



E-Complaint Management as an Instrumental Method for Customer Retention: The Case of Erdek

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Extensive Summary

Hotel businesses are labour-intensive and the significance of human factors in these businesses cannot be ignored. While there may be errors even in businesses producing goods by means of automation, it is unfeasible not to make mistakes when providing services in hotels, where there is no possibility of switching into full-automation and all presentations still have to be prepared by humans. In this respect, service mistakes result in dissatisfied customers, who have paid for the good or service concerned, and unmet expectations, leading to complaints. Under present-day conditions, a hotel manager must pay attention to customer complaints for the sake of the objectives of growth and change, profitability increase, solvency, and prevention of customer losses. It is apparent that the management, upon realizing that customer complaint management is a process and provided that it conducts the given process well, would regain customers and have a great competitive advantage against competitors by creating customers dependent on management.

Complaints arise when customers put their dissatisfaction into words when a good or service not meet their expectations (Barış, 2006: 23). Customers can make their complaints through phone, in writing, face-to-face, and nowadays electronically on digital platforms (Görmüş et al., 2013: 170). According to another classification, complaints can be made verbally (face-to-face, via phone, etc.) or in written form (via the feedback form, fax, e-mail, etc.) (Alrawadieh ve Demirkol, 2015: 133). It is called an electronic complaint (e-complaint) when a complaint is made through websites.

Having become busier in line with the present-day conditions, individuals can now connect to any website and get information and purchase goods and services from these sites online

without leaving their seats. Another service offered for people through the internet is complaint websites. Customers can submit their complaints to the business concerned through complaint websites if a purchased good or service does not meet their expectations. In a way, e-complaint sites are platforms bringing customers and businesses together. (Kutluk ve Arpacı, 2016: 374). The difference of this complaint type from others is the fact that the customer expresses their complaint through words online after leaving the premises of the business. The purpose behind this behaviour of the customer is to indicate their unhappiness with the business while warning others who read their complaints by sharing their own experiences (Alrawadieh ve Demirkol, 2015: 138). Actually, a complaining customer acts as a mediator of some sort between the business and other potential customers.

Under present-day market conditions, described as the acts of finding the matters causing discontentment and examining its reasons along with possible solutions, complaint management is potentially the most valuable way of satisfying customers through correcting the errors in goods and services. (Barrow ve Moller, 1998, cited in Güven ve Bengül, 2009: 2526). Thus, the sound analysis of customer complaints is crucial; it is the primary matter to be considered by businesses. Business administrators should be familiar with the customer's complaint perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours as well as their complaints in terms of the time and context of the complaints and the platforms through which they are communicated (Ayaz ve Torlak, 2011: 79). It should not be forgotten that every matter mentioned above is also valid for electronic complaints.

There is an increasing number of such websites in our country; some prominent examples include "sikayet.com", "sikayetim.com", and "sikayeticem.com" in addition to sector-specific websites like "hotelsikayet.com", "otelreferans.com", "otelpuan.com" focusing on hospitality businesses. One of the above-mentioned sites is <https://www.sikayetvar.com/>. The principal reasons behind the selection of this website for the present study are the facts that it is a popular complaint platform among customers and that the data it provides are deemed fit for the purposes of this study.

There are 124 large and small hotel businesses in Balıkesir/Erdek district, one of the prominent tourism destinations in Turkey. The purpose of the study is to determine whether e-complaint management is used effectively as an instrumental method in customer retention by analysing the complaints made against the hotels in Erdek through sikayetvar.com. Although there are similar studies in the national academic literature, the absence of a study dealing with hotels in the Erdek district makes this study significant.

A total of 42 complaints were confirmed related to seventeen hotels in the analysis performed among active hotel businesses in the Erdek district between 1 and 30 July 2020 on the complaint website; complaints were mainly categorized in three sections, namely *general matters*, *rooms*, and *catering*. There were two remarkable outcomes: Firstly, even though there are many hotels in the district, the complaints declared are only limited to the seventeen hotels concerned. Secondly, 78.5% of guests (33 out of 42) were generally displeased with their stay in the facility. Complaining customers are all Turkish and 55% of them are women. Although the related site gives the business in question the right to respond, there were no feedbacks from none of the hotels concerned regarding compensation.

In conclusion, it is established that the executives of hotel businesses in the touristic destination of Erdek, a district of the Balıkesir province, are not aware of what customer complaint management is, how it functions, its importance and purpose, its benefits for the business, and how it contributes to reputation; therefore, they did not make any attempt to resolve customer's complaints.

The study suggests that hotel managers in Erdek must be aware of complaints, perceive them as signals, and take the complaints expressed on websites concerning their businesses into account in order to turn this shortcoming into an advantage. The repetition of the study in the future is deemed beneficial to find out if there will be any changes in these circumstances.