

Determinant Factors for Unfair Trade Complaint Behavioural Intentions of Consumers in Zambia

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Abstract:

The study aimed to understand factors that determine unfair trade complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia. The study was anchored on the TPB. The study followed the post-positivism philosophy and quantitative approach. The cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data was gathered using structured questionnaires to a convenience sample of 385 consumers from the retail sector in Lusaka district. Data was analysed using descriptive and regression analyses. The findings of the study led to the conclusion that there are several factors that determine the complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia towards unfair trade practices including social norms, consumer rights awareness, attitudes towards complaining, behavioural beliefs, self-efficacy and prior experience in complaining. The study recommended consumer protection agencies in Zambia such as the CPCC to increasingly educate the public on their rights as consumers as stated in law. The study further recommended for enhanced access to consumer protection that is easy and convenient ways of lodging consumer complaints about unfair trade practices.

Keywords: Unfair trade practices, consumer; complaint behavioural intentions; Zambia

1. Introduction

Globally, unfair commercial trading practices are a common and widespread problem. Problems such as product defects, inadequate services, false brands, deceptive pricing and misleading advertising are rampant, and gullible consumers often fall for them (Swinnen, Alessandro and Senne, 2021; Russo et al., 2023). As a result, consumer protection has become an important issue in many areas of trade including retail trade. Several legislative frameworks have been designed to protect consumer rights against unfair trade practices though most legislative pieces are not used to a sufficient extent by consumers across the globe (Benöhr,

2020). This is also a manifestation in African developing countries including Zambia. In Zambia, consumer rights resonate with the concept of human rights, and the demand for consumer protection is growing day by day (Sampa and Msidi, 2023). In sync with the modern world, the Competition and Consumer Protection Act (CCPA) enacted in 2010 is a major measure in Zambia to protect consumer rights (Sampa and Msidi, 2023).

However, most Zambian consumers continue to encounter unfair trade practices such as deceptive advertisements, unethical business practices, inflated prices and lack of product/service information, among other business malpractices (Sampa and Msidi, 2023). Over the years, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) has noted with concern the deceptive trading practices employed by certain traders to exploit unsuspecting consumers (CCPC, 2024). However, according to the recent CCPC (2023) annual report, there is a mismatch between the prevalence of unfair trade practices and the number of customer complaints lodged to the Commission. According to this report, customer complaints regarding unfair trade practices are underreported in Zambia (CCPC, 2023).

In relation to underreporting of complaints by consumers, over the past five years, the number of consumer complaints received by the CCPC significantly dropped from 2,470 to 1,150 between 2020 and 2023 (CCPC, 2023). In addition, in 2023, the CCPC investigated and solved 1,150 unfair trading practices compared to 1,743 unfair trading cases handled in 2022 (CCPC, 2023). This was a significant decline of from the 2,366 consumer complaints handled in 2021 where only 29% were resolved (CCPC, 2023). Moreover, although the CCPC has implemented several strategies to encourage consumers to report unfair trade practices, the rate of reporting complaints to the Commission is very low compared to the increasing unfair trade practices in commercial transactions. However, to the best knowledge of the researcher, no study has been undertaken to determine the consumer complaint behavioural intentions of the consumers. This is the knowledge gap which the study sought to fill by examining factors that determine unfair trade complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Theoretical foundation

The research was anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) put forward by Ajzen (1985). The TPB is one of the commonly used theories to investigate the consumer complaint behavioural intentions. The TPB is a powerful and commonly used tool that is widely used to assess, model, and investigate people's behavior in relation to specific activities, products, or services (Zhao and Orthman, 2011). TPB explains how an individual behaves in certain situations and how individuals behave in a particular way.

The following constructs are evaluated in the study: (1) behavioural beliefs, (ii) attitudes towards normative behaviour (iii) Perceived behavioural control and (vi) intentions (Ajzen, 2012). According to the TP, human behavior is guided by three considerations: beliefs about the likely consequences of behavior, beliefs about the normative expectations of others and beliefs about the likely consequences of promoting or the presence of factors that hinder behavioral performance (Procter et al., 2019). The theory was found relevant in explain the determinant factors for unfair trade complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia.

