

## **The Impact of Negative Customer-Brand Relationships in Tourism and Hospitality: Key Insights from Existing Research**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the negative dimensions of consumer-brand relationships within tourism and hospitality literature. By focusing on various constructs tied to unfavorable consumer interactions with tourism brands, the study aims to provide a comprehensive overview and highlight key issues. The review identified four thematic clusters encapsulating these negative dimensions and their implications, which could significantly influence and guide future research in this area, potentially leading to significant advancements in the field and inspiring new avenues of exploration.

**Keywords:** Customer-Brand relationship, Service failure, tourism and hospitality, Negative experience

### **1. Introduction**

Competition among tourist operators has significantly strengthened the connections between brands and their customers, leading to shared value creation, encompassing substantial profits, positive experiences, and emotions. Emotions are fundamentally a mental state that prepares individuals for specific actions and motivates them to take action, thereby influencing human behavior (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Until recently, negative and positive emotions were viewed as bipolar. This perspective suggests that negative emotional responses from customers lead to negative behavior, such as complaints about services (Schoefer & Ennew, 2005). The inherent intangibility of services (Siu et al., 2013) exacerbates the role of emotions within the tourism and hospitality industry. The focus on pleasure and hedonic perspectives in previous research, combined with the relative stability of negative emotions (Li & Chan, 2023), has led to limited research interests in negative emotions. However, negative emotions are critical components of the tourism and hospitality context and form an integral part of the tourist experience in specific contexts, particularly in danger zones, dark tourism, and specific types of travel (Quang et al., 2023).

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The complex relationships between consumers and brands in tourism provide valuable insights into the impact of negative emotions. While positive brand relationships are often celebrated for enhancing travel experiences, tourism also contains a hidden "darker side" marked by negative encounters. These include service failures, negative experiences, and the subsequent spread of negative word-of-mouth (WOM), all of which can damage a brand's reputation and decrease tourist interest. Service failure, defined as the provider's inability to meet the expected service level in interactions, is a critical factor in these negative outcomes (Harrison-Walker, 2019; Shams et al., 2020).

Empirical studies suggest that negative brand-related social self-expression can lead customers to distance themselves from a brand, often driven by embarrassment in social contexts (Sarkar et al., 2020). In the tourism sector, if tourists feel ashamed or embarrassed about their association with a particular brand, this can result in negative sentiments toward it. These unfavorable emotions may manifest in anti-brand behaviors such as boycotts and negative word-of-mouth (Md Kashedul, 2019; Sarkar et al., 2020).

This study addresses the growing call for research into tourists' negative emotions within the context of CBRs in tourism and hospitality (Ekiz et al., 2012; Herjanto et al., 2022). While significant research has explored CBRs in this field, there is a clear need for more studies examining these relationships' adverse and hidden dimensions. Through a systematic review, we comprehensively identify, evaluate, and analyze the existing literature in tourism and hospitality. Our review uncovers four thematic clusters highlighting these negative dimensions and their broader implications.

## **2. Method**

The negative facets of CBRs in tourism and hospitality research are analyzed through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. As emphasized by previous studies, this methodology provides a structured outline of the entire data retrieval process (Diaz et al., 2022) and has gained considerable popularity across various academic disciplines, including tourism and hospitality (e.g., Kim & So, 2022; Papavasileiou & Tzouvanas, 2021). The PRISMA framework ensures that selecting and analyzing the final sample pool of papers is transparent, offering a benchmark for others working in the same field (Booth et al., 2020).

The review was conducted using the Scopus database from 2001 until June 2024. Previous research has identified it as a suitable database for conducting systematic literature reviews (Mariani et al., 2023) and noted its extensive use in the field (Veloutsou & Liao, 2023). The keywords string was "Brand hate\*" OR "Negative experience\*" OR "Service failure\*" OR "Negative word of mouth" AND "Tourism." The initial search consisted of 221 results. After applying the inclusion criteria, in the second round, articles were screened out based on the English language, articles in type, and the "Business Management and Accounting" discipline, and 141 articles remained in the sample for the next round. After thoroughly reading the articles' titles and abstracts in the third round, 67 studies were excluded as these

did not fulfil the inclusion criteria for the last round. The final sample comprised 74 studies. Descriptive and keyword-based co-occurrence analyses were performed on the final sample using the Bibliometric R package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), VOSviewer, and Microsoft Excel.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

**Descriptive analysis:** The descriptive analysis assessed the distribution of documents over the years, revealing a notable increase in publication numbers from 2012 onwards, with each year having a minimum of 4 articles. The journal that published the most documents is "Tourism Management," prominently leading with 12 publications on various negative aspects of Customer-Brand relationships. Moreover, we observed that most of the articles were authored by researchers from the United States of America, totaling 26 publications, with China and the United Kingdom, respectively. The keyword-based co-occurrence analysis allowed us to identify the main concepts in the analyzed field and their interconnections. The review identified four thematic clusters encapsulating the negative dimensions and their implications.

