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**EFFICIENCY OF ANSWERS  
FOR CUSTOMERS' COMPLAINTS  
– APPLICATION IN A SAMPLE  
OF FRENCH COMPANIES**

## Introduction

Customer complaint management is becoming a critical key success factor in today's business environment. The claims are the revealing one of a dysfunction of the company. Even if, obviously, these dysfunctions must be to avoid, the linked complaints constitute there a real opportunity for the companies to improve the product, service and process. It is the reason why this is the subject of abundant literature about twenty years.

The first step is to define what is meant by the complaint. Complaint is an unsatisfied expectation. Customer complaints are an indication that the service or product does not meet the customers' expectations. It can be defined as a protest, the expression of dissatisfaction from a customer towards a brand or product/service of this brand (Singh, Wilkes, 1996). The client expects of its claim a gain: Either exchange the product or a refund, apologies or even a change in business practice of the brand (for example, when it is ethical considerations who are in game).

The claim is clearly an expression of negative feedback from the customer (Bell, Mengüç, Stefani, 2004). But, as outlined in Van Oest and Knox (2011), complaints are "customer-initiated interactions that are driven by dissatisfaction, but they provide the firm with an opportunity to recover. While most dissatisfied customers do not complain and these customers may be even less likely to purchase again in the future, complaints contain useful information on customer defection beyond that already provided in the customer's purchasing history". Incorporating complaints for the CRM has the potential not only to improve predictions, but this approach may also yield new insights about both customer purchasing and drop-out. Finally, the speech of the customer directly expressed is ultimately a favor, a gift, done for the company and reflects a real commitment of the consumer to the brand\*. Indeed, the client could have:

1. Decreased his consumption, or worse, definitely stop buying the product or service.

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\* Reasons for not complaining are described for example by Snellman & Vihtkari (2003). First, the customers does not complain because they think complaining is ineffective. Second, claim filing consumes too much time. Thirdly, the customer describes the situation as so hopeless that complaining would not have helped. Other reasons quoted by the authors for not complaining included categories as: the company needs to be aware of the problem; the customer does not know where and how to complain; the problem is solved during or just after the incident.

2. Generated a negative word-of-mouth from friends and family spreading thus his discontent. This type of reaction spreads over some hundred individuals. The risk associated to this behavior is a loss of several customers. There exists also the possibility to inform and mobilize a consumer association. The difficulty is the cost of remedy to retain a whole of consumers.
3. Generated a negative buzz on Internet by mobilizing social networks and reaching thus thousands of people.

This speech of the dissatisfied customer usually follows a transaction that has proved to be unsatisfactory. However, there is frequently protests consumers without them have purchased the product (Huber et al., 2010). These people were shocked by the advertising messages, the supply policy of the company, the lack of social and environmental responsibility.

Nevertheless, researchers recognize that all complaints haven't originated from dissatisfaction (Reynolds, Harris, 2005; Kowalski, 1996). In reality, some complaint episodes occur without experiencing service failure or dissatisfaction and such complaints are essentially illegitimate and fraudulent in nature (Reynolds, Harris, 2005). Consumer unethical behaviors have been discussed in the literature using various forms. In a retail setting, "deshopping" or "fraudulent return" refers to the actions of customers who intentionally prepare the purchase of goods in the knowledge that they will use the products, and then fraudulently complain and return them at a later date, often taking advantage of a stores' return policy (Harris, 2008; Rosenbaum et al., 2011). This is particularly the reason why many studies suggesting methods for the classification of complaints have been published (Galitsky et al., 2009). For example, the study of Coussement and Van den Poel (2008) introduces a methodology to improve complaint-handling strategies through an automatic email-classification system that distinguishes complaints from non-complaints. The classification system combines traditional text information with new information about the linguistic style of an email.

However regardless of relevance or reality of the complaint, the client's response to treatment of his claim is very important (Larivet, Brouard, 2007). Indeed, a dissatisfied customer of its complaint may re-enter a process of "speech" and then again to take the risk of disseminating a bad image to the business. As an example, a customer of Marks & Spencer in England who complained to pay extra for her bra large size, without a satisfactory response to the consumer service of the brand, decided to create a group on the Facebook social network.

