

An Assessment of Borrower Satisfaction of Micro Finance Services in Grameen Bank of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study is aimed to determine the nature and dimensions of microfinance service and to have an understanding on borrower satisfaction level using various determinants of Grameen bank in Bangladesh.

Methodology: This analysis of the study is based on primary data collected from 312 respondents who are the borrowers of Grameen bank. Five point likert scale questionnaire is used for quantification and chi-square test is used for the analysis.

Findings: The results indicate that economic conditions of the borrowers, their income, and loan facilities of the bank, interest rates on the funds, insurance policy of the bank, transparent transactions, and bankers' behavior with the borrowers have significant influence on borrower satisfaction. The study has also drawn some inferences such as reducing the interest rate, arranging training programs for their officials, giving individual borrower attention, improving customer service department etc. to foster better banking services for superior borrower satisfaction.

Limitations: The research study has focused on six districts in Bangladesh. This could be extended to more areas. Time period for the study could also be extended.

Practical Implications: The outcomes of the study would be helpful in formulating customer services policies and improving the quality of services to ensure much satisfaction to the borrowers for future growth.

Originality: This study mainly focuses on the core customers in microfinance sector and as the prevailing level of satisfaction is very much important to sustain the market, this study has been done with direct intersection with the borrowers.

1. Introduction

In modern economic environment, banking system plays a vital role in carrying out economic activities as well as promoting economic development of a country. Actually banks have become the most powerful foundation for constructing a building block for the economic system. The necessary funds for executing various programs underway in the process of economic development are provided and the funds scattered in different sources are collected by the banks throughout the country. Imagine, in the absence of banks, the funds would have remained idle and unproductive. Through a well working banking system, the funds are pooled together and made available to individuals, households, business and industries for meeting their requirements. Among the numerous banking mechanisms and formats, microfinance has become a very well formula for pushing the rural and poor people up in the developing economies worldwide. In Bangladesh, Grameen bank has become one such leading institution that has played a pioneering role in mobilizing rural funds and upgrading financial sustainability for rural poor people. Grameen Bank (GB) has played a pioneering role to reverse conventional banking by practicing the removal of the

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need for collateral and has been able to create a banking system ensuring mutual trust, accountability, participation and creativity. GB provides credit to the poorest of the poor in rural Bangladesh, without any collateral (www.grameen.com/introduction). Some distinguishing characteristics possessed by this bank play significant role in the economic development of Bangladesh. With lots of branches all over the country, this bank is providing microfinance to the root level poor people to grow and sustain their life.

Now we need to have a brief description of the emergence of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Microfinance emerged in Bangladesh in the mid-1970s to provide loan facilities to the poor rural people. These people were not generally included in the formal financial services. Das and Mousumi (2004) defined micro finance as an economic mechanism that extends the opportunity to the poor people for availing adequate amount of credit easily to start any income generating activity. Today, microfinance is increasingly seen as one of the most effective components for broader financial inclusion system, the system that is comprised of multiple players having the common objective of providing high-quality financial services to low-income people. Asiama and Osei (2007) stated that, microfinance includes loans, savings, insurance, transfer services and other financial products and services. Throughout the evolution and development of microfinance services, borrower satisfaction has drawn the interest of academicians and practitioners for more than four decades considering the fact that borrowers are the prime source of most institutions' revenue.

The origin and development of Grameen Bank can be traced back to 1976. Professor Muhammad Yunus, Head of the Rural Economics Program at the University of Chittagong, launched an action research project to provide banking services and examine the possibility of designing a credit delivery system to targeted rural poor people. The project succeeded overwhelmingly and the demand for the services by the project reached in the peak. In October 1983, government legislation transformed the GB project into an independent bank. Today Grameen Bank, as an institution, is owned by the rural poor whom it serves. Customers of the Bank own 90% of its shares, while the remaining 10% is owned by the government. The Bank continues to expand operations across the nation. As of November, 2019, it has 9.60 million members, 97 percent of whom are women. With 2,568 branches, GB provides services in 81,678 villages, covering more than 93 percent of the total villages in Bangladesh (www.grameen.com/introduction). Grameen Bank, Bangladesh has provided the poor people especially to rural women with credits without any collateral security defined as "microcredit".

