

Comparing Service Delivery to What Might Have Been

Behavioral Responses to Regret and Disappointment

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The effects of the specific emotions disappointment and regret on customers' behavioral responses to failed service encounters were examined. Study 1, using a vignette methodology, showed that regret was more associated with switching behavior than was disappointment and that disappointment was more associated with word of mouth and complaining than was regret. These results were largely replicated in Study 2, in which each customer was asked to report an autobiographical episode in which he or she experienced dissatisfaction with a service. Characteristics of this experience, as well as regret, disappointment, satisfaction, and behavioral responses, were assessed. As hypothesized, regret had a direct effect on customers' switching, over and above the effect of dissatisfaction. Moreover, disappointment had a direct effect on word of mouth, over and above the effect of dissatisfaction. Finally, neither regret nor disappointment had a direct effect on the actual complaining in Study 2.

Choosing the appropriate service provider often is not a simple task. It is not just that there are several options to choose from that makes these decisions difficult; rather, it is the intangibility of the offer and the heterogeneity of its

delivery. Thus, it is hard to evaluate the service provider beforehand, and therefore, the actual service delivery obtained might be a source of negative emotion. In the present article, we attempt to build on and extend recent developments in behavioral decision theory and emotion theory to come to an improved understanding of the antecedents and experiences of these service-related emotions. Then, in the main objective of the article, we investigate what the behavioral consequences of these service-related emotions might be. We do this by focusing on two specific emotions: disappointment and regret.

Why would the focus on *specific emotions* be so important? Research in emotion theory has shown that specific emotions have idiosyncratic behaviors and behavioral tendencies associated with them (Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure 1989; Frijda and Zeelenberg in press; Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz 1994). Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure (1989) found that 32 specific emotions could be differentiated on the basis of measures of cognitive appraisals of the emotion-eliciting situation and of emotional action readiness associated with the emotions. In addition, Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994) found for 10 negative emotions that they can be differentiated in terms of distinctive feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and motivational goals. What this research shows is that specific

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emotions have idiosyncratic phenomenologies, suggesting that the behavioral consequences of these specific emotions might be idiosyncratic as well. If this is the case, then there are important implications for service research. Specificity in the behavioral responses associated with different emotional experiences implies that the mere fact that customers are dissatisfied does not tell us much about the specific behaviors in which they will engage. At least, it does not tell us as much as we could learn from focusing on specific emotions.

Different specific negative emotions may produce a whole repertoire of different behaviors, varying from fighting in the case of anger, to flighting in the case of fear, to inertia in the case of sadness. Thus, focusing on a single construct to measure the negative evaluation of a service (e.g., overall negative affect, customer dissatisfaction, postconsumption valuation) might fall short when the goal is to predict what customers are likely to do following these aversive experiences. Will they complain, switch to other service providers, or engage in negative word of mouth? On the basis of the more general evaluations of the service, we can only predict that customers are more likely to engage in all of these behaviors the more negatively they evaluate the service. However, the main point we are trying to make here is that focusing on specific emotions may help us to better understand and predict the specific behaviors in which customers engage.

Specific emotions experienced by customers in response to failed service encounters will, of course, also contribute to the dissatisfaction with the service encounters and the service provider, but we maintain that these specific emotions also have *direct* effects on the behavioral responses in which the customers engage. We provide a conceptual model for the behavioral effects of the specific emotions regret and disappointment in services. First, we explain why we consider the specific emotions regret and disappointment of particular importance. Subsequently, we relate the two emotions to customer satisfaction.

Why would the focus on these two emotions specifically be so important? We argue, in keeping with behavioral decision theory (Bell 1982, 1985; Loomes and Sugden 1982, 1986) and recent theorizing in marketing (Inman, Dyer, and Jia 1997) that these are the two emotions most directly related to decision making. Regret and disappointment are the emotions that can be felt when these decisions somehow go awry. We experience disappointment when the delivery of the service does not match up to prior held expectations, and we experience regret following a choice of the "wrong" service provider, that is, when a forgone provider would have delivered a better service. Of course, other negative emotions might be experienced as well during or following service encounters such as anger, shame, disgust, embarrassment, and sad-

ness (Oliver 1993; Westbrook 1980; Westbrook and Oliver 1991). Yet, these other emotions are not directly linked to the decision-making process. They either are related to the social interaction during service delivery (e.g., anger, embarrassment) or are secondary emotions in the sense that they follow up on the disappointment or regret experienced directly in response to the obtained service delivery (e.g., disgust, sadness) (Levine 1996).

Establishing That Regret and Disappointment Are Different Specific Emotions

The key issue in the present article is that we argue that the emotions regret and disappointment have distinct behavioral consequences associated with their experience. To maintain this conviction, discriminant validity between regret and disappointment needs to be established. In other words, one needs to show that they indeed refer to two different emotional experiences. We address this issue by providing evidence indicating that regret and disappointment have different antecedents and that regret and disappointment have different experiential qualities (i.e., they feel differently).

