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ART OF REDRESS:THE CONSUMER COMPLAINT HANDLING OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY- REGION 3

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses the effectiveness of consumer complaint handling within the DTI-Region 3, which covers the provinces of Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, and Zambales. In alignment with the DTI's mandate to uphold consumers' rights to redress, the study focuses on three key areas: complaint channels, mediation facilitation modes, and the competencies of mediation officers. It also aimed to identify problems encountered in the consumer complaint process. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, the study collected quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews involving both consumer complaints and mediation officers across the seven provinces. The findings revealed a neutral perception of the overall complaint channels (grand mean of 2.97), with traditional methods such as filing complaints through DTI provincial offices and registered mail or courier receiving higher satisfaction ratings compared to the digital DTI-CARe System, which was perceived as difficult to use, inaccessible for many users, and inefficient in lodging complaints. In contrast, mediation facilitation modes, such as online and face-to-face mediation, were positively rated (grand mean of 4.16). Face-to-face mediation in particular was preferred for its perceived effectiveness in fostering mutual understanding and clearer communication. Online mediation, although useful, was hindered by technical issues. Mediation officers were generally viewed as competent (grand mean of 4.10), though gaps were identified in digital proficiency.

The study further identified several problems encountered by both mediation officers and clients, including a lack of public awareness of complaint procedures and matrix, inadequate post-mediation monitoring, delayed retrieval of signed documents, and systematic inefficiencies of DTI CARe System. Based on the findings, the study recommends strategies to strengthen the DTI-Region 3's complaint handling. These include enhancing consumer education, improving digital infrastructure and system usability, continuous capacity-building for mediation officers, reinforcing post-mediation monitoring, and inter-agency coordination. The study has significant implications for public administration by highlighting pathways to improve government responsiveness, institutional efficiency, and citizens' satisfaction. Further, it contributes practical insights for policy formulation, inter-agency coordination, and consumer protection efforts both in local, regional, and national contexts.

INTRODUCTION

(OECD, 2022) around the world, consumer rights frameworks are being strengthened through more transparent complaint mechanisms, dispute resolution platforms, and mediation services. In countries such as France, Mexico, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), particularly mediation, has emerged as an important tool for alleviating court congestion while ensuring timely justice for consumers.

(ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for Consumer Protection 2016-2025) The ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for Consumer Protection (ASACP) outlines the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) consumer policy goals from 2016 to 2025. This action plan covers four main goals: creating common ASEAN Consumer Protection Framework, ensuring a high consumer confidence in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and Cross-border Commercial Transactions and integrating consumer concerns in all ASEAN Policies continuing the work of the ASEAN Committee on 2 Consumer Protection (ACCP) these plan focuses on ensuring that all ASEAN members states have consumer protection laws, enhanced consumer access to information, and effective mechanisms for consumer redress and product recalls.

DTI Philippines' mission is to serve as the key driver of economic growth by fostering innovation, competitiveness, job generation, inclusive business opportunities, and consumer empowerment. These efforts are aimed at achieving the department's Vision 2028 of "A higher level of competitiveness for the Philippines and 2nd in ASEAN in FDI by 2028."

The Consumer Act of the Philippines, or R.A. 7394, is the policy of the state created to protect the interests of the consumer, promote general welfare, and establish standards of conduct for business and industry.

Part of the plan is the launching of the DTI-Consumer Complaints Assistance and Resolution (CARe) System. This is an initiative of the DTI's redress mechanism in cross-border transactions, as online shopping has become a global trend because of the rapid growth of e-commerce, which has also led to the growth of consumer issues in online transactions.

The DTI Head Office, through its Fair Trade and Enforcement Bureau (FTEB), has a Mediation Division, exclusively dedicated to handling consumer complaints. Similarly, the DTI CPAB manages the DTI CARe System, an online platform where consumers

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from anywhere in the Philippines can file complaints. The DTI-CPAB, as the system administrator, gathers these complaints and refers certain cases to the DTI Provincial Offices for action.

