

THE NEGATIVE ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG MILLENNIALS: TRIGGERS AND RESPONSES



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TIIVISTELMÄ

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Työn nimi Nuorten milleniaalien negatiivinen sitoutumiskäyttäytyminen	
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Tiivistelmä <p>Viime vuosikymmen on osoittanut asiakassitoutumisen olevan merkittävä trendi organisaatioissa sekä lukuisilla eri tutkimuksen aloilla. Tutkimuksen ansiosta ymmärrämme asiakkaiden sitoutumiskäyttäytymistä jo melko laajalti, mutta samanaikaisesti tarve kääntöpuolen, negatiivisen sitoutumisen tutkimukselle on kasvanut - tiedämme vasta vähän asiakkaiden negatiivisesta sitoutumisesta ja sen ilmenemismuodoista.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma pyrkii valaisemaan nuorten milleniaalien negatiivista sitoutumista tutkimalla, mitkä tekijät laukaisevat heissä negatiivista sitoutumiskäyttäytymistä sekä kuinka he reagoivat ja perustelevat toimintaansa negatiivisten asiakaskokemusten jälkeen. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmäksi valittiin nuoret milleniaalit, joiden asiakassitoutuminen on erityisen kiinnostavaa, koska diginatiivien sitoutumiskäyttäytyminen on monikanavaista ja poikkeaa siten aiemmista sukupolvista. Tutkimuksessa käytettiin vuonna 2017 kerättyä tutkimusaineistoa, johon vastasi miltei 300 Jyväskylän yliopiston opiskelijaa. Tutkimus on kvalitatiivinen, ja aineistoa tutkittiin temaattisen analyysin keinoin.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittivat viisi trigger-kategoriaa, joihin nuorten milleniaalien negatiivisen sitoutumiskäyttäytymisen herättäjät voidaan jakaa. Nämä viisi "triggeriä" olivat tuotteiden ja palveluiden virheet, asiakaspalvelun epäonnistuminen, ostotapahtuman ja toimituksen epäonnistuminen, korvauksien ja palautusten epäonnistuminen sekä organisaatioiden viestintään liittyvät epäonnistumiset.</p> <p>Nuorten milleniaalien negatiivisen sitoutumiskäyttäytymisen osoitettiin näyttävästi erityisesti tunteiden ja kokemusten jakamisena, johon päädyttiin pääasiassa halusta varoittaa muita kuluttajia ja tarpeesta purkaa tunteita. Siihen, päätyvätkö nuoret milleniaalit jatkamaan organisaatioiden kanssa asiointia negatiivisten kokemusten jälkeen, näyttivät vaikuttavan etenkin ydintuotteet ja -palvelut ja kilpailijoiden tarjoamien vaihtoehtojen saatavuus sekä vaihtamisen vaivattomuus.</p> <p>Tutkimus tuotti laajaa ymmärrystä nuorten milleniaalien negatiivisen sitoutumiskäyttäytymisen herättäjistä ja ilmentymistä, mutta tulokset osoittavat myös tarpeen yhä laajemmalle ymmärrykselle. Perusteellisemman tulkinnan luomiseksi tutkimuksen on syvennyttävä negatiivisen sitoutumiskäyttäytymisen taustalla vaikuttaviin pidempiaikaisiin prosesseihin ja esimerkiksi asiakkaiden arvopohjaisiin asenteisiin, jotka synnyttävät sitoutumispäätöksiä.</p>	
Asiasanat sitoutuminen, negatiivinen asiakassitoutuminen, asiakaskäyttäytyminen, asiakaskokemus	
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract <p>In recent years, customer engagement has been a largely research subject in several fields of research. There is a wide understanding on how customers engage and identify with organisations, but research on the negative side of engagement is more sparse, and we still know little of the origin and manifestations of customers' negatively valenced behaviour.</p> <p>This research aims to shed light on young millennial customers' negative engagement behaviour by studying their negative customer experiences, and the triggers and manifestations of their negative engagement behaviour. The digitally influential generation of young millennials was chosen as the focus of this research, because their negative customer engagement behaviour is perceived as especially multifaceted and complex, being inherently spread on a variety of platforms and within interpersonal interactions. The research used secondary data from a survey conducted in 2017. The research is a qualitative study and the collected data was analysed using the method of thematic analysis.</p> <p>The findings of the study show that the triggers that drive young millennials toward negative engagement behaviour can be categorized under five different themes: purchased product and service failure, customer service failure, purchase and delivery process failure, compensation and return failure and organisational communication failure. Based on the broadened understanding offered by this study, young millennials' negative engagement behaviour is especially connected to sharing behaviour, driven by their willingness to warn others and vent feelings. Whether they chose to continue business with the concerned organisations or switch to another provider, was closely connected to core products and services, whether other providers could offer adequate substitutes and the ease of switching.</p> <p>The research gained much needed knowledge on the triggers and responses of young millennials' negative engagement behaviour, but the results indicate that there is still a crucial need to gain more understanding on negative engagement behaviour. Research especially needs to dive deeper into the attitudes and longer-term processes impacting negative engagement and its manifestations, as well as how customers' values affect their engagement behaviour.</p>	
Keywords engagement, negative engagement behaviour, customer engagement, customer experience	
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The context of the research

Customers have more power than ever before. The importance of engaging consumer-organisation relationships has been increasing rapidly during the recent years and as the significance of these interactions is growing, consumers are also gaining more influence, especially online (Ghazali, Nguyen, Mutum & Mohd-Any 2016; Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege & Zhang 2013). Customer interactions in the diverse online environments of the day pose great challenges for brands - organisations are no longer the exclusive communicators on their brand content, as customers are participating by discussing brands and their value. (Fournier & Avery 2011.) The significance of online customer bonds and interaction is especially highlighted within customers that fall into the generation of millennials. Specifically young millennials, born in the late 1990's and early 2000's, are natives on online platforms, where their actions are highly influential. (Smith 2012; Rissanen & Luoma-aho 2016.)

A growing number of organisations are trying to manage these changes by seeking to form steeper connections with their customers. Their aim is to involve consumers into the products, services and operations of organisations in order to create engagement, improving the chances of customer loyalty. (Hollebeek 2011.) But even when organisations are doing their utmost to nurture good customer relations, organisational failures causing customer disappointment and loss of loyalty are bound to happen (Frow, Payne, Wilkinson & Young 2011).

Disappointed customers' influence is critical – negative word of mouth can severely threaten brands' wellbeing, and digital platforms as well as social networking services, such as Twitter and Facebook, expand the reputational threats posed by negative customer statements. Online platforms have the ability to gather wider audiences, rapidly spreading negatively valenced messages, that are characterized as inherently contagious. (Rissanen & Luoma-aho 2016; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016.) And while the reach of negative online reviews and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is often wider, personal word of mouth (pWOM) in face-to-face contexts is sometimes even more powerful in changing customers' attitudes toward brands. A negatively valenced interpersonal review from a known, credible source has in some cases proven more influential in affecting both the perceived organisational image and purchase intentions of a customer. (Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi 2016.)

Customers writing bad reviews, spreading negative word of mouth and giving critical feedback in online environments or face-to-face contexts are all manifestations of negative engagement behaviour, which also includes customers' exit, and switching behaviour. (Hollebeek & Chen 2014; Naumann, Bowden & Gabbott 2017.) Negatively engaged customer behaviour not only harms, but might have severely destructive consequences to organisations' finances, relations and reputation in the long-term. To make matters more critical, negative testimonials are more influential than the ones with a positive valence – negative reviews also have a greater chance of lowering sales, than positive reviews increasing them. (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Chevalier & Mayzlin 2006; Kumar, Aksoy, Donkers, Venkatesan, Wiesel & Tillmanns 2010.)

Although negative customer engagement behaviour can severely damage the reputation and value of an organisation, it also entails the potential to help the company learn and develop. Encouraging the customers to give negative feedback allows the organisation to make amends and recover after initial service and product failures. (Liu & Mattila 2015; Lievonen, Luoma-aho & Bowden 2018.) Customer complaints have even been deemed as gifts to organisations, as they can point out faulty processes that need developing, so that organisational failures can be identified and avoided. When customers leave without speaking up about their issues, organisations are left in the dark, and further violations and mistreatments of customers are enabled. (Yilmaz, Varnali & Kasnakoglu 2016.) Thus, understanding the unknown attitudes and behaviour of passive customers is critical information for organisations striving to improve and develop (Lievonen et al. 2018).

In conclusion, research has shown that in all its forms, customers' negative engagement behaviour poses significant threats to brands' wellbeing by decreasing value, customer loyalty and harming reputation. (Van Doorn et al. 2010; Hollebeek & Chen 2014) In order to successfully manage negative customer behaviour in the diverse communication environments of today, organisations need more information on the drivers and response strategies of negatively engaged customers. This is especially true for corporate communication, which has to be planned according to customer knowledge, for the organisation to be able to effectively respond and recover. (Chen 2018; Nguyen, McColl-Kennedy, & Dagger 2012.) The current research understanding on negatively engaged behaviour, its causes and manifestations in customers is still fairly limited, and therefore needs to be studied further.

1.2 Research questions

The triggers and drivers of negative engagement behaviour, and what comes after, are crucial parts of customer engagement research and the understanding of customer journey. (Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016.) Merely understanding the ideal, the journey of an engaged customer is not enough - to create a holistic approach to engagement's drivers and consequences, there is an increasing need to look at the negative side of things, by studying negatively engaged customers and their journey. What drives a customer toward negative engagement? How do customers respond after being mistreated or failed by an organisation? How are these processes intertwined?

The aim of this study is to gain more insight on what kind of negative experiences triggered young millennial customers to engage in negative customer engagement behaviour. The research also strives to deepen the understanding of the ways young millennials respond to negative customer experiences and rationalize the responses they chose. By looking at the triggers, drivers and manifestations of negative engagement, the study seeks to identify critical touchpoints of the customer-organisation relationship and create better understanding of young millennials' negatively valenced customer behaviour.

The research questions are:

RQ1: What are the organisational triggers that drive young millennial customers toward negative customer engagement behaviour?

RQ2: In what ways do young millennials respond to negative customer experiences?

1.3 The structure of the research

This research is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the context of the research and acknowledges the purpose of the thesis and the proposed research questions. In chapter two, relevant literature on customer engagement will be presented and the studied group, young millennials, are examined in the light of previous research. The chapter includes the arguments for choosing to study this particular group, and supports the decision with critical interdisciplinary analysis. The third chapter discusses the characteristics and drivers of negative customer engagement as well as the known manifestations of customers' negative engagement behaviour.

After introducing the key concepts, reviewing the previous research and providing reasoning for the chosen definitions, the focus is directed to methodology. The third chapter will discuss qualitative research and data collection and describe the methods used for analysing the content. In chapter five, the results and findings of the research are presented and thoroughly scrutinized.

And finally, chapter six will summarize the results of this research, present conclusions and discuss the academic significance of the findings. What could not be studied within the limits of the thesis will be discussed and lastly, directions and recommendations for future research on negative engagement will be offered.

2 CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

The following chapter discusses the existing literature on customer engagement, and specifically, the most recent understanding on the ways customers engage with brands. Literature on the target group of the research, young millennials, will also be presented and discussed in relation to customer engagement during the digital era.

2.1 Customer engagement

Customer engagement research has gained increasing interest from academics within the fields of marketing, psychology, management and communication during the past decade (van Doorn et al. 2010; Brodie et al. 2011; Brodie et al. 2013; Hollebeek 2011; Dwivedi 2015), as organisations, that successfully engage with customers, are suggested to have competitive advantages, increased sales and profits, and overall improved performance over others (Hollebeek 2011). Previous studies have mostly examined the creation and processes of positive customer engagement and analysed it in relation to organisations' brand value. Research is largely focused on possibilities rather than threats, disregarding the need to study negatively engaged consumers and the destructive power of their voice, feedback and negative word of mouth. (Naumann, Bowden & Gabbott 2017.) The need for more specialized research, on the different valences and manifestations of engagement is widely recognized in the previous literature (e.g. Hollebeek & Chen 2014; Brodie et al. 2013; Bowden et al. 2017).

Customer engagement is evidently a widely researched topic, but there is still no wider consensus on the definition of the concept of it, and several differing definitions exist in the parallel streams of research (Dessart, Veloutsou &

Morgan-Thomas 2016). The established understanding on customer engagement agrees that the concept includes positive, neutral and negative customer-organisation bonds (Kumar et al. 2010), and that customer engagement goes beyond the traditional customer management concepts, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Beckers, van Doorn & Verhoef 2017). Consumer engagement research also mostly agrees that there are three primary dimensions engagement consists of. These are the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions, comprehending of the thoughts, attitudes, feelings as well as interactions and actions of engagement. (Chen 2018.)

When examining customer engagement, it is crucial to identify the approach and the field of research, as the lack of a definitive definition shatters the understanding on the concept. There is research that primarily defines engagement through its psychological processes, and others that understand it through its behavioural side, mainly focusing on customers' actions rather than thoughts. Research has also combined these efforts, while trying to offer a more holistic view on the multifaceted nature of customer engagement. (Osei-Frimpong & McLean, 2020; Vivek, Betty & Morgan 2012; Brodie et al. 2011.)

Within the research specifically concentrating on the behavioural side of customer engagement, it is defined as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organisation's offerings and/or organisational activities, which either the customer or the organisation initiate" (Vivek et al. 2012 127). According to the behavioural view, customer engagement manifests primarily in "behaviours that go beyond simple transactions and may be specifically defined as a customer's brand focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers." (van Doorn et al. 2010 254)

The psychological perspective understands customer engagement as a psychological state that occurs under a specific set of context-dependent conditions and is formed by interactive and co-creative customer experiences with a brand, a company or an organisation. Within this approach, customer engagement exists as a dynamic, iterative process within service relationships that co-create value in customers' cognitive, emotional or behavioural dimensions (Brodie et al. 2011). Hollebeek and Chen (2014) combine both the behavioural and psychological approaches to engagement and further develop the views by suggesting that customer engagement is a positively valenced, cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity that occurs during or is related to

customers' interactions with the object of engagement. In this thesis, the broadened viewpoint on customer engagement, suggested by Hollebeek and Chen (2014) is adopted, as it offers the most holistic view on the topic. Moreover, the concept of negative engagement is later examined through a similar three-dimensional approach, hence it is beneficial to utilize this conceptualization.

Customer engagement is also categorized through its valences – positive, negative and disengagement, and further, how these valences externalise. When compared to the research on positive engagement, often merely referred to as consumer, customer or stakeholder engagement, research regarding the negative valence and disengagement has been notably lagging behind, and has only recently awakened the interest of researchers. (Brodie et al. 2011; Hollebeek and Chen 2014.)

Although earlier studies have primarily described engagement as interactive by nature, only the negative and positive valences of engagement share this feature, while disengagement is a process that, rather than being interactive, is stimulated by trauma or a disturbance leading to the termination of a customer-organisation relationship (Bowden et al. 2015). As seen in figure 1 below, disengaged customers have e.g. lost interest or cut ties with an organisation and are no longer involved, making their level of engagement towards an organisation either very low or nonexistent. (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann 2005; Luoma-aho & Rissanen 2016.) Customer engagement and disengagement are inherently connected concepts (Bowden et al. 2015), being parts of the same continuum of engagement (Heinonen 2016). But because they manifest in two opposite ways, as customers' interaction, or the lack of it, these concepts have to be examined very differently in research and seen as two entirely separate dimensions of engagement. (Bowden et al. 2015).

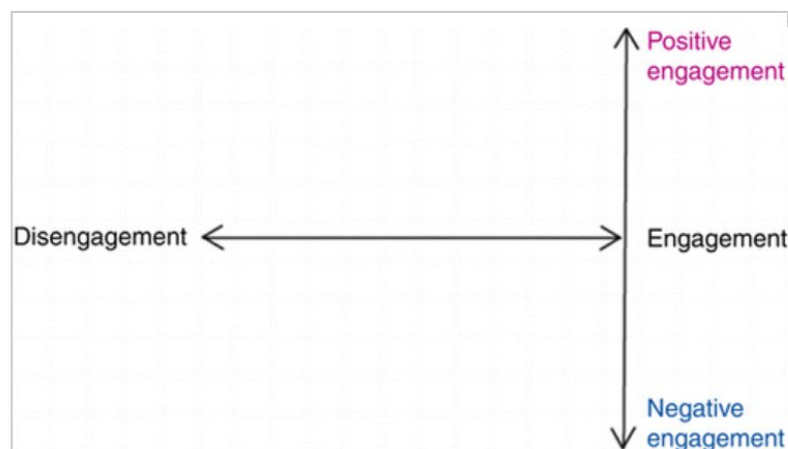


FIGURE 1 The continuum of engagement, consisting of the degree of involvement (horizontal), and the tone of engagement (vertical) (Luoma-aho & Rissanen 2016)

Negative engagement is viewed as a more severe negative condition compared to the passive nature of disengagement. Unlike disengagement, negative engagement is considered to be a premeditated, activated and dedicated customer behaviour. (Bowden, Luoma-aho and Naumann 2016.) Negative engagement has a target and is a goal-directed process, involving dedicated expressions of negative emotions. (Juric, Smith and Wilkins 2016; (Lievonen et al. 2018.) The concept of negative customer engagement will be examined further in chapter three, titled 'negative customer engagement'.

2.1.1 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is a critical aspect within customer-organisation relationships and engagement. In a very similar manner to customer engagement, customer loyalty has been a sustained research subject in the field of marketing and communication research, primarily for having remarkable benefits for organisations: enhancing profitability, the possibilities of engaged, long-term customers and reputation-improving word of mouth. Scholars have recognized that studying customer loyalty and its drivers also varies greatly depending on the approach – the definitions of the concept are complex and highly differing. (Dick & Basu 1994; Dwivedi 2015; Bowden & Chen 2001; Fraering & Minor 2013.)

Traditionally, customer loyalty was mainly studied through one-dimensional factors of customer relationships, such as consumer satisfaction, repeat purchase behaviour and brand image perceptions. However, these concepts have been criticized later for being too deficient for comprehensively explaining customer loyalty. (Wallin, Andreassen & Lindestad 1998; Bowden & Chen

2001.) The research calling for a wider perspective on loyalty was first established in the 1990's, as the affective, cognitive and conative antecedents' effects on customers' relative attitude towards brands sparked researchers' interest. These studies elaborated on the need for more versatile ways to measure the concept of loyalty – ways that would go beyond customers' repeat purchase behaviour. They pointed out that the one-dimensional understanding missed important details and nuances of loyalty, and factors like customer satisfaction could only act as indicators of loyalty, if customers were extremely satisfied, which is often not the case. (Dick & Basu 1994; Bowden & Chen 2001.)

