

Beyond case studies: a media review methodology

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is an attempt to apply media review methodology method to consumer behavior problematic situations using examples from the comedy movie "Heartbreakers". The short plot, two marketing cases, and their analysis with lessons are presented. Results suggest that service recovery strategies developed by marketers are not enough to deal with problematic customers.

Keywords: media review method, recovery strategies, qualitative methodology

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1. Introduction

The literature review shows that in the marketing research field emerged new innovative qualitative research methods helping practice marketing. For example, among them: “investigative research” (Douglas, 1976), “negative case analysis” (Kidder, 1981), ‘theoretical triangulation.’ (Hoque et al. 2013; Patton, 1990), etc. Perhaps, “oldest” among them is the “product placement” (Gupta and Lord, 1998). This method “product placement” is remarkable since it is connected with movies. Movies’ heroes smoke cigars, drink drinks, wear a watch, drive cars, speak by cell phones but only of certain brands chosen by a director of the movie in agreement with some advertisement agency.

Quite recently marketing specialists began to practice the new method which has been also connected with movies. Method received the title “movie review” or “media review”. As well as in case studies, a “movie review” analyses a certain marketing problem, and marketing specialists take out from this lesson.

Nikhilesh Dholakia, Editor of *Markets, Globalization & Development Review* (MGDR) notes:

Issues of markets, globalization and development are raised not just in articles (in MGDR and other places) and books but also in other media: movies, video series, plays, multimedia and transmedia platforms, and more. MGDR is, therefore, attempting to include "media reviews" with a fair amount of regularity in its (electronic and, when printed, physical) pages¹.

In Vol. 2 No. 4 MGDR published two interesting and useful movie reviews. Besides the review of the movie "The Founder" that recounts the story of the founding of the McDonald's Corporation, there is also a review of the Oscar-winning but controversial "Lost in Translation" (Hazera, 2017, Takemura, 2017).

To continue this interesting path this article is an attempt to apply this method to consumer behavior problematic situations using examples from the comedy movie "Heartbreakers" created in 2001 by the American director David Merkin². The short plot, two marketing cases, and their analysis with lessons are presented.

2. Brief story with a plot

Mother Max and her daughter Page Conners (Sigourney Weaver and Jennifer Love Hewitt) are a mother-daughter con artist team. Their victims are wealthy men. The scheme of fraud is

¹ <https://www.researchgate.net/project/Markets-Globalization-Development-Review-MGDR/update/5a45b6da4cde266d587e783f> (last access 10 March 2018)

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ja2Q5gH_Mac&list=PLpHCXz-M3H6HmqiA7GmZtEZds12hJxGrM (last access 10 March 2018)

that Max marries a wealthy man. The very next day, her daughter Page tries to put herself and the newly-made husband in very compromising circumstances. Max "accidentally" sees the whole scene. She was "cheated on" and demands an immediate divorce, which she receives with a very substantial material compensation.

Everything suited Max but was not quite right for her already grown-up daughter. Page begins to believe that she can already play a star part in the next show. To which Max notices to her that Page is not ready yet to deceive the man who she is marrying without self-reproach. Referring to her own experience, she explains what it can lead to: falling in love, becoming pregnant and left alone without means. That was exactly how Page, Max's partner, was born.

Max deceitfully convinces Page that they have spent all their money and that they urgently need to shake some money out of some well-to-do man in the shortest possible time. Miami is selected the city of the possible venture, where many millionaires live.

3. Case1. "Free dinner at expensive restaurant"

Dining a dinner in an expensive restaurant with a good reputation, Max decides to teach her inexperienced daughter Page how not to pay for lunch. At the end of the dinner, she drops an ashtray from the table and crushes it with her heel. Collecting pieces, she tosses them into her dish on the table. Then she calls a manager creating an artificial scandal. As a result, they do not pay for the dinner and in addition receive a free bottle of expensive wine as compensation for the cook's mistake, who will later be fired. As a result, the restaurant suffered losses, attracted the unnecessary attention of other respectable visitors and lost a professional chef, which incidentally is one of the key success factors of any restaurant.