At the Regional Office, specifically in Region 3, the Adjudication Officer's primary role is to handle complaints and cases. However, in the DTI Provincial Offices, the designated Mediation Officers are from the Consumer Protection Division, the Chief or Officer-In-Charge (OIC), and technical staff. Each province generally has two or three mediation officers who also manage various tasks such as consumer advocacy, accreditation of service and repair shops, price monitoring, and ensuring businesses' compliance with fair trade laws. The effectiveness of these officers in resolving disputes hinges not only on their competencies, such as proficiency in using the various complaint 5 channels, skill in facilitating mediation, and technical knowledge of the law, but also on their ability to multitask, manage difficult clients, and adapt to an evolving redress system. Their performance is further influence by the efficiency of the DTI's Quality Management System, compliance with the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 (Republic Act No. 9485), as amended by the East of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 (Republic Act No. 11032), and adherence to the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees (Republic Act No. 6713).

This study is grounded in the researcher's practical experience as a Mediation Officer in DTI-Tarlac Provincial Office, where direct engagement with clients provided firsthand experience of the dynamics and challenges in DTI's complaint handling. Complementing this experience are insights drawn from focus group discussions with fellow mediation officers from the DTI-Region 3 Consumer Protection Division. These discussions brought attention to recurring concerns about the functionality of consumer complaint channels, the effectiveness of various mediation modes, and the skillsets of officers involved in dispute resolution. Through the integration of both experiential knowledge and peer-informed perspectives, the study is uniquely positioned to critically evaluate and address the persistent and pressing issues in the consumer complaint handling of the DTI-Region 3. Specifically, the study described the art of redress, examined the consumer complaint channels, mediation facilitation modes, and competencies of the mediation officers. It also identified the problems faced by the respondents and proposed 6 recommendations aimed at enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the consumer complaint handling of the DTI-Region 3.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to evaluate the consumer complaints handling of the Department of Trade and Industry's Region 3. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How is the Department of Trade and Industry Region 3's handling of consumer complaints described and evaluated in terms of:
1.1 Consumer Complaint Channels
1.2 Mediation Facilitation Modes
1.3 Competencies of Mediation Officers
2. What are the problems encountered by the mediation officers and clients in the DTI's consumer complaint handling?
3. What recommendations can be proposed to enhance the consumer complaint handling of the DTI Region 3?
4. What are the implications of the study to Public Administration?

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH

The study used a mixed-methods research design of quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the consumer complaint handling in DTI Region 3. The research was conducted in Central Luzon Region 3, covering the area of Aurora, Bataan, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, Tarlac, and Zambales. The respondents were composed of all mediation officers in DTI Region 3 (total of 17) and a sample of consumer complaint clients (n = 165), yielding a total of 182 respondents. The clients' sample size was computed using Cochran's finite population formula and checked with a statistician; purposive (for specific provincial coverage) and random selection procedures were combined to ensure geographic representation across the seven provinces.

Moreover, the researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire, it is divided into three parts, the profile and filing channel, Likert-scale items on channels/modes/competencies/problems and open-ended suggestions, which were expert-validated and pilot-tested.

Quantitative data were encoded and organized for analysis, and descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and ranking were used to describe respondent profiles and service indicators. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was applied to determine perceptions and satisfaction levels. Pearson correlation and ranking tests were used where appropriate to examine associations between profile variables and outcomes. Qualitative inputs from open-ended items and follow-up interviews were thematically analyzed to contextualize the survey findings.

All data collection procedures observed ethical safeguards and considerations. Written consent was secured from the DTI Region 3 Office and from individual respondents.

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RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Table 1
DTI-R3 Consumer Complaint Channels

Statement	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Walk-in complaints at DTI offices are managed professionally and efficiently.	3.95	Agree
The process of submitting complaints via courier or registered mail is simple and efficient.	3.84	Agree
The public is well-informed in all channels for lodging complaints.	2.72	Neutral
I know how to use the DTI CARe (Consumer Complaints Assistance and Resolution) System.	2.71	Neutral
The DTI CARe (Consumer Complaints Assistance and Resolution) System is user-friendly.	2.36	Disagree
Complaints submitted through the DTI CARe System are addressed promptly.	2.24	Disagree
Grand Mean	2.97	Neutral

Table 1 shows that walk-in (mean: 3.95) and courier/mail (mean 3.84) complaint channel rated positively (agree). However, respondents are neutral about public awareness (mean 2.72) and their knowledge of using the DTI CARE system (mean 2.71). The system itself rated poorly, with users disagreeing on its user friendliness (mean 2.36) and promptness (mean 2.24). The overall rating is neutral (grand mean 2.97), indicating strengths in traditional channels but significant issues with the digital complaint system.