Research has later offered solutions to the one-dimensional view, and now largely understands and measures loyalty bonds through the concept of customer engagement (Hollebeek 2011). The most recent studies on loyalty have indicated a strong causal relation between consumers' loyalty intentions and customer brand engagement, and engagement has been further characterized as a crucial, precise predictor of consumers' loyalty intentions and behaviour. The traditional view of loyalty deriving from value, quality and satisfaction is still used and visible in customer research, but has been long contested by the more comprehensive approach – aspects like satisfaction are now usually seen as the 'bare minimum' for brands to even be able to compete in the markets. (Dwivedi 2015; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016.)

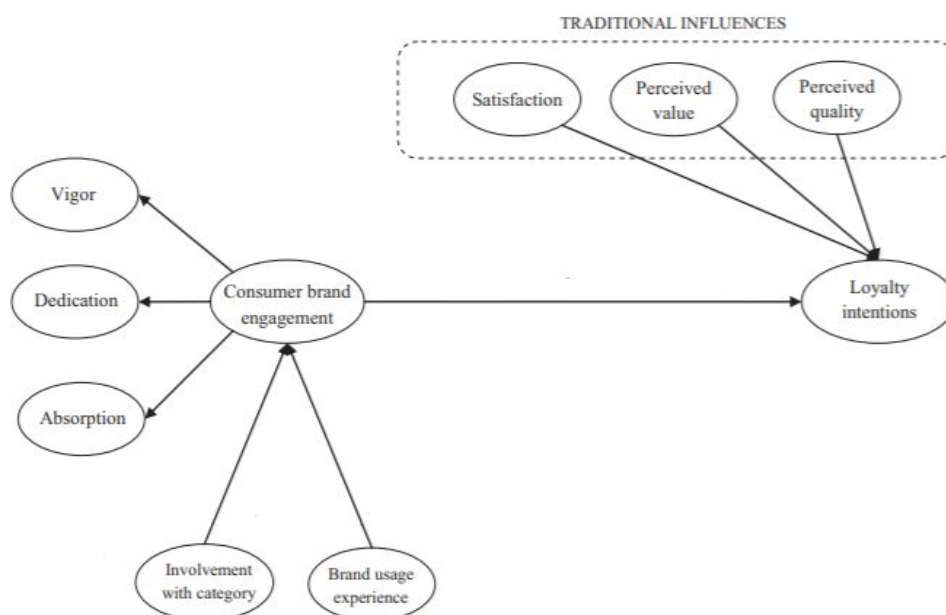


FIGURE 2 The impact of consumer brand engagement on loyalty intentions (Dwivedi 2015, 103).

Therefore, consumer engagement is shown to be inseparably connected to customers' loyalty intentions (Dwivedi 2015). And while the research on customer brand engagement and loyalty is still limited, the relationship between loyalty and negative engagement is even more so. Within negative engagement research, loyalty is often perceived as a crucial variable, that affects consumers engagement behaviour and outcomes in customer-organisation relationships. Loyalty has been suggested to be a barrier to negative engagement, preventing customers from engaging negatively, switching providers and spreading negative messages on companies, even after organisational failures and negative customer experiences. (Hirschman 1970.)

Even though loyalty has the potential to prevent negative engagement, it is not an unbreakable barrier. Research shows that organisations disregarding the initial signs of customers' negative engagement behaviour, like negative feedback, could prove detrimental to customer loyalty. Due to a lack of research on the subject, the details are still unclear and there is a need to shed light on how customer loyalty affects the behaviour, attitudes and decisions of negatively engaged customers and the overall process of negative engagement. (Hirschman 1970; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016.) Studying how consumers feel and what kind of loyalty outcomes derive from negative customer experiences and disappointment is also an especially important aspect in terms of engagement research.

2.1.2 Young millennials and customer engagement

Millennials, sometimes referred to as Generation Y, are broadly defined as a digitally influential generation, born between 1980's and early 2000's (Wang, Wang, Xue, Wang & Li 2018; Smith 2012; Rissanen & Luoma-aho 2016). As a generation millennials have been socialized to use digital platforms from a young age and often utilize online environments in a more native manner than the previous generations (Veloutsou & McAlonan 2012). Due to the early digital socialization process, millennials have become the 'native speakers of the digital era' and are often referred to as 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001).

Although millennials are a largely researched generation, the concept of the generation has been criticized for being too ample of a definition for a more accurate analysis - millennials' age group is a wide spectrum, and the lifestyles and values within the group vary greatly. In research, defining the studied group too broadly might result in a shattered and misleading set of data, and should be avoided by making logical limitations to the targeted group.

(Calvo-Porrall, Pesqueira-Sanchez & Faiña Medín 2018; Taylor 2018.) Narrowing the scope of millennials for the purposes of this study is a cogent choice for avoiding misleading results.

Instead of studying the whole group of millennials, the research focus will be directed toward a younger section of the generation: millennials born between 1990's and early 2000's. This division has also been utilized in marketing and advertising research before, and people born in this time scope are often described as late millennials, young millennials or generation Z, as opposed to older sections of the age group, early millennials. (Moore 2012; Taylor 2018.) The term *young millennials* will be used for the purposes of this research, when referring to this narrowed down segment of the generation group.

Young millennials are an advantageous target for researching negative engagement, as they use online environments largely for networking with people and brands and are more likely to adapt digital marketing into their daily lives, than the earlier generations, such as generation X and baby boomers (Florenthal 2019; Moore 2012). Even when compared to older millennials, research has proven young millennials to be more tech-savvy and agile in online environments. This results in the fascinating phenomenon of brands being increasingly interested in engaging younger millennials on their online platforms. (Singh 2014; Florenthal 2019.)

As stated, young millennials are a digitally influential generation, and their relationships with brands are no exception. While the new, increasingly digital communication habits of millennial customers increase the interest of brands, they also set challenges for companies, as the tech-savvy generation is more likely to connect with retailers and organisations using multiple, frequently differing platforms, and both mobile and internet methods. Organisations now need to find successful practices and methods to convince and keep customers content in the constantly altering online platforms as well as offline. (Taylor 2018.)

Simultaneously, young millennials have grown more critical towards organisational efforts, and are easily pushed away by customs such as too eager communication and over-the-top promises. Studies show that when trying to influence millennials, brands should first and foremost pay attention to and prioritize delivering their brand promises and communicating truthfully, transparently and creatively. (Moore 2012; Taylor 2018.) And although millennials are often described as more agile and less brand-loyal than earlier generations, loyalty and engagement can be evoked in millennials through new,

differing measures – such as appealing to them with brand images that millennials perceive as fitting or beneficial for their personal brand identities. (Shukla 2009; Taylor 2018.)

Maintaining successful interactions with ‘the critical and dubious millennial customers’ is evidently a great challenge for companies, and mishaps are bound to happen. Even if companies succeed in satisfying the complex needs of millennials, millennials can also turn into negatively engaged customers quickly, and silently, further preventing organisations from tracking and fixing what went wrong with the customer’s journey and when the issue occurred. (Moore 2012.)

The research on millennials’ engagement styles has already gained the interest of scholars, but while the field is slowly starting to understand what drives and motivates millennials to engage with brands and organisations, there is still an increasing need to study what drives them away from it. Exploring what makes young millennial customers negatively engaged and what kind of negative engagement behaviour they are likely to engage in, are crucial research subjects for marketing, communication and customer research, and have long remained largely unstudied. (Rissanen & Luoma-aho 2016.)

3 NEGATIVE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

This chapter discusses the current understanding on negative customer engagement. The drivers and triggers of negative engagement behaviour will be introduced and the chapter will examine how negative engagement manifests in customers, and what kind of strategies customers use when responding after a negative customer experience.

3.1 Negative engagement

Even if brands do their utmost to succeed in engaging and satisfying all customers, mishaps are bound to happen with the products, services and the communication of organisations, and customers are let down. Negative engagement is a frequent phenomenon within customer-organisation relationships - the presence of negatively perceived brand relationships may be even more common than positive relationships'. (Fournier & Alvarez 2013.) Tracking negatively engaged customers is also often difficult, as only 30% of consumers use official brand environments to complain after a negative experience, whereas the rest is shattered through different platforms - as much as 70% share their negative sentiment via consumer or third-party-generated platforms, such as blogs, social networking sites and online brand communities. (Weitzl & Einwiller 2018.) In the online era, negative customer behaviour has become a more severe threat, as the negative actions that take place online are more visible and ubiquitous compared to traditional channels. (Lievonon et al. 2018). The ever-shattered field of both offline and online communication creates even further challenges for brands trying to maintain and manage their

customer relations, especially in terms of monitoring and tracking negatively engaged customers, negatively toned behaviour and discussion.

Research characterizes negative engagement as customers' negatively toned thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It is the associated disdain and activated anger that customers may express toward the relationship, leading to organisation-related denial, rejection, avoidance, and negative word-of-mouth. (Hollebeek and Chen 2014.) The definition suggests that, much like customer engagement, negative engagement also consists of the three key dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. The cognitive dimension encompasses an individual's perceived, unfavorable cognitive responses, eg. negative thoughts related to the objective. The emotional dimension refers to consumers' emotional responses, such as expressions of object dislike, hatred, fear, resentment, shame and humiliation. The behavioural dimension of the definition includes customers' behavioural capabilities, which refer to consumers' willingness to enact negative activation by, for example spreading negative word of mouth. (Hollebeek & Chen 2014.) Other, additional behavioural ways of negative engagement are complaints (Naumann et al. 2017), boycotting the brand or organisation (Lee et al. 2009), applying revenge seeking behaviours on the brand (Grégoire & Fisher 2008) or forming anti-brand communities (Turner 2007).

Negative engagement is also described as a customer's sequential actions that are provoked by their experience with an organisation. These actions usually include negatively valenced actions, such as public communication on the brand, products or services. (Luoma-aho & Lievonen 2015.) In addition, negative engagement is associated with unpleasant feelings and negative appraisals of the engagement object or actor (Juric et al. 2016). Whereas positive customer engagement is seen as a mental state that occurs under a specific set of context-dependent conditions, formed by interactive and co-creative customer experiences with a brand, a company or an organisation (Brodie et al. 2011), negative engagement is rather seen as a series of mental states that form an iterative psychological process. Furthermore, negative engagement is characterized not as a continuous process, but as episodic. (Juric et al. 2016.)

Understanding on negative engagement has also been pursued by creating typologies of negatively engaged customers, drawing from the characteristics of their negative engagement behaviour and emotions. Research has proposed a detailed, six level categorization of negative engagement, based on the measures of negatively engaged stakeholders' connectivity and activity. This approach categorizes three negatively engaged based on the severity of their

negative emotions and the width of their negative messages' potential audiences. According to this approach, the negatively engaged can be categorized as inactive, active, or malicious, and either private low or public high in level of connectivity. Within this approach, the public high connectivity levels are described as especially critical, as the more public the negative engagement behaviour is, the more harmful it is for brands and organisations. (Lievonen et al. 2018.)

TABLE 1 Categories of negatively engaged stakeholders (adapted from Lievonen et al. 2018)

	PRIVATE LOW CONNECTIVITY (limited audiences)	PUBLIC HIGH CONNECTIVITY (unlimited audience)
INACTIVE (weak negative emotions)	Level 1: Passive discontented	Level 2: Dormant resentful
ACTIVE (moderate negative emotions)	Level 3: Irate	Level 4: Justice-seeking (Hateholder)
MALICIOUS (extremely strong negative emotions)	Level 5: Revenge-Seeking	Level 6: Troll

Passive discontented and dormant resentful (levels 1–2 in the table) represent stakeholders who experience weak negative emotions towards an organisation. When stakeholders are on these levels they do not actively seek to share their negative experiences. Negative emotions on the levels 3–4 are stronger, but still moderate by nature. Level 3, irate stakeholders are active in terms of negative emotions but they are unable to share negative content publicly as they need others as an audience for a public manifestation. These stakeholders are not able to gain access to unlimited audiences, hence they are unable to stir public discussion. Level 4 stakeholders are described as justice-seeking stakeholders or hateholders, and are the most damaging group to organisations. Their disclosures are perceived as credible, and they thus cause substantial harm and eg.reputational damage, through their negative engagement behaviour. They are suggested to emerge through negative experiences and act out as a result of unresponsiveness from the organisational side. (Lievonen et al. 2018; Luoma-aho 2015.)

Lastly, level 5 of revenge seeking stakeholders and level 6 of trolling represent extremely strong negative emotions and hostile thoughts toward a brand. Both revenge-seeking stakeholders and trolls either intend to cause harm or impress their peers (Bishop 2014). In level 5 intended malice toward brands and organisations is present as actions such as revenge-seeking, brand sabotage, online crime, and even bullying (Bishop 2014; Hardaker 2010; Kahr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer & Hoyer 2016). Trolls, in turn, usually have sadistic, psychopathic, narcissistic and manipulative characteristics (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhus 2014). Trolling can also contain false information (Buckels et al. 2014) and trolls can be difficult to separate from genuine stakeholders (Lievonen et al. 2018).

While extremely strong negative emotions are critical threats to organisations, they can also decrease the credibility of malicious stakeholders. Audiences are unlikely to trust or join implausible disclosures of malicious customers, which may lead to a situation where they are unable to successfully implement their revenge actions, and the reputational threat toward brands diminishes. (Lievonen et al. 2018.)

Negative customer engagement

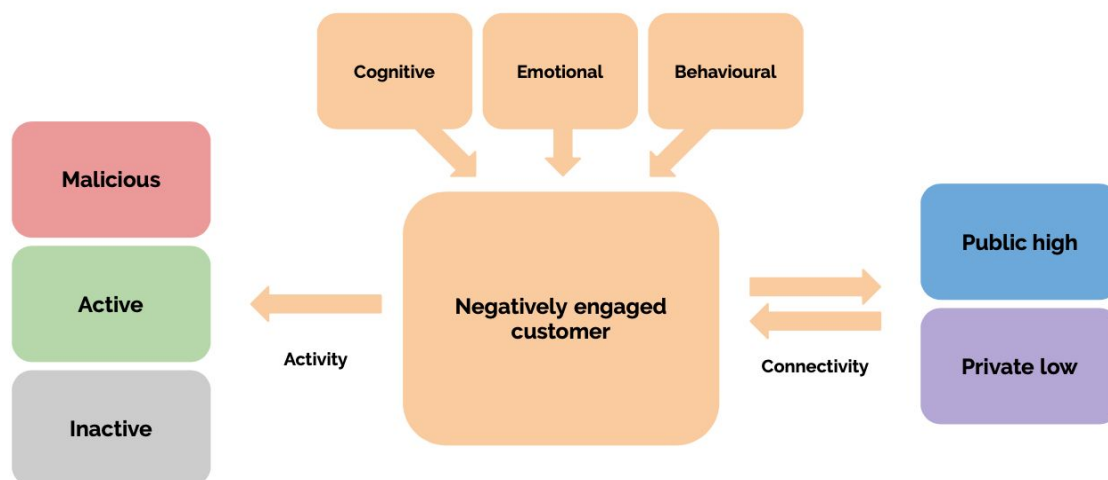


FIGURE 3 The current understanding on negative engagement (adapted from Lievonen et al. 2018 & Hollebeck & Chen 2014)

Combining the efforts of previous research, negative engagement can be characterized through its cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions, and

additionally based on the levels of activity and connectivity of negatively engaged customers, partially overlapping with the behavioural and emotional side. The combination of these approaches offers a multi-dimensional view on negative engagement and enables a chance to observe the phenomenon from a wider perspective. It is also noteworthy that the actual manifestations of negative engagement are even more complex – although negative and positive engagement have primarily been studied as two completely separate entities, the two valences of engagement may, in some instances even co-exist in customers. This situation, where notions of both engagement valences are present in a customer, is often described as ambivalent engagement and it challenges the traditional understanding of negative and positive engagement as the polar opposites of engagement. (Li, Juric & Brodie 2017.)

3.2 What drives and triggers negative customer engagement?

Negatively engaged customer behaviour has been found to be driven by customers' urge to reduce their own anxiety, vengeance, concern for others and product involvements. In other words, customers take actions to better their varying situations. (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler 2004, Mazarol et al 2007, Sundaram, Mitra and Webster 1998.)

A trigger refers to a negative event or a factor experienced by customers, that alters the customer evaluation of an offering or a service (Gustafsson, Johnson & Roos 2005; Juric et al. 2016). Triggering events can be either simple or complex and they can happen only once or several times, cumulatively. The triggering process within a customer does not necessarily always happen during the negative event itself, and can also happen later, when the negative experience is remembered and the memory of the event triggers the customer's emotions and provokes the customer to act. (Juric et. al 2016.)

Although the triggers or drivers of negative engagement behaviour have not been widely studied, some previous research exists, mainly in parallel streams of research, like Frow et al. (2011), who focused their research on customer relationship management and the dark side behaviour of organisations. Organisations' dark side behaviour is described as "a customer management activity that can damage customer relationships and knowingly or deliberately exploit customers." (Frow et al. 2011, 79.)

Frow et al. (2011) suggest that there are eight types of 'dark side behaviours' that displease and trigger customers, and as can be seen in the figure below,

these dark side behaviours are divided under two umbrella categories. The first umbrella category is communication-based dark side behaviour, which includes information misuse, customer confusion, dishonesty and privacy invasion. The second is dark side behaviour through manipulating alternatives.

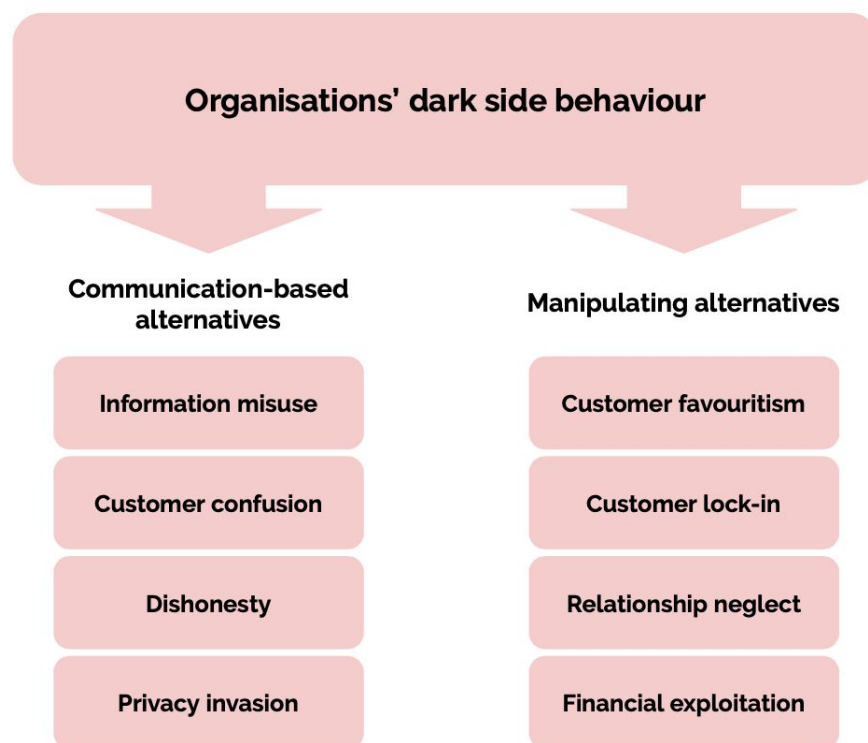


FIGURE 4 Organisations' dark side behaviour (adapted from Frow et al. 2011)

The first of the triggering, communication-based dark side behaviours is information misuse. A part of customer relations management information about customers is gathered in order to serve them better. Unfortunately, the collected information may end up being used in ways, which the customers do not want their information to be used. (Frow et al. 2011.) The second dark side behaviour is customer confusion, in which a company uses misleading or confusing information and/or hides relevant information from customers – behaviour which can ultimately lead to customers making disadvantageous or uninformed decisions. (Frow et al. 2011).

