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## Do Consumers Raise Their Voices or Leave after Service Failures? Examining Angry Rumination, Distraction, and Brand Loyalty

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## Introduction

Given that service failures are inevitable, a better understanding of how consumers perceive service failures and what can be effective recovery strategies has represented an important topic for academics and practitioners. The existing literature has investigated service failures and recovery strategies from an input-output transaction value perspective based on appraisal, justice, and equity theories (Kwon & Jang, 2012). Researchers, however, have largely overlooked consumer coping strategies as factors influencing consumer complaining behaviors. Consumers' responses toward service failures may vary depending on how they regard a service failure incident. Sometimes, consumers cannot stop thinking about a provoking incident, which is referred to as *angry rumination*, whereas at other times they just "let it go", which is referred to as *distraction* (Denson, 2013). Psychologists have long argued that people use rumination and distraction to cope with the transgression, which ultimately has different impact on people's behaviors toward the transgressor. Previous studies on interpersonal relationship have suggested that angry rumination increases negative affect and aggressive behaviors toward the transgressor (e.g., bad mouthing and revenge), whereas distraction buffers negative affect and aggressive behaviors (Bushman et al., 2005; Pedersen et al., 2011).

Due to the intangible and perishable nature of hospitality and tourism products, experiential value based on consumer memory greatly influences consumer's post consumption behaviors. Particularly, for a service failure incident in the lodging industry where guests stay for a certain period, from at least overnight to several nights, consumer's perceived experiential value can be influenced by consumer tendencies to ruminate on a service failure as a provoking incident or distract themselves from the service failure. Hence, angry rumination and distraction would affect consumer complaining behaviors following service failures. Thus, this study empirically investigated angry rumination and distraction as coping mechanisms consumers use to deal with service failure incidents and their influence on consumer complaining behaviors (e.g., voice, negative word of mouth, and exiting). Further, this study examined the moderating role of brand loyalty on the effect of angry rumination and distraction on consumer complaining behaviors.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

### *Consumer Complaining Behavior (CCB)*

Consumer complaining behavior (CCB) refers to “an action or set of actions arising out of customer dissatisfaction” (Rogers et al., 1992, p. 81). CCB has been regarded as a post-failure response stemmed from customer dissatisfaction. Three types of CCB appear most frequently in the literature: voice refers to consumer complaints directed at service providers and is paradoxically considered to be beneficial because service providers have the opportunity to analyze and rectify customer dissatisfaction (Kim et al., 2014); negative word of mouth (NWOM) refers to speaking negatively about service providers to others. This can hurt a service provider’s reputation and its ability to retain consumers (Lau & Ng, 2001); and exiting refers to consumers’ intentions not to revisit a service provider again. It also includes anti-organization reactions whereby dissatisfied consumers intend to penalize service providers (Diaz & Ruiz, 2002).

### *The Influence of Angry Rumination and Distraction on CCB*

Angry rumination refers to thoughts and behaviors that focus an individual’s attention on negative affect, as well as the causes and consequences of this state (Sukhodolsty et al, 2001). In contrast, distraction is to focus attention away from a negative state to pleasant or neutral stimuli that can prevent the thought from wandering back to the source of the negative state (Denson, 2013). Previous research suggests that angry rumination increases the accessibility of aggressive actions, while distraction reduces anger and aggressive actions (Kross et al., 2005). Such effects can be explained by the spreading activation theory of mood, which argues that emotions impose a fundamental organizational structure on information stored in the memory’s semantic network and each emotion is conceptualized as a central organizing node that causally links information related (Rusting & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998). Hence, rumination and distraction activate the nodes, subsequently influencing behaviors. For example, while experiencing a service failure incident, customer’s ruminative tendency triggers the spreading activation of nodes linked to the provoking incident, which exacerbates negative emotions and responses. Conversely, distraction interrupts the spreading activation of nodes, which allows negative emotions to subside. Neural evidence suggests that angry rumination also increases cardiovascular reactivity (e.g., increased heart rate and blood pressure), but distraction quickly promotes the return of cardiovascular and cortisol responses to baseline (Larsen & Christenfeld, 2011). This implies that both mind and body are vigilant during rumination than distraction. Thus, this study proposes that when service failure occurs, angry rumination would increase CCB since it exacerbates anger toward the service failure incident and promotes consumers’ intentions to directly complain, spread

NWOM, and exit service providers. In contrast, distraction would have opposite impacts on CCB.

