INTRODUCTION

The customer complaint behavior (CCB) is an area of research which deals with the spotting and analysis of all the aspects involved in the consumer reaction to a product or a service failure and the resultant perceived dissatisfaction. Consumer dissatisfaction, satisfaction, and CCB are three distinct, but highly correlated subjects investigated by marketing and customer research studies. The growing competition in the market, the importance given to quality, performance, and satisfaction, the developing consumerism, the emphasis given to customers, considered as the center of a product or service, brings researchers to inquire about the complex mechanisms which determine customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the consequent consumer behaviors [1]. When the service encounter overcomes the expectations, the customer is satisfied; on the contrary, when the expectations are not fulfilled by the experience, the customer is dissatisfied. For these reasons, dissatisfaction should be considered as a precursor of complaining [2]. According to Lovelock et al. [3], when customers experience dissatisfaction, four basic courses of action can be taken by them, which include:

1. Doing nothing
2. Complaining in some form to the service organization
3. Taking some overt action with a third party
4. Defecting and simply not patronizing the organization in the future.

CCB is a distinct process, which begins when the consumer has assessed a consumption experience (resulting in dissatisfaction) and ends when the consumer has completed all behavioral and non-behavioral responses [4]. However, a few companies recognize the importance of customer complaints which can be estimated through the fact that fewer than 50% of complainants receive a reply from the company and those that do often view the organization’s response as unsatisfactory [5]. It seems that the issue of service failure is still not adequately addressed by businesses, especially when the seriousness of customer dissatisfaction for companies in the short- and long-term is considered [6]. In this competitive era, customer dissatisfaction can lead to long-term losses for any service industry. The growing airline industry faces many challenges in this regard due to the rising customer demand for better service at a lower price. Although airlines have customer satisfaction as a major goal, not all airline experiences are satisfactory from the consumer’s perspective – service failures do occur in this industry.

Rationale of the study

The present study was conducted keeping in mind the need to study the CCB. As no previous study on CCB has been conducted on airline customers at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, India, the study will provide useful insights regarding airline customers and their complaint behavior.

Literature review

To understand the impact of customer dissatisfaction and service failure, many previous studies have been reviewed which provide a better insight. Bejou and Palmer [7] examined the effects of service failure on the relationship between buyers and sellers in the airlines industry. They administered a questionnaire using face-to-face interview of passengers waiting for their flights. Overall 257 completed questionnaires were collected, 214 of which were found usable. An analysis of customers’ post-failure assessment of trust and commitment indicated that for any given level of service failure, their inclination to recommend the airline, which had experienced a service failure, was dependent on the length of time that they had been dealing with that airline. The effect of service failure on trust and commitment to a relationship was partially confirmed, in that relationship duration was seen to be an important mediating influence on the outcome level of trust and commitment following the service failure. Tax and Brown [8] found that the greatest barrier to effective...
service recovery and organizational learning was that only 5-10% of
dissatisfied customers choose to complain following a service failure.
To see the financial impact of complaints [9] conducted a study, in which
they found that the complaints of airline passengers were negatively
correlated with future revenues and profit margins. They suggested
that as the financial information on listed carriers are reported
quarterly and customer complaint information is available in the public,
one can use monthly customer complaint information to help predict
the financial performance of the carriers before their financial results
are announced in the next quarter. Wirtz and Johnston [10] highlighted
the positive correlation between the profits and the service excellence
of Singapore Airlines (SIA). The authors conducted in-depth interviews
with SIA’s senior management and found that the senior management
considers valuing staff and customers as the key driver of service
excellence and focuses on service excellence and costs/profits, pushed right out to the
front line staff. In another study, Bamford and Xystouri [11] examined
the effectiveness of internal processes of service quality recovery for an
international airline. An action research methodology was adopted. It
was found that, for service recovery to be effective, it must be external
to the customer) as well as internal (to the organization). The need to
incorporate employees and not overlook their significance, power, and
influence on the delivery of quality service is highlighted. Atalik [12]
identified common complaints made by Turkish frequent flyers related
to their program membership. He administered a questionnaire via
the Internet to 2000 members who were randomly selected from the
Elite members of the Miles & Miles program of THY and that the common complaints of members fell into five
categories. The main concerns were related to the availability of free
tickets and upgrades of the flight class, the behavior of personnel,
card ownership issues, level and type of priority services offered within
the program and the lack of alliances with other airlines. Ndubisi
and Adeline [13] investigated whether male and female Malaysian
consumers differ in their dissatisfaction complaint behavior and its
aftermath. The study examined the moderation effect of gender in the
relationship between public complaint behavior, private complaint
behavior, and customer defection. The results showed that public
and private complaints are significantly associated with defection.
Liu and Zhang [14] focused on factors related to the CCB tendency in
and friends without a word to the organization) on customer defection.
The study was limited to a single airport and covered a small sample.
Limitations
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METHODS

Objectives of the study
1. To find the pre-board and on-board service attributes that the
customers complain about when they are dissatisfied
2. To find the problems which influence the customers’ decision to
complain
3. To find the complaint actions taken by customers when they feel
dissatisfied with the airline service.

