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## Customer Complaint Journey Mapping: A Qualitative Approach

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## Customer Complaint Journey Mapping: A Qualitative Approach

### Abstract

- **Purpose:** This paper extends customer complaint behaviour (CCB) knowledge by introducing a visual technique called customer complaint journey mapping as a means of capturing and understanding multi-faceted service failures involving multiple actors.
- **Design/methodology/approach:** Research participants were trained to record contemporaneous accounts of future dissatisfactory dining experiences. Minimising issues of memory recall whilst faithfully capturing complainants' raw emotions. These recordings formed the basis for follow up interviews, based on the critical incident technique.
- **Findings:** The central finding of this paper was how other actors outside of the traditional service dyad played a dynamic role in co-creating a complainants' emotions and subsequent behaviours.
- **Practical implications:** The resulting customer complaint maps give deep insights into the complex social dynamics involved in CCB, providing a powerful tool for both researchers and staff responsible for recovery strategies.
- **Originality/value:** The mapping framework provides an innovative means of capturing the actual complaint experiences of customers and the role of other actors, utilising a multi-method approach designed to address various limitations of existing CCB research.

**Keywords:** Customer Complaint Behaviour; Customer Journey Mapping; Service Failures.

**Article Classification:** Research Paper

**Word Count:** 7,779 words

## Introduction

This research argues that service failures represent a critical “moment of truth” (Kiil et al., 2018, p. 2041) in a company-customer relationship. A deeper understanding of such moments demands exploration outside of the traditional service dyad to examine “all possible responses to perceived dissatisfaction around a purchase episode” (Crie, 2003, p. 62) which includes appreciating other social actors.

Traditionally, CCB research has focused on a taxonomy of responses to dissatisfaction and the identification of the antecedents of complaint behaviours (e.g. Singh, 1988; Boote, 1998; Crie, 2003), recognizing that “consumers’ complaints arise from their dissatisfaction as a response to perceived negative feelings” (Arslan et al., 2018, p.1981). This paper contends that historically there has been an over-emphasis on the use of quantitative approaches, which has hampered our ability to explore the nuanced “social dynamics” (Kassai et al., 2018, p. 1850) that may underpin customer complaint behaviour. Rather than a focus on real complaint behaviours and their dynamics, too often the emphasis is on overly simplified hypothetical scenarios (e.g. Thøgersen et al., 2009). Such work results in exploring emasculated theoretical behavioural intentions devoid of real emotion engagement and other actors. However as Cerri et al. (2019, p. 897) argue: “Social desirability could lead consumers to misreport their preferences”, when responding to vignettes and other hypothetical scenarios.

CCB should be seen as a series of touchpoints involving not only service provider-complainant, but also encompassing other customers / social actors.- A simple example of this would be a customer being more willing to complain about their food if they overheard

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3 another customer make a similar complaint. This increased willingness to complain comes  
4 from the creation of “structural capital [which] manifests itself in the interaction process of a  
5 member’s participation” (Hung et al., 2012, p. 1565), which extends beyond the service dyad.  
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8 The incorporation of these other social actors therefore provides a more holistic view of  
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12 customer complaints as a journey.  
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17 This study seeks to address these issues by capturing the evolution and drivers of real  
18 behaviours, whilst minimising issues around memory recall, the dissipation of emotions such  
19 as anger/frustration over time and considering other actors outside of the traditional service  
20 dyad. Adopting the principles of customer journey mapping (CJM) offers a powerful visual  
21 tool to address these issues and examine customer and staff interactions across multiple touch  
22 points (Nosi et al., 2019; Richardson, 2010) through pre-purchase, purchase and post-  
23 purchase stages (Dhebar, 2013). These mappings encapsulate cognitive, emotional and  
24 behavioural drivers and their complex interplay (Wolny and Charoensuksai, 2014).  
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38 A fuller understanding of complaints in relation to services demands real-time, dynamic  
39 complaints captured in their natural settings and incorporating “multiple voices in the  
40 research process” (Chitakunye et al., 2014, p. 1167), including those outside of the traditional  
41 dyad (Kim et al., 2014). This argument appears particularly true in the restaurant context  
42 where actors come together to create value through a service-dominant logic (Baron and  
43 Harris, 2010). Restaurants were chosen as the service context for this study since they  
44 provide a multi-faceted service environment with satisfiers ranging from food quality to the  
45 conduct of other customers (Andersson and Mossberg, 2004) and are characterised by a  
46 higher rate of complaining than other categories (Namkung et al., 2011).  
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## Customer Complaint Behaviour: A Critical Moment (or Moments?) of Truth

Services are more problematic than products due to their intangibility and the role of other social actors in their creation and consumption. Consequently, some level of customer dissatisfaction appears inevitable (Ngai *et al.*, 2007). -Rather than a single critical moment of truth, resulting in a customer complaint, it is helpful to visualize a journey through multiple touch points with service providers and other customers both near and more distant; each touch point being subjectively evaluated and their aggregation resulting in a critical moment of truth (Edvardsson, 1992). Hence a complaint may result from one incident/touch point or the compounding of many individually trivial incidents. Service performance therefore is subject to flux throughout all stages of a service encounter (Wu, 2008; Colm *et al.*, 2017).

This research posits, that in the context of restaurants there are four key types of actors; the complainant (the basis of CCB research), service staff (service recovery research) and other customers (customer-to-customer interaction [CCI] research), which are sub-divided into the complainant's companions and other diners.