Table 2
DTI-R3 Mediation Facilitation Modes

Statement	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Face-to-face mediation allows a clearer understanding of the feelings and concerns of both parties compared to online mediation.	4.55	Strongly Agree
Face-to-face mediation provides a suitable environment for open discussion.	4.38	Agree
Both mediation modes (online and face-to-face) support fair and balanced resolutions.	4.19	Agree
The use of both online and face-to-face mediation increases the accessibility and efficiency of the process.	4.18	Agree
The scheduling of both online and face-to-face mediations is convenient and timely.	4.12	Agree
I prefer face-to-face mediation over online mediation platforms.	4.11	Agree
Online mediation platforms (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet etc.) used by DTI are reliable and easy to use.	4.02	Agree
I find online mediation more convenient than face-to-face mediation.	3.94	Agree
I prefer using online platforms for mediation over face-to-face sessions.	3.94	Agree
Grand Mean	4.16	Agree

Table 2 shows a strong preference for face-to-face mediation, particularly for better emotional understanding (mean 4.55) and open discussion (mean 4.38). However, both mediation modes are seen as fair (mean 4.19) and efficient (mean 4.18). While online platforms are considered reliable (mean 4.02) and convenient (mean 3.94), face to face remained the preferred option (mean 4.11). Overall, the grand mean of 4.16 indicates positive reception of both methods with a slight edge toward face-to-face mediation.

Table 3
DTI-R3 Competencies of Mediation Officers

Statement	Mean	Adjectival Rating
Mediation officers demonstrate effective mediation and negotiation skills.	4.41	Agree
Mediation officers communicate clearly and professionally.	4.40	Agree
Mediation officers show sound judgment and analytical thinking during complaint handling.	4.38	Agree
Mediation officers are knowledgeable about consumer protection laws and complaint procedures.	4.37	Agree
Mediation officers demonstrate competence in using digital tools to facilitate the mediation process.	3.96	Agree
Mediation officers are competent in using the DTI CARe System.	3.06	Neutral
Grand Mean	4.10	Agree

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Table 3 shows that the DTI Region 3 mediation officers are generally rated positively across key competencies, particularly in mediation skills (4.41), communication skills (4.40), sound judgement and analytical thinking (4.38). They are also seen as knowledgeable in consumer protection laws and complaints procedures (4.37), and capable with digital tools (mean 3.96). However, their competence with the DTI CARe system is rated neutral (mean 3.06). The overall assessment is agree (grand mean 4.10) indicating that while mediation officers are overall performing well particularly in interpersonal and procedural skills, digital usage, such as the DTI CARe system remains an area for improvement.

Table 4
DTI-R3 Consumer Complaint Handling Overall Evaluation

Key Areas	Grand Mean	Adjectival Rating
Complaints Channels	2.97	Neutral
Mode of Facilitation	4.16	Agree
Mediation Officers' Competencies	4.10	Agree
Grand Mean	3.74	Agree

Table 4 shows that the mode of facilitation and mediation officer's competencies (means of 4.16 and 4.10, respectively), signifying that once a complaint is received, they are handled professionally, efficiently, and fairly. This demonstrates the agency's strong internal capabilities and procedural effectiveness. However, the complaints channel received the lowest rating (mean of 2.97). This suggests that consumers find the filing of complaints through walk-ins, mail, and DTI CARe System in unclear and inefficient.

The overall evaluation of DTI-R3's consumer complaint handling, indicates a generally positive perception among respondents, with a grand mean score of 3.74. This suggests that, on average, consumers are satisfied with how the agency handles complaints.

