

## **Customer Retaliatory Complaining: An Extension of Customer Complaining Behaviour (CCB)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Customer complaining behaviour is universal and studies relating to it have received substantial attention over recent years. Customers expect fair treatment from service providers for the effort invested in the relationship. Perceived unfairness would make customers feel as though they have been betrayed. Hence, they are likely to express their dissatisfaction through complaining. In certain cases, they might also resort to exhibiting aggressive behaviour to compensate for the unfairness they experienced. This paper proposes a conceptual framework by investigating the effect of customer's dissatisfied service experience attribution (DSEA) on aggressive complaining and its motivation in achieving fairness of treatment in a business relationship. Through a review of relevant literature on this topic, this paper attempts to conceptualise the framework of customer retaliatory complaining behaviour (CRCB). Understanding the implications could help service providers create more robust strategies to overcome negative consequences. Such an understanding is likely to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on how dissatisfaction can be dealt with effectively as empirical evidence could now be established on the importance of dealing with retaliatory behaviours in the service industry.

*Keywords:* Aggressive complaining, conceptual paper, customer complaining, dissatisfaction, emotional reaction, retaliatory complaining, service experience attribution

### **ARTICLE INFO**

#### *Article history:*

Received: 13 March 2015

Accepted: 28 September 2015

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Customer satisfaction is one of the most researched areas in the marketing literature and it has been proven to produce positive responses from customers such as an increase in intention to repurchase and giving positive recommendations to others (Han & Kim, 2009). Dissatisfaction on

the other hand, could trigger customers to behave in the opposite way. There is empirical evidence that shows some of the most common responses from dissatisfied customers include exit, voice, switch, and negative word-of-mouth (Richins, 1983; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1988; Singh, 1990a; Smith & Bolton, 2002; Bechwati & Morrin, 2003; Panther & Farquhar, 2004; Blois, 2008; Tronvoll, 2011). In contrast, there are also studies that indicate incidents where unsatisfied customers would rather remain passive than to complain (Oliver, 1993, 1994). Of the two responses, however, complaining is seen as a more attractive option although it may or may not lead to retaliation.

Creating superior customer experience seems to be the central objective in today's service environment but to gain complete satisfaction among customers would indeed be a difficult if not an impossible task. There will still be customers who will not be happy with the level of services rendered. Customers' dissatisfaction may be for reasons such as delayed service, receiving bills with unnecessary charges, or even having to wait in a long queue for service. However, these incidents are not necessarily strong enough to force them to behave aggressively. In order for aggressive behaviour to occur, a strong trigger linked to emotions such as anger would need to be present (Westbrook, 1987; Phillips & Baumgartner, 2002). Indeed, marketing researchers have established that emotions do play a role in determining customers' aggressive responses after service failures

(Richins, 1997; Svavi & Olsen, 2012). For example, they may resort to a more extreme dysfunctional behaviour such as vandalism and theft as a way of venting their anger (Fisk et al., 2010). This types of behaviour is supported by psychological research findings which posit that in order for aggressive behaviour to occur, a strong affective trigger is required (Verona et al., 2002), which often times is in the form of emotion (Roos & Friman, 2008). Therefore, in the context of this study, the affective trigger is linked to angry emotions that will motivate customers into displaying aggressive complaining behaviour (CRCB) after experiencing bad service.

Although complaining is not a new research area in marketing literature, very little attention has been given to study the link between customer's blaming attribution and their actual aggressive complaining behaviour (Keng et al., 1995). This is particularly so for Malaysia because such issues have the tendency to be viewed as confrontational (Ndubisi & Ling, 2005) and therefore studies that examine such behaviour or attributes may not be seen as providing positive inputs for marketing. This view, however, should change as studies on retaliatory behaviours in business settings can enhance our understanding on how to deal effectively with such behaviours. Therefore, in order to advance our comprehension of CRCB, it is necessary to have an in-depth understanding of how and why customers react to unsatisfying service experiences and whether complaints that evolve from such experiences ultimately

lead to retaliation by the customers. This is still an area that has not been dealt with comprehensively in the literature on services marketing.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