*CCB*: Customers experiencing dissatisfaction respond through either voice, exit, third party action, negative word of mouth or silence (Singh, 1988; Blodgett and Granbois, 1992; Boote, 1998). These responses, coupled with their visibility to the organisation (Singh, 1988) and consumer engagement (Boote, 1998), have been used to create numerous typologies of CCB. Whilst useful, such models fail to consider the complex social dynamics surrounding a service failure-recovery event. It is critical to successful service recovery that organisations adopt a "listening orientation, openness to dialogue and development of consumer engagement" (Sfodera *et al.*, 2020, p. 18).

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3 It is recognized that service failures trigger negative emotions” (Ortiz et al., 2017) such as  
4 anger, regret, disappointment, frustration, shame, guilt, and fear (Laros and Steenkamp, 2005;  
5 Sánchez-García and Currás-Pérez, 2011). Such human responses are inconsistent and  
6 responses can vary dramatically to near identical failures. However, Boote (1998) identified  
7 the potential role of other social actors on the service experience, acknowledged by Yan et al.  
8 (2009) as a neglected area of CCB research.  
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19 *Service Recovery:* Recognizes that:  
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24 “In services, the human element is so prominent in both production and consumption  
25 that mistakes are unavoidable ... Given the inevitability of errors, the way in which  
26 service organizations respond to mistakes becomes a crucial factor in customer  
27 retention ” (Kandampully, 2002, p. 267).  
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35 Rather than viewing service failures as a threat, it is possible to view them as an opportunity  
36 to strengthen customer relations and customer loyalty through effective recovery (Gursoy *et*  
37 *al.*, 2007; Petzer and Mostert, 2012). However, failure to recover at the first attempt from a  
38 service failure represents a “double deviation” (Bitner et al., 1990, p. 80) from the “service  
39 promise” (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992). As Pacheo et al., (2018, p. 3) state: “despite its  
40 prevalence, only a limited number of studies examine how organizations can recover  
41 customer trust after a double deviation”.  
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53 *CCI:* Any interaction between the focal consumer and the other customers in a servicescape  
54 (Bitner, 1992) is commonly referred to as CCI. Moore et al. (2005) acknowledge existing  
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3 research which clearly highlights the influence of CCI on services outcomes, supported  
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5 further by McColl-Kennedy et al. (2017 p. 57):  
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10 “there is growing realization that, rather than being passive recipients of goods and  
11 services, customers are actively engaging in a range of interactions and activities to  
12 co-create value... some activities may involve interactions with service providers, or  
13 with friends and family, or even with other customers”.  
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21 Such interactions are common in service contexts, due to physical proximity in shared  
22 spaces. As such, CCI may either enhance or detract from a customer’s experience (Wu, 2008;  
23 Verhoef et al., 2009). Despite this, little is known about how other customers influence a  
24 focal customer (Zhang et al., 2010; Albrecht, 2016). This point is further supported by Moore  
25 et. al., (2005, p. 482) who argue that “there is a lack of empirical research that examines the  
26 role that the effects of CCI have on service evaluations”. In particular, Martin (1996)  
27 concluded that restaurant consumers were particularly negative towards behaviours that may  
28 compromise hygiene standards. Grove and Fisk (1997) used the critical incident technique to  
29 identify how other customers’ dysfunctional behaviour impacts a customer’s evaluation  
30 throughout the consumption process.  
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47 Whilst CCB, service recovery and CCI offer powerful lenses with respect to service failures  
48 each alone appears myopic. Bringing these concepts together through the process of CJM  
49 allows for a more holistic appreciation of the complaint process.  
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## Customer Journey Mapping

CJM involves creating chronological visualisations of customer experiences across touchpoints (Richardson, 2010), in this case concerning service failures which may involve multiple actors. It focuses on a customer's actual experiences (Halvorsrud et al., 2016), be those intended or otherwise (Norton and Pine, 2013) and can provide "valuable insight into what it is like to walk in the user's footsteps" (Marquez et al., 2015, p. 135) while recognizing that many elements of customer's journey may be outside of the service providers control (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). Halvorsrud et al., (2016) caution organizations against the creation of 'aggregate' journeys for their customer base which fail to acknowledge the individuality of each journey and its traveller.

Some limited attempts (e.g. Rosenbaum et al., 2017) have been made to visualize such journeys with individual touch points of the journey commonly being mapped on the horizontal axis, and company actions addressing each touch point on the vertical axis.

However, research by Teixeira et al. (2012) and Halvorsrud et al. (2016) has not included CCI touchpoints nor the capture of the emotional component of complaint scenarios, an oversight addressed through the methodological approach outlined in the following section.

### **Method: The Customer Complaint Journey Mapping Process**

The previous section argues that service failures and subsequent complaints can result either from a single event or the accumulation of individually inconsequential failures. In addition, it argues that a complaint must be understood holistically, capturing emotions, intentions and behaviours as they are continually being co-constructed and negotiated with other social actors. This is consistent with the constructionist/vist paradigm which argues that meanings are not static but are continually refined/revised over time, and argues for the consideration of a role for other voices outside of the primary complainer – service provider dyad. This process will be exemplified using a service failure story entitled “Foreign object in food incident”.

This story was collected as part of a PhD in customer complaint behaviour and along with other participant stories resulted in the development of novel customer complaint journey maps.

The use of CIT to explore moments of truth (including complaint scenarios) is common in marketing (see Gremler, 2004 for a review of CIT in the marketing literature). However previous studies have often failed to:

1. Consider the dynamic interplay of other actors (customers) within often complex CCB settings;
2. Address issues of poor memory recall among all actors within such settings, with interviews often taking place many months after an event;

3. Capture raw negative emotions near to the incident, which are later psychologically rationalized away prior to being discussed with researchers.