As the third communication-based dark side behaviour, there is dishonesty. Even though the previous two behaviours undoubtedly entail dishonesty, there are inherently dishonest dark side behaviours that are not included in information misuse or customer confusion. These behaviours fall under the

category of dishonest behaviour. For example, when a company experiences a management pressure on staff to upsell, cross-sell or sell, they might end up pushing products or services that the targeted customers do not need. (Frow et al. 2011.) Privacy invasion is the last communication-based dark side behaviour, which relates to companies' ability to access and use information on customers from several sources. This can lead to a situation where companies have the potential to learn more about their customers than they would like them to, such as transaction records or detailed observations of customer behaviour. (Frow et al. 2011.)

Dark side behaviour through manipulating alternatives also includes four triggering behaviours. The first behaviour within this category is customer favouritism. Customers can be segmented depending on their buying behaviour and their economic attractiveness. Hence, as high priority customers may be offered additional and superior services, customers who have not been prioritised can feel unattended. (Frow et al. 2011). The second one is customer lock-in, where in order to retain customers, service providers can make it difficult and costly for customers to change service providers. (Frow et al. 2011).

Relationship neglect is the third dark side behaviour through manipulating alternatives. Especially in long term customer relationships, companies can lose their ability to be objective or fail to add further value to the customer. Companies which perpetuate relationship neglect, can also exploit customers' trust in the company. (Frow et al. 2011.) The final triggering behaviour through manipulating alternatives is financial exploitation, where companies financially take advantage of their customers. Companies can, for example, use unfair and "unexpected" financial penalties to exploit customers. (Frow et al. 2011.)

Azer & Alexander (2018) have also studied the triggers of negatively valenced influencing behaviour. Influencing behaviour is described as a form of customer engagement behaviour, and it refers to customers using resources, like time, experience, and knowledge to affect other customers' knowledge, preferences and perceptions about a focal firm, brand, or service (Jaakkola & Alexander 2014). According to the research, there are five triggers of negatively valenced influencing behaviour, and they are divided into cognitive and emotional triggers. As seen in the table below, cognitive triggers include service failure, overpricing and deception and the emotional triggers entail disappointment and insecurity. (Azer & Alexander 2018.)

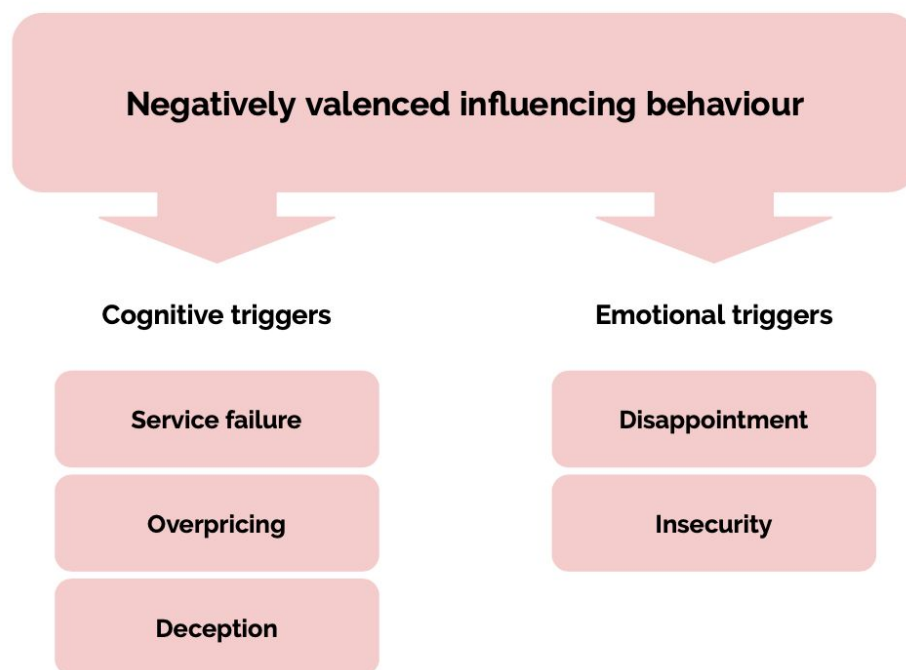


FIGURE 5 The triggers of negatively valenced influencing behaviour (adapted from Azer & Alexander 2018)

Service failure occurs when a central service fails to meet customers' expectations. Service failures are, for example, the failure of the core service itself, the failure of the service environment, the behaviour of service staff and the dysfunctionality of service facilities. (Azer & Alexander 2018.) Overpricing is a trigger, where customers believe that a service or product is overpriced when the value of what they receive is perceived as poor compared to the price they pay. (Priem 2007; Azer & Alexander 2018.) Deception occurs when a customer believes that he or she has been cheated deliberately by a company (Chowdhury and Miles 2006; Azer & Alexander 2018).

The first emotional trigger, disappointment, occurs when a company fails to keep their promises, disappointing customers and causing negative feelings. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988; Zeelenberg & Pieters 2004; Azer & Alexander 2018). Insecurity takes place when a customer has had threatening experiences with the company, and feels insecurity based on them (Patterson, Yu and De Ruyter 2006; Azer & Alexander 2018).

As mentioned above, Frow et al. (2011) concentrated on malicious dark side behaviours of organisations, whereas Azer and Alexander (2018) researched the triggers of negatively valenced influencing behaviour. Even though these studies have differing perspectives, they entail similarities which fit together

well in terms of this research's approach to the triggers of negative engagement behaviour. For example, according to both, dishonest behaviour and deliberately cheating and confusing customers are all behaviours that will certainly act as triggers. Both also suggest that financially taking advantage of customers acts as a triggering event. (Frow et al. 2011; Azer & Alexander 2018.)

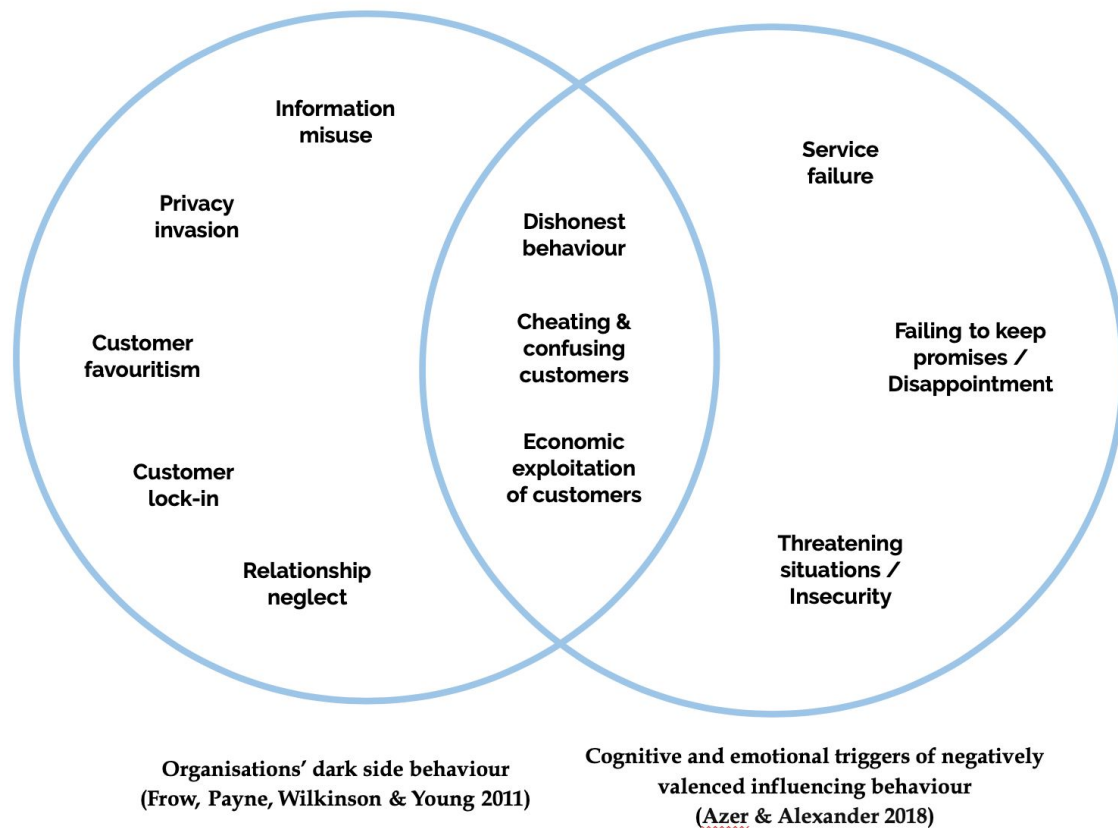


FIGURE 6 Similarities and differences between the organisational triggers of Frow et al. (2011) and Azer & Alexander (2018)

In addition to these two comprehensive approaches, Joireman Grégoire and Tripp (2016) have studied the drivers of negative engagement through the triggers, that drive extremely negative behaviours in customers, focusing specifically on revenge-seeking behaviour. According to this view, revengeful customer behaviour is primarily driven by four organisational actions – betrayal of the customer, a severe service failure, a customer perceiving an organisational action as greedy and a double deviation, which is the combination of an initial service failure and a failed organisational recovery. (Joireman et al. 2016.) The approach is not a comprehensive in contrast to the findings of Frow et al. (2011) and Azer & Alexander (2018), as revenge is not the only, and rarely the first customer response to triggers. However, extreme events such as the above can incite retaliation-seeking in customers, as feelings of justification to punish organisations grows (Komarova et al. 2018; Gregoire et

al. 2018). Extreme negative behaviour, such as revenge-seeking, has also been connected to hostile and extremely negative emotions, awakened in customers by the organisational triggers presented above (Bishop 2014).

3.3 Manifestations of negative customer engagement

Due to the context of this research and the proposed research questions on young millennials' negative engagement behaviour, it is beneficial to concentrate especially on the behavioural side and manifestations of negative engagement, seen in the figure 7 below. Previous research also suggests that examining the manifestations and behaviour related to customer engagement is a useful approach, for these aspects open new views on the interactions, actions and attitudes between customers and organisations, as well as in customers in relation to each other (Żymkowska 2019), all of which are in the core of the research focus.

The customer journey to negative engagement behaviour



FIGURE 7 The customer journey to negative engagement behaviour

The previous chapter offered understanding on how customers' negative engagement is triggered – research has shown that negative customer

engagement behaviour does not occur without a trigger, but also needs a motive from customers' emotions, a structure portrayed in the figure 7 above. Customers who engage in negative customer behaviour have objectives for their actions, such as trying to affect how fellow customers feel, think and behave toward organisations. (Jaakkola & Alexander 2014.) As can be seen in the figure 7, customers' negative emotions and objectives incite actions, negative engagement behaviour or negative customer responses. Literature suggests that these determined actions of customers can manifest through either direct or indirect negative engagement behaviour, both of which occur after unsatisfactory or perilous experiences with organisations. Direct influencing behaviour manifests when customers specifically aim to address other customers by discouraging or warning them to avoid certain organisations. Indirect influencing behaviour occurs when customers discredit the organisation or generally express regret for choosing the organisation in question. (Azer & Alexander 2020.)

Juric et al. (2016) suggest that a customer's existing relationship with an organisation influences the nature and intensity of the means that a customer chooses to take. Customers with strong relationships with organisations often react more strongly when they feel betrayed, while customers with more casual relationships can forgive organisations more easily, especially when they experience the level of harm done as low. But if the perceived level of harm increases, customers' dissatisfaction can end up growing over the course of time and actions against the organisation tend to harden. (Tsai, Yang & Cheng 2014).

When customers feel like the level of harm is increased considerably, it may ultimately lead to customer rage, as feelings of rage tend to accumulate after multiple failures. Hence, instead of being the customer's initial reaction, rage usually evolves over time after a customer has given the organisation multiple opportunities to compensate and recover. (Patterson, McColl-Kennedy, Smith & Lu 2009). Being an extremely strong negative emotion, rage has the potential to provoke customers to engage in extreme, malicious activities against organisations. (Lievonen et. al 2018). This makes customer rage harmful toward brands, as its consequences are known to cause economic losses for organisations (Grove, Fisk and John 2004) and create psychological strains for service personnel involved (Dormann and Zapf 2004).

Hirschman (1970), categorized negative customer responses under two reactions to the organisational failure he researched, a quality drop of a product. These reactions are exit and voice, and the approach closely connects them to the concept of loyalty, as customers' loyalty affects how the two former responses manifest in customers. If a customer's loyalty is high, for example,

choosing to exit is a less likely option, and voice is more likely to be used. Loyalty thus acts as an allegiance that makes exit less likely in groups and organisations. (Hirschman 1970.) On the other hand, the downside of loyalty and tight customer-organisation bonds can also be seen within these customer responses – strong relationships with customers can backfire if organisations fail to deliver their promises or meet customers’ expectations. (Zeelenberg & Pieters 2004.) For committed customers, organisational failures can trigger strong emotions and cognitive discomfort, which in turn can manifest as customer anger and retaliation. (Weitzl & Hutzinger 2019.)

However, Hirschman’s two-dimensional view on customer responses lacks the current understanding of word of mouth as a customer response option. According to the current understanding, seen in figure 8 below, customers are free to choose among the three possible forms of customer protest: exit, voice and word of mouth, which is directed towards the customer’s friends, family, acquaintances or online networks, rather than the organisation. (Solvang 2008.)

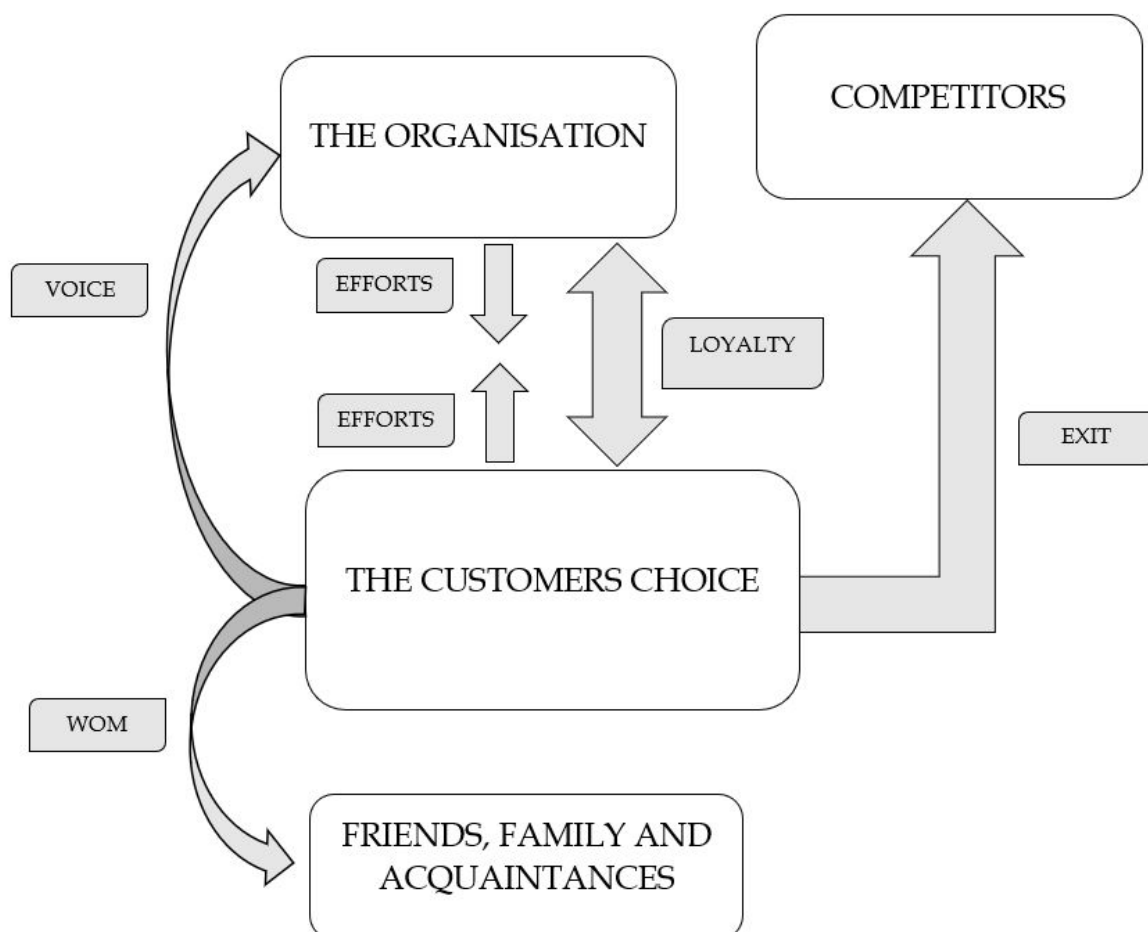


FIGURE 8 Customer loyalty and freedom of choice. (Adapted from Solvang 2008)

The three following sub-chapters on the manifestations of negative customer engagement will discuss negative customer behaviour through the lenses of customer responses: exit, voice and negative word of mouth. The sub-chapters will offer relevant literature on the response strategies and actions customers choose after being triggered by negative customer experiences and organisational failures.

3.3.1 Switching behaviour and exit

When customers choose to exit, they stop using the products or services of the concerned provider, and sever their relationship with the organisation. Traditionally, the focus of customer response research has been on the option of exit, and it has been treated as a sign of customers' unhappiness with a product or service. (Hirschman 1970.) There are several alternative terms for customer exit: Customer switching behaviour and customer defection are the two most commonly used, but the likes of withdrawal, disengagement and discontinuation have also been seen in research (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh 1987; Steward 1998).

Steward (1998) suggests that exit is a process with variable duration. The process is triggered by a factor or factors, continued by negative customer evaluation of a situation and it ends in a customer switching organisations. Customer dissatisfaction is often connected to customer exit, and even though dissatisfaction is partly behind customer exits, it is not the sole reason and as stated earlier, it is not a reliable predictor of customers' loyalty intentions. Sometimes satiation can even drive customers to exit as it causes feelings of boredom and variety-seeking in customers. (Bowden & Chen 2001; Steward 1998).