First, we review research about the antecedents of the emotions. Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure (1989, Study 2) asked participants to recall the experience of several emotions and assessed the appraisals related to these different emotions. They found that regret and disappointment differed with respect to the appraisal item "self-agency." Self-agency was measured by means of the question, "Were you responsible for what happened or had happened?" and regret scored higher on this item than did disappointment. This difference in responsibility also was found by Zeelenberg, van Dijk, and Manstead (1998), who manipulated the way in which decision makers arrived at a suboptimal outcome. This was either the result of their own choice or the result of a random procedure over which they had no control. Greater regret was ascribed to those who were responsible for the outcome (i.e., the choosers) than for those who were not responsible. For disappointment, the results were the reverse. More disappointment was ascribed to the decision maker when the negative outcome was the result of a random procedure than when it resulted from a choice. This difference in responsibility is consistent with the assumptions in regret theory and disappointment theory. These specify that regret stems from a comparison of the obtained outcome with an outcome that would have been obtained if a different choice had been made ("wrong decision") and that disappointment stems from a comparison of the obtained outcome with an outcome that would have been obtained if things that were not under the decision maker's control had been different

("disconfirmed expectancy"). Zeelenberg et al. (1998b) provided empirical support for these assumptions.

The following research is pertinent to the question concerning differences in phenomenologies of regret and disappointment. Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz (1994) showed that 10 different negative emotions could be differentiated from each other on the basis of their phenomenologies. Regret was included in this study, but disappointment was not. The authors asked each participant to recall an experience of one of these negative emotions and to indicate, on closed-ended questions, what he or she felt, thought, felt like doing, did, and wanted during this experience. There were two questions per response type for each of the 10 emotions. Regret was differentiated from other emotions on the basis of several characteristics. Regret was associated with having a sinking feeling, thinking about what a mistake one has made and about a lost opportunity, feeling the tendency to kick oneself and to correct one's mistake, actually doing something differently, and wanting to have a second chance and improve one's performance. Their results led to the conclusion that the experience of regret involves a focus on the self as a cause of the event and on possibilities for undoing the regret by changing the unfavorable outcome or by improving future performance. In a follow-up on that work, Zeelenberg et al. (1998a) explicitly compared the phenomenologies of regret and disappointment using the same methodology. The results confirmed the findings of Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz concerning regret and revealed significant differences between regret and disappointment in their accompanying feelings, thoughts, action tendencies, actions, and motivational goals. These findings led to the conclusion that regret and disappointment involve different experiences.

Taken together, there is ample evidence that regret and disappointment have different antecedents and that they have different phenomenologies. On the basis of these findings, we expect that these emotions also will differ in the behavioral responses they promote. However, to date we are not aware of any research addressing these differences in behavior. We aim to fill this gap with the present research. We now turn to the relation of these specific emotions to customer satisfaction.

Disappointment, Regret, and Satisfaction

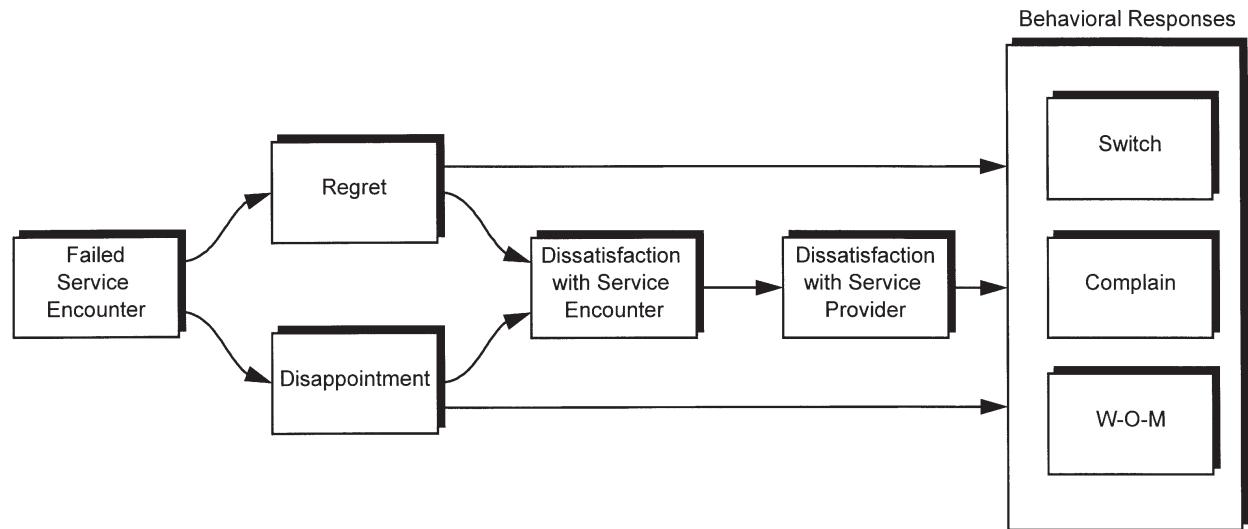
Traditionally, customer satisfaction has been equated with the negative disconfirmation of expectations. Indeed, numerous studies have shown that expectation-disconfirmation has a significant effect on customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with service encounters (for an overview, see Oliver 1997). Note that in our approach, negative disconfirmation is the antecedent condition of the

emotion disappointment, which is consistent with recent developments in emotion theory (van Dijk and van der Pligt 1997; van Dijk, Zeelenberg, and van der Pligt 1999). This could be interpreted as if dissatisfaction and disappointment are referring to the same construct. We have strong reasons to argue against such an interpretation and later argue that the emotion disappointment mediates between negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction.