CIT has its origins in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (Flanagan, 1954), and has developed a broad following across social sciences. It effectively allows researchers to capture the beliefs, thoughts, opinions, feelings, and drivers for behaviours that constitute the facets of an incident from each participant's subjective perspectives (Butterfield *et al.*, 2005). Thus, CIT used-is well suited to explore the complex multi-faceted social dynamics that underpin complaint processes and their evolution.

#### *Data Collection*

Although the use of the CIT technique is common in examining complaint incidents, a strength of this paper is the novel use of qualitative research diaries (QRDs) which address two key challenges of complaint research: "memory recall" and post event "rationalization". For example, Britten *et al.*, (2012, p. 58) argue that:

"Memory recall is not a "reliable source" of information due to distortion and "rewriting" the history ... For this reason, most researchers using CIT try to use events that have occurred in the recent past, and even put a time limit of up to six months on the collection of information".

CIT is by definition retrospective, so a six-month timeframe is problematic particularly for the collection of more nuanced data such as body language, raw emotions and the social dynamics surrounding the incident. Consistent with the stance of social constructionism,

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3 individuals will through the process of “rationalization”, retrospectively reinterpret events  
4 and incidents which triggered a significant emotional response and these reconstructions  
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6 often smooth out raw emotional responses.- Consequently, it is critical that emotions and  
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8 other artefacts are captured as near to the critical incident as possible, both to capture  
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10 participants’ own voices and their raw emotions.  
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17 Whilst it was a requirement for the QRDs to be completed within 24 hours of an incident,  
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19 many were completed much more quickly, and some incidents were captured almost in real  
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21 time. This minimizes the risk of details such as emotions, interactions with others and  
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23 complaint drivers being lost, changed or forgotten by the participant.  
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29 All research participants were taught how to collect data using QRDs prior to encountering  
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31 critical incidents that were defined as ‘every time the participant has a dissatisfying or  
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33 unhappy dining experience at a restaurant’. The participants were asked to record key details  
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35 of the incident of interest such as the context of the dining experience, what made the dining  
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37 experience dissatisfying, the emotions they felt, their response towards the incident and their  
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39 interactions with other social actors particularly the service provider. All QRDs were  
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41 electronic, which allowed participants to verbally share the incident in their own language,  
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43 removing “observer bias” and capturing a more faithful account of events. Electronic QRDs,  
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45 using the WhatsApp recording tool on smartphones, allowed for the capture of the everyday  
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47 and mundane, rather than just the most memorable and extreme components of the incident  
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49 (Gremler, 2004). The value of using the participants’ smartphones is evidenced by one  
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51 participant recording their critical incident story whilst the incident unfolded.  
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3 *Interviews:* The second stage of data collection involved the development of individualized  
4 semi-structured interviews, based upon the participants' transcribed verbatim QRD accounts.  
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6 These interviews allowed for the researcher to probe each participant through the use of a  
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8 bespoke interview guide-(Figure 1) with specific probes, resulting in the creation of further  
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10 understanding and elaboration of each incident. In conjunction with specific incident probes,  
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12 a number of key themes/questions were addressed including the service failures, the  
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14 participant's responses, their underlying motivations and the emotions experienced  
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16 throughout the process. To minimize the issues of memory recall and rationalization, all  
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18 follow up interviews were conducted within a week of each incident, and typically lasted less  
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20 than 30 minutes.  
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### 33 34 35 *Sampling and Recruitment* 36 37

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40 All participants were Lebanese adult citizens, living in Lebanon and eating out at least once  
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42 per week, the last criteria is important since frequency of dining is expected to relate to  
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44 likelihood of encountering service failures. Rather than consider the gamut of possible  
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46 restaurants in Lebanon, only moderately priced restaurants were considered ranging between  
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48 25USD and 45USD per person, since they constitute the highest percentage of all restaurants  
49  
50 in Lebanon. Furthermore, focusing on a specific price band ensures that the incidents  
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52 explored are not excessively skewed by marked variations in price and subsequent service  
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54 evaluations (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987).  
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3 In the two months following recruitment and training on digitally recording critical incidents  
4 a total of 18 participants from the 33 recruited reported at least one critical incident. In total  
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6 23 critical incidents were recorded. Each of these 23 incidents conformed to the following  
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8 criteria:  
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15 1. Each participant's electronic recording (a qualitative research diary, QRD) had to be  
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17 shared with the researcher within 24 hours of the incident, to maximize recall and  
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19 capture near raw emotions;
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22 2. Each participant was interviewed within one week by the researcher about the specific  
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24 dynamics of the service failure within their incident, drawing on their QRD;  
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### 28 *Data Analysis*

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33 All the interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated/transcribed into English (see  
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35 Figure 2). A professional translator was then employed to ensure the accuracy of the  
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37 translations as recommended by Van Nes et al. (2010).  
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42 **<PLEASE ENTER FIGURE 2 HERE>**  
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47 Template Analysis was applied across all transcriptions (King and Brooks 2017). In total,  
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49 five iterations were required to move from the initial template to the final template (Table 1).  
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51 To ensure that the template analysis process was robust, an independent researcher was asked  
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53 to code six transcripts chosen at random against the final template and concluded that no  
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55 further template modifications were required.  
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3 <PLEASE ENTER TABLE 1 HERE>  
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8 In addition to the development of incident themes through Template Analysis, case  
9 summaries and novel complaint journey maps were developed for each incident, allowing a  
10 deeper understanding of the social dynamics inherent in each incident. -One such summary is  
11 named “Foreign object in food incident” (Figure 3):  
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<PLEASE ENTER FIGURE 3 HERE>

## Results

### *Customer Complaint Journey Mapping*

The analysis of all the critical incidents suggest that complaints are dynamic, on-going, nuanced and embedded in a complex multi-layered social fabric, comprising of multiple touchpoints between the complainant and other social actors, and that emotions and behaviours both drive and are driven by the specifics of the incident.