4. Case 2. "Free room at expensive hotel"

Arriving in Miami and unable to afford an expensive hotel where millionaires stay, Max decides to teach her daughter Page how to get a hotel room free of charge. Approaching the reception, Max, out of her daughter's sight, produces a bottle of water and spills some on the floor. Then she trips Page up for her to lose balance. Page falls down and a scandal is imitated with a bruised foot and a concussion. The manager immediately intervenes to help. The help is expressed in a free penthouse, free doctor, and a chic dinner with champagne. As a result, the hotel suffered losses.

5. Lessons

Zemke and Anderson (1990) designate consumers like Max and Page as "the customers from hell" (see Appendix 1). Bateson and Hoffman (1999) simply title them "consumers-terrorists." The most prominent "consumer terrorist" and antiglobalist is Jose Bove, a member of Euro parliament, who dismantled a McDonald's under construction just outside the city of Millau near

Larzac, France³. During an interview by Lynn Jeffress for "Z" magazine in June 2001, Bove explained why he destroyed the McDonald's, saying: "This is a fight against free trade global capitalism. It's about the logic of a certain economic system, not an American system. It can be a struggle against any country, this one or that one."⁴

Hunt (1991) defines this type of consumer behavior as "retaliation." Retaliation refers to the situation in which the consumer takes action deliberately designed to damage the store or hurt future business. Retaliation involves physically damaging the store or restaurant and going out of the consumer's way to communicate to others potential consumers negative aspects concerning the business.

6. The problem of customer complaints

The problem of customer complaints appears in markets with fierce competition, which means that consumers of services have a choice and companies need to implement a set of marketing actions to attract and retain them. On the one hand, working with negative reviews is emotionally unpleasant and sometimes even legally dangerous. From a strategic point of view, complaining clients reduce the marketing effectiveness of the firm by launching the "bad word of mouth": they talk about their negative experience to numerous consumers in personal communication and with the help of mass media, including the Internet (Sharma, et al. 2010).

Working with customer complaints requires substantial material and time effort: the service has actually to be re-sold. In addition, complaints can demoralize contact personnel who are not prepared to interact with dissatisfied customers (Ramsey, 2010).

On the other hand, experienced marketers argue that a customer's complaint is a gift to the company. Studies show that of 20 dissatisfied clients only one complains in the service sector. The rest do not want to waste time or emotion in the unpleasant process of expressing a complaint, they rather blame themselves for the wrong choice of service provider or have no information allowing to state unequivocally that the service provided to them was of inadequate quality (Ro, 2012).

In these cases, "switching" behavior is observed: customers silently go to competitors. Analysis of complaints of customers who did not want to keep silence, allows the firm to understand what is wrong with the servicing process, giving it the opportunity to save on external consultants.

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IdtZoATJdc

⁴ http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Reforming_System/World_Struggle_Underway.html (Last access March 10, 2017)

7. Strategies to deal with customer complaints

In the literature on consumer psychology, it is common to categorize complaints as instrumental and non-instrumental. Instrumental complaints are expressed in order to correct the abnormal state of affairs. In these cases, customers want action to remedy the situation. However, more frequently presented are non-instrumental complaints - comments expressed without hope of improving the situation. Instrumental and non-instrumental complaints are the result of service failures, i.e., inconsistencies in the quality of servicing with client's expectations, formed by the provider's promises (Hunt, 1991; Bateson and Hoffman, 2010; Tronvoll, 2011).