In a service-based industry, managing customer experience is an important element in building long-term relationships as repetitive patronage is sought by service providers. Customer service experience includes every point of contact at which the customer interacts with a business (Sandström et al., 2008; Grewal et al., 2009). For example, providing a conducive service atmosphere is crucial for customer satisfaction as it plays an important role in customer evaluation of the quality and value of service (Martín-Ruiz et al., 2012), which can also be the source of customer dissatisfaction. Further, research findings have revealed that customers do not only blame service providers for their bad experience, but also make inferences to factors that are beyond the control of the service provider (Brocato et al., 2012). For example, service disruption due to the inability to follow instructions properly will be considered as internally caused. Hence, self-blame will most likely be the dissatisfying outcome for not being able to comply with a service requirement (Svari et al., 2011). These two varying causes (service atmosphere, and customers themselves) would motivate customers to act differently in their complaining behaviours. Therefore, in dealing with dissatisfied customers, it is crucial for organisations to understand who

or what is to be blamed for the shortcomings. However, in more serious cases, it has been said that customers have also resorted to exhibiting aggressive behaviour as a way of expressing their emotions for the service shortcomings (Bougie et al., 2003).

The Malaysian National Consumer Complaint Centre's (NCCC) annual report showed a total of 40,560 complaints were received by the centre in 2013 which costs RM61,700,640.62 in expenditure. Although the number of complaints had dropped compared with 2012, there was a dramatic increase of 34.2% on the expenses incurred for dealing with such complaints in 2013. The followings are the top five areas of complaints received by NCCC based on sector category; (1) General Consumer Products, (2) Telecommunication, (3) Retailers (including e-commerce), (4) Automobile, and (5) Travel and Leisure Industry (including Airlines). Malaysia should therefore take consumer complaints seriously as it could provide essential information to help improve the quality of life and contribute to the country's economy in its efforts to becoming a developed nation by 2020.

Although there has been extensive research conducted on CCB, understanding of the overall concept is still scarce and does not reflect the full spectrum of the subject. Indeed, past research conducted on reaction from dissatisfied customers focused only on certain aspects of behavioural responses such as switch and complain, commonly known as complaining behaviour (Singh, 1988). It overlooks other possible response

behaviours that might be exhibited by customers such as aggressive complaining (Huefner & Hunt, 1994, 2000; Funches et al., 2009).

Pertinent concepts such as emotional reactions (ER) are ignored and this omission creates a knowledge vacuum that fails to highlight the severity of the complaining behaviour. The CCB taxonomies (Singh, 1988) that were referred to by many researchers in the past only focused on two main behavioural aspects, which were complaining and non-complaining. This perspective therefore left researchers and practitioners with limited information in understanding the full spectrum of customer complaining responses when faced with poor services and where emotional elements are likely to be inherent. This issue has received limited attention in the academic literature. To address the gap in the literature which focuses specifically on complaining responses (such as exit, voice, and third party complaining) and in order to expand the current CCB taxonomy (Singh, 1990b), the elements of ER will be investigated, and vindictive word of mouth and online word of mouth will be included in the CCB to reflect CRCB. As dissatisfied customers are the ones displaying retaliatory behaviours, elements influencing such actions will be a subject of interest. As such, service conditions including the atmosphere and customers' perceived inclinations when confronted with service situations will be included in the study. It is proposed that CRCB displayed by dissatisfied customers may be driven by service atmosphere and

customer self-evaluations, and the existence of ER may mediate the DSEA – CRCB relationship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses customer aggressive complaining behaviour (CRCB), dissatisfied service experience (DSEA), and emotional reaction (ER) as a mediator. In this conceptual paper, relevant literatures were reviewed and four hypotheses proposed accordingly.

### A. CRCB – an extension of CCB

Although studies on complaining behaviour have received considerable attention in the West, there are very few studies on the topic conducted in Southeast Asia. Keng et al. (1995) conducted the first study with the aim of profiling complaining behaviour of Singaporean consumers. The study concluded that complainers who resorted to public actions were assertive and possessed greater self-confidence with strong individualistic traits. Another study by Phau and Sari (2004) investigated the complaining and non-complaining behaviour of consumers at a shopping mall in Indonesia. The study revealed that consumers were more inclined to make a complaint when they attribute blame to sellers and manufacturers for their bad experiences.