*Hypotheses 1-3: Angry rumination positively influences consumers' intentions to (H<sub>1</sub>) voice complaints, (H<sub>2</sub>) spread negative word of mouth, or (H<sub>3</sub>) exit.*

*Hypotheses 4-6: Distraction negatively influences consumers' intentions to (H<sub>4</sub>) voice complaints, (H<sub>5</sub>) spread negative word of mouth, or (H<sub>6</sub>) exit.*

### *The Moderating Role of Brand Loyalty*

Brand loyalty refers to “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Brand loyalty helps maintain the relationship between consumers and service providers by creating a sense of belonging and identification that fosters generosity and tolerance toward service failures (Tanford, et al., 2012). Hence, consumers who are loyal to a brand are less likely to disseminate NWOM to others or exit service providers than non-loyal consumers, but they are more likely to complain about their dissatisfaction directly to a service provider (“loyal voicers”) to provide an opportunity for the service provider to solve a problem (Namkung et al., 2011). Thus, for loyal consumers, a positive relationship between angry rumination and voice would be strengthened more than non-loyal consumers, whereas the positive influence of angry rumination on NWOM and exiting would be weakened more so than non-loyal consumers. Further, for loyal consumers, distraction would buffer CCB more than non-loyal consumers. Based on these notions, the following hypotheses are suggested:

*H<sub>7a</sub>: High brand loyalty strengthens the positive relationship between angry rumination and voice, whereas it weakens the positive relationships between angry rumination and negative word of mouth/exiting more so than low brand loyalty.*

*H<sub>7b</sub>: High brand loyalty strengthens the negative relationship between distraction and consumer complaint behaviors more so than low brand loyalty.*

The conceptual model and proposed hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.

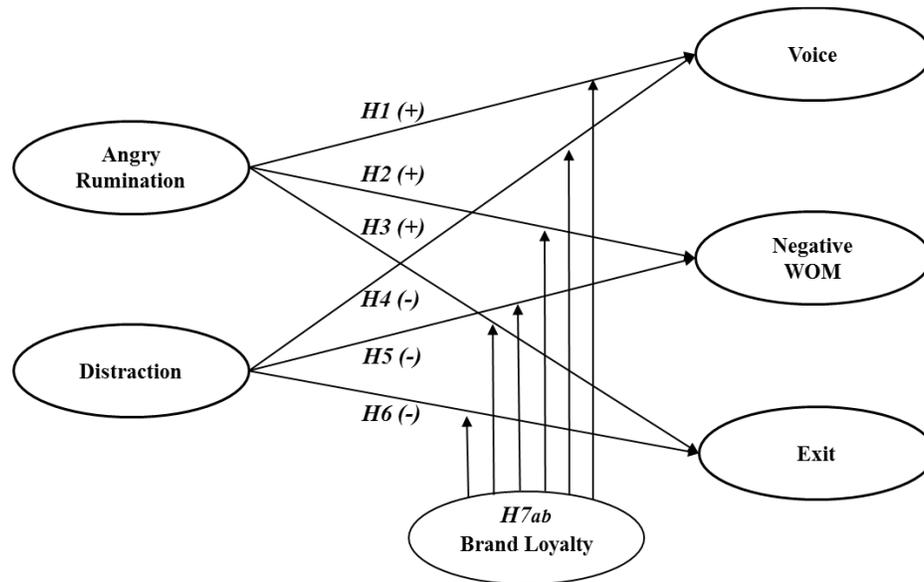


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model

## Methods

A hypothetical scenario was developed to illustrate a service failure at a hotel when checking in (see Appendix A). The survey questionnaire consisted of four parts. The first part included screening questions; only respondents who had stayed in a chain-brand hotel within the last month were eligible for the survey. Next, respondents answered questions about brand loyalty toward the hotel where they stayed most recently. Then, respondents read a hypothetical service failure scenario set at the same chain-brand hotel, and angry rumination, distraction, and CCB were measured. Lastly, respondents rated the realism of the scenario and answered to demographic questions.

This study used previously validated measurements: angry rumination and distraction (Sukhodolsky et al., 2001); CCB (Chan & Wan, 2001); and brand loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 1996). A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was used for all measurements except demographic information. For data collection, a web-based nationwide survey was conducted by an online marketing firm. After screening for eligibility by screening questions, overall 371 usable responses were collected and used in the data analysis. To examine the hypothesized relationships, structural equation modeling was conducted using Analysis of Moment Structure.