2.2 Determinant factors for complaint behavioural intentions of consumers

Consumer complaint intentions and behavior regarding unfair trade practices are influenced by several interrelated factors including consumer rights awareness, personality traits, consumer attitudes and prior experiences.

Consumer rights awareness

Consumer rights awareness is a key factor for complaint intentions and behaviours of consumers (Zhao and Othman, 2011; Kim and Lee, 2016). According to Makanyeza, Svotwa, and Jaiyeoba (2021), consumer rights awareness is part of the broader concept of consumerism. Consumer rights awareness enables consumers to seek redress when they are dissatisfied (Bello et al., 2020; Makanyeza et al., 2021). On the other hand, when consumers are not aware of their rights, they are less likely to seek redress when they are dissatisfied (Donoghue et al., 2015; Ibarra and Revilla, 2014). More so, Kim and Lee (2016) found low intentions of complaining behavior due to lack of customer rights awareness. Vijayanand and Ravi (2024) also found that heightened awareness correlates positively with favorable consumer behaviors, which can extend to reporting unfair trade practices. Overall, consumer rights awareness is crucial for consumer complaint behavioural intentions leading to the formulation of the hypothesis:

H₁: Consumer rights awareness significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions

Consumer attitudes

Generally speaking, attitudes toward a behaviour influence the intention to respond and the ultimate decision to take action (Kanjoo et al., 2013; Makanyeza et al., 2021). Studies have found that attitudes towards complaining play a significant role in defining and shaping consumer complaint behavioural intentions. The study by Kanjoo et al. (2013) found that attitudes towards complaining have significant effects on complaint intentions

of consumers. Badghish and Shagagi (2023) found that attitudes towards complaining significantly predicted consumer complaint intentions. From the literature, consumer attitudes have significant influence on consumer complaint behavioural intentions. Hence, the study proposed the following hypothesis:

H₂: Consumer attitudes significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions

Subjective norms

Research indicates that subjective norms or social norms or social influence significantly influence consumer complaint intentions. The study by Rehman et al. (2013) in the context of Pakistan found that subjective norms have significant effects on complaining intentions. Burucuoğlu and Yetkin (2016) concluded that subjective norms significantly impact consumer intentions to complain. In line with these findings, the study hypothesised that:

H₃: Subjective norms significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions

Prior complaint experiences

The literature review suggests that past experiences or previous complaint experiences influence the formation of complaint behavior. Rizwan et al. (2013) emphasized the role of prior experiences in shaping complaint intentions. Equally, Rehman et al. (2013) found that prior experience is a significant antecedent for complaining intentions. Kanjoo et al. (2013) found that prior experience of complaining has significant effects on complaint intentions of consumers. Badghish and Shagagi (2023) also found that prior experience significantly predicts consumer complaint intentions. Basing on these findings, the study hypothesised that:

H₄: Prior complaint experiences significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions

Perceived behavioral control

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) has been consistently found to predict complaint intentions across various contexts (Özdemir et al., 2015; Sallaberry et al., 2024). Burucuoğlu and Yetkin (2016) concluded that perceived behavioral control impacts consumer intention to complain. Similarly, Riyanta (2020) found that perceived behavioral control determines customer complaint intentions. More recently, Sallaberry et al. (2024) found that PBC influences customer complaint intentions. From the findings, perceived

behavioural control has significant influence on consumer complaint behavioural intentions leading to the following hypothesis:

H₅: Perceived behavioural control significantly influences consumer complaint behavioural intentions

Behavioural beliefs

Studies have shown that behavioural beliefs significantly predict customer complaint intentions and behaviours. Behavioural research shows that consumers will choose not to resort to justice when the costs of seeking justice exceed the benefits of seeking redress. The research by Sallaberry et al. (2024) also found that behavioural beliefs influence customer complaint intentions. Zhao and Orthman (2010) also found that behavioural beliefs have significant influence on customer compliant intentions. Basing on these findings, the study hypothesised that:

H₆: Behavioural beliefs significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Based on the review of literature and research hypotheses, the conceptual framework for the study was developed and is presented in Figure 1.