In Malaysia, the research study by Aizzat et al. (2004) was among the first conducted to discriminate between complainers and non-complainers in the manufacturing company in the Northern region. The

findings revealed that consumers with a more positive attitude were more likely to complain, which is consistent with the findings by Keng et al. (1995). Another attempt to investigate gender differences in complaining was conducted in the context of banking services (Ndubisi & Ling, 2005, 2007). The study investigated the relationship between private complaint, public complaint, and customer defection. The findings show that both public and private complaints are associated with defection. More recently, a study carried out by Norazah (2011) attempted to investigate complaining behaviour of public library users in Malaysia. The study focuses on five types of user responses to dissatisfaction. What is clearly missing in all these studies is the cause of aggressive complaining. Additionally, none of the studies investigated customer retaliatory complaining behaviour in the Malaysian context. Therefore, it is timely for such studies to be conducted in order to advance our understanding and provide a full spectrum of CCB.

The basic premise of CRCB is to reach equitable business relationship. Unlike normal complaining, aggressive complaining is performed with specific motive(s). In particular, the purpose of retaliatory complaining exhibited by customers is to cause inconvenience (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003), restore fairness (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, 2008), or to get even (Funches et al., 2009; Huefner & Hunt, 2000) with a service provider as a way of coping. This perspective posits that the main motive for CRCB is to restore balance in a relationship

through the act of complaining. Therefore, to better understand CRCB, it is deemed important to first understand CCB.

The original work of Hirschman (1970) on complaining behaviour has attracted significant attention among behavioural researchers where several attempts have been made to extend the model (Rusbult et al., 1982; Singh, 1988; Hunt, 1991; Huefner & Hunt, 2000). This work was an early attempt to understand how customers respond to poor consumption experiences. In the framework, three behavioural responses were introduced, which are: exit, voice and loyalty. Exit and voice are the two main recuperative mechanism of a dissatisfying experience. Loyalty on the other hand, is a more subtle way of expressing dissatisfaction where consumers give the organisation time to make corrections before they decide to exit the relationship. Other applications of Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty includes investigating consumer's complaint in China's retail industry (Jin, 2010), complaint behaviour among library users (Oh, 2008), and in an online shopping context (Kim et al., 2003). Huefner & Hunt (2000) extended this work into the realm of and theory of retaliatory behaviour.

Another classic work on CCB is the taxonomy proposed by Day & Landon (1977) which generated a starting point for studying the variation in possible CCBs. In the study, the authors introduced a three-tiered classification of CCB. The first tier distinguishes between action and no action. Here, a dissatisfied customer may choose to either take action or take no action. If

the customer decided to take action, he can either decide between private actions or public actions. Private action entails specific behaviours such as boycotting, negative word of mouth, and redress seeking behaviour. Alternatively, for public action, he can choose to take legal action, or complain to consumer agencies. Using the same model, Broadbridge & Marshall (1995) investigated levels of post-purchase dissatisfaction of customers regarding domestic and major electrical appliances. The result of their study showed that for electrical goods, customers prefer to take public actions rather than undertake private complaints.

Another study on complaining behaviour that has been commonly cited is the work of Singh (1988). He collected empirical data from four different consumer categories namely banking services, medical services, grocery stores, and automobile repairs. The study revealed that customer complaint intention can be divided into three dimensions of private response, voice, and third party complaining, which was later known as Singh's CCB Taxonomy. Private response refers to negative word-of-mouth to friends and relatives, while voicing relates to complaining directly to sellers to seek redress. The final dimension of CCB Taxonomy signifies a consumer taking legal action, or complaining to a third party to address dissatisfaction. Attempts have been made to extend Singh's Taxonomy to different environments. Among them are conceptual studies by Davidow and Dacin (1997) with a new addition of exit / boycott,

and Stern (1997) with an addition of exit and loyalty dimension. Two empirical studies subsequent to Singh's were conducted by Dart and Freeman (1994) on clients in accounting firm, and Hansen, Swan, & Powers, (1997) on organisational buyer complaints behaviour. Both studies support Singh's three dimensional CCB taxonomies.

