

Customer satisfaction and complaint behaviour: The case of small custom-made clothing businesses

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ABSTRACT

Small and medium enterprises are increasingly considered as playing an important role in the economy of many countries, including South Africa. Unfortunately, home-based businesses in particular, such as most of the custom-made clothing businesses, are exhibiting high failure rates. The purpose of this study was to explore female customers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of custom-made clothes, the accompanying emotions resulting from the dissatisfaction and their coping strategies in the form of complaint behaviour. A survey-based research design was followed. The sample consisted of 209 females older than 18 years, residing in Tshwane, South Africa, who had had custom-made clothes made by small urban-based custom-made clothing businesses during the previous 12 months. Customers in this study had high expectations for most performance features of the custom-made garments, especially the sensory and emotional performance features, with which they were ultimately not as satisfied as they had expected to be. Most of them blamed the business for the dissatisfaction. They did, however, not contact the business to complain but rather told others about the experience and decided no longer to support the business. They also experienced high levels of negative emotions such as disappointment, frustration and sadness. The results have implications for small custom-made clothing businesses.

Key words: complaint behaviour, small businesses, custom-made clothing, dissatisfaction, emotions

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has prioritised the promotion of small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs). In the same year, the

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country's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) highlighted that small and medium businesses are important in the development of the economy and the creation of employment (Amra, Hlatshwayo & McMillan 2013). Although there are no internationally agreed definitions or criteria of what constitutes small, medium and micro-sized enterprises, most definitions are based on the number of employees and annual turnover. The South African National Credit Regulator (NCR) defines a small business as "a separate and distinct business entity, including co-operative enterprises and non-governmental organizations, managed by one owner or more which, including its branches or subsidiaries, if any, is predominantly carried on in any sector or sub-sector of the economy" (NCR 2011). A small enterprise has fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover of less than R2–R25 million, depending on the industry. Many micro- and small businesses in South Africa are, however, not registered and therefore operate in the informal sector (Amra et al. 2013; Ligthelm 2013).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly considered as playing an important role in the economy of many countries, including South Africa. South Africa suffers from high unemployment, with an unemployment rate of 25.40% in the third quarter of 2014 (Trading Economics 2014). According to Olawale and Garwe (2010), one of the best ways to address unemployment is to promote small business development. In 2013 the informal sector accounted for 28.13% of employment, while 84.25% of informally employed individuals in South Africa worked for SMEs with fewer than 10 employees. These SMEs make up approximately 40% of all firms in the economy. Unfortunately, the failure rate of SMEs in South Africa is one of the highest in the world, with about 75% of new SMEs not becoming established firms (SME Reports 2014). Specifically home-based businesses, such as most of the custom-made clothing businesses, are exhibiting higher hazards and closure rates than enterprises located in commercial districts (Rogerson 2000). From their research findings, Brink, Cant and Ligthelm (2003) attributed this high failure rate to, amongst others, increased competition in the small business sector and insufficient demand for the product. Moreover, customers who seek custom-made products are usually motivated by the desire for high-quality unique products (Peterson & Gordon 2001; Foreman 2007). Custom-made businesses therefore need to be innovative and competent in order to prosper (SME Reports 2014). Part of being competent is being aware of customer expectations and being able to satisfy them. Dissatisfaction with a product's or service's performance can lead to complaints to the businesses as well as consumer behaviour changes such as boycotting the business, negative word of mouth or even taking no action but remaining angry (Chen-Yu, Williams & Kincade 1999; Donoghue, De Klerk & Isaac 2012). Negative word of mouth is a common response to dissatisfaction, and entails telling friends and other members of one's social

network about a negative product encounter with the business and advising them not to acquire the product from the same business (Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenberg 2003; Zeelenberg & Pieters 2004). Studies have shown that dissatisfied customers share their experiences with twice as many people as satisfied customers do (Dubrovski 2001; Rad 2011). Therefore, negative word of mouth can be detrimental, as the business can lose the opportunity to remedy the situation, consequently leading to loss of sales and profits.

Most informal micro and small businesses do not engage much in marketing but rely on word of mouth as their means of advertising, which means that they should always put the customer first. This is also the view of the Consumer Goods and Services Ombud, Adv. Neville Melville (2014: 1–2): “If someone cannot treat customers fairly and honestly and provide quality goods and services at a reasonable price, one must question why they should be allowed to conduct a business at all.” Sadly, in the experience of the Consumer Goods and Services Ombud, “small businesses seldom live up to, let alone exceed, the service levels of most retailers as far as complaint handling is concerned. Instead of welcoming complaints as valuable customer feedback, some small business owners tend to take them personally and become defensive, if not downright hostile.” This not only does irreparable damage to the business relationship, but also leaves small businesses in the dark about what exactly their customers expect from their products.