These authors suggest that every customer-oriented service organization should have:

1. *An organized system for encouraging complaints.* Since, as mentioned above, customers often remain silent or complain to third parties, it is necessary to create an organized system for collecting complaints;
2. *Complaint analysis system.* The complaint analysis system allows finding vulnerabilities in the service process and causes of customer dissatisfaction. On the basis of such analysis, market experts recommend to draw up flowcharts, a kind of service provision drawing, indicating who does what in the process of customer service;
3. *Cost analysis.* It is quite useful to compare the costs of attracting new customers and retaining the existing ones. In the marketing literature this concept is referred to as relationship marketing;
4. *The speed of resolving customer complaints.* Researchers of the behavioral psychology of complaining consumers found out that clients, whose problems were quickly resolved, remain more loyal than clients, who did not have complaints in the process of service. Thus, the speed of responding to customer complaints is a marketing tool;
5. *Training of contact personnel.* Contact personnel will not be able to react quickly to customer complaints if they do not know how to behave in the event of a service failure. Therefore, it is necessary to teach employees the principles of behavior in such situations and strategies to restore the quality of service adopted by the company;
6. *A delegation of powers to contact personnel.* The simplest type of staff behavior in a problem situation is a redirection of the problem to a manager. However, one person cannot cope with all complaints coming from clients. Therefore, experts recommend that in dealing with complaints, the contact personnel should be given a freedom to act, that is, certain powers should be delegated to employees.

There are three levels of freedom of decision-making by the employee. Routine freedom presupposes the existence of a list of actions from which one can choose independently. With

creative freedom, the staff creates a list of possible actions to resolve the problem. Finally, deviant freedom envisages the performance of extraordinary actions, not included in the routine or creative lists and not prescribed by the manager. The employee can, for example, take a customer from the hotel to the airport on his car if the latter is late, or serve the client in the bank after the official hours. Opponents of a delegation of powers in a service organization point to its shortcomings, such as increased costs and deviations from standard service processes. Supporters point out the growth of consumer satisfaction, emergence of positive feedback and discovery of additional reserves for quality customer service;

7. *The modern concept of empowerment (enfranchisement)*. This concept involves a system of material incentives for extraordinary actions to resolve customer problems. However, the growth of the effectiveness of such a system is hampered by the category of consumers called "terrorist clients", as described above. These are people who go beyond the scope of civilized behavior during consumption of services. They deliberately create problematic situations in the service process in order to benefit from a delegation of powers and service recovery strategies.

For example, for a restaurant setting Hoffman and Bateson (1997, p. 345) investigated and suggested several strategies how to deal with customer's complaints (Table 1).

Table 1. Recovery strategies: perceived effectiveness and retention rates

Recovery Strategy	Effectiveness	Retention Rate (%)
1. Free food	8.05	89.0
2. Discount	7.75	87.5
3. Coupon	7.00	80.0
4. Managerial intervention	7.00	88.8
5. Replacement	6.35	80.2
6. Correction	5.14	80.0
7. Apology	3.72	71.4
8. Doing Nothing	1.71	51.3

SOURCE: K. Douglas Hoffman and John E. G. Bateson, *Essentials of services marketing* (Fort Worth, TX: Dryden, 1997), 345.

In cases #1 "Free dinner at expensive restaurant" and #2 "Free room at expensive hotel", discussed above, analyzing the movie we can visually observe some of these strategies correctly

taken in action by customer-oriented service organizations: #4 “Managerial intervention”; #7 “Apology”; and #1 “Free food” (with free bed and doctor). Perhaps for “customers from hell” strategies #4 “Managerial intervention” and #8 “Doing nothing” would be more appropriate.

7. Conclusion

It appears that service recovery strategies suggested by Hoffman and Bateson (1997) are not enough to deal with “customers from hell.” Neutralization of "terrorist clients" might be facilitated by additional strategies: face-control, hidden surveillance, the presence of a security guard in the hall, police, or a sign "As a private enterprise, we are entitled to deny service to some customers."

8. Literature

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Appendix 1. The Customers From Hell

The Crown of Creation

Call him *Egocentric Edgar*. This is the guy Carly Simon had in mind when she sang, "You're so vain, you probably think this song is about you." Stand in line? Him? My dear, his time is much too valuable. "Excuse me, I'm in a hurry here! Coming through!"

