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Negative Emotions and Their Effect on Customer Complaint Behaviour

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates pre-complaint situations and has a threefold purpose: (i) to identify a set of negative emotions experienced in unfavourable service experiences, (ii) to examine the patterns of these negative emotions and (iii) to link these negative emotions to complaint behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach: To fulfil the threefold purpose previously outlined, the study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A critical incident technique is applied. The empirical data are derived from 25 in-depth interviews and the results of a questionnaire survey of 3104 respondents.

Findings: Twenty observed negative emotions are reduced to a second-order construct with five latent categories of negative emotions: (i) shame, (ii) sadness, (iii) fear, (iv) anger and (v) frustration. These categories coincide with three categories of negative emotions in the agency dimension: (i) other-attributed, (ii) self-attributed and (iii) situational-attributed. The study finds that the negative emotion of frustration is the best predictor for complaint behaviour towards the service provider.

Research limitations/implications: The results are limited by the fact that the data are entirely self-reported. Moreover, the generalisability of the results is limited by the fact that the findings relate to one service industry in one country.

Originality/value: The study provides a comprehensive conceptual understanding of both pre-complaint negative emotions and how these emotions affect customer complaint behaviour.

Key words: negative emotions, customer complaint behaviour, frustration, attribution

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Negative emotions are usually the result of an unfavourable service experience and subsequently a trigger for customer complaint behaviour (Westbrook 1987; Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2003; Mattsson, Lemmink, and McColl 2004). It is therefore vital for the service provider to understand the emotional aspects of an unfavourable service experience in order to prevent damaging complaint behaviour. Most research attention on the service experience of customers, however, has emphasised the cognitive aspects of various service constructs (Bearden and Teel 1983; Oliver 1980; Oliver and DeSarbo 1988). A cognitive approach that commonly utilises disconfirmation theory (Churchill and Surprenant 1983; Tse and Wilton 1988; Oliver 1980), has been the main basis for explaining such constructs as service quality, customer satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction and customer loyalty (Oliver 1999; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985; Grönroos 1984). However, it can be argued that this emphasis on the cognitive aspects of the service experience fails to take adequate account of other perspectives. As noted by Edvardsson et al. (2005, p. 151), the service experience is a tripartite process "...that creates the customers' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses, resulting in a mental mark or a memory". It is the contention of the present study that greater research attention should be paid to the *emotional* and *behavioural* aspects of the service experience (Westbrook 1987; Westbrook and Oliver 1991; Liljander and Strandvik 1997; Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Oliver 1994). In spite of the importance of the topic for service providers, empirical studies of customers' emotional responses to service experiences remain limited (Knowles, Grove, and Pickett 1999; Brown and Kirmani 1999). Several researchers have called for further research on the role of emotions in service encounters, including how emotions should be measured and how emotions are related to each other (e.g. Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999).

The emotional aspects of the service experience have not been entirely neglected. The role of emotions in service research has been attracting more attention as a central element in understanding customers' experiences and behaviour (Oliver 1997; Richins 1997; Wong 2004; Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2003; Soscia 2007; Watson and Spence 2007). Research has shown that emotions have an important impact on word-of-mouth communication, attitudes to the service provider, customer loyalty, repurchase intentions and complaining behaviours (Davidow 2003; Barsky and Nash 2002; Wong 2004; Liljander and Strandvik 1997; Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Allen, Machleit, and Kleine 1992). Customers who have positive emotional responses to service employees are more likely to develop committed relationships with the employees' service provider (Liljander and Strandvik 1995). It is reasonable to suppose that the opposite is also true and that negative emotional responses will have an adverse effect on the development of a committed relationship with a service provider; indeed, there is evidence to suggest that negative emotions have a stronger effect on service experience than positive emotions (Liljander and Strandvik 1997).

In particular, it is essential for any service provider to understand customer complaint behaviour because of its relationship with negative word-of-mouth, repurchase intentions and switching behaviour (Tax and Brown 1998; Lovelock 1996; Johnston 2001). Day (1984) and Bougie, Pieters and Zeelenberg (2003) noted that the source of complaint behaviour might not be the judgment of dissatisfaction per se, but rather the antecedent negative emotional state produced by the appraisal of unfavourable consumption outcomes. Similarly, Westbrook (1987) has contended that complaint behaviour might arise from negative emotional experiences

irrespective of overall customer satisfaction. Given the importance of negative emotions in generating complaints, there is clearly a need for a thorough exploration of the emotional aspects of unfavourable service experiences. In investigating these matters, it is the contention of the present study that the majority of studies within service research have suffered from two limitations: (i) the consideration of only a limited number of negative emotions and (ii) an over-emphasis on post-complaint analysis and the customer's reaction to service recovery. To address these limitations, this study will introduce a considerable number of negative emotions and focus on negative emotions as a *pre-complaint construct* that is antecedent to complaint behaviour. The present study adopts the view of Smith and Bolton (2002), who contend that negative emotions are provoked by negative critical incidents, which can provoke negative emotions that may lead to complaint action responses.

The present study therefore explores the role of emotions resulting from negative critical incidents in an unfavourable service experience. The objectives of the study are as follows: (i) to identify a set of negative emotions experienced in unfavourable service experiences, (ii) to examine the patterns of these negative emotions and (iii) to link these patterns of negative emotions to complaint behaviour. Following this introduction, the paper presents a conceptual framework of negative emotions in service experience and their effects on complaint behaviour. An empirical study of the proposed framework is then presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings, managerial implications and opportunities for further research.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Emotions

There is a considerable debate among marketing and management researchers about how emotions should be defined and studied (Plutchik 1980, 1994). In the absence of a generic definition, it has been suggested that emotions should be dealt with in the management/marketing context in terms of their descriptive characteristics, rather than their essential nature. One such descriptive formula is that of Clore et al. (1987), who suggested that emotions represent a valence affective reaction to perceptions of situations. This characterisation is adopted in the present study.