Grameen Bank has been awarded with the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize. Its efforts to create economic and social development and the formulating concept got recognition and application worldwide. The satisfaction of the borrowers is subject to be verified in a capitalistic concept of GB as the satisfaction itself can be regarded as the most important criterions for the effectiveness of the microcredit concept. At present, the gap between poor and wealthy people is increasing rapidly in the world. This study, through in depth questioning with the borrowers and stakeholders, tries to have an understanding on the satisfaction of themselves and also the bank's perception to that satisfaction. After the importance of borrower satisfaction within the microfinance industry is highlighted, a gap in the borrower satisfaction research is detected and it is explained why it is particularly important to pay attention to clients perception. Having discussed the theoretical and financial products and services of the GB, borrower satisfaction is very important for this bank. Reasonably, this research tries to assess the borrower satisfaction on microfinance services of GB in Bangladesh. The basic attention of the study is basically based on services provided by the Grameen Bank to their borrowers and the main objective is to make inferences on borrower satisfaction on microfinance services of GB. This study tries to find out the answers from the viewpoints of microfinance borrower expectation and management perception of this bank and to do an analysis to assess the satisfaction of borrowers from the services provided by the bank.

2. Review of Literature

At GB, credit is treated as a cost effective tool that fights poverty and serves as a catalyst in developing the overall socio-economic conditions of the poor people who generally belong outside to the banking orbit and are assumed to be not bankable on the ground that they are poor (www.grameen.com/introduction). Asiama and Osei, (2007) stated, microfinance is made up of the provision of financial services as well as the management of small amounts of money through a range of products and a system of intermediary functions that are targeted at low income clients. Ejigu (2009) said, microfinance is basically the provision of financial services, mainly comprising of savings and

credits to poor people who have a very little or no access to commercial banks. Anin (2000) noted, the past two decades have been momentum in a number of countries in South-East Asia, Latin America and Africa for the establishment of microfinance industry. Due to the alleged failure of conventional commercial banks to provide financial services to the poor and economically disadvantaged members who operate in the rural areas or in the shanty areas of towns and cities of developing countries, this evolution of the industry has been arisen (Anin, 2000). Kralikova (2015) mentioned, in the last twenty years, the microfinance industry has experienced substantial changes and the increasing competitiveness has led microfinance institutions (MFI) to focus more on understanding their clients' needs and preferences, and on looking for ways to effectively approach the unbanked poor. The study found that, young people provided with tailored financial services has a positive influence on their lives as well as on the growth of the economy.

Harris (2007) defined customer service as basically anything we do for a customer that improves upon a customer's experience while satisfaction of customers is their overall feeling of contentment after interaction. Another discussion extended three dimensional feelings that customer satisfaction leads to namely a positive feeling (satisfaction), a negative feeling (dissatisfaction) or indifference feeling (neutral) from consuming a product or a service (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Swaid & Wigand, 2007). Moreover, the services received from the institution are evaluated by the customers with their level of expectation and the resulting feeling based on their evaluation leaves the aforesaid dimension of feeling. This has been advocated by the words of Conchon, Eleouet, and Andreani (2006) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991). They have mentioned that "If the product fulfills and performs to the customer's expectations, customers will be satisfied". Kanyurhi (2013) conducted a research on the satisfaction of microcredit services in KOGO using factorial analysis, customer satisfaction index and ANOVA and found that responsiveness remains the most important dimension in microfinance sector. The results revealed that customer's branch, customer's revenue and number of services accessed by customers strongly influence customer's satisfaction. Results also indicated that the current customer satisfaction index at WAGES is equals to 71.2%. Researchers use several tools and techniques for measuring the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction from which SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988) and performance based sale SERVPERF developed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) are the most mentionable. Besides, Cronin and Taylor (1992) investigated the conceptualization and measurement of service quality and the relationships between service quality, consumer satisfaction, and purchase intentions. The results picked service quality as an antecedent of consumer satisfaction and inferred that consumer satisfaction than service quality exerts a stronger influence on purchase intentions. However, measuring satisfaction in microfinance following any structured formula is not universalized yet. Qualitative as well as quantitative approaches have been used in this regard (Kanyurhi, 2013).