This conviction is based on two recent publications in which it is demonstrated that the extent to which customers are dissatisfied with a service depends not only on disappointment (i.e., the amount of negative disconfirmation) but also on regret (i.e., the performance of forgone alternatives) (Inman, Dyer, and Jia 1997; Taylor 1997). As argued earlier, customers experience regret on realizing that they would have obtained better delivery if they had opted for other service providers. Taylor (1997) found, in two studies on satisfaction with movies, that in addition to expectancy-disconfirmation about the chosen movie, the expected quality of nonchosen movies (i.e., a proxy for regret) influenced satisfaction with the chosen movie. Specifically, the higher the expected quality of the nonchosen movies, the lower the satisfaction with the chosen movie. Inman, Dyer, and Jia (1997) provided additional support of the impact of regret on (dis)satisfaction. They asked their participants to make choices between lottery pairs. Participants received outcome feedback for each choice, and their evaluation of each decision was assessed. The analysis shows that both the outcomes gained from the lotteries and the outcomes forgone in the lotteries (because nonchosen options won) had significant effects on participants' evaluations of their decisions. If the effects of the forgone alternatives were not taken into account, then the percentages of variance accounted for in participants' evaluations of their decisions dropped significantly.

Thus, the studies by Inman, Dyer, and Jia (1997) and Taylor (1997) documented the consequences of disappointment and regret for participants' evaluations of their choices. The conclusion to be drawn on the basis of these studies is that we know more about satisfaction when we take regret into account in addition to disappointment. In the present article, we aim to build on and extend these findings. We do so by examining the potential implications of disappointment and regret for customers' behavioral responses to the failed service encounters. As argued earlier, research in the fields of emotion theory and behavioral decision theory suggests that regret and disappointment might have idiosyncratic direct effects on future behavior. If we were to find emotion-specific differences in the behavioral responses (and these are not mediated by their effects on dissatisfaction), then we would have a case against combining the two in one satisfaction score, as suggested by Inman, Dyer, and Jia and Taylor.

FIGURE 1
Behavioral Responses to Failed Service Encounters



NOTE: W-O-M = word of mouth.

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR DISAPPOINTMENT AND REGRET EFFECTS IN SERVICES

The conceptual model in Figure 1 summarizes our predictions about the impact of disappointment and regret on dissatisfaction and customers' behavioral responses. The appraisal of the failed service encounters results in regret and/or disappointment. These emotions will have an effect on customers' dissatisfaction with the specific service encounters. Dissatisfaction with the encounters, in turn, influences customers' more general satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service organization as a whole, and this eventually leads to behavioral responses. However, in addition to their indirect effects through dissatisfaction, we expect that disappointment and regret also have *direct* effects on behavioral responses. Before turning to the predictions of these direct effects, we first discuss possible behavioral responses to dissatisfaction in more detail.

Behavioral Responses to Dissatisfying Services

Three dominant behavioral responses to dissatisfaction are switching, complaining, and word-of-mouth communication (Oliver 1997; Richins 1987; Zeithaml, Berry, and

Parasuraman 1996). *Switching* refers to leaving the relationship with the service provider and either initiating a relationship with another service provider or refraining from the service altogether. Switching is the opposite of loyalty, which refers to choosing to remain in the relationship with the service provider despite dissatisfaction. There is ample research showing that dissatisfied consumers are more likely to switch than are satisfied customers (Loveman 1998; Rust and Zahorik 1993; Solnick and Hemenway 1992).

Complaining occurs when customers communicate their negatively disconfirmed expectations to the firm. This may occur either because the firm led customers to form unrealistically high expectations about the service or because the firm delivered the service at a level lower than what could realistically be expected. Customers can complain directly to the service firm, the second party in the transaction, or to a third party such as a consumer union or a government body. Maute and Forrester (1993) and Singh (1988), among others, found that dissatisfaction leads customers to complain.

Word-of-mouth communication covers interactions with members of one's social and professional network about the failed service encounter, usually by talking to family members, friends, relatives, fellow customers, and the like. It refers to all communications concerning the evaluations of goods and services rather than to formal

complaints to the organization or its personnel (Anderson 1998). Whereas switching and complaining responses are observable to the firm, word of mouth generally remains unobserved. Both satisfaction and dissatisfaction produce an increase in word of mouth. Satisfied customers usually engage in positive word of mouth; they share their positive experience with the service with others. Dissatisfied customers usually share their negative experiences with the service through negative word of mouth; they might do so to obtain sympathy from others or to warn them about the particular service provider. In the present article, we focus only on dissatisfied customers.

