

The Mediating Role of Psychological Distancing and Complaining Behaviour on the Effect of Negative Emotions on Repurchase Intention

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Abstract—This study examines whether psychological distancing and complaining behaviour has a mediating role on the effect of negative consumer emotions on repurchase intention in online purchasing. In the study, regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses of the model (Mediator Effect Analysis). This study conducted on the consumers who purchase online in Muş shows that negative emotions experienced after online purchasing have a direct, negative and significant effect on repurchase intention. Besides, the study reveals that this effect is partially mediated by complaining behaviour and psychological distancing strategies.

Index Terms—Negative emotion, complaining behaviour, psychological distancing, repurchase intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

Negative emotions are those emotions that are experienced by every person to varying degrees and affect attitudes and behaviours [1]. Such emotions arise out of nervousness felt after online purchasing or dissatisfaction and anger experienced due to a failure in service delivery. Consumers usually do not pay attention to the consequences of online purchasing. However, they feel irritated with their purchases after a while and try to psychologically distance themselves from purchasing behaviour or exhibit a complaining behaviour due to the problems in a service delivery. They avoid making online purchases in order not to experience negative emotions again. Therefore, such emotions can affect repurchase behaviour adversely. Customers experiencing negative emotions also try to cope up with the negative impacts of these behaviours, in addition to directly avoiding making further purchases. In doing so, they employ various coping strategies. They use problem-based and emotion-based strategies in coping up with negative emotions. When it comes to online purchasing, the strategies they employ include complaining which is one of the problem-based strategies, and psychological distancing which is one of the emotion-based strategies [2]. These strategies

mediate the negative effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention. This study aims to define the mediator effect of complaining behaviour and psychological distancing on online purchasing since they have an important effect on the customer purchase decision. Based on the findings obtained, some comments and suggestions are provided.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

A. Negative Emotions

Negative emotions are negative feelings usually arising out of an unexpected service experience [3], [4]. Various classifications of negative emotions have been used by different authors in the literature. According to [5], negative emotions include unhappiness, worry, regret, anger, disgust, fear and nervousness, while [6] indicates that they include anger, disappointment, worry and regret. [7] identifies 3 sets of emotions. They consist of positive emotions such as joy and interest; negative emotions such as anger, disgust, contempt, shame, guilt, sorrow, distress and fear, and neutral emotions such as surprise [2]. Among these emotions, anger is one of the most powerful emotions experienced by the customers when their expectations are not met, and it includes being upset, angry, and irritated [8], [9].

B. Online Purchases

Negative emotions arise from the appraisal of an event that is relevant and important to the individuals [2] and [9]. Online purchasing is one of these events. Ensuring that customers have positive emotions after each purchasing is one of the main goals of sellers [10]. Therefore, some sellers think that their customers will be satisfied with every purchase and will exhibit repurchase behaviour. However, they may experience negative emotions, which leads to reduced customer repurchase [11]. Therefore, emotions also have an impact on purchase intention and behaviour in online purchasing [12].

C. Complaining Behaviour

Complaining behaviour is one of the problem-based coping behaviours that mediate the negative impact of emotion [2]. The most commonly used complaint methods are vocal and private responses. Vocal responses include complaints to the seller, while private responses include complaints to family and friends [13].

D. Psychological Distancing

Psychological distancing is an emotion-based strategy that mediates the effect of negative emotions [14]. This coping

Manuscript received April 12, 2016; revised August 10, 2016.

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strategy involves detaching from the stressor and ensures controlling emotions and maintaining emotional stability [15]. When consumers employ psychological distancing, they remain silent and exhibit a non-complaining behaviour, and attempt to psychologically distance themselves from the stressor and take their minds off the problem [12] and [16]. This also reinforces repurchase intentions in the future [6].

Since they have an important role in making sense of our behaviours, emotions and coping strategies are important issues that need to be addressed in terms of consumer behaviours [17]. It can be seen that there has been an increase in the number of studies on coping strategies and emotions in the marketing literature recently [18]-[21].