A number of literatures can be mentioned to have a more clear understanding on customer satisfaction. Janahi and Mubarak (2017) conducted a research in Bahrain in which six dimensions of customer service quality relating to customer satisfaction (Compliance, Assurance, Reliability, Tangibility, Empathy and Responsiveness) have been used. Their study is based on Islamic banking services. It found strong and positive relationships between them. This study was one of the few that focused on the impact of customer service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction in the Islamic banking sector. It revealed that, despite paying special attention to Sharia'h laws (compliance) in transactions with banks, the customers notably concentrate on the ways services are delivered to them.

SERVQUAL scale has been regarded as one popular tool that is used by many researchers. Ozatac, Saner and Sen (2016) conducted a study on "Customer Satisfaction in the Banking Sector: The Case of North Cyprus" analyzed the perception of customers on determinants of service quality. Total of 207 customers of the major banks in North Cyprus have been surveyed. Empirical analysis are carried out by SPSS 18 and the results revealed that customer satisfaction in the banking sector depends on good and firm relations, building trust between customers and bank employees for the case of North Cyprus. Results also suggested positive words while conversation plays a major role in customer satisfaction. Uddin, Nipa and Rashid (2015) also used SERVQUAL scale and examined the level of service quality as perceived by customers of Jamuna Bank Limited situated in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Five important dimensions of Service quality namely Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, and Tangibility were used and one sample Z test was done to analyze the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction. The results revealed that service quality is an important factor of customer satisfaction. It is apparent from the study that banks in Bangladesh to seek ways of improving the elements of service quality that ensure customer satisfaction. In Bangladesh, a study using SERVQUAL method was conducted by Nupur (2010) on customer satisfaction to

e-banking services. This research focused that, e-banking can provide speedier, faster and reliable services to the customers for which they become relatively happy. The purpose of this research was to avail the impact of variables of e-banking on customer satisfaction in Bangladesh.

Another interesting study conducted based on SERVPERF in two countries named Ghana and Spain by Mensah (2011). The basic objective of the research was to compare the perceptions of customers regarding the quality of banks' services in Ghana and Spain. One set of questionnaire administering the five dimensions of SERVPERF was made in both countries. Remarkable recommendations made also included that banks in Ghana and Spain should make conscious efforts to be reliable to sustain and increase customers' confidence and trust. Especially for Ghana, it was recommended to open more banks' branches and introduce products like internet banking and Automated Teller Machines.

Satisfaction also differs with respect to easy service over cost. Das and Mousumi (2004) conducted a study titled "Micro finance through Self Help Groups-A Boon for the Rural Poor" in which they said that the need of the hour rather than cheaper rate of interest is more important to the poor with regard to easy access of credit. Belas and Homolka (2013) conducted a study to analyze satisfaction of bank's customers. This report presented important area of building long-term relationships with the clients, which significantly influences the financial performance of commercial banks through successful business. In the study, first research has been carried out on the first half of 2008 on the sample of 298 respondents and second research has been conducted in 2012 with sample of 320 respondents. The changing trend of satisfaction factors, respectively dissatisfied bank's customers compared with 2008 has been investigated by standard statistical methods. Results of study in 2012 showed reduced satisfaction of customers and also the changes in respondents' preferences of the perception of satisfactory factors.

Barua and Sulaiman (2007) performed a research on impact evaluation and client satisfaction of Northwest Microfinance Expansion Projection which the determinants of client dropout have been explored to see whether and how much effect does satisfaction has on exit decision. The study found to have significant influence on dropout because of poverty of the participants, variation in economic status within the groups, availability of alternative service providers, and level of client loyalty along with the overall satisfaction of the clients. Rahman and Ahmad (2010) conducted a research on the impact of microfinance services on poor's livelihood by Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited. This research used tabular, graphical, and econometrical methods for analyzing data. The results showed that household income, productivity of crops and livestock, expenditure, and employment had increased significantly due to the influence of investments. Akhter (2012) performed a study aimed to investigate customer satisfaction and its determinants in the banking industry of Bangladesh through the development and operation that constructs service quality, service charge, perceived value etc. To analyze the data the research used an exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The findings indicated customer satisfaction is positively associated with both service quality and fair service charge in a mass banking industry. The study recommended formulating operations and marketing strategies that focus on desires of customers to enhance the level of satisfaction.

