

## CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION AS A NEGATIVE PURCHASE EXPERIENCE – RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY

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**Purpose:** The principal objective of this paper is to present the findings of a preliminary study into the phenomenon of negative purchase experiences. The objective of the pilot study was to identify issues and research areas that could be exploited in future research.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study used a survey-based approach. Respondents were asked about their experiences with failed purchases, reasons for those purchases and the emotions they felt afterward. The data was processed using descriptive statistics and content analysis of open-ended questions.

**Findings:** The most commonly experienced and strongly rated emotions after an unsatisfactory purchase were disappointment and dissatisfaction. In a large number of cases these feelings were primarily related to the attractive or promotional price of the product. Most respondents did not remain passive after a failed purchase (only 10.9% did not take any action) and drew conclusions from negative shopping experiences.

**Research limitations:** Since it is a pilot study, the main limitation of it is the small sample size and insufficiently in-depth analysis of qualitative data.

**Practical implications:** Future research should be focused on the strongest negative purchasing experiences: disappointment and dissatisfaction and address what actions customers take or should take to avoid these experiences. An interesting topic for investigation is relationship between an attractive price and level of dissatisfaction.

**Originality/value:** The paper is based on own surveys and data analyses.

**Keywords:** negative consumer experiences, consumer dissatisfaction, consumer disappointment.

**Category of the paper:** research paper.

### 1. Introduction

Almost every consumer has had to deal with a feeling of dissatisfaction during the purchase or after the purchase. This dissatisfaction can have various sources, e.g. lack of knowledge of the seller, failure of the purchased product to meet expectations, problems with complaints, etc.

Dissatisfied customers have a sense of unfulfillment, reflect on what they missed, consciously evaluate their behaviour and want to find out who or what is responsible (Bougie et al., 2003). In addition, highly dissatisfied customers demonstrate, as a direct consequence of their dissatisfaction, a strong tendency to switch service provider, spread negative word-of-mouth, and complain (Kim et al., 2017).

In some situations it is possible to alleviate negative customer feelings but the seller must know that there was a situation in which the customer is or was dissatisfied. Feedback from a dissatisfied customer enables the company to take appropriate action to avoid similar situations in the future. The lack of information, on the other hand, is a threat that entails certain negative consequences for the company. As Anderson (1998) notes the negative effects of customer dissatisfaction on service businesses may be even greater than the positive effects of customer satisfaction.

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## **2. The concept of customer dissatisfaction in the literature**