Consequently, a visual tool was developed (a customer complaint journey map) to better understand these dynamics and their evolution. The “Foreign object in food incident” is expressed in such a map in Figure 4.

<PLEASE ENTER FIGURE 4 HERE>

In this incident Jade (the complainant) is a female in her mid-twenties. She went out for lunch on a working day with her colleagues to a restaurant they regularly visit. Like most of the other participants in the study, Jade experienced service failures in a restaurant she was familiar with. The restaurant a reputable moderately priced casual diner in Lebanon and is known for good customer service. Jade explains in her story that she was expecting the waiter (service provider) to apologise for the failure (foreign object in her food) and ask her if she would like to order something else. This would represent a common response to a service failure of this nature in Lebanon. Jade, like all participants in the study, was not dining alone when they encountered the service failure: they were accompanied by friends, colleagues, or partners. Other customers were present for all service failures reported in this study.



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3 After analysing all 20 stories and considering all the actors present in a service ecosystem,  
4 customer complaint journey maps were developed. These divide actors into four distinct  
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6 categories; the complainant, the service provider, companions (of the complainant) and other  
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8 diners, resulting in four distinct layers of relationships/interactions. The key elements of the  
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10 journey maps are:  
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- 17 1. Service failure(s) (SF): Rather than a single event (i.e. service failure) dining is  
18 complex and stretches over time, and it is likely that a service failure be a composite  
19 of several sub-incidents as supported by CCB literature. Hence a map is required to  
20 capture the time evolution of several incidents.  
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22
- 23 2. The complainant response (CRS): In this study responses were categorised as either  
24 primary (responses prior to the service provider offering some form of redress) or  
25 secondary (any complainant responses after said redress). This follows the taxonomy  
26 of Boote (1998) and ensures incorporation of service recovery attempts.  
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- 29 3. Negative emotions (NEM): In this study the negative emotions were only those  
30 reported by the complainants. Whilst not done in this study, it would be possible to  
31 capture the perspectives, emotions and behaviours of other actors across the levels as  
32 they evolve in response to the unfolding situation in such maps.  
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- 35 4. The service recovery attempts of the service provider (SR): This includes the initial  
36 response of the service provider and any further attempts to recover this service  
37 failure and any subsequent service failures after a complaint has been voiced.  
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54 These elements were subsequently developed into a chronological four-layered map. These  
55 four elements were colour-coded and then linked by arrows to show the dynamic flow and  
56 evolution of the critical incident story.  
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3 To further explain the map within the context of the featured story (Figure 4). The incident  
4 started when Jade's friend (companion) pointed out the failure (SF) to her (a hair in the plate  
5 of food). Jade felt disgusted (NEM) but at first she did not want to respond (CRS), but her  
6 companions pressured her to complain. She gave in to the pressure and complained (primary  
7 response) to the waiter (service provider: CRS). Although the waiter apologised and replaced  
8 her plate (SR), Jade was disappointed (NEM) because he didn't ask her if she would like to  
9 order something else. The supervisor then approached Jade and apologised (SR). However,  
10 she still completed the comment card (secondary CRS) and after leaving the restaurant she  
11 shared her experience with friends through negative word of mouth (secondary CRS).  
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26 In Jade's story she didn't report any interaction with the other customers at the restaurant. But  
27 such interactions were reported in other incidents where other customers were found to be  
28 either the catalyst for service failures through dysfunctional behaviour (Harris & Reynolds,  
29 2003) or indirectly influential in the response of the focal customer via perceived non-  
30 compatibility. This is when focal customers perceive that there is no compatibility in terms of  
31 age, social status and appearance between them and other customers. Hence, they choose to  
32 respond in ways they believe are appropriate within this context (Martin & Pranter, 1989;  
33 Colm et al., 2017).  
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47 It is important to note that this incident is described through the lens of the focal customer  
48 (complainant), and this is likely different (yet related) to other actors within the incident such  
49 as the service provider. Nevertheless, these completed customer journey mappings capture  
50 the dynamic interactions that take place between a focal customer and other actors, including  
51 critically those outside of the traditional complaint dyad.  
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## **Discussion and Managerial Implications**

### *Discussion*

This paper posits that service failure touchpoints with service providers represent moments of truth that are-evaluated individually (i.e. discretely) but also collectively (i.e. continuously) across an unfolding service experience. It also recognizes that complainants, consistent with the tenets of social constructionism, do not act in isolation. Instead, their behaviours and emotions are mediated by others outside of the primary service dyad. Indeed, the influence of other actors far outweighs that of the physical restaurant setting (Tombs and Mccoll-Kennedy, 2003).

Complaint journey maps add real value by capturing the changing emotional state of the complainant, and by illustrating how failure to effectively address this emotional flux results in greater levels of customer dissatisfaction. Rather than a complaint resulting from a single incident, such maps indicate that often a complaint develops from an accumulation of small (almost trivial) failures, each individually below the threshold to be considered in isolation as “critical”.

Whilst major service failures tend to obvious to all parties, the identification and understanding of complaints resulting from an accumulation of more trivial failures requires careful and systematic analysis. These complaint journey maps offer a tool for complaint researchers to visualize often complex complaint dynamics but also a diagnostic and training tool for service providers. The customer complaint journey mapping framework presented in Figure 5 demonstrates the process followed to develop such mappings.

