



## Complaining Behavior in the Service Context: Evidence from Benin City

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**Abstract:** This paper explores complaining behaviour with respect to restaurant and interstate transport services in Benin City metropolis. It examines proportion of service customers who are dissatisfied and complained, complaint motivation and factors influencing complaint voicing in the restaurant and interstate transport service subsectors. Using the survey research design, responses obtained from 371 respondents were analysed using binomial analysis, chi square and multiple regression at a 0.05 level of statistical significance. Content analysis was employed for open ended questions. Results from the study showed that while there was no significant difference between the proportion of customers who were satisfied and those dissatisfied with the service offering in both subsectors, there was also no significant difference between the proportion of dissatisfied customers who complained and those who did not. Complaint voicing in the selected service subsectors was found not to be dependent on gender, age, educational level, usage frequency, income level, personal confidence of customer, cost of service or severity of service failure. Based on the findings, the authors suggest that there is need for restaurants and interstate transport companies in Nigeria to develop formal complaint management systems. Procedures for consumer complaints should be simple and involve little or no documentation as customers in the subsectors studied seem not to be favourably disposed to putting their complaints in writing.

**Keywords:** Complaining Behaviour, Compliant motivation, Restaurants, Interstate Transport Companies

### Introduction

As noted by Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), service failure is inevitable even for the best of firms with the

best of intentions, even for those with world-class service systems. Due to the negative impact of service failure, an understanding of

complaints behaviour is crucial in minimizing the incidence of service failure in service organizations.

Since complaining gives service providers the opportunity to recover dissatisfied customers, a number of studies (Heung and Lam 2003; McCole 2004; Bolting 1989) have been carried out over the years on how customers express dissatisfaction and dealing with complaints in service settings. In spite of this fact, Michel and Meuter (2008), explained that it is necessary for more studies to be carried out with respect to complaints and recovery across different service settings and cultures. According to them, exploring whether customers of different nationalities have differing perspectives on failure and recovery would be an addition to the existing literature on complaints management - hence this study seeks to contribute to literature on complaining behaviour by exploring the perspective of customers as it relates to service failure and complaining behaviour in the restaurants and interstate transport service subsectors in Benin city. The specific objectives of this study are to ascertain the proportion of service customers who were dissatisfied and complained. To find out possible reasons why dissatisfied customers may not complain and customers' complaint motivation/action. Lastly, we sought to ascertain whether gender, age, educational level, income level, usage frequency, personal

confidence of customers, cost of service and severity of service failure determined whether dissatisfied customers will or will not voice their complaints.

### **Literature Review**

Though, the first law for service productivity and quality might be: Do it right the first time (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004), service failure continues to occur. According to Maute (2003; 10), service failures are challenging events for service providers, exacerbating the potentials for customer defection on the one hand while creating opportunities to restore satisfaction and loyalty on the other.

Service failure occurs when the customer's expectations of the service encounter are not met by the service organization. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1991), note that customers have three (3) levels of service expectations namely; level of desired service, level of adequate service and level of predicted service. A customer's level of perceived/expected service is therefore a function of the above three (3) levels. According to Zeithaml et al (1991), where actual service does not reach the adequate, desired or predicted level of service expectation, a service failure is said to have occurred.

#### *Customers' Response to Service Failure*

Over the years, a number of studies have been carried out on dissatisfaction as a consequence of

service failure. Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2001) are of the opinion that when customers experience dissatisfaction, four major courses of action are available to them: do nothing, but the service provider's reputation diminishes in the eyes of the customer and they will consider defecting if it occurs again; complain in some form to the service organization; take some kind of overt action with a third party; defect or simply not patronize the firm again and tell other people thus engaging in negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) behavior.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003), capturing customers' response to dissatisfaction arising from service failure explained that dissatisfied customers may not always complain. Research actually reveals that only a minority of dissatisfied customers voice their complaints (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011; TARP, 1986; TARP, 1996; Andreassen, 2001). We seek to test this conclusion with respect to service customers in Benin City, Nigeria. We therefore propose that:

H1: There is no significant difference between the proportion of service customer who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied.

H2: The majority of dissatisfied service customers do not complain.