Studies concerning CCB continue to receive significant attention from the marketing scientist in the new millennium. Researchers continue to advance their understanding on dissatisfaction and the various possible complaining behaviour due to the richness of information obtained that could help organisations strategise appropriately. For example, switching, negative word of mouth, exit, voice, neglect, inertia, and avoidance (Huefner & Hunt, 2000; Bougie et al., 2003; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Fisk et al., 2010; Ferguson & Johnston, 2011; Tronvoll, 2011; Petzer et al., 2012) are among the specific behaviour being studied. These behaviours are generally known as complaining.

In contrast, CRCB requires a strong trigger to occur (Verona et al., 2002). It demands that an individual experiences a negative emotional reaction prior to aggression in his or her behaviour (Bennett, 1997). As such, in consumer studies, triggers are factors that could influence customer perceptions resulting in actual behaviour (Roos & Friman, 2008) and often occur in the form of emotions. For example, a study conducted on customer response to dissatisfaction indicates that emotional



response (irritated/annoyed) is a trigger to a customer's aggressive behaviour (Huefner & Hunt, 2000) such as vandalism and theft (Fisk et al., 2010). Very few studies however, have delved into verbal aggression (Huefner & Hunt, 2000) as a way of coping.

In getting even with a service provider, a customer's aggressive complaining may come in many forms. Among others are vindictive complaining, spreading negative words of mouth or third party complaining for publicity (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Conversely, it is also argued that motivations for customer aggression goes beyond just getting even (Funches et al., 2009). Customers may behave aggressively for many other reasons such as to teach the service provider a lesson, save others from the same fate and seek redress, or revenge (Friend et al., 2010; Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches, 2011).

Although different aspects of aggression have been identified and studied in many research areas, the topic has only received a passing mention in the area of consumer dissatisfaction and complaining behaviour (Huefner & Hunt, 2000). Huefner and Hunt (2000) conducted the first exploratory study to discover the types of retaliation in which dissatisfied consumers engage. The study revealed that cost/loss demands, vandalism, trashing, stealing, negative word of mouth, and personal attack are among the most common retaliatory behaviours of consumers who are dissatisfied with services deemed as poor. Subsequent study by Huefner et al., (2002) on shopping behaviour in malls confirmed the findings

of their first study that in addition to exit and voice, retaliation independently occurs as a standard response to consumer dissatisfaction. Grégoire and Fisher (2008) in another study as well as Funches et al. (2009) looked at anti-consumption behaviour where customer retaliates not just to get even, but instead to teach service providers a lesson, or to save others from experiencing the same fate. Recent studies however, have not extensively investigated how or why a particular situation arise (Phau & Baird, 2008) which limits the CCB taxonomy to only certain behavioural outcomes.

## **B. Dissatisfied Service Experience Attribution (DSEA)**

While studies on satisfaction have received considerable academic attention in the past due to the nature of its continuous enriched positive findings, study on dissatisfaction may also yield valuable knowledge for organisations. For example, studies conducted to investigate satisfaction revealed that satisfaction does have a positive impact on customer's behavioural intention (Ali & Amin, 2014), loyalty (Martensen et al., 2000), willingness to return (Bowen & Chen, 2001), business performance (Morgan & Rego, 2006), and profitability (Hallowell, 1996). Similarly, studies on dissatisfaction may also generate important findings for business organisations as it could provide important cues in understanding a customer's negative responses such as switching (Panther & Farquhar, 2004), negative word of mouth (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004),

exit (Phau & Sari, 2004), boycotting (Day & Landon, 1977), and retaliation (Huefner & Hunt, 2000), all of which will tarnish an organisation's reputation (Svari et al., 2011; Tronvoll et al., 2011) and hence, loss of business and profit for the service providers in the long run (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006). Therefore, organisations should look at dissatisfaction as an opportunity to improve service offerings, which will lead to the enhancement in the strength of the relationship and not as a threat to business.

