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Beyond good and bad: Challenging the suggested role of emotions in customer experience (CX) research

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
- Mixed emotions
- Emotions
- Customer experience
- Customer-employee interaction
- Customer-firm interaction
- Customer-to-customer interaction

ABSTRACT

Our paper challenges several notions regarding emotion’s role and their influence on the customer experience (hereafter CX). Based on our analysis, we develop the following five propositions to advance our understanding of emotions’ role in customer experience research. First, we argue that positive and negative emotions can coexist during the consumption experience. Second, positive emotions do not automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions may not necessarily generate negative results. Third, positive or negative emotions toward a company employee might not automatically transfer to the company as a whole. Fourth, customers are not apathetic victims of their emotions with no capability to control their emotional experiences. Our last proposition is that consumption emotions are not a purely intrapersonal phenomenon, but that the social context matters and influences the consumption experience. We propose a related future research agenda highlighting opportunities for scholars and managers alike.

1. Introduction

Customer experience (hereafter CX) is considered a differentiator in markets where finding a competitive advantage is a really hard task (Christopher et al., 1991; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Abbott (1955, p. 40) introduced the idea that “what people really desire are not products but satisfying experiences.” Pine and Gilmore (1998, p. 3) view experiences as distinct from goods or services, implying that customers purchase experiences to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages … to engage him in an inherently personal way. Consumption experiences are multidimensional and include dimensions, such as the sensorial, affective, behavioral, and intellectual (Brakus et al., 2009). Moreover, when goods or services are rich in terms of experiential attributes, the potential to evoke an emotional response becomes even greater (Otto and Ritchie, 1996). Emotions therefore play a distinguishing role in customer experience (Klaus and Manthiou, 2020; Oliver, 1997).

Previous CX research linked to emotional processes relied on foundational assumptions that do not hold up well under close scrutiny. The first assumption in the literature is related to customers individually feeling either positive or negative emotions during a CX. However, this does not always hold true, as customers may simultaneously experience positive and negative emotions about a purchase decision (Ramanathan and Williams, 2007; Svari et al., 2011). Under specific consumption situations, customers may simultaneously feel happy and unhappy. For example, travelers may feel happy about a trip they bought, but unhappy about the price paid. Both emotions therefore appear in the experience (Diener, 1999).

In the past, researchers relied on a second assumption: positive CX emotions are link to positive outcomes (e.g. satisfaction and repurchase behavior), and negative emotions to negative consumption outcomes (e.g. dissatisfaction and avoidance behavior) (e.g. Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Holbrook and Batra, 1987; Russell et al., 1989). Fast et al. (2012) note that excessive positive emotions can lead to overconfidence, which is linked to negative outcomes. Similarly, negative emotions (e.g. stress, anxiety) may be present in some consumption situations without comprising the overall experience’s quality (Pool et al., 2015). We recommend a more nuanced understanding of the outcomes linked to positive and negative emotions.

The third assumption concerns the emotional experience’s targets. The literature suggests emotions toward a company may also transfer to its employees. However, companies need to analyze customers’ emotions at a transaction-specific level and when they evaluate their overall experience (Jones and Suh, 2000). Consequently, customers distinguish
between employees and companies as two relational items (Yim et al., 2008).

Employees’ role is often crucial in order to create positive customer experiences (Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000). Marketers tend to assume that emotions experienced toward an employee will transfer to the company (Porath et al., 2010; Mende and Bolton, 2011). While this might be true of many encounters, it is equally possible that customers might experience a mixture of emotions toward a company employee and the company itself, and treat them as two separate entities (Mende and Bolton, 2011; Jones and Suh, 2000). For instance, customers might be satisfied by the way a company employee responds to their individual needs, but be dissatisfied with the company in general. We stress that future research should explore the circumstances where positive or negative emotions toward an employee might not automatically transfer to the company as a whole.

The fourth common assumption in customer experience research is that customers are in some way the passive victims of their emotions, and that they have no power to interfere with or regulate their emotional experiences. Psychological research shows, however, that individuals can engage in a series of cognitive processes to control their emotions in various settings (Gross et al., 1998; Grandey et al., 2004; Greenaway and Kalokerinos, 2018). Customers displeased with a service encounter might modify their emotional reactions, because their motivational goal is not to allow a passing, external event to upset them. Customers might also control their positive emotions, for example, by concealing them to receive a better service or receive a discount. They might feel mixed emotions throughout their experience, which could include positive and negative aspects (Larsen et al., 2017). Current research lacks a coherent understanding of how customers’ purchase decisions are followed by persistent emotion regulation.

The fifth and final assumption that this paper challenges is that emotions are a purely intrapersonal phenomenon. Customer experience research tends to assess emotions as a personal outcome caused by a customer experience and are not victims of their emotions. The fifth and last proposition suggests that consumption emotions are interpersonal issues and are not victims of their emotions. The fifth and last assumption that this paper challenges is that customers can have coexisting positive and negative views with regard to their willingness to buy emblematic brands. Roster and Richins (2009) identify mixed emotions in product replacement decisions, because customers experience mixed feelings regarding what to do when they wish to replace their possessions, and are caught between wishing to retain them and wanting to replace them. Addis et al. (2018) show that in-store events designed to elicit surprise and romantic emotions, also bring about negative emotions, such as embarrassment.