### *Customers' Complaint Behaviour in Services*

Due to the fact that customer complaint behavior is a complex construct, a number of definitions exist as to what it is. The existence

of a multiplicity of definitions is better appreciated when one understands the various theories upon which customer complaint behavior is built. Irrespective of the theory on which it is built, Tronvoll (2008), explains that these definitions either describe the complaining customer's state of mind, a behavioral act and/or a communication act. Most of these definitions see complaint behavior as a post purchase activity based on dissatisfaction and therefore outcome oriented. Landon (1980) defined customer complaint behavior as an expression of dissatisfaction by individual consumers (or on a consumer's behalf) to a responsible party in either the distribution channel or a complaint handling agency. Stephens (2000), however explained that though complaining is a post-purchase process; it may or may not occur when customers are disappointed. In refining the various existing definitions for customer complaining behavior, Tronvoll (2007) defined it as a process that emerges if the experience is outside the customer's acceptance zone during the service interaction and/or in the evaluation of the value-in-use. From the above, we posit that customer complaining behaviour is the process by which customers express dissatisfaction about an unfavourable service encounter.

### *Antecedents of Customer Complaining Behaviour*

When a customer is dissatisfied, different alternatives are open to

him/her. According to Zaugg and Jaggi (2006), the complaint response open to dissatisfied customers include exit, voice, negative word-of-mouth to family/relatives and silence. Tronvoll (2012; 288) explains that complaints do not always stem from dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction does not always lead to complaining behaviour; therefore dissatisfaction is not a sufficient cause for customers to complain.

Researchers have over the years therefore focused on uncovering the underlying factors/motivators that influence the propensity of dissatisfied customers to complain. McCole (2004), lists the factors that influence consumers' propensity to complain about a less than satisfying service experience as; type of product, cost and social involvement of purchase, level of dissatisfaction felt, annoyance or 'victimization', cost of complaining (financially and psychologically), benefits of complaining, likelihood of resolution, availability of resources (for making a complaint), access (to means of registering a complaint), demographics, structural bonds, power bases and social norms.

Tronvoll (2008) summarized research findings on the antecedent of customer complaining behavior as situational factors, individual/personal factors, service provider/service factors and market factors. He notes that 'the literature review of antecedents of complaining behavior suggest that typical complainers belong to the

upper socio-economic groups in society. They tend to complain when the service has a high complexity, is expensive, has favorable cost/benefit ratio, or the problem is serious. In addition, personal confidence levels, values, attitudes towards complaining, and whether or not the failure is the provider's fault, all increases the complaint frequency. Factors like cultural collectivism, individualism, social and political involvement, and experience contribute to a complaint response as well. Finally, the degree of market competition or industry structure, the type of provider, the likelihood of success, the responsiveness of the provider, and friendliness generate complaint behaviour'. We seek to test the above conclusion with respect customers in the Nigerian service industry. We propose the hypothesis that:

H3: Complaint voicing is not dependent on gender, age, educational level, income level, usage frequency, personal confidence of customer, cost of service or severity of service failure.

### **Methodology**

Since it is practically impossible to study the totality of firms in the service industry we therefore decided to focus on the hospitality sub sector of the Nigerian service industry. We specifically studied the restaurant and interstate transportation service sub sectors in Benin City, Edo state, Nigeria. The population of this study therefore comprised of customers and potential customers in both

subsectors in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Since it was not possible to generate a sampling frame, we have on the basis of Convenience sampling chosen to work with a sample size of 400 respondents. The 400 respondents were divided equally between the two (2) industries. Respondents were selected from across the four (4) local government areas that make up the capital city. One hundred (100) respondents (50 respondents for restaurants and another 50 for inter-state transport companies) were conveniently selected for each of the selected areas to make up the total of 400 respondents. Since customers cannot complain about a service they have not used, exit questionnaires were given given to selected customers at major restaurants and interstate transport companies across the city.

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The first part of this questionnaire was an introduction; the second part focused on key demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. While the third part of the questionnaire raised questions relating to attitude towards complaining, reasons for not complaining, complaint action taken and complaint motivation.

Attitude towards complaining was measured on a likert scale of 5(strongly agree) to 1(strongly disagree). Proportion of customers who complained was ascertained

through a dichotomous question while checklist questions were used to allow respondents indicate reasons for not complaining, complaint action taken and complaint motivation. Open ended questions were also added to enable respondents indicate possible reasons that were not captured in the checklist.

### **Results and Discussion**

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 371 were collected. One hundred and eighty five (185) of the collected questionnaires were from restaurant respondents while the other one hundred and eighty six (186) were from interstate transport respondents. The demographic profile for the restaurant respondents showed that 105 (58.7%) were male while 74 (41.3%) were female. Most of these respondents were in the age group of 18 – 24 (45.6%) followed by 25 – 34 (34.4%). A total of 39 respondents (21.8%) had post graduate degrees while 105 respondents (58.7%) had one form of tertiary education or the other. The monthly income of a majority of these respondents (78.3%) was within the ₦10, 000 to ₦100, 000 ranges.