From the point of view of organisations providing products and services, it is essential to understand customer switching behaviour as it ultimately can result in a loss of future revenue from individual customers (Liang, Ma & Qi 2013). But exiting from one and switching to another organisation is not simple, as there are barriers that complicate and hinder the process. As stated, customer loyalty, for example, creates an exit barrier as it is seen as the opposite of exit. (Steward 1998; Dick and Basu 1994.)

Factors like customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, purchase frequency, risk evaluation and treatment of complaints are essential for organisations. If these aspects are nurtured and handled effectively, they can act as barriers of exit, or

switching barriers – factors that reduce propensity for exit. But if these variables are decreased or handled poorly instead, they can contribute to a customer's tendency to exit. (Solvang 2008.) In addition to the positive barriers, customers' barriers of exit can also be negative. While the positive barriers are relational benefits that a customer gains while having a customer relationship with a certain organisation, negative barriers consist of the height of switching costs and how available and attractive the offers from rival companies are. (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall 2006.)

Previous research suggests that there are several reasons for customers to exit. Pricing, inconvenience, core service failure, service encounter failure, failed service recovery, competition, ethical problems and involuntary switching were all found to be antecedents of customer exit. (Keaveney 1995.) Pricing refers to high prices, price increases, unfair pricing practices, and deceptive pricing practices. Inconvenience means situations, in which the customer thought that the service provider's location, opening hours or waiting times were not convenient. Core service failures is a wide category, referring to issues such as mistakes made by organisations, errors in billing and even severe service catastrophes. (Keaveney 1995.)

Service encounter failures include service personnels' behaviour or attitudes, meaning that the workers were uncaring, impolite, unresponsive or unknowledgeable in a service situation. Attraction by competitors refers to situations, where customers switch to using a competitors' services or products. The employee responses to service failures included incidents, in which switching was chosen because the organisation failed to handle the aftermath of a service failure properly and instead gave reluctant or negative responses or did not respond at all. (Keaveney 1995.) Ethical problems are situations where the organisation is guilty of dishonest or intimidating behaviour, unsafe or unhealthy practices, or existing conflicts of interest. And finally, involuntary switching can happen if there are factors beyond the control of either the organisation or the customer. (Keaveney 1995.) It is also suggested that much like the triggers of negative customer behaviour, the antecedents described above rarely happen individually, and instead, they combine and make the process more complex (Keaveney 1995; Steward 1998).

Core service failures combined with failed recovery attempts are suggested to be the most common reasons behind customer exit (Keaveney 1995), and it seems that within organisations' recovery efforts there is a risk of further aggravating customers. But a successful recovery can lead to customer satisfaction and even strengthen relationships between customers and

organisations (Smith & Bolton 2002), making a service recovery a high risk, high reward pursuit. Organisations should at the minimum, meet the customer's expectations, if not go above for a recovery process to be successful. The differing needs of customers require the organisation to offer solutions from basic to highly customised service recovery efforts. And while matching customers' recovery expectations is important, it is also suggested that recovery efforts exceeding customer expectations will result in more satisfied customers and increased repurchase intentions, than a situation in which expectations are simply met. (Nguyen et al. 2012.)

There are several aspects relating to not choosing to exit, and staying with an organisation after a negative experience that go beyond loyalty and engagement. Factors that hinder or make switching organisations difficult, might result in negatively engaged customers who ultimately choose to stay with the organisation, even after being mistreated by them. Research has shown that high switching costs, for example, sometimes weigh more than negatively valenced attitudes in the process of deciding to stay or switch organisations. (de Villiers 2015.) On the other hand, young adults have also been described as unpredictable consumers, as their loyalty does not always predict staying and switching behaviour. Young adults' economic resources are often tighter, and cost-based factors such as affordability can weigh over the attitude and engagement factors. (Shukla 2009.)

Passivity and activity are also factors, affecting customers' loyalty and switching behaviour - how customers react to switching triggers, such as negative customer experiences, is steered by the passivity or the activity of the customer. A passive customer has been found to be more likely to switch organisations due to triggers, and activity, in turn, increases loyalty and the potential of staying. (Roos & Gustafsson 2011.)

Research suggests that negative engagement also manifests in these two forms, as a more active and passive approaches, and of these, passivity behaviour within customers has primarily been connected to disengagement. The passive approach within negatively engaged customers also appears through characteristics of disengagement, and is the most challenging segment of customers to manage by organisations, as tracking, recovery and creating a connection with a disengaged group is more than difficult. (Naumann et al. 2017; Lievonon et al. 2018.) Passivity in negatively engaged customers can manifest for example, as customers declining to purchase a product and engage with the company's processes. And while passive customers do not contact the organisation to demand either compensation or correction, they can still be

likely to agree and go along with the opinions of other negatively engaged, more active customers. (de Villiers 2015.)

3.3.2 Customer complaints and voice

Hirschman (1970) was one of the first scholars to research customer responses after organisational failures through the concept of customers' voice. Voice refers to customers' attempt to change an objectionable state of affairs instead of escaping the situation. This can happen through individual or collective petitions to the management directly in charge, through appeals to higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management and through other, various types of customer actions and protests. Especially loyal customers are likely to use their voice when a reduction in quality is experienced (Hirschman 1970). From organisations' point of view, voice still has advantages over exit, as using voice can be subtle whereas exit is considered as a coarse line of action. Consumers are able to indicate their desires more clearly by complaining and phrasing their dissatisfaction better. (Dowding, John, Mergoupis & Van Vugt 2000.)

Consumer engagement and co-creation have become increasing interests in the market, and brands are constantly looking for ways to cultivate closer bonds with their customers. Recent research has shown that in order to attract and engage consumers, especially millennials, a brand must be flexible and have room changes, deriving from customer input. (Kennedy & Guzmán 2017.) Organisations are more keen on heading towards customer-favourable changes and during the recent years, both customer complaints and constructive customer criticism have been perceived as invaluable information. In order to make engagement through co-creation possible, brands have to find new ways to persuade customers to participate in feedback processes that provide them with priceless information on their practices. (Liu & Mattila 2015; Kennedy & Guzmán 2017; Kennedy 2017.)

Companies have gradually increased the possibilities for customers to use their voice by providing them with direct lines of communication to the company to make the feedback process easier for customers (Andersen 1999). It is no wonder that organisations encourage customers to complain, as it can reduce dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth, offer valuable information about market situations and help organisations in retaining customers. Naturally complaints can benefit customers as well, as they can help organisations in developing and providing better products and services. (Gilly & Hansen 1985;

East 2000; Lievonon et al. 2018.) A complaint also provides an opportunity of a service recovery for organisations, which in turn offers a chance to educate the customer, strengthen customer loyalty and evoke positive word of mouth comments. (Blodgett, Hill & Tax 1997.) Hence, from the point of view of organisations, successful complaint resolving is a vital part of operations.

Sometimes complaints can also pose threats, as when customers complain directly to the brand, they may have an urge to get even by punishing the brand and demanding compensation. These are the manifestations of revenge and reparation, two justice restoring strategies that go in hand in hand. How these strategies are utilized depends on the amount of customers' pre-failure brand commitment. (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2019.) Pre-failure brand commitment defines how much injustice a customer perceives when failure happens. Committed complainers desire revenge and compensation more compared to uncommitted complainers, as the already committed customers feel more hurt by a brand's wrongdoing (Weitzl & Hutzinger 2019).

Nowadays, customers gradually prefer to use social media channels to connect with companies regarding their misconducts and get compensation after service failures (Weitzl & Hutzinger 2019). Complaints in social networking services entail more threats, as sometimes complaints and possible recovery efforts of companies are visible to outside observers. Unaffected users may even engage in the interactions by either supporting a complainant with negative comments or by supporting the company with positive comments (Schaefers & Schamari 2016).

Dissatisfaction has been commonly seen as a reason for complaining, but complaints do not always stem from dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction does not always lead to complaining behaviour, as complaining can also be illegitimate or opportunistic. Illegitimate or opportunistic complaining means that a customer tries to deliberately take advantage of an organization, for example, by seeking refund even though there is no real reason for compensation. (Reynolds & Harris 2005; Baker, Magnini & Perdue 2012.) Complaining behaviour has thus been shown to be far more complex than a mere customer reaction from dissatisfaction following purchasing. (Joy, Chen, Li, & Xiaoxiao 2014.)

3.3.3 Negative word of mouth

In order to maintain and promote successful brand image and create social brand engagement within stakeholders and prospects, it is crucial for organisations to have a social presence and relevant, captivating content, through which customers can participate and engage with the brand. To amplify engagement and steepen bonds, it is also necessary for organisations to offer platforms, encourage and nurture word of mouth within their customers. (Osei-Frimpong & McLean 2020; Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007.)

Word of mouth, often referred to as WOM, is a form of non-commercial communication, involving two or more private parties, primarily consumers, informally exchanging their views on companies, products or services. The definition of WOM mostly leaves out customers' voice, meaning that customer-organisation interactions in formal settings, such as complaints and direct feedback, are not considered to be word of mouth. (Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007; Brown, Broderick & Lee 2007.)

Word of mouth can manifest in online environments as well as personal or face-to-face contexts, and is either positively or negatively valenced (Brown et al. 2007). Word of mouth within online platforms, widely referred to as electronic word of mouth (eWOM), has been a sustained research subject especially within communication scholars during the recent years. Personal or interpersonal word of mouth (pWOM) is less studied, and refers to spoken interactions, which in most cases happens between parties that already know each other. The research on the influence of pWOM and eWOM has resulted in differing findings. There are studies that have found pWOM to be even more influential, as the testimonial of someone the customer knows, can be more convincing than eWOM in the form of Facebook, corporate website and an third-party review site testimonials. (Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi 2016.) On the other hand, eWOM is found to be more likely to reach wider audiences due to the high connectivity between individuals on social networks, and is characterized as contagious by nature. (Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016; Curina, Francioni, Cioppi & Savelli 2019.)

Whether it is personal or electronic, the influence of WOM is evident. And while it is important for organisations to encourage positive word of mouth, it is as important to ensure that negatively valenced messages and attitudes will not spread and pose reputational threats toward brands. However, for organisations, minimizing negative feedback and reviews is a challenging task – it is far more likely for consumers to engage in negative word of mouth than

talk or publish positive things about brands. (Curina et al. 2019). In fact, out of all forms of customer protest, negative word of mouth is the most frequent choice of protesting for customers (Solvang 2008).

But it is exactly the frequency, contagiousness and destructiveness of negative word of mouth makes limiting, decreasing and preventing public outbursts of customer anger an increasing interest for organisations. (Rissanen & Luoma-aho 2016; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016.) It has been argued that if angry or revengeful customers choose turn to the organisation with their negative feedback first and the organisation handles it well, it is more likely that they will not engage in public, post-feedback outbursts of anger in online environments. Research suggests that directing customers' revenge behaviour to the organisation's private, direct channels and encouraging them to use their voice, create an opportunities to relieve, calm and even satisfy the consumer before they opt for publicly disclosing their feelings and thereby potentially hurting the brand. (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.)

Therefore providing customers with enough direct channels for using their voice and handling the feedback well could result in a smaller overall amount of negatively valenced public word of mouth. This way organisations would also have a better understanding of their negatively engaged customers' journeys and an enhanced chance of recognizing the most triggering points of contact as well as issues with their production or service chain. (Solvang 2008; Williams & Buttle 2014; Chih, Yuan, Liu & Fang 2019.) And vice versa, is it more likely for customers to go public with their negative feedback, if the organisational channels for influencing are not easily or readily available?

To understand negative word of mouth, it is also essential to understand the emotions that drive customers to engaging in it. The emotions customers feel after being failed and triggered by organisations are closely linked to the responses they choose - sharing behaviour and how word of mouth manifests is connected to whether the affected customers feel e.g. disappointed, angry, regretful or revengeful. Negatively engaged customers have been described to seek to attain their emotion-driven goals by resorting to negative WOM, whether it is motivated by venting feelings, taking revenge or warning others. (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007; Mazarrol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007.)

Especially feelings of anger in customers have been found to predict a willingness to vent emotions and act on revengeful desires towards organisations (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007). Furthermore, revenge-seeking attitudes seen in consumers often indicate that the consumer is

more likely to engage in negative word of mouth, than the customer who does not experience revengefulness. (Chih et al. 2019.) An angry customer is also more likely to search online environments to find consumers that have had similar negative experiences compared to theirs to share the experience, and this line of action has been found to satisfy the angry customer more, than disclosing the feeling to a close one. (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.)

Regretful customers, on the other hand, often aim to warn others or steepen their social relationships by engaging in negative WOM. (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007). Regretful customers were more likely to be satisfied when they disclosed their feelings to a person close to them, rather than sharing it online. (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.) In addition to regretful customers, the need to warn others has been found to also motivate customers who are disappointed by an organisation (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007). While most of the research concentrates on the failed customer's needs, there is also literature that suggests that word of mouth can be motivated by other customers' need for information. This approach sees warning behaviour, for example, as the failed customer recognizing that others need to know more about the organisation, and offering the information to the ones in need. (Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007.)

Whether the research approach concentrates on factors that pull or push customers into engaging in negative WOM, studies agree that WOM is goal-oriented, and inherently connected to how customers feel after negative customer experiences (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007; López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016). So, to examine how WOM manifests, it is crucial to understand customer journeys, including the organisational failures and triggers, and what kind of feelings and urges these triggers awaken in customers.

4 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter will present the methodology and analysis methods that are used for concluding the findings and arguing for the functionality of the chosen methods in conducting the research. The used secondary data will be introduced and justified. The ethics relating to the research methods and data will also be discussed in this chapter.

4.1 Data gathering

The data used used in this research is secondary data. The set of secondary data was chosen as using pre-existing data was considered to offer several advantages over primary data. The pre-existing set of data was deemed suitable in the light of the research questions and the data was already in the form of an Excel-file. Hence using secondary data was seen as more time and expense efficient than collecting primary data. In addition, the vast quantity and versatility of the pre-existing data set was seen as an advantage for the research.

Overall, utilizing secondary data offers researchers an alternative to the collection of primary data. Using secondary data is advantageous as it is often cost-efficient, saving efforts and expenses, and can be organised more quickly. (Vartanian 2011.) While using secondary data has many benefits, it can still have its disadvantages. For example, a lack of control over framing and wording of a survey or an interview might prove problematic. Older sets of

data may also be outdated and unable to answer questions regarding recent changes. (Vartanian 2011.)

The analysed data was collected during the fall of 2017 (5.9.2017–18.10.2017) from students participating in an introduction course on corporate communication. 278 responses were received in total. 80 of them were later removed because 68 respondents did not fit the targeted group of young millennials and 12 of responses did not answer the questions set for the data. Thus 197 answers were chosen for the final analysis. 60,2% of the chosen respondents were female and 39,8% were male.

The questionnaire, found in the appendix 1, consisted of both open-ended and closed questions. In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked to describe an especially negative experience they had had with an organisation, meaning interactions either online or offline. The second question asked respondents to elaborate on how they acted after the experience. They could choose one or more actions from seven options, which were:

- A. I continued to use the services of the organization
- B. I changed the organization
- C. I told about experience publicly online (by giving negative feedback/ writing a review)
- D. I told about the experience privately to friends or relatives
- E. I gave feedback to organization privately (e.g. by sending an e-mail)
- F. I did nothing
- G. Other behavior. What did you do?

The third and final analysed question asked customers to describe what motivated them to respond in the way they did.

Characteristically for a qualitative research, the data was deliberately narrowed down by choosing only relevant responses that were fitting for the purposes of the analysis. (Jensen 2013.) The first qualification chosen for the respondents, was that at the time of the survey's conduction, they fit into the age group from 18 to 24 (in 2017). The respondents who did not fit the research's characterization of young millennials, were removed from the data.

The responses that were deemed unfit for answering the research questions based on the relationship of the respondent and the organisation were also removed. The conditions were that the respondent had to have acted as a customer in the described incident and the organisation in question was not a

monopolistic actor in their field of operation. This was due to the fact that the actions of the respondents were also analysed: responses that described monopolies, could distort the data, as the customers did not have the option to switch organisations. Choosing only customer-organisation relationships meant that employee-employer relations were also excluded from the analysis. Some responses were removed as unfit, for they did not answer the questions of the survey properly e.g. "I can't think of an especially negative experience with an organisation". Responses that left out fields like "motivation for actions" were also removed before analysis.

After the described exclusions, the data consisted of young millennial customers' negative experiences with organisations that had potential competitors in their fields. The majority, a total of 135 respondents were Finnish students, and the remaining 62 respondents consisted of international students, whose countries of origin were not requested as a part of the survey.

4.2 Ethics of the study and GDPR

In this research's demography, only the gender and age of the respondents were asked. The respondents cannot be identified solely based on these characteristics, as no other personal data was collected. The research data contains no names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers or social security numbers, making the respondents' identities highly confidential. These data elements are GDPR compliant, as even when combined, a specific person cannot be identified from the data.

The study handled a large amount of data on companies and their products and services. To prevent disclosing the brands discussed by the respondents in the survey, the names of the organisations were replaced with descriptions of the businesses and the industries the brands operated in. Handling the brand data in this manner offers a possibility to connect the negative customer experiences to their original contexts and the fields of business, without revealing any confidential company information.

4.3 Thematic analysis and the coding process

4.3.1 Thematic analysis

The analysis of this research was conducted as a thematic, qualitative analysis as the aim of this study is to gain more insight on organisational triggers and examine organisations' actions that customers perceive to drive them towards negative engagement behaviour. The research questions were naturally based on the purpose of the study and thus a qualitative method was chosen to be the best fit to offer answers. The research questions "*What are the organisational triggers that drive young millennial customers toward negative engagement behaviour?*" and "*In what ways do young millennials respond to negative customer experiences?*" thrive for a more perception-led understanding of customers' negative engagement processes. There is a lack of research that examines especially millennial customers' perceptions and outlooks of negative engagement behaviour, rather than just the objective behaviour, so by choosing a qualitative method, there is a chance to shed light on aspects and find themes that have not been previously discovered.

The chosen, pre-collected data also set its limitations, and offered more useful material for the purposes of a qualitative research. The open-field questions asked from the participants of the study resulted in often broad, written responses, and thus the collected data offered beneficial material for the method of thematic analysis. As the research pursues to gain deeper understanding of the attitudes, responses and rationales of young millennials, it would prove difficult to achieve this by using quantitative methods, and qualitative analysis was chosen as the best fit for creating credible results.

With qualitative methods communication research aims to understand phenomena, experiences and perceptions by making inductive or deductive conclusions from different sets of data. (Daymon & Holloway 2010; Berger 2019.) The aim of the study was to understand how, why and with what consequences young millennials experience and actualise the phenomena of negative customer experiences and negative engagement behaviour. Thus, how young millennial customers put these experiences into words, was deemed to be the most efficient focus for the study.