Most of the literatures reviewed conducted the customer satisfaction of various banking and other microfinance services in different countries in which e-banking, Islami banking services, general banking services and microfinance services have been considered. The prior literature also showed that many studies have been conducted on analyzing the impact of microfinance loan on poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, women empowerment etc. Further few studies also concentrated on problems of microfinance institutions. But in general, tracing the studies on microfinance management is very difficult, especially the apparent determinants of satisfaction as bank's environment and behavior of the employees, credit facility, distribution of microfinance loan, interest rates, protective insurance and social programs, banks' environment, problems in obtaining loan and transparency of transactions etc. and the impact of these variables on customer satisfaction has not been constructed and analyzed so far. Hence, this study has been undertaken to cover these research gaps in the microfinance sector. Grameen Bank is one of the most successful micro financing banks in Bangladesh. The rationale of the study lies here as the bank has been providing services for a long time with sustainability and playing significant role in empowering poor financially and developing Bangladesh economy. The study will also help further research on the subject matter.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology in a research study is considered as an important section for determining the methods, tools and techniques used in the research. The brief methodology of the study is noted section wise.

3.1. Research Type, Population and Sample

This paper is descriptive and experimental in nature. All the branches of Grameen Bank located in Bangladesh have been considered as the population of the study. Sample is a part or portion of the whole population. The researchers have selected six districts as sample namely Mymensingh, Sherpur, Netrokona, Gazipur, Tangail and Manikganj districts in Bangladesh and a total of 312 borrower respondents from these districts have been selected purposively as sample size.

3.2 Data Sources

Both primary and secondary sources of data are used for the study. Primary data is collected through direct questionnaire from the borrower of Grameen bank located in the above mentioned areas. Secondary data in the research have been collected from internal as well as external sources like prior research report, bank's annual report, several other reports, different books and periodicals, internet browsing, newspapers, journals, articles etc.

3.3 Analysis Design

Data collecting instruments consists of in-depth interview and questionnaire survey. The questionnaire contained at most eight (8) questions having "Five Point Likert Scale" model to quantify the answers. Quantitative value 1 stands for Very Dissatisfaction, 2 stands for Dissatisfaction, 3 stands for Neutral, 4 stands for Satisfaction and 5 stands for Strongly Satisfaction. The null hypotheses are developed based on the questionnaire and chi-square test is used for the analysis of the data. The study also used descriptive statistics. Data analysis is mainly done through SPSS software 20. Finally the interpretations of the analyzed data have been discussed in the result section.

3.4 Conceptual Framework

Borrower service is the provision of service to borrowers before, during and after a purchase. While satisfaction is a person's feelings of pleasure or disappointment that results from a product's perceived performance compared to his or her expectations, borrowers' satisfaction is a measure of how loan products and services supplied by a company can meet the customers' expectations. Microfinance allows poor people to avail reasonable small business loans and other services in a consistent ethical lending manner. Although this concept is more or less used all around the world, the majority of micro financing operations occur in developing nations. The determinants used for measuring satisfaction through questionnaire are highlighted in the following figure.

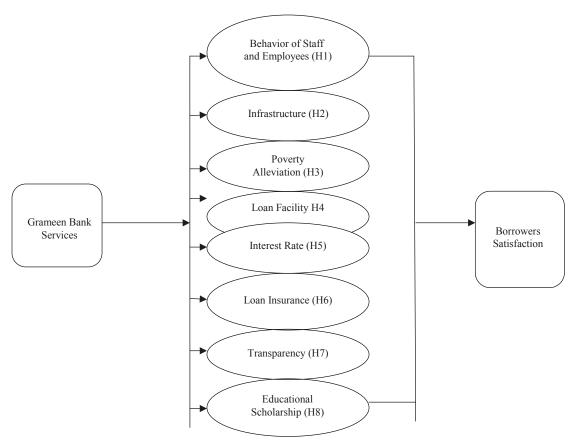


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework, Source: Authors Developed