Customers exposed to products/services’ positive and negative attributes, develop bivalent evaluations and experience a high level of ambivalence (Pang et al., 2017). An example of ambivalent decision is whether to book a hotel with a cozy room (a positive attribute), but few amenities (a negative attribute), or whether to buy a vehicle that is safe (positive), but boring to drive (negative). For example, Olsen et al. (2005) examine customers’ subjective ambivalence when consuming seafood. Customers sometimes feel satisfied when having seafood, but dissatisfied at other times; sometimes the food tastes good, but other times they feel the taste is unpleasant; sometimes consuming seafood is exciting, but other times it is simply boring. The occurrence of blended emotional experiences has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts, such as watching a movie (Andrade and Cohen, 2007), listening to music (Hunter et al., 2008), consuming food (Olsen et al., 2005), making product replacement decisions (Roster and Richins, 2009), watching commercials (Madrigal and Bee, 2005), experiencing a disappointing win or a relieving loss in a gambling setting (Larsen et al., 2004), and experiencing indulgent consumption (Ramanathan and Williams, 2007). We therefore expect that:

**Proposition 1.** Positive and negative emotions can coexist during a CX (Table 1).

Besides playing a key role in customer experience, emotions also predict customers’ future behavior (Gaur et al., 2014; Penz and Hogg, 2011). Experienced emotions affect customers at different stages of the purchase decision process (Roster and Richins, 2009; Maguire and Geiger, 2015). According to Ottes et al. (1997), “customers are intermittent or sequential experience of multiple emotional states, as a result of the interaction between internal factors and external objects, people, institutions, and/or cultural phenomena in market oriented contexts can have direct and/or indirect ramifications on pre-purchase, purchase or post-purchase attitudes and behavior.” However, the long-lasting view that positive emotions are linked to positive purchase outcomes (e.g. satisfaction, behavioral intention, positive WOM), and negative emotions with negative consumption results (e.g. dissatisfaction, purchase avoidance) does not always hold (e.g. Namkung and Jang, 2010; Bilgihan et al., 2016; Spielmann, 2020). In this study, we view satisfaction as a positive global evaluation or feeling state (Olsen et al., 2008).
Table 1
Positive and negative emotions do coexist during a CX.

| Reference | Key Findings | Key variables/dimensions | Method | Industry and contextual conditions |
|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| Chepogorich et al. (2019) | Consumption emotions shown with happiness, pleasure, amazement, contentment, loneliness, excitement and relaxation. The study includes only positive emotions and ignores the negative ones. | Customer emotions | Regression analysis | Luxury hotels: 20 in Nairobi, 1 in Kisumu, and 10 in Mombasa; 361 clients (questionnaires) |
| Gaur et al. (2014) | Four domains related to emotions in marketing: social/ personality issues, cognitive factors, the development of emotions and their interactions with other consumption factors. However, how to deal with the coexistence of emotions was not highlighted. | Social/personality issues; Cognitive factors; Development of emotions; Emotions' interactions with other consumption factors | Conceptual | Conceptual; 340 emotion-related articles from 19 different marketing journals published from 2002 to 2013 |
| Liljander and Strandvik (1997) | Negative and positive emotions as separate entities. The study ignores a mix of both. | Satisfaction in service quality, negative and positive emotions; Emotions (a unipolar view) | Structural Equation Modeling | Services - Customers visiting employment bureau for low paid jobs, USA; Casual dining restaurants in the USA; 326 surveys |
| Namkung and Jang (2010) | Oriented in respect to a single emotional pole. | Positive emotions | Experiment design | Green vs conventional products; Cosmetics, coffee; 4 studies in France |
| Spielmann (2020) | The study includes only positive emotions and ignores negative ones. | | | |

et al., 2005). Oliver (1997, p. 28) suggest that satisfaction is "the consumer's fulfillment response, the degree to which the level of fulfillment is pleasant or unpleasant". We interpret behavioral intention as the willingness to repurchase, to purchase more in the future, and to recommend to others (Baker et al., 2002; Macintosh and Lockshin, 1997; Liu and Jang, 2009). In terms of negative consumption outcomes, dissatisfaction is a negative global evaluation of the offer, or an unpleasant fulfillment thereof (Oliver, 1997; Olsen et al., 2005), and avoidance behavior describes customers' unwillingness to repurchase and recommend to others (Hightower et al., 2002; Namkung and Jang, 2010).

Think of being really happy with a product/brand (a positive emotion), but dissatisfied because it is not available for purchase (a negative result), or being discontent with the gym you use, but continuing to go to this gym, because there are no other options close to your home. Goodstein et al. (1990) observe that uneasy emotions lead to more favorable attitudes toward an advertisement, whereas disinterested feelings lead to more unfavorable ones. Feeling stress (a negative emotion) increases when one wants a reward, which is a positive outcome (Pool et al., 2015). Addis et al. (2018) maintain that an in-store social event mainly created to evoke customers' surprise and feelings of romantic love, will not necessarily have a positive influence on their purchase decisions. Although companies might design positive customer-centric experiences to increased customers' purchase intention, this might also have negative results. Based on the above discussion, we introduce the following proposition.

**Proposition 2.** Under specific consumption situations, positive emotions do not automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions may not necessarily generate negative consumption outcomes (Table 2).

1.2. Emotional experiences with a company and its representatives

Companies must attract and retain customers to ensure they have a sustainable competitive advantage. They therefore need to pay attention to customers' emotions at the transaction-specific level and for their overall evaluation of their experience with the company. Both evaluations have an influence on customer repurchase behavior, and, ultimately, on the company performance (Jones and Suh, 2000; Klaus, 2015). Many companies invest heavily in relationship marketing on the premise that close customer-company and customer-employee relationships will lead to positive financial results (Palmtier et al., 2006). This implies that customers regard company employees and companies as two different relational targets (Yim et al., 2008; Jones and Suh, 2000). For example, a customer may have a dissatisfactory experience with a flight attendant on one flight and still be satisfied with the airline, due to other positive touchpoints throughout this customer experience. Customers are likely to comment on a service transaction’s particular events (e.g. specific employee actions) when asked about a transaction-specific experiences (Jones and Suh, 2000). However, when asked about their overall satisfaction, customers are more likely to comment on their global impressions and general experiences with the firm (e.g., the firm’s honesty) (Yim et al., 2008). According to Porath et al. (2010), courteous encounters with employees cause consumers to make false negative generalizations about (a) others who work for the firm, (b) the firm as a whole, and (c) future encounters with the firm, inferences that go beyond the discourteous incident. The appraisal tendency framework (ATF) (Lerner and Keltner, 2000, 2001) explains this behavior. The ATF serves as a basis for predicting specific emotions’ influence on customer decision making. The ATF addresses specific emotions carried over from past situations and might color future judgments and choices (Lerner and Keltner, 2000, 2001). In other words, transaction-specific satisfaction/dissatisfaction does not always correlate with overall satisfaction/dissatisfaction with a firm. Mende and Bolton (2011) theorize that employees are human attachment targets, while the firm is an abstract attachment target. Their results found that customers who cannot develop interpersonal bonds with a company’s employees compensate for this deficiency by being more likely to bond with the company (Mende and Bolton, 2011), which shows that customers’ relational objectives differ from those of the firm and its employees.