The main disadvantage of the chosen method is that the findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty than they could with quantitative analyses. This is because the findings of the research are not tested to discover whether they are statistically significant or due to chance. (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012.)

Even though quantitative research has been dominating within business research, there is a demand for a qualitative approach as qualitative research

offers an opportunity to focus on the complexity of business-related phenomena in their contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Qualitative research seeks to explore, understand and describe research participants' experiences and uncover the views and meanings held by the participants (Daymon & Holloway 2010). The approach has the potential to create further understanding of phenomena and their manifestations in real life contexts. Qualitative analysis can provide deeper understanding on the operation and transformations of the researched concepts. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.)

In this research, the data collected with the survey was analysed by using a thematic analysis, also because the method is suitable for large sets of data and fitting for a team research (Guest et al. 2012). Thematic analysis is also a functional and useful method in the context of this research, because in essence, thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses and reports patterns found in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The possibilities of narrative analysis as well as content analysis were considered on the grounds of the collected data, but they were deemed unfit for the purposes of the study. Content analysis was found to be too strict of a grid for the data, as counting the frequency of exact word choices was not beneficial for the research purpose. Hence thematic analysis was chosen.

Even while there are only a few exact guidelines for using a thematic analysis, there are some ground rules related to the method (Sang & Sitko, 2014). This research was carried out in line with these rules. The guidelines are described in the table below and further explained below the table and the analysis of the research data of this thesis is also described in detail.

TABLE 2 Phases of thematic analysis Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, 87).

Phase	Description
1. Familiarisation with the data	Data transcription (if necessary). "Active" reading and writing down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding the data (posteriori) in systematic fashion across the entire data set.
3. Searching for themes	Re-focusing the analysis at the broader level. Forming codes into potential themes.

4. Reviewing themes	Checking themes against coded extracts and in relation with each other. Forming thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Further refinement if identified themes. Locating the overall story of the analysis.
6. Producing the report	Writing up the analysis results with vivid extract examples and comprehensive commentary.

The first phase of the analysis consists of a data transcription, active reading and writing down initial ideas. In essence, this means that the content should be read through several times, as it is crucial to become highly familiar with the data. It is also important to list initial ideas that emerge from the data. (Sang & Sitko 2014.) The second phase consists of organising the notes taken earlier into codes. At this phase it can be useful to generate as many relevant codes as possible. Some codes are likely to be contradictory or unfit, but these have to be noted as well. (Sang & Sitko 2014.) In the third phase the codes are combined into potential themes. One cluster could pile up as main themes whereas others can form into more specific subthemes. (Sang & Sitko 2014.)

Sang and Sitko (2014) suggest that in phase four, the assembled themes are revised and should be compared to the code extracts and each other. This phase is important as it may come to light that themes do not have enough evidence to support them or that underlying data is too diverse to form a single coherent theme. It can also be noticed that separate themes are about the same topic, and in these cases, it is beneficial to assemble one theme from the many. Finally, the revised themes should be formed into a map. (Sang & Sitko 2014.)

The fifth phase requires a further clarification of the themes. Here, how the themes fit into the overall arguments has to be acknowledged. The goal is to analyse the data and reveal relationships rather than summarise the transcript, as further refining the themes should bring to light what is inherently interesting about the data. (Sang & Sitko 2014.) The sixth and final phase consists of analysis writing. The identified themes are reported and should provide the reader with the story of the data. Arguments should be supported with examples of data extracts. (Sang & Sitko 2014.)

4.3.2 Coding and analysis processes

“Coding is the process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way” (Creswell 2015). In other words coding is a way to provide an overview of disparate data. This allows the researcher to make sense of them in relation to their research questions. (Elliott 2018.) It is appointing the codes, previously defined with a codebook, to raw data. Thus researchers can engage in data reduction and simplification. Coding also allows making new connections between concepts, converting data into meaningful units and rethinking theoretical associations. (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & Mcculloch 2011.) Codes can be developed from existing theory, they can develop from the raw data or they can grow from specific research goals. A codebook is a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data. Codebooks are integral to analyzing qualitative research data as they provide a formalized operationalization of the codes. (Fonteyn et al. 2008.)

The coding process followed the phases and guidelines set by Sang and Sitko (2014) and Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first phase of coding, the data was to read through and notes of observations were taken. Aim of the first phase was to get a general view of the data, so that coding could be continued more clearly. At this stage there were no determined codes, just notes and ideas.

In the second phase, those notes were organised and they were formed into codes. Codes were given nominal numbers between 1-26 regarding triggering, and between 100-115 regarding the reasoning behind customers' behaviour after negative experience. For example, number 1 indicated that the triggering happened because of an incorrect product. 100 meant that the behaviour was a result of a willingness to warn other customers. Consumers' actions after negative experiences were not answered with open ended questions in the survey and instead, the respondents chose one or more options from seven alternatives to indicate how they acted. By choosing the option 7 'Other behavior, what did you do?', respondents could also elaborate more on their actions.

The coding was executed in Microsoft Excel. Excel is often associated with quantitative data analysis, but it is also useful as a qualitative tool, as it can handle large amounts of data, provide multiple useful attributes and allow a variety of display techniques (Meyer & Avery 2009).

Table 3 below includes the codes used to analyse the data:

TABLE 3 Codes identified

Negative engagement trigger	Behaviour after a negative experience	How did the customer reason his/hers behaviour after a negative experience?
Incorrect product	I continued to use the services of organisation	Will to warn others
Broken product	I changed organisation	Will to take revenge
Purchased product not as promised	I told about the experience publicly online (e.g. by writing a negative comment or review)	The urge to share a negative experience
Purchased service not as promised	I told about the experience privately to friends or relatives	Will to get compensation
Purchased service not working	I gave feedback to organisation privately (e.g. by sending an e-mail)	Will to get information
Slow customer service	I did nothing	Will to help the organisation develop
Customer service tries to sell instead of helping	Other? What?	The superiority of the product or service
Rude customer service		Ease or affordability
Unprofessional customer service		Inconvenience of switching
Customer is not taken seriously		Feelings of being hurt or mistreated
Uninformative customer service		Brand image or engagement
No response from customer service		Broken expectations

Careless customer service		Effort
Dishonesty		Distrust in possibilities to influence
Customer is blamed		Successful compensation or apology
Slow or no delivery		
Unsuccessful purchase process		
No refund		
Slow refund		
Cannot return product		
No compensation		
Insufficient compensation		
No apology		
Organisation does not take responsibility		

The negative engagement triggers column identifies the incidents that led to the negative triggering of a customer. 26 different triggers types were given a code. The below example describes how the codes were formed:

“A negative situation was at a bike rental in the French alps. We had rented out two bikes for a day initially however, once realizing that the **bikes were not working correctly** (*purchased service not working*) we brought them back and asked to change to better ones. **These too did not work correctly** (*purchased service not working*), so we decided to end the day after only 1 hour at the

resort. **The manager did not seem to care (*unprofessional customer service*)** about our experience and **demand we pay for a whole day instead of just 1 hour (*no compensation*)**. Even after negotiating he did not change his mind and we left.”

The behaviour after a negative experience column identifies how customer acted after the initial negative customer experience, and the reasoning for the behaviour column presents how the customers explain their behaviour. The multichoice questions for behaviour after a negative experience offered pre-set frames for themes of customer behaviour, but the customers’ reasoning for their actions were coded into themes. 15 different codes based on the reasoning for negative behaviour were given. The example below describes how the codes were formed:

Respondents answered to the multichoice that they decided to:

- continue to use services of organisation
- and share their experiences with others

And responded to the open-ended question:

“I’ve been a customer of the bank for all my life and had positive experiences before (*brand image or engagement*). Changing would have been to drastic . However I did complain to many of my friends and family about it. **I wanted them to know that it is possible to get bad service from this specific office (*will to warn others*)**.”

In the third phase, the codes were categorized and assembled into themes. Eleven themes were formed based on the codes. Five of the themes were related to triggers. The other six themes concerned the actions young millennial customers took after a negative experience and how they justified their actions. In stage four the themes were reviewed and further compared in relation to other themes and individual codes. It was observed that themes were not contradictory and the codes were suitable for the themes. Two thematic analysis maps, found in the appendix 2, were created to embody the relationships between the codes and themes.

Finally, in the fifth phase the, the themes were further clarified and the results of the research were formed and reported. The results are presented in chapter 5.

5 RESULTS

The aim of this research was to identify the organisational triggers that act as drivers of negative engagement in the midst of young millennials, and explore the ways in which they respond to negative customer experiences. The following research questions were stated in the beginning of the study:

RQ1: What are the organisational triggers that drive young millennial customers toward negative customer engagement behaviour?

RQ2: In what ways do young millennials respond to negative customer experiences?

The following chapter will look at the thematic results that were derived from the data of the survey. First, RQ1 will be answered by presenting the triggers that drive young millennials' negative engagement. The second half of the chapter responds to RQ2, showing how millennials responded and reacted to negative customer experiences, and further, in which ways they rationalized their decisions and actions. The chapter finishes with a conclusion that draws from both research questions and collects the results of the study together.

5.1. Triggers of negative engagement

The triggers of negative engagement were examined through the first research question. After the initial negative engagement triggers were coded in

systematic detail, they were then formed into broader themes. Five different organisational trigger themes leading to negative customer engagement behaviour were identified from the data. The triggers of negative engagement usually did not occur alone. Instead, often two or even three different triggers could be identified in the same answer. Due to this, many responses were coded under more than one trigger theme, making the quotes and shown results partially overlapping. There are also similarities between the themes, as one side of a negative customer experience often affected another. The triggers are described in the Table 4 and further illustrated in subchapters below.

TABLE 4 Findings: Key negative engagement behaviour triggers of young millennials

Trigger theme	Trigger description	Example from the data
Purchased product or service failures	The purchased service or product was incorrect, broken or not as promised.	"2 months ago i bought a pajamas in the ETAM store and some days after it was already damaged so i was very disappointed about this store."
Customer service failures	Customer service was unprofessional, rude or uninformative.	"I went to Life shop -- It took a very long time until they even said hi to me and asked if I needed any help. I didn't feel very welcome and didn't end up buying anything, even though, they had the product I was looking for."
Purchase or delivery failures	Problems with purchase process, or slow/no delivery	"I ordered something online. However the items had not been shipped after 3 months. -- Finally after 5 months I received what I ordered and after all that time waiting I really was not that excited for it. It was a nuisance."
Compensation or return failures	Problems with return and refund or lack of compensation/apology.	"-- I didn't receive the room that I had booked, because there had been too many people. So I had to live in a smaller apartment for the same amount of money, I didn't even get any discounts although that is not acceptable."
Organisational communication failures	Lack of communication and information on process, product or service	"I was ordering items online. According to the site they had the items I wanted ready, but it turned out they didn't -- I had to find this out for myself, as the company never informed me. When I cancelled my order

		and complained, I got a very generic response and no apology for the inconvenience.”
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5.1.1 Purchased product and service failures

Failures with purchased products and services were common negative triggering events for young millennials. Purchased product and service failures refer to situations where customers either experienced that the product or service they bought was not as the organisation promised, or was somehow damaged, broken or inoperative. This trigger category only entails core products and services, that were the objects of a customer’s purchase, and failures in supporting services, such as stores’ websites, purchase and delivery processes are analysed under the category of ‘purchase and delivery process failures’, in subchapter 5.1.3.

In many cases young millennials described that their disdain derived from the expectations of what was marketed and said about the product or service before the purchase, and the anticipation was not being met by the end product. These customers were not therefore getting what they were initially promised by the organisation, and often described feelings of being led on. Preceding studies are in line with this result, as they suggest that dishonesty and deception of customers are exactly the types of organisational actions, that can trigger negative engagement (Azer & Alexander 2018, Frow et al. 2011).

I bought a customized cover for phone online, but the product didn't look as planned --. (Respondent 136)

I ordered laptop in online shop. Verkkokauppa.com. It was an advertisement that it was the "bestseller", in fact it was really awful and worked very slow in the internet. (Respondent 189)

Purchased product and service failures also refer to events where the product in question was actually broken or of poor quality, or the bought service was not working.

2 months ago i bought a pajamas in the ETAM store and some days after it was already damaged so i was very disappointed about this store. (Respondent 145)

I booked a hotel on Ebookers and during the booking there was a some sort of technical error, due to which my hotel booking went completely wrong.
(Respondent 105, translated from Finnish)

Previous research also supports the suggestion of young millennials finding a damaged product or service a trigger, as failing to deliver a core product or service has been found to act as a triggering factor for negative engagement (Azer & Alexander 2018). The customers not receiving the product or service, which was promised to them, is exactly the kind of event that could be described as a core product or service failure. The quality of services and products has also been described as a bare minimum requirement for organisations to compete in their fields (Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson, 2016). Therefore, for example, the cases of the broken pajamas and technical hotel booking error, the failure meant that the core object did not meet even the minimum requirements of quality, and thus, could not meet the customers' basic level of expectations either.

The results seem to reveal more detailed information regarding product and service failures, as responses indicated that there are several ways, in which a failure of products/services can occur. According to the responses the failure does not simply mean that a product or service is not working or the quality of a product/service was declined. When the respondents thought that a product/service was lower in quality than what was promised or marketed, it was enough to trigger them.

Often the failure of a product or service was the event that laid the foundation to triggering, meaning that it was the initial event that started the triggering process. But product and service triggers usually appeared in clusters, and respondents often reported several events that made the experience with the organisation especially negative. There were cases, where a single product or service failure was enough to trigger customers, but these experiences were more uncommon.

5.1.2 Customer service failures

Customer service failures refer to all situations where a customer deemed the customer service or the customer service representative somehow unsatisfactory. Inappropriate behaviour was an often-mentioned issue within customer service failures, and in several occasions, the respondents described

that the customer service representatives had behaved in a rude, ignorant or otherwise unprofessional way.

I was buying a magazine at a local kiosk. The seller was quite impatient and rude which resulted in me never going there again. (Respondent 196)

-- Negative experiences that I have had are mostly with people who are either working on the counter of a club, food place or a shop. And it mostly involves them being rude or condescending." (Respondent 178)

Respondents also reported several instances where it was difficult for them to reach customer service, due to either long holding times, lack of customer service contact details or slow email response times. The inaccessibility or unresponsiveness of customer service was found frustrating by several customers.

Once I had to hold the line about 30-40 minutes to get connected with the customer service. It was a cellphone company. (Respondent 176)

-- All the e-mails, that I have sent to the support of the company, stayed unanswered for a couple of weeks and there was no telephone number of the company which I could call. (Respondent 152)

Numerous respondents also expressed irritation over how customer service was not helping with their problems, but rather strived to sell them different, additional products or services. These customers wanted to fix or clarify issues, but ended up getting frustrated when the customer service aimed to derail the interaction they had wished for.

I was frustrated with how I was not getting helped with my computer and they tried to sell me a completely different device, that I did not want at that moment. (Respondent 115, translated from Finnish)

-- I had problems with my username, which I tried to make clear, but the customer service only tried to sell me more services, and I did not feel like my issue was going to be resolved. Only after several minutes of declining to purchase anything I got help for the problem. (Respondent 74, translated from Finnish)

Customer service related triggers also included failing customers by handling the customer in an ill manner – ridiculing, blaming the customers or not taking

them seriously. Young millennials expressed dissatisfaction especially in cases, where customer service averted responsibility by engaging in customer-blaming behaviour or questioned the customer's purposes.

I had bought a new blender, which got rusty after the first use. I went to the store to switch it for a new one, but the same thing happened to it. I contacted [consumer products company], but from there I got an unpleasantly toned response, which told me that there could not be anything wrong with their products, and the customer was to blame. -- (Respondent 131, translated from Finnish)

I was returning clothes, which I did not end up liking at home, to [a clothing retailer]. The store has a return right, if the clothes are unused (like mine were). However, at the checkout I met a very impolite saleswoman, who did not believe that my clothes were unused. She made me feel very embarrassed, questioning my honesty in a loud voice in front of other customers. (Respondent 70, translated from Finnish)

Dishonest and slow customer service were also seen as factors that cultivated negative engagement.

I went to a newly renovated restaurant with my sisters. We had the worst service I've ever had - the place was almost empty but no one came to show us to our table, we waited very long for the waiter to get our order and when we wanted to get the check, eventually had to go to the kitchen to get one of the waiters who were not even doing anything. -- (Respondent 161)

A visit at the hairdresser's: There was not much lightening in my hair, but the hairdresser implied that it would happen during the following visits, but this did not happen compared to the eventual successful hairdresser visit in another salon. (Respondent 28, translated from Finnish)

According to the results, customer service failures were the most common triggering event described by young millennials. In more detail, rude, ignorant, unprofessional, unattainable or slow customer service, selling additional products and dishonesty seemed to act as triggers. These findings are supported by previous research as the bad behaviour of service staff, dishonesty and flawed service have been found to trigger customers (Azer & Alexander 2018, Frow et al. 2011). Also, aiming to make additional sales, rather than helping customers solve their current issues may be viewed as dishonest and thus triggering as customers may view that customer service personnel are

trying to take advantage of the situation instead of helping sincerely (Frow et al. 2011).

Responses pointed out that young millennials are quite aware of how customers should not be treated and that bad customer service should not be tolerated. The results also show that customer service processes may fail in various different ways, and in worst scenarios, customer service could commit several failures during a single interaction. In addition, the results show that often customer service failures were a combination of misdemeanours instead of, for example, a single rude comment.

It is noteworthy to notice that often customers reached out to customer service after facing an initial issue with a product or a service, so customer service was already the second or the third touchpoint a customer had with the organisation in question. Several young millennials described that they were already irritated or frustrated with e.g. a broken product or a non-operative service, and customer service not handling the issue well only exacerbated their dissatisfaction or even evoked anger. These experiences fill the characteristics of sequential triggers of negative engagement, known as the especially negatively influential double deviation in research. (Joireman et al. 2016.)

5.1.3 Purchase and delivery process failures

The respondents' negative experiences with supporting services, specifically purchase and delivery processes, were put under the trigger category of 'purchase and delivery process failures'. These triggers also often include the core services of companies that offer supporting services to other goods, e.g. booking sites for flights or hotels, in which cases the flight or hotel stay can be seen as the core end product. Most often these events had to do with postponed, slowed down or canceled deliveries of purchased goods.

I once ordered a shirt from a website to my apartment in Amsterdam, and it was suppose to come in an month but it never came. When i tried to get my money back i couldnt because it said the shirt was delivered. (Respondent 173)

I ordered something online. However the items had not been shipped after 3 months. I asked them multiple times where are they and they said they were already shipped. Finally after 5 months I received what I ordered and after all that time waiting I really was not that excited for it. It was a nuisance. (Respondent 192)

I bought a piece of furniture in a furniture store and they promised to deliver it to my home within two weeks. I did not hear anything from the furniture after two weeks, so I contacted the store. They said that the piece of furniture in question would not be available until over two months. -- (Respondent 75, translated from Finnish)

Although problems with delivery were the most common issues within the category of purchase or delivery failures, respondents also reported purchase processes that evoked negative engagement behaviour. In these situations the customer's purchase process failed due to e.g. low stock on products, issues with websites or sales personnel.