Emotion-Specific Behavioral Responses

We now address the hypothesized direct effects of the specific service-related emotions regret and disappointment on the three different behavioral responses just described. We conjecture that regret will have a significant direct impact on customers' switching of service providers. Customers who experience regret feel that they made wrong decisions, feel like "kicking themselves," and experience a tendency to correct their "mistakes" (Zeelenberg et al. 1998a). These action tendencies and emotivational goals stimulate them to switch service providers when the opportunities arise. Moreover, these consequences may be relatively independent of the customers' dissatisfaction with the service encounters and the service provider. On a theoretical level, Festinger (1964) already noticed the link between regret and switching:

Post-decision regret is simply the manifestation of the fact that the dissonance has suddenly become salient. . . . It would seem reasonable for [the decision maker] to feel regret and to think that perhaps he did something wrong. . . .

If during the period when dissonance is salient a person were given the opportunity to reconsider, he should show some inclination to reverse his decision. (pp. 99-100)

Festinger and Walster (1964) provided empirical support for this decision reversal. These researchers induced post-decisional regret in participants and provided them with the opportunity to switch to another option. They did so by having participants in one condition rank several haircuts on attractiveness. The participants could have for free the haircuts they ranked as most attractive. Because this task implied a choice in favor of one of the alternatives, it was expected to produce some dissonance and, hence, some regret. Participants in the other condition also ranked the attractiveness of the haircuts but were unaware of the fact that they subsequently could choose one for free. Because in this condition the ranking did not imply a choice, disso-

nance and the accompanying regret were not expected to appear. When the participants subsequently were asked to choose coupons for free haircuts, it was expected that participants who knew this in advance would feel more regret and would show more decision reversals than would participants who did not know in advance that they would get haircuts for free. This was indeed what Festinger and Walster found. Unfortunately, the intensity of the post-decisional regret was not assessed, and therefore, a direct relation between regret and switching could not be tested. Zeelenberg and Beattie (1997) studied the effects of regret in a bargaining experiment and *did* measure intensity of the experienced regret. Their results show that participants altered their subsequent behavior in such a way as to minimize future regrets. These effects disappeared when we statistically controlled for the effects of regret.

Interestingly, the prediction that regret promotes switching also is consistent with Thibaut and Kelley's (1959, pp. 80-81) reasoning about regret in relationships. They argue that a comparison with a forgone alternative "provides a standard in terms of which decisions about remaining in or leaving the relationship are made" (pp. 80-81). Of course, opportunities to switch service providers frequently are limited (e.g., because of monopolies), and switching costs might be high (e.g., when customers engage in long-term contracts with a service provider). Thus, the customer who regrets the choice of a gardener might not switch directly if he or she signed a 1-year maintenance contract for the garden. This implies that the dominant response to regret is the inclination to switch but that the strength of the relationship between regret and actual switching is not necessarily very high due to various mediating and external factors.

Because regret implies a sense of personal responsibility, we do not expect that regret promotes complaining and word-of-mouth communication to a large extent. We expect that customers complain when they perceive the service provider to be responsible, but less so when they made "mistakes" themselves. This also is the reason why we think that regret will not promote word-of-mouth communication. We assume that people do not like to share their mistakes with others ("Look how foolish I was").

What would be the direct effects of the specific emotion disappointment? We hypothesize that disappointment will have a significant direct effect both on complaining and on word-of-mouth communication, especially because disappointment typically is associated with external attributions (Zeelenberg, van Dijk, and Manstead 1998; Zeelenberg et al. 1998b). Customers who experience that their expectations are negatively disconfirmed will be inclined to voice their dissatisfaction, either to the service provider by complaints or to the members of their social networks by word of mouth ("Look what happened to me"). Again, the

strength of these relationships is not necessarily high due to the multiple factors that mediate between customers' experiences and their behavioral responses (Singh 1988).

Summarizing, in the present article, we test for the behavioral effects of experienced regret and disappointment after a failed service encounter. We expect that these two specific emotions have idiosyncratic direct effects on customers' behavioral responses. These effects are expected to be different for disappointment and regret, and we expect that they are not too mediated by the dissatisfaction with the service encounters and service provider. Specifically, we hypothesize that regret has a direct effect on the tendency to switch service providers, and we expect that disappointment has a direct effect on the tendency to complain and to express word-of-mouth communication after a failed service encounter. These predictions were tested in two studies using very different methodologies.

STUDY 1: BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO REGRET AND DISAPPOINTMENT

In this first study, we tested the idea that regret and disappointment are associated with different behavioral responses. We did so by presenting participants, 50 students approached on the Tilburg University campus, with a vignette in which two customers are described, both of whom were equally dissatisfied with a service they had purchased. These customers, however, differed with respect to the specific emotions they experienced. One of them was described as especially regretful, whereas the other was described as especially disappointed. Next, the participants were asked, for each of the three behavioral responses, which of the two customers was most likely to express the behavioral response. The complete vignette read as follows (translated from the original Dutch):

Jansen and De Wit do not know each other. Both decided to become customers of the same service-providing organization. After having used the service several times, both Jansen and De Wit are rather dissatisfied about the service provision of the organization. Although they are equally dissatisfied, they do not experience identical emotions. Jansen is especially disappointed, whereas De Wit is especially regretful.