Beside the general customer-company relationship, a customer’s experience with an employee is also as a key strategic competitive tool (Mattila and Enz, 2002). Customers’ perceptions of face-to-face encounters with employees are an important determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Liljander and Mattsson, 2002; Winsted, 2000). The role of service encounters is also well established in the marketing literature (e.g. Mattila and Enz, 2002; Raajoot, 2004; Jayawardhana et al., 2007). Chandon et al. (1997) developed a dyadic assessment of service encounters encompassing the employees’ competence, their listening behaviors, their dedication, and their effectiveness. Winsted (2000) developed a three-dimensional measure to assess service encounter evaluation, encompassing concern, civility, and congeniality. Raajoot (2004) has created a measure of service encounter quality, encompassing seven-dimensions: tangibility, reliability, assurance, sincerity, personalization, formality, and responsiveness. Finally, Jayawardhana et al. (2007) have revealed a four-factor structure of service encounter quality, encompassing professionalism, civility, friendliness, and competence dimensions.

Moreover, the employee interaction with a customer can synchronously affect other customers’ experience either positively or negatively.
Table 2
Under specific consumption situations, positive emotions do not automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions may not necessarily generate negative consumption outcomes.

| Reference | Key Findings | Key variables/dimensions | Method | Industry and contextual conditions |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| Addis et al. (2018) | Brand attitude and purchase intention are outcomes of positive and negative emotions. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Emotion | Structural Equation Modeling | In-store social event 220 customers |
| Bilgihan et al. (2016) | Positive emotions have a strong effect on casino gamblers' return patronage. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Emotions | Structural Equation Modeling | 3 casinos in USA 4511 surveys of gamblers |
| Chepngetich et al. (2019) | Happiness, pleasure, amazement, contentment, loneliness, excitement, and relaxation have an impact on purchase behavioral intentions. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Customer emotions | Regression analysis | Luxury hotels: 20 in Nairobi, 1 in Kisumu, and 10 in Mombasa 361 clients (questionnaires) |
| Liu and Jang (2009) | Positive emotion has a positive effect on perceived value and negative emotion has a negative effect on perceived value. Positive emotion has a positive effect on behavioral intentions and negative emotion a negative effect on these. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Positive emotions | Structural Equation Modeling | Chinese restaurants in the US 348 customers |
| Ladhari et al. (2008) | Positive emotions are positively related to satisfaction levels. Negative emotions are negatively related to satisfaction levels. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Positive emotions | Structural Equation Modeling | 338 undergraduate business students Restaurant service |
| Maguire and Geiger (2015) | Temporal aspect is critical for consumption emotions in service settings, as it impacts emotions during all stages of the consumption journey. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes, | Emotional experiences of the servicescape | Semi-inductive, exploratory research method | 13 different service encounters in Ireland 57 participants (SMS diaries and subsequent in-depth interviews) |
| Namkung and Jang (2010) | Customers' positive emotions have a positive effect on behavioral intentions and their negative emotions a negative effect on behavioral intentions. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Positive emotions | Structural equation modeling | Casual dining restaurants in the USA 326 surveys |
| Olen et al. (2005) | There is a negative relationship between ambivalence and satisfaction. Ambivalence has an independent and direct effect on loyalty. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Subjective Ambivalence | Structural equation modeling | Seafood in Norway 1194 respondents (survey) |
| Penz and Hogg (2011) | Emotional states such as pleasure, arousal, dominance, and enjoyment have an impact on future shopping intentions. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Pleasure | Multiple mediated regression analyses | Offline or online shopping 335 questionnaires (responses from offline or online shopping (Australia n = 127, Greece n = 111, the UK n = 117) |
| Roster and Richins (2009) | Emotions have an impact on pre-purchase and post-purchase phases. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative consumption outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Subjective ambivalence | Difference scores: An Extension of the Griffin Measure | Durable goods (cars, boats, household appliances, TV, stereo, etc.) Survey 1: 404 responses Survey 2: 1 year later 131 responses |
| Russell et al. (2011) | Emotional ambivalence is negatively related to willingness to buy American brands. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Positivity | Mixed methods | American brands and non-American brands 12 in-depth interviews across France 215 surveys from French customers |
| Spielmann (2020) | Green products are more likely to be purchased than conventional products, because they evoke positive emotions. The study ignores how positive emotions are related to negative outcomes and positive emotions to negative outcomes. | Positive emotions | Experiment design | Green vs conventional products Cosmetics, coffee 4 studies in France |
(Bitner, 1992; Jung et al., 2017). These encounters might then become an integral part of the customer’s image of the company and, in turn, could play an influential role in determining its success (Bitner, 1990). These important interactions occur in the strategic services triangle, where the three interlinked groups (customers, company, and employees) work together to develop, promote, and deliver an offer (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

The simultaneous investigation of a customer-company and a customer-employee emotional experience has received relatively little attention in the literature (Mende and Bolton, 2011; Jones and Suh, 2000; Porath et al., 2010). It is therefore important that academic researchers and practitioners understand the distinction between the two and their relative influence on repurchase intentions. Based on the discussion above, we develop the following proposition:

**Proposition 3.** Under specific consumption situations, customers’ positive or negative emotions, triggered by experiences with a company employee, will not necessarily lead to perceive the company positively or negatively (Table 3).