In accordance with such a descriptive approach, Oliver (1997) has suggested that emotional responses in consumption experiences should be seen in terms of the consequences of specific events. Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Pieters (1995) adopt a similar approach in describing goal-directed emotions. In a similar vein, Nolen-Hoeksema (1987) posited negative emotions in terms of an underlying attributional structure. According to this view, once an attribution has been formed, a customer tends to perceive future events in a manner that confirms the attributional structure already established in the customer's mind (Taylor 1994; Keltner, Ellsworth, and Edwards 1993). Further, negative emotions are the most complex type of emotions and account for the majority of variance of reported emotional experiences (Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995; Watson and Clark 1991, 1992; Berenbaum, Fujita, and Pfennig 1995).

Various taxonomies and dimensions of emotions have been suggested (Izard 1977; Richins 1997; Russell 1980; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988); however, the nature and number of dimensions of any construct of emotions is unclear (Larsen and Diener 1992; Russell and Feldman Barrett 1999). Nevertheless, four dimensions have been used in many studies: (i)

activation, (ii) valence, (iii) potency and (iv) intensity (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). Of these, the two most commonly used dimensions have been valence and activation (Russell 1980; Larsen and Diener 1992). The valence dimension indicates an evaluation of whether an event is perceived by the customer as positive or negative (pleasant or unpleasant), whereas the activation dimension relates to the customer's sense of energy (ranging from sleepy to excited) (Russell and Feldman Barrett 1999).

In terms of the valence dimension, a customer's emotions can be fundamentally divided into positive emotions and negative emotions (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Liljander and Strandvik 1997; Machleit and Mantel 2001; Chaudhuri 1998; Brainerd et al. 2008). The focus of the present study is on the negative affect, which is an umbrella term for a second-order construct of moods and attitudes associated with negative emotions (Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995). Negative affect has been associated with various sets of emotions such as fear, sadness, guilt and hostility (Watson and Clark 1992), sadness, fear and anger (Berenbaum, Fujita, and Pfennig 1995) and fear, anger, shame and sadness (Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995).

In assessing such negative emotions, Smith and Ellsworth (1985) have suggested that the valence dimension (of positive or negative emotions) is inadequate and that there is a need to consider the additional dimension of "agency". This dimension refers to appraisals of whom or what caused the negative critical incident that thereby caused the negative emotions. In a similar vein, Weiner's (1985) cognitive theory posits that customers who appraise negative experiences in terms of the agency dimension differentiate among self-responsibility, other-responsibility and situational-responsibility. Oliver (1993, 1989) provided support for this view by proposing a tripartite concept of causal agency: (i) other-attributed (anger, disgust and contempt), (ii) situational-attributed (anxiety, fear and sadness) and (iii) self-attributed (shame and guilt).

Complaints

The most common argument to explain complaint behaviour has been customer dissatisfaction (Oliver 1997). Dissatisfaction is based in disconfirmation theory and is defined as a customer experience that is lower than the perceived expectation. Complaints do not always come from dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction does not always lead to complaining behaviour; therefore dissatisfaction is not sufficient cause for customers to complain (Day 1984; Singh and Pandya 1991). Davidow and Dacin (1997), for example, have shown that personality-related variables represent almost half of the total complaint responses. Emotions, therefore, play an important role in post-complaint behaviour (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999). The same situation likely applies to pre-complaint behaviour. Some scholars even believe that decision-making without the influence of emotions is not possible (Damasio 1999).

According to Tronvoll (2007), customer complaining behaviour can be defined as a process that emerges if a customer's service experience lies outside the "acceptance zone" during the service interaction and/or in the customer's evaluation of the value-in-use of the service. Such complaining behaviour can be expressed in the form of communication (verbal and/or non-verbal) with another party and it can lead to a behavioural change.

Several behavioural models have been suggested to explain customers' reactions to an unfavourable service experience. According to Hirschman (1970), a customer can choose to voice a complaint to the seller (or a third party) or exit the relationship - depending on the degree of customer loyalty. Day and Landon (1977) suggested a two-level hierarchy in which the first

level distinguished action from non-action and the second level distinguished “private” actions (word-of-mouth communication to friends and relatives and/or ceasing to patronise a retail outlet) from “public” actions (seeking redress or refund from the seller, complaining to a consumer organisation and legal action). Singh (1988) extended Day and Landon’s (1977) two-level hierarchical model to a three-dimensional model consisting of (i) private action (for example, negative word-of-mouth), (ii) voice (for example, seeking redress from the seller) and (iii) third-party actions (for example, taking legal action or complain to an external third party). The most common reaction of a negative critical incident, however, is inactivity and as a result a non-complaining behaviour (Singh and Pandya 1991; Stephens and Gwinner 1998; Huppertz 2003). Some studies report that two thirds of customers fail to report their dissatisfaction to the companies (e.g. Andreasen 1985; Richins 1983) and it is likely that a vast majority of those who do not complain would simply leave the relationship.

Relationship between emotions and complaint behaviour

Emotions can influence behaviour by influencing the storage, organisation and retrieval of cognitive information (Ger 1989; Nasby and Yando 1982). The recollection of an unfavourable service experience is likely to be associated with the negative emotions experienced at the time of the event (Bower 1981; Bower, Gilligan, and Monteriro 1981). The recollection of such negative emotions is therefore likely to influence judgments about the service experience and expectations regarding similar experiences. The negative emotions have thus been posited as mediators in the relationship between cognitive evaluations and constructs such as perceived service performance and complaint behaviour (Oliver 1993; Oliver and Westbrook 1993).