This paper aims to shed light on the expectations, satisfaction/dissatisfaction and complaint behaviour of customers of small custom-made clothing businesses. In a South African context, no research could be traced on female custom-made clothing customers as a market segment, their evaluation and satisfaction with custom-made clothes or their complaint behaviour in cases of dissatisfaction. The specific objectives of this study were therefore to:

- Determine and describe the relationship between the importance of customer expectations of, and the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with, the performance of custom-made clothes.
- Explore and describe dissatisfied customers’ appraisals following their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the end product.
- Determine and describe the relationship between customers’ emotions and their coping strategies in terms of complaint behaviour.

Theoretical background

In this section, clothing quality is first conceptualised. Secondly, the theory of customer expectations, perceived product performance and satisfaction/

dissatisfaction is explained in terms of the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm. The section focuses thirdly on the role of cognitive appraisal and the resultant emotions, and finally on emotions and post-purchasing complaint behaviour as coping strategy.

Product quality

Stamper, Humphries, Sharp and Donnell (1991) and Clodfelter and Fowler (n.d.) view a product's quality (in this case clothing quality) as the superiority and excellence of the product. However, quality is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, which is relative and difficult to perceive (Swinker & Hines 2006; Koskennurmi-Sivonen & Pietarila n.d.). To a customer, quality is the degree to which an item satisfies the customer's needs (Brown & Rice 2014). From a customer's perspective, quality therefore depends on the dimensions of a product that are important to the user, and these dimensions differ by product as well as by customer. Customers' perceptions of the quality of products include both concrete and abstract features of the products. This is referred to as 'perceived quality'. Defining quality from this perspective implies that it is not universal, and that the way the customer perceives it depends on her needs and preferences (Kadolph 1998).

Product quality has two dimensions, namely the physical features (what the product is) and the performance features (what the product does or can do) (Brown & Rice 2014). The physical features of products, also known as intrinsic features, provide the product's (in this case clothing) tangible form and composition, and cannot be altered without changing the product itself. These include the design, materials, construction and finishes. The product's physical features determine its performance features. For this reason, customers purchase products with specific physical features that they believe will fulfil certain performance expectations.

Brown and Rice (2014) further categorise performance features into functional and aesthetic performance features. Functional performance features refer to the product's utility and durability aspects, which are the performance features other than the product's appearance. With regard to clothing, that includes aspects such as the comfort of the garment, ease of maintenance and suitability for end-use. Aesthetic performance refers to the sensorial attractiveness/beauty of the product, but also to the emotional and symbolic qualities of the product – in other words, the messages that the product will convey and the feelings that it will evoke when the product is used (Fiore & Kimle 1997; Kincade, Redwine & Hancock 1998; De Klerk & Lubbe 2008). Aesthetic performance therefore has a sensory, an emotional and a symbolic dimension. However, these abstract factors are very difficult to define, which is why

customers, in the absence of tangible products as reference, are often not able to express their emotional and symbolic preferences to the custom-made business when ordering custom-made products. This could result in an unhappy customer who feels that her aesthetic needs have not been met.

The disconfirmation paradigm

The expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm is widely used to explain how customers reach satisfaction/dissatisfaction decisions (Churchill & Suprenant 1982; Sattari 2007). An explanation of the theory from a marketing context is that customer satisfaction is a collective outcome of perception, evaluation and psychological reactions to the consumption experience with a product or service (Sattari 2007). The full disconfirmation paradigm, according to Churchill and Suprenant (1982), has four related constructs, namely customer expectations, product performance, confirmation/disconfirmation, and customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Expectations are a set of beliefs held by users about a product's perceived level of performance (Sattari 2007; Gocek & Berecen 2012). Customers usually form expectations about the anticipated performance of products prior to purchasing or ordering (Sattari 2007; Donoghue & De Klerk 2009), and acquire products with specific physical features that they believe will fulfil their performance expectations. Satisfaction literature suggests that customers may use multiple types of expectations when forming opinions about a product's anticipated performance, which can relate to the product's functional performance and symbolic meaning, and the customer's emotional needs (Laufer 2002).