### 1.3. Customers can regulate their emotional experiences

We posit that customers can regulate their emotional experiences, whether they are negative, positive, or mixed. Customers are not passive victims of their emotions and can tolerate and control an emotional experience; examples of these are: if a positive outcome outweighs the negative emotion experienced, or if a positive emotion is concealed to gain a reward or better service. Customers who regulate their emotions are more likely to interpret a stressful encounter positively by putting it into perspective. Gross (1998) argues that individuals can regulate their emotions by means of suppression or reappraisal. Customers who use reappraisal experience a reduction in an emotional experience’s negativity (Goldin et al., 2008).

Customers might feel mixed emotions during an experience, particularly during complex events with both pleasant and unpleasant aspects (Larsen and McGraw, 2014; Larsen et al., 2017). If customers’ goal is to have a positive outcome, such as a quick service or delivery, this might outweigh the negative emotion experienced, such as having to pay a premium for overnight delivery or for a rapid service encounter. Psychological research (Gross, 1998; Grandey et al., 2004; Greenaway and Kalokerinos, 2018) highlights that customers’ motivational goal might allow them to modify their emotional reactions.

The model of goal-directed behavior (MGB; created by Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001) integrates motivational and effective processes with past behavior, and socio-psychological theories such as reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), as well as with the theory of planned behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2005). Han and Rhu (2012) highlight that planned behavior theory’s weakness is that it omits motivational processes (desires), effective processes (positive and negative anticipated emotions), and past behavior, all of which are crucial factors. Perugini and Bagozzi (2001) introduce negative and positive emotions as drivers of desire and behavioral intention in the MGB model. Meng and Choi

### Table 3

Under specific consumption situations, customers’ positive or negative emotions, triggered by experiences with a company employee, will not necessarily lead to perceive the company positively or negatively.

| Reference | Findings | Key variables/dimensions | Research tool | Industry and Contextual conditions |
|-----------|----------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bansal et al. (2001) | In a service-oriented economy, organizations should emphasize employees’ well-being as a means to attract and retain external customer patronage. The study does not examine the company’s role separately. | Internal marketing (HR practices, internal customer) Internal customer behavior External marketing (external service quality, external customer satisfaction, external customer) | Conceptual | Service industry |
| Grigoroudis et al. (2013) | The service provider’s overall efficiency is achieved on every level of its service delivery process. Efficiency happens on different levels: confirming customer expectations (level 1), achieving customer satisfaction (level 2), producing higher operational results, and creating loyal customers (level 3). The study does examine the company’s separately. | Efficiency evaluation Customer satisfaction Business performance Employee appraisal | MUSA (Multicriteria Satisfaction Analysis) method | 16 bank branches |
| Jayawardhena et al. (2007) | Each service encounter matters for customers' perceptions. The service encounter quality is directly related to customer satisfaction and service quality, and indirectly to loyalty. The study does not examine the company’s role separately. | Service encounter quality (professionalism, civility, friendliness, and competence dimensions) Customer satisfaction Service quality perceptions loyalty Customer Attachment Anxiety (Firm/Employee) Customer Attachment Avoidance (Firm/Employee) Satisfaction (Firm/Employee) Trust (Firm/Employee) Affective commitment (Firm/Employee) | Mixed methods | Private safety inspection organization in New Zealand 50 service providers (interviews). 778 customers from a private safety inspection organization (surveys) |
| Mende and Bolton (2011) | In the service setting, customers with low levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance view a firm and its employees more favorably than those with high levels. Insecurely attached customers who find the relationship with service employees insufficient, might be better connected with the service firm. The study does not test an emotional experience transfer from a company to its employees and vice versa. | Customer Attachment Anxiety (Firm/Employee) Customer Attachment Avoidance (Firm/Employee) Satisfaction (Firm/Employee) Trust (Firm/Employee) Affective commitment (Firm/Employee) | Regression models (Least squares estimation) | A North American insurance company. 932 customers |
| Porath et al. (2010) | Customers make faster and more negative generalizations when encountering discourteous employees. The study does not examine the company’s role separately. | Employee incivility Anger Rumination Negative generalizations | Experimental design | Study 1: 73 respondents at a large university. Study 2: 117 undergraduate respondents. Study 3: 2 (courteous employee-employee reprimand versus discourteous employee-employee reprimand) x 2 (customer delayed versus not delayed by a discourteous service provider) between-subjects design. Study 4: 59 respondents. |
(2016) later extend the MGB model in the tourism sector and support that emotions and past behavior have a positive influence on desire and behavioral intention. This literature highlights both the importance of emotions in customer experience and how they can influence behavioral intention.

It is well cited that emotions (both negative and positive) can predict customer intention, desire and behavioral change (see Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001; Larsen and McGraw, 2014). Emotions can also be attributed to re-purchase intention, Bui and Kemp (2013) argue that emotional regulation has both a direct and mediating effect on repeat purchase intentions. For example, when customers purchase online music regularly, this can regulate their emotions and leads to their repeat purchase intentions. Customers engage in emotion regulation to attain desired benefits; they might, for example, change their behavior to seek a reward or desired goal (Tamir, 2016). However, as mentioned by Balaji et al. (2017), there is a surprising lack of research into customers’ emotional regulation and its influence on subsequent customer behavior.

It is well documented in the literature that there is a strong relationship between emotions and satisfaction. Han and Rhu’s (2012) results highlight that customer satisfaction is a function of positive and negative emotion, and that customer satisfaction has the greatest impact on customers’ re-purchase intention. Customer satisfaction might be a function of anticipated positive and negative emotions, which have a positive impact on customers repurchase intention. In the context of service failure, both positive and negative emotions have an impact on satisfaction (Schoefer, 2010) and recovery satisfaction (Kuo and Wu, 2012).