For the interstate transport subsector, 103 (57.9%) of the respondents were male while 75 (42.1%) were female. Most of the respondents in this category were within the age of 25 – 34 years (43.1%) followed by 18 – 24 years (37%). 41 respondents (23.4%) had post graduate degrees while 113 respondents (64.6%) of

this group had a form of tertiary education. The majority of respondents in this group (71.5%) also have a monthly income of within the ₦10, 000 to ₦100, 000 ranges.

*Proportion of Dissatisfied and Complaining Customers*

Of a total of 185 restaurant respondents, 14 had no response to whether they were dissatisfied with the service offered. Table 1 shows that in the restaurant subsector, 85 (49.70%) respondents were dissatisfied. A two tailed binomial test at 0.05 per cent significance (see table 1) shows that this proportion was not significantly different from the test proportion (0.50). Hence, it can be concluded that half of our respondents were dissatisfied. We therefore accept the hypothesis that

there is no significant difference between the proportion of service customer who are satisfied and those who are dissatisfied in the restaurant service subsector.

Of the 186 respondents in the transport subsector, 13 did not indicate whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied. Table 1 show that 81 (46.82%) respondents were dissatisfied. The binomial test result as shown in Table 1 indicates that this proportion is not significantly different from the test proportion. Hence as in the restaurant sub-sector, the proportion of satisfied customers is same as the proportion of dissatisfied customers. We therefore also accept the first hypothesis with respect to the interstate transport subsector.

**Table 1: Binomial Test for Proportion of Dissatisfied Respondents**

Category	N for Restaurant Respondents	N for Interstate Transport Respondents	Observed Prop. For Restaurant Respondents	Observed Prop. For Transport Respondents	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) for Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-	
						tailed) for Restaurant Respondents	tailed) for Transport Respondents
Dissatisfied	85	81	49.70	46.82	.50	1.000	.447
Satisfied	86	92	50.29	53.18			
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>1.00</b>				

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Of the respondents who were dissatisfied, two (2) respondents (1 in each subsector) did not indicate whether they complained or not. Table 2 shows that of the 85 restaurant respondents who were

dissatisfied, 35 (41.2%) complained while 49 (58.3%) did not. A two tailed binomial (see table 2) test at 0.05 per cent level of statistical significance shows that none of these proportions were significantly

different from the test proportion (0.50). Hence half of the proportions of customer who indicated they were dissatisfied complained.

**Table 2: Binomial Test for Proportion of Dissatisfied Respondents who complained**

Category	N for		Observed	Observed	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) for Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) for	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) for
	Restaurant	Transport	Prop. For Restaurant	Prop. For Transport		Restaurant	Transport
	Respondents	Respondents	Respondents	Respondents		Respondents	Respondents
Complained	35	38	41.6	47.5	.50	.156	.738
Did not Complain	49	42	58.3	52.5			
No Response	1	1					
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>			

Source: Authors’ Fieldwork

With respect to the restaurant sub-sector, we therefore reject the null hypothesis that majority of dissatisfied customers do not complain and conclude that the proportion of dissatisfied customers who complained is same as the proportion of dissatisfied customers who did not complain.

For the interstate transport sector, Table 1 indicates that of the 81 transport respondents who were dissatisfied, 38 (46.9%) complained while 42 (51.9%) did not. The binomial two-tailed test reveals that neither of these proportions was significantly different from the test

proportion (0.50). Hence as in the restaurant sub sector, we reject the second null hypothesis that the majority of dissatisfied customers do not complain. Rather the proportion of dissatisfied customers, who complained in the interstate transport subsector, is same as the proportion of dissatisfied customers who did not complain.