Dissatisfaction occurs when customers' prior expectation is disconfirmed by the evaluation made on actual service received. Disconfirmation here refers to the inadequate return to the effort invested in the relationship (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1988) felt by customers. Similarly, Michel (2001), defined dissatisfaction as the disconfirmation of service expectation due service failure where expectations are determined by a variety of factors. This perspective posits that customers may feel dissatisfied with their purchase experience when service providers fail to meet the expectation of at least one or more aspects of a service, product specification and operations (Ferguson & Johnston, 2011). When customers feel dissatisfied, they will form a negative cognitive and emotional impression (Tronvoll, 2007) towards the service and will then start to question what or who is responsible for the situation. Sometimes, they may also end up complaining or, in a worst case scenario, behave aggressively (Singh, 1985, 1988; Keng et al., 1995; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Funches et al., 2009; Svari & Olsen, 2012).

On a loyalty premise, Fornell & Wernerfelt (1988) find that dissatisfied customers, once persuaded to stay, are more loyal and valuable and are likely to generate positive word-of-mouth communications. This is because they feel that the service provider appreciates and values them as customers. Therefore, it is very important for organisations to take customer dissatisfaction seriously as it could be the source of untapped competitive advantage, or organisations' disruption. However, despite the importance of creating superior service experiences, our understanding of what customers actually experience during a service remains limited (Esbjerg et al., 2012) mainly because most of the prior studies were focused on service failures and recovery (Mattila, 2001; Xin, 2006; Ngai et al., 2007; Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2007; Gelbrich, 2009; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2009; Gelbrich & Roschk, 2010; Varela-Neira et al., 2010; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2011; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011; Ro, 2013) and not service dissatisfaction.

Unlike product consumption, the production and consumption of a service takes place simultaneously. Therefore, in any service transaction, both the service provider and customers' involvement are required to create a successful exchange. For example, in a retail banking setting, the service provider will rely on customers to explain what kind of service is needed. Conversely, the customer depends on the service provider to execute his or her request, thus creating a successful exchange. Any unsuccessful exchanges between the two parties will lead to dissatisfaction and



will be perceived as relationship inequity causing the customer to respond in order to cope with the situation (Varela-Neira et al., 2010). Besides these two elements, service atmosphere is also important in ensuring successful exchanges (Pareigis, Edvardsson, & Enquist, 2011). Indeed, service atmosphere was found to have direct effect on service dissatisfaction and thus influenced customers' behavioural responses (Ryu & Han, 2011). This is because when customers undergo a dissatisfying episode, specific emotions will be triggered. The occurrence of emotions will distinguish the blaming attribution either to one's self, or other factors (Menon & Dubé, 2004; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004; Sviri et al., 2011). For example, if the service disruption was due to matters such as failure to provide necessary supporting documents; then the dissatisfaction will automatically be attributed to customers themselves. If the failure was caused by factors such as the service environment, then the customer will blame the service provider for their dissatisfaction.

With regards to Malaysia, past studies on dissatisfaction have focused on factors such as demographics, psychographics, attitude toward businesses, and product attributes (Aizzat et al., 2004). Alternatively, a study by Osman (2011), used four dimensions (e.g. perceived control, self-monitoring, procedural perception, and low efficacy) to study the extent of complaints by consumers. In a more recent study, Tam and Chiew (2012) used general attitude towards business, sense of justice, likelihood of

success in complaining, and difficulty of complaining as antecedents in profiling young adults' complaining behaviour in Sabah.

Despite the many studies that have demonstrated the link between factors of service experience such as store environment, service environment, convenience, and hedonic service (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2010; Walter, Edvardsson, & Öström, 2010; Esbjerg et al., 2012; Wong, 2013), and customer dissatisfaction behaviour, our understanding of the relationship between these elements remain limited, especially in Malaysia. Indeed, most of these studies were conducted in the context of western culture focusing on service failures, recovery, and behavioural intention, and not on customers' actual aggressive response behaviour. Similarly, for the case of Malaysia, none of the studies (Aizzat et al., 2004; Ndubisi & Ling, 2005, 2007; Norazah, 2011; Syahmi, Daleela, & Khasimah, 2013; Tam & Chiew, 2012) focused on the customer's aggressive complaining or retaliation as a way of responding to dissatisfaction. This fact may be due to the lack of formal data on retaliatory complaining behaviours compiled within the Malaysian context. Therefore, it is important to consider the dynamic aspect of service experience when investigating the situation. As suggested by Varela-Neira et al. (2010), further studies should be conducted to investigate whether different causes of service dissatisfaction produce different customer reactions in different parts of the world as a number of studies have reported that individuals