Table 4
“Customers can regulate their emotional experiences”.

| Reference | Key Findings | Key variables/dimensions | Research tool | Industry and contextual conditions |
|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Audrezet et al. (2016) | These findings do not include emotional regulation, but do highlight that emotions play a large role in determining intentions and behaviors in complex social behaviors (such as breast feeding). Positive anticipated emotions have a stronger influence on novice vs. experienced mothers’ intentions and desires. | Satisfaction, negative, and positive emotions, perceived quality | Interviews & Structural Equation Modeling | Services - banking customers USA |
| Balaji et al. (2017) | This paper only focuses on customer satisfaction and injustice, not on the regulation of their emotional experience. It does, however, find support for customers’ emotion regulation through suppression and reappraisal, which influence satisfaction’s effects on both negative word-of-mouth and repurchase intentions. Positive and negative emotions mediate the relationship between perceived injustice and customer satisfaction. | Emotion regulation, negative/positive emotion, customer satisfaction | Structural Equation Modeling | Services - service failure (hospitality) in Malaysia |
| Bui and Kemp (2013) | Greater complexity leads to a greater emotional state, which in turn leads to a higher purchase intention. This study ignores the ways customers can regulate their emotional experiences. | Emotion regulation, hedonic value, emotional response, | Structural Equation Modeling | Retail - UG students, USA - digital music shoppers |
| Caruelle et al. (2019) | Proposes a model for goal-directed behavior (MGB), introducing negative and positive anticipated emotions as drivers of desire, intention, and BI. This study only focuses on goal-oriented behavior and not on the regulation of emotional experiences. | Customer emotions measurements - EDA | Conceptual | Literature review - conceptual |
| Mattila et al. (2014) | This study does not measure emotion regulation, but does link emotion with behavioral intentions. It also supports the double deviance effect regarding customers witnessing unfair treatment experiencing negative emotions and therefore giving lower fairness ratings and indicating lower likelihood of returning. | Perception of fairness, positive and negative BI, service recovery | Experimental design | Services - USA, regular restaurant visitors |
| Meng and Choi (2016) | This study extends the MGB model (Perugini and Bagozzi, 2001), finding that, in the tourism sector, positive and negative anticipated emotion and past behavior have a positive influence on desire. This study does not measure emotion regulation, but does posit that perceived behavior control, negative anticipated emotion, and subjective norms are the more important determinants of desire. | Goal-directed behavior and negative/positive anticipated emotion | Structural Equation Modeling | Tourism - South Korean tourists in a slow tourist destination |
| Namkung and Jang (2010) | This study only focuses on perceived fairness in a service setting (restaurant) that negate negative emotions. Price fairness is a significant predictor of both positive and negative emotions and future BI. This research does not examine emotion regulation. | Fairness, negative and positive emotions, and BI | Structural Equation Modeling | Services - Restaurant visitors in USA |
| Parkinson et al. (2018) | This research highlights the importance of emotions and experience in complex social behaviors such as breast feeding. It does not, however, measure emotion regulation. Positive anticipated emotions have a stronger influence on emotion regulation. | Positive and negative anticipated emotions, desires/intentions/behavior. | Structural Equation Modeling | Healthcare - USA vs AUS women that have breastfed |
| Perugini and Bagozzi (2001) | Proposes a model of goal-directed behavior (MGB), introducing negative and positive anticipated emotions as drivers of desire, intention, and BI. This study does not examine emotion regulation and experience. | Goal-orientated behavior, positive and negative emotion. | Structural Equation Modeling | Healthcare/education - Study 1 wt, study 2 studying/Italy longitudinal study. |
| Quidbach et al. (2015) | Emotion regulation strategies can be used before, during, and after positive emotional events. This study lacks empirical data and does not examine the customer’s emotional experience. | Situation selection, attentional deployment, cognitive change, response modulation | Conceptual | Conceptual Conceptual Conceptual |
Customers’ emotions can change over time (Maguire and Geiger, 2015); it is therefore important to capture emotions not as recall, but during an actual CX (Caruelle et al., 2019). Physiological experiments are used to measure emotional arousal (such as the galvanic skin response), which could influence altruistic behavior, particularly when the participants are given hedonic choices (Guerrero et al., 2015). Caruelle et al. (2019) call for more research using physiological experiments such as EDA (electrodermal activity) to measure emotional arousal more accurately and in real time rather than in recall.

Greenaway and Kolokerinou (2018) highlight that customers do not always show what they feel, and do they always show what they know. Emotion goals occur when there is a discrepancy between a current and desired state, and this differs from emotion regulation strategies (Tamir, 2015); it is therefore important to capture emotions not as recall, but in the desired state, and this differs from emotion regulation strategies (Tamir, 2015).