The cognitive appraisals approach has often been used to study consumption emotions and their impact on behaviour (Nyer 1997). Appraisal theory has generally been considered suitable to study customers’ consumption phenomenon (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Johnson and Stewart 2005). Appraisal theory advances the understanding of how emotions affect customer decisions and holds that specific emotions are associated with specific patterns of cognitive appraisals, and thus explains the coping responses to stressful situations (Lazarus 1966, 1991; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Appraisal refers to the process of judging the importance of an event for personal comfort or discomfort. To arouse an emotion, an event must affect a customer in a way that has an adverse effect on the customer’s attitude or behaviour towards the service provider. Customers may differ in the specific appraisals (or attributions) that are obtained by a particular event, but similar patterns of appraisals normally give rise to the same emotions. Frustration or anger arises in response to an unfavourable service experience, for example, when customers consider an event unfair - especially if the service provider has or should have control of the experience (Folkes, Koletsky, and Graham 1987; Ruth, Brunel, and Otnes 2002).

Several studies have linked negative emotions to customer behaviour, although the majority of studies within service research have utilised a limited number of negative emotions such as frustration (Stauss, Schmidt, and Schoeler 2005) or anger (Nguyen and McColl-Kennedy 2003). In contrast, the present study attempts to capture a constellation of negative emotions by utilising the model of Diener et al. (1995), who suggested 16 negative emotions arranged in four categories:

- *fear* (including the emotions of fear, worry, anxiety and nervousness),

- *anger* (including the emotions of anger, irritation, disgust and rage),
- *shame* (including the emotions of shame, guilt, regret and embarrassment) and
- *sadness* (including the emotions of sadness, loneliness, unhappiness and depression).

Research Methods

Sample and Data Collection

This empirical study of negative emotions and their effect on complaint behaviour is divided into three phases. Phase one aimed to establish a set of negative emotions, phase two aimed to categorise these negative emotions and visualise their dimensions, and phase three is aimed to link specific categories of negative emotions to complaint behaviour.

The study uses a critical incident technique (Flanagan 1954; Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990) that includes both qualitative and quantitative sections to collect data. This technique is especially useful when examining defined situations and involves asking informants to recall a specific event and to explain the circumstances surrounding the incident (Gremler 2004). A negative critical incident is defined as an incident that has the potential to have an adverse effect on the customer's attitude and/or behaviour towards the service provider. Both the interview guide and the survey questionnaire were structured to guide the informants through the entire service process; therefore, the recollection of the negative critical incident was framed in an actual service experience. The information covered (i) the overall service process, (ii) the type of service, (iii) when and where the negative critical incident took place, (iv) the circumstances surrounding the incident, (v) what type of triggers appeared to have caused the incident, (vi) their emotional responses during the incident and (vii) their complaint behaviour during and after the service interaction.

The tourism industry was chosen as the study context because of the high level of customer - employee interaction (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007) that might generate high emotional experiences and respondents were likely to remember their travel and holiday experiences. There were three criteria for inclusion in the study: (i) informants/respondents had experienced an unfavourable service experience in the tourism industry during the last 12 months, (ii) they were aged 16-80 years and (iii) they were permanent residents of Norway for at least five years. The latter criterion was used to homogenise the cultural effects on emotions.

The dataset was collected as part of a larger research project investigating the relationship among emotions, justice and complaint behaviour. In all, 25 interviews were conducted during January 2006. On the basis of the interviews, a revised survey questionnaire was used to collect data by personal interview from 3104 respondents among the general public in February-April 2006.

Most respondents (55%) were females. The average age was 37 years and both educational and income levels reflect the general population.

Measurement

To develop a measurement of negative emotions, the 16 emotions suggested by Diener et al. (1995) were presented to the informants. In addition, informants were asked about any other emotions that they experienced at the time of the negative critical incident. The informants were selected by a purposive snowball sampling technique (Patton 2002). In-depth interviews are

considered to be the most valuable data collection method, given that the aim was to investigate a complex phenomenon and process (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants who were asked to describe their unfavourable service experiences as customers.

When collecting quantitative data on negative emotions, a survey questionnaire was constructed and pre-tested by 40 respondents for content validity. As a result, some questions were reworded to improve validity and clarity. All responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = 'low level of emotion'; 7 = 'high level' of emotion). Alternatively, respondents could indicate that a given negative emotion was irrelevant. To facilitate interpretation of the analyses in phase three, the negative emotions were converted to a scale of 0–100. The list of 16 negative emotions compiled by Diener et al. (1995) was used. In addition, the negative emotions revealed in the first phase were included.

Analysis and results

Phase one

The aim of the first phase of the study was to utilise the list of negative emotions developed by Diener et al. (1995). All interviews were conducted individually and typically lasted one hour. There were 25 in-depth interviews conducted with the informants, which is an acceptable number for a solid basis for analytical generalisation (Ruyter and Scholl 1998; Eisenhardt 1989). All interviews were conducted individually and typically lasted one hour. Each interview followed the interview guide and once questions had been addressed, a free discussion was opened to allow participants to add to issues previously raised. The interviews were recorded to allow revisiting, probing and documenting of any relevant data at a later date. The data was approached with an open mind and without preconceptions so that categories could emerge from the qualitative data (Gibbs 2002). The coding of the data was not approached with a blank mind (*tabula rasa*), however, as the study was designed on the premise that previous knowledge about negative emotions should be used to inform the choices and developments in the qualitative data analysis (Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995).

The analytical procedure confirmed the existence of the 16 negative emotions described by Diener et al (1995). In addition, other negative emotions appeared when the informants were frustrated in their interactions with the service provider. These negative emotions were categorised as frustration; the category included the emotions of frustration, resignation, powerlessness, despair and confusion. Typical statements from the informants are described in table 1.

Take in Table 1 about here

Table 1: Description of the category of frustration

Phase two

The aim of phase two was to map the negative emotions of Diener, Smith and Fujita (1995), in addition to those that appear in the in-depth interviews. The analysis of the survey questionnaire (table 2) shows the three most frequently experienced negative emotions, the three least frequently experienced emotions, the four latent categories of negative emotions (from Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995) and the fifth latent category from phase one. It is apparent that

irritation (88%) was the most frequently experienced negative emotion, followed by anger (78%) and resignation (76%). In contrast, guilt (24%) was the least frequently experienced negative emotion, followed by loneliness (25%) and shame (27%). There was a significant difference in means among the negative emotions ranging from 1.92 (guilt) to 5.07 (irritation) on a 7-point scale.