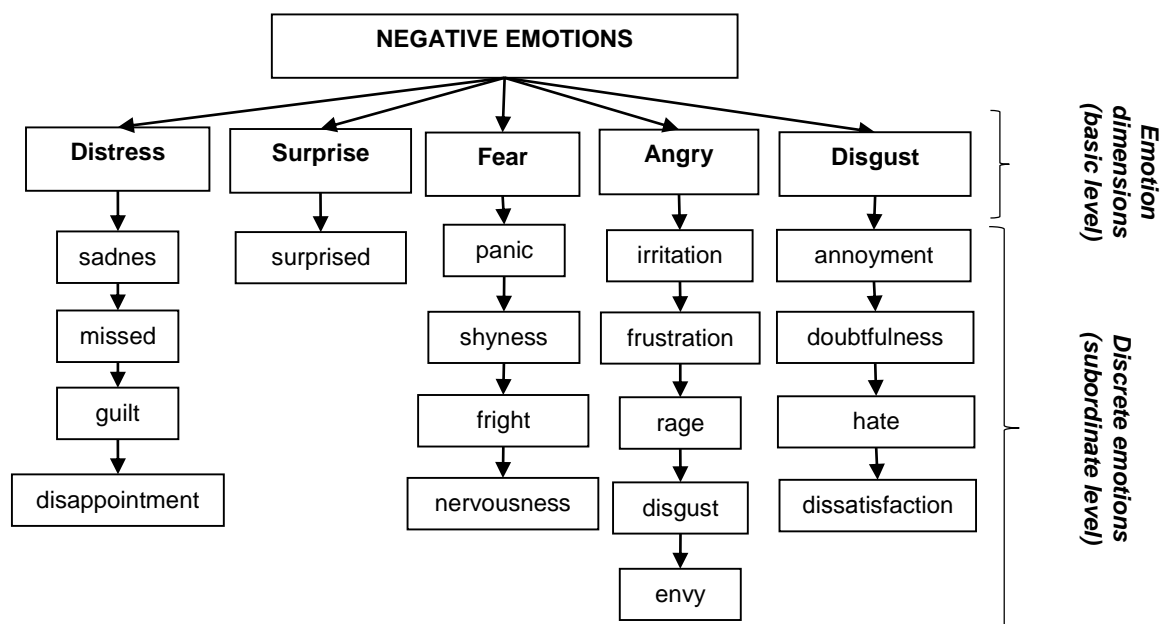
Literature in the field of customer satisfaction research, customer service, quality, customer relationship management etc. devotes considerable attention to customer satisfaction, factors affecting customer satisfaction and being its consequences. However, the negative aspect of customer satisfaction i.e. dissatisfaction appears far less frequently. The concept of customer dissatisfaction is variously explained in the literature, e.g. Johnston (1995) considers that dissatisfaction is usually elicited by tangibility or integrity problems. However, Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987) presented the opinion that it is a state of cognitive/affective discomfort caused by an insufficient return relative to the resources spent by the consumer at any stage of the purchase/consumption process. Important in this matter are the expectations of the customer. Isac and Rusu (2014) pointed out that dissatisfaction will happen if the perceived performance falls beneath expectations. Table 1 shows selected concepts of the meaning of customer dissatisfaction based on definitions of customer satisfaction.

It can be noted that for both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, emotions play a major role (Spreng, Singh, 1993). Emotion research describes dissatisfaction as “a negative term, related to anger, hatred, and disgust” (Bougie et al., 2003; citing Storm, Storm, 1987). According to Isac and Rusu (2014) the dissatisfaction is not an emotion, but the evaluation of an emotion. This perception of negative emotions can lead to different behaviours, ranging from fighting in the case of anger or fear, to inertia in the case of sadness (Zeelenberg, Pieters, 1999). The types of negative emotions that accompany customer dissatisfaction are shown in Figure 1.

**Table 1.***The concept of customer dissatisfaction as an opposition to customer satisfaction*

<b>Autors</b>	<b>The concept</b>
Mazurek-Łopacińska (2003)	Emotional reaction to the comparative processes activated by the customer, involving the juxtaposition of experiences and sensations after consuming a product or service with expectations on the one hand and perceived value on the other.
Falkowski, Tyszka (2009)	Negative emotional reaction of the consumer to the evaluation of a product or service.
Otto (2004)	Mental state, which is an emotion expressing dissatisfaction with the choice made in the act of purchase.
Lotko (2004)	A state of mind in which the consumer's needs and expectations for a product or service have not been achieved.
Hill, Aleksander (2003)	A reflection of the extent to which the total product offered by an organization does not satisfy a set of customer requirements.
Giese, Cote (2000)	A reaction (cognitive and emotional) that focuses specifically on the customer's experience of buying a product and occurs over a period of time (i.e., post-purchase, post-consumption/after use).
Oh, Parks (1997)	A complex process that involves cognitive and emotional processes, as well as other psychological and physiological factors.

Source: own based on referenced literature.