### Table 5

| Reference                         | Key Findings                                                                 | Key variables/dimensions                      | Research tool                                  | Industry and contextual conditions          |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Goldenberg et al. (2020)          | Participants are found to be influenced more by other customers weaker emotions than their own. The study highlights how motivational forces influence other customers’ emotions. This study does not, however, examine the emotional experience. | Emotional influence, emotional motivation      | Lab experiment and Twitter analysis           | Lab experiment and Twitter analysis USA students |
| Heinonen et al. (2018)            | Identifies customer-to-customer interaction drivers, i.e. the desire for social interaction, self-enhancement, and self-validation. These drivers lead to value outcomes that include emotion and social value. This study lacks empirical data and does not focus on the emotional experience. | C2C interaction. Value, drivers of C2C interactions | Conceptual                                    | Literature review - conceptual               |
| Hochschild (1979)                 | Highlights how the links between emotion management and feelings come alive during a social exchange with others. This study lacks empirical data and does not focus on the emotional experience. | Emotion management, feeling rules, social exchange | Conceptual                                    | Literature review - conceptual               |
| Huang and Hsu (2010)              | Highlights the lack of empirical research on C2C interaction in services. The quality rather than the quantity of interaction with customers is found to be more significant. This study only focuses on the tourism sector and does not examine the emotional experience. | C2C interaction, customer interaction, satisfaction | Structural Equation Modeling                  | Tourism - USA cruise ship tourists          |
| Jung et al. (2017)                | This study does not focus on the emotional experience but posits that supportive behaviors from other customers can influence a customer's judgement of service quality. It's important for services to develop a positive customer perception of service climate to aid in positively influencing C2C interactions. | Positive C2C interactions, dysfunctional customer behavior, support from other customers, customer perceived service climate | Structural Equation Modeling                  | Services - Gym members, South Korea x 2 surveys |
| Liljander and Strandvik (1997)    | Highlights the lack of research on other customers’ impact in service encounters. According to the negative script-incongruent behaviors theory, negative customers have stronger psychological effects than those with a positive nature. This study does not examine the emotional experience. | Satisfaction in service quality, negative and positive emotions | Emotions and SERVQUAL                          | Services - Customers visiting employment bureau for low paid jobs, USA |
| Lin et al. (2018)                 | This study focuses on emotional influence, not on the emotional experience. The results highlight that we shift our emotion to be aligned with the ingroup rather than the outgroup. The social and physical environment has a positive influence on customers’ emotion and satisfaction. | Social influence, emotion, and satisfaction     | Online experiments                            | Online experiment - USA & Chinese online experiment students USA |
| Miao et al. (2011)                | Behaviors of others (particularly negative) can affect the ambience adversely and will reduce the consumption utility, which in turn affects satisfaction. This study focuses on emotions and satisfaction not on the emotional experience. | Psychological closeness, script-congruent behavior, felt/displayed emotions, satisfaction | Script theory, emotional response             | Services - USA, UG students                 |
| Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007)      | When customers receive social and emotional support from other customers, they exhibit CVP (customer voluntary performance) regarding the service and other customers. This study only focuses on the social interaction and not on the emotional experience. | Social-emotional interaction vs instrumental support | Structural Equation Modeling                  | Services -gym members, USA                  |
| Sierra and McQuitty (2005)        | This study focuses on inseparability and shared responsibility rather than on the emotional experience. Social exchanges create a sense of shared responsibility for service settings, whose inseparability produces customer perceptions of shared responsibility for service outcomes, resulting in greater emotions. | Inseparability, shared responsibility, emotional response, service brand loyalty | Structural Equation Modeling                  | Services - UG students, USA                 |

Based on the above discussion, we posit that:

**Proposition 4.** Customers can regulate their emotional experiences (Table 4).

### 1.4. Social interactions can influence an emotional experience

Customers can not only regulate their emotions, but other customers can also influence them. Researchers have viewed emotion as purely intrapersonal. We challenge this viewpoint and highlight the way social interactions influence a customer’s emotional experience.

There is a lack of empirical research into customer-to-customer interaction (Huang and Hsu, 2010; Zhang et al., 2010), and particularly into this social interaction’s influence on a customer’s emotional experience (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2013; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Other customers can adversely affect the ambience, which could reduce consumption and in turn affect customer satisfaction (Miao et al., 2010).
Table 6
Future research directions.