*Reasons for not complaining*

Reasons given by respondents in both service subsectors for not complaining are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Reasons given by Respondents for not complaining**

S/N	Reasons	Frequency
1	No time to complain ( I was in a hurry)	15
2	I didn't see the need to complain	11
3	I felt my suggestions will not be used	10
4	The restaurant/transport company had no place for me to lay my complaint	8
5	I decided not to use the service provider again	6
6	I don't like argument /complaining	5
7.	I don't want to be blamed for someone losing their job	3
8.	Other customers said service failure is usual with the restaurant/transport company	2
9.	I felt management should know what the problems with the organisations were.	1
10.	The employees were hostile	1
11.	I didn't want to be insulted	1

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

From the Table 3, reasons given by respondents for not complaining can be categorised into six. They are as follows;

1. Time Factor – I was in a hurry
2. Non-availability of complaint management system – no place to complain.
3. Ignorance/Fear on the part of the customer – I did not see the need to complain, I felt my suggestions will not be used, I don't like argument/complaining, I don't want to be blamed for someone losing their job, I felt management should know what the problem was and I didn't want to be insulted.
4. Employee factor – the employees were hostile.

5. Other Customers Opinion – other customer said service failure was usual with the organization.

6. Decision to switch – I decided not to use the service provider again.

*Determinants of Whether Dissatisfied Customers will Complain*

Since sex is a nominal variable, chi square was used to test for dependence between sex and complaining behaviour. For other variables (age, educational level, income level, usage frequency, personal confidence of customer, cost of service and severity of service failure) on ratio scale, multiple regression was used to test their impact on complaint voicing.



**Complaint Voicing In the Restaurant Sub-Sector**

Table 4 shows that though thirty five (35) restaurant respondents indicated that they complained, two (2) of such respondents did not indicate their sex hence only a total of thirty three (33)

responses was used in the chi square computation. Chi square test at 0.05 per cent level of statistical significance reveals that complaint voicing is not dependent on gender – since the chi square value (0.021) is less than its tabulated value (3.841).

**Table 4: Chi Square test for dependence between gender and complaint voicing**

CATEGORY		COMPLAINED			Chi-Square Value	Df	Sig. Value
<b>RESTAURANT SUBSECTOR</b>				<b>Total</b>	.021	1	.885
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>				
<b>SEX</b>	Male	19	29	48			
	Female	14	20	34			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>82</b>			
<b>INTERSTATE TRANSPORT SECTOR</b>				<b>Total</b>	2.265	1	.132
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>				
<b>SEX</b>	Male	20	29	49			
	Female	18	13	31			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>80</b>			

Source: Authors’ Fieldwork

Multiple regression analysis was then performed to ascertain the joint impact of the other variables on complaint voicing (see Tables 5). The R squared value of 0.05327 implies that all seven independent variables jointly explain about 5% variation in complaint voicing. On the basis of the P-value obtained, it is obvious that at a 0.05 per cent level of statistical significance, none of these variables are statistically significant (since the p-values are all greater than 0.05) in explaining complaint voicing in the restaurant subsector. The ‘t stat’ values for the selected variables also confirm this result since they are all less than an absolute value of 2. Hence, with

respect to the restaurant sub-sector, we accept the third null hypothesis that complaint voicing is not dependent on gender, age, educational level, income level, usage frequency, personal confidence of customers, cost of service or severity of service failure.

**Complaint Voicing in the Interstate Transport Sub-Sector**

For the interstate transport respondents, chi square test also reveals that gender has no implications for complaint voicing since the chi square value (2.265) is lesser than the tabulated value (3.841) - see Table 4.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis for selected determinants of Complaint Voicing**

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>t-stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significant F.</i>	<i>R Square</i>
<b>Restaurant Subsector</b>						
Intercept	1.3048	4.9042	0.0000	1.4228	0.1987	0.053
Age	-0.1290	-1.5698	0.1183			
Education	-0.0913	-1.0306	0.3041			
Income	0.0866	1.9327	0.0549			
Usage Frequency	0.0021	1.3038	0.1940			
Cost of Service	0.0722	1.1984	0.2324			
Severity of Failure	0.0352	0.5452	0.5863			
Personal Confidence	-0.1152	-1.8765	0.0622			
<b>Interstate Transport Subsector</b>						
Intercept	0.1917	1.5652	0.1193	0.3425	0.9334	0.0133
Age	0.0136	0.4114	0.6813			
Education	0.0060	0.1864	0.8524			
Income	-0.0099	-0.6098	0.5428			
Usage frequency	0.0000	0.0077	0.9938			
Cost of Service	-0.0304	-1.2540	0.2115			
Severity of Failure	0.0129	0.6052	0.5458			
Personal Confidence	0.0089	0.4963	0.6203			

Source: Authors’ Fieldwork

Multiple regression analysis as seen from the P- values (see Table 5) indicates that none of the selected variable had significant implications for whether a dissatisfied customer in the transport sector will/will not voice his/her complaint at a 0.05 level of statistical significance. The R squared value of 0.013 reveals that in the transport sub-sector, these variables only jointly account for about 1.3% variation in complaint voicing.