<PLEASE ENTER FIGURE 5 HERE>

Whilst CCB, service recovery and CCI represent different perspectives with respect to complaint behaviour, the proposed customer complaint journey maps allow these theoretical perspectives to be blended to create a more holistic perspective of a complaint event, from multiple stakeholder perspectives. For example, the top two layers of Figure 4 (above) broadly represent the primary complainant-service provider dyad from the perspectives of both the complainant (CCB) and the service provider (service recovery). The complainant's interactions with companions (Layer 3) and other diners (Layer 4) are represented by the CCI literature. This proposed methodology addresses three significant issues in the historical study of complaints, namely:

- 1) Augmenting the critical incident technique, through teaching participants to self-interview with respect to future events, resulting in more authentic emotional recall and richer data capture.
- 2) Minimizing the impacts of memory recall and rationalization as a result of greater temporal and physical distance from a critical event.
- 3) Through the development of the customer complaint maps, allowing marketers to view a complaint episode as a nuanced dynamic interplay between multiple actors within the complaint setting, bridging the gaps between branches of complaint theory.

Such maps therefore represent complaint journey mapping as a schema for capturing a customer's actual experience, changing emotions and antecedents in a chronological order (Norton and Pine, 2013; Halvorsrud *et al.*, 2016). This four-layer approach represents an

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3 extension to previous mapping attempts by Halvorsrud *et al.* (2016) and Teixeira *et al.*  
4  
5 (2012), and further differentiates customers by nearness to the complainant's companions and  
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7 others, in recognition of their differing influences on behaviours and emotions.  
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12 As identified by Kim *et al.* (2014), the advancement of CCB understanding requires the  
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14 timely capture of real complaint scenarios. The methodology presented here offers a tool to  
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16 capture the authentic voices of real complainants through their complaint journeys. A  
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18 particular strength is the near to real time audio-recorded diaries that not only capture the  
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20 incident in the complainants own words but also their reasoning and raw and evolving  
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22 emotions.  
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30 This paper concludes that it is only through the capture of rich, authentic complaint accounts  
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32 from multiple actor perspectives that customer complaint research will be further advanced.  
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34 This perspective is consistent with the constructionist paradigm and the notion of negotiated  
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36 “sense making”. We do therefore need to acknowledge that such complaint maps are not able  
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38 to provide us with a generalisable understanding of CCB, given the specific nuances and  
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40 interactions within each incident. Rather we position this tool as giving us deeper insight into  
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42 specific types of complaint incident.  
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#### 48 *Future Research and Managerial Implications*

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52 We believe that the complaint journey mapping process can be utilised by both academics  
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54 and business practitioners since it allows for the effective understanding (diagnosis) and  
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56 remedy (treatment) of often complex, cumulative service failure events as a prelude to  
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58 effective service recovery. Such a process is well-suited to a range of complex service  
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3 offerings where customers share physical spaces and consequently have the potential to  
4 influence one another's experience (for example other leisure scenarios such as hotels, retail  
5 environments and even education settings). In such industries, utilising complaint maps as a  
6 training tool for service staff will better help them understand the complex dynamics and  
7 interactions inherent in the provision of services. Through these mappings, providers can  
8 identify the moments of truth involved in the complaint journey and analyse how different  
9 actors can influence complainant responses and emotions. This will feed into developing  
10 service recovery strategies not only focusing on the complainant and their primary  
11 behavioural response, but extending outside the traditional service dyad to include other  
12 customers, and consider into the role of negative emotions in such contexts. More broadly  
13 speaking, it may be that food industry regulators (such as the Food Standards Agency in the  
14 United Kingdom and the United States Food and Drug Administration) may recommend  
15 customer complaint journey mapping to restaurant owners as an example of good practice to  
16 enable them to better handle service failures.

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38 This paper closes by identifying three potentially fruitful lines of future enquiry. Firstly,  
39 application of this methodology to other service settings would provide further understanding  
40 of the interplay between different actors in a complaint context. As part of this process,  
41 researchers may also wish to explore the complaint policies of organisations, as they provide  
42 a frame of reference for how service providers can respond to complaints. Secondly, an  
43 extension of this methodology to the digital domain would provide an alternative  
44 understanding of CCB in an online setting, where consumers may be influenced by the views  
45 of others they have never met but have shared similar consumption experiences. Finally, and  
46 perhaps most challenging in methodological terms, research which collates data from  
47 different actors within a service failure would represent a significant leap in our  
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understanding of CCI and CCB. This would lead to far more complex complaint journey maps, but the subjective perspectives of each actor would undoubtedly build a fuller picture of complaint incidents and carry both theoretical merit and practitioner benefit.

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**Figures:**

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## Foreign object in food incident

1 Yesterday I was at \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 with some colleagues at work for lunch or \_\_\_\_\_  
 3 more it was a brunch it was around 12 \_\_\_\_\_  
 4 noon, we were 4 people. I ordered the \_\_\_\_\_  
 5 grilled Halloume \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 6 the others ordered different things. After \_\_\_\_\_  
 7 the food arrived by a good time, around 10 \_\_\_\_\_  
 8 minutes; the waiters were all very nice to \_\_\_\_\_  
 9 us. I started to eat. Then I find a VERY \_\_\_\_\_  
 10 VERY LONG hair in my food but it is not my \_\_\_\_\_  
 11 hair. It is obvious that it is curly. I am not \_\_\_\_\_  
 12 the type who is easily disgusted so I moved \_\_\_\_\_  
 13 it to the side and I said to myself that I \_\_\_\_\_  
 14 don't want to see it anymore.. But the \_\_\_\_\_  
 15 people who were with me they called the \_\_\_\_\_  
 16 waiter and told him that there is a hair in \_\_\_\_\_  
 17 the food. They told him we don't want this \_\_\_\_\_  
 18 plate and asked for the plate to be \_\_\_\_\_  
 19 replaced. I was a bit shy and then accepted \_\_\_\_\_  
 20 what the others were asking and told the \_\_\_\_\_  
 21 waiter to please get me another plate \_\_\_\_\_  
 22 because the hair was too disgusting. The \_\_\_\_\_  
 23 waiter apologized and got another plate; \_\_\_\_\_  
 24 we waited for 5 minutes for the 2<sup>nd</sup> plate. \_\_\_\_\_  
 25 Then the manager came to our table and \_\_\_\_\_