| Proposition                                                                 | Future research avenues                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Reference                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Proposition 1 Positive and negative emotions can coexist during a CX.       | • What kinds of specific consumption situations (e.g. buying a luxurious good vs. a non-luxurious one, a physical good vs. a service or experience) capture blended consumption-related emotions better?                     | Namkung and Jang (2010)                                                                    |
|                                                                             | • How do customers act when experiencing mixed emotions during a consumption CX?                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Which view of emotions (unipolar vs. bipolar) is appropriate in different consumption CXs?                                                                                                                               |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • What role does the subjective and objective ambivalence play in consumption CXs?                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • How can ambivalence or mixed consumption emotions be resolved?                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • What is the relationship between time and blended emotions? How can the association between these two perspectives be quantified?                                                                                       |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Do mixed consumption emotions vary in a longitudinal setting?                                                                                                                                                    | Ramanathan and Williams (2007)                                                               |
|                                                                             | • How does the blended emotional experience of indulgent consumption and of non-consumption indulgences happen?                                                                                                      |                                                                                              |
| Proposition 2 Under specific consumption situations, positive emotions do not | • Which positive emotions relate to negative outcomes and which negative emotions relate to positive outcomes?                                                                                                           | Pool et al. (2015); Olsen et al. (2005); Chepogtitch et al. (2019); Bilghian et al. (2016);   |
| automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions | • Do cultural and subcultural factors influence the consumption outcomes of positive and negative emotions?                                                                                                               | Penz and Hogg (2011); Ottes et al. (1997); DeWitt et al. (2008); Chebat and Stanaczyk (2005); |
| may not necessarily generate negative consumption outcomes.                  | • What role does service recovery play in changing emotions and consumption outcomes?                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                              |
| Proposition 3 Under specific consumption situations, customers’ positive or | • Do customers feel a mixture of emotions towards a company and its employees?                                                                                                                                          | Bansal et al. (2001); Jones and Sub 2000; Mende and Bolton (2011)                           |
| negative emotions, triggered by experiences with a company employee, will not | • Do customers treat them as two separate entities?                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                              |
| necessarily lead to perceive the company positively or negatively.          | • What are the boundary conditions for this situation?                                                                                                                                                                   | Jayawardhena et al. (2007); Mende and Bolton (2011); Porath et al. (2010)                    |
|                                                                             | • Does only the last experience with an employee affect customers’ repurchase behavior, while the others affect their overall experience with the company?                                                                 |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • What are the outcomes of mixed emotions with a company and its service employees (e.g. word-of-mouth, trust, commitment, value, etc.)?                                                                                  |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Can longitudinal data provide better results to better understand and track when, why, and the extent to which customers’ mixed emotions toward the two entities vary over time?                                         |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Do the mixed emotions of these two entities differ across industries (high-tech, hospitality, insurance, banking, etc.) and across cultures?                                                                         |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • What are the roles of existing competition and other environmental variables in developing blended emotions toward a company and its employees?                                                                     | Grigoroudis et al. (2013)                                                                   |
| Proposition 4 Customers can regulate their emotional experiences            | • What is the impact of service expectations on consumer perceptions and emotions? Investigating the presence of specific emotional reactions to injustice toward other customers and the conditions under which they occur. | Mattila et al. (2014), Maguire et al. (2015), Maguire and Geiger (2015), Larsen and McGraw (2014) |
|                                                                             | • Explore whether multiple opposite-valence emotions allow greater insight into whether some opposite-valence emotions (e.g., high-arousal emotions) co-occur more frequently than polar opposite emotions. |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Investigate emotions in real time, as service encounters can be emotional rollercoasters and can change. The use of portable neural imaging devices could be used - link these findings to service evaluation and satisfaction. |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Use the MGB model in different contexts (non-restaurant) to assess actual consumption in real-time. Do personal characteristics, i.e. personality, income, and cultural background affect consumption? |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Use physiological (such as skin arousal or eye detecting software) experiments to measure customer emotions in real time.                                                                                               |                                                                                              |
| Proposition 5 Emotions are not purely intrapersonal, since social interactions | • What drives group members to feel/show emotion? Measure the motivations and strength of emotional influence.                                                                                                         | Goldenberg et al. (2020); Heinonen et al. (2018), Huang and Hsu (2010), Jung et al. (2017),  |
| can influence an emotional experience                                         | • Investigate the negative drivers of C2C interaction, i.e. what hinders interaction and which factors moderate the drivers’ effects? How do different types of C2C interactions contribute to the customer journey/experience? |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Use real time experience rather than recall. Investigate types of social interactions, i.e. interactions with other travelers, cruise staff, and the local community. |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | • Investigate the influences of positive and dysfunctional customers and test them as separate constructs and the                                                                                                         |                                                                                              |
|                                                                             | (continued on next page)                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                              |
... their findings highlight the importance of ingroup behavior; the more similar respondents are to one another, the more influential they are in the group. This leads to participants shifting their emotions to reward and positive valuation. Goldenberg et al. (2020) support this and argue that the motivation to feel weak emotions lead participants to be more influenced by weaker emotions than their own, which highlights social influences’ impact on emotion. This leads us to our fifth proposition:

**Proposition 5. Emotions are not purely intrapersonal, since social interactions can influence an emotional experience (Table 5 and 7).**

### 1.5. Research contribution and managerial implications

Our study’s theoretical contribution is three-fold. First, we present the five propositions regarding customer emotional experience research. Second, this paper adds to the increasing body of research on emotions’ important role in CX. Third, this study identifies various future research opportunities for an effective stream of emotional experience research.

In terms of practical contributions, this research provides marketing

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### Table 7

| Existing assumptions and new propositions |
|------------------------------------------|
| **Proposition 1:** Positive and negative emotions can coexist during a CX. | Namkong and Jang (2010); Olsen et al. (2005); Penz, and Hogg (2011); Ottes et al. (1997); Pang et al. (2017); Ruth et al. (2002); Maguire and Geiger (2015); Schmalz and Orth (2012); Roster, and Richens (2009); Ramanathan and Williams (2007) |
| **Proposition 2:** Under specific consumption situations, positive emotions do not automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions may not necessarily generate negative consumption outcomes. | Penz, and Hogg (2011); Ottes et al. (1997); Chepejetich et al. (2019); Bilgihan et al. (2016); Maguire and Geiger (2015); Quoidbach et al. (2015); Roster and Richins (2009); Gaur et al. (2014) |
| **Proposition 3:** Under specific consumption situations, customers’ positive or negative emotions, triggered by experiences with a company employee, will not necessarily lead to perceive the company positively or negatively. | Bannal et al. (2001); Jones and Sub (2000); Mende and Bolton (2011); Jayawardhana et al. (2007); Mende and Bolton (2011) |
| **Proposition 4:** Customers can regulate their emotional experiences | Balaji et al. (2017); Han and Ryu (2012); Matilla et al. (2014); Perugini and Bagozzi (2001) |
| **Proposition 5:** Emotions are not purely intrapersonal, since social interactions can influence an emotional experience | Goldenberg et al. (2020); Heinonen et al. (2018); Huang and Hsu (2010); Jung et al. (2017); Miao et al. (2011); Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007); Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2013) |
practitioners with guidance to deal with the different aspects and targets of emotional customer experience. Our first proposition allows practitioners to interpret the role that mixed emotions play in consumer decision-making further. We suggest that managers should be aware that customers’ emotional state might be a mixture of contrary feelings and that all the conflicting emotions need to be evaluated. In a restaurant setting, customers might really like the food, but be unhappy with the ambiance and the physical evidence. For instance, asking customers to fill out a satisfaction survey is not enough, since they might indicate some level satisfaction, but never return, due to the high levels of negative emotion they also experienced. Consequently, their negative views should also be assessed.

The second proposition helps managers capture positive and negative emotions toward the offer as well as the subsequent consumption outcomes. Managers need to understand that positive emotions experienced with the product/service do not necessarily generate positive consumption outcomes, while negative emotions do not always engender negative consumption outcomes. For instance, a customer may be excited about a product just launched, but cannot buy it due to its price. Or customers may have a negative emotion toward a brand/product, but still recommend it to others. In addition, managers need to analyze which positive or negative emotions have the greater impact on consumption outcomes. Past research has shown contradictory results. Liljander and Strandvik (1997) reveal negative emotions’ effect is stronger with regard to services than that of positive emotions. On the other hand, Ladhari et al. (2008) and Liu and Jang (2009) show that positive emotions have a stronger impact than negative ones on customer satisfaction and behavioral intention in restaurant settings.