Take in Table 2 about here

Table 2: Frequently and infrequently experienced emotions

The latent negative emotions demonstrated significant differences in frequency and means. The latent category of frustration was the most frequently experienced negative emotion; this category also generated the highest mean. The latent category of shame was the least experienced; this category also had the lowest mean.

Only 3% of the respondents did not experience any negative emotions at all after the negative critical incident.

Table 3 shows the results of the confirmatory factor analysis. One of the indicators (confusion) exhibited large error variance (extraction of 0.31 with maximum likelihood method) and was therefore removed from the model. All negative emotions showed high reliability, as evidenced by the factor loadings (ranging from 0.70 to 0.93) and the explained variance (ranging from 0.83 to 0.90), which were all above the recommended values (Nunnally 1978). The internal consistency of all constructs was supported by Cronbach's alpha values that exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 (Nunnally 1978).

Take in Table 3 about here

Table 3: Factor analysis

Correlations among the five latent negative emotions are presented in Table 4. The table shows substantial positive correlations ranging from 0.19 to 0.64, which were all highly significant ($p < 0.001$).

Take in Table 4 about here

Table 4: Correlations among the five latent emotions

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to investigate the construct of negative emotions (Byrne 2001; Schumacker and Lomax 2004; Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). This technique is widely used in behavioural science (Kline 1998) and is especially suitable to explore the structure of personality constructs (Hull, Lehn, and Tedlie 1991). The structural equation methodology usually takes a confirmatory approach and it can normally be separated into measurement models and structural models. The recommended two-step approach to model construction and testing was adopted (Anderson and Gerbing 1988).

Measurement model A pure measurement model (model 1) was constructed consisting of five latent variables and 20 negative emotion variables were established using AMOS 17. Following the suggestion of Byrne (2001), the measurement model was checked to ensure that parameter estimates exhibited the correct sign and size. The results of the analysis showed that the measurement model provided a good fit to the data as shown in table 5 and that all the paths

were significant. Although the chi-square test was unsatisfactory, the chi-square statistic is recognised as problematic (Jöreskog 1969) because the null hypothesis is too easily rejected in large samples (in this case, $N = 3104$).

Take in Table 5 about here
Table 5: Specifications of models

Structural equation model If the theory suggests that correlations among first-order factors can be better explained by a higher-order factor, an additional analysis can be conducted to test for the existence of a second-order construct (Bollen 1989). A second-order reflexive construct is in accordance with previous literature (e.g. Diener, Smith, and Fujita 1995) and consistently implies the existence of a negative emotions construct.

Two second-order reflexive structural models (model 2 and 3) were then constructed to measure variables retained in the measurement model. According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the first assessment should be whether any structural model exists that has an acceptable goodness-of-fit. In model 2, none of the residuals of the variables was allowed to correlate. This model provided a reasonable fit with all significant paths. In model 3 as shown in figure 1, residuals were allowed to correlate. If a model does not achieve a good fit, it is recommended to look for the possible reason of lack of fit. Examination of the patterns of standardised residuals (Anderson and Gerbing 1988) and the modification indices are often suggested in the literature for this purpose. In model 2, the largest modification index of an item can be evaluated by the researcher by re-specifying the model if it is consistent with theory and interpreted substantially (Garver and Mentzer 1999). Refinements were made with extreme caution so that the modified model would not be capitalised on 'change' rather than reflecting true sources of variation in the observed covariance matrix. The modification index revealed four significant potential links within two of the latent variables (anger and frustration) that should correlate - anger-irritation, disgust-rage, frustration-resignation and powerlessness-despair. When these paths were included, the goodness-of-fit increased. Following similar approaches used in the literature (Baker et al. 2002; Yim, Tse, and Chan 2008) these correlations were added. The revised model provided a good overall fit and, similar to the other models, all paths were highly significant ($p > 0.000$).

Competing models Although both the structural second-order models (model 2 and 3) satisfy the statistical criteria and are theoretically sound, it is important to note that SEM models, as all hypothesis-testing models, can never be accepted on the basis of statistical criteria alone; they can only fail to be rejected. Therefore, the comparison of competing models is recommended practices, which carries more certainty than the testing of just a single model. It is common to use two methods for comparison among models: AIC/BCC-index (Browne and Cudeck 1989; Akaike 1987) and differences in the chi-square values. The AIC/BCC is used in the comparison of two or more models on the basis of fit and simplicity, with smaller values indicating a better fit of the hypothesised model. The two tested structural equation models received respectively AIC/BCC values, as shown in table 5. Of the two models, model 3 received the lowest AIC/BCC value (ΔAIC 582,5 and ΔBCC 582,4) and should be considered as the best model in terms of fit and simplicity.

In analysing and comparing negative emotion models, it is essential to note that the higher-order factor fundamentally explains the co-variation among the first-order factors more parsimoniously (Segars and Grover 1998). Consequently, the second-order model (model 3) can

never demonstrate improved fit statistics when compared to the correlated, first-order model (model 1). The efficiency of the model can be examined through the utilisation of a target coefficient calculated as the chi-square of the first-order model divided by the chi-square of the second-order model (Marsh, Balla, and McDonald 1988). The target coefficient is upper bound at 1.0 with higher numbers indicating a more effective representation. Following the procedure outlined by Segars and Grover (1998), each model's chi-square value is adjusted for the degrees of freedom for the individual model (i.e., χ^2/df). The adjusted χ^2 for the first-order model (model 1) is 10.04 (1606/160) and the second-order model (model 3) value is 12.19 (2012/165). The target coefficient is then calculated to be 0.82, which lends support for the second-order model being a valid, parsimonious representation of the relationships between the first-order constructs.