While using the product, customers reach satisfaction decisions by comparing their prior expectations about how the product should perform with the perceived product performance, and note whether there is a difference (Laufer 2002; Donoghue & De Klerk 2009; Wang 2012). Whenever there is a discrepancy between prior expectations and actual performance, disconfirmation arises, which is presumably, according to Churchill and Suprenant (1982), the dominant variable in the central position of the theory. An individual's expectations are confirmed when the product performs as expected, negatively disconfirmed when the product performs more poorly than expected, and positively disconfirmed when the product performs better than expected (Dubrovski 2001; Sattari 2007). Whereas some researchers, such as Swan and Combs (1976), believe that confirmation and positive disconfirmation result in satisfaction, other researchers, such as Day (1984) and Westbrook (1987), are of the opinion that confirmation leads to indifference (neutral situation), where

the outcome obtained exactly meets the expected outcome. This implies that the customer is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The disconfirmation theory suggests that satisfaction/dissatisfaction is not only generated by the direction of the gap between prior expectations and perceived performance, but also by the intensity of the disconfirmation effect (Sattari 2007). Customers tend to express a great feeling of satisfaction when performance significantly exceeds expectations. Sattari (2007) refers to this feeling as delight. Compared to customer satisfaction, customer delight is a much stronger, positive emotional state of customer engagement, which happens when customers experience a mixture of surprise and happiness because of a product that is not only satisfying, but provides unanticipated satisfaction (Oliver, Rust & Varki 1997; Torres & Kline 2006). In order to exceed customer expectations and delight the customer, a business should identify the product dimensions that have more than proportional influence on customer satisfaction, and be able to separate them from those that are an absolute must in the eyes of the customer. This could be challenging for the small custom-made clothing business, as there is initially no product that customers can evaluate and against which they can compare their expectations.

Cognitive appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is defined by Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis and Gruen (1986) as a process through which an individual evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is significant to his/her personal wellbeing, and if so, in what way. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) have popularised the cognitive appraisal theory while studying consumption emotions and their impact on post-purchase behaviours. The cognitive appraisal theory has been widely used for a better understanding of the role of specific emotions on post-consumption behaviour, as it offers a more in-depth approach to explain the subtle distinctions of emotions (Watson & Spence 2007; Wang 2012). The notion behind the cognitive appraisal approach is that the customer is always active in finding the meanings of events in the environment. Lazarus (1991) stresses the importance of cognitive appraisal in guiding individuals to grasp the significance of what is happening in their encounters with the environment, and in choosing among alternative values and courses of action. According to Lazarus (1991), an emotion is thus always a response to cognitive activity, which generates meaning. For an emotion to be aroused, the event must be appraised as affecting a person in some way, or the person must have a personal stake in it (Bougie et al. 2003; Watson & Spence 2007).

Therefore, the mere recognition that an individual has something to gain or lose, generates an emotion.

Appraisal takes place in two phases, namely, primary and secondary appraisals. The two appraisal phases converge to determine whether the person–environment transaction is regarded as significant for wellbeing (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994). During primary appraisal, the individual evaluates whether he/she has anything at stake in a specific encounter. During secondary appraisal, the individual evaluates whether anything can be done to overcome or prevent harm. Secondary appraisal also involves customers' assessment of their ability to cope with the marketplace problem by evaluating various coping options. The secondary appraisal process takes into account blame attribution for the incident, evaluation of one's own coping potential, and assessment of what might happen in the future. Attribution of blame for the incident (knowing who is responsible) is a necessary process of secondary appraisal.

Attribution is therefore about who is responsible for the given situation and who or what had control over the stimulus event (Watson & Spence 2007; Demir, Desmet & Hekkert 2009). While attempting to explain the causes of the disconfirmation, customers may attribute the causes to external factors, to situational factors, or to internal factors. This dimension of attribution, which involves attributing product performance failure either to something within the person or to an outside agent such as the manufacturer, is referred to as locus of control (Laufer 2002). Specific emotions resulting from cognitive appraisals therefore vary according to the attribution of responsibility for the stressful situation. A customer who is dissatisfied, while attributing blame to himself/herself, will therefore react differently from one who is dissatisfied and blames the manufacturer or the circumstances (Soscia 2007).

Complaint behaviour

When a customer appraises a dissatisfying and stressful market encounter as harmful for his/her personal wellbeing, negative emotions such as anger and sadness could be triggered. This will leave the individual in a state of disequilibrium, which will require him/her to engage in one or more coping strategies in order to return to a normal state. Coping refers to the psychological and behavioural efforts undertaken by the individual to manage the demands of a stressful emotion-evoking event (Nyer 1997). It involves what individuals do and think in an effort to manage stress and the emotions associated with it (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994). Two major functions of coping are to regulate stressful emotions and to alter the troubled person–environment relationship causing the distress. During the process of coping, individuals engage in some post-purchasing behaviours, identified in the literature

as coping strategies (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994; Soscia 2007; Watson & Spence 2007), or in a purchasing process also seen as complaint behaviour.

