**The Negative Behavioural Consequences of Customer Personality Traits in Service Failure Settings: The Big Five Inventory in Relation to Negative Word-of-Mouth**

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**Abstract**

Negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) is one of the forms of post-purchase behaviour exhibited by customers in service failure situations. Although numerous studies have focused on a number of organizational-related factors (such as: customer dissatisfaction) as drivers to NWOM, studying customers’ dispositional traits as potential predictors of NWOM in service failure situations has been scarce in services marketing literature. This research aims at understanding how customers’ personalities reflected by the big five inventory are likely to affect their engagement in NWOM, when experiencing disappointing services. The proposed conceptual framework was initially developed based on a number of research propositions which were derived from prior literature in organizational behaviour, and a few speculations in services marketing studies. It is to be tested by the researcher to validate the hypothesized associations between customer personality traits and NWOM. The study contributes to theory by suggesting a direct relation between customer personality traits and negative post-purchase behaviours. It also suggests that service providers should strongly account for customer various dispositional traits and effectively handle their complaints when experiencing service failure, in order to reduce their disconfirmation and engagement in NWOM.

***Keywords*:** *NWOM, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience.*

***Track*:** *Consumer Behaviour*

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**1. Introduction**

 Customer post-purchase behaviour has been the focus of numerous marketing scholars (e.g. Hernandez & Fugate, 2004; Nyer, 2000). It has been well established in services marketing literature that service failure arises when customers’ expectations of value propositions of a service exceeds what they actually receive. Negative disconfirmation is known to be one of the outcomes of service failure. This outcome is likely to cause customers to engage in other kinds of negative behaviour, such as exit (switching behaviour), voice, and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) (Hsieh, 2014). Complaints made by customers present an opportunity for service providers to correct the problems facing customers. These situations (known as service recovery situations) influence customers to engage in favourable behaviours (Blodgett, et al., 1997). If handling complaints is found to be successful, customer satisfaction after service recovery can help improve customer retention rate, increase company profitability, and reduce NWOM (Tax, et al., 1998). It is worth noting that service recovery situations help service providers build long-term relationships with their customers. Accordingly, there exists a strong link between customer satisfaction, service failure, service recovery, and word-of-mouth (Kambiz & Ronak, 2010).

 Prior literature in service recovery contexts has examined the effect of customer personality traits such as self-efficacy, risk-taking propensity, and perceived control on their attitude to submit a complaint (Bodey & Grace, 2007). While the literature on customer post-purchase behaviour (e.g. loyalty, trust, word-of-mouth, feedback and suggestions) is extant, it is defragmented for a number of reasons. First of all, prior studies have been focusing on the relation between customer personality traits and its outcomes in service recovery settings, with limited reference to the link between personality and post-purchase behaviour in service failure situations (Shoham, et al., 2012). Secondly, the majority of studies that focused on the behavioural consequences of the big five inventory as an indicator of personality traits were in the organizational behaviour context (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Thirdly, studies on the antecedents of NWOM have considered a number of firm-related factors, such as perceived value (e.g. Keiningham, et al., 2007), justice perceptions (e.g. Lin, et al., 2011), relationship quality (e.g. Dagger, 2011), and customer dissatisfaction (e.g. Goldenberg, et al., 2007), thus ignoring customer individual personalities. Accordingly, the primary aim of this research is to identify the degree to which customer personality traits reflected by the big five inventory are likely to influence their post-purchase behaviour (specifically NWOM) in service failure settings.

**2. Literature Review and Research Propositions**

 NWOM can be defined as *“all negatively valenced, informal communication between private parties about goods and services and the evaluation thereof”* (Wetzer, et al., 2007). Prior literature on NWOM has proposed a number of potential drivers, such as emotions, perceived justice, and revenge (Wetzer, et al., 2007).

 Different people usually show different personalities. In psychology, personality traits are numerous, and include locus of control, need for achievement, proactivity, and positive and negative affectivity to name a few. Personality traits shape individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Devaraj, et al., 2008). Consequently, personality traits can strongly affect customer post-purchase behaviours, and specifically NWOM in service failure situations. Personality traits, however, can be comprehensively generalized into five basic dimensions, collectively known as the Five-Factor Model of personality (the big five dimensions). These dimensions include extraversion, emotional stability (neuroticism), agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. A brief description to each of these five traits follows.