I was looking for a new phone -- The salesperson told a long story about the product and assured me that the phone was a good choice. I told them I would buy the phone in question, and only then the salesperson told me that they do not currently have the phone in stock. (Respondent 83, translated from Finnish)

I was ordering plane tickets from [the website of an airline] -- At the very last step when you are supposed to accept the payment the next page they had a text stating "Internal error" and my booking did not go through. -- I went to book the same tickets, for the exact same day and exact same time, but this time they were 40€ more expensive per person, so they would have been 80€ more than 20 minutes earlier when their system had an error and fell apart. (Respondent 151)

I booked flights online through [online travel agency]. They charged a bill twice for the flights that cost over a thousand euros, even though the website stated that the order had been interrupted. I did not get a confirmation of order or email from the company, and their customer service was not open until a few days (Respondent 57, translated from Finnish)

The responses highlight that purchase and delivery processes should be effortless by default and additional steps in the process were often viewed as failures by young millennials. Even though similarities can be found in previous research as failures by service staff and dysfunctionality of service are suggested to trigger customers (Azer & Alexander 2018), the results of this study offer more specific information as delivery and purchase process failures are distinguished as their own. Especially delivery failures seemed to irritate young millennials. Within these events, often the product had already been

paid for and customers expressed their disappointment when they could not have the product that they felt was theirs.

Even though customers' anger is often targeted at the company they purchased from, delivery failures cannot always be blamed on organisations, as external factors can have an effect on deliveries and delivery times. For example, a strike within a postal service, problems with subcontractors or a sudden increase in demand can affect delivery process or product availability negatively, and organisations may not necessarily be able to fully prepare for these kinds of situations. Nevertheless, respondents distinctly expressed that they felt that the organisation had failed them, even though the source of the problem may have been elsewhere.

5.1.4 Compensation and return failures

Service and product failures sparked negative feelings in young millennials frequently, but in some instances, well-handled service made up for the initial failures. However, if the compensation, refund or return process following an initial failure was difficult, customers felt like they were failed twice by the organisation. A usual issue with compensation and return failures was a slow refund or the complete lack of it.

I tried to return a shirt I bought online, but I didn't get the refund for a long time. (Respondent 182)

Some responses that described issues with compensation had received compensation in form of an e.g. gift card, but deemed them insufficient compensation for e.g. compared to the harm caused.

I ate in a local restaurant with a friend and got especially poor customer service. We gave feedback about the issue afterwards, but because the service was so lousy and the food so poor, we were not interested in a 'reimbursement gift card'. (Respondent 103, translated from Finnish)

I bought earphones in [consumer electronics store] and they broke after a short time of use. -- The maintenance was prolonged by a week and eventually I was told that they could not be fixed, and I was offered brand new ones. I went to get the new earphones, when I was informed that the earphones would not be available until next month. I asked for my money back, which was supposed to be possible at first, but at the end, was not. I would have gotten a mere gift card,

which I did not need. I decided to wait for the earphones. (Respondent 72, translated from Finnish)

I bought a bracelet at a store as a present. But I had to return it and without a warning I couldn't get the money back. I could only get a giftcard, although I did not want that. (Respondent 172)

Although previous research points in the same direction as these results, suggesting that the feeling of being financially exploited and deceived can trigger customers (Azer & Alexander 2018, Frow et al. 2011), the findings specifically show that slow or missing refund and insufficient compensation were perceived as triggers by young millennials. This broadens the previous understanding, as it highlights the different ways that failures can accumulate.

Unsuccessful compensation or return processes usually already meant that there was an initial failure that needed to be fixed or compensated. These were often the points of contacts, in which customers were interested in getting reimbursed for the issues they first encountered, but if the organisation failed to recover by compensating, the customer experience was mainly described to have considerably worsened. When the organisational recovery succeeded and a sufficient compensation was combined with an apology by the organisation, respondents' negative experiences seemed to turn neutral, or even positive in some cases. Previous research has suggested that successful recovery can prevent customers from exiting by making them satisfied (Smith & Bolton 2002). Interestingly, this seems to apply also in the context of negative customer engagement behaviour.

5.1.5 Organisational communication failures

Customers were faced with organisational communication failures when there was a lack of sufficient communication on the behalf of the organisation. These included situations, where there was little or no information available about the organisation or their policies on the organisation's website, store or during the purchase process.

-- The online store's return policy was a bit unclear to me so I sent an email asking if it's okay to return the shoes and get a refund. They replied that it's possible. However when I was at the post office sending the shoes back I found out that the online store didn't cover the postage and I would have to pay 80€

just to send them back. -- I was unhappy how indistinct their website was about the return policy. (Respondent 164)

Organisational communication was deemed lacking also when customers did not receive customized updates on e.g. details or changes in their personal purchase, delivery, return or compensation process. These uncommunicated details often had to do with the duration of deliveries and availability of products and services.

I was ordering items online. According to the site they had the items I wanted ready, but it turned out they didn't – I had to find this out for myself, as the company never informed me. (Respondent 163)

-- They charged me a hidden fee of \$6 to unlock my phone. -- What they also did not tell me was that it takes ten business days to move money into that account, something that should have been told to me in the beginning. (Respondent 142)

Hidden or unexpected fees came up in several responses regarding organisational communication failures. Young millennials suggested that organisations should clearly communicate price-related issues prior to purchase, on websites and during customer service interactions, which indicates that customers felt like they were not given enough information and also deemed unexpected fees as communication failures. Organisations presenting misleading or confusing information and hiding relevant information have been found to trigger customers' negative engagement (Azer & Alexander 2018, Frow et al. 2011).

The results on organisational communication failures indicated that being kept sufficiently informed as customers seems to be rather important for young millennials, as they often expressed feelings of annoyance and disappointment, when they felt that they were not offered enough information on the product, service or process details. Especially the incidents, where young millennials felt that they had lost money due to a lack of information seemed to be a source of considerable frustration.

To summarize, the results show that there are five types of organisational failures that young millennials reported as triggers of their negative engagement behaviour. As can be seen in the figure 9 below, these triggers fall under the main categories of: purchased product and service failure, customer service failure, purchase and delivery process failure, compensation and return failure and organisational communication failure.

Organisational failures, the triggers of negative engagement



FIGURE 9 Young millennials' triggers of negative engagement behaviour

5.2. Responding to the negative customer experiences

This part of the results chapter presents the negative engagement behaviour young millennials engaged in after their negative experiences. The sub-chapters are categorized based on the customer responses they chose, and within each chapter, the rationales and reasonings they offered for each response are introduced.

5.2.1 Sharing responses

Sharing experiences with friends and family

Out of all actions after a negative experience, negative word of mouth, and specifically sharing the experience with friends and family was the most common one – the majority of all respondents reported to have done so. Sharing often happened in face-to-face situations, but instant messaging services were also used as a medium to express feelings and describe the negative experience.

Young millennials who shared their experiences with friends or family, expressed that they wanted to:

- Warn others
- Vent their feelings

It was very common for young millennials to share the experience in order to **warn others**. Several responses stated that after the negative experience, they felt like they had to prevent others, which in this context meant their close-ones, from being mistreated by the organisation in question. The respondents described that they did not want their friends and family to end up enduring a similar experience, and by offering information on their own experience, young millennials felt like they could 'give them a choice' to avoid the company.

I wanted others to know what happened to me so they can choose to avoid that place. (Respondent 138)

--However I did complain to many of my friends and family about it. I wanted them to know that it is possible to get bad service from this specific office. (Respondent 188)

In some instances the warning behaviour was not at first initiated by the disappointed customer and only took place after the respondent was asked about the concerned service or advice by their friends or close ones. These young millennials engaged in warning behaviour, by not actively attempting to share their experience, but rather offering their insight after the initiation to discuss the theme had come from another direction.

Later friends who were moving to Jyväskylä asked for advice on apartment issues, and I felt like it was in their best interest to know that the queueing times were not as promised and the service was very rude, to me at least. (Respondent 43)

Literature has previously suggested that push factors are not the only drivers for customers to engage in negative word of mouth, and there are pull factors that also expedite negative WOM, and especially others' need for information can make customers speak up about their negative experiences. (Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007.) This specific pull factor is also seen in the response above as the respondent described that they '--felt like it was in their [the customer's friends'] best interest to know--'.

Based on the tones of young millennials' responses, the need for sharing the experience seemed to also derive from the respondents' natural urge to **vent their feelings** and talk about the negative event they had experienced. Most responses described this urge as a need to express their disappointment, anger or feelings of being mistreated to people close to them - 'vent their feelings' about the organisation.

I felt mistreated and wanted to share my experience (Respondent 148)

I went and bought the computer in another place and growled to my friend about being upset at the organisation. (Respondent 115, translated from Finnish)

It's the bad experiences that are also more likely to be shared with friends, and these events are the ones you also give feedback on. Somehow the experiencing 'injustice' or ill treatment creates a need to tell someone. (Respondent 123, translated from Finnish)

In literature, venting behaviour is often seen as a result of anger in customers. Although angry customers are likely to vent feelings, they are also more prone to sharing the experience in online environments, with customers who have similar experiences, and regretful customers are the ones who find more satisfaction in venting to close-ones. (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007; López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.) However, the results on young millennials indicate that being upset or angry was the most common reasoning behind venting feelings specifically to close-ones, rather than online, and that the variety of feelings leading to venting behaviour is much more complex than anger alone.

Young millennials' natural urge to share can also be evoked by feelings of annoyance, mistreatment and frustration, and the respondents often characterized a feeling of 'needing' or 'having to' let their emotions out by sharing the experience they had. Some even described sharing their feelings about the organisation with close ones as an obvious, even necessary choice, using expressions like 'I naturally shared the experience--' or 'I of course talked about it--'.

As stated, especially angry customers often try to find audiences with similar experiences to theirs, to engage in satisfying venting behaviour (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014). A willingness to vent negative experiences especially to people, who were aware of the issues in question or had also had bad experiences with the concerned company, was also seen in young millennials' responses, although anger was not always named as the emotional motivator. Young millennials expressed that they felt good about sharing the experience with familiar people who understood or had similar experiences, and that they were more likely to share issues concerning a company that was already somehow resented by their close ones.

My friends also had bad experiences with the store in question, so it was good to vent my annoyance to them. (Respondent 69, translated from Finnish)

Negative experiences are more likely to be shared, and the local movie theater had a bad reputation as it is, so the issue is often discussed. (Respondent 58, translated from Finnish)

How venting behaviour connected to the odd or humorous qualities of a customer experience was an interesting observation, not discussed much in previous literature on word of mouth. Negative events that young millennials perceived odd or somehow either comical or humorous, were often vented to close ones, even based on those qualities alone.

It was somehow stupid behaviour, and maybe even a bit comical situation, so that made me tell others about it. (Respondent 77, translated from Finnish)

I thought the case was so odd, that I wanted to share it with mainly my friends. (Respondent 107, translated from Finnish)

Sharing experiences publicly online

It was more uncommon for young millennials to go public with their experience, than to vent about it to their family and friends. However, it is worth noting that the survey did not ask the respondents to specify whether they had shared the experience on a brand page or in their own social network. This might have an effect on the reasons behind sharing, as in some cases it was unclear, whether the customers wanted to share their negative feedback specifically to the organisation's other customers on the brand page or vent about the incident to the networks within their own social media. In both cases, they would have checked the box of 'publicly giving feedback'. Young millennials reported to have participated in both kinds of behaviour in their answers, and the key is that in both situations, young millennials were deliberately and knowingly sharing the experience publicly in online spheres.

Young millennials who shared their experience publicly online, expressed that they wanted to:

- Warn others
- Take revenge

While several of the millennials, who disclosed their experience with family and friends stated that by sharing they wanted to **warn others**, it was also a fairly common rationale for the respondents who published their experience online. These young millennials, who turned to negative eWOM, often argued that they did not want anyone to endure the experience they had, rather than only limiting the warnings to the people close to them.

To warn other customers to fully check the gear before using it and to be careful when deciding to rent here. (Respondent 139)

The urge to spread my story and 'warn' others (Respondent 25, translated from Finnish)

I do not want anyone to have a similar experience (Respondent 3, translated from Finnish)

Young millennials also described feelings of annoyance over how companies treated their customers, implying perceived injustice. They often felt like other customers also 'needed to know', in order to be aware and even avoid the company. This connects to the earlier literature on word of mouth, implying that in addition to their own needs, customers also engage in negative word of mouth in order to fulfill other customers' need for information, by sharing their customer experience (Mazzarol, Sweeney & Soutar 2007).

The annoyance at the company's way of treating their customers (Respondent 26, translated from Finnish)

There were a few millennials who, while warning, also stated to have gone public, so that the organisation in question would take their feedback more seriously. They were not convinced that the organisation took or would take their private feedback seriously, so these young millennials resorted to publishing their feedback so that the organisation would be pressured to reply to the customer they upset or improve their processes. These respondents expressed that they wanted the organisation to notice their feedback and 'learn from it'.

I was also angry, because I felt like my comments and feedback were just being "dealt with" and swept under the rug, without considering the critique any further and really learning something from it. (Respondent 180)

-- I also hope the restaurant sees my review and decides to learn from it. (Respondent 138)

Taking revenge was a notably uncommon way for millennials to describe and rationalize their actions after a negative experience. These young millennials differed from the others who shared their experience on public platforms, as the first part wanted to warn others and prevent customers from engaging in situations, where the negative customer experience could happen to them, and the revengeful customers, in turn, wanted to prevent the organisation from failing their customers by taking their negative feedback public. Young millennials under both behaviour categories expressed to have perceived injustice and seemed to focus on preventing further violations, from different perspectives. Young millennials who went public to warn others were focused on the customers' perspective, while revenge-seeking behaviour was mainly linked to harming the organisation by smearing the organisational image.

I experienced injustice and I wasn't listened to. I wanted other people to know about this. I didn't want the organization to get away with it (respondent 185, translated from Finnish)

The literature on revenge behaviour indicates that revenge behaviour is rarely the first choice for customers, and only serious organisational failures are likely to incite revengefulness. The respondents who reported revengefulness, also described the kind of failures that the literature considers severe, such as double deviation, a service failure followed by a failed recovery. (Joireman et al. 2016.) Moreover, these young millennials elaborated that their idea of a revenge was to share the information with others to let customers know about the organisational failure – a behaviour that is very much in line with the previous understanding on the customer retaliation process. (Komarova et al. 2018; Gregoire et al. 2018.) But unexpectedly, even the large amount of young millennials who had endured serious issues or double deviations did not noticeably increase the number of customers seeking to get revenge.

Privately contacting the organisation

When compared to public disclosures, contacting the organisation privately after the negative experience was a more frequent option for young millennials. These millennials chose, instead of writing a public bad review, to deal with the issue through private platforms and channels, sharing the feedback one-to-one with the organisation that had initially failed them.

Young millennials who privately contacted the organisation, expressed that they wanted to:

- Help the organisation to develop
- Get compensation and correction

Within the millennials who contacted the organisation directly, there were respondents who expressed a desire to either **help the organisation develop** or support them. Young millennials that gave this rationalization for giving direct feedback, often stated that they understood how significant customer feedback was in terms of organisational development and furthermore, improvement. They characterised that they wanted to give their insight in order to help the organisation understand customers' issues and fix them.

Feedback is crucial for companies if they wish to improve so I tend to give it when I see a need for it. (Respondent 192)

Feedback or reclamation enhances the organisation's opportunities to solve issues and develop the organisation's operations. -- (Respondent 71)

In addition to helping the company in question develop, young millennials were in some instances reluctant to cause harm to the organisation's reputation, and wanted to give them another chance to do better before writing public feedback. These respondents reported to have resisted the urge to write a bad review and contacted the organisation privately instead, implying that they understood the potential reputational harm that a public negative review could cause to an organisation.

Actually I wanted to write a really bad review but I don't like to do this because in my opinion it is not fair as it can have a really bad impact on the company and mistakes can happen. Therefore I would give someone a second or third chance before writing a bad review and giving them private feedback before. (for example if it is a restaurant or things that you can try several times) (Respondent 156)

Millennials also tended to choose contacting the organisation, if they wanted the organisation **to correct and compensate** for their negative experience. Especially if they had evident issues with a product or a service that needed correcting, they described it as an obvious choice - they contacted the organisation so that they could get what was originally promised to them.

-- I also wanted to correct the mistake on my card, so I contacted the organisation (Respondent 1, translated from Finnish)

The greatest motivation for me was of course that I get a repaired phone.
(Respondent 171)

Contacts were also made when the customer that had been failed, felt like the correction was not enough, and wished for an additional compensation from the organisation.

I sent negative feedback, and I thought then that I would get a free maintenance
-- (Respondent 94, translated from Finnish)

We wanted compensation for the issue, and that we did get (free delivery, -50% off of the next product). (Respondent 15, translated from Finnish)

When reflecting the results to the previous research, similarities can be found.

Customers complain when they are dissatisfied and think they have a chance to get compensation (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2019). It is also previously suggested that by complaining customers have the potential to encourage organisations to improve their products and services (East 2000). Thus it seems logical that customers would like to take part in the process as it could benefit them in the future.

5.2.2 Loyalty responses

Switching the organisation

After a negative experience, discontinuing doing business with the organisation, and switching to another provider was reported by young millennials more commonly than staying.

Young millennials switched organisations because of:

- The ease of switching
- Loss of trust

The most reported reason young millennials gave for switching organisations was the **ease or effortlessness of switching** the organisation to a better option in the market. These responses mainly described situations where there were available options that were relatively affordable, logistically reachable, with satisfactory products or services, and there were no other obvious obstacles in the way, hindering the changing of companies. The previously recognized factors causing customer exit were also seen in young millennials, as the

availability and attractiveness of competitors' products and services was often mentioned as a reason for switching. If young millennials saw the rival as an eligible option for satisfying their customer needs, it was likely they switched providers. (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall 2006; Keaveney 1995.)

I felt like I could do business with another organisation. (Respondent 49, translated from Finnish)

There was another cafe nearby, that was very upscale, but a bit more expensive, so switching hangouts was not difficult. (Respondent 6, translated from Finnish)

Young millennials also switched organisations because they felt like staying and trying to change the processes of or get compensation from the company would be more inconvenient than simply leaving it behind, therefore choosing to do business with another provider.

I switched organisations, because I deemed it easier. -- (Respondent 94, translated from Finnish)

The rest of the young millennials who switched organisations, implied that they could not continue to do business with the organisation, because they had **lost trust in the company**, their core services or customer service. After they were failed, they either did not trust that the company had their best interest in mind, or doubted that they could carry out their processes according to what they had promised. Especially if young millennials perceived that the company had knowingly treated them in a dishonest way or even financially exploited them, causing feelings of being cheated, they were highly encouraged to exit. This connects to the previous literature on the organisations' dark side behaviours, as deliberate dishonesty and financial exploitation of customers are known to be critical triggers to customers. (Frow et al. 2011.)