After several weeks of consequent negative buzz, the company was forced to change the price and practice the same price regardless of the size. Examples of this type, generating word-of-mouth more or less extensive, are very numerous (Williams, Buttle, 2011). So, whereas word-of-mouth communication initially referred to the idea of person-to-person conversation between consumers about a product, the worldwide spread of the Internet brought up a less personal but more ubiquitous form of word-of-mouth communication, the so-called online word-of-mouth communication (Bambauer-Sachse, Mangold, 2011). Is one more reason to be effective in the treatment of the claim.

Many studies show the positive impact of claims. For example, the expression of complaints would be a factor:

1. To improve customer satisfaction, appreciation of the product or the service and purchase intent, allowing the evacuation of dissatisfaction (Dewitt, Brady, 2003; Snellman, Vihtkari, 2003). For example, Nyer (2000) finds that consumers who were encouraged to complain reported greater increases in satisfaction and product evaluation compared to consumers who were not explicitly asked to complain. The changes in satisfaction and product evaluations were found to be related to the complaining intensity.
2. To increase and positive influence on loyalty (Homburg, Fürst, 2005). For example, Andreassen (1999) shows that satisfaction with complaint resolution has a positive impact on customer loyalty. Complaint resolution is thus an important element of the company's customer retention strategy. Besides, negative affect caused by the initial service failure has a negative impact on satisfaction with complaint resolution and customer loyalty.
3. To improve the retention rate. Ang and Buttle (2006) using a quantitative survey of 170 companies in Australia, found that excellence at customer retention is positively and significantly associated with the presence of documented complaints-handling processes.
4. To limit of word-of-mouth negative (Blodgett, Anderson, 2000). Conducting a meta-analysis, Gelbrich and Roschk (2011) test and confirm the following path model: organizational responses (compensation, favorable employee behavior, and organizational procedures) → justice perceptions (distributive, interactional, and procedural justice) → post-complaint satisfaction (transaction-specific and cumulative satisfaction) → customer behavioral intentions (loyalty and positive word-of-mouth).

Thus, all these studies underline the need and interest to encourage consumers dissatisfied to file a claim. So the company has the dual opportunity to retain future earnings associated with customer retention and improve the quality of its services. However, this reasoning assumes that the organization offers an efficient complaints management process. Several research underline how an organization's complaint management affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. For example, in delineating an organization's complaint management, Homburg and Fürst (2005) draw a distinction between two fundamental approaches, the mechanistic approach and the organic approach. The mechanistic approach gives guidelines for specific activities so the task is performed each time the same way. In the organic approach, organizations can influence behavior by focusing on training and motivating employees and by providing them with shared values and norms. Their findings indicate that though both the mechanistic and the organic approach significantly influence complaining customers' assessments, the mechanistic approach has a stronger total impact.

On this mechanistic basis, Waardenburg (2005) lists seven points of attention for handling complaints:

- 1) listen,
- 2) show understanding,
- 3) gather information,
- 4) summarise,
- 5) gather information for a resolution,
- 6) show your resolution,
- 7) check for customer satisfaction.

Some other authors like Johnston (2001) identified several factors in order to define by a good complaint management process:

1. Having clear procedures, providing a speedy response.
2. The reliability (consistency) of response.
3. Having a single point of contact for complainants.
4. Ease of access to the complaints process.
5. Ease of use of the process.
6. Keeping the complainant informed.
7. Staff understand the complaint processes.
8. Complaints are taken seriously.
9. Employees are empowered to deal with the situation.
10. Having follow up procedures to check with customers after resolution.
11. Using the data to engineer out the problems.
12. Using measures based on cause reduction rather than complaint volume reduction.

To summarize, first claims can be analyzed as a customers' gift for companies due to the information on products, services or brand perception. Second, it is necessary to develop within the companies, a service dedicated to the claim management. According to its more or less big efficiency, consumer initially upset will be re-satisfy.

The investigation we propose to carry now is related to the perceived effectiveness of customer service in its process answer the dissatisfaction of the consumer who comes to claim. We limit our investigation to the first interaction between the customer service and the claiming customer.