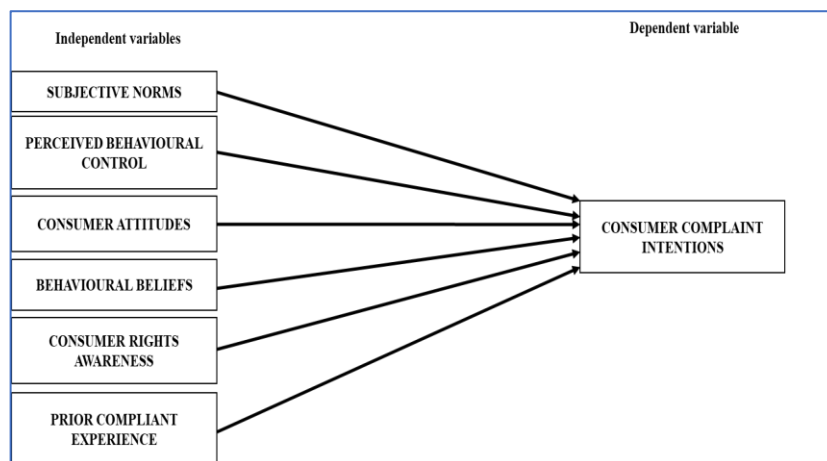


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3. Research Methodology

The research adopted the quantitative methodology employing the post-positivism research philosophy. The deductive research approach and the cross-sectional survey research strategy were employed.

3.1 Population and sampling

The study targeted consumers from the retail sector in Lusaka district. For the purposes of the study, participants were drawn customers for Shoprite Zambia, KFC Zambia, Chinese Supermarket, Farm Depot Zambia and Steelhub Hardware Ltd. Non-probability sampling, convenience sampling was employed to select the shoppers due lack of consumer database for the retail stores. Mwansa et al. (2022) support the use of convenience sampling in consumer research. Given this, the actual population for the shoppers was unknown such that the following Cochran's (1977) formula for unknown population size and population proportion was utilised:

$$n = \frac{z^2}{4e^2} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where; n = sample size; e = acceptable/tolerable sampling error margin; z = Critical z-score value at the desired confidence level or significance level. For this research, based on the 95% confidence interval, z-score of 1.96 and sampling error margin of 5%, the ideal sample size for the survey research was 385.

3.2 Data collection and measurement instrument

Primary quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires physically distributed to the conveniently selected consumers from the retail sector. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions rated on a five-point Likert scale (i.e. 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was pre-tested to a sample of 30 shoppers for validity and reliability and modified accordingly. The scales for the variables and their sources are presented in Table A1.

3.3 Data analysis techniques

In this study, quantitative data from the survey was analysed using descriptive and regression analyses. The researcher first engaged in data editing, coding, sorting and cleaning prior the analyses. Data was subjected to SPSS version 29.0 for analyses. Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The independent variables were consumer attitudes towards reporting unfair trade practices, consumer awareness, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. Complaint intention behaviour was the dependent variable as illustrated in equation 2.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \delta_i \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Where; Y = consumer complaint intentions; α = regression intercept; β_i = regression coefficient; X_1 = Perceived behavioural control; X_2 = Subjective norms; X_3 = Consumer attitudes towards complaining; X_4 = Consumer rights awareness; X_5 = Prior

complaint experience; X_6 = Behavioural beliefs and δ_i = error term with mean zero and constant variance

The normality histogram was conducted to assess normality, while the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test was employed to examine multicollinearity. The Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic was estimated to check for autocorrelation and heteroskedasticity was checked using the Breusch-Pagan test whilst the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) F-test was utilised to check for overall statistical significance of the model. Goodness of fit of the model was checked using R-squared.