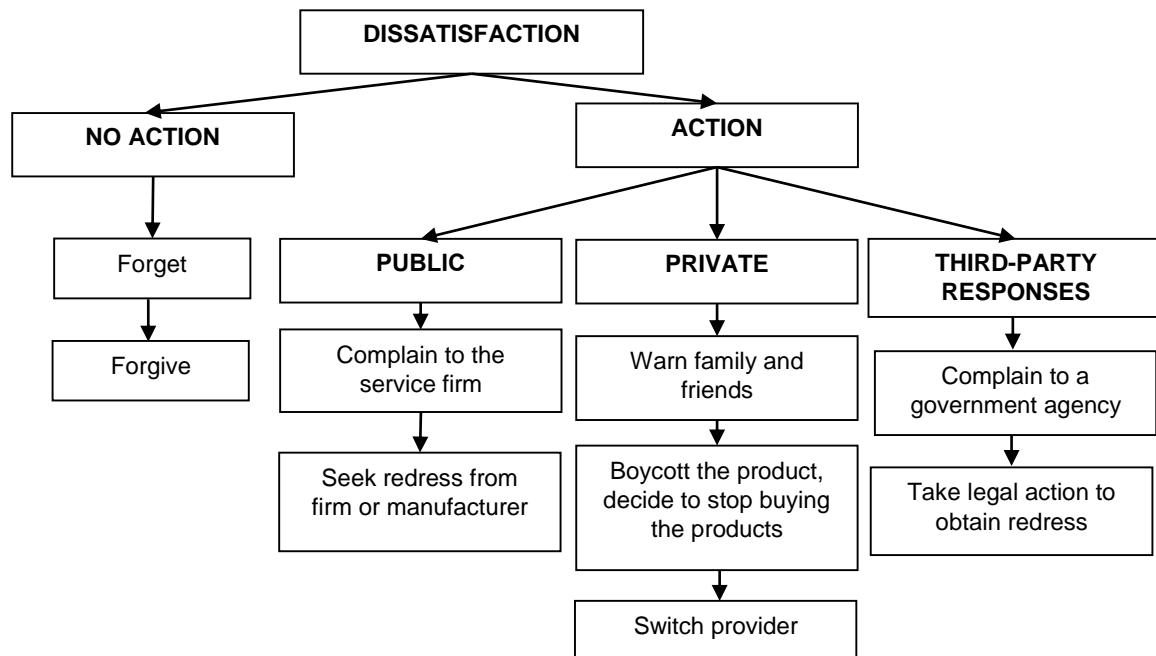
**Figure 1.** The types of negative emotions.

Source: own based on: Xu et al. (2015), Bisio et al. (2014).

Regardless of type and evaluation of an emotion, consequences of customer dissatisfaction become unfavourable for the company. Research shows that the negative effects of customer dissatisfaction on service businesses may be even greater than the positive effects of customer satisfaction (Anderson, 1998).

The consequences of consumer dissatisfaction may include different behaviours i.e. action or no-action (figure 1). These behaviours may include: negative word of mouth, switching intentions, consumer complaints, request for exchange/refund, protest, lawsuit/prosecute (Boadi et al., 2017; Sun, Yung, 2009; Mattila, Ro, 2008; Vargo et al., 2007). If a customers'

dissatisfaction with a company, products, customer service etc. exceeds their tolerance level, they are likely to engage in complaining behaviour (Yilmaz, 2016; Zeelenberg et al., 1999; Yilmaz, 2016). However, when a consumer believes that a company has a low response rate to consumer complaints and there is a low probability of success as a result of a complaint, then the consumer tends to engage in negative WOM (Yilmaz, 2016).



**Figure 2.** Consumer behavior in response to dissatisfaction.

Source: Day, Landon (1976), Klerk, Janette (2017), Crié (2003).

Customer may also take no action despite of their dissatisfaction. The reason for this behaviour may be that the effort put into the complaint is not commensurate with the costs incurred or the consumer is not convinced in one's capacity to be effective in particular situations (it says about it for example self-efficacy theory – SET) (Matusitz, Breen, 2009).

Customer dissatisfaction is not solely driven by disappointment but also by regret over forgone alternatives (Zeelenberg et al., 1999). It represents a certain kind of discomfort resulting from an inadequate return on the resources invested by the consumer in their relationship with a seller. The level of dissatisfaction can also be influenced by the perceived level of under-fulfilment of consumption-related needs (Yoon et al., 2012).