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friends / occasion

good service.

hair in the food  
 - tell me more  
 - how did you feel / why?  
 - what did you do / why  
 why didn't I → why not complain

people / friends complained instead  
 - how did this make you feel

shy - tell me more why

another plate + manager  
 what can you tell me more about their handling  
 - how did this make you feel

**Figure 1:** Extract from “Foreign object in food incident” interview Guide

Foreign object in food incident		Theme			
Notes	Line	Level 1		Level 2	
		Level 3	Level 4	Level 3	Level 4
	1	H: in this interview the questions will be related			
	2	to the story you recorded.			
	3	H: to recap, it was <b>you and your colleagues at work</b> and			
	4	you went out for <b>lunch during the lunch break</b> at zzz, so			
	5	just to confirm it wasn't a special occasion –			
	6	J: no not at all. <b>We didn't feel like staying in the office. So</b>			
	7	<b>we left the office and the boss was with us-</b>			
	8	H: OK			
	9	J: we were bored all the time at work so we left the			
	10	office. We walked there because it ia very close			
	11	H: so you chose it because it was close			
	12	J: exactly, we can walk there			
	13	H: so as I understand from the story up until you			
	14	ordered, the welcoming, seating, the waiters everything			
	15	was perfect-			
	16	J: yes yes they were nice and there was nothing unusual			
	17	H: you said they all ordered and you ordered the grilled			
	18	cheese and you said they came			
	19	really fast. The service was quick and everything was			
	20	perfect. The waiter was very nice-			
	21	J: yes yes, on top of this they know us. We usually go			
	22	there because it is close to work-			
	23	H: so there are no more details you want to add here.			
	24	Until you started to eat. Tell me what happened -			
	25	<b>J: and then, actually the girl facing me looked like this</b>			
	26	<b>(.) with her eyes wide opened. And then I saw it</b>			
	27	<b>H: so your friend saw it -</b>			
	28	<b>J: yes she saw it. She did like this, yukki</b>			
	29	<b>((very disgusted)). I didn't understand at first. So I</b>			
	30	<b>looked and then I found a very very long hair-</b>			
	31	H: so your friend saw it first-			
	32	<b>J: yes yes it was so big that she was able to see it and she</b>			
	33	<b>pointed it to me. at first I didn't understand then when I</b>			
	34	<b>looked at my plate I saw it. Honestly it is very big . this is</b>			
	35	<b>one of the very rare times that I really feel disgusted. It</b>			
	36	<b>was really big and disgusting. &gt;In any case a hair in the</b>			
	37	<b>food is disgusting. Fine a small hair but not something</b>			
	38	<b>like this</b>			

**Figure 2: An extract from “Foreign object in food incident” transcript**

### Foreign object in food incident

Jade went out for lunch with her office colleagues during their lunch break on a weekday. They went to a nearby restaurant that they always go to.

She ordered a Halloume platter. When the plate was served, her friend who was sitting across from her looked with her eyes wide open and said “yucky!” At first Jade did not know what was wrong and then when she looked in her plate, she saw a very long, black hair.

Jade was very disgusted. First she moved the plate to the side and covered it with a tissue so that she doesn't see it. Here, her friends were surprised that she did not call the waiter and asked her if she were not going to. Jade explains that she was hesitant and did not want to complain but her friends pressured her to do so. So she called the waiter.

The waiter came and asked what's wrong and when she showed him the hair he apologised and directly took the plate. She was expecting a sincere apology and to ask her if she would like to order something else. So this made her feel disappointed.

The waiter got her another plate after 10 minutes. She ate some of the food because she had lost her appetite and all her friends were waiting for her to go back to the office. She wasn't enjoying her meal.

She completed the comment card but no one followed up with her. She also told friends about what happened with her. She wanted to say negative things about the place.