Table 1. Hypo theses Development

Hypothesis-1	H_0 : Staff and employees of Grameen bank are not helpful enough. H_a : Staff and employees of Grameen bank are helpful enough.
Hypothesis- 2	H ₀ : Grameen Bank's environment is not well satisfactory. H _a : Grameen Bank's environment is well satisfactory
Hypothesis-3	H_0 : Grameen Bank doesn't contribute to poverty alleviation. H_a : Grameen Bank contributes to poverty alleviation.
Hypothesis-4	H_0 : Loan facility of Grameen Bank is not satisfactory. H_a : Loan facility of Grameen Bank is satisfactory.
Hypothesis-5	H_0 : The interest rate for the loan of the Bank is not congenial. H_a : The interest rate for the loan of the Bank is congenial.
Hypothesis-6	H_0 : The loan insurance policy of the Bank is not sufficiently helpful. H_a : The loan insurance policy of the Bank is sufficiently helpful.
Hypothesis-7	H_0 : The transactions of the Bank are not transparent enough. H_a : The transactions of the Bank are transparent enough.
Hypothesis-8	H_0 : Bank's educational scholarship service is not satisfactory. H_a : Bank's educational scholarship service is satisfactory.

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of primary data.

4. Results

The study basically concludes aiming at identifying important factors of efficiency of borrower service and satisfaction level of the Grameen Bank customers. Of course, different aspects might influence the satisfaction level of different classes of borrowers of Grameen Bank differently. In view of this, the study collects information from different classes of borrowers of Grameen Bank from various branches. The information is taken from 312 general people who answered questions regarding bank's service quality divided into five scales as very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied and very satisfied. Chi-square test is used to test the hypotheses. The standard alpha value is α = 0.05. The study says that the association between two variables is statistically significant if Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) < 0.05. That means that the two variables (factors affecting satisfaction and satisfaction itself) are significantly associated with each other if the calculated value is less than the alpha value. So, in that case, the null hypotheses would be rejected that we assume that there is no relationship between the factors and satisfaction.

Verv Verv Chi-square Satisfaction Factors Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Total dissatisfied satisfied test value Behavior of employees 4 25 40 202 41 312 0.05>0.000 Infrastructure 11 60 88 115 38 312 0.05>0.000 Poverty Alleviation 14 28 50 185 35 312 0.05>0.001 9 81 Loan Facility 123 81 18 312 0.05>0.003 72 0.05>0.000 Interest Rate 180 49 11 0 312 Loan Insurance 19 134 97 58 4 312 0.05>0.000 Transparent Transactions 0 10 28 178 96 312 0.05>0.001 Educational Scholarship 0 0 32 170 110 312 0.05<0.062 2496 Total 129 560 465 1000 342 Percentage 22.44 5.16 18.63 40.1 13.70 100

Table 2. The summary of the Results

Source: Developed by authors on the basis of the statistical analysis in SPSS.

This research has provided some interesting insight into what kind of services the borrowers give importance to and what quality service they get from GB. It is quite obvious from the research that the borrower requirements are not fully met and they are very dissatisfied with some of the aspects of the bank.

The dimensions regarded in this study to clients' satisfaction are the behavior of staffs and employees; bank infrastructure; contribution to poverty alleviation; credit facilities; interest rates; loan insurance policy; transparency of transactions and education scholarship among which all dimensions have been found closely associated with borrowers satisfaction except the last one i.e. educational scholarship has no association with clients satisfaction.

Most of the borrowers are somewhat satisfied (64.70% are satisfied) with the employee behavior, infrastructure of bank branches is not congenial for borrowers revealed by the mixed percentage of frequency distribution results, major borrowers of bank are satisfied (59.3% are satisfied) to the contribution of the bank regarding poverty alleviation. Maximum respondents regarding prompt and accurate transaction are satisfied (57.1% are satisfied). Educational scholarship program reflects very positive image (54.5% are satisfied) of GB clients. Grameen Bank provides its services at the time it promises to do so. From the analysis the researchers found while interviewing most of the respondents, and found that they think, GB provides its services at the time.