Under Day and Landon's (1977) taxonomy of consumer complaint behaviour, three major coping strategies are available to consumers who are in the end dissatisfied with a product, namely, private action, public action, or no action. As such, consumers may engage in private action (warning family and friends) and/or in public action such as seeking redress, or refrain from taking action by rationalising and forgetting about the unfortunate experience (Crié 2003). Many factors, such as product-specific variables, redress environment variables and consumer-related variables, influence dissatisfied consumers' decisions whether to engage in specific complaint action or no action (Donoghue & De Klerk 2009; Tronvoll 2011). Direct complaining may, in the case of the small business, pose more of a challenge for the consumer with low coping potential, as it usually involves confronting the owner directly. However, Melville (2014: 2) notes that: "If (small) businesses are able to master complaint handling, they stand to gain. Research shows that (small) businesses that are able to resolve consumer complaints satisfactorily benefit from increased loyalty."

Methodology

A survey-based research design was followed, with the research purpose being exploratory and descriptive.

Sampling

The units of analysis were African and Caucasian females who resided in the Tshwane region of Gauteng. The participants had to be older than 18 years, had to fall in the LSM group 6–10 and had to have had one or more custom-made items made in the previous 12 months by formal or informal (where the owner was also the designer) small custom-made clothing businesses, situated in business areas and suburbs of Tshwane. A purposive and snowball sampling technique was followed. This technique is most appropriate when members of a special population are difficult to locate (Babbie & Mouton 2001; Walliman 2005). Two hundred and nine (209) respondents took part in the research. Demographic results revealed that most of the respondents had their garments made for special occasions (73.21%). Fifty-one respondents chose formal small businesses, situated in business areas in Tshwane, while 158 (75.60%) respondents chose informal home-based businesses, situated in suburbs of Tshwane. Most of the respondents were willing to pay between R600 and R3000 for the garment.

Measuring instrument

A structured questionnaire was used and was pre-tested on a sample of 15 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section (7 questions) consisted of the demographic background of the respondents and the business (age, occasion for which the garment was made, cost of garment and type of business). In the second part, the respondents' expectations for and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the functional and aesthetic performance dimensions of the custom-made product were measured on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very important/satisfied) to 4 (not important/very dissatisfied). Respondents' expectations and satisfaction/dissatisfaction were tested in respect of all the functional and aesthetic performance dimensions (3 statements tested each dimension) of the custom-made item, namely comfort, durability, ease of care, suitability for end-use, as well as the sensorial, emotional and symbolic dimensions of aesthetic performance (3 questions with sub-questions). This type of scale has previously been used successfully to measure consumers' expectations for and satisfaction/dissatisfaction with clothing products (Nkambule 2010; Smith 2010; Jason 2011). In the third part, dissatisfied respondents had to indicate their attribution of blame, the type and intensity of the emotions that they had experienced, and their post-purchase behaviour in terms of Day and Landon's (1977) taxonomy of complaint behaviour (6 questions).

Procedures

The questionnaire was handed out at the respondents' places of convenience with the assistance of two trained field workers. Most respondents opted to complete the questionnaire at their convenience and return it within a period specified by the researcher.

Data analysis

The findings are presented and described in the form of frequencies and percentages. Cronbach's alpha coefficient tests were done in order to determine consistency between the three statements that measured each dimension for both expectations and satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65 ($\alpha = 0.65$) was accepted as criterion for the test. Where low consistency was found ($\alpha < 0.65$), statements were removed and considered individually to find an explanation for the inconsistency. The results indicated that, except for the three statements that measured the suitability for end-use and sensory dimensions, good consistency was determined between the statements that measured all the other dimensions. The

chi-square and Fisher’s exact test (in cases where a number of cells with expected frequencies of less than five) were used to determine the relationships between the importance of expectations and the level of satisfaction, and the relationships between emotions and post-purchase complaint behaviour. The level of significance was established at 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$).

Results

Expectations versus satisfaction

The aim of the first objective was to determine and describe the relationship between the importance of customer expectations for and the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the various performance dimensions of custom-made clothes (Table 1).

Table 1: Test for relationship: Importance of expectations versus level of satisfaction

Construct	Expectation	Very important + Important %	Satisfaction	Very satisfied + Satisfied %	P value chi2-test Fisher's exact test
Care	It should not crease easily	70.8	It did not crease easily	83.0	0.7797
Care	It should be easy to wash	62.7	It was easy to wash	82.0	< 0.0001*
Care	It should need little or no ironing	52.6	It needed little or no ironing	80.9	0.4515
Average		62.0		82.0	
Durability	The material should last long	84.7	The material was of good quality	91.0	0.1372
Durability	It should retain its shape	84.2	It retained its shape	93.2	0.0391*
Durability	Construction and finishing should be strong	92.0	Construction and finishing were strong	84.1	0.7050
Average		87.0		89.44	
Comfort	It should allow room for easy movement	90.9	It allowed room for easy movement	89.5	0.0002*
Comfort	The material should not scratch my skin	92.4	The material did not scratch my skin	90.2	0.2013

