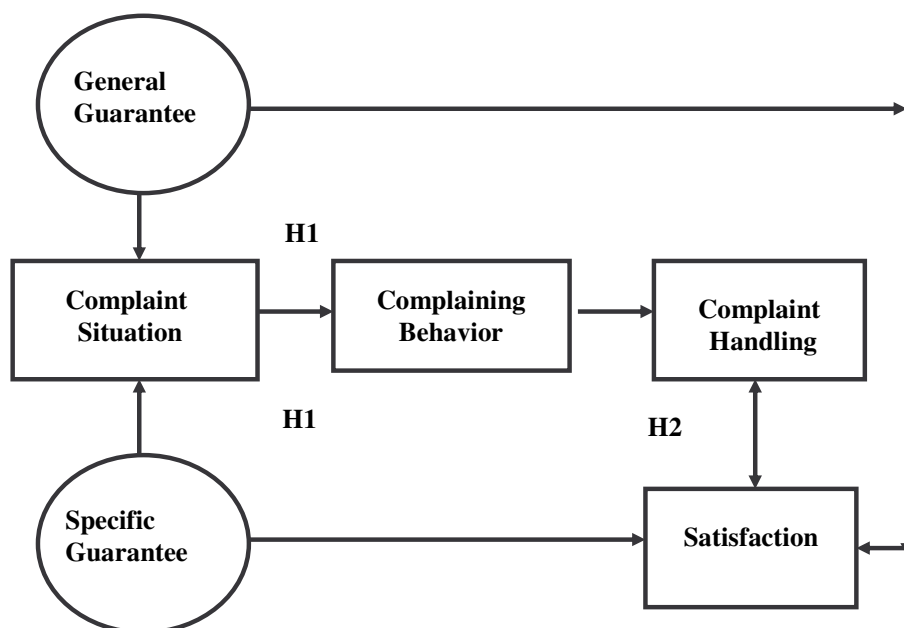
- Does the consumer complaint behavior differ significantly between specific and unconditional service guarantee?
- We have to make clear how do the customers evaluate the complaint handling in the case of different types of service guarantee?
- How do the complaint handling evaluations influence the customer satisfaction?
- How can be the consumers categorized based on complaint behaviour?

We conclude the supposed relationships effects in the following model, and interpret relationships among the components of the research model (Figure 1).

The postal satisfaction surveys take notice of complaint situations, too (Ercsey, 2005). What kind of role does the service guarantee have in development of the complaint situation and the

consumer' complaining behaviour outside of personal attributes, performance – price rate, communication, and image. When service fails we can shed light on that how the consumers give expression to their dissatisfaction (e.g. complaint to service provider, complaint to friends), and how the consumers evaluate the circumstances of complaint handling (e.g. speed, compensation) apropos of service guarantees.

Figure 1: Model of Current Research



Source: author

This study aims to analyse and interpret the general guarantee in case of postal services (Table 1.). If there are service parameters which are important for clients in addition both company and consumers can measure, control (e.g. speed of mail deliveries, waiting time, accessibility), (Ercsey and Dernóczy, 2005).

Another type of service guarantees is examined in this paper: postal services with specific guarantees. Specific guarantees promise superior company performance on specific attributes (e.g. delivery). Quality regulations of postal services refer to the time of forwarding: services with time guarantee within one day at mail deliveries and within two days at parcels. The compensation amount is a double of postal tariff at time guarantee services (Table 1.).