Hence as with the restaurant service subsector, we also conclude that for the interstate transport sub-sector in

Benin city, complaint voicing is not dependent on gender, age, educational level, income level, usage frequency, personal confidence of customers, cost of service or severity of service failure. In conclusion, with respect to the service industry, we conclude that complaint voicing is not dependent on any of the selected independent variables.

*Customer Complaint Motivation/ Action*

From the check list of possible complaint motivation that was presented to our respondents, the

most preferred motivation for complaining was need for ‘corrective action’, followed by need for ‘an explanation’, then ‘apology’. The need to ‘register my protest’, and ‘compensation’ ranked 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> respectively in both sectors. In addition to the five (5) complaint motivations given, respondents added that the need for “refund” also motivated them to complain.

Customers may not always complain to the organisation; they have other ways of expressing their complaints. A check list of possible complaint actions was presented to respondents. Table 6 shows respondents ranking of their complaint actions in both the

restaurant and interstate transport sub sectors. It indicates that customers who complained ranked “complained to an employee” of the organisation they patronize as their first option. “Complained to a friend or relative” and “told a fellow customer” were ranked second and third respectively in both service sub sectors.

Hence, customers in these sectors have a tendency to become “terrorists”- spread negative reports about the service provider. That the “decided not to use the service provider again” option was ranked fourth in both sectors points to the fact that switching could be high amongst dissatisfied customers in both sectors.

Table 6: Customer Complaint Action

S/N	TYPE OF COMPLAINT ACTION	RESTAURANT SUB-SECTOR		INTERSTATE TRANSPORT SUB-SECTOR	
		Frequency For Restaurant Respondents	Ranking according Restaurant Respondents	Frequency For Interstate Transport Respondents	Ranking according Transport Respondents
1	Complained to an Employee	80	1 <sup>st</sup>	72	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Told a Fellow customer	53	3 <sup>rd</sup>	66	3 <sup>rd</sup>
3	Complained to a friend or relative	63	2 <sup>nd</sup>	69	2 <sup>nd</sup>
4	Filled a complaint card	12	5 <sup>th</sup>	17	5 <sup>th</sup>
5	Wrote a letter to the Manager	6	7 <sup>th</sup>	6	6 <sup>th</sup>
6	Wrote a letter to Head quarters	5	8 <sup>th</sup>	5	7 <sup>th</sup>
7	Sued the Service provider	7	6 <sup>th</sup>	4	8 <sup>th</sup>
8	Decided not to use the Service Provider again	50	4 <sup>th</sup>	38	4 <sup>th</sup>
9	Took no action	7	6 <sup>th</sup>	-	9 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Authors’ Fieldwork

The ranking of “filled a complaint card”, “wrote a letter to the manager” and “wrote a letter to Headquarters” indicates that customers in this sector are not favourably disposed to putting their complaint in writing. Customers in the service subsectors studied, seem not to also be comfortable with suing the service providers since it was ranked third to the last and second to the last in both sectors. That the “took no action” option was ranked least in transport sub sector and second to last in restaurant subs sector implies that customers who choose to complain often took one form of action or the other.

Other complaint actions that some respondents indicated they took include ‘complaining directly to the owner of the business’, ‘threatening to report a worker to his/her boss’ and ‘calling the office line displayed’.

#### *Discussion of Findings*

The result of this study shows that there is no significance difference between the proportion of customers who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied. It also showed that there was no significant difference between the proportion of dissatisfied customer who complained and those who did not complain. This means that about half of the customers were dissatisfied and half of those dissatisfied actually complained. This is unlike the findings of other studies (Andreassen 2001, Chelminski and Coulter 2011,

TARP 1986 and TARP 1996). TARP 1986 observed that only one in twenty dissatisfied customers voiced their complaint. In 1996, TARP reported that seventy per cent (70%) of dissatisfied customers in the United States did not complain. In Norway, Andreassen (2001) reported that sixty eight per cent of dissatisfied customers did not complain. In this study we observed that about fifty eight per cent (58%) of dissatisfied customers in the restaurant sub-sector did not complain while in the interstate transport sector about fifty three per cent (53%) of dissatisfied customers did not complain. When these results are compared with previous findings in America and Norway, it seems to indicate that though the number of dissatisfied customers that complain is still not significantly different from 0.50, it is rising – i.e more and more dissatisfied customers are complaining when compared to the proportion of dissatisfied customers who complained in previous studies.