Our third proposition recommends that practitioners should assess customers’ emotions separately concerning their experiences with employees and with the company as a whole. For instance, a new guest at a hotel may be content with the service that the front desk employees provide, but unhappy with the room, and therefore has no intention of returning. Managers therefore need to assess and treat the two entities (company and employees) separately. Moreover, employees need to understand their role as a separate entity and be trained in this regard.

Our fourth proposition highlights that customers can regulate their emotional experience; it is therefore important that managers deliver a positive customer experience, and that they react and reassure customers when they experience a negative emotion. It is important that staff members are trained to gain a better understanding of customers’ emotional responses, and to highlight positive outcomes, and can reassure customers if needed. Managers should not just rely on data to predict consumer behavior; they need to understand individual customer drivers and provide qualitative one-to-one feedback.

The last proposition maintains that managers cannot ignore other customers and social interactions’ impact. Service providers need to manage not only customer emotions, but also how other customers can influence these emotions. It is important for managers to understand that they cannot always control and manage customers’ experience. They should, however, create a service design to control social interactions in advance, which should encourage positive outcomes. For example, a manager might stagger customers’ entrance times according to their surname or address, so that they do not have to queue. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Italian post offices assigned pensioners a specific time according to their surnames, which meant that they did not have to queue for too long. Another example could be for retailers to allocate a specific area - away from the sales desks - for exchanges/refunds to reduce these customers’ interaction with others. Staff members need to be trained to not only manage the relevant customer when a service failure threatens, but to also control those customers who have observed this failure and respond with a negative emotion (Table 8).

1.6. Future research directions

Although this paper proposes several propositions to advance our understanding of the role that emotions play in customer experience research, there are still many research gaps and challenges across many levels of emotions in the customer experience domain. In order to stimulate further reflection on emotions in customer experience, we conclude by outlining several research questions aligned with the five propositions.

In respect of Proposition 1, research should focus on the coexistence of positive and negative emotions during one consumption experience. A promising research avenue is one that better capture the blended emotions in specific consumption situations.

Proposition 2 argues that positive emotions do not necessarily generate positive consumption outcomes and negative emotions do not engender negative consumption ones. Future research should test these opposing relationships in different consumption settings. Another future research avenue could be to examine service recovery’s role in fluctuating emotions and in consumption outcomes (DeWitt et al., 2008; Chebat and Slusarczyk, 2005).

Proposition 3 concentrates on the mixture of emotions related to a company employee and the company itself. Positive or negative emotions due to an interaction with a firm’s employee will not shift to the entire company and vice versa. Future research should examine a company and its employees as separate constructs.

Proposition 4 highlights that customers can regulate their emotions if the benefit of doing this outweighs the experienced sacrifice/negative emotion. Emotions can change over time and during a purchase

| Propositions | Managerial implications |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| Proposition 1: Positive and negative emotions can coexist during a CX. | Managers need to simultaneously assess positive and negative consumption emotions. They should use tools that can capture emotional ambivalence, for example, surveys measuring opposing emotions. Managers need to evaluate positive and negative consumption emotions, as well as the opposing results they might bring about. They should use mechanisms that reveal the contrary relationships between emotions and consumption outcomes. Managers need to appraise the two entities (company and employees) separately and treat them as such. They require tools that can measure customers’ emotional states in respect to the two entities separately. Managers need to focus on one-to-one qualitative feedback from customers and not just use data interactions to predict consumer behavior. It is important that the individual drivers of customers’ emotional experience are actioned and that managers do not only focus on the outcome. Managers need to understand that they cannot always control customer experience, as they cannot manage the entire experience. However, they can design service experiences to control social interactions in advance. For example, a retailer could allocate a service desk, far from the sales desks, for exchanges/refunds. |
| Proposition 2: Under specific consumption situations, positive emotions do not automatically lead to positive consumption outcomes, and negative emotions may not necessarily generate negative consumption outcomes. | |
| Proposition 3: Under specific consumption situations, customers’ positive or negative emotions, triggered by experiences with a company employee, will not necessarily lead to perceive the company positively or negatively. | |
| Proposition 4: Customers can regulate their emotional experiences | |
| Proposition 5: Emotions are not purely intrapersonal, since social interactions can influence an emotional experience | |

Table 8

Propositions and managerial implications.
decision, which is why it is important to analyze customers’ experiences in real time. The recall of an experience has its limitations, and does not always capture all the emotions exhibited during a service episode; portable neural images devices could therefore be used to do so (Maguire and Geiger, 2015). Future research could use experiments that track an emotional experience in real time by using skin arousal experiments or eye-tracking software.

**Proposition 5** suggests that social interactions might influence an emotional experience. Consequently, it is important to measure other customers’ experiences and their effect on their emotion during a customer experience. Although there is a body of literature on customer-to-customer interaction, there is very little literature that investigates other customers’ emotional engagement and its effect on their experiences in the service industry (Huang and Hsu, 2010; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010). Future research could investigate all customers’ positive and negative emotions during a service experience to identify the social interactions’ influence, drivers, and outcomes. Challenging this proposition and investigating when social interactions do not influence a customer’s emotional experience could be very interesting, giving rise to the question whether/how could change the proposition’s context or its goal? Could the goal achieved outweigh the emotional experience that specific contexts might moderate or moderate? For example, do other customers’ experiences have a potential emotional effect on discounted items during a Black Friday sale or not? Does the use of isolation headphones on an airplane or when traveling on public transport reduce the noise and interaction of other customers, making the emotional experience more intrapersonal than interpersonal? (Table 6)

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