Table 1: Consumer Information of Postal Service Guarantees

Factors of Guarantee	General Guarantee	Specific Guarantee
Performance: Transit time	Ordinary letter: within 3 days Parcel: within 5 days	First class letter: within 1 day Express parcel: within 2 days
Compensation: Lost deliveries	Parcel: max. fifteen folds of postal tariff	First class letter: max. double of postal tariff Express parcel: max. double of postal tariff or insurance of value
Compensation: Delay delivery	x	First class letter: max. double of postal tariff Express parcel: max. double of postal tariff

Source: author

It is important to analyse how guarantees affect consumer evaluations when service fails. Since much research indicates that a majority of consumers do not complain, a service guarantee provides benefits by serving as an effective forum for listening to the voice of the consumer (Kashyap, 1999). McDougall, Levesque, and VanderPlaat (1998) found that customers invoked a specific service guarantee in the higher degree because the procedure for claiming compensation was relatively hassle-free. It is suggested (Johnston, 1998) that the more dissatisfied a consumer is, the more likely she/he is to complain, to tell friends and acquaintances, to avoid using the service again and even dissuade others from using it. Oliver (1997) found that dissatisfied consumers told on average ten others about their negative experience. Besides, TARP study (1986) suggest that dissatisfied consumers tell on average nine others.

It may be hypothesized that unsatisfied clients make a complaint more often in case of services with specific guarantees.

H1 Higher degree of consumers makes a complaint to provider when the specific guarantee was not delivered.

It is important the nature of process at services the client is involved in the significant part of actions he or she passes through the service episode. During the evaluation process the client compares his/her expected and experienced fulfilment in reference to service. In case of the postal activities: satisfaction is a cognitive, emotive response based on the subjective evaluation process (Oliver, 1997). Focus of satisfaction: attributes of postal services,

fulfilment parameters, physical facilities, personnel. The customers had claim situation and satisfied customers are not the same number regarding servicing so it is important to clear the special situations with special incident technique. These actions can be used in the prevention on other hand in the management can show in the quality image. The satisfaction of clients may be evaluated during consumption, but it can change its intensity. In a complaint situation the hitherto relatively stable impression about service quality is temporarily transformed, the value judgement of the user moves to a lower level, then the previous value judgement is restored – or not (Veres 2003). The customers who have been in a complaint situation and the satisfied customers do not cancel each other out in the evaluation of the service.

Research on customer satisfaction with complaint experiences emphasized the need to give attention to elements of distributive and procedural justice (Tax et al., 1998). However, research shows that when the compensation is not sufficient or requires too much effort to claim, few customers even bother to report the failure (Ettore, 1994). Therefore, in order for guarantees to be effective, the procedure for claiming compensation should be relatively hassle-free (Maher, 1991). It may be hypothesized that guarantee attributes (speed of delivery, amount of compensation) and the experience of complaint handling improve the consumers' satisfaction.

H2 Satisfaction with complaint handling is related positively to the average satisfaction in case of specific guarantee.

Therefore, we come to the most interesting phases of our study, the examination in practise of theoretical questions, relationships. Whether does clients' opinion prove the previous relationships? The examination of relationships among the type of service guarantee, and the consumer complaint behaviour, and satisfaction results in important information in case of low value services relatively.

3.2. Methodology of our Research

Qualitative phase went before quantitative one, which constitutes of our study. Data collection was made with face-to-face interview in April 2006. There was the emphases especially the customer' evaluation standpoints of postal services, customer' interpretation, definitions of service guarantee, furthermore the comparison of motivation and evaluation of delivered

different postal services. This qualitative phase prepared quantitative surveys. Therefore, at the same time it was managed to find time for the depth interviews and test of the planned questionnaire, too.

Quantitative Phase of Primary Research

In the second part of primary survey, there was the questionnaire survey at the population of one of the Hungarian regions (West part of Hungary) in April – May, in 2006. Number of respondents was 341 at our survey. Sampling technique was combination of stratified sampling and simple random sampling in accordance with our survey in conformity with aim. We selected more respondents with college and secondary degrees education to sample, than it would be necessary based on population distribution. In one respect, these two groups more often go post office, both to fill in exactly the questionnaires expect more education than average of respondents. The questionnaire survey happened to interviewers with personal survey according to the project and number of questions.