3.4 Ethical issues

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the UNZA Research Ethics Committee. Thereafter, ethical considerations in this study included obtaining informed consent from the participants and maintaining participant privacy and confidentiality. In this study, both verbal and written informed consent were sought. The researcher also sought permission to carry out the research from the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, management at the CCPC, management of the selected retail stores. Participants were informed that all information would be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only. For anonymity and privacy, the participants were not identified by their real names in the study as pseudo names were used.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Testing for multicollinearity

As shown in Table A2, all the independent variables had VIF values less than 10 indicating absence of the problem of collinearity in the regression model.

4.2 Testing for normality

The histogram (Figure A1) shows the distribution of the residuals was almost normal as indicated by the histogram which is approximately symmetrical and bell-shaped.

4.3 Testing for independence of errors (autocorrelation)

The DW statistic of 1.795 (Table 1) lying between 1.5 and 2.5 indicate that the model was free from the problem of autocorrelation.

4.4 Testing for heteroskedasticity

The results in Table A3 showing a Chi-square statistic of -25.085, 1 degree of freedom (df) and p-value of 1.000 indicate that the assumption of homoscedastic variance of residuals was met.

4.5 Testing for goodness-of-fit

Table 1 indicates an R-squared value is 0.541 indicating a significant goodness of fit signifying that about 54.1% of the variations in the dependent variable (compliant behavioural intentions) can be attributed to changes in the predictor variables whilst the remaining 45.9% can be attributed to other determinant factors such as personal traits excluded in the model.

Table 1: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.736 ^a	.541	.532	.660	1.795
a. Predictors: (Constant), Consumer complaint attitudes, Consumer rights awareness, Prior complaint experience, Perceived Behavioural Control, Subjective norms, Behavioural beliefs					
b. Dependent Variable: Complaint behavioural intentions					

4.6 Testing for overall significance of the model

The results of the ANOVA F-test reported in Table 2 [$F(6) = 60.97$; $p < 0.05$] indicate that the model was significant and capable of accurately predicting the compliant behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia.

Table 2: ANOVA F-test results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	159.209	6	26.535	60.971	.000 ^b
	Residual	134.914	310	.435		
	Total	294.123	316			

4.7 Results for the multiple linear regression

The multiple linear regression results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of multiple linear regression

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-10.82	0.94		-11.46	0.000**
Subjective norms	0.35	0.09	0.19	3.82	0.000**
Perceived Behavioural Control	1.49	0.10	0.72	15.75	0.000**
Behavioural beliefs	0.62	0.07	0.75	8.34	0.000**
Consumer rights awareness	0.11	0.05	0.09	2.21	0.028**
Prior complaint experience	0.56	0.12	0.21	4.84	0.000**
Consumer complaint attitudes	0.98	0.09	1.05	11.57	0.000**

** means significant at 5%

The results in Table 3 show that subjective norms representing social influence have significant positive effects on consumers' complaint behavioural intentions as shown by the coefficient of 0.35 and p-value of 0.000. These results show that subjective norms or social influence represent a significant predictor for complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia. Based on these findings, the research therefore rejected the null hypothesis concluding that subjective norms significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practice. The findings confirm the TPB which predicts a significant association between subjective norms and intentions towards a particular behaviour. In addition, the findings are consistent with Rehman et al. (2013) and Burucuoğlu and Yetkin (2016) who found that subjective norms have significant effects on complaining intentions.

In addition, the beta coefficient for perceived behavioural control was found to be 1.49 with a p-value of 0.000 (Table 3). These results imply that perceived behavioural control representing self-efficacy can significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions. The results indicate that positive self-efficacy among consumers can promote behaviour of reporting unfair trading practices. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected reaching the conclusion that perceived behavioural control significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practice. The findings corroborate the findings by Riyanta (2020) and Sallaberry et al. (2024) who found that perceived behavioural control determines customer complaint intentions.

Furthermore, the results in Table 3 show that behavioural beliefs have significant positive effects on consumer complaint behavioural intentions as revealed by the coefficient of 0.62 and p-value 0.000. The results mean that behavioural beliefs can

significantly increase the intentions of consumers to report unfair trading practices to relevant authorities. Based on the results, the null hypothesis was rejected concluding that behavioural beliefs significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practices in commercial transactions. The researches by Sallaberry et al. (2024) and Zhao and Orthman (2010) also found that behavioural beliefs influence customer complaint intentions.