From the conversations over and above collecting data, it is appeared that the borrowers are also satisfied with the problem solving skills of the employees. Most of the borrowers are not satisfied (57.7% are dissatisfied) with the current interest rate of the GB as they think that the bank's interest rates should be cut further. Moreover, there prevails mixed perception regarding loan insurance, and loan facility.

The chi-square test also doesn't support any significant relationship between Grameen bank's educational scholarship program and borrower's satisfaction and hence, the null hypothesis is accepted and alternative hypothesis is rejected. That is, it appears that the scholarship program doesn't influence the satisfaction of the borrowers. All the other factors revealed a significant association with satisfaction and hence, the null hypotheses are rejected and alternative hypotheses are accepted meaning that these variables are related to satisfaction and influence the satisfaction of the borrowers.

5. Discussion

The fundamental objective of the study is to examine borrower satisfaction on microfinance services of GB, Bangladesh. Comparison between positive findings and negative findings from the survey clearly suggest that positive findings are far more than the negative findings. So it can be said that most of the borrowers are satisfied but not fully regarding service and facility provided by the Grameen Bank. All the null hypotheses are rejected except one and all the alternative hypotheses are accepted except one. The behavior of staffs and employees; bank infrastructure; contribution to poverty alleviation; credit facilities; interest rates; loan insurance policy; transparency of transactions, all these variables are closely associated with satisfaction of the borrowers and hence, the borrowers are significantly satisfied with these services. The analysis couldn't found any significant relationship with borrower satisfaction and educational scholarship. The reason may lie in the fact that the low percentage of borrowers who avail educational scholarship.

However GB has many areas where they can improve the quality of the service and atmosphere. Moreover, they need to think about the borrower requirements, desire and expectation and should work according to this. They should build a strong relationship with the borrower by offering the best services they can. They need to set goal to make the borrower fully satisfied by improving all the lacking they have. All the variables discussed before like interest rate, loan facility, loan insurance policy, bank environment, individual attention and office atmosphere are very important elements for the bank as they have direct or indirect impact on the borrower satisfaction.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In a developing capitalistic economy like Bangladesh, Microfinance services open a broader way of reaching marginal peoples' financial market and carry them to the stream of modern banking. As the urge for this inclusion increase over time and the demand for this active sector to sustain grow over time, the satisfaction of the stakeholders has become more important for the institutions like Grameen bank. This study has investigated borrower satisfaction scenario on micro-finance of GB in Bangladesh. The results indicate that economic conditions of the clients, their income, and loan facilities of the bank, interest rates on the funds, insurance policy of the bank, transparent transactions, and bankers' behavior with the clients have significant influence on client satisfaction. Satisfied borrowers are more likely to remain with the bank. Therefore, banks should be careful and focus more to these issues. Grameen Bank should emphasis more on empathy to borrowers which means that bank should give more individual attention to their borrowers. Because borrowers think that they don't get enough individual attention. This is also statistically proven and the management should also emphasize on employee efficiency by training and other workshop regarding customer dealings which would have perfectly positive correlation with overall borrower satisfaction. The bank can diversify its loan portfolio and upgrade loan facilities for marginal borrower. The interest rates for loans are also higher than the borrower expectation. So GB should reduce the interest rate of loans and advances for their existing valued borrowers. Other variables are also appeared to be relevant namely insurance, poverty alleviation programs and transparency etc. So the bank should focus more on these factors to ensure full satisfaction of the borrowers. The Researchers think that the bank should put emphasis on its overall service quality because that will have much impact in increasing the satisfaction level of the customers. This study on borrower's satisfaction on Micro-finance of GB supports the conclusion that every Bank should serve the borrowers through capacity building. Moreover, borrower analysis, marketing strategy and environmental factors can also play a key role in ensuring overall borrower satisfaction. All the services should be attractive and able to meet the expectation of the borrowers. However, this paper should not be considered as an utmost standard for increasing overall borrower satisfaction as tools and techniques vary with studies. But over and above, satisfaction of the customers be given the superior importance while serving and all the mechanisms be composed of keeping in mind that customers should not be treated as tools for profits rather as the origin thereof.

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