Measurement Methods

We used the attribute – oriented method, SERVPERF measured on multi item scale, from the satisfaction measurement methods. The service quality is measured to assess the perceived performance by this method (Parasuraman-Zeithaml-Berry, 1985). The aim of the measurement is subjective evaluation of the perceived service attributes. The performance measurement is engaged more often to evaluate consumers' satisfaction in practise. We used evaluation, satisfaction and expectation scales from one to five to the basic questions of questionnaire (Hofmeister, Simon and Sajtos, 2003. Parasuraman–Zeithaml–Berry, 1988).

We measured the complaining behaviour on a nominal scale with six categories (complaining by oral to Post, complaining by written to Post, complaining to a friend, complaining to some friends, no complaint). Previous research (Singh, 1988) has shown that complaint responses can be conceptualized as consisting of three distinct dimensions (1) voice responses, including actions directed toward the service staff, (2) private responses, that is, actions involving word-of-mouth communication to friends, relatives, (3) third party responses, including actions directed toward media. Following these results, CCB is conceptualized as four dimensional (plus passive responses) in our research. Complaint clusters were defined based on the consumer complaining behaviour. Past research, (Barlow and Moller, 1996) four clusters

were identified: voicers, passives, irates, and activist. The satisfaction with complaint handling was measured with items adapted for this research context (e.g. Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990). Pretest findings indicated a few problematic items, and revisions were made to the final instrument. These are: procedural elements – accessibility, speed, interactional elements – politeness, empathy, distributive element – refund.

Besides, the respondents evaluated the given variables with ordinal, ratio, and nominal scales on 1 to 5 ones. We decided the variables list because of literature, researches, and previous issues. There were only closed questions in the questionnaire, because we wanted marked and ranked data for statistical analysis. The required information, the structure of questionnaire: the assemblage of questionnaire followed the objects of our research. We made the analyses in reference to the guaranteed delivery time postal items and non-priority ones, too.

3.3. Analyses of the Results

3.3.1. Hypothesis (H1) in Connection with Consumer Complaining Behaviour testing in case of Specific and General Guarantees

As can be seen last year thirty-one percent of respondents had complaint situation sending or delivering ordinary letter, and every second of them made a complaint to service provider or friends. In case of parcel, there were twenty-nine percent of clients questioned who had complaint situation, and it was the highest percentage of complaining (18 %), supposedly, it was due to more value. Otherwise, only every fifth of them remembered negative experiences with first class letter, and made a complaint in rate fifty percent of them. In our research, at express parcel there were the least subjects with complaint situation (13 %), and the rate of complainers was fifty percent.

First hypothesis examines the type of complaint response by right of different service guarantees. In this paragraph, we analyse, how the type of service guarantee influences the type of complaint response for understanding of consumer complaining behaviour at Post. First, we formulate the null hypothesis: the proportion of complainers who makes a complaint directly to Post is twenty percent at the most in case of letter and parcel services. We apply the test statistic Z for hypothesis testing based on marketing research literature (Malhotra, 2003, pages 536-540). We found the respondents in more proportion that made complaint in writing to postal provider in case of first class letter. We can see that more respondents of objects with complaint situation applied to Post for service recovery by phone or in person in

case of first class letter. Otherwise, there are more respondents with passive behaviour in case of ordinary letter, than it is at first class letter.

Results show that more complainers made complaint only in verbal to postal provider in case of parcel and express parcel. Furthermore, there were much more complainers who made complaint some private people by negative word-of-mouth.

Results of Z test show that the probability associated with the calculated value of the test statistic is less than the level of significance; the null hypothesis is rejected in case of first class letter, parcel, and express parcel. We conclude that there is evidence that the proportion of complainers who made complaint directly to provider is significantly greater than 0.20 when consumers dissatisfied with specific guarantees (Table 2).