## **1. Research method**

First we present our data collection method and explain all our analytical approach. The study was conducted with the support of the French Association for Management of Customer Relations (AMARC). Thus, the base population of the study is the companies' member of the association, about 240 firms in 2010 (for more details see [www.amarc.asso.fr](http://www.amarc.asso.fr)). These are mostly companies of significant size: about 75% of CAC 40 companies are adhering to the AMARC. All economic activities sectors are represented at the AMARC' association. Only the companies in business to consumers with a centralized and dedicated customer service support of the claims are the object of analysis in the present study, eliminating by the way firms operating in business to business framework and firms who treat claim by other services like quality... Such a choice offers a higher degree of internal validity due to the restriction of extraneous differences caused by heterogeneity among organizations.

A survey approach was chosen to examine naturally occurring responses within customers who had recently experienced a service or product failure and recovery encounter in firms adhering to AMARC. Our research design allowed a large variety of sector activities to be represented. This aspect of the research design ensures the external validity across organizations in distinct industries. Data were collected from a sample of 148 undergraduate business students enrolled in a research method course. The nature of the research model and the detailed research topic was neither mentioned nor alluded to. The research was presented as a scientific study of the consumer satisfaction in a general view.

In a first stage, students were asked for one 6 weeks period to report a number of dissatisfactions they have experienced as consumers in the meantime and which are likely to lead them to a complaint behavior. These dissatisfactions were likely to relate to diverse aspects of the offer from the companies. Once they have identified such dissatisfactions, they were instructed to fill out a multi-item scale designed to assess their evaluation of the failure severity. At the end of the period, students were asked to name the incriminated companies. Well, we had a first version of the sample firms to test. With regard to failures nature, respondents mentioned the following types of dissatisfactions:

- employees' difficulty in fixing problems and attending to consumers (34.3%),
- lack of product quality (29.2%),
- delays or service breakdowns (15.7%),
- product information and website design inadequacies (12.2%),
- environmental or consumer health insufficient policy (5.8%),
- other causes (2.8%).

The sectors under investigation included: financial services (17.4%), convenience goods (16.5%), telephone/Internet (14.9%), retail (11.6%), transports (10.5%), housing (10.2%), health products and services (6.9%), automotive (4.1%), and others (8%).

For each firm in the first sample defined by the students, independent observers were identified the number of complaint channels open. Potentially, three channels of complaint were investigated: either the mail or the phone or the online channel. For very few companies, it was very difficult to find channels for the claim filing so they were eliminated. For the remaining firms, i.e. 135, we had the following distribution:

- 46 have only one channel for claim filing (34% of the sample): 14 firms can be contacted only by phone, 24 only by email and 8 only by postal letter sent to the consumers service,
- 43 have two channels open (32% of the sample): 14 firms can be contacted both by phone or postal letter, 21 firms by phone or online channel, and only 8 firms by online channel and postal letter,
- 46 have the three channels open (34% of the sample).

So at the end of the first step, we have a large number of dissatisfactions identified whose nature and the level are different and various accessibility of the customer services the companies concerned for a claim filing. Thus, we assigned randomly a claim linked to a specific dissatisfaction at a channel filing (telephone, letter or online channel).

In a second stage, we tested each firm of the sample on his open claim channels at least three times. Given the number of open channels of complaint and their distribution, it's 810 interactions with customer service that should been made. Students were asked to submit a complaint against companies which have dissatisfied them and were constrained as well to respect the customer service's channel that has been previously specified for each company. Immediately after performing their first interaction with the customer service, they were instructed to fill out a series of scales designed to assess their perceptions of the service recovery. This immediate report has the advantage of reducing the biases from memory lapses common in self-reports of service failures (Smith et al., 1999).

As the first interaction with customer service, we refer to:

- the first phone conversation when considering phone channel,
- the reception of the first electronic response from the customer service when considering online channel; in this latter case, we took exception of automatic messages confirming only the complaint reception,
- the reception of the first answer at the claim letter.

In the absence of response from the customer service after:

- three separate calls over two minutes repeated twice times during the same week but at different times for the phone channel,
  - a period of fifteen days without answer for the online channel,
  - a period of three weeks for the letter channel,
- the complaint has been described as “unanswered”.

Immediately after receiving the reply to the complaint, students have completed a survey consisting of psychometric scales which have already been published in the academic literature.