I lost the trust in this organization and will never book again any trip there. I wanted to share my bad experience, so that other potential customers know that there might be some problems with the organization. (Respondent 160)

Now I dont trust them anymore. (Respondent 189)

I felt cheated. It seems like they just want to take money from you instead of providing you a nice product. (Respondent 174)

Previous studies indicate that there are even more reasons behind customer exit, than the ones found within the data of this research. Young millennials' responses also implied that customer exit is a complex process and often requires a combination of different negative antecedents to be chosen by customers. Particularly young millennials who explained their exit with loss of trust, described their exit as a no-confidence motion to the organisation, resulting from core failures and double deviations, also previously connected to coarse customer responses like exit. (Steward 1998; Solvang 2008.)

Staying with the organisation

Regardless of the especially negative experiences young millennials had encountered, it was relatively common to continue using the products or services of the organisation and choose to stay with the organisation. Staying with the organisation manifested differently in customers, as some young millennials described organisations that they were continuous clients of, such as banks or health service providers while others talked about companies that they occasionally did business with. Therefore, staying with the organisation meant both choosing to stay as a permanent client or to continue making occasional transactions with a company.

Young millennials stayed with the organisation because of:

- Inconvenience of switching
- Affordability
- Superior product or service
- Brand image or engagement

The inconvenience related to switching the organisation, was described in several responses as a reason to stay with the organisation in question, regardless of the negative experience. This reasoning was especially mentioned in instances, where the organisation had the customer's previous information and business data, which could not be transferred easily or at all if the customer chose to exit and switch to another organisation.

It is easier to use the same organization when it comes to health since they have all the information from previous visits. (Respondent 109)

Millennials explained to have stayed with an organisation to avoid inconvenience even when also demonstrating strong signs of negative engagement. Some even described being furious with or in their own words

'hating' the service provider. It was apparent that if exit and switching organisations was perceived as especially troublesome or demanding a lot of effort from the customer's side, young millennials could ignore their disappointment and even more severe emotions like anger, and opt to stay with the company.

I keep using the bank even though I hate it because I need it, and it would be too inconvenient to transfer my money somewhere else.-- (Respondent 191)

Several millennials reported to have chosen to stay with the organisation mainly due to their **affordable products or services**. Some described that they tried not to care or 'put too much weight' on their negatively valenced feelings about the organisation, their customer service or practices.

I still have a [telecommunications company] cell phone plan, even though the customer service I received from them was defective. However, nowadays I have a reluctant attitude towards telephone operators because of my experience. The phone plan is affordable though (now that I only pay for the phone plan from one operator...), so that engages me to stay with [telecommunications company]. (Respondent 64, translated from Finnish)

Because [a bus company] still offered the offered the cheapest travelling option in the market. (Respondent 13, translated from Finnish)

[A health club chain] is by their price level and location, clearly the most fitted gym, so I haven't given too much weight to my negative feelings. (Respondent 113, translated from Finnish)

Young millennials even reported to have stayed with organisations regardless of their disdain, due to the products or services of the organisation being affordable. The impact of resources was apparent in young millennials' responses, and seemed to affect and sometimes even overpower customers' engagement factors, a phenomenon recognized before in the switching behaviour of young adults, deriving from the potential scarcity of their resources (Shukla 2009).

Young millennials also often connected factors like affordability and superior products or a versatile selection of goods and services, while explaining their reasons for staying with the organisation. All of these rationalizations, affordability, superiority and selection, encompass the customers' opinions and

stances on the characteristics of the core objects, so the overlap of these factors in responses is logical.

I continued to do business regardless of the slow delivery, because the company's products are affordable and the selection versatile. (Respondent 16, translated from Finnish)

In some instances, only specifically **the products or services of the organisation were described to be superior or of such good quality**, that the respondents had chosen to continue with the organisation. They either reported that the products or services were high-quality or especially satisfying to fit their exact needs, or approached their decision through a comparison, and described them to be better than the other options from competing companies in the market. Therefore, in some cases superior products meant especially good quality, and others, specifically a better quality than competitors' available options.

I continued to use the products of the organisation, because they were of quality. (Respondent 2, translated from Finnish)

There were young millennials who specifically described that their decision to stay with the organisation in question had to do with their **overall positive attitude towards the brand**. These respondents described either having a good brand image, from e.g. the influence of word of mouth or having had direct dealings with the organisation before and having built trust based on these interactions. Loyalty has previously been found to act as a barrier to negative engagement and negative customer behaviour, and seemed have the potential to act as such for young millennials as well.

I told the problem that I had to warn my relatives to be careful. However, I continued to use [online marketplace] because [online marketplace] remains a good site. (Respondent 137)

I've been a customer of the bank for all my life and had positive experiences before. Changing would have been too drastic. (Respondent 188)

Interestingly, a positive brand image through experiences other than the young millennial's own, seemed to also encourage continuing with the organisation or giving them a second chance. This is an especially interesting finding, as young millennials implied that word of mouth positively impacted their customer loyalty, even after a personal negative experience.

Although the incident was not in any way the end of the world for me, it did not leave a positive image either. However, according to what I have experienced and heard [electronics company] usually stands for a high quality-price ratio in the field of electronics, so I am possibly ready to give them another chance. (Respondent 82, translated from Finnish)

5.2.3 Passivity

Passive customers: Doing nothing

The passivity seen in young millennials who had encountered negative experiences, primarily manifested as them withholding their feedback, not using their voice or not bothering to switch firms.

Young millennials resorted to passivity, because:

- It was too much effort
- They were indifferent
- They were distrustful of their chances to influence

Millennials reported to have done nothing after a negative experience if they felt like it was **'too much effort' to act on it**. These millennials did not bother or want to make the effort associated with either giving feedback, demanding compensation or switching organisations. Some respondents described that if the process was somehow complicated and they were, for example, uncertain of the channels, through which they could give feedback or contact the organisation, they did not want to use their time or resources to search for solutions or contact channels.

I did not know where to complain about the issue and I did not want to bother about such a relatively small thing, so I did not do anything. (Respondent 89, translated from Finnish)

The young millennials who did not perceive the negative experience as 'worth the trouble' also brought up that the concerned products or services were not of great importance to them. Several young millennials explained these feelings especially with a low price or affordability, indicating that they might have

been less passive, had the products or services been more expensive and taken up more of their financial resources.

I felt like the effort for a few pieces of clothing was way too big. (Respondent 20, translated from Finnish)

Even though the survey asked the respondents to describe ‘especially negative experiences’ with organisations, some young millennials **described feelings of indifference**, and did not express having been particularly disappointed or angry towards the organisation they named in their responses. Understanding ‘where the organisation came from’ and that ‘these things happen’ were frequent explanations for the indifferent attitude towards the event.

I did not react to the situation in any particular way, because I know that these things happen, and there is not always something you can do about them. (Respondent 121, translated from Finnish)

Some also reported similar attitudes as customers who stayed with organisations – they described to have brushed the experience off as a one-off incident, suspecting that they would wind up using the services or products of the company in the future. These young millennials specifically explained their passivity by describing that they did not want to let the singular event affect their customer behaviour and prevent them from doing business with the organisation in concern.

The shop was still a place where I sometimes end up, so I will not let it [the negative experience] ruin the whole store. (Respondent 100, translated from Finnish)

Young millennials also argued that their **distrust towards their chances to influence** drove them to passivity and not using their voice. These millennials were not confident that giving feedback, complaining or switching organisations would change the organisation or its faulty practices. They often already anticipated a faulty feedback process and in some cases, if the lack of trust was considerable, they even expected the organisation to deliberately ignore them and delete their feedback from their platforms without responding.

Writing a review would have been in vain, because the organisation would have just deleted it from their Facebook page.-- (Respondent 55, translated from Finnish)

-- I didn't feel like starting an "email-war" with the company. (Respondent 164)

-- I did not feel like my customership was valued, and I did not see that my negative experience would have been apologized for or compensated in any way. (Respondent 20, translated from Finnish)

An especially interesting finding about the passivity responses of young millennials, was that they were rarely completely passive and understood passivity differently. Although they reported to have 'done nothing', they often might have engaged in some type of customer responses. For example, some were passive when it came to giving feedback to organisations but shared the experience with their close ones, and some did not bother to demand compensation, but reported to have quit using the company's products or services. Passivity can thus manifest very differently in customers, but the shared, key issue is often that the customer does not contact the organisation after a negative experience, resulting in the organisation not receiving the valuable understanding on their issues while potentially losing customers.

In conclusion, chapter 5.2, 'Responding to the negative customer experiences' examined young millennials' negative engagement behaviour through their reported sharing responses, loyalty responses and passivity after encountering negative customer experiences. Behind each response category, there were several differing rationales young millennials gave for their actions. These were the following:

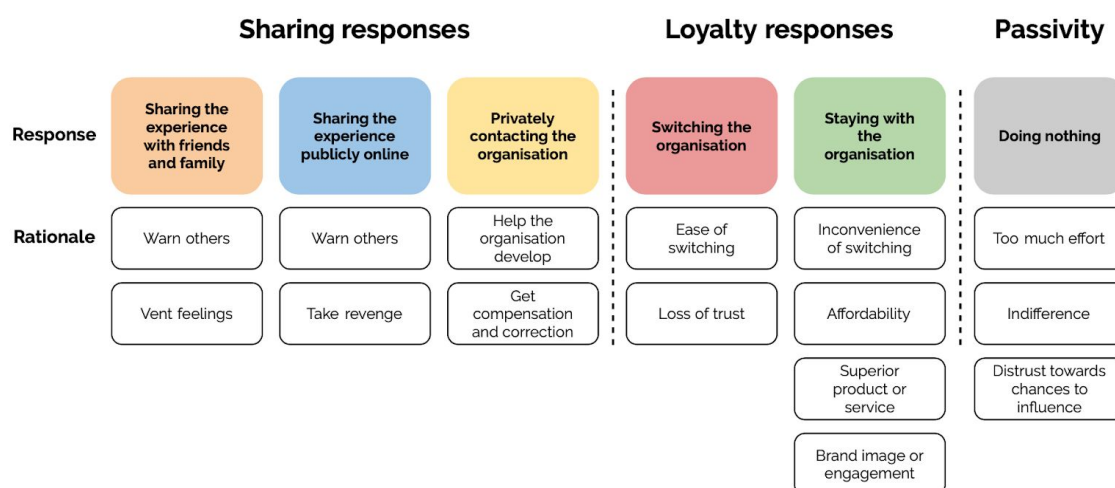


FIGURE 10 Young millennials' responses and rationales after negative customer experiences

6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter will conclude the results of the study, and the findings will be discussed in the light of earlier engagement research. How the results of this study fit within the previous understanding on negative engagement and negatively valenced customer behaviour will be analysed. The chapter will then present the limitations of the study and discuss recommendations for future research in the field of negative engagement.

6.1 Conclusions and theoretical implications

This study aimed to shed light on young millennials' negative engagement by studying what drives negative engagement behaviour, and furthermore, how young millennials respond and rationalize their behaviour after negative customer experiences. Relevant literature on negative customer engagement and generational research on young millennials was presented and critically discussed to demonstrate a credible basis for the research. The research then used survey data on young millennials to further understand their negative customer engagement behaviour.

Prior research regarding customer engagement has often focused on the positive valence of customer engagement, whereas research concentrating on the negative side has been limited (Juric et al. 2016). The research aim of further studying negative customer engagement is especially crucial, as it can potentially severely harm organisations by encouraging customers to engage in behaviours like negative word of mouth communication, public complaints, boycotting, revenge seeking and forming anti-brand communities (Grégoire &

Fisher 2008; Hollebeek & Chen 2014; Lee et al. 2009; Naumann et al. 2017; Turner 2007). Understanding what triggers negative customer engagement behaviour and how the behaviour manifests in customers is vital, so that organisations can innovate, improve and develop response strategies (Lievonen et al. 2018).

RQ1. What are the organisational triggers that drive young millennial customers toward negative customer engagement behaviour?

The results identified five organisational triggers that acted as drivers of young millennials' negative customer engagement behaviour, seen in the figure 9 below, first introduced in the results chapter. These triggers were: purchased product and service failure, customer service failure, purchase and delivery process failure, compensation and return failure and organisational communication failure.

Organisational failures, the triggers of negative engagement



FIGURE 9 Young millennials' triggers of negative engagement behaviour

The existing literature has examined triggering events especially in the contexts of negatively valenced influencing behaviour and dark side behaviours of organisations (Azer & Alexander 2018; Frow et al. 2011). The findings of this thesis support the previous research, as the main triggers identified by this research are mostly present in the existing literature within parallel research streams (cf. Azer & Alexander 2018; Frow et al. 2011).

However, this thesis offers a new perspective, as even while previous research has analyzed triggers in the context of negatively valenced influencing behaviour and customer relationship management, it has not offered detailed descriptions on the characteristics of triggers in the light of negative customer engagement behaviour (cf. Azer & Alexander 2018; Frow et al. 2011). In addition to identifying the five main trigger themes driving young millennials' negative engagement behaviour, the results of this research provide more insight into the contextual surroundings and nature of these triggers, and thus

contribute to the existing research by gaining a better understanding of the triggering process, specifically from young millennial customers' point of view.

Customer service failures were the most common trigger among young millennials. It entailed organisations treating customers in a rude, ignorant or otherwise unprofessional way, ridiculing, blaming the customers or not taking them seriously, unreachable or slow customer service and additional selling attempts instead of customer service. As the results indicate, there are several pitfalls into which organisations can fall in the context of their customer service. Responses show that young millennials were quite aware of the misbehaviours of organisations and that they did not hesitate to take action if they felt that they had experienced injustice. This alone offers valuable information as the prevalence of customer service failures in responses might indicate that it is quite common for organisations to fail and trigger customers in this area. On the other hand, it might also imply that negative experiences with customer service are more easily remembered by young millennials and thus present in so many responses.

How service and product failures trigger customers has also been studied by previous research (Axer & Alexander 2018), and combined with failed recovery attempts, has been considered to be one of the main reasons for customers' switching behaviour (Keaveney 1995). Young millennials described to have been triggered, when a product or service was lower in quality than what was promised or simply broken. In addition, young millennials often characterized a failure of a core product or service being the first, initial event that caused their triggering, indicating that often there were other events that further triggered their negative engagement behaviour.

Failure of delivery and purchase was also highlighted as a trigger by young millennials, meaning that slowed down or canceled deliveries of purchased goods, or problems with purchase due to low stock on products and issues with websites or sales personnel, could also trigger young millennials. Within these triggers, young millennials tended to direct their negative engagement behaviour towards the provider, even if there were external factors and operators that could have affected the delivery or purchase process. For example, the original supplier of a product could have been unable to deliver the product due to third-party issues. But nevertheless, respondents often held the organisation they had personally done business with responsible for the failure, especially if the organisation also failed to communicate issues and inform the customer.

Failures related to communicating with customers and insufficient refund and compensation were also perceived to cause triggering, much like within earlier research (cf. Azer & Alexander 2018; Frow et al. 2011). Respondents identified the communication as the trigger in situations where there was little or no information available about the organisation or their policies in the brand channels, stores or during and after the purchase process, especially if there were uncommunicated or unexpected fees. The results highlight customers' need for information, and imply that customers have to be properly informed during all stages of the customer process, or else suspicion and distrust toward the organisation can arise. Also slow, completely missing or insufficient compensation were found triggers, indicating that effortless purchase and delivery processes are the default customer expectations for young millennials.

What the results add to existing literature, is that a sufficient compensation combined with an apology by the organisation might curb the triggering of young millennials and potentially prevent them from engaging in negative engagement behaviour. Previously similar traits have been recognised when examining service recovery and customer exit (Smith & Bolton 2002), but interestingly, the results seem to indicate that a successful recovery could also have similar consequences in the more comprehensive context of negative customer engagement.

As implied above, in most cases a single trigger was not enough to drive young millennials toward negative engagement behaviour. The results offered insight on the complex nature of double deviations, as young millennials' negative customer experiences were located in several points within organisations' service and product chains. Although earlier research also recognizes double deviations, the subsequent triggers provoking extreme negative emotions in customers (Joireman et al. 2016) and cumulative nature of the triggers (Juric et al. 2016.), the findings on young millennials suggest that they are more frequently present as drivers of negative engagement, than previously implied. The results suggest that young millennials may more often than not, be failed in several points of contact, before they deem an organisational failure as an 'especially negative experience' or engage in negative customer behaviour.

The new trigger categorization adds to previous research as it brings forth triggers divided into themes on the basis of the organisational failures they entail, instead of dividing them by their cognitive or emotional aspects, as was suggested by Azer and Alexander (2018). This categorisation clarifies the specific events and points of contact, that can form into negative engagement behaviour triggers within customer-organisation interactions. It also explores

the triggers' development by examining each individual trigger's event-specific details and analysing the exact actions of organisations that young millennials perceive as drivers of their negative engagement behaviour. The study dives further into each trigger, by looking at all the differing customer experiences within certain organisational processes, that form into similar trigger events for young millennials.

There were triggers identified by previous research that were unexpectedly not mentioned by young millennials. Triggers such as information misuse, privacy invasion, customer favouritism and relationship neglect were not reported by the respondents of the study. While it is possible that young millennials did not experience these types of events as especially negative or triggering, it might also be that the young millennials who participated in the study had simply not experienced or encountered these triggers, and therefore they were not highlighted by the results. Triggers such as information misuse can also be less visible to the customers, and data seepages can often stay hidden or uncovered in clusters after a long time, possibly making it a less frequently mentioned trigger.

RQ2. In what ways do young millennials respond to negative customer experiences?

The study put out interesting findings regarding young millennials' customer responses and negative engagement behaviour by examining their sharing behaviour, loyalty behaviour and passivity, that followed their negative customer experiences. Young millennials' responses and rationales behind these responses can be seen in the figure 10 below, first introduced in the results chapter.