Table 5
Problems Encountered by the DTI-R3 Consumer Complaint Clients

Problems Encountered	*f*	%	R
Lack of public awareness on the DTI consumer complaint filing process through DTI Consumer CARe System, DTI Provincial Offices, and courier or registered mail.	138	83.64	1
Lack of public awareness about which agency is responsible for handling specific consumer concerns, causing misdirected complaints.	117	70.91	2
There is a lack of proper complaint monitoring or follow-up after mediation, making it difficult to verify compliance with the compromise agreement or track resolution outcomes.	89	53.94	3
Retrieval of signed documents (e.g., compromise agreement) is often difficult and delayed.	75	45.45	4
The DTI CARe System is difficult to use or access.	64	38.79	5
Filing complaints through DTI Provincial Offices is often inefficient and time-consuming, as clients must wait for assistance from mediation officers who are simultaneously managing other tasks.	44	26.67	6
Insufficient digital literacy among mediation officers challenges their ability to facilitate online mediation effectively.	45	27.27	7
Mediation officers are not proficient in using the DTI CARe System.	39	23.64	8
Submitting complaints via courier or registered mail (snail mail) is unclear or unreliable.	37	22.42	9
Face-to-face mediation sessions are sometimes inconvenient or lack proper facilities, affecting the quality of discussions.	36	21.82	10
The procedures for complaint handling are difficult to understand.	22	13.33	11
Long wait times for mediation appointments.	21	12.73	12
Perceived bias or unfair handling of complaints.	19	11.52	13
Inconsistent application of mediation rules.	7	4.24	14
Mediation officers lack adequate knowledge of consumer protection laws and complaint procedures.	4	2.42	15
Mediation officers have limited mediation and negotiation skills.	4	2.42	16
Mediation officers do not communicate clearly or professionally with clients.	3	1.82	17
Mediation officers show weak judgment or poor analytical thinking in handling complaints.	3	1.82	18

Table 5 shows that the primary problems faced by the DTI R3 consumer complaints clients are related to lack of public awareness and system accessibility. The most common issue, reported 83.64%, is unfamiliarity with how to file complaints through official channels. Similarly, 70.91% of respondents are unclear about which agency is responsible for specific consumer issues, leading to misdirected complaints. Other significant concerns include poor follow-up after mediation (53.94%), difficulty retrieving signed

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documents (45.45%), and challenges using the DTI CARe System (38.79%). These findings point to gaps in communication, digital infrastructure, and post-resolution monitoring. Lower ranked issues, such as officer competency, fairness, and communication, received minimal responses, suggesting general satisfaction with mediation officers.

The findings revealed that the most critical issues are centered around public awareness, system accessibility, and procedural efficiency.

These survey findings were strengthened by the interview results, which echoed similar issues and highlighted the same need for better system usability, more consumer guidance, and improved accessibility.
Based from the interview with consumer complaint clients, several recurring problems were identified in relation to the DTI CARe System. Many clients expressed the need for training and more accessible information about the new system, suggesting the creation of online tutorials, guided video instructions, and downloadable forms. Some reported experiencing system errors, which led them to abandon the platform and instead file complaints through email. Others noted that the system is not user-friendly on mobile devices, with one stating that it works better only when accessed through a laptop or desktop. Follow-ups were also found to be difficult, particularly for older clients and those who are not tech-savvy, as they had to repeatedly log in just to check complaint updates. As a solution, many suggested adding SMS notifications for real-time updates.

Table 6

Problems Encountered by the DTI-R3 Mediation Officers

Problem Encountered	*f*	%	R
Lack of public awareness about which agency is responsible for handling specific consumer concerns, causing misdirected complaints.	15	88.24	1
Lack of public awareness on the DTI consumer complaints filing process through DTI Consumer CARe System, DTI Provincial Offices, and courier or registered mail.	11	64.71	2
There is a lack of proper complaint monitoring or follow-up after mediation, making it difficult to verify compliance with the compromise agreement or track resolution outcomes.	11	64.71	3
Retrieval of signed documents (e.g., compromise agreements, feedback forms, withdrawal confirmations) is often difficult and delayed.	10	58.82	4
Some mediation officers are not fully trained or proficient in using the DTI CARe System.	10	58.82	5
Long waiting periods for scheduling mediation contribute to complaint backlogs and client dissatisfaction, primarily due to officers handling overlapping duties beyond handling consumer complaints.	5	29.41	6
There is no formal training to enhance mediation and negotiation skills among officers.	5	29.41	7
Insufficient digital literacy among mediation officers challenges their ability to facilitate online mediation effectively.	5	29.41	8
Online complaints through the DTI Consumer Complaints Assistance and Resolution (CARe) System are difficult to access/use.	4	23.53	9
Some officers feel insufficiently equipped with up-to-date knowledge of consumer protection laws and relevant complaint procedures.	4	23.53	10
Mediation officers sometimes face challenges in maintaining clear, respectful, and professional communication with difficult clients.	3	17.65	11
Some mediation officers encounter difficulties in applying sound judgment and analytical thinking when resolving complex complaints.	3	17.65	12
Complaints submitted via courier or registered mail are difficult to track and often arrived/received unclear or incomplete with the necessary details.	2	11.76	13
Online mediation platforms (Zoom, Teams, Google Meet etc.) are unreliable or difficult to use.	2	11.76	14
Face-to-face mediation sessions are sometimes inconvenient or lack proper facilities, affecting the quality of discussions.	2	11.76	15
Filing complaints through DTI Provincial Offices is often inefficient and time-consuming, as clients must wait for assistance from mediation officers who are simultaneously managing other tasks.	1	5.88	16
The complaint handling procedures are complex and not easily understood by both clients and mediation officers.	1	5.88	17
Some parties perceive mediation outcomes as biased or unfair, affecting trust in the process and the role of mediation officers.	1	5.88	18
Inconsistent application of mediation rules.	1	5.88	19