### 3. Customer dissatisfaction among other negative experiences – own study

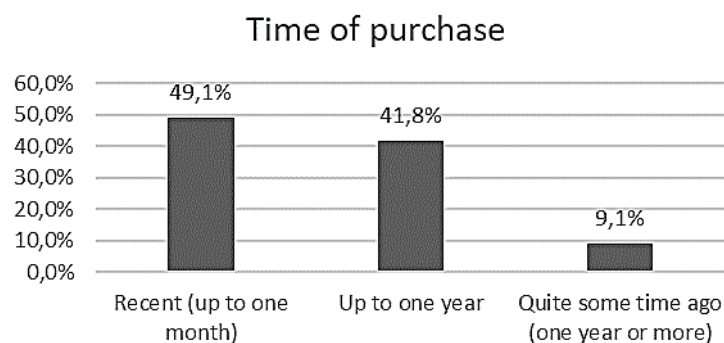
A review of the literature reveals that researchers frequently overlook the examination of customer dissatisfaction or regret. This may be attributed to several factors, including the negative connotations associated with dissatisfaction in opposition to positive outcomes such

as satisfaction and loyalty. The literature also shows that satisfaction is not an isolated feeling, but occurs in a coupled way with other experiences.

We decided to take a closer look at this issue and to design a study in which we combine the issues of dissatisfaction and other negative shopping experiences and their consequences. In order to decide which experiences to focus on for further research work, we conducted a pilot study. This was a questionnaire survey in which we asked respondents to recall a recent purchase that caused them negative emotions, e.g.: regret, anger, disappointment, dissatisfaction, etc. Respondents were completely free to choose their purchasing situation. They were then asked to describe the circumstances of the purchase, justify what prompted them to make the purchase, indicate what negative emotions the purchase triggered in them and whether they took any action after the purchase. Finally, respondents were asked to indicate whether they saw any positive aspects of the uncomfortable situation. Questions about these issues were opened, uncategorised and allowed for the identification and collection of conceptual categories that could be used in further research.

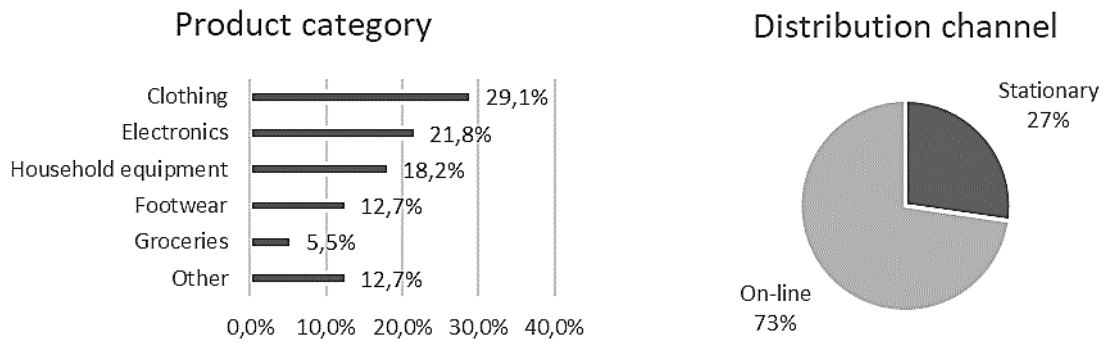
The questionnaires were distributed using the snowball method. Ultimately, 55 correctly completed questionnaires were collected. The respondent structure was dominated by female (61.8%). The majority of the sample consisted of people not running a household on their own.

As already mentioned, respondents were free to choose the negative purchasing situation. It turned out that in almost half of the cases, such a situation had occurred recently (up to a month – Figure 3) and concerned the purchase of clothing (29.1%), electronics (21.8%) and home equipment (18.2%). For the overwhelming majority of respondents (73%), the negative purchase situations were related to online shopping, which may suggest that this mode of distribution is more capable of causing negative emotions (Figure 4).