Next, the participants were asked to indicate whether either the disappointed Jansen or the regretful De Wit was most likely to engage in each of switching, word of mouth, and complaining. These behavioral responses were described as follows: "switching to another service provider," "talking with friends and relatives about this negative experience with the service," and "complain-

TABLE 1
Behavioral Responses Following Failed Service Encounters in Study 1

<i>Behavioral Response</i>	<i>Jansen: Disappointment (number of times chosen)</i>	<i>De Wit: Regret (number of times chosen)</i>	$\chi^2(1)$	<i>p <</i>
Switch	5	45	32.0	.001
Word of mouth	33	17	5.1	.025
Complain	40	10	18.0	.001

NOTE: Participants ($N = 50$) were asked to indicate, for each particular behavioral response, who felt a stronger tendency to engage in it, Jansen or De Wit.

ing to employees of the organization about their service," respectively.

The results are depicted in Table 1. They clearly show that regret is more associated with switching behavior (45 of 50 participants pointed to the regretful De Wit as being most likely to switch), whereas disappointment is more associated with both word-of-mouth and complaining behavior (33 and 40 of 50 participants indicated that the disappointed Jansen was most likely to engage in word-of-mouth and complaining behavior, respectively). These results provide some initial support for our hypotheses about the differential effects of the specific service-related emotions regret and disappointment. Of course, this study does not yet provide insight into whether these are direct effects or whether these effects were mediated by more general satisfaction responses. We argue, however, that the vignette explicitly stated that the customers were equally dissatisfied, which makes an alternative explanation in terms of mediation by satisfaction responses less likely. Moreover, in light of the research reviewed in the conceptual part, it is not yet clear how differences in satisfaction would have opposite effects for switching, on the one hand, and complaining and word-of-mouth behavior, on the other. In Study 2, we assessed satisfaction in addition to the specific emotions regret and disappointment and the different behavioral responses that were associated with a personal experience of a failed service encounter. This allowed us to investigate more appropriately whether the effects of the service-related emotions are direct effects or possibly mediated by dissatisfaction.

STUDY 2: SAMPLING REGRET AND DISAPPOINTMENT EXPERIENCES

In the second study, we aimed to generalize and extend our findings to real experiences and behaviors. Instead of asking consumers about behavioral tendencies in a hypothetical situation as in Study 1, we now used experience

sampling as a method. In experience sampling, a customer is asked to describe in detail his or her experience in response to an autobiographical episode. Next, the customer is asked to answer open- and closed-ended questions about this experience. Providing a detailed description of the experience helps the customer to remember more accurately what actually happened and to relive the experience. Although this procedure does not overcome all possible shortcomings related to the use of retrospective life accounts, it has been successfully applied in current emotion research including research on regret and disappointment (Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure 1989; Gilovich and Medvec 1995; Roseman, Wiest, and Swartz 1994; Zeelenberg et al. 1998a, 1998b). In Study 2, we asked each customer to report on a personal experience of dissatisfaction with services, which makes the method of experience sampling similar to that of critical incidents research. However, there are some differences. In critical incidents research the autobiographical episodes are focused on, whereas in experience sampling the experiential qualities of the episodes are central. Also, in critical incidents only extreme (critical) incidents are examined, whereas in experience sampling experiences of all intensity can be collected. In addition, each participant typically provides one positive and one negative critical incident, whereas there is no such restriction in experience sampling. Finally, whereas critical incidents research typically is used to categorize incidents and their antecedents and consequences, the experiences in experience sampling are followed by response scales that are subjected to standard testing.

More specifically, in Study 2 we asked each participant to describe one specific failed service encounter that he or she had experienced recently. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants provided free responses to open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were designed to facilitate participants' recollection of the service encounters and to have them reexperience thoughts and feelings. In the second part of the questionnaire, participants responded to a set of closed-ended questions concerning their emotions, judgments, and behavioral responses.

Study 2 has the following additional advantages over Study 1. Participants reported on a single experience and were not asked to compare regret or disappointment experiences. The instruction used for eliciting the reports of failed service encounters did not even mention the words regret and disappointment. These alterations of the procedure eliminated possible demand effects of Study 1. Moreover, in Study 2 we measured the behavioral responses with multiple items to obtain more reliable measures.

Method

A total of 150 students of Tilburg University participated in the study. Each of them was questioned about a service about which he or she was particularly dissatisfied. To sample a wide range of experiences, including experiences that were loaded with the emotion regret or the emotion disappointment, we used two different instructions for recalling such a specific experience. Approximately half of the participants read the *disconfirmed expectancies* instruction, aimed at eliciting an experience associated with disappointment. Specifically, each was instructed, "Please describe below an experience from your own life in which you were *very dissatisfied with the delivery of a service because it was worse than expected beforehand*. Describe this experience in so much detail that any reader of your description will understand why you were so much dissatisfied." The remaining participants read the *forgone alternatives* instruction, aimed at eliciting an experience associated with regret. In their instruction, the part in italics was "*very dissatisfied with the delivery of a service because, in retrospect, you would rather have liked to have chosen another service provider*." Apart from this focus on disconfirmed expectancies or forgone alternatives, the two questionnaires were identical. Next, the following open-ended questions were asked: "What kind of service was involved?" and "How long ago did it happen?" Participants could write down their responses in large boxes, which provided ample space.