The studies by [16], [22], [23] reveal that negative emotions affect consumer behaviours by means of complaining behaviour. The study conducted by [24] indicated that negative emotions had a positive impact on behavioural intentions of the consumers such as switching, direct complaining and negative word-of-mouth. In their study, [15] examined the direct and indirect effects of emotions such as excitement, happiness, anger and anxiety on information technology use. They reported that excitement, happiness and anxiety had a direct effect on information technology use and found that anxiety was related IT use through psychological distancing, while anger was related to IT use through seeking social support. [25] examined the relationship between coping strategies and the emotions of guilt and shame. According to the findings of their study, the consumers employed problem-based strategies in coping up with guilt, and emotion-based strategies in coping up with shame. In their study, [2] investigated the relationship between dissatisfaction, negative emotions, coping strategies and repurchase intention. They revealed that the effect of dissatisfaction on negative emotions; the effect of negative emotions on coping strategies, and the effect of psychological distancing and seeking social support (which are among the coping strategies) on repurchase intention was significant. Besides, they detected that the effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention was mediated by psychological distancing. [26] examined the mediator effect of coping strategies and rumination between customers' behavioural intentions and anger elicited in service failure. According to the findings of their study, active coping is a more effective mediator. [1] investigated the mediator effect of complaining behaviour on the role of negative emotions on repurchase intention in the context of e-commerce. The findings of the study show that complaining behaviour reduces the negative effect of negative emotion and facilitates the smooth flow of communication and customer retention intention. In their study, [27] examined the effect of complaints on repurchase intentions. They found that complaining led to increased repurchase intentions, while non-complaining did not have a positive impact on repurchase intentions. Some of the studies suggest that negative service experiences directly lead to negative emotions [3], while some others examine how coping strategies such as complaining and non-complaining can be used in coping up with negative emotions [9] and [16]. It is seen that the number of studies on the mediating role of complaining behaviour and psychological distancing on the relationship between negative emotions and behaviours after

online purchasing is limited [2]. However, post-purchase emotions of consumers not only have direct influence on repurchase intentions, but also have indirect influence through the coping strategies. In this sense, this study is believed to contribute to the literature.

E. The Mediating Role of Complaining Behaviour and Psychological Distancing on the Relationship between Negative Emotions and Repurchase Intentions

In coping up with negative emotions, consumers usually employ problem-based and emotion-based strategies [6]. Problem-based coping strategies include rational efforts. Complaining behaviour is one of the problem-based strategies used in online purchases. Some studies argue that companies pay attention to complaining behaviours in eliminating negative emotions of consumers, but it is inadequate, emphasizing that they should take into account other strategies in addition to the complaining behaviour [2] and [28]. Emotion-based strategies are among these strategies. They include an attempt of not worrying about a negative situation [2]. Especially, psychological distancing is an emotion-based avoidance behaviour that is difficult to be perceived and needs to be attached more importance [15].

H1: Negative emotions will have a positive effect on complaining behaviour.

H2: Negative emotions will have a positive effect on psychological distance.

Negative emotions, most of the time, have a direct influence on post-purchase behaviour and reduce repurchase intention [29]. Customers may decide to leave a supplier due to the effect of negative emotions [30]. In the context of service experience, negative emotional experiences have a negative effect on establishing or maintaining relationships with service providers [31].

H3: Negative emotions will have a direct negative effect on customers' repurchase intentions.

When customers experience post-purchase negative emotions, they employ diverse coping strategies to control their future purchase decisions [3] and [9]. Some customers, by the effect of negative emotions, respond to by complaining before leaving a supplier, and actually leave the supplier when their complaint is not dealt with [30] and [32]. On the other hand, some others think that complaining will not be effective while coping up with negative emotions and do not find a complaint necessary, thus remaining silent and attempting to psychologically distance themselves from the situation they are in. Therefore, complaining behaviour and psychological distancing has a mediating role on the effect of negative emotions on repurchase intentions. Consumers trying to get rid of negative emotions through complaining or psychological distancing are also likely to directly leave a supplier [2].