Some of the reasons given by respondents in this study for not complaining are the same as those stated by Tronvoll (2008) – lack of time and not knowing where and how to complain. Other additional reasons given by respondents for not complaining include: decision to switch service provider, report by other customers that service failure is usual with the provider, employee hostility and feeling that

management already knew what the problem was.

Tronvoll (2008) summarizing the findings in service literature lists demographics as a major determinant of whether a dissatisfied customer will or will not complain. In this study, we found out that demographics may not always explain complaint voicing. Complaint voicing was found not to be dependent on gender, age, educational level, usage frequency and income level. Another individual factor that was tested in this work was personality. We observed that personal confidence of the customer was also not a determinant of whether a dissatisfied customer would or would not complain in both service sub-sectors.

This study also revealed that contrary to Tronvoll (2008), situational factors may not always determine complaint voicing. Two situational items (cost of service and severity of service failure) were tested in this study. We observed that complaint voicing was not dependent on both variables. When regressed against complaint voicing at a 0.05 level of statistical significance, cost of service had a P – value of 0.2324 in the restaurant sector and 0.2115 in the interstate transport sector while severity of service failure had a P – value of 0.5863 and 0.5458 in the restaurant and interstate transport sub-sectors respectively. As indicated by respondents in this study, the major factors that seems to account for whether a dissatisfied

service customer will or will not voice his/her complaint are time factor and the availability of a complaining point. Our investigations revealed that most restaurants and interstate transport companies in the city did not have a designated complaining point. Hence demographics, situational and market factors will have little or no impact on complaint voicing where the organisations had no complaint management system.

As in Heung and Lam (2003), this study found that customer complaint motive includes seeking corrective action, seeking an explanation, seeking an apology and seeking compensation. We found in addition to the above that when customers complain they seek for refund or may merely want to register their protest. We observed that the complaint motive that majority of respondents who said they complained in both sub-sectors sought was ‘corrective action’ and then ‘an apology’.

In this study it was also observed that service customers in Benin City are not favourably disposed to putting their complaints in writing or suing service provider. This may be due to the fact that customers believe letters or cards filled are not read by management. Suing is also not favoured by respondents possibly due to the cost involved and the fact that court cases take very long to prosecute. When dissatisfied, they prefer to complain directly to an employee, a friend/relative or a

fellow customer. Other complaint actions that were taken by respondents in this study include 'complaining directly to the owner of the business', 'threatening to report a worker to his/her boss' and 'calling the office line displayed'.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### *Implications for Service*

#### *Organisations*

Though the proportion of dissatisfied customers who complained in this study was on the high side when compared with those of previous studies in America and Norway, many restaurants and interstate transport companies' customers still do not complain when dissatisfied. Service providers in the two subsectors must therefore do everything possible to encourage dissatisfied customers to complain since complaints serve as feedback opportunities. Some respondents explained that they did not complain because the firms in question did not designate a complaining point. This point to the fact that many firms in the subsectors studied have not begun seeing complaints as 'gifts' that should be sought for and welcomed from dissatisfied customers since they are means of improving the organization's performance. We recommend that restaurants and interstate transport companies without a formal complaint management system develop one. While developing this system, service providers must take cognizance of the fact that customers are usually in a hurry hence

steps/procedures involved in laying a complaint must be minimal. The availability of toll free lines will help ensure that even where a customer left in a hurry he/she can subsequently reach the provider to lay complaints. We therefore encourage service providers to have toll free lines and display these numbers conspicuously throughout the organisation. We also recommend that the complaint procedure involves little or no writing and that employees are available to put the complaints in writing where necessary.

The fact that respondents indicated that the first option they considered in complaining was to an employee provides organisations with opportunities for service recovery. Employees (especially those at the frontline) must therefore be trained in complaint handling and applicants with interpersonal skills should be given priority during the recruitment and selection process of service organisations.

There is also a need for consumers to be taught that complaints are necessary ingredients if any organization will improve. We recommend that consumer awareness and enlightenment campaigns be carried out on the importance of complaints by service organizations to customers in their premises. This can be done through rallies and displaying of messages encouraging customers to complain.

### *Recommendations for future research*

Though the conclusions of this study was generalised to the service industry, there is need for more service sub sectors to be studied in other to ascertain if the conclusions of this study are also valid for them.

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