The second part of the questionnaire contained a set of closed-ended questions. The extent of *disappointment* and *regret* experienced by participants was measured with "How much disappointment did you feel after this experience?" and "How much regret did you experience after this experience?," respectively, both accompanied by a 7-point response scale ranging from *nothing at all* (1) to *very much* (7).

Dissatisfaction with the service encounter was measured with the following two items: "In general, how good or bad did you feel after this experience?" (on an 11-point scale ranging from *good* [-5] to *bad* [+5]) and "In general, how dissatisfied were you with this service?" (on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all dissatisfied* [1] to *very dissatisfied* [7]). After standardizing the items to make their scales comparable, the scores were averaged ($\alpha = .58$).

Dissatisfaction with the service provider was measured with the following three 7-point items: "All in all, I currently feel that the service provider is . . ." (*good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, positive-negative*). Scores of the three items were averaged ($\alpha = .88$). The measures of dissatisfaction with the service encounters and dissatisfaction with the service provider express discriminant valid-

ity, as indicated by their nonunity correlation ($r = .34, p < .001$).

Nine possible *behavioral responses* to failed service encounters were measured. Items were selected from a recently developed scale to measure behavioral consequences of service quality (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). This scale covers behavioral responses with positive valence. Because our focus was on behavioral responses to disappointment and regret, we selected items that could be reworded into responses with negative valence. Five items measured switching: "I have used the services of XYZ less than before," "I have switched to a competitor of XYZ," "I will use less of the services of XYZ in the near future," "I will make use of the services of a competitor of XYZ," and "I will make use of the services of a competitor, even if he or she is somewhat more expensive." Two items assessed complaining: "I have complained to employees of XYZ about their service" and "I have complained to external agencies, such as the consumer union, about the service of XYZ." Two items assessed word-of-mouth communication: "I have talked to others about my experience" and "I have complained to other customers about the service of XYZ." All items were accompanied by 7-point response scales ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very strongly* (7).

To explore whether the expected factors in customers' behavioral responses to failed service encounters would emerge in the present context, a principal components analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the nine behavioral response items. A clear three-factor structure emerged that covered 70.915% of the variance. The five items that covered switching from XYZ or to a competitor loaded highest on the first factor (loadings of .893 to .820, eigenvalue after rotation = 3.596). The two items that tapped word of mouth loaded highest on the second factor (loadings of .874 and .855, eigenvalue after rotation = 1.529). The two items that tapped complaining loaded highest on the third factor (loadings of .797 and .734, eigenvalue after rotation = 1.258). In subsequent analyses, scores of the three-factor solution are used.

Results

FAILED SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

First, a content analysis was performed on the open-ended questions that tapped the failed service encounters. Two independent judges, unaware of the purpose of the study, coded the descriptions provided by the respondents. The level of agreement was 83.2%. Disagreement was resolved by discussion. Table 2 presents the categories of services and their incidence in this study.

TABLE 2
Service Categories With Failed Encounters
in Study 2 (N = 149)

<i>Service Category</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Transportation	30.9
Repair and utility services	17.4
Restaurants, entertainment, hospitality	10.7
Travel agencies	8.1
Consulting and education	8.1
Telecommunications	5.4
Banking and insurance	5.4
Government services	4.0
Personal care (beauty, hairdresser)	4.0
Spectator events	4.0
Stores	2.0

Participants reported a wide variety of failed service encounters, which fell in 11 categories. The highest incidence of failed service encounters was in transportation, both of people (by train, bus, and airplane) and of goods (mainly by mail). Failed service encounters also appeared frequently in repair (car, television, house) and utility (electricity, water) services, as shown in Table 2.

Participants' responses concerning the times when the failed service encounters happened were coded into eight categories ranging from *less than a week ago* (1) to *more than a year ago* (8). On average, the failed service encounter happened about 1 to 2 months before the study took place. Yet, in 29.6% of the cases, the failed service encounter happened longer than 6 months before the study.

The disconfirmed expectations and forgone alternatives versions of the questionnaire did not differ in a statistically significant manner in the service categories that they produced, $\chi^2(10) = 12.371, p = .261$, or in how long before the study the failed service encounters had happened, $\chi^2(7) = 9.655, p = .209$.

DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONS AND DISSATISFACTION

The instructions in the two versions of the questionnaire aimed at eliciting service experiences with different specific feelings but with the same overall dissatisfaction with the service encounters. The disconfirmed expectations instruction aimed at a feeling of disappointment, and the forgone alternatives instruction aimed at a feeling of regret. The results of *t* tests on the relevant items and scales indicate that the instructions successfully achieved this. As expected, customers experienced more disappointment in the disconfirmed expectations condition than in the forgone alternatives condition, means = 5.10 and 4.61, respectively, $t(148) = 2.00, p = .047$. Also in line with our

TABLE 3
Impact of Disappointment and Regret on Customer Dissatisfaction
and Behavioral Responses in Study 2