**Figure. 3.** Time of purchase of the product about which respondents opined.

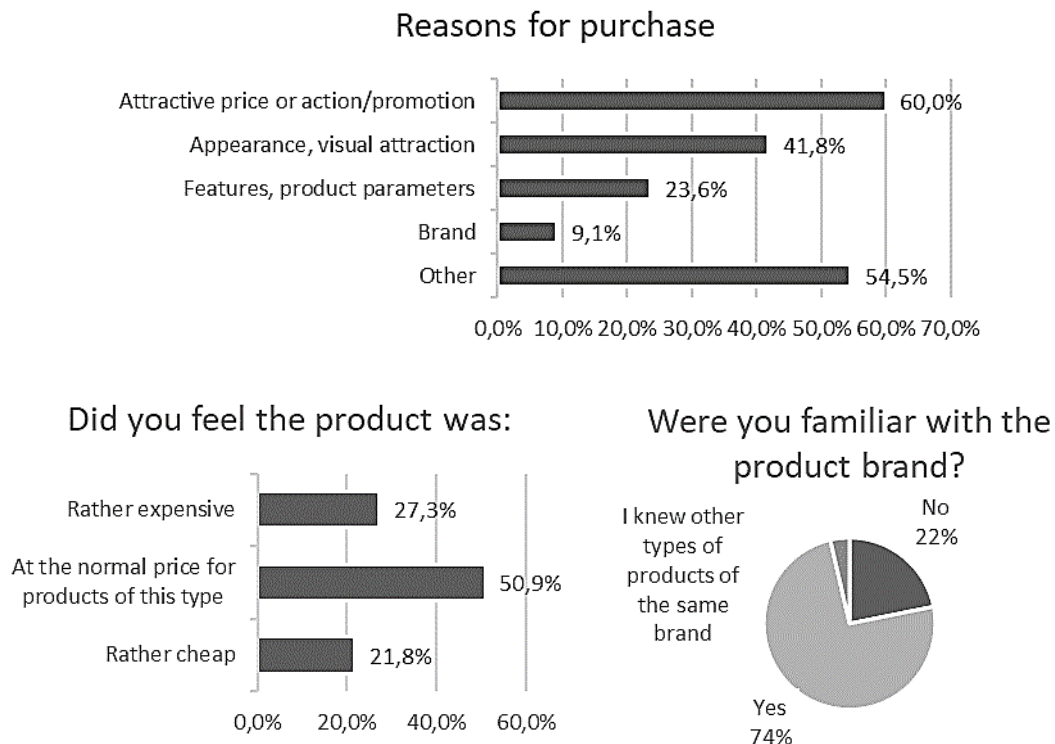
Source: own.



**Figure 4.** Product category and its distribution channel.

Source: own.

For the majority of respondents (60.0%), the main reason for purchasing a product that caused dissatisfaction was the attractive or promotional price. However, they were not significantly attracted by the price, as half of the respondents felt that the product purchased was priced at the usual price for products of this type. Another important factor was the visual appeal, appearance or attractiveness of the product. Only in further places did respondents indicate exceptional product features or brand loyalty (although 74% of respondents claimed to be familiar with the brand).



**Figure 5.** Circumstances of product purchase.

Source: own.

More than half of the respondents also indicated other reasons for purchase, e.g.: opinions of the others or lack of time to look for other alternatives. This data is presented in Figure 5. The quantities in the chart do not add up to 100%, as most of the respondents gave more than one reason for purchase.