Consumer rights awareness was also found to have significant positive effects on consumer complaint behavioural intentions as shown by the beta coefficient of 0.11 and the p-value of 0.028 (Table 3). The results imply that high levels of consumer rights awareness can significantly translate to increased intentions to report unfair trading practices. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected at 5% level concluding that consumer rights awareness significantly influences consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practice. Other studies also revealed that consumers with higher awareness of their rights and consumer protection agencies are more likely to complain and seek redress (Zhao and Othman, 2010; Kim and Lee, 2016).

More so, the results reported in Table 3 show that prior complaint experience have significant positive effects on consumer complaint behavioural intentions as revealed by the beta coefficient of 0.56 and p-value 0.000. The results mean that positive (or negative) prior complaint experiences can significantly increase (or compromise) the intentions of Zambian consumers to report unfair trading practices to relevant authorities. Based on the results, the null hypothesis was rejected concluding that prior complaint experience significantly influences consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practices. Rehman et al. (2013), Kanjoo et al. (2013) and Badghish and Shagagi (2023) found that prior experience significantly predicts consumer complaint intentions.

From Table 3, the coefficient for consumer complaint attitudes was found to be 0.98 with a p-value of 0.00. These results imply that positive complaint attitudes can significantly drive consumer complaint behavioural intentions whilst negative complaint attitudes can significantly undermine consumer complaint behavioural intentions. The results indicate that attitudes towards complaints can significantly predict consumer behaviour of reporting unfair trading practices. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected reaching the conclusion that consumer attitudes significantly influence consumer complaint behavioural intentions following an encounter of unfair trade practices. These findings confirm the predictions of the TPB which predict a significant association between attitudes and behavioural intentions. In addition, the findings agree with the

findings by Ibarra and Revilla (2014) and Badghish and Shagagi (2023) that attitudes towards complaining are significant predictors for customer complaint intentions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study aimed to understand factors that determine unfair trade complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia. The study was anchored on the TPB. The study followed the post-positivism philosophy and quantitative approach. The cross-sectional survey design was employed. The findings of the study led to the conclusion that there are several factors that determine the complaint behavioural intentions of consumers in Zambia towards unfair trade practices including social norms, consumer rights awareness, attitudes towards complaining, behavioural beliefs, self-efficacy and prior experience in complaining. The study recommended consumer protection agencies in Zambia such as the CPCC to increasingly educate the public on their rights as consumers as stated in law. The study further recommended for enhanced access to consumer protection that is easy and convenient ways of lodging consumer complaints about unfair trade practices.

Limitations and Areas for Further Study

The research was confined to few factors that influence complaint behavioural intentions of consumers whilst there are several factors that could have been examined including demographic factors. Hence, further studies can also be done taking into consideration of other factors for complaint behavioural intentions such as demographic variables and institutional factors such as corruption.

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APPENDICES

Table A1: Measurement scales

Variable	No. of items	Source
Consumer rights awareness	6	Donoghue <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Consumer attitudes towards complaining	5	Ibarra and Revilla (2014)
Behavioural beliefs	4	Zhao and Orthman (2010)
Subjective norms	4	Rehman <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Perceived behavioural control	5	Burucuoğlu and Bulut (2016)
Prior complaint experience	5	Badghish and Shagagi (2023)
Consumer complaint intentions	6	Zhao and Orthman (2010)

Table A2: Test results for multicollinearity

Independent variable	TV	VIF
Subjective norms	.575	1.740
Perceived Behavioural Control	.708	1.413
Behavioural beliefs	.181	5.532
Consumer rights awareness	.892	1.122
Prior complaint experience	.806	1.241
Consumer complaint attitudes	.181	5.525

Table A3: Breusch-Pagan test results for heteroskedasticity^{a,b,c}

Chi-Square	df	Sig.
-25.085	1	1.000
a. Dependent variable: Standardized Residual		
b. Tests the null hypothesis that the variance of the errors does not depend on the values of the independent variables.		
c. Predicted values from design: Intercept		

Figure A1: Normality histogram