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Dissatisfaction With Encounter</i>	<i>Dissatisfaction With Provider</i>	<i>Response: Switch</i>	<i>Response: Word of Mouth</i>	<i>Response: Complain</i>
Disappointment	.555 (.001)	-.044 (.646)	-.013 (.878)	.367 (.001)	.120 (.232)
Regret	.005 (.942)	-.037 (.646)	.297 (.001)	-.176 (.019)	-.053 (.531)
Encounter dissatisfaction	NA	.371 (.001)	-.297 (.001)	.036 (.694)	-.069 (.502)
Provider dissatisfaction	NA	NA	.471 (.001)	.288 (.001)	.204 (.019)
R^2	.309	.119	.277	.263	.050
<i>F</i> value (and <i>p</i> value)	32.921 (.001)	6.598 (.001)	13.920 (.001)	12.964 (.001)	1.894 (.115)

NOTE: Parameters are standardized regression weights, with significance levels of *t* values in parentheses. Degrees of freedom are (2, 147) for the first analysis, (3, 146) for the second, and (4, 145) for all others.

expectations, customers reported more regret in the forgone alternatives version than in the disconfirmed expectations version of the questionnaire, means = 3.90 and 3.14, respectively, $t(144) = 2.38$, $p = .019$. The disconfirmed expectations and forgone alternatives versions of the questionnaire were not associated with significant differences in customers' dissatisfaction with the service encounter, means = .08 and -.09, respectively, $t(148) = 1.23$, $p = .219$. However, the two versions differed in a marginally significant manner on customers' dissatisfaction with the service provider, means = 4.88 and 5.25, respectively, $t(147) = -1.98$, $p < .06$.

Summarizing, these results show that the two questionnaires successfully tapped failed service encounters that differed in the amount of disappointment and regret that customers experienced. The service encounters reported in the two questionnaires did not lead to significant differences in dissatisfaction. Moreover, as discussed earlier, the types of events that were reported were similar in both conditions.

THE IMPACT OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND REGRET ON BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

Multiple regression analyses were performed to examine the direct and indirect effects of experienced disappointment and regret on customers' behavioral responses to failed service encounters. First, regression analyses were performed to examine the effect of disappointment and regret on customers' dissatisfaction with the service encounters and with the service provider. Next, the effect of disappointment and regret on customers' behavioral responses was analyzed. In these latter analyses, dissatisfaction with the service encounters and with the service provider were entered as explanatory variables as well. This procedure allowed us to examine the direct effects of disappointment and regret on behavioral responses after controlling for the effect of the two measures of dissatis-

faction. Also, the procedure effectively controlled for the fact that dissatisfaction with the service provider differed in a marginally significant manner between the two questionnaires. The results of the analyses are summarized in Table 3.

Inspection of Table 3 shows that dissatisfaction with the service encounters was driven by the disappointment experienced by customers, not by their regret, contrary to other results obtained by Inman, Dyer, and Jia (1997) and Taylor (1997). It appears that in the heterogeneous sample of failed service encounters under study, disappointment dominates dissatisfaction. We return to this result in the General Discussion section.

The regression results also revealed that, as expected, the influence of disappointment and regret on satisfaction with the service provider was mediated by satisfaction with the service encounters ($p < .001$). Neither disappointment ($p = .646$) nor regret ($p = .646$) had a significant direct effect on dissatisfaction with the service provider.

As expected, the regret that customers feel had a direct effect on the tendency to switch service providers, independent of the effects of dissatisfaction with the service encounters and dissatisfaction with the service provider. The effect of regret on switching was substantial and was statistically significant at $p < .001$. As hypothesized, disappointment had no direct effect on switching response ($p = .878$). Its effect was indirect only, through dissatisfaction with the service encounters and with the service provider. Unexpectedly, there was a significant effect of dissatisfaction with the service encounters on switching, and this effect was negative. Further inspection of the data revealed that there was no significant correlation ($p = .206$) between switching and dissatisfaction with the service encounters. Also, when we reran the regression analysis after removing provider dissatisfaction as a predictor, the effect of encounter dissatisfaction dropped to insignificance ($p = .244$). Because the effects of encounter satisfaction are not central in our theorizing and were included in the regres-

sion analyses merely to provide a stronger test for the direct effects of regret and disappointment, and because the additional analyses are consistent with our hypothesis that the effects of encounter satisfaction occur via its effect on provider satisfaction, we do not speculate about the possible interpretation of this unexpected result.

As hypothesized, customers who feel disappointed were more inclined to talk about this with members of their social network. The effect of disappointment on word-of-mouth communication was independent of the effect that dissatisfaction with the service encounters and with the service provider had. The effect of disappointment was substantial, as indicated by a significance level of $p < .001$ of its regression coefficient. In addition, regret had a statistically significant effect on word-of-mouth communication. Yet, the regression sign indicates a negative relationship. This means that when controlling for disappointment and dissatisfaction, customers were more inclined to talk about the failed service encounters if they experienced less regret. The result is quite meaningful. Customers who feel less regret feel less personally responsible for the failed service encounters; hence, it is easier (less threatening) for them to talk with the members of their social network about the negative outcomes they experienced.