**Figure 3:** Case summary of “Foreign object in food incident”

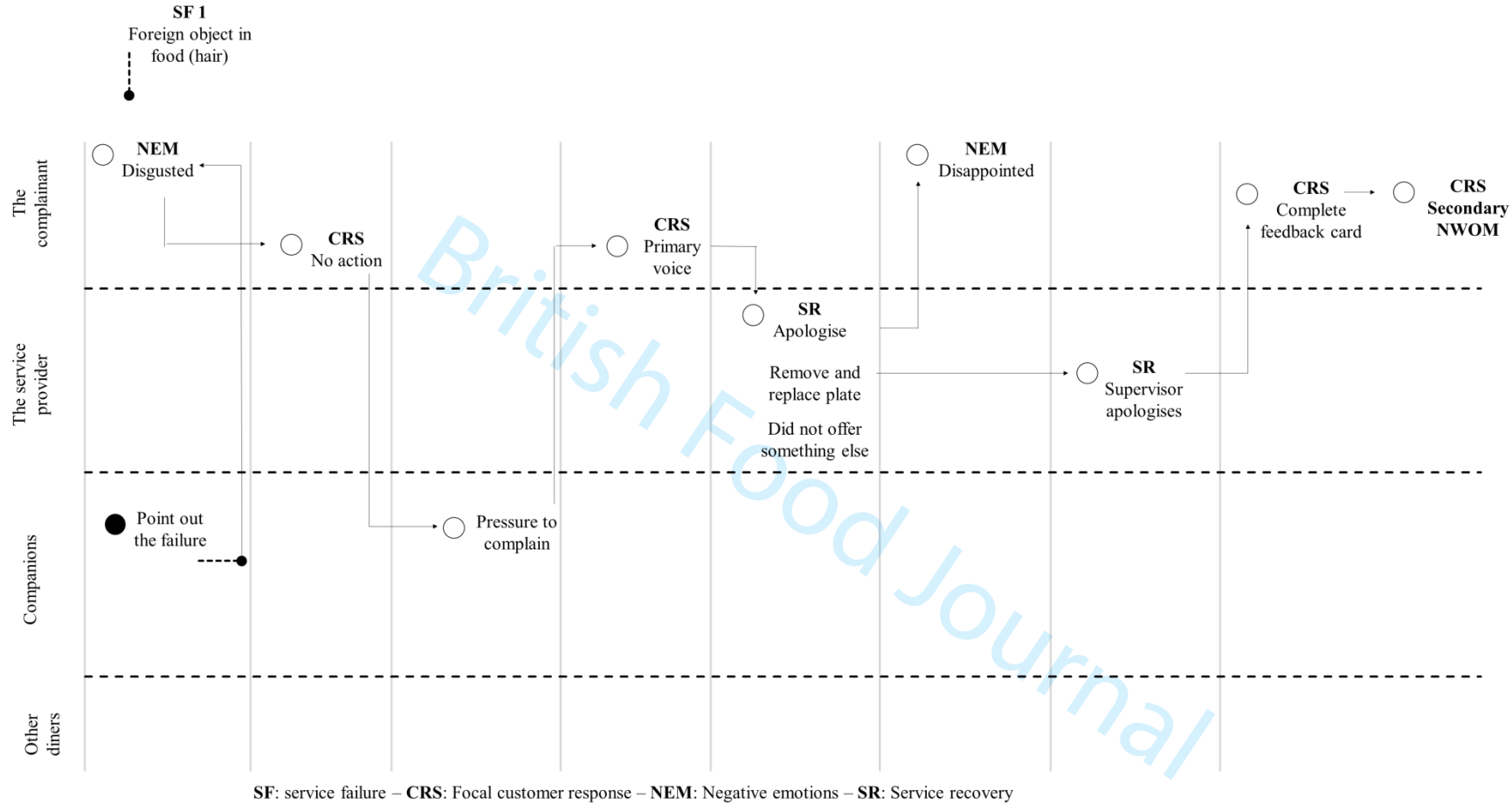
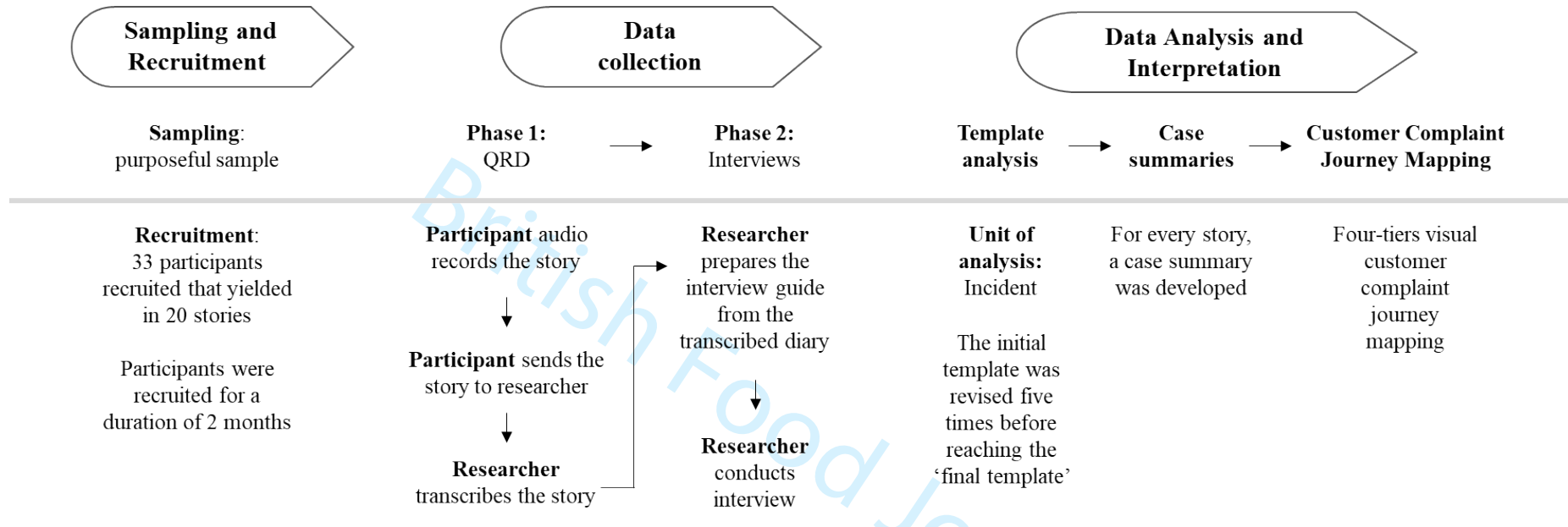


Figure 4: Customer Complaint Journey Mapping of “Foreign object in food incident”