Take in figure 1 about here.

Figure 1: The structural equation model (model 3)

Underlying dimensions To reveal the underlying patterns of the negative emotions and their latent dimensions, a visual representation of the complex interrelationships was utilised by using a multidimensional scaling (MDS) (Borg and Groenen 2005). MDS refers to a class of structural techniques that convert a matrix of proximities (i.e., numbers indicating the degree of dissimilarity among emotions as Euclidean distance measures) into a geometric configuration or map of points in a dimensional space (Kruskal 1964; Kruskal and Wish 1978). Greater proximity among the points on a map indicate that the emotions they represent are perceived in a similar way, while greater distance shows that they have little in common. In general, the aim of the analysis is to detect meaningful underlying dimensions to explain observed similarities or dissimilarities (distances) among negative emotions. Although SEM also shows a statistical representation of negative emotional data, MDS manages to portray the data in a more fruitful way and hence gives an intuitive visual interpretation of the data. MDS is therefore a suitable technique for visualising the complex structure of negative emotions and revealing the agency dimensions. The negative emotions were converted into proximity data to provide indices of dissimilarities that constituted the specific locations in the conceptual space using the PROXSCAL method.

The two-dimensional solution of MDS showed a S-stress average value of 0.011 (Schiffman, Reynolds, and Young 1981), which is in accordance with the suggested criterion of being less than 0.1 (Davidson 1983) and a Tucker's coefficient of congruence (Tucker 1951) of 0.993, which was in accordance with the suggested criterion of being greater than 0.9 (Davidson 1983). The perceptual map of negative emotions is shown in Figure 2.

Take in Figure 2 about here

Figure 2: Visualisation of negative emotions using MDS

The multidimensional scaling map confirmed that it is possible to categorise the negative emotions into five groups of latent variables: "fear", "anger", "frustration", "sadness" and "shame". In particular, the MDS map revealed the underlying structure of attribution pattern. The map unmistakably shows the other-attributed, self-attributed and the situational-attributed dimensions of negative emotions.

Phase three

To ascertain the negative emotions that influence complaint behaviour, both a multiple regression technique and a post hoc predictive grouping methodology known as “chi-squared automatic interaction detection” (CHAID) (Wedel and Kamakura 1998) were considered when examining the relationship between the dependent variable and the remainder of the variables. The CHAID technique was chosen because of its hierarchical structure and clearly shows the emotional “path” of complaining behaviour. This technique divides the total sample into meaningful groups on the basis of meeting specific conditions (Arentze et al. 2000). The decision tree techniques can be used as model building tools and are useful in the identification of significant variables as predictors of response (Haughton and Oulabi 1997). The results of the analysis showed how various predictor variables predicted the dependent variable, thus enabling identification of the best predictor (that is, the variable with the lowest adjusted *p*-value) (Magidson 1994).

The results, as shown in Figure 3, show that the latent negative emotion of ‘frustration’ was the best predictor of complaints to service providers. The latent negative emotion of ‘fear’ was identified as the second-best predictor among customers who had experienced an upper level (50–75) degree of frustration.

Take in Figure 3 about here

Figure 3: Classification using complaint to the provider as dependent variable

The emotional profiles of customers who were most likely to complain to the provider are shown in Table 4. Frustration, which was the main predictor, was experienced by 24% of all the customers who complained to the service provider (N = 747). Of those with a frustration index of 76-100, 76% had strongly voiced their complaint, whereas only 23% of customers with a frustration index of 0-25 had expressed a strong complaint to the service provider.

Take in Table 5 about here

Table 5: Frustration level and complaint behaviour

Discussion

The analyses have shown that it is possible to categorise 20 observed negative emotions into five latent groups. Further, the high correlation between the latent variables of anger and frustration, and between shame and sadness, indicates that these pairs of emotions were often experienced together. These results are in accordance with Watson and Clark’s (1984) conceptualisation of negative affect, whereby customers who frequently experience certain negative emotions are likely to experience other negative emotions as well. Almost every customer (97%) that experiences a negative critical incident also experiences negative emotions. This emphasizes the importance of the emotional part of the tripartite definition of service experience. A vital part of the service experience is emotions, which are overwhelming and particularly present in an unfavourable service experience.

The MDS map showed that the negative emotions were positioned along the agency dimensions of self-attributed, other-attributed and situational-attributed. As shown in Figure 2,

the distribution approximated an orthogonal matrix with self-attributed and other-attributed at opposite poles of one dimension and situational-attributed representing a second dimension that was approximately orthogonal to the first.

The dimension with self-attributed and other-attributed at opposing poles can be compared with what Oliver (1989) described as internally oriented and externally oriented emotions. Anger and frustration, which were the two most frequently experienced categories of negative emotions, are typical of other-attributed or externally oriented emotions (Menon and Dubé 1999). These emotions are provoked by the actions of others (the provider and/or other customers) who prevent the fulfilment of customers' needs (Menon and Dubé 1999). In contrast, guilt and shame, which were the least frequently experienced negative emotions in this study, are self-attributed or internally oriented emotions. These emotions are caused by customers' themselves and cause inconvenience to the service provider (Menon and Dubé 1999).

On the orthogonal dimension, situational-attributed emotions can be provoked by a variety of factors, for example, the customer feeling stigmatised or the customer feeling unable to cope with a situation that is perceived to be uncontrollable (McFadyen 1995). This illustrates that the valence dimension, divided into positive and negative emotions (Russell 1980; Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer 1999; Liljander and Strandvik 1997), is not the best possible construct to reflect negative emotions. These emotions have to be seen as an independent construct and not only as a linear counterpart to positive emotions.