So, the one hundred forty-eight students completed the survey: 64 males (43%) and 84 females (57%). They were between 21 and 29 years old. They submitted an average of 4.97 complaints per student resulting in 736 submitted complaints. So, only 90.6% of the theoretical interactions have been realized by the students. Due to difficulties with the scheduling of students' courses, some phone calls which have been planned at the end of their semester could not be performed, resulting in a lower number of interactions for the phone channel compared to the postal and electronic one. More precisely, 215 telephone calls were passed (i.e. 75.5% of theoretically calls expected), 297 e-mail were sent (i.e. 100% of theoretically e-mail expected) and 224 letters were mailed (i.e. 98.2% of theoretically letters expected).

## **2. Main results**

Two sets of results will be presented successively. The first is related to the response rate of consumer services requested through the mystery survey. The second focuses on predictors of claimant consumer satisfaction.

### **2.1. Results on the response rates and accessibility to the consumer service**

So, we carried out 736 mystery survey. The overall response rate, all channels claims combined, is 66%. It is 91% for the phone but only 61% for e-mail and 54% for the letters. On channels online, many claims filing have been followed that a message acknowledging receipt, without more news in the days following. For our investigation, this is considered as a no-answer. If we integrate these acknowledgements of receipt to calculate the response rate, we would obtain a 98% rate.

Note that the channel response used by the customer service is not necessarily the same as that used for the claim filing (except phone). For mail and online channels, the response rate on the channel of claim broadcast is respectively 74% and 94%. When the customer gives his telephone number in the letter, e-mail or in electronic forms for filing online, he appreciates greatly that the customer service answer him directly by a phone call. But in some cases, while the client had not given his telephone number, the consumer service takes the initiative to contact by telephone the customer after a research of its number. Our results show that this scenario generates a negative assessment from the customer who analyses the situation as intrusive.

At this low response rate combines the feeling among the investigators of a fairly substantial problem of access to the customer service business. For example, it was found:

- some call centers are unavailable (more than 5 minutes waiting) several consecutive days,
- the disruption to the website making it impossible to record the claim,
- in the electronic filing form of the claim, an insufficient number of lines,
- the default of claim acknowledgment when filing is electronic, so that claimants are not certain of having filed their complaint in due form.

The response rates differ substantially depending on the nature of the claim. It amounts to 88% for issues of environmental and social policy of the company (but few interactions were made on the subject) against only 48% for product information and website design inadequacies.

Many surveys show that the preference for the consumer in terms of channels will contact the phone followed by Internet (online form) and email and finally the post. The phone is preferred for the immediate response, email and website to save time. The postal letter provides a guarantee for its “traceability”. Our findings confirm this and it should be noted that companies accessible only through the channel “mail” does not make it easy the task for customers who want to file a claim. Indeed, compared to two other channels, the act of writing a letter is seen as an additional constraint and degrades clearly the evaluation of the accessibility of customer service.

For summarize, this response rate is relatively low. However, it is not necessarily surprising. Many studies show a growing commitment of the top management company with respect to the processing of claims. However, the last mapping of customer services of firms member of AMARC (2011) indicates that the executive committee of one company on three regularly addresses the subject of customer relationship (the executive committee of one company on ten systematically). Even today, customer service is widely seen as a cost center rather than a profit center, so the human and financial resources allocated to customer service for the management of complaints seems insufficient in some cases.

## **2.2. Results on the reasons for the satisfaction of a customer**

Of the 736 interactions conducted with customer services, we had a response rate of sixty six per cent. So, 486 interactions were evaluated and used to determine the variables explaining the performance of these customer services. From the questionnaires composed of psychometric scales, statistical treatments have led to the emergence of four variables statistically significant predicting satisfaction of a customer initially upset. Thus, overall satisfaction about the processing of the claim is due to ninety-six percent by the following variables:

- 1) empathy,
- 2) efforts of customer advisor perceived by the customer,
- 3) procedural performance,
- 4) claim filing ease.

The most explanatory variable is empathy: it plays both a direct and indirect impacts. Empathy is defined as the mechanism by which an individual can “understand” the feelings and emotions of another individual or, in a broader sense, his emotional mental states as beliefs. As part of an inter-relationship between a customer advisor and the person claiming, the empathy must be clearly distinguished from sympathy, compassion and emotional contagion by the fact that the empathic response to the client’s emotional states occurs even if there is no the same emotional feeling or, even, an emotion whatsoever (Escalas, Stern, 2003).