in different cultures focus on different factors when evaluating services. These differences may well be linked to ethnic factors embedded in cultural underpinnings as posited by Ali (2012), who looked at the effects of ethnicity and religiosity on customer loyalty. Therefore, based on the above, the research hypothesised [H<sub>1</sub>] that:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between DSEA and CRCB.

### C. Emotional Reaction (ER) as mediator

Studies have proven that dissatisfaction alone is not enough to cause customers to behave aggressively but instead such a behaviour is triggered by the negative emotional state produced by the appraisal of unfavourable consumption (Fornell & Westbrook, 1979; Smith & Bolton, 2002; Tronvoll, 2011). For example, when a customer experiences dissatisfaction, he or she will tend to evaluate the causes that are important and relevant (Bagozzi et al., 1998; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Smith & Lazarus, 1990). These causes will then influence their affective state of thoughts and affect their emotional stability (Bougie et al., 2003); hence, the generation of ER [H<sub>2</sub>].

H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant relationship between DSEA and ER.

Emotions positive and/or negative, are said to have effects on a customer's behaviour (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005). Marketing research has also provided support for this claim that customer's

feelings or emotions determine their aggressive responses after a service failure (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003; Smith & Bolton, 2002; Tronvoll, 2011).

Consequently, it was also revealed that ER is a significant predictor of customer response to dissatisfaction (Bougie et al., 2003). Often times, emotionally affected customers tend to feel more betrayed and this feeling influences them to react negatively to a greater extent (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). This link can be also equated with angry responses that occur as a result of dissatisfactory service experiences. Indeed, customer's actual behaviour is also said to be mostly driven by emotions, where even if the complaints can be fixed, customers do not necessarily remain loyal if the emotions are not properly taken care of (Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005). Therefore, based on the above, the following hypothesis [H<sub>3</sub>] is developed for further testing.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is a significant relationship between ER and CRCB.

Empirical evidence indicates that emotion mediates the relationship between service dissatisfaction and behavioural responses (Bougie et al., 2003; Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; Ng & Hodgkinson, 2005; Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Customers who experienced unfavourable service will be motivated to search for the cause and, depending on the attribution, related emotions will be triggered which will influence their subsequent behaviour (Casado-Díaz, Más-Ruiz, & Kasper, 2007; Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2007).

For example, in a retail banking setting, a customer who went through a dissatisfying experience (too crowded space, or inability to provide supporting documents) would feel uneasy with the moment and therefore will be motivated to find the cause for his or her inconvenience. They would question who or what is to be blamed for the shortcomings. In this case, dissatisfaction caused by the space management issue will be attributed to the service provider while the latter will be attributed to the customers themselves. Depending on the blame attribution, specific emotions will be triggered, thereby resulting in specific response behaviour. Hence for this research, we consider that the different evaluations made on the attributions of service dissatisfaction (e.g. service atmospheric, and customer own-self) does have an effect on customers' emotions, which may in turn influence their specific aggressive complaining behaviour. This reasoning is in line with the findings of DeWitt et al. (2008) who posits that

emotions either positive or negative have important mediating roles on customer behaviour. Therefore, based on this, ER will be investigated as a mediator [H<sub>4</sub>].

H<sub>4</sub>: ER mediates the relationship between DSEA and CRCB.

#### D. The Conceptual Framework

Review of relevant literatures provides enough evidence to show the linkage between DSEA and CCB. Specifically in this study, the independent variable (DSEA) influences the dependent variable (CRCB) with the mediation of ER in place. The inclusion of ER is to understand how retaliatory complaining can result from service dissatisfaction. With Huefner and Hunt's Theory of Customer Retaliatory Behaviour (CRB) as the platform of conceptualisation, Figure 1 addresses the influence of dissatisfied service experience.