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Table 6 shows the problems encountered by the mediation officers. The most significant problem being identified is the lack of public awareness about which agency handles specific consumer concerns. This leads to frequent misdirected complaints. Closely following are issues with low public awareness of complaint filing procedures, and inadequate post-mediation follow-up, both of which hinder the effectiveness of the complaint resolution process. Officers also report delays in retrieving signed documents and limited proficiency in using the DTI CARe system. Other concern include long scheduling delays, lack of training in mediation skills, and insufficient digital literacy. While technical and training-related challenges exist, most problems stem from external factors, such as lack of awareness and systematic inefficiencies.

The interview with the mediation officers strengthened the results of the survey by providing deeper context and firsthand insights into the challenges they face in handling consumer complaints. One of the most prominent issues raised is the lack of dedicated personnel to manage consumer complaints, especially through the DTI CARe system. Officers also highlighted insufficient training, particularly on legal frameworks and ADR skills.

2. Recommendations to enhance the Consumer Complaint Handling of the DTI- Region 3

The study aimed to recommend actionable solutions and develop a comprehensive action plan to address the problems encountered by the mediation officers and consumer complaint clients.

One major issue is the lack of public awareness on how to file a consumer complaint through DTI. Many consumers remain unaware of their rights and how to exercise them. To resolve this, the objective is to increase public awareness of DTI complaint channels. The plan includes publishing a downloadable Consumer Complaint E-Book and sharing it on DTI's official website and Facebook page. Hard copies will be distributed to LGUs, Negosyo Centers, schools, and business establishments. Additionally, monthly infographics will be posted on social media. These actions will equip consumers with knowledge, empowering them to assert their rights and take proper action when wronged in the marketplace.

A common frustration among complainants is the lack of follow-up after mediation. Some issues remain unresolved or unmonitored. By introducing a follow-up step in the standard operating procedure and assigning dedicated staff to monitor post-mediation compliance, DTI ensures that consumers can trust that their complaints will be seen through to the end, with accountability from all involved parties.

Some consumers find the DTI CARe System difficult to access or use, especially those unfamiliar with online platforms. To improve system usability, DTI will create easy-to-understand guides and video tutorials and simplify the platform's interface based on real user feedback. DTI will also conduct quarterly user testing. This will make the system more consumer-friendly, reducing errors and increasing the number of successfully filed complaints.

Filing complaints directly at DTI Provincial Offices has also proven inefficient and time-consuming. By implementing online appointments, orienting frontline staff, and assigning backup personnel during busy hours, DTI will streamline this process. Consumers will save time, avoid long queues, and receive more organized service.

Meanwhile, the digital literacy of mediation officers must also be improved to deliver better service to consumers. Through ICT training, including tools like Google Workspace and Zoom, officers will become more capable of handling online complaints and digital documents. This will directly benefits consumers, as they will be dealing with competent officers who can provide timely assistance in both face-to-face and virtual settings.

Another internal issue affecting service quality is that some officers lack proficiency in the DTI CARe System, which leads to delays and errors. With hands-on training and the development of a troubleshooting FAQ, officers will become more efficient. This results in faster and more accurate handling of consumer complaints, reducing consumer frustration and anxiety.

Consumers who file complaints via courier or snail mail often feel uncertain about whether their documents are received or processed correctly. To solve this, DTI will create and distribute a step-by-step guide for mailing complaints, ensuring that consumers are properly guided and can confidently submit their concerns from remote or offline areas.

Facilities for face-to-face mediation are also a concern, with some venues lacking comfort or privacy. By inspecting and upgrading these spaces adding furniture, signage, partitions, and AV equipment, DTI ensures that consumers experience a respectful, safe, and professional environment when resolving disputes.