Finally, neither disappointment nor regret had a significant direct effect on the incidence of complaining after failed service encounters. In fact, only the overall dissatisfaction with the service provider had a significant (but small) effect ($p = .019$) on complaining incidence, and overall the regression model was not significant ($R^2 = .05$, $p = .115$). This result testifies to the difficulty to account for variation in complaining responses, which has been documented frequently in the past (Oliver 1997; Singh 1988).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of these two studies clearly show that the emotions of disappointment and regret have differential direct effects on the behavior of dissatisfied customers. Previous research has primarily focused on the disappointment part of dissatisfaction, that is, the extent to which expectancies were disconfirmed. The present studies underscore the claim of Inman, Dyer, and Jia (1997) and Taylor (1997) about the importance of regret by demonstrating its relevance in understanding customers' reactions to unsatisfying services. Moreover, the study follows up on Oliver (1997), who noticed that "researchers have investigated the occurrence of regret rather than its consequences" (p. 228) and suggested that more research on these consequences is needed. The present studies show

that regret directly promotes switching behavior, independent of the level of dissatisfaction with the service encounters and service provider. At the same time, the studies show that disappointment has a direct impact on word-of-mouth communication of dissatisfied customers. The results of Study 1 indicate that disappointment also promotes complaining, although this was not replicated in Study 2.

Even though the present studies support the findings of Inman, Dyer, and Jia (1997) and Taylor (1997) at a more general level, there is some disagreement at a lower level. Recall that both Inman, Dyer, and Jia and Taylor argued that regret should be incorporated into the overall satisfaction score. That also is what they found in their studies. However, in the present Study 2, regret did not affect dissatisfaction with the service encounters. How might this be caused? A possible explanation is that in Study 2 the level of experienced regret was assessed, and this was used to predict satisfaction. In the studies of Inman, Dyer, and Jia and Taylor, regret was not assessed directly; rather, it was inferred from the success of a regret manipulation. It might be that these regret manipulations result in more extreme regret than the regret that was picked up by our experience sampling method. An experimental study in which regret is both manipulated and assessed might provide more insight.

We also should note that Study 2 did not show effects of regret, disappointment, or dissatisfaction with the encounters on complaining (although we did find a small effect of dissatisfaction with the service provider on complaining). Moreover, we could not account for variance in complaining to the same extent as we could for the other behavioral responses (cf. the R^2 's in Table 3). Perhaps this is due to the low incidence of complaining in the sample. A total of 98.7% of the participants indicated that they had not complained to a third party, and 65.5% indicated that they had not complained to the service provider. Perhaps there are too many factors that intervene between dissatisfaction and complaining to find strong overall relationships. This also might explain why we did find such an effect in Study 1, where we asked for behavioral tendencies instead of actual behaviors. It is possible that disappointment, more than regret, produces a tendency to complain. However, implementing the tendency might be hindered by all the intervening factors, resulting in the absence of a strong effect on the level of real behavior. Another possibility is that we did not measure complaining appropriately (although the significant relationship between dissatisfaction with the service provider and complaining suggests that we did not do such a bad job). Future research on potential mediating and moderating factors in the relationship between service-related emotions and complaining is needed to resolve these issues.

It is important to note that the results from the present research were obtained using two very different methodologies: a vignette study in which participants compared regret and disappointment and reported about behavioral tendencies and an experience sampling study that focused on personal experiences of dissatisfying services. The second methodology generates an enormous heterogeneity in the service encounters included in this study, as is evident in Table 2. We consider this to be a strong point of the study. Despite the heterogeneity in service encounters that our participants reported, significant effects were found, and the pattern of results provides substantial support for our hypotheses. Together with the data of Study 1, we have convergent validity for our claim that the service-related emotions of disappointment and regret have idiosyncratic effects on behavior.

The results of these studies are also of interest for emotion theory. Although there is ample research on antecedents of emotions and on their phenomenology (for a review of antecedents and phenomenologies of regret and disappointment, see Zeelenberg et al. in press), the topic of behavioral consequences of emotions is virtually neglected in emotion research. The present research suggests that emotions also can be differentiated on the basis of the behavior that accompanies, or results from, the emotional experience.

Limitations

Our research has several limitations as well. First, our data rely on either the imaginations (Study 1) or the memories of customers (Study 2), both of which may be selective and fallible. Second, we used single items to measure regret and disappointment in Study 2. Although the results we obtained support the hypotheses and are in line with previous research, the measurement unreliability introduced by single items might have attenuated some relationships. For example, it cannot be ruled out that the absence in Study 2 of direct effects of the consumption emotions on customers' tendencies to complain after failed service encounters is due to our use of single items. A third limitation in Study 2 that is inherent in using experience sampling is that we did not manipulate regret and disappointment. Therefore, it might be the case that the events in the forgone alternatives version of the questionnaire were different from those in the disconfirmed expectations version on other aspects as well. Even though there were no significant between-condition differences in the categories depicted in Table 2, in the timing of the events, and in the satisfaction with the service encounters or service provider, we cannot rule out this possibility. The same applies to Study 1, where participants might have assumed differences in the events on the basis of the different emo-

tions experienced by the customers in the vignette. An experimental study with a more sophisticated assessment of regret and disappointment would overcome these possible limitations.

In summary, a fuller understanding of the role of specific service-related emotions and their idiosyncratic behavioral responses will lead to better predictions of customers' actual responses to failed service encounters. It is hoped that this also will eventually lead to less of those encounters.

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