Sampling design
A total of 150 passengers were randomly selected from those waiting
for their flights at the IGI, New Delhi Airport. Of the responses received,
112 were complete (response rate of 74.66%) and used for the analysis.

Methods of data collection
Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Primary
data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered
to the passengers. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections
with questions related to pre-board and on-board service attributes,
problems influencing customer’s decision to complain which were
rated as "no," "little," "somewhat," "very much" influential and
and complaint actions taken by customers which were rated on 5-point
scale representing 1 with "never," 2 "unlikely," 3 "likely," 4 "most likely,"
5 "extremely likely." Secondary data were collected from online
journals, magazines, and websites.

Research tools
The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences
version 23 to find the descriptive statistics. Cronbach’s alpha (0.92)
was found to be good enough showing the reliability of the research instrument.

Limitations
The study was limited to a single airport and covered a small sample.
The study was conducted on passengers in waiting only, and in-flight
passengers were not surveyed who may have different views.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it can be seen that the majority of the passengers are
"likely" to complain about services attributes such as boarding
information, jetway waiting longer, pre-boarding assistance, ticket
reservation, and security check as the value of the mean is above 2 for all
these statements with the likelihood of complaints regarding boarding
information being the highest (mean=2.96±1.122) and security check being the least (mean=2.57±0.994).

In the case of on-board service attributes, passengers are likely to
complain about crew service efficiency, crew attentiveness, courtesy,
crew friendliness, and complaint handling as all the statements
have values of more than 2 for mean scores. The highest value among all being that of crew service efficiency (mean=3.14±1.161) and the least being crew friendliness (mean=2.61±1.240) and complaint handling (mean=2.54±1.154).

According to Table 2, problems influencing the decision to complain included delay in flight, cancellation of flight, rudeness of crew, and lost luggage with the highest majority of people being somewhat influenced by cancellation in flight (mean=3.00±1.004) and the lowest number of people being less influenced by lost luggage (mean=2.64±1.047).

From Table 3, it can be seen that the actions to be taken by people when dissatisfied with the airline included taking no action, urging family/friends not to patronize the airline, not personally flying on the same airline again, negative word of mouth (WOM), seeking a replacement for the service, complaining to the airline management, diverting complaint to media, complaining to consumer council, and seeking legal advice. The highest majority are most likely to seek replacement for service (mean=3.14±1.161) and negative WOM (mean=3.07±1.393). The lowest number either take no action (mean=2.25±0.954) or seek legal advice (mean=2.21±1.052) both of which lie at the extreme ends of the action being taken.

The results related to pre-board and on-board service attributes that lead to the complaint on dissatisfaction showed that majority of the complaints were related to boarding information and crew service efficiency. The cancellation of flights was found to be a major problem among airline passengers. Finally, the most common complaint action taken by airline customers included seeking replacement for the service which shows that if the airlines do not deal with the complaints of the customers with due care then there is a risk of the customers shifting to some other airline service leading to losses as seen from previous studies by Behn and Riley [9] and Bamford and Xystouri [11].

CONCLUSION

CCB is a part of understanding the customer response to services in case they are dissatisfied. A large amount of existing findings focuses on answering questions such as: How consumers tend to act when dissatisfied; what factors trigger the complaint behavior; what type of consumers tend to choose a certain type of action; what are the purposes of the complaint; why it is necessary to manage consumer complaint [20]. In this study too, an attempt has been made to highlight the service attributes that the customers complain about when dissatisfied and the action taken by them in response to dissatisfaction. The findings revealed that the among the pre-boarding service attributes the boarding information was the most likely attribute which led to complaining, whereas among the on-board service attributes crew service efficiency was the most likely attribute. The most common complaint actions taken by customers include seek replacement for service and negative WOM. Negative WOM is very dangerous, especially with the use of the social media; where one word can be spread to millions of people through Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., a problem that the companies should avoid.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

As it was seen through the study that among airline passengers the problem of cancellation of flight was prominent; so steps could be taken by the airline industry to avoid these failures and have contingency plans for situations where such problems occur.

REFERENCES