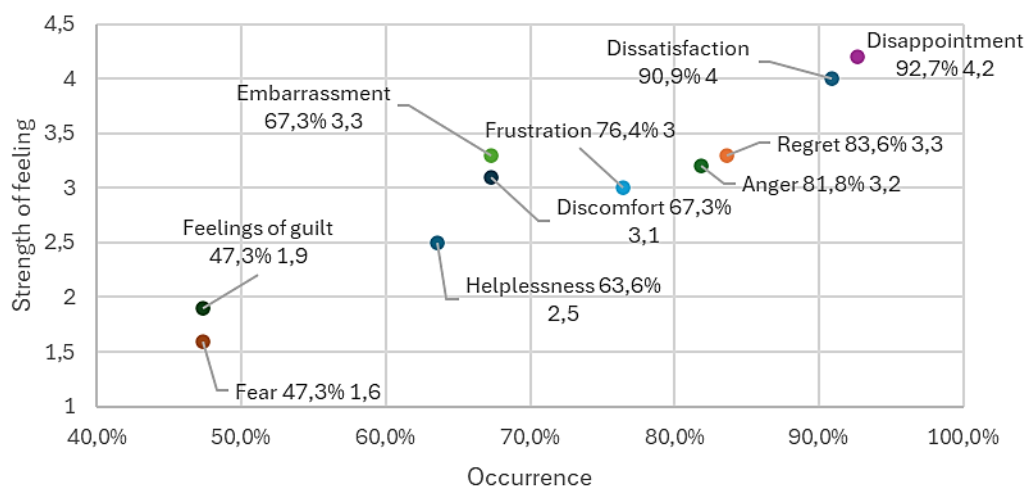
In the main part of the survey, respondents were asked to identify which of the listed ten negative experiences they felt after the described failed purchase. In addition, if an experience occurred, respondents rated on a semantic scale of 1-5 (where 1 meant a small or weak and 5 meant a strong feeling) how strong the feeling was. In addition, a mean was calculated from the scores on a scale of 1-5, which can be a cross-sectional measure of the strength of a given feeling. Table 2 presents the results of the survey.

**Table 2.**  
*Post-purchase experiences revealed in the research*

Post-purchase experiences	Not experienced	Experienced	1 weak	2	3	4	5 strong	Mean
Disappointment	7,3%	92,7%	2,0%	7,8%	11,8%	25,5%	52,9%	4,2
Dissatisfaction	9,1%	90,9%	2,0%	6,0%	12,0%	52,0%	28,0%	4
Embarrassment	32,7%	67,3%	16,2%	16,2%	16,2%	21,6%	29,7%	3,3
Regret	16,4%	83,6%	8,7%	15,2%	30,4%	26,1%	19,6%	3,3
Anger	18,2%	81,8%	11,1%	26,7%	15,6%	28,9%	17,8%	3,2
Discomfort	32,7%	67,3%	8,1%	35,1%	13,5%	21,6%	21,6%	3,1
Frustration	23,6%	76,4%	16,7%	26,2%	16,7%	19,0%	21,4%	3
Helplessness	36,4%	63,6%	31,4%	28,6%	17,1%	2,9%	20,0%	2,5
Feelings of guilt	52,7%	47,3%	57,7%	15,4%	11,5%	11,5%	3,8%	1,9
Fear	52,7%	47,3%	61,5%	26,9%	7,7%	0,0%	3,8%	1,6

Source: own.

Analysis of the data in Table 2 shows that the more often respondents reported experiencing a particular emotion, the stronger their average rating of that emotion.

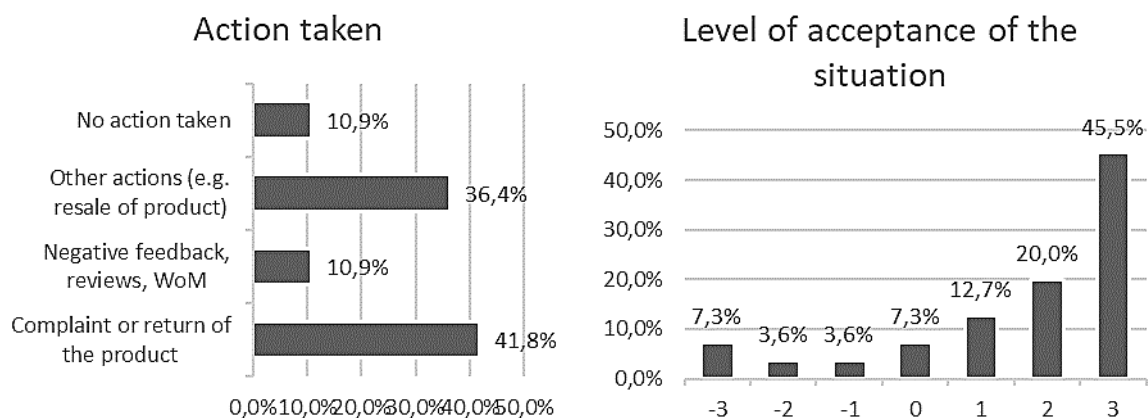


**Figure 6.** Post-purchase experiences – strength and occurrence.

Source: own.