It turns out, of course, that Edgar's big emergency involves buying a plane ticket—for a flight next month. Or a sudden need to cash 97 savings bonds—except he doesn't have them signed and his checking account is in another bank and there is only one teller on duty. "You *do* advertise that you believe in service to the customer, *n'est-ce pas?*" Then again, he may simply be in urgent need of directions to the nearest hot comb.

Edgar *will* speak to the owner, the president, the chairman, "the man in charge," as he will never fail to put it. Actually, he doesn't care if the individual in charge is male, female, or a Swiss mountain goat as long as there is a chance it's someone he can intimidate through some judicious name-dropping. And he'll delight in walking over a front line person to get there.

Edgar is the one who loudly demands that your organization stop the hurricane, quell the civil insurrection, or create the replacement part out of thin air so his flight can leave on time. "Don't tell me this airplane can't be moved! I want it moved!" Me first, me last, me only—that's his creed. You? You're just a bit player, an extra, an extraneous piece of scenery in his grandest of all productions. "Edgar: The Greatest Story Ever Told."

The Breath of Spring

Bad-Mouth Betty: Her mother would be proud. Such an extensive vocabulary! It takes timing, talent, and a total lack of shame to walk into a department store or a bank lobby and cuss like a drunken stevedore, but Betty makes it look easy.

You: "Good morning, Ms. Coupon Clipper."

Betty: "Don't good morning me, you -----! I know what you are doing. You're holding on to my-----ing money so you can get rich on -----the ----- ing float!"

You: "But Ms. Clipper, the payment isn't due until the first of the month and this is only the 25 th."

Betty: "----- you, you little -----! I know your game, you-----ing lousy, two-bit ----- . You were two days late last-----ing month. Let it

happen again and I'll have your----- s in court,you
----- ing----- -—s!"

If she can't be right, she'll be caustic, crude, cruel, and as foul as a pigpen in July.

The Air Raid Siren

Hysterical Harold is a screamer. The Harolds of the world blow their corks higher and faster than an agitated bottle of cheap champagne—and come down a lot slower. The second Harold senses a possible deviation from the plan—his plan—he goes off at 10,000 decibels.

Allen Funt would love this guy: he's so animated and photogenic. Harold is likely to turn vein-popping purple and jump up and down on the hood of his own car when the service manager tells him a part is out of stock and has to be emergency ordered—for the next day. Naturally, Harold expects the dents he inflicted to be fixed at the dealership's expense, during the same visit.

And wouldn't you know it, Harold is *always* the guy who gets the banana split without any banana in it. All of his friends think this is hilarious. Harold does his rabid-dog impersonation while everyone else is doubled over laughing.

If it's true that there is a child in all of us yearning to break free, Harold demonstrates the dark side of that happy thought. He is the classic tantrum-thrower, the adult embodiment of the terrible twos. Only louder. Much louder.

The Pride of the Reich

"Und you *will* follow orders, und you *will* do it my vay! *Macht schnell!*" That's *Dictatorial Dick*. Any wonder that this guy gets dose after dose of malicious obedience? People follow his mandates to the letter, even those that make no sense.

Suspected of being Edgar's even-evilier twin, Dick often shows up with written marching orders: a copy for the service person, a copy for the service person's manager, a copy for himself. The original will have been dated, time-stamped, and sent to his lawyer by registered letter.

By a happy coincidence, Dick "used to be in this business" and knows all the little tricks of the trade that you, you sneaky peon, were planning to pull on him. As soon as you hear his plan for how the impending transaction is going to work, you realize why he isn't in the business any more.

Dick issues uldmatums, sets arbitrary deadlines, and tells everyone exactly how to do their jobs. And when his plan doesn't work? It's your company's fault, of course. Better still, it's *your* fault. Obviously, you were incompetent. Either that or you were trying to sabotage his brilliant plan.

SOURCE: Zemke, R and Anderson, K. (1990) "Customers from hell," *Training* 26 (February), pp. 25-31.