There is a significant relationship between negative emotions and complaint behaviour, with frustration being the latent negative emotion that is the best predictor of such behaviour. Three out of four customers who experienced a high degree of frustration made a clear complaint to the service provider. 'Frustration' relates to the obstructions causing the situation, and the expectations of the customers (Mowrer 1938). Indeed, Dollard, Doob and Miller (1939) defined frustration as an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response at its proper time in the behaviour sequence. If the goal is not fulfilled, frustration is experienced because satisfaction is not accomplished. The frustrating situation that obstructs the possibility of success can be either internal or external (Shorkey and Crocker 1981). Internal blocks relate to an insufficiency within the customer, such as a lack of knowledge, skill or physical ability. External blocks include such factors as the physical environment, social barriers or the behaviour of other individuals (such as service employees or other customers).

The levels of frustration experienced by customers can vary, depending on the situation surrounding the negative critical incident. Important factors in determining the level of frustration include (i) commitment, which refers to the determination to try for and persist in the achievement of a goal (Campion and Lord 1982), (ii) the importance of the outcome to the customer and whether a belief exists that the goal can be accomplished (Locke and Latham 2002), (iii) the severity of the interruption and the degree of interference with the goal achievement (Dollard, Doob, and Miller 1939) and (iv) whether the customer perceives that the negative critical incident was arbitrary (as opposed to being justified by socially acceptable rules) (Baron and Richardson 1994). The external frustration situation is connected with other-attributed emotions and can explain the high correlation between the complaint to the provider and the frustration index.

In explaining how frustration leads to complaint behaviour, Dollard, Doob and Miller (1939) developed the so-called "frustration-aggression hypothesis", which holds that frustrating incidents lead directly to aggressive behaviour. According to this view, complaining to the

provider is a form of aggressive behaviour (Stauss, Schmidt, and Schoeler 2005) whereby frustrated customers attempt to “get back” at the service provider (Blodgett, Hill, and Tax 1997; Oliver 1989; Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2003). This ‘frustration-aggression hypothesis’ is an explanation for the prominent role of frustration in provoking complaints to the provider. In contrast, customers who experience self-attributed negative emotions are more likely to attribute them to causes other than the service provider’s performance; such customers are less likely to feel and act in an aggressive fashion towards the provider and are more doubtful to share their experiences publically.

The findings in the study support the cognitive appraisal theory by confirming that negative emotions have a strong impact on complaint behaviour. It seems like the strong connection is between frustration and anger (other-attributed negative emotions) that are perceived to be under control of the service provider, while shame and sadness (self-attributed negative emotions) are caused by the customer himself and fear (situational-attributed negative emotions) that are believed to be controlled by the situation. This suggests that the appraisal theory may explain the findings: frustrated and angry customers are more likely to want to take control over their own unfavourable service experience, while shamed and sad customers are more likely to make a choice that is consistent with the sense of a lack of control by choosing a non-complaining behaviour.

Managerial implications

Pre-complaint emotions should be of particular interest to service managers because they influence complaint behaviour and advance the determination of a successful service recovery. The study reveals that customer complaint behaviour is a complex emotional phenomenon and that it is essential to have knowledge about antecedents that can ultimately influence this behaviour.

To handle pre-complaint situations, employees should be trained to recognise and cope with customers who express other-attributed negative emotions (frustration and anger), because of their strong influence on complaint behaviour. A complaint situation that emerges from strong negative emotions is usually scary and difficult to handle because of the customer’s aggressive behaviour. To cope with these usually extreme situations, it is important to encourage the customer to express his/her frustration before entering a “real” dialogue. After a frustrated outburst, the customer usually becomes more open to enter into a constructive dialogue. In the pre-complaint phase, the service employees’ actions are fundamental and a quick response to the emotional experience may turn the customer away from pursuing complaint behaviour. After the unfavourable service experience, it is vital for the service employee to meet the customer with an apology and show empathy before entering the phase of investigation and problem solving. Folkes, Koletsky and Graham (1987) showed that when reducing a specific negative emotion such as anger (other-attributed as frustration), the propensity to complain also reduced. Consequently, an apology appears to have a significant impact on customers’ emotions and their evaluation about how the service provider has handled the situation. According to Tax and Brown (1998, , p. 80), an apology is vital because “fair procedures design with the firm assuming responsibility for the failure”.

Another important issue to be aware of when handling emotional complaint situations from the customer is the internal service recovery (Bowen and Johnston 1999; Johnston and

Michel 2008). After recovering frustrated customers from an unfavourable service experience, the front-line employees need to give care and support in such a way that it reduces the feeling of helplessness. The management must display empathy and apprehension for the recovery problems and through this provide social support to moderate the negative stress effects among the front-line employees (Manning, Jackson, and Fusilier 1996).

In addition to handling the pre-complaint negative emotional situation, it is also important for service managers to obtain more knowledge about the customers' emotional triggers and patterns as well as measuring the emotional aspect of the unfavourable service experience. Dissatisfaction is not necessarily a significant trigger for complaint behaviour. It seems like strong negative emotions may explain complaint behaviour in a better way. Measuring different specific emotions, based on other-attributed emotions (latent category of frustration and anger), should enable management to make a better prediction about customers' complaint behaviour and subsequently a better service recovery as well as reducing behaviour leading to switching, exit and loss of service profitability.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to provide a comprehensive, conceptual understanding of both negative emotions and how these emotions affect customer complaint behaviour. To accomplish these aims, a three-phased study was conducted: first, to establish a set of negative emotions, second, to categorise the negative emotions and visualise their dimensions, and third, to link specific categories of negative emotions to complaint behaviour.

Several important findings emerged from the study. First, strong negative emotions are generated by negative critical incidents and these influence future behaviour against the service provider. The study showed that 97% of all respondents had an emotional reaction to a negative critical incident. The phenomenon of emotions is complex - customers experience several different emotions at the same time, although the emotions experienced are usually within the same dimension. It is thus apparent that the emotional reactions of customers must be carefully considered in any attempt to explain customer complaint behaviour and the effectiveness of service recovery.