## Results

### *Measurement Model*

To determine the adequacy of the overall model, first, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The goodness-of-fit indicators suggested that the proposed model fit the data well (Table 1). Convergent validity was ensured since all standardized factor loadings, all composite reliabilities, and all average variances extracted (AVE) exceeded the cut off value of .5, .7 and .5 respectively. Internal consistency was acceptable with Cronbach's alpha exceeding the thresholds of .7. Discriminant validity was checked with the comparison between squared correlations between two constructs and AVE, and confirmed since AVEs were greater than the squared correlations (Table 2).

Table 1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	Item	Standardized factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliabilities	AVE
Angry rumination	AR1	.913	.944	.839	.813
	AR2	.905			
	AR3	.944			
	AR4	.842			
Distraction	Dist1	.861	.904	.802	.712
	Dist2	.919			
	Dist3	.650			
	Dist4	.917			
Voice	Voice1	.967	.964	.885	.900
	Voice2	.918			
	Voice3	.961			
Negative WOM	NWOM1	.896	.911	.771	.777
	NWOM2	.852			
	NWOM3	.896			
Exit	Exit1	.836	.856	.715	.691
	Exit2	.698			
	Exit3	.942			

Notes:  $\chi^2=237.766, p=.000, \chi^2/df=2.181, NFI=.963, TLI=.974, CFI=.979, RMSEA=0.057$

Table 2. Discriminant Validity

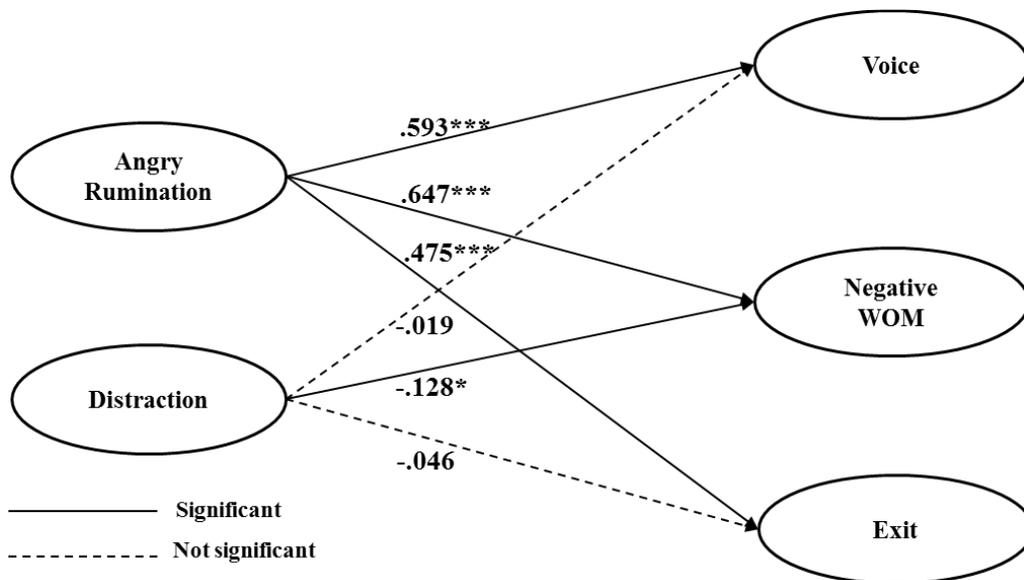
	1	2	3	4	5
Angry Rumination	(.813) <sup>a</sup>				
Distraction	.510 <sup>b</sup>	(.712)			
Voice	.350	.193	(.900)		

Negative WOM	.527	.348	.442	(.777)	
Exit	.248	.148	.266	.551	(.691)

Notes: a: AVE; b: squared correlation

### Structural Model

A structural model was assessed to test the proposed hypotheses. The goodness-of-fit statistics suggested that the model reasonably fit the data well (Figure 2). As expected, the hypothesized relationships between angry rumination and CCB were significant (voice: $\beta=.593$ , NWOM: $\beta=.647$ , exit: $\beta=.475$ ;  $p<.001$ ), suggesting that angry rumination increases CCB. Distraction, however, had a significant impact on NWOM ( $\beta=-.128$ ,  $p<.05$ ) only, indicating that distraction reduces consumers' intentions to spread NWOM, but it had no significant influence on voice and exciting. The structural results supported  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$  and  $H_5$ .