Thus, in this context, the empathetic relationship is the advisor’ ability to share the emotion with the claimant without confusing him. It’s about understanding the emotional states and in some cases, the mental states (called cognitive empathy).

Our results indicate very clearly that the positive perception of empathy occurs when the advisor in charge to consider the claim listens to the feelings and emotions of customers, understands and is affected by the problem. Three factors explain about forty percent of perceived empathy. They are:

- process reformulation of the incident by advisor,
- the research by the advisor the information necessary to understand the incident; this search is the first step for create a valorization feeling in the complainant person,
- the avoidance of intrusive questioning that might call into question the seriousness of the claim.

Empathy has a direct role in the satisfaction but also an indirect role. Indeed, it positively influences the second predictor of satisfaction: The efforts of the advisor perceived by the customer to offer an explanation and the beginning of the solution process to the consumer dispute in question. This second explanatory variable corresponds to the claiming consumer perception of time spent to explain in depth the origin of the dissatisfaction or dispute. How the advisor registers the claim, specifies how it will be treated, shows how the claim will be sent to the service causing the problem, specifies the time periods considered for the different stages of the resolution ahead... plays a key role in customer re-satisfaction.

The third variable is the procedural performance. These are all procedures and methods for resolution of customer dissatisfaction. The professionalism of the advisor in the implementation of the procedure is part of this variable. The dead-

lines for receipt of the response are also included in this variable. This is the deadline for receipt of mail or e-mail and time spent on the phone to get an answer (other than simple acknowledgment of the claim). These times have a significantly negatively impact when they exceed 24 hours for an e-mail, five days for a letter and if the advisor is not able to provide solution, even partial, from the first phone call.

The fourth explanatory variable is the claim filing ease. More difficult it is to file a claim and it will be difficult to re-satisfy customer. This variable therefore punishes waiting times on the phone that requires call back, the time of writing the letter, electronic forms somewhat friendly, downtime and technical malfunctions of devices for claim filing.

The diagram below summarizes the main determined relationships between satisfaction that induces a positive engagement of consumers with respect to the company (repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth...) and the different explanatory variables.

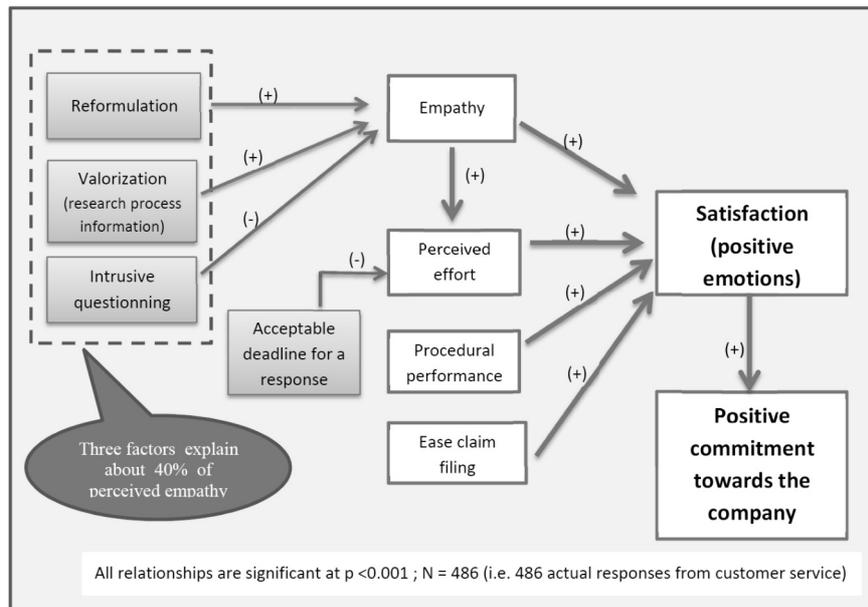


Figure 1. Explanatory model of satisfaction customer after the claim filing

The statistical analysis shows that in some situations, some factors in satisfaction may play a decisive role in the evaluation of the advisor performance. In particular, we determine the most explanatory variable of satisfaction according to the type of customer and the claim channel selected:

1. The first situation is where there have been difficulties for the client to access the consumer service. Here, the unhappy customer expects the customer service a compensation for the difficulties of access encountered. Thus, the first key factor for success is the empathetic attitude of advisor.
2. The second situation is when the client is “competent”, that is to say that a good command of the product and its competitive environment, he uses easily the claim filing channel, he has a positive attitude about the brand and the product or the service that he knows well. Here, procedural performance becomes the first key factor of success.
3. The third situation is that the unhappy customer is found in a really discomfort situation. He expects the consumer service to adapt to his situation at the level of own discomfort he feels. He masters wrong the product and its competitive environment. The incident he suffered has greatly disturbed his relationship with the brand. In this case, the first key factor of success is the visible efforts undertaken by the consumer service: time for a thorough explanation, length, number and aesthetic response, confirmation of the terms of discussion with the advisor.

It should also be noted that the explanatory variables play a different role depending on the channel chosen by the customer. For the phone channel, this is the empathy that is the first key success factor. Then, for letter channel, it is the efforts of customer service perceived by the customer and, finally, for the online channels the procedural performance plays the most important role.

### **3. Managerial implications**

The objective assigned to the customer service in the claim management is to ensure that the client initially dissatisfied does not generate a negative buzz and reaffirms his commitment to the brand and the product. So, it is necessary to understand the determinants of relational performance between the customer service and the consumer. The diagram below summarizes the relational performance of the customer service.

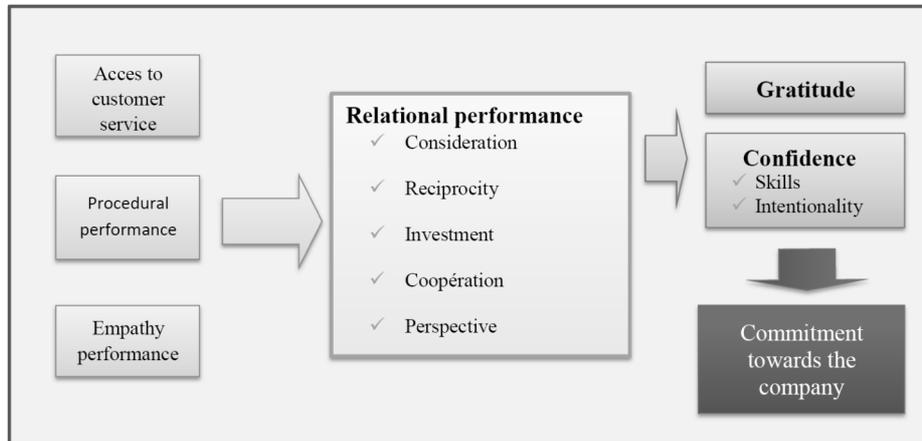


Figure 2. Relational performance of the customer service

Our study identifies five characteristics associated with the relational performance namely: consideration, reciprocity, emotional investment, cooperation and the prospect of solving the problem. If these five characteristics are respected, initially of gratitude, and after, confidence can emerge at the customer. This relational performance depends significantly itself on three variables: ease of access to customer service, procedural performance and empathic performance. But, our results indicate very clearly that the first variable to control for satisfy a customer initially unhappy is the empathic performance. Specifically, three attitudes are to be avoided by the advisor if he wants to empathize with the claimant.

First, the adviser must avoid calling into question the claiming customer status. Our investigation indicates that this negative reconsideration goes mainly through discourse but also by deeds. These include situations where there is technically impossible to file the claim, but also when one finds advertising messages on vocal responders while the communication is not free. In addition, certain cases arose during the investigation show the impossibility of leaving a message when the claim is not within predefined categories of the collection of complaints. This induces a feeling of frustration among consumers. This reconsideration of customer claiming status is more asserted that the claim is made by a third person (for example, when a person telephones for her grandmother who is then the true claiming customer) or when it is irregular client. A fairly common example found in our investigation, is that at the beginning of the phone conversation, the call center agent requires the customer gives various information about its identity and its status of client (account

number, loyalty card number...), without first taking time to listen the reasons for the claim. This practice leads to the risk that the claimant makes negative judgments on the company concerned in terms of competence and ethics as much as on the product or service accused.