The complaint handling process itself is often confusing for consumers, especially those unfamiliar with legal or bureaucratic terms. DTI will redesign its flowchart in plain English and Filipino, post it widely, and create an explainer video. This ensures that consumers understand what to expect and what steps to take, giving them confidence and clarity throughout the process.

Mediation officers must also be equipped with a strong understanding of consumer laws and procedures. Annual training sessions and regular legal updates will ensure that officers are legally sound in their decisions. This benefits consumers by ensuring they are served by knowledgeable officers who understand their rights and legal protections.

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Additionally, many mediation officers still lack proper negotiation and mediation skills, which are vital in reaching fair resolutions. By using real case simulations, role-play assessments, and mentorship from experienced mediators, DTI will significantly improve mediation outcomes. Consumers will benefit from more effective and empathetic negotiations that result in fair agreements.

Lastly, analytical skills are crucial in making sound mediation decisions. Training in logic, case analysis, and peer review of complex cases will empower officers to make better judgments. This ultimately benefits consumers by ensuring that their concerns are handled thoughtfully, fairly, and with critical reasoning.

Implications of the study to Public Administration

This study carries important implications for Public Administration, especially in the context of enhancing government responsiveness and citizen satisfaction. As agencies like the Department of Trade and Industry works to modernize service delivery and consumer protection, this study offers valuable insights aligned with the principles and mandates of key public administration laws in the Philippines.

First and foremost, the action plan emphasizes the importance of accessible and transparent public service, which directly aligns with the Anti-Red Tape Act of 2007 (Republic Act No. 9485), as amended by the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 (RA 11032). These laws mandate government agencies to simplify procedures, reduce red tape, and improve frontline services. The study recommends practical measures like simplifying the complaint filing process and digitizing document submission and retrieval.

The study also highlights the importance of ethical conduct and professionalism in public service, as required by the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees (RA 6713). The training modules proposed for DTI mediation officers, covering communication, impartiality, and emotional intelligence, reflect the need to uphold these ethical obligations in all interactions with the public.

The call for inter-agency coordination and clearer jurisdictional roles reflects the necessity of integrated governance. The proposed development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and joint referral mechanisms supports collaborative public management, which is key to resolving complex, cross-cutting issues in the public sector.

Thus, this study goes beyond operational recommendations. It reinforces the core values of Public Administration, including efficiency in the use of public resources, transparency in decision-making process, accountability to the public, responsiveness to the needs and concerns of citizens, and a commitment to professionalism.

Further, the study directly contributes to the fulfillment of national laws that govern ethical public service. Its findings and insights align with the DTI mandates and policy objectives, enhancing both the theoretical understanding and practical effectiveness of public sector performance and service delivery.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study:

1. Consumer Complaint Channels: The overall evaluation of the DTI-Region 3 consumer complaints handling presented a mixed picture, revealing a balance of strengths and areas for improvement. Their traditional complaints filing (walk-in and emailed complaints) received positive feedback. However, the DTI CARe System faces significant usability and technical challenges.
2. Mediation Facilitation Modes: Mediation services are generally viewed favorably, especially face-to-face mediation, which is seen as effective in creating a clear communication and mutual understanding. Mediation officers are competent in their core roles. However, they require enhanced training in digital systems and consumer protection laws to better adapt to the evolving service delivery methods.
3. Mediation Officers Competencies: The DTI-Region 3 mediation officers are generally perceived as competent; the overall grand mean suggests a positive perception of their competencies, though the findings highlight an area that may benefit from further support or training. They are perceived as competent in areas such as mediation and negotiation, professional communication, and application of sound judgment during complaint handling. They also demonstrate strong knowledge of consumer protection laws and procedures. However, while they are seen as capable in using digital tools overall, there is a noticeable gap in their proficiency with the DTI CARe System, which received a neutral rating.
4. The problems encountered by the mediation officers and consumer complaint clients include a high frequency of issues indicating that many consumers remain unfamiliar with the use of complaint channels and process of filing complaints, showing persistent gap in public awareness. Post-mediation oversight remains weak, affecting the ability to ensure that agreements are honored and that complaints are fully resolved. Document access challenges persist, impeding both clients and mediation officers from obtaining complaints records promptly. Clients experience service delay in provincial offices, largely due to competing responsibilities handled by limited staff. Lack of proficiency among officers contributes to inefficiencies in complaint handling and resolution tracking. Complexity in the complaint handling process remains barrier for many clients, making it harder to use and complete the process. Further, instances of poor communication hinder mutual understanding and negatively affect the client's perception of fairness and professionalism.