 *Extraversion* refers to the degree to which individuals are outgoing and sociable. Those who have a high degree of extraversion tend to be affectionate and talkative (Schultz & Schultz, 1994). *Emotional Stability (Neuroticism)* is the degree to which individuals can control their emotions. Individuals with high emotional stability (low neuroticism) tend to be self-confident and stable. Low emotional stability individuals tend to be anxious, angry, depressed, worried, insecure, and emotional. *Agreeableness* refers to the extent to which a person can be friendly, helpful and approachable regarding feelings and thoughts. More agreeable people are sympathetic, cooperative, forgiving, trusting, and considerate. *Conscientiousness* is the degree to which an individual is motivated and achievement-oriented. High conscientious people are responsible, organized, and ambitious (Costa & McCrae, 1985). *Openness to Experience* refers to the extent to which individuals enjoy flexibility, innovativeness, and creativity. People who are high on openness to experience are usually willing to try new and different things.

 In organizational behaviour literature, studies on personality traits and their consequences have been well established (e.g. Chiaburu, et al., 2011; Organ & Ryan, 1995). For instance, personality traits were found to be significantly affecting OCB (Chiaburu, et al., 2011; Organ & Ryan 1995), job satisfaction (Judge, et al., 2002), employee dysfunctional behaviour (Salgado, 2002), and job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

In services marketing, extrovert personalities are usually influenced by negative attitudes (Lucas & Baird, 2004). Previous studies have speculated that complainers are usually more extrovert in nature than non-complainers (Bodey & Grace, 2006). Accordingly, when they feel angry because of service failure, extroverts tend to engage in NWOM immediately.

**P1: In service failure situations, the higher the extraversion of individuals, the more likely they are to engage in NWOM.**

Similar to extraversion, neuroticism implies attraction towards negative feelings and emotions. Thus, when people who are high on neuroticism experience a service failure, it is more likely that the negative feelings they have will lead them to engage in NWOM, warning others from dealing with the same service provider.

**P2: In service failure situations, the higher the neuroticism of individuals, the more likely they are to engage in NWOM.**

Conscientious personalities have a high degree of responsibility. They are internally motivated to engage in actions that improve overall performance (Devaraj, et al., 2008; Krishnan, et al., 2010), which in turn will lead them to step in to benefit other individuals by providing them with negative feedback in service failure contexts.

**P3: In service failure situations, the higher the conscientiousness of individuals, the more likely they are to engage in NWOM.**

Unlike the previous dimensions of customer personality traits, people who are high on agreeableness are considerate, enjoy helping, and cooperate with others (Devaraj, et al., 2008). They are usually more tolerant, less rude, and less aggressive. Thus when they experience service failure, their tolerance towards service failure will cause them not to engage in NWOM.

**P4: In service failure situations, the higher the agreeableness of individuals, the less likely they are to engage in NWOM.**

People who are highly open to experience, enjoy sharing and exchanging information with others (Matzler, et al. 2008). Such attitude of openness means they can share also their negative experiences. Consequently, in service failure settings, people who are high on openness to experience tend to engage in NWOM.

**P5: In service failure situations, the higher the openness to experience of individuals, the more likely they are to engage in NWOM.**

**3. Potential Contributions**

 NWOM is argued to influence a business reputation more strongly than positive word-of-mouth, regardless of whether NWOM arises because of customers’ personality traits or as a way of response to their negative disconfirmation (Bone, 1995). This study is expected to contribute to literature in several ways. First, prior studies have been focusing on the link between NWOM and its organizational-related antecedents. This study suggests the incorporation of the big five factor model personality traits as potential predictors of NWOM in service failure situations. Studies of personality traits and their consequences have been extant in organizational behaviour literature. Scant empirical research was conducted in customer contexts. The study’s proposed conceptual framework suggests that customer personality traits represented by the big five inventory are likely to trigger post-purchase behaviour, especially NWOM when services fall short of customer expectations. Companies are strongly advised to detect customers whose personalities strongly affect their tendency to engage in NWOM as a consequence to service failure, train their employees to witness early indicators of customers’ disconfirmation, and handle their complaints effectively.

**4. Limitations and Future Research Frontiers**

Although the research provided some insights, a number of research limitations need to be addressed. The proposed conceptual framework needs to be empirically tested in different service contexts through the adoption of representative samples in order to indicate the validity of the suggested research propositions and generalize the results to different contexts.

 This study has exclusively focused on the effect of dispositional traits on one type of post-purchase behaviour in service failure situations (i.e. NWOM). Future research needs to address this gap by incorporating other forms of post-purchase behaviour in the study’s conceptual framework research, such as switching behaviour and voice, in order to make a reasonable comparison between each one of these behaviours. Similarly, future researchers are urged to include different personality traits such as self-efficacy, locus of control, and risk propensity as potential predictors of NWOM.

 The moderation effect of some variables (including other personality traits) might be considered by future research. Also, further studies are encouraged investigate the behavioural consequences of NWOM, and their effect on organizational performance.

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