Table 1 continued

Customer satisfaction and complaint behaviour

Table 1 continued

Comfort	It should be comfortable for the season's weather	84.7	It was comfortable for the season	91.4	0.0536
Average		89.3		90.4	
Suitability	It should be suitable for the specific occasion	98.1	It was suitable for the specific occasion	95.1	1.0000
Suitability	It should be possible to wear it to other occasions	63.6	It could be worn to other occasions	83.2	< 0.0001*
Suitability	It should be possible to match with other clothes	38.8	It was possible to match it with other clothes	81.5	< 0.0001*
Average		66.8		86.6	
Emotional	It should make me feel good about myself	96.2	It made me feel good about myself	89.9	0.4834
Emotional	It should make me feel better dressed than others	64.6	It made me feel better dressed than others	80.9	0.5485
Emotional	It should make me feel excited when wearing it	84.7	It made me feel excited when I wore it	87.5	1.0000
Average		81.8		86.1	
Sensory	The style should suit my figure type	97.6	The style suited my figure type	92.2	1.0000
Sensory	The material should feel nice to touch	79.9	The material felt nice to touch	94.0	0.0909
Sensory	The material should drape well on my body	95.2	The material draped well on my body	86.9	0.1160
Average		90.9		90.0	
Symbolic	It should make me look appropriate for my status	78.9	It made me look appropriate for my status	89.0	0.0002*
Symbolic	It should make me look like a celebrity	49.3	It made me look like a celebrity when I wore it	85.2	0.0137*
Symbolic	It should make me look fashionable	77.5	It made me look fashionable	89.4	0.3922
Average		68.6		87.9	

* 5% level of significance $p \leq 0.05$

Table 1 shows that, apart from the care (average, 62.0%), suitability (average, 66.8%) and symbolic (average, 68.6%) dimensions, all other performance dimensions were rated very high with regard to their importance, with the sensory beauty of the product rated as the most important (average, 90.9%) dimension. The notably lower performance expectations for care and suitability for end-use (specifically that it should be possible to mix and match with other outfits (38.8%)) can probably be ascribed to the fact that most respondents had their garments made for a specific special occasion, in which case one does not necessarily require that the garment should be easy to care for, or that it should be possible to be mixed and matched with other garments. Where performance dimensions are of such high importance to customers, as was the case in this study, customers usually expect to be highly satisfied with the performance of the specific dimensions when the garment is worn. Table 1 shows the percentages of these customers who rated a dimension as very important and important, and who were very satisfied and satisfied with the performance of the dimension. Although percentages for satisfaction seem to be high, they were in many cases lower than was expected, with no significant relationship between the importance of the expectation and the level of satisfaction ($p > 0.05$). It is further clear that specifically with regard to the six statements that measured the emotional and sensory dimensions, no significant relationships were found between the importance of performance and level of satisfaction with any of these statements. Regarding the overall satisfaction with the performance of the end product, just over half (51.7%) of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied, while 32.5% indicated that they were satisfied, and (15.8%) respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied (Table 2).

Table 2: Overall level of satisfaction

Level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction	Frequency (n = 209)	%	Combined %
Very satisfied	108	51.7	84.2
Satisfied	68	32.5	
Dissatisfied	24	11.5	15.8
Very dissatisfied	9	4.3	
Total	209	100	100

Customers' appraisals

The aim of the second objective was to explore and describe the dissatisfied respondents' appraisals following their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the end product.

Table 3: Attribution of blame

Attribution of blame	%
Designer/small business	78.8
Self	12.1
Other	3.0
Missing	6.1
Total	100

Table 3 shows that the majority (78.8%) of the 33 respondents who were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with the end product blamed the small business for their dissatisfaction. Only four (12.1%) of the respondents blamed themselves for the dissatisfaction. Twenty-six (78.8%) of the respondents also felt that the party that they blamed had control over the situation (Table 4).

Table 4: Controllability of preventing poor performance related to custom-made clothes

Controllability of preventing poor performance	Frequency	%
Yes	26	78.8
No	2	6.1
Uncertain	4	12.1
Missing	1	3.0
Total	33	100

It is clear from Table 5 that the dissatisfied respondents experienced strong negative emotions following the disappointing situation. Most of the respondents felt extremely or very disappointed (75.8%), extremely or very frustrated (72.7%), as well as extremely or very sad (66.7%) and extremely or very unpleasantly surprised (57.6%). A substantial percentage felt extremely or very stressed (48.5%) and extremely or very angry (45.5%).