Table 2: Z test for Examination of Type of the Complaint Responses and the Service Guarantees

<i>Type of Service Guarantee</i>	<i>Z test</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
General guarantee (Ordinary letter)	0.3914	0.3483 > 0.05
Specific guarantee (First class letter)	3.2236	0.0007 < 0.05
General guarantee (Parcel)	3.03719	0.0011 < 0.05
Specific guarantee (Express parcel)	2.4518	0.0071 < 0.05

There is consensus among researchers is the fact that not all consumers engage in some of complaint action. This is due to different reasons, which are: (1) consumers might not know to whom to complain, (2) negative experiences related to having their complaints handled poorly, and (3) consumer belief that complaining is an exercise in futility because they will be either ignored or patronized.

By virtue of the results, **first hypothesis is accepted.**

Table 3: Hypothesis in Connection with Complaint Responses

Hypothesis	Status
H1. Higher degree of clients makes a complaint to provider when the specific guarantee was not delivered.	Accepted

Determination of Complaint Clusters based on the Consumer Complaining Behaviour

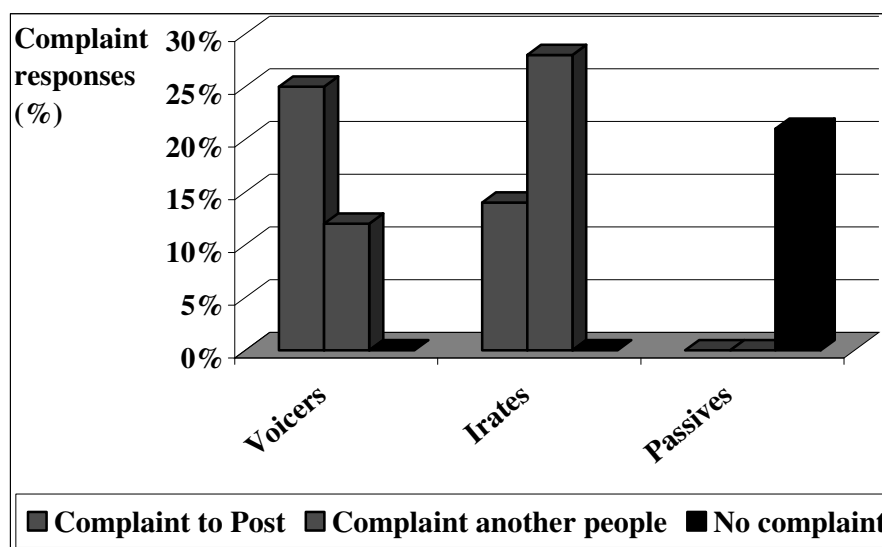
Our results of consumer complaining behaviour piqued our interest: can we categorize the respondents based on their complaining behaviour? Several researchers have concluded that

consumers' responses given complaint situation may be three levels (e.g. Veres, 2003, p. 180):

1. level: consumers tell the provider that something is wrong,
2. level: consumers do not say a word to the providers but they engage in negative word-of-mouth,
3. level: consumers do not say anything.

As can be seen there were not consumers of interviewed dissatisfied ones who gave their negative experience to third party. The dissatisfied respondents fell into three clusters, and we can categorise and label them based on the type of complaint response. We determined the complaint clusters in reference to four postal services. As can be seen in Figure 2, the proportion of complainers is low, and the difference between the postal-response and non-postal-response is important.

Figure 2: Complaint Clusters of Parcel



For provider it is very useful the voicers. Otherwise, the irates are a danger of the provider, because negative word-of-mouth mushrooms. At passive behaviour, the dissatisfaction of consumer is hidden, so the opinion of silent killer does not get into Post.

3.3.2. Relationship between the Satisfaction with the Complaint Handling and the Overall Satisfaction, H2 testing

The Claim-handling System of the Hungarian Post

At claim handling system there is considered the usual standards and furthermore EU standards and demands fixed in acts. The Post operates Service of Customers on all office - easily reachable places with phones - for reception of claims, arrangements, and examination of them and for solution. In addition, customers can reach the webpage of Post. In 2001 there happened a development to install the homogeneous complain-system and information system, there established the Office of Customer' Service Co-ordination. This centre is to collect the claims on countrywide, the regions, and special services (money, news, EMS) databases, processing and analyzing tasks. From June of 2002 there is operating a computerized complain programme on the signed points of which help the obligation (for customers rights – administration and data servicing) determined in acts can be fulfilled.