This can be seen very clearly in the graph in Figure 6, where the percentage of occurrence of a given feeling is plotted on the vertical axis and its strength is plotted on the horizontal axis. We can see from the data that disappointment and dissatisfaction are post-purchase feelings that are very frequent and strong in the case of unsuccessful shopping experiences. In contrast, feelings such as fear, guilt or helplessness are infrequent and, when they do occur, of low intensity.

Literature shows that both positive and negative purchase experiences have consequences in terms of customer attitudes and behaviour. In our study, we asked respondents whether the negative purchasing situation described, forced them to take any action. Only 10.9% of the respondents stated that they did not take any action, the others took actions related to asserting their rights (e.g. complaint) as well as those related to spreading information about their negative experience (e.g. negative review, negative WoM). According to the statements of the respondents, only in 3 cases public action (complaint, return of goods) did not have a positive effect (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Actions taken by respondents and level of acceptance of the inconvenient.

Source: own.

Finally, respondents were asked if they drew any conclusions from the situation described. Here, respondents were free to express their opinions, but the following categories of reflections appeared most frequently in their statements:

- Switching intentions – the negative shopping experience caused respondents to change their supplier, shop, brand or even the region of the world in which they shopped.
- Caution and prudence in the future – becoming more vigilant when shopping online, reading product and vendor reviews more carefully.
- Increased consumer awareness – becoming familiar with terms and conditions of transactions, return policies, the need to keep purchase documents, awareness of the sense of fighting for one's rights.
- Balancing distribution channels – a return to offline shopping, especially for certain goods such as clothing or plants.



- Giving up false savings – giving up buying products with low prices, but usually also low class or poor quality.

In summary, we can conclude that, faced with an uncomfortable situation, respondents did not remain passive, took appropriate public and private action and learned lessons for the future. This explains why, despite the negative shopping experience, the majority of respondents said they had already come to terms with the unpleasant situation (Figure 7).

#### **4. Findings and conclusions**

The emotions experienced during the act of shopping are widely documented in literature and can be classified into two distinct categories: positive (e.g. satisfaction) and negative (e.g. dissatisfaction, regret). Negative emotional states are associated with a subjective experience of discomfort. Such discomfort is relieved when the customer is adequately compensated for the inconvenience experienced.

Our short study highlighted several aspects related to negative purchasing experiences. We can conclude that customer disappointment or dissatisfaction is associated with an attractive or promotional product price and with the brand awareness, trust in it and its image.

Feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction were the most common in respondents' statements. Their intensity was also rated highest. Interesting that the majority of respondents experienced negative experiences in online shopping.

Respondents took appropriate public and private action related to asserting their rights (e.g. complaint) as well as those related to spreading information about their negative experience (e.g. negative review, negative WoM) and learned lessons for the future. In the vast majority of cases, the result of these activities was positive, so it can be said that the expectations of the respondents were met, hence the high level of acceptance of the situation.

The pilot study formed important conclusions for future research. They should be focused on the strongest negative purchasing experiences: disappointment and dissatisfaction, followed by embarrassment, regret and anger. The relationship between an attractive price and level of dissatisfaction also seems interesting.

Future action research should also address what actions customers take or should take to avoid dissatisfaction and disappointment. They should focus on:

- Considering the possibility of changing intention.
- Caution and prudence.
- Consumer awareness.
- Balancing distribution channels.
- False savings.

In addition, research should take into account the dynamics of negative feelings over time, the change in their intensity and answer the question whether we can talk about forgiveness or even forgetfulness in the case of negative purchase experiences.

Since it is a pilot study, the main limitation of it is the small sample size, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population. Qualitative data should also be deeper analysed to obtain a richer insights into consumers feelings and behaviours.

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