Table 5: Emotions following dissatisfaction (n = 33)

Type of emotion	Intensity of emotion	Frequency	%	Combined %
Anger	1 Extremely angry	5	15.2	45.5
	2 Very angry	10	30.3	
	3 Reasonably angry	14	42.4	51.5
	4 Not angry at all	3	9.1	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100
Sadness	1 Extremely sad	4	12.1	66.7
	2 Very sad	18	54.6	
	3 Reasonably sad	8	24.2	30.3
	4 Not sad at all	2	6.1	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100
Unpleasant surprise	1 Extremely unpleasantly surprised	6	18.2	57.6
	2 Very unpleasantly surprised	13	39.4	
	3 Reasonably unpleasantly surprised	10	30.3	42.4
	4 Not unpleasantly surprised at all	4	12.1	
	Total		33	100
Frustration	1 Extremely frustrated	16	48.5	72.7
	2 Very frustrated	8	24.2	
	3 Reasonably frustrated	6	18.2	24.3
	4 Not at all frustrated	2	6.1	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100
Stress	1 Extremely stressed	6	18.2	48.5
	2 Very stressed	10	30.3	
	3 Reasonably stressed	12	36.4	48.5
	4 Not at all stressed	4	12.1	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100
Disappointment	1 Extremely disappointed	19	57.6	75.8
	2 Very disappointed	6	18.2	
	3 Reasonably disappointed	6	18.2	21.2
	4 Not disappointed at all	1	3.0	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100
Shock	1 Extremely shocked	2	6.1	33.4
	2 Very shocked	9	27.3	
	3 Reasonably shocked	14	42.4	63.6
	4 Not shocked at all	7	21.2	
	Missing	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100	100

Complaint behaviour

The aim of the third objective was to determine and describe the relationship between the respondents' emotions and their coping strategies in terms of complaint behaviour.

Of the 33 dissatisfied respondents, only 18 respondents took any action, whether formal action, informal action or avoidance. When asked about their reasons for not taking any action, the reasons that were mostly given by the 14 respondents who did not take any action were that they did not think it was worth the effort and time (57.1%), and that they did not trust that the designer or business could rectify the problem (35.7%).

Table 6 shows that in only six cases (33.3%) did those who took action opt for problem-focused coping by contacting the designer. In most cases they opted for emotion-focused coping and avoidance coping. It should be noted that all dissatisfied and very dissatisfied respondents informed friends, family and acquaintances about the bad experience, while 15 of the 18 respondents also decided to stop supporting the small business.

Table 6: Types of actions taken by respondents following dissatisfaction with the performance of custom-made clothes (n = 18)

Types of private and public actions taken	Frequency	%
Problem-focused coping		
Contacted the designer/small business to obtain redress, such as refund or alteration.	6	33.3
Complained in the social mass media (magazine/newspaper/Facebook/consumer complaint website)	0	0
Emotion-focused coping		
Informed friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	18	100
Avoidance coping		
Stopped supporting the designer	15	83.3
Total	39	

Table 7 shows that when respondents experienced negative emotions, in most cases they contacted family, friends or acquaintances to tell them about the bad experience. Even in cases where respondents experienced extremely strong negative emotions, most of them still contacted others to inform them about the experience, for example, although only 46.5% of the dissatisfied respondents indicated that they

were extremely or very angry, 73.3% of these respondents nevertheless told others about the bad experience. Significant relationships were found between extremely or very disappointed as well as extremely or very angry respondents and their coping by telling friends and family about the experience ($p \leq 0.05$).

Table 7: Test for relationship: Emotions following dissatisfaction versus coping strategies

Emotion	%	Coping strategies	%	P value chi2-test Fisher's exact test
Extremely disappointed and very disappointed	75.8	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	60.0	0.2095
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	20.0	1.0000
		Inform family/friends/acquaintances about the bad experience	56.0	0.0105*
Extremely frustrated and very frustrated	72.7	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	58.3	0.4235
		Stop supporting the designer	45.8	1.0000
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	25.0	0.2964
Extremely sad and very sad	66.7	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	59.1	0.4501
		Stop supporting the designer	50.0	0.4461
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	18.2	1.0000
Extremely unpleasantly surprised and very unpleasantly surprised	57.6	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	68.4	0.0622
		Stop supporting the designer	52.6	0.3347
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	26.3	0.2085
Extremely stressed and very stressed	48.5	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	56.3	0.7232
		Stop supporting the designer	50.0	0.4760
Extremely angry and very angry	46.5	Stop supporting the designer	60.0	0.0818
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	33.3	0.0755
		Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	73.3	0.0314*
Extremely shocked and very shocked	33.3	Inform friends/family/acquaintances about the bad experience	54.6	0.9072
		Stop supporting the designer	54.6	0.4651
		Contact the designer to obtain redress	27.3	0.3897