H4: The effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention is mediated by complaining behaviour

H5: The effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention is mediated by psychological distancing

H6: Complaining behaviour will have a direct negative effect on customers' repurchase intention.

H7: Psychological distancing will have a direct negative effect on customers' repurchase intention.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Aim of the Study

There are many factors that affect repurchase decisions of the consumers [33]. Post-purchase negative emotions constitute one of these factors. In addition to their direct effect on repurchase decisions of consumers, negative emotions can also have indirect effect through the use of coping strategies. Therefore, this study primarily aims to define the direct and indirect (through the use of complaining behaviour and

psychological distancing strategies) effects of negative emotions on repurchase intentions.

B. Research Model

The research model in Fig. 1 has been prepared based on the aim of this study, hypotheses and other studies in the literature. In the model, a, b, c, d, e indicates direct relations, while c' (mediator effect of complaining behaviour) and c'' (mediator effect of psychological distancing) indicates indirect relations.

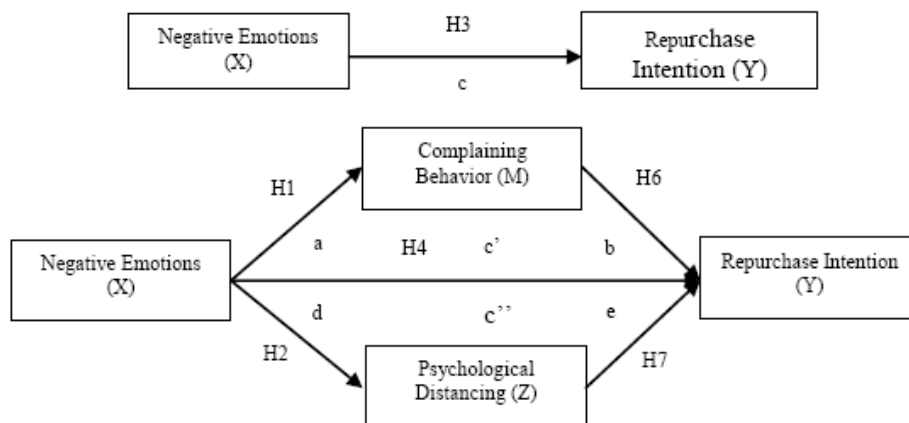


Fig. 1. Research model.

C. Universe of the Study and Sampling

The consumers who purchase online in Muş were included in the universe of the study. Face-to-face survey was conducted on consumers selected through convenience sampling. A questionnaire was administered to totally 500 consumers. As a result of screening, 464 questionnaires were evaluated. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. First section included items measuring negative emotions, complaining behaviour, psychological distancing and repurchase intention. 5-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire for the measures (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). Negative emotions were measured by the items adapted from [34] and [35], repurchase intention was measured by the items adapted from [36] and [37], psychological distancing was measured by the items adapted from [15] and complaining behaviour was measured by the items adapted from [3]. The second section included questions about the demographic features of the respondents.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

A. Demographic Features

In the sample, 72,6 % of the respondents were male and 27,4 % were female; % 50,6 % of those were married and % 49,4% were single; 89,7% of those were university graduates, 9, 1% completed their master's degree and 1,3 % completed their doctoral studies. According to the age groups, 39 % of the respondents were between 21 and 25, 20,9% were between the ages of 26 and 30, 8, 8% were between 31 and 35, 14,7% were between the ages of 36 and 40 and 16,6 % were over 40. According to the income, 59,7 % of the respondents were between 3000 and 3500 TL, 39,0 % were between the income of 3501 and 4000 TL, 4,1 % were between 4001 and 4500 TL, and 0.2 % were over 4501 TL.

B. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

We used reliability analysis to examine the scales. The results of the analysis showed that the scales had good reliability. Therefore, no variable was removed from the model. In the model, negative emotion, repurchase intention, complaining behaviour and psychological distancing variables were tested through confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation analysis was conducted to test the model and found values indicative of acceptable model fit. Chi-square/degree of freedom (χ^2/df) was found to be 3.648, AGFI (Adjusted goodness of fit index) was 0.90, GFI (goodness-of fit index) was 0.94; CFI (the comparative fit index) was 0.95 and NNFI (non-normed fit index) was 0.93. Another index, RMSEA was found to be 0.076 at the end of the analysis. A RMSEA value between 0.05 and 0.08 is indicative of good fit. In the other indexes, the values found to be between 0.80 and 0.90 are generally accepted, while those above 0.90 are indicative of good fit [38].

C. Hypothesis Testing

The method proposed by Baron and Kenny was followed in the mediating effect tests. According to their method, it should be confirmed whether three conditions (a , b , c' and d , e , c'' paths) are met. First, the independent variable must affect the mediator variable. Second, there must be a significant relation between the dependent variable and mediator variable; and third, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less in the third equation than in the second. In other words, when the independent variable is included in regression analysis together with the mediator variable, the effect of it on the dependent variable must be reduced or zero. That is, when the paths (c' and c'') are zero or reduced, the mediator effect is said to have occurred [39]. When the effect of the independent variable on the dependent

variable is less in the third equation than in the second, partial mediation is said to have occurred; when it is zero, then perfect mediation is said to have occurred [39]-[40].

Table II and Table III shows the triple regression equation used to test the statistical significance of mediator effects in

the model. The first equation estimates the effect of negative emotion on coping strategies. The second one estimates the effect of negative emotion on repurchase intention. And the third equation estimates the effect of negative emotion together with the mediator variable on repurchase intention.

TABLE I: DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

Education	N	(%)	Income	N	(%)
University	416	89.7	3000-3500	277	59.7
Master Degree	42	9.1	3501-4000	167	39.0
Phd.	6	1.3	4001-4500	19	4.1
Age	N	(%)	4501+	1	0.2
21-25	181	39	Gender		
26-30	97	20.9	Women	127	27.4
31-35	41	8.8	Men	337	72.6
36-40	68	14.7	Marital Statue	N	(%)
40+	77	16.6	Married	235	50.6
			Single	229	49.4
Total	464	100	Total	464	100

TABLE II: MEDIATOR EFFECT OF COMPLAINING BEHAVIOUR

Variables	Equation 1: MV = f (IV)	Equation 2: DV= f (IV)	Equation 3: DV= f (IV, MV)	
	(a)	(c)	(c')	(b)
X*, Z**, Y***	$\beta=0.476$ $t=11.150$ $P=0.000$ S. Error=0.043	$\beta=0.647$ $t= 13.926$ $P= 0.000$ S. Error = 0.046	$\beta=0.548$ $t=10.626$ $P=0.000$ S. Error =0.052	$\beta=0.213$ $t=4.264$ $P=0.000$ S. Error =0.050

*X= Negative Emotion, **Z= Complaining Behaviour, ***Y= Repurchase Intention MV= Mediator Variable, DV= Dependent Variable, IV= Independent Variable

According to Table II, negative emotion has significant positive effect ($\beta =.476$) on complaining behaviour, and significant and direct negative effect ($\beta =.647$) on repurchase intention. Therefore, Hypothesis H1 and Hypothesis H3 are supported. The negative direct effect of complaining behaviour on repurchase intention is significant ($\beta =.213$) and

H6 should be accepted. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (with the mediator variable complaining behaviour stepping in) is less in the second equation (direct effect of negative emotion on intention) ($c'<c$). Therefore, partial mediation is said to have occurred and Hypothesis H4 is supported.