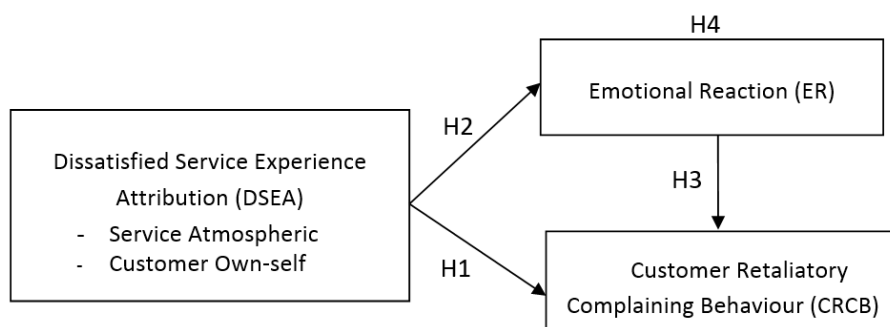


Figure 1. The mediating effect of emotional reaction on dissatisfied service experience attribution – customer retaliatory complaining behaviour

In essence, the CRB theory addresses specific complaining behaviours brought about by dissatisfaction experienced by the customers which may reach an extreme point leading to retaliation. This study is extended to propose that much of the retaliatory behaviours may be affected by the customers' emotional reactions. Although this model is merely an excerpt of a much larger model of retaliatory complaining behaviours, what is posited here is the core element of dissatisfactory service experience and its influence on retaliation in a service setting. As consumers and as humans, it is the emotions that often trigger a reaction that can be either accepting or retaliating. It is envisaged that retaliation is the conduct of emotions even in a situation involving the transaction of buying and selling. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed role of ER as mediator. To test this model empirically, a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) tool would be appropriate. Generally, for mediation to be demonstrated, four conditions must be present (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The conditions are:

- i. there must first be a statistically significant relationship between the independent variable (DSEA) and the dependent variable (CRCB);
- ii. there must also be a statistically significant relationship between independent variable (DSEA) and the mediator (ER);
- iii. after controlling for the effects of the independent variable (DSEA), there must be a statistically significant relationship between the mediator (ER)

and the dependent variable (CRCB); and

- iv. complete mediation is demonstrated when, after controlling for ER, the relationship between DSEA and CRCB is zero.

The more likely scenario in this example is one of partial mediation, where after controlling for ER, the relationship between DSEA and CRCB is reduced. In other words, part of the relationship between DSEA and CRCB is explained by ER. This example provides an illustration of how identification of potential mediators can increase theoretical richness, and may enhance both the predictive and explanatory power of the underlying theory.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In a competitive business environment, organisations offer more or less the same product or services like the others. Thus, any feeling of dissatisfaction will trigger emotional reactions (ER) that will influence how a customer reacts towards an organisation. In the past, studies have indicated that dissatisfaction could create conflict in the buyer – seller relationship and could cause or force customers to react in specific ways in order to cope with unfavourable situations (Athanassopoulos, 2000; Keaveney & Parthasarathy, 2001; Yang et al., 2009). Some, would respond by complaining (Singh, 1990b; Singh & Wilkes, 1996; Ngai et al., 2007; Sharma et al., 2010) while others would do nothing (Day & Landon, 1977). However, there will

also be those who would resort to displaying aggressive behaviour as a way of coping.

Therefore, understanding customer aggression brought about by dissatisfaction related to services is crucial for service providers including government agencies where satisfactory level of services are demanded by the general public utilising such services. Comprehending what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable service provision levels from a theoretical perspective will ultimately enhance practical offerings of services leading to a more concrete service provision by service providers and also related policies by the government.

From a practical perspective, the findings from this research are likely to benefit high customer contact service organisations that deal predominantly with services in which customers are highly dependent such as banking services, telecommunication and public utility companies. Viable approaches of how to handle retaliatory complaining behaviours may well assist such organisations in dealing with critical encounters that has the potential to affect public image of the organisation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to all involved at the Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, and to the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia for the support given in carrying out this study. This study is funded by the FRGS Grant (Ref: FRGS/1/2015/SS01/UITM/01/1).

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