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CONCLUSION

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2. Mediation Facilitation Modes: Mediation services are generally viewed favorably, especially face-to-face mediation, which is seen as effective in creating a clear communication and mutual understanding. Mediation officers are competent in their core roles. However, they require enhanced training in digital systems and consumer protection laws to better adapt to the evolving service delivery methods.
3. Mediation Officers Competencies: The DTI-Region 3 mediation officers are generally perceived as competent, the overall grand mean suggests a positive perception of their competencies, though the findings highlight an area that may benefit from further support or training. They are perceived as competent in areas such as mediation and negotiation, professional communication, and application of sound judgment during complaint handling. They also demonstrate strong knowledge of consumer protection laws and procedures. However, while they are seen as capable in using digital tools overall, there is a noticeable gap in their proficiency with the DTI CARe System, which received a neutral rating.
4. The problems encountered by the mediation officers and consumer complaint clients include a high frequency of issues indicating that many consumers remain unfamiliar with the use of complaint channels and process of filing complaints, showing persistent gap in public awareness. Post-mediation oversight remains weak, affecting the ability to ensure that agreements are honored and that complaints are fully resolved. Document access challenges persist, impeding both clients and mediation officers from obtaining complaints records promptly. Clients experience service delay in provincial offices, largely due to competing responsibilities handled by limited staff. Lack of proficiency among officers contributes to inefficiencies in complaint handling and resolution tracking. Complexity in the complaint handling process remains barrier for many clients, making it harder to use and complete the process. Further, instances of poor communication hinder mutual understanding and negatively affect the client's perception of fairness and professionalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following is a list of potential recommendations based on the research's findings and conclusions.

1. Public awareness and consumer empowerment must be prioritized. To address this, DTI should launch an awareness campaigns utilizing various media platforms and community-based outreach. These campaigns must clearly communicate the available complaint channels and procedures, ensuring that information reaches all consumers, including those in remote areas. The creation and distribution of accessible educational materials will further aid in guiding consumers through the complaint-filing process. Development of user-friendly support tools, such as video tutorials, step-by-step guides, and downloadable forms, will help bridge the gap for individuals with limited digital literacy.
2. There is an urgent need to enhance the DTI CARe System to make it more accessible and user friendly. Feedback from both clients and mediation officers highlights several usability issues with the current platform, including technical errors, login difficulties, and poor mobile compatibility. To address these issues mentioned, the DTI must invest in upgrading the system interface to be more 97 intuitive and mobile-friendly. Real-time notifications and complaint progress tracking features should be integrated to improve user experience and maintain engagement throughout the complaint process.
3. Capacity-building of mediation officers. The evolving digital landscape demands that officers are not only skilled in traditional mediation but also proficient in using digital platforms like the DTI CARe System. To meet this need, DTI should implement specialized training programs that focus on enhancing digital literacy of the mediation officers. Furthermore, training should emphasize best practices in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), ensuring a standardized and professional mediation approach across all offices.
4. In terms of service delivery, maintaining and optimizing both online and in-person complaint channels is essential. The DTI must continue to offer both modes to maximize accessibility. It is also important to preserve the quality and reliability of face-to-face mediation. Continuous staff training and sufficient resource allocation are necessary to sustain high-quality in-person services.
5. Infrastructure and operational support also require focused investment. Many regional and provincial offices suffer from inadequate facilities. These issues limits both digital and face-to face mediation processes. Upgrading these infrastructures is essential to support hybrid service formats, particularly in underserved areas.
6. One of the key outputs of this study is the development of a Consumer Complaint Handling Handbook and E-Book, designed to address critical gaps identified in the research. These include the difficulty experienced by consumers in filing complaints, the lack of knowledge among both clients and mediation officers regarding the various complaint channels, and confusion about the proper regulatory agency to approach for specific concerns. The handbook and e-book aim to guide users through the step-by-step process of filing a consumer complaint with the DTI, providing clear and user-friendly information on procedures, requirements, and available channels. On the final page, a matrix of regulatory agencies is included to help consumers identify where to properly file their complaint based on the nature of the issue. In the e-book version, each agency name is hyperlinked, allowing users to be directly redirected to the agency's official website where they can lodge their

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complaint online. This handbook is a first of its kind within the DTI Philippines and was created as a direct product of the study that supports both consumers' and mediation officers' awareness and improves service delivery within the DTI's consumer complaint handling process.