TABLE III: MEDIATOR EFFECT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCING

Variables	Equation 1: MV = f (IV)	Equation 2: DV= f (IV)	Equation 3: DV= f (IV, MV)	
	(d)	(c)	(c')	(e)
*X, **M, ***Y	$\beta= .410$ $t=8.834$ $P=.000$ S. Error = 0.046	$\beta=0.647$ $t= 13.926$ $P= 0.000$ S. Error = 0.046	$\beta=0.512$ $t=10.658$ $P=0.000$ S. Error =0.048	$\beta= 0.332$ $t= 7.405$ $P=0.000$ S. Error =0.045

*X= Negative Emotion, **M= Psychological Distancing, ***Y= Repurchase Intention MV= Mediator Variable, DV= Dependent Variable, IV= Independent Variable

According to Table III, negative emotion has a significant positive effect on psychological distancing ($\beta =.410$), and psychological distancing has a significant and direct negative effect on repurchase intention ($\beta =.332$). Therefore, Hypothesis H2 and Hypothesis H7 are supported. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (with the mediator variable psychological distancing stepping in) is less in the second equation and Hypothesis H5 is supported.

In addition to the conditions that need to be met for a mediator effect to occur, it is necessary to define whether the direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable is significant or not. Sobel test is required to do this [41]. To define the mediator effect, a macro (PROCESS) for SPSS developed by Hayes was used. This macro does everything

that Sobel Test does for defining a mediator effect as well as generating bootstrap confidence intervals for an indirect effect [42].

Besides, Sobel test can also be calculated using raw regression coefficients for the relevant variables and the relevant standard error values. Following equation estimates the standard errors for $a*b$ and $d*e$. In the equation, S_a^2 , S_b^2 , S_d^2 , and S_e^2 represent the standard errors of a, b, d and e. The amount of mediation is equivalent to $c-c'$ and $c-c''$. Following equation is approximately subject to Z distribution [39]. If the Z-score coefficient of Sobel Test is significant and greater than 1.96, a mediator effect can be said to have occurred [43].

Mediator Effect of Complaining Behaviour:

$$S_{ab} = z\text{-score} = a*b/\sqrt{(b^2*S_a^2 + a^2*S_b^2)}$$

$$S_{ab} = z\text{-score} = 0.476*0.213/\sqrt{(0.213^2*0.043^2 + 0.476^2*0.050^2)}$$

Z score = 3.975 and p<0.000, means mediator effect is significant.

Mediator Effect of Psychological Distancing:

$$S_{de} = z\text{-score} = d*e/\sqrt{(e^2*S_d^2 + d^2*S_e^2)}$$

$$S_{de} = z\text{-score} = 0.410*0.332/\sqrt{(0.332^2*0.046^2 + 0.410^2*0.045^2)}$$

Z score = 5.324 and p<0.000, means mediator effect is significant.

After determining the mediator effects, it is necessary to define total, direct and indirect effects and to determine whether the indirect effect is significant in order to estimate to what extent the mediator variable affect the relationship. To do this, we need to examine the bootstrap confidence intervals. According to the bootstrap estimates, the lower and upper limits both must be lower and higher than zero [39].

TABLE IV: TOTAL, DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Bootstrap Confidence Interval BOLLCI BOULCI	Mediation Type
Mediator Effect of Psychological Distancing	0.647	0.512	0.135	(-0.1903)-(-0.0861)	Partial
Mediator Effect of Complaining Behaviour	0.647	0.548	0.109	(-0.1647)-(-0.0483)	Partial

Table IV shows that both of them are lower than zero. According to these findings, complaining behaviour and psychological distancing can be said to have a partial mediating effect on the relationship between negative emotions and repurchase intention.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigated the direct and indirect effect (through complaining behaviour and psychological distancing) of the negative emotions experienced by consumers after online purchasing on repurchase intention. Negative emotions have significant and positive effect on the relevant coping strategies; while these strategies together with negative emotions have significant and negative effect on repurchase intention. The most important finding of this study is that the relationship between negative emotions and repurchase intention is partially mediated by complaining behaviour and psychological distancing. Indirect effect of complaining behaviour is 10%, while that of psychological distancing is 13%. The rest is explained by other variables that were not included in the research model. In this sense, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 are all supported.