* 5% level of significance; $p \leq 0.05$

Discussion

According to the theory of perceived quality, customers form expectations about the performance of products prior to acquiring and using them (Sattari 2007), and they purchase the products with specific physical features that they believe will fulfil their performance expectations (Brown & Rice 2014). For the custom-made clothing customer, this may pose a problem, as there are initially no physical features that can aid her evaluation at the point of sale, while the quality of the end product depends primarily on the small business owner's or designer's skills and ability to correctly interpret the importance of the various performance attributes that the customer expects from the final product. Participants in this study had high expectations regarding the performance of most of the quality dimensions and therefore most probably expected superior performance from the final product. Most of the respondents in this study indicated that they had ordered the custom-made garments for special occasions, which explains the superior importance that they placed on the sensory, emotional and aesthetic dimensions relative to the importance of suitability for end-use, in other words how beautiful the garment would look on the body and how they would feel when wearing the garment. These are non-tangible dimensions that are generally difficult to describe to another person, but that are of the utmost importance for most female consumers when choosing a garment for a special or social occasion (Jason 2011). Although a high number of respondents were extremely or very satisfied with most of the quality dimensions of the final product, the study revealed that, for those respondents who rated the emotional and sensory dimensions as very important or important, no significant relationships existed between the six statements that measured the importance and satisfaction of the sensory as well as the emotional quality dimensions, indicating that the respondents were ultimately not as satisfied with these dimensions as they had expected to be. This could imply that the small businesses or designers were not able to translate their customers' sensory and emotional expectations into the formal qualities of the final product, or that the customers were not able to clearly verbalise their expectations.

Regarding their overall satisfaction with the final garment, only about 50 per cent of the participants were very satisfied with the overall performance of the final product, while almost a fifth were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and then, according to cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Lazarus 1994), had to appraise the situation in order to decide who was to blame for the situation, who had control over the situation and what could be done about the situation. Almost 80 per cent of the participants in this study blamed the small business/designer for their dissatisfaction and also felt the business/designer had control over the situation. Most of them

were extremely or very disappointed, frustrated and sad. One would therefore have expected them also to feel extremely or very angry, although less than half of the disappointed participants reported these high levels of anger. In a retail situation, one would have expected the participants to contact the party directly whom they blame for the situation. In this study, however, only six of the 33 disappointed customers contacted the small business. In far more cases, the participants opted for emotion-focused coping strategies by not further supporting the small business and by telling friends and family about their experiences; these behaviours could be detrimental to any small business.

The results of this study point to the strong power of emotions in consumers' choice of complaint behaviours. Significant relationships existed between very high and extreme levels of anger and disappointment, and telling friends and family about the bad experience. Previous studies have shown that when blame is attributed to businesses, customers experience anger and may consequently desire to do the business harm by engaging in negative word of mouth (Laufer 2002; Laufer & Gillespie 2004). Anger is often the result of a damaged ego, and one way to cope with it is to retaliate by warning others about the problem (Soscia 2007). Telling others about the product's failure will not solve the problem, but could lower the intensity of the consumer's emotions. Anger is associated with the appraisal of a consumption experience as frustrating and harmful (Bougie et al. 2003) and it occurs when the individual sees another person as the source of the unpleasant event (Menon & Dube 2004). According to Lazarus and Lazarus (1994), anger is often accompanied by high coping potential, which usually manifests itself in an aggressive behaviour directed towards the person who caused the unpleasant situation. Angry people often feel energised to fight against the cause of anger, because they feel that someone else is to be blamed (Laros & Steenkamp 2005). Although the findings of this study do not support previous research (Tronvoll 2011), namely that dissatisfied and angry customers usually take public action such as contacting the business for redress, they are consistent with the results of previous research studies specifically on dissatisfied clothing customers (Chen-Yu & Hong 2002). These studies have shown that when a clothing item fails to perform as expected, only a relatively small portion of customers seek redress from the manufacturer or retailer.

It should be noted that many different factors influence consumers' complaint behaviour, including customers' attitudes towards complaining (Kim et al. 2003; Yuksel, Kilinc & Yuksel 2006; De Matos, Rossi, Veiga & Vieira 2009). Attitudes towards complaining are influenced, amongst others, by consumers' attitude towards the business and their decisions to continue relations with the business. Previous research has shown that customers who want to continue relationships with a

business tend to also directly contact the business to complain or to voice their initial expectations (Yuksel et al. 2006; Kruger & Mostert, 2014), while customers with negative attitudes towards the business mostly engage in negative word of mouth (Lau & Ng 2001). Most of the dissatisfied customers in this study did not directly contact the small business to complain, but rather decided to tell others about the bad experience and not to continue their relationship with the business.