Table 4: Satisfaction Mean with the Elements of the Complaint Handling

<i>Type of Service Guarantee</i>	<i>Procedural Elements</i>		<i>Interactional Elements</i>		<i>Distributive Element</i>	<i>Average satisfaction</i>
	<i>Accessibility</i>	<i>Speed</i>	<i>Politeness</i>	<i>Empathy</i>	<i>Refund</i>	
Gen. guarantee (letter)	3.371	2.789	3.11	2.951	x	3.33
Specific guarantee (letter)	3.222	2.576	2.769	2.807	2.666	2.964
General guarantee (parcel)	3.181	2.726	3.184	3.00	3.00	3.282
Specific guarantee (parcel)	3.218	2.357	3.35	2.714	3.142	3.285

The complainers evaluated the average level and different elements of complaint handling, too. Results indicate that respondents dissatisfied with complaint handling. We further analyse different services, we can point out that at ordinary letter 3.33, a little worse at time guaranteed services, at first class mail 2.964, at express parcel 3.285, and at parcel 3.282. The standard deviation of average satisfaction with complaint handling is highest at first class mail 1.035, and worst at express parcel 0.825. At evaluation of different aspects, the accessibility of the procedural elements has better evaluation, and the speed of the procedural elements has worse evaluation. The consumers dissatisfied with refund, especially the first class users.

Generally, the interactional elements of complaint handling are very poor, the provider does not pay attention for postal staff' politeness and empathy.

Liu (2000) have shown that in general, the complaint handling impacts the consumer evaluation of service quality, the complaining behaviour, and the consumer expectations.

After these let us see there is relationship between the average satisfaction with complaint handling and customers' overall satisfaction. Because of our hypothesis opinions about services, positive complaint experience favourably effect to the consumer satisfaction. Results of survey did not verify this hypothesis at none of postal services. At analysing of the consumer complaining behaviour, it is important to examine, whether the evaluation of elements of complaint handling effects to consumer satisfaction. There is relationship between overall satisfaction and the evaluation of refund at first class mail. We can see, that better compensation perceived adds to higher satisfaction. However, this connection is very low ($r=0.164$). Besides, in case of express parcel (Table 5.) it is connection ($r = 0.661$), the more favourable is the refund policy the more good is overall and vice versa. Furthermore, there is relationship between perceived timing of complaint handling and satisfaction at time guaranteed parcel ($r = 0.589$), although the strength of association shows, this connection is higher than average.

Table 5: Correlation between the Overall Satisfaction and the Evaluation of Complaint Handling

<i>Elements of the Complaint Handling</i>	<i>Pearson Correlation</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Refund (Specific Guarantee – First class letter)	0.164	0.005 < 0.01
Refund (Specific guarantee - Express parcel)	0.661	0.014 < 0.05
Speed (Specific guarantee – Express parcel)	0.589	0.034 < 0.05

In virtue of above, second hypothesis is accepted partly.

Table 6: Hypothesis in Connection with the Satisfaction with the Complaining Handling

Hypothesis	Status
H2. Satisfaction with complaint handling is related positively to the average satisfaction in case of specific guarantee.	Accepted partly

Summary

Four research questions were stated at the beginning of this research. We re-examine these questions in light of the results from our survey.

1. Does the consumer complaining behavior differ significantly between specific and unconditional service guarantee?

In general, small number of the dissatisfied clients made a formal complaint in case of postal services. This finding corresponds with previous researches (Andreassen, 2001, TARP 1986) which suggest that the majority of consumers do not complain. Chakrapani (1998) mentioned that only four percent of dissatisfied consumers complain. It is interesting to note that higher degree of the clients made a complaint to provider when the specific guarantee was not delivered. This is consistent to previous studies (Kashyap, 1999, McDougall et al., 1998). It concludes that customers invoked a specific service guarantee in the higher degree because the procedure for claiming compensation was relatively hassle-free.