According to the findings, when consumers experience negative emotions after online purchasing, they directly avoid making online purchases in order not to experience negative emotions again. There are studies in the literature that support the direct effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention [24] and [44]. But sometimes, the consumers try to cope up with these emotions. However, their repurchase intention decreases despite the coping strategies they use. Complaining behaviour can be seen to be the most commonly employed coping strategy by consumers. Consumers resorting to complaining in coping up with negative emotions, usually express their complaints about a service to sellers in an electronic environment. Those choosing psychological distancing think that complaining will not be effective and there is nothing to do. This way of thinking prevents future

repurchases. If consumers express their dissatisfaction or negative service experiences through complaining, then service providers can realize the situation and turn the complaints into opportunities. Thus, the negative effect of complaining behaviour on repurchase intention may be reduced. In other words, if a dissatisfied customer makes a complaint and receives immediate response, the negative effect of complaints on repurchases can be reduced [15] and [45]. In short, complaining behaviour does not always turn out badly. Because complaining behaviour can have an impact on repurchase intentions depending on the effectiveness of complaint handling [46]. However, service providers cannot realize the problems when consumers resort to psychological distancing, non-complaining and remaining silent. Therefore, such strategies can make greater contribution to the direct effect on consumer behaviour and the negative effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention [2]. Besides, due to a lack of face-to-face buyer-seller relation in online shopping, consumers engaged in online purchasing do not know how and to whom they express their complaints, thus trying to psychologically distance themselves from the problem [27]. This causes greater direct and indirect decrease in repurchase intention. Because psychological distancing does not eliminate the negative effect of negative emotions on repurchase intention, but on the contrary, may stabilize negative emotions and maintain their negative effect on repurchase intention. There are studies in the literature that support the direct and indirect effect of psychological distancing and complaining behaviour on repurchase intention [1]-[3], [14], [15] and [47].

This study revealed the direct and indirect effect of negative emotions and coping strategies on repurchase intention. Within the scope of the study, negative emotions have been classified in the context of online purchasing and the place of negative emotions and coping strategies in different consumer behaviours was explained. Thus, it was revealed that emotions experienced in different consumer behaviours and the strategies employed to cope up with them would have different mediator effects. In addition to making

contribution to the literature, this study also gives some suggestions to the online service providers: Service providers must deal with customer complaints quickly and effectively in order to help them get rid of negative emotions they experienced after a purchase. If they provide immediate response to the customer complaints, consumers will be satisfied at the end. If they modestly accept complaint and improve their products and service quality, then the negative effect of complaining on repurchase intention can be reduced [2]. Besides, they should prevent consumers from psychologically distancing themselves, and should warn them to review their purchases and express their complaints. Because, consumers that do not express their complaints can influence other potential buyers through their negative service experience. In other words, sellers should provide convenience for consumers so that they do not remain silent about a negative service experience and feel free to express their complaints. Service providers can establish social networking sites for consumers so that they can closely follow their complaints. They can also use negative emotions as a tool for market segmentation and identify different market segments based on negative emotions.

This study is expected to guide future studies. Different consumer characteristics can result in different mediator effects of emotions and coping strategies. Therefore, the study can be conducted in the future on consumers with different demographic and personal features. Mediator effects of negative emotions experienced due to purchase behaviours such as variety-seeking behaviour, hedonic purchase behaviour or compulsive buying can be examined. Coping strategies and emotions can also have an effect on other post-purchase behaviours such as word-to-mouth communication and switching. The mediator effect of coping strategies on such factors may be examined. Various classifications of negative emotions have been used by different authors in the literature. Apart from the general assessment of mediator effect, assessment in terms of certain emotion classifications may be recommended for the future studies. Besides, mediator effect of different coping strategies may also be investigated.

This study has two basic limitations. First, the study is limited to the province of Muş. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized across Turkey. Second, all the emotions have been combined under a single group, i.e. negative emotions.

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