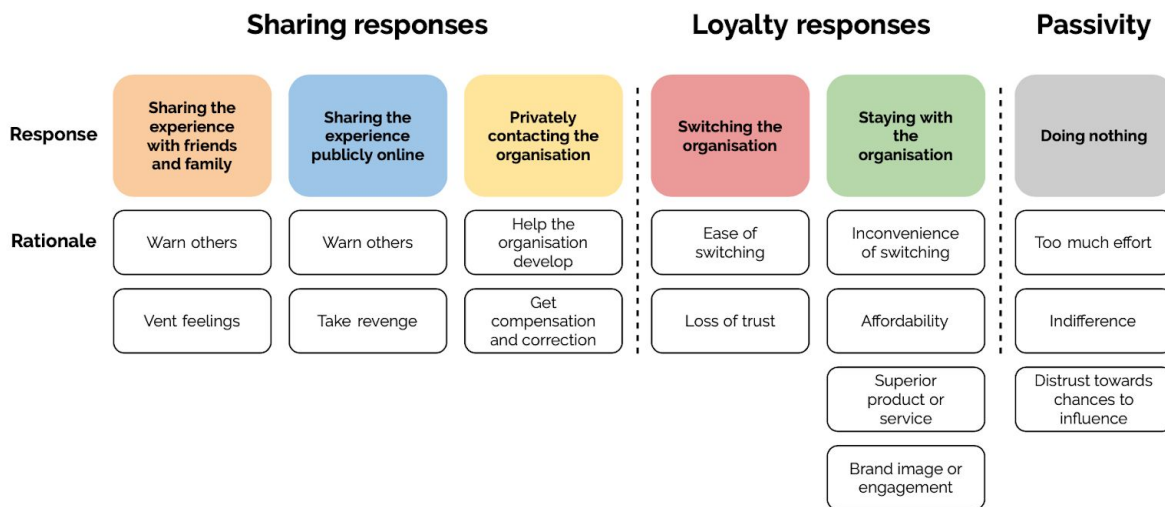


FIGURE 10 Young millennials' responses and rationales after negative customer experiences

The sharing responses reported by young millennials differed from previous research especially in terms of sharing the experience to close-ones and sharing it publicly online. The frequency of sharing the event with friends, family and acquaintances was very high, being the most reported customer response after encountering a negative experience. The literature on negative WOM and customer sharing behaviour describes that primarily regretful customers are the ones who strive to and find most satisfaction in disclosing the event to someone close to them, and are likely to engage in negative WOM in order to warn others. This study, however, implied that regardless of whether the young millennials felt angry, upset or frustrated, they were highly likely to warn and share their experiences to their close-ones. (López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.)

Others, who shared the experience with a close-one and did not report a willingness to warn others, primarily wanted to vent their feelings by sharing their anger, disappointment, disdain or other feelings. And while venting behaviour has previously been connected to angry and vengeful customers, who often seek to share their feelings in online environments with likeminded people, young millennials appeared satisfied with venting to close-ones, and even described it as a 'natural' or an 'obvious choice'. And contrary to previous understanding, sharing the experience publicly in order to vent was not a popular choice within young millennials. (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters 2007; López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014; Chih, Yuan, Liu & Fang 2019.) Instead, warning intentions were much more present in millennials, who shared their experience publicly online, and they described a need to warn wider audiences about the organisation and its practices.

Earlier literature has understood that customers are motivated to complain to either seek retaliation or repairments, but the reasoning of retaliation was not seen in young millennial customers who chose to use their voice (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2019). When young millennials used their voice and contacted the organisation privately, they were mainly driven by two factors: either helping the organisation recognize their issues, improve and develop or for getting compensation and correction to their negative experiences, so the motivation of repairments was supported, while revenge-seeking was not.

Young millennials' overall unwillingness to engage in revenge-seeking behaviour was an unexpected finding, considering how present revenge behaviour has been within the research on negative engagement. This result is especially intriguing for a research, where the respondents were specifically asked to describe their 'especially negative experiences', as previous research understands revenge-seeking behaviour to be precisely the result of extreme negative feelings towards an organisation (Bishop 2014). Furthermore, several young millennials also reported to have encountered exactly the types of triggers that have been found to evoke revengeful customer responses, such as severe core service failures and double deviations (Joireman et al. 2016; Patterson et al. 2009).

And while previous research understands revenge-seeking and punishing as a response, that can manifest either in direct communication towards a brand, or as public outbursts of anger (Bishop 2014; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2019), the few young millennials who reported to have acted on revenge, were the ones, who either shared the experience with close-ones or publicly online. While public outbursts of anger have been known to relate to vengefulness, it was especially interesting, that young millennials not only recognized the power of public WOM, but also described that they knew that they could also harm organisations by spreading negative WOM to their close-ones.

The loyalty responses of young millennials offered new understanding on customers' switching behaviour, exit and loyalty as a barrier to the former two behaviours. Young millennials who switched organisations, were mainly driven to switch on two differing, either pushing or pulling, grounds. Some reported to have switched due to pushing factors, such as disdain towards the organisation that had failed them, because they could no longer trust the organisation they used to do business with. Others described that they were driven by the ease of switching: these were usually pulling factors regarding other good, available or affordable options to substitute for the company they had previously dealt with

- also previously recognized as expeditors of customer exit. Pulling and pushing have been known factors behind customer switching intentions, but their impact on young millennials' responses after negative customer experiences is an intriguing finding. (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall 2006.)

Less young millennials stayed with the organisation after a negative experience, and their reasonings behind staying were more shattered. The inconvenience of switching drove especially long-term clients of health organisations and banking services to stay with their current providers. This finding resembles the literature on the negative barriers of switching behaviour and how difficulty with e.g. transferring information and customer lock-in hinders switching behaviour by making it utterly inconvenient. (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall 2006; Frow et al. 2011.)

Loyalty, which scholars have previously offered as a key variable, hindering customers' willingness to switch companies, seemed to play some kind of role in young millennial customers' decisions to stay, but surprisingly differently compared to earlier understanding of loyalty. The young millennials who stayed, were primarily bound to organisations through either their superior products, services or convenient location and did not thus want to change providers. The surveyed young millennials' loyalty seemed to mainly derive from tangible core products and services, and feelings of more comprehensive brand loyalty were rarely described. (Hirschman 1970; Hollebeek 2011; Leckie, Nyadzayo & Johnson 2016; Dwivedi 2015.)

This finding could be generation-specific, and partially explained by how affordability and price have been previously connected to the loyalty and switching behaviour of especially young adults, as they are more likely to have limited economic resources impacting their choices, compared to the previous generations. Research has shown that young adults are agile actors in the market due to this characteristic, as they can act against loyalty in the favor of affordability. (Shukla 2009.) The results of this study indicate that affordability could also have the converse potential to act against customers' willingness to switch companies, and young millennials might stay with a provider they have bad experiences with due to their affordable products or services. This finding broadens the previous understanding of young adults' loyalty and engagement behaviour being affected by the probability of their sparse resources (Shukla 2009).

Although brand loyalty was a rare reasoning for young millennials to stay with a brand, some respondents did feel like the incident did not represent the brand

in question at all. These young millennials had a pre-formed positive image or were already engaged in such a way, that the negative experience did not affect their loyalty behaviour, or sometimes even the image of the brand, supporting the earlier knowledge on brand loyalty and its notion of loyalty as a positive barrier to exit and negative engagement. (Vázquez-Carrasco & Foxall 2006.) Unexpectedly, young millennial customers' loyalty intentions seemed to be also impacted by what they had heard about the brand, even while having encountered personal issues with the brand, further proving the influencing power of word of mouth. (Curina, Francioni, Cioppi & Savelli 2019; Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi 2016.)

Interestingly, **passivity** was perceived in varying ways. It was very rare for young millennials to choose complete passivity, and often customer who reported to have 'done nothing', did share the experience with close-ones. Passivity was mainly reported as an option within young millennials who experienced feelings of unwillingness to see effort, indifference or distrust towards their chances to influence the organisation. The millennials who completely ceased from responding, were mainly not convinced that doing something about the negative experience would be worth the effort or could make a change in the organisations' processes. Within young millennials' passivity responses, indifference was the factor that was most in line with earlier understanding on customer passivity. The young millennials who reported feelings of indifference towards the negative experience also indicated weak signs of negative engagement and very little interest in engaging in negative customer behaviour. (Naumann et al. 2017; Lievonen et al. 2018.)

6.2 Managerial contributions

To understand engagement and engaged customers, organisations need to understand negatively engaged customers, and the drivers and triggers of negative engagement that their processes might entail. This study supports especially the previous suggestions on the critical nature of double deviations, and acknowledges the substantial harm they can cause to customers, and thus organisations. Organisations letting customers down not once, but twice, by failing the recovery after an initial error, is still seen as a clear indicator of negative engagement behaviour and negative customer responses. (Joireman et al. 2016.) Based on this understanding, managers should plan their processes carefully and keep track of their customers, so that issues in organisations' production or service chains are recognized quickly and handled effectively, so

that the likelihood of customers encountering a double deviation becomes less likely.

The findings also highlight the crucial role of customer service. The initial dissatisfaction customers have after receiving a broken product or a non-operative service could be diluted and handled with effective customer service processes. Organisations should increasingly pay attention to ensuring functioning, available and effective customer service, meaning that for the customers, the customer service experience should appear as smooth, polite and professional. This, in organisational contexts, often means that customer service has to have sufficient resources and training to meet the expectations of the customers and prevent the critical double deviations.

Organisations knowing their customers is also key in preventing negatively engaged behaviour. Organisations have to have the means and mediums, through which they can attain information on their customers and locate and tend to customers with negative experiences and attitudes quickly, and prevent the formation of angry, and revenge seeking customer behaviour. This study supported the previous understanding of upset customers being more likely to engage in negative word of mouth, and by tending to them and channeling their frustration effectively, organisations have the potential of reducing negative word of mouth relating to their brand. (Chih et al. 2019; López-López, Ruiz-de-Maya & Warlop 2014.)

This is especially crucial with passive customers, who are untrusting of their chances to influence or are unwilling to see the effort of voicing out their issues. To encourage these customers to also speak up, companies need to offer more direct and easily available feedback channels, be reactive in these channels and actually change practices according to customers' needs, to build trust and gain valuable information for development. Good compensation policies are also evidently needed for successful organisational recovery and preventing double deviations. Well-handled compensations could act as counterforce to the initial triggers experienced by customers and prevent negative experiences from cumulating into negatively valenced word of mouth, reputational threats and loss of customers.

While the study identified the importance of effortless and satisfactory customer processes and communication, sometimes the key factors in young millennials' decisions ended up being related to the core characteristics of organisations, such as the affordability and quality of products and services. The importance of brand fundamentals in building customer loyalty is

highlighted, as if the company fails to offer customers unique value, price or quality-wise, they are more likely to be substituted with other available options, especially after organisational failures. The communication on the fundamentals has to be credible, legitimate and involve only promises that can be fulfilled. Furthermore, how customers are affected by the processes, interactions and core services and products also supports the perception of brand loyalty and negative engagement as the comprehensive, multi-faceted processes they are. In order to keep customers content, organisations' strategies has to be all-encompassing, so that the functions support and complement each other. In this way, when an initial process fails a customer, another, like customer service or communication, makes amends and takes on.

The key issue around maintaining relationships with customers is inherently connected to how organisations understand their customers' issues and respond to the inevitable failures that trigger customers. Successful recovery and effective communication after an initial, ideally first failure has the potential to prevent customers from engaging in negative engagement behaviour – according to this study, the most critical behaviour often manifests after the organisation has already been given several opportunities to correct their actions. (Patterson et al. 2009; Joireman et al. 2016.)

6.3 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

The trustworthiness of a research is a crucial concept, when evaluating the worth of a qualitative research. (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Trustworthiness involves establishing the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of a research.

To ensure credibility, direct quotations from survey young millennials' responses were presented in the text. Coding process was also recorded and displayed in text step by step. Thus, the reader is able to observe how coding was conducted and themes were created. As this study was conducted by two researchers, the codes were created by constant discussion and cooperation. All the codes and themes were discussed until agreement was reached. Confirmability has been affirmed by reflecting the findings in the light of previous research. The objective was that the analysis would not be just presenting citations. Also appropriate scientific practice was used in the

research to enforce dependability. Used literature mostly consisted of peer reviewed articles.

The results of this research can be reflected on previous research, but it cannot be alleged that the findings of this study would be the sole triggers of negative engagement or that young millennials everywhere would respond to negative experiences similarly. It has to be noted that replication is typically not a goal in qualitative research as many of the studies are meant to be descriptive and not replicated (Guest et al. 2012).

The validity of the concepts used while coding the data could also be critically discussed. The terms used e.g. for different loyalty response reasonings, such as *affordability* and *superiority of the products and services*, were partially overlapping, and could have affected the results of the study. The responses of young millennials also often included several triggers, actions and reasonings, which meant that actions and reasonings could not always be connected directly.

The secondary data used in the research was deemed relevant and sufficient, but being collected before the beginning of this research, the research could not affect the scope or the wording of the questionnaire. The data collection phase was not originally conducted while keeping the research purposes of this study in mind, so the data was also limited afterwards to fit the focus of the research.

The studied respondents of this research were higher education students, participating in a basic course in corporate communication: the survey was conducted as a part of the course. It is possible that the themes of the course might have directed the students' responses to certain directions and given them some pre-existing insight on the subject. It could thus be assumed that compared to average consumers, the respondents were more aware of the concept of negative customer experiences and their relation to brand images and engagement. Therefore the data did not fully represent a random sampling of young millennials.

The majority of the surveyed students, over two thirds (69%), were Finnish nationals, so the data also does not represent a fully international sampling of young millennials. It is worth noting that all of the students were studying in a higher-educational institution, making the results applicable only to millennials within higher education.

The scope of this research focused on customer-corporation relationships and left out the negatively engaged millennials, who were boycotting or had moral conflicts with the values of organisations. The data of the research can thus only account for customers that have had neutral or positive premises of an organisation before a personal negative experience, which they described in their responses.

The open-ended questions of the survey left some room for interpretation, and the reasoning millennials gave for their actions after a negative experience were varying. Some responses elaborated widely on the aspects of their personal motivation, while others just reiterated the trigger they had already mentioned while answering the earlier questions of the questionnaire. Also, a large amount of responses had contradictions. Some had left certain fields empty and did not, for example, report whether they continued to use the services of the organisation or switched organisations. Some had also responded to have done nothing, but simultaneously reported that they e.g. shared the experience privately or switched organisations.

As the core of this research consists of customers that were let down by organisations in the form of communication, product or service failures, and shed much needed light on the nature and triggers of negative engagement. But still, a lot remains unexplored when it comes to the negatively valenced behaviour of millennials. This study focused on consumerist relationships, but the rationale behind the behaviour of millennial customers who are negatively engaged due to value-driven moral conflicts could be further explored. What aspects of negative engagement are entangled in activism, for example?

Regarding the negative engagement of customers, the long-term effects of it could prove an interesting follow-up for the results of this study. After months or even years have gone by, do negatively engaged millennials still avoid the organisations they were mistreated by?

This study focused primarily on identifying the triggers of negative engagement and the behaviour they sparked in young millennials. The results only scratched the surface of the emotions behind negative engagement, identifying feelings of anger and hurt. More research is needed for gaining a deeper understanding of the emotional spectrum of negative engagement – both the customers' initial feelings during a triggering event and the emotional outcomes could be further explored. The timespan of the emotions could be inspected through a research including a follow-up: How long does the disdain of customers last, and which organisational triggers create long-lasting feelings

of anger? The other intriguing aspect of long-lasting disdain could be studied from an organisational point of view. What kind of actions do customers expect from organisations to be able to forgive and forget?

As the targeted group of this study were millennials, there are a number of questions remaining – what about previous generations? What are the triggers of negative customer engagement for e.g. baby boomers or generation X? Are they alike millennials in this respect, or does the generational experience make a difference in the ways of negative engagement?

This study analysed negatively engaged behaviour from a qualitative point of view, discussing the themes and triggers identified to relate to negative engagement. Due to its qualitative nature, this study cannot indicate direct causal connections between organisational triggers and customer behaviour, and thus a quantitative research on the topic could show us which triggers of negative engagement lead to which customer behaviour outcomes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - The survey

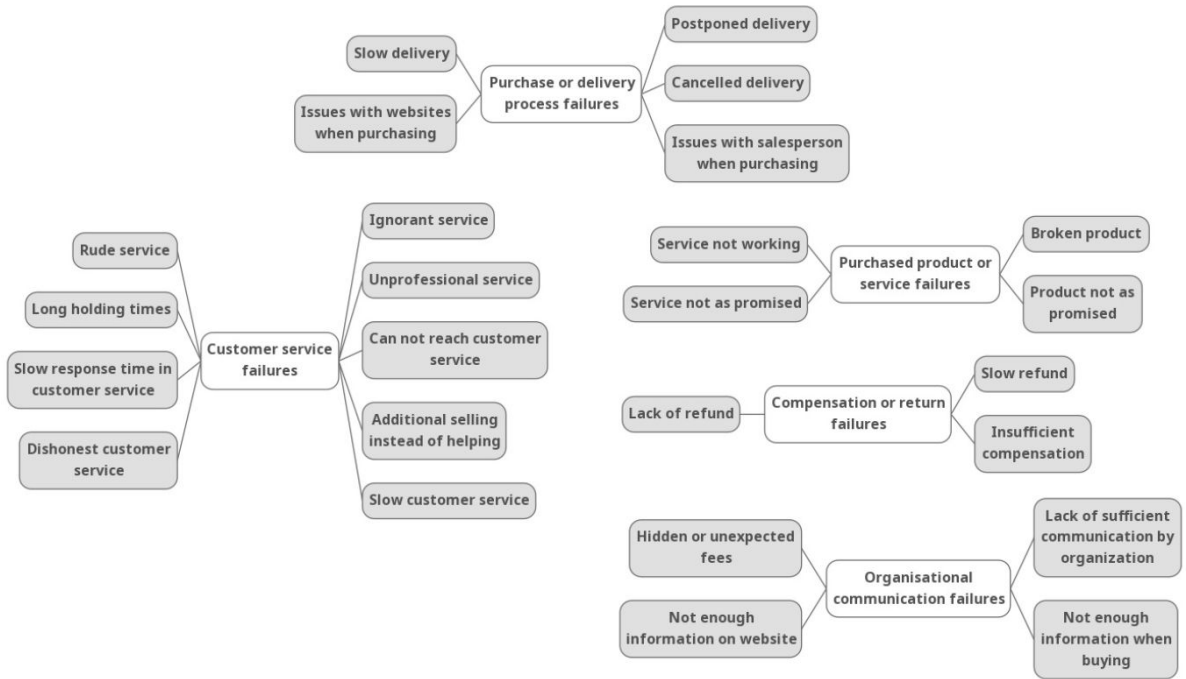
Age:

Gender:

1. Think about especially NEGATIVE experience you have had with some organization either online or offline. Describe shortly where were you and what happened.
2. How did you act after this negative experience? Choose either one or more options.
 - a. I continued to use the services of the organization
 - b. I changed the organization
 - c. I told about experience publicly online (by giving negative feedback/ writing a review)
 - d. I told about the experience privately to friends or relatives
 - e. I gave feedback to organization privately (e.g. by sending an e-mail)
 - f. I did nothing
 - g. Other behavior. What did you do?
3. What motivated you to act in that way after the negative experience?
4. Imagine that you are a communication consultant. How would you instruct an organization to respond to its stakeholders when stakeholders give negative feedback?

Appendix 2 - The thematic maps:

Map 1 Triggers of negative customer engagement behaviour



Map 2 Negative customer responses