Second, the study reveals that negative emotions can be clustered into certain categories that form specific patterns. The study has confirmed the validity of the latent categories of shame, sadness, fear, anger and frustration as well as confirming the agency dimensions of other-attributed, self-attributed and situational-attributed negative emotions.

Third, the study has shown that other-attributed negative emotions, such as frustration, are the main drivers of complaint behaviour to the service provider.

Limitations and further research

Several limitations are acknowledged in this study. First, the study was reliant on self-reported emotions. The focus on negative critical incidents and unfavourable service experiences could have skewed the findings by encouraging an over-emphasis on negative events and feelings. Second, the use of a structured questionnaire might have caused difficulties for respondents who were required to define variable subjective emotions in specific categories. To minimise the effects of this limitation, however, respondents were asked to recollect actual negative critical

incidents in real service interactions, rather than respond to an artificial scenario-based case. Third, it can be argued that the negative emotions measure does not reflect the underlying latent construct but combines to form it; consequently, it makes more sense to view the negative emotions as emanating from the measures to the negative affect construct. If this is accurate, a formative structural model should be applied instead of a reflexive structural model (e.g. Jarvis et al. 2003; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Jarvis 2005). This may be complicated, however, because a formative structural equation model must either (i) have a minimum of two reflexive indicators attached to the latent construct or (ii) be an exogenous construct in a larger model. To achieve the former, the questions that are linked to the latent variable have to be reflexive in nature, that is, 'what is your overall negative emotion after experiencing...'. These questions will probably only reflect the same emotions already described or the strength in the negative emotions and will probably not contribute to the understanding of the diverse and complex structure of negative emotions. To achieve the latter, a construct where negative emotions are just a small part of a larger model may not reveal the 'true' structure of negative affect. Finally, the study was conducted in the restricted context of the tourism industry; moreover, all respondents had the same nationality. It is acknowledged that customers from different cultures in different research settings might have different structures of negative emotions. Future research should test the findings in this study in other service industries and cultural contexts. In particular, future studies could examine whether there are differences in negative emotions as a result of differences in the individual characteristics of customers and the nature of particular incidents. Although these studies have focused on pre-complaint situations, future research should also attend to how negative emotions vary during the complaint process and the service recovery. Finally, an interesting question for further research is how specific negative emotions influence service experience outcome, such as satisfaction, loyalty and switching behaviour.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Description of the category frustration

Negative emotion	The story
Frustration	<p>We were going on a holiday to Spain, which was arranged by a charter operator. Two days before departure, we received a phone where it was stated that the top floor of the hotel was under renovation. We could therefore not get the room we had booked, but was assured that we would get an equally good room. When we arrived we had gotten the worst room in the hotel. It was very sunny outside, but inside the room was dark as night. The terrace was blocked by a large high wall. The furnishing was much worn and the doors hung and slang. We had to repair a bit ourselves. After arguing for three days, we got a new room, but there were too much noise from the renovation so it was impossible to be inside. In addition there was no hot water in the faucet. We appeal to both the hotel and to charter company but our complaint, and from other guests, were not taken seriously. We felt that the holiday had been ruined and we were very frustrated. (Male, 51 years old)</p>
Resignation	<p>I took the bus to Berlin and during the trip the bus driver managed to drive the bus out of fuel, and also run the wrong way. So the trip was pretty much longer than what it would have needed to be. I felt resignation. I sat in the bus still quite long, and was hungry, tired and exhausted. (Male, 29 years old)</p>
Powerlessness	<p>We were on a charter tour to Turkey and had booked a guided boat trip. The guide was going to pick us up at the hotel at 9 am. We were ready in good time but when no one had picked us up at 10 am, we went back to the hotel room. We had paid advance, but we did not get any cancellation and we had no phone number to contact them. It was nothing we could do. We felt very powerless, - how long time should one stands and waits? (Female, 24 years old)</p>
Despair	<p>I'm on a trip with my granddaughter, she is 3 years old. We were at the hotel and got plenty of time before our flight was departure. In the meantime we heard on the radio that there was chaos at the airport. All passengers were requested to call the airport before traveling. I called and they said that the planes were standing still, but all the passengers had to meet at the airport. We traveled to the airport and there were mile long queue in front of the encounter and the information boards showed that all the flights were canceled. So I queued up for about 1.5 hours with a small child and lots of luggage. When the clock was 9 pm. we were notified that all planes were cancelled that evening. I was very desperate, because of my grandchildren and I was supposed to go to work the next day (Female, 56 years old).</p>

Table 2: Frequently and infrequently experienced emotions

Type	Negative emotions	Frequent experienced emotions in percent	Mean (1 to 7 scale)	Std deviation
Most frequent	Irritation	88.1	5.07	1.78
	Anger	78.0	4.50	1.97
	Resign	76.3	4.67	1.97
Least frequent	Guilt	23.5	1.92	1.57
	Loneliness	24.6	2.36	1.86
	Shame	26.5	2.26	1.79
Latent negative emotions	Fear	48.4	3.06	1.74
	Anger	67.0	4.17	1.63
	Shame	27.2	2.33	1.31
	Sadness	30.5	2.63	1.64
	Frustration	68.2	4.35	1.74

Table 3: Factor analysis

Basic category	Emotional indicators	Factor loading	Percentage of variance explained	Cronbach's alpha
Fear	Fear	.76	76.4	.90
	Worry	.82		
	Anxiety	.93		
	Nervous	.80		
Anger	Anger	.89	68.6	.84
	Irritation	.80		
	Disgust	.63		
	Rage	.71		
Shame	Shame	.71	67.0	.83
	Guilt	.79		
	Regret	.71		
	Embarrassment	.78		
Sadness	Sadness	.77	77.0	.90
	Loneliness	.75		
	Unhappiness	.95		
	Depression	.86		
Frustration	frustration	.91	72.4	.87
	resignation	.86		
	powerlessness	.70		
	despair	.70		