**Thematic analysis:** Results of keyword-based co-occurrence revealed that several keyword pairs have solid and prominent connections in the network, such as service failure and service recovery, tourist destination and tourist behavior, tourism management and service quality, tourist market and negative emotions, service recovery, and WOM. The four thematic clusters of co-occurring keywords showed the main adverse aspects and hidden dimensions of CBRs

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**Table 1:** Thematic clusters of adverse aspects and hidden dimensions of CBRs

Cluster	Cluster's theme	Main keywords	Occurrence
<b>Cluster 1</b>	Service Failure	Service failure (anchor)	40
		Service recovery	27
		Justice	04
<b>Cluster 2</b>	Overtourism and service complaints	Tourist behavior (anchor)	27
		Tourist destinations	16
		Tourist market	13
		Complaints	04

<b>Cluster 3</b>	Consumer value, brand value, and loyalty	Service quality (anchor)	17
		Service perception	11
		Hospitality industry	07
<b>Cluster 4</b>	Cultural heritage and museums	Tourism Management (anchor)	17
		Hotel industry	08
		Heritage tourism	05

Source(s): Authors' own work

*Cluster 1* features “service failure” as a prominent issue and gathers terms describing service failure-specific and negative experiences-related aspects such as negative travel experiences, unpleasant encounters, memorable negative experiences, guest perspectives, and tourist scams. The literature highlights that service failures significantly impact customer satisfaction (i.e., dissatisfaction), leading to avoidance and complaint behavior (see Cluster 2), decreased trust, and potential threats to business survival such as customer switching (Bradley & Sparks, 2009; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Swanson & Hsu, 2009).. Firms aiming to deliver flawless services and positive customer experiences must deal with negative tourist emotions which are a key factor affecting dissatisfaction and related implications (Bradley & Sparks, 2009; Kim & Hwang, 2022; Swanson & Hsu, 2009). Indeed, a service experience creates lasting memories that influence cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses (Svari et al., 2010).). Although it is impossible to eliminate all dissatisfaction and service failures, firms must be aware that these issues affect service co-creation, consumption, and perceived value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Svari et al., 2010). Affective Events Theory (AET) has been used to explore how tourists' perceptions of deception impact moral emotions, dissatisfaction, revisit intentions, and negative word-of-mouth (Ma et al., 2022). Tourist scams, considered “affective events,” can trigger strong negative emotions and dissatisfaction. Studies reveal that dissatisfied female customers are more likely than male customers to share negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Generation Y customers share positive experiences more frequently (Kim & Hwang, 2022). Additionally, factors such as atmosphere, service, and location were found to have minimal impact on eWOM in food tourism.

*Cluster 2* features overtourism and sustainability issues, along with service complaints as prominent issues. Scholars have found that overtourism has been analyzed through two distinct yet interconnected lenses: the (negative) experiences of residents and tourists and the capacity thresholds of destinations (Nilsson, 2020; Quang et al., 2023). Three aspects of overtourism that appear crucial are localized issues within city centers, the rise of unregulated accommodations via platforms like Airbnb, and their impact on gentrification and sustainability (Nilsson, 2020; Sthapit & Björk, 2022). Research on service complaints (Ramachandran & Chidambaram, 2012) highlights that effective complaint handling is crucial for customer satisfaction and retention, as complaints can be seen as opportunities to strengthen customer relationships (Ekiz et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2018). Third-party

complaints often indicate severe service failures and prompt significant customer reactions (Chang & Chung, 2012). Identifying and proactively addressing potential failure modes is essential to manage these failures and protect long-term profitability. Schoefer and Ennew (2005) call for more research on emotional responses to complaints. Recent studies also explore how new digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), both cause and address service failures in tourism. AI plays a significant role in the industry, but its limitations, such as lack of flexibility and common sense, pose challenges in managing service failures effectively (Lv et al., 2022).

*Cluster 3* discussed consumer value, brand value, and loyalty as a dominant research area. Specifically, it addresses how negative aspects of CBRs impact them. Tasci (2016) found that a brand's overall value might decline if consumers feel it does not offer sufficient value. However, this effect on consumer loyalty is minor and does not significantly impact destination brands, highlighting the complex nature of consumer-brand interactions in this market. Similarly, brand image affects how tourists receive customer service, affecting their behavioral intentions (Cham et al., 2020). Satisfaction and perceived value mediate this relationship, emphasizing the importance of managing brand image to enhance consumer experiences. Conversely, when positive customer-brand relationships deteriorate, they can lead to negative behaviors such as disparaging remarks and anti-brand protests.

*Cluster 4* addresses the negative aspects of CBRs. Research highlights the importance of addressing hostile encounters and emotions by reinterpreting and reorganizing cultural heritage and museums. Additional services can broaden their appeal and enhance their traditional roles of collecting, preserving, and displaying heritage (Brida et al., 2016; Li & Chan, 2023). In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for better service recovery methods and complaint resolution procedures.

#### **4. Final remarks**

This study systematically evaluated research on consumer-brand relationships in tourism and hospitality, focusing on negative experiences. Through descriptive analysis, we uncovered key literature trends, and keyword co-occurrence analysis revealed four distinct clusters of critical issues related to negative experiences and their consequences. These findings highlight how service failures and poor experiences widen the gap between tourists and tourism businesses. Understanding these negative aspects of CBRs is crucial for developing effective strategies to address and manage customers' negative experiences. Our findings also point to future research directions for scholars. For instance, how can service recovery strategies mitigate the consequences of service failures in tourism and hospitality, particularly those involving AI devices? Additionally, companies should align their service failure handling with customer care expectations. Scholars can explore supportive responses to recovery efforts and examine customers' emotional reactions to understand better how these strategies influence customer satisfaction and loyalty.

**References are available upon request.**