2. We have to make clear how do the customers evaluate the complaint handling in the case of different types of service guarantee?

Bases on the results we conclude, that postal clients dissatisfied with complaint handling. Interestingly, it does not show essential difference the satisfaction level of the complaint handling between specific and general service guarantee. We can establish, the accessibility of the procedural elements has better evaluation, and the speed of the procedural elements has worse evaluation. The consumers dissatisfied with refund, especially the first class users. Generally, the interactional elements of complaint handling are very poor, the provider does not pay attention for postal staff' politeness and empathy.

3. How do the complaint handling evaluations influence the customer satisfaction?

Similarly, to other services, the recovery policy and the complaint handling play significant role in the consumer satisfaction. The findings presented in Table 5, there is relationship between the elements of the complaint handling in connection with specific service guarantee and the overall satisfaction. The more favourable is the complaint handling with the specific guarantee the more higher the consumer satisfaction, and vice versa.

4. How can be the consumers categorized based on complaint behaviour?

It seems that the dissatisfied clients fell into three clusters, and we can categorise and label them based on the type of complaint response. We determined the complaint clusters in reference to four postal services; these were voicers, irates, and passives. On the one hand, this is consistent to Barlow and Moller (1996) theory that four clusters were identified; on the other hand, our finding contradicts the previous study that we identified only three clusters.

Managerial implications

We made primary survey at individual clients. Although the postal items volumes of individual clients indicate descending tendency (e.g. percentage of individual postal letter is ten percent), Hungarian Post supplies basic needs as the appointed universal post services company, and the positive-negative opinions of postal activity contribute to building of firm image. Drawing from the results, we offer the following strategic suggestions for postal managers, and for other service providers:

- The service organization may be able to focus on postal services with specific guarantees, and managing of service quality.
- In point of personal evidences, it would be take notice of employ skilful, motivated staff, which is in practice, and committed to provider, too.
- In management of service process, the improvement of effective of complaint management system is a significant task by creating of the claim-friendly organization, and company culture, and by improvement of the external and internal communication.
- For a complaint management system to be successful, the Post has to regard complaints as opportunities and even encourage clients to complain more as company can only improve a negative situation if they know about it.
- Post also has to train its clients, show them how to complain, and make tea complaining process as easy as possible for them.
- Furthermore, Post should learn from its clients and their problems and inform them about the steps being taken to remedy their problem and the changes being made to ensure it does not occur in the future.
- In addition, Post should always communicate a contact person so that forwards of complaints due to “outside my reference” employee reactions, which are time consuming

for both clients and company, can be prevented. Drawing public attention can help the company to generate complaint, inform the clients how Post will react to a complaint, and to secure the client that the company will deal his problem appropriately.

- The modernisation of the post's information system would contribute to the reduction of the deficiencies in connection with the reliability and the handling of complaints.

However, the highest priority for organisations should still always be to prevent service failures from happening at all and to do it right the first time. The liberalisation of the European post market leads attention of postal organizations to improving the level of service quality.

Limits of this research, and implications for further research

We assumed the following:

- Firstly, we examined consumers only at one point of time in one region. Therefore, our results might be distorted by situational and regional factors. It can be supposed that consumers' evaluation gives differences in regional context. This could be related to their cultural and geographic background.
- Secondly, only one service industry context was examined, postal services.

This research represent that results of questionnaire gave answers for major aims by exploration the important relationship between variables. For deep analysing of consumer' satisfaction it should be know complain situation before consumer interview, and complain experiences. It can be used focus group interview for analyses the extraordinary situation.

The main limitation of our investigation is the ability to generalize its conclusions, mainly because all data were gathered only for postal services. Whereas the extension of research field gives possibility to refer to behaviour-personality features of variables, too. Future research should explore the nature of word-of-mouth and the attitude of complaining in case of different public utility services.

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