**Figure 5: Customer Complaint Journey Mapping Framework**

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**Tables:**

British Food Journal

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6	<b><u>1. Incident Context (CO)</u></b>
7	<u>1.1. Type of occasion</u>
8	<u>1.2. Day of the week</u>
9	<u>1.3. Companion</u>
10	<u>1.4. Restaurant occupancy</u>
11	<u>1.5. Purpose of the meal</u>
12	<u>1.6. Past experience</u>
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15	<b><u>2. Type of service failure (SF)</u></b>
16	<u>2.1. Process</u>
17	<u>2.2. Product</u>
18	<u>2.3. People</u>
19	<u>2.4. Physical evidence</u>
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22	<b><u>3. Negative emotions emerged based on causal agency (NEM)</u></b>
23	<u>3.1. Other-attributed</u>
24	<u>3.2. Situational-attributed</u>
25	<u>3.3. Self-attributed</u>
26	
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28	<b><u>4. Type of CCB response (CRS)</u></b>
29	<u>4.1. Primary involved</u>
30	<u>4.2. Primary uninvolved</u>
31	<u>4.3. Secondary involved</u>
32	<u>4.4. Secondary uninvolved</u>
33	
34	
35	<b><u>5. Stimuli of negative emotions and CCB responses (SER)</u></b>
36	<u>5.1. Situation related</u>
37	<u>5.2. Attribution</u>
38	<u>5.3. Psychographics</u>
39	<u>5.4. Relationship between consumer and restaurant</u>
40	<u>5.5. Social</u>
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**Table 1:** The key themes of the final template



**Customer Complaint Journey Mapping: A Qualitative Approach**  
**Paper Amendments**

Reviewer Comments	Proposed Changes	Section Affected
<p><b>Reviewer 1</b></p> <p><b>Result:</b></p> <p>No explicit information about age, gender, or other personal characteristics is provided making it hard to judge the participant.</p> <p>The results reporting weak interpretation of the data and looks unpersuasive.</p> <p>Qualitative research must create specific results because researcher does not exactly know what he is looking for. Hence, one of the important tasks is to identify appropriate participants. For example: Does all participant are loyal customer (familiar with the other actors around the services) or not? Do these restaurants have a service guarantee? Because how well a firm handles complaint and resolves problems frequently determines whether it builds customer loyalty, or it should just watch its customers take their any action to complain.</p> <p>With using these criteria, researcher can capture the authentic voices of real complainants and clearly presented the results.</p>	<p>We have made some amendments to the results section in response to this useful feedback:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1, We have added much more contextual data about the complainant Jade, which combined with the case summary in Figure 3 hopefully provides a holistic view of this incident.</li> <li>2, We have added a long paragraph which applies the various elements of the complaint mapping process to the Jade story, referring to service failures (SF), complaint responses (CRS), negative emotions (NEM) and service recovery (SR).</li> </ol> <p>We did not collect data concerning the restaurant policies around complaints and we believe that it is extremely rare for such policies to exist as they may do in other parts of the world such as the US and Europe. We have acknowledged in the closing section that collection of such contextual data may be a useful idea for future research.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Results</p>

<p><b>Implications for research, practice and/or society:</b></p> <p>The implications for practice and society could be substantially improved, if the author/s could provide some policy implications.</p>	<p>The implication section has been developed further to express more clearly how such complaint maps can be used to aid service providers, for example through their usage in staff training.</p> <p>In policy terms, we have also suggested that food safety authorities may include complaint mapping as an example of good practice when managing the customer experience.</p>	<p>Future research and managerial implications / page 20</p>
<p><b>Quality of Communication:</b></p> <p>The structure of the paper could be improved substantially if: the "Methodology: The Complaint Journey Mapping Processes" could be presented in "Methods"; and "Customer Complaint Journey Mapping" presented in "Results". The "Discussion" and "Future Research and Applications" could be included in "Discussion and Managerial Implications" section.</p>	<p>As part of the review we have fully reviewed all parts of the paper and made the changes suggested to structure (received with thanks). We hope that the result of this is a clearly organised paper which is easy to follow.</p>	
<p><b>Reviewer 2</b></p>		
<p><b>Literature:</b></p> <p>In this section be clear the relation of the topic with the previous literature but there is a lack with new studies in the research field (there are only four literature sources from 2016 till 2017). I propose to use similar studies from British Food Journal.</p>	<p>Many thanks for this feedback – we totally agree this needed to be acted upon.</p> <p>In total 8 references have been added from the British Food Journal, 6 from other recent journal articles and 2 references have been removed namely, Day (1984) and Nicholls (2010).</p> <p>These 14 additional references include a number dated 2018-20 and include BFJ papers from Arslan et al. (2018), Cerri et al.(2019), Kiil et al (2018) and Nosi et al. (2019).</p>	<p>Literature</p>

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<p><b>Results:</b></p> <p>The generalization of research results is not permitted because it is qualitative research.</p>	<p>This has been addressed in the results sections by giving more specific information and presenting context for the data.</p>	<p>Results</p>
<p>Implications for research, practice and/or society:</p> <p>Attitude plays a major role in shaping behaviour, and for this reason it is a significant factor in consumer behaviour research. This section needs support; there is a little approach to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the discussion section. But it needs more clearly way to describe the impact upon the society. There aren't implications consistent with the findings and conclusions.</p>	<p>The implications were developed as to refer to the findings and the theory especially moving from the traditional dyad to including other customers.</p>	<p>Future research and managerial implications / page 20</p>
<p>Quality of Communication:</p> <p>Generally, the paper has good image, with correct grammar and cohesion between the sections. But it needs more documentation in the section of implications.</p> <p>it needs attention paid to the clarity of expression and readability.</p> <p>In the text avoid the use of the first plural and try to use more passive voice.</p>	<p>These comments have been addressed throughout the paper. As part of the wider changes made, we have reviewed the writing style and made changes throughout the paper where appropriate to hopefully result in a clearer style.</p> <p>We have also developed further our implications section to address the comments, with particular emphasis on practical application of customer complaint journey mapping and also ideas for future research.</p>	