Table 4: Correlation among the five latent emotions

Latent negative emotions	1	2	3	4	5
1. Fear	---				
2. Anger	,32**	---			
3. Shame	,44**	,21**	---		
4. Sadness	,45**	,28**	,63**	---	
5. Frustration	,31**	,64**	,19**	,42**	---

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 5: Specifications of models

Type of model	χ^2	df	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	AIC	BCC
Measurement model (model 1)	1606	160	0.908	0.916	0.890	0.054		
Structural equation model with no co-variance (model 2)	2012	165	0.884	0.892	0,863	0.06	2142,0	2142,9
Structural equation model with co-variance (model 3)	1421	161	0.918	0.927	,904	0.05	1559,5	1560,5

Figure 1: Two-factor model of negative affect structure

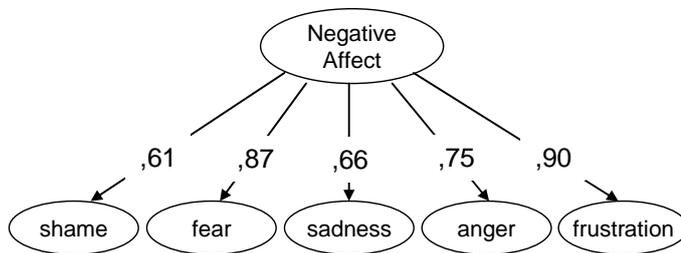


Figure 2: Visualisation of negative emotions using MDS

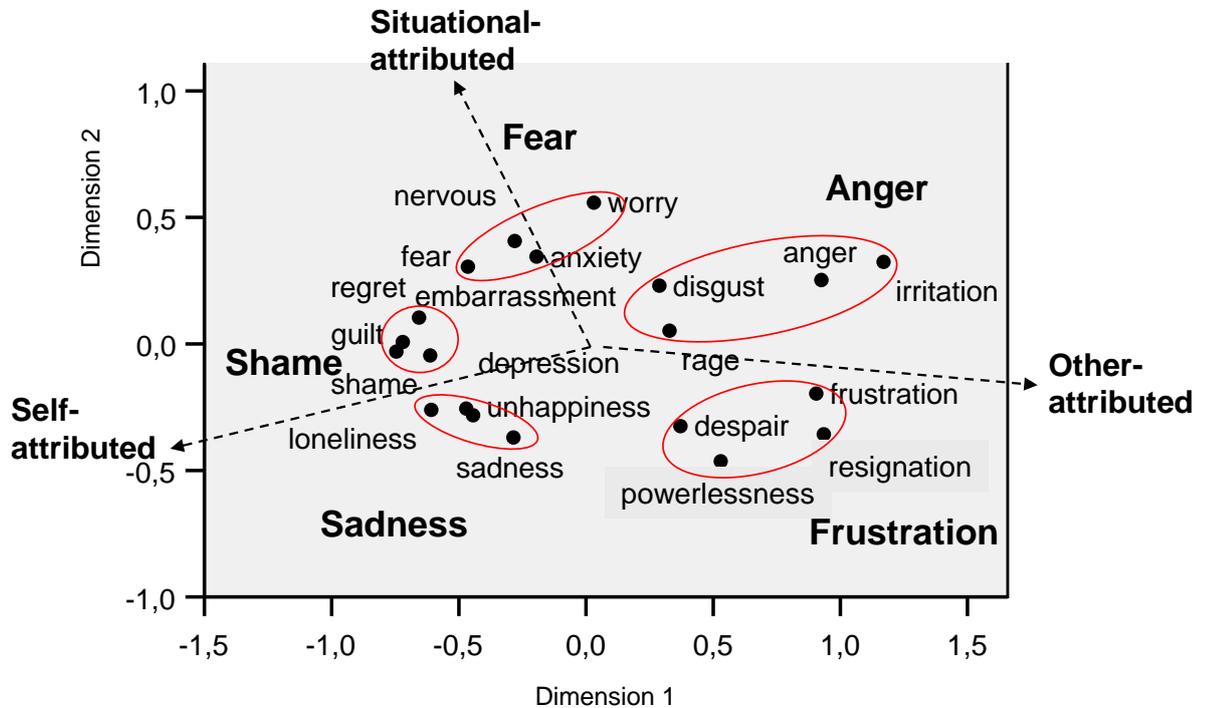


Figure 3: Classification using complaint to the provider as dependent variable

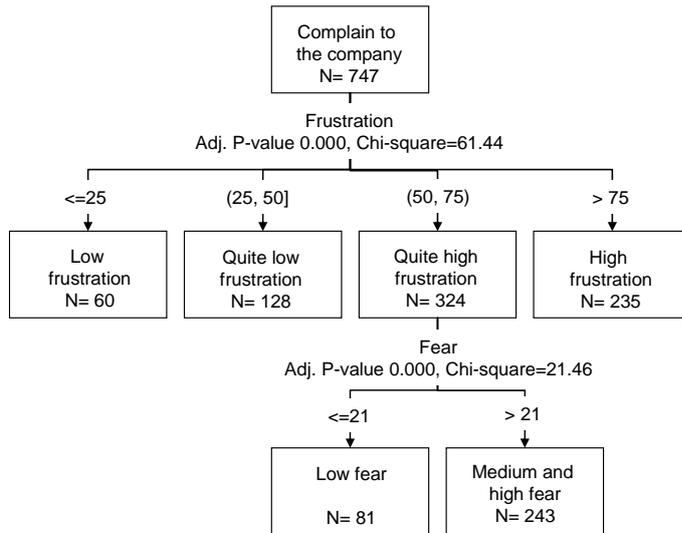


Table 5: Frustration level and complaint behaviour

		Frustration level (%)				Fear	
		Low (0-25)	(26-50)	(51-75)	High (76-100)		
Strengths in complaint	Low	77	51	39	60	25	
	High	23	49	61	40	75	