Attitudes towards complaint behaviour are also influenced by consumers' perceptions of the willingness of the business to listen to their complaints as well as the ability of the business to resolve the problem (Kim et al. 2003; Velázquez & Blasco 2012). Little previous research has focused on complaining directly to the small business and none on complaining to the custom-made small clothing business. Rhaman (2001), however, found that many small businesses are not customer-focused, do not record customer complaints and do not use customer complaints to improve their products and services, in which cases the customer then turns to negative word of mouth in an attempt to cope with the accompanying negative emotions such as frustration and anger. In this study, all the dissatisfied customers told family and friends about their dissatisfaction, irrespective of the specific emotions that they experienced, while those who did not take any action mostly felt that it would not be worth the effort, and in any case they did not trust the business to rectify the problem.

Conclusions and implications

This paper has shed some light on the relationship between custom-made clothing customer expectations of, and satisfaction with, the performance features of custom-made garments, their appraisals, emotions and complaint behaviour following dissatisfaction, as well as the relationship between dissatisfied customers' emotions and their coping strategies in terms of complaint behaviour.

Customers in this study had high expectations of most performance features, and specifically of the sensory and emotional performance of the garment that they had ordered. They expected superior performance from the final product. Unfortunately they were not as satisfied with the sensory and emotional performance of the final product as they had expected. Ultimately, only about half of the small custom-made clothing businesses' customers were very satisfied with the overall performance of the final product. More than three quarters of the dissatisfied customers blamed the business/designer for their dissatisfaction, felt that the business had control over the situation, and felt extremely or very disappointed, frustrated and sad.

Despite their high levels of disappointment, frustration and sadness, only about half of the dissatisfied customers took any action in the form of complaint behaviour,

while those who did not take action felt it was not worth it, and in any case they did not trust the business to rectify the problem. Most of those customers who did take action also did not contact the small business, but rather decided to tell friends and family and not to support the business in future. The results of this study point to the strong power of emotions in consumers' complaint behaviour. Significant relationships were found between very high and extreme levels of anger and disappointment, and telling friends and family about the bad experience; such behaviour could harm the reputation of the small business immensely, leaving the business in the dark about the customers' experiences and with no opportunity to rectify the problem.

The findings of this study have implications for the small custom-made clothing business and those businesses that operate in the custom-made manufacturing domain. Consumers become dissatisfied when a product does not meet their functional, sensory, emotional or symbolic needs and does not perform as they expected when the item was chosen and bought. As there is initially no product to evaluate or compare against their needs and expectations, customers then have to rely totally on the business to interpret their preferences and expectations and to translate those into a design and final product that will meet their needs. Custom-made businesses have to realise that it is generally difficult for their customers to express their non-tangible needs and the emotional and symbolic performances that they expect from the final product. It is therefore of the utmost importance for the small business to initially spend enough time with the customer to ensure that the business knows exactly what the customer expects regarding the functional and specifically the non-functional performance of the final product. This can be done by means of in-depth interviews that cover in detail all tangible and non-tangible performance features of the product.

Small businesses also have to realise that customers' dissatisfaction is accompanied by strong negative emotions, but, because they might think it would not be worth the effort, and they might also not trust the business or designer to rectify the problem, they will in most cases not come back and complain to the business. They would rather boycott the business in future and tell family and friends about the bad experience. Many, if not most, small businesses do not have or do not advertise a formal complaint-handling system, leaving their customers in the dark as to what to do about a problem and with no other option to cope with emotions of disappointment and anger than to tell family and friends about the negative experience. In the case of custom-made products, the customers know that the final product cannot be returned or exchanged for another product, which contributes to their high levels of frustration and sadness. Custom-made businesses should, if possible and depending on the product, encourage their customers to voice their unhappiness with any

performance feature at any stage of the design and construction process of the item, and certainly not wait until after they have received or worn the final product. This, however, requires an open and empathetic relationship between the customer and the business. All customers should be encouraged to contact the business in cases of dissatisfaction and should know what options there will be to rectify the problem, whether in the form of alterations or monetary reimbursement. Custom-made small businesses need to realise that they should, irrespective of a possible solution to the problem, always sympathetically acknowledge the dissatisfied customer's emotions and apologise for the customer's experience.

Limitations and future research

As a convenience sample was used, the results of this study are only representative of those who participated in this research study. This imposes limitations on the generalisation of the results to all custom-made small businesses in South Africa. The study was also limited to a sample of 209 respondents only from the Tshwane region in Gauteng. It is therefore recommended that the study also be conducted on a larger sample from other geographical areas in South Africa. Most of the participants in this study had their garments made by an informal small custom-made clothing business. It is recommended that the study also be conducted amongst customers from formal small custom-made clothing businesses.

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