Second, the advisor should avoid calling into question the validity of the claim. This is meant in speeches by irony, or more generally, by the reconsideration of the advanced arguments or, even more serious, word given. In any case, during the first interaction, the advisor must consider that the customer is mistaken. In our investigation, some claiming customers were clearly seen that were not taken seriously. In such a situation, the customer loses face and finds himself put in a situation of incompetent consumer. For example, during a phone call about a complaint linked to a lack of product information, the call center agent responds ironically: "In fact, you want to make us change the packaging". In fact, through the expression of his dissatisfaction, the customer wanted make just an observation that could be beneficial to the company. This reflects the fact that some companies, although having a customer service, did not develop yet in their culture the idea of using the client as information source and for the continuous improvement of product quality and services.

Third, the investigation reveals situations where there is a lack of interest for the claim and a real lack of listening on the part of advisers. This lack of listening is then interpreted by the customer as contempt (a lack of consideration) or as a lack of knowledge of products and/or services offered by the company. It can also be an ignorance of the litigation treatment process by the advisor so that the customer then considers the advisor as a mere recorder of his discontent. In fact, what is expected by the customer is always to put in perspective the problem considered: What can be the causes, how it will repair the injury.

Our investigation shows that the advisor should adopt an empathic attitude that takes different forms depending on the receive channel of the claim and the selected channel for respond. With regard to the telephone channel, empathic posture requires:

- a warm voice, a friendly tone,
- an expression of sympathy and regrets for all inconveniences suffered,
- the valorization of the claiming person and the cogency of his claim; the advisor must reassure the customer,
- the expression of thanks for taking the time to file the claim and for informing the company of a malfunction,
- a reciprocity personalization.

When the mail channel is used, our survey indicates that, too often, the answers provided by customer service are too short and direct. In some cases, however relatively rare (about 3% of responses by email), we noted the absence of a salutation. With online channels and unlike the telephone channel, it is difficult for the customer to perceive if the adviser has been affected by the claim. It is therefore absolutely necessary to write expressions of compassion and regrets. Also, specify the coordinates of the contact person is indispensable (in approximately 8% of mail received it was not the case). In the end, what emerges from our work is that there is nothing better than e-mail that mimics a letter! Moreover, the most popular and efficient solution is an e-mail with a letter attached.

Lastly, it is with the letter channel that we get the best result for satisfaction and a commitment again positive for the brand and the product. This letter must, first, express empathy, compassion and regrets, and second, specify the source of the malfunction and then express the terms of management and resolution of the claim. Regardless of the channel that was used for the claim filing, an answer by letter that meets the above conditions systematically makes it possible to obtain a greater satisfaction of the customer.

## **Conclusion**

In a fiercely competitive business world, the customer has been recognized as a major driving force for a company's continuous success. As a result, customer relationship management is regarded as an essential contemporary management tool these days. Among the various types of information, customer complaints are one of the most significant for capturing and understanding customer requirements and responding to them promptly. So, service or product failures do not need to result in permanent negative consequences as long as effective recovery activities are undertaken. Our investigation based on 135 mystery enquiry towards customers' services of large French companies shows that efforts are still needed. On one hand, it is still technically difficult to file a claim and, on the other hand, the response rate to dissatisfaction is relatively low. On 736 claims, we evaluated 486 first responses made by the customer services. It appears that the first expectation expressed by the customer is that the counselor does not call into question the claim validity and show empathy. Empathy is the most explanatory variable of satisfaction of a customer initially upset. When, the consumer perceives moreover that the advisor made efforts to explain and put into perspective the problem, then the probability of restoring confidence and generate a positive commitment towards the brand will be strong. Finally, the procedure for resolution of consumer dispute plays a relatively smaller.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations and future research is needed to deal with the issues. First, it uses a cross-sectional survey method of data collection which focuses on the first interaction with the customer service, the results neglect possible complementary actions on companies' behalf. Secondly, the fact that participants were asked to submit a complaint may be another limitation of the study even if their claims were duly motivated by a dissatisfaction which actually emerged of the course of their everyday lives. Constrained complainers might be in different emotional states from spontaneous users. Replications of the study with both spontaneous and constrained complainers would help in identifying the boundary conditions for generalization of the model. Finally, students may have somewhat different attribute importance weights than other customer segment to evaluate service recovery, but this feature does not make them less appropriate for this study than any other customer group. However, the method does raise concern about the generalizability of findings from this given segment.

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