Notes:  $\chi^2=295.998, p=.000, \chi^2/df=2.667, NFI=.953, TLI=.963, CFI=.970, RMSEA=.067; ***p<.001, *p<.05$

Figure 2. Structural Results of the Proposed Model

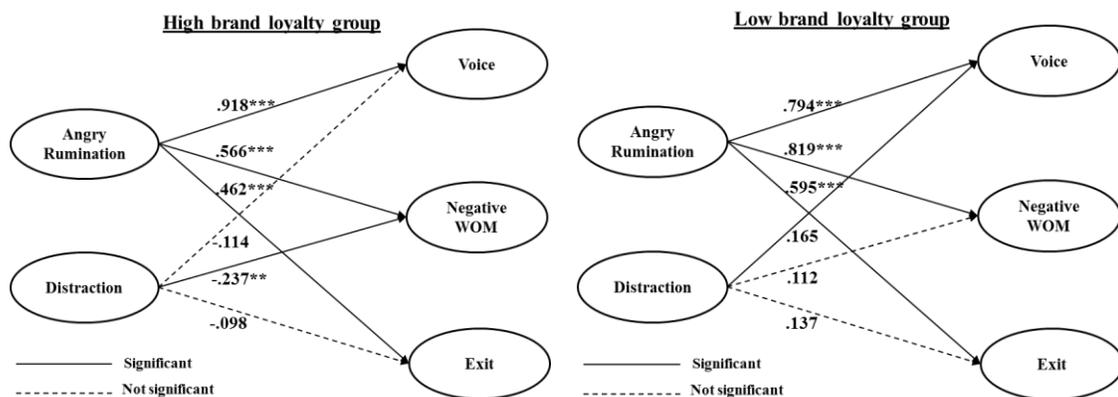
### The Moderating Effect of Brand Loyalty

To test the group difference across the levels of brand loyalty, samples were divided into two groups (high brand loyalty<sub>(n=212)</sub> vs. Low brand loyalty<sub>(n=159)</sub>)

using a mid-point 4 of a 7-point Likert scale, and then the chi-square difference ( $\Delta\chi^2$ ) test between constrained and unconstrained models was conducted. The chi-square difference ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(\Delta df=18)}=27.842$ ) between constrained ( $\chi^2_{(df=240)}=497.512$ ) and unconstrained models ( $\chi^2_{(df=222)}=355.490$ ) was marginally significant ( $p=.065$ ). This result indicates that the relationships between angry rumination, distraction and consumer complaining behaviors significantly differ between the two groups.

To identify differential effect of each relationship across the two groups, the chi-square difference for each relationship was assessed separately (Figure 3 & Table 3). Statistically significant group differences were detected in all relationships except for exiting, which partially supported  $H_7$ .

Angry rumination had a significantly stronger effect on voice for the high brand loyalty group ( $\beta=.918$ ) than the low brand loyalty group ( $\beta=.794$ ), whereas in the relationship with NWOM the low brand loyalty group ( $\beta=.819$ ) was more sensitive than the high brand loyalty group ( $\beta=.566$ ). In other words, when loyal consumers ruminate about service failure incidents, they are more likely to directly express their dissatisfaction to service providers than non-loyal consumers. Conversely, non-loyal consumers are more likely to disseminate NWOM than loyal consumers. As expected, distraction had significantly weaker effects on voice and NWOM for the high brand loyalty group than the low brand loyalty group. This suggests that loyal consumers are less likely to voice complaints and spread NWOM if they distract themselves from a service failure incident than non-loyal consumers.



Notes:  $\chi^2=467.670$ ,  $p=.000$ ,  $\chi^2/df=2.116$ ,  $NFI=.928$ ,  $TLI=.951$ ,  $CFI=.960$ ,  $RMSEA=.055$

Figure 3. Moderating Effect of High versus Low Brand Loyalty

Table 3. Comparison of Path Coefficient

Hypothesized path	Standardized coefficient		$\Delta\chi^2_{(\Delta df=1)}$
	High loyalty	Low loyalty	
H <sub>1</sub> : Angry Rumination → Voice	.918***	.794***	7.609**
H <sub>2</sub> : Angry Rumination → Negative WOM	.566***	.819***	6.396**
H <sub>3</sub> : Angry Rumination → Exit	.462***	.595***	.098
H <sub>4</sub> : Distraction → Voice	-.114	.165	4.300*
H <sub>5</sub> : Distraction → Negative WOM	-.237**	.112	7.565**
H <sub>6</sub> : Distraction → Exit	-.098	.137	2.230

Notes: \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05,

## Conclusion

By incorporating angry rumination and distraction in a service failure encounter to better understand CCB, this study broadened the scope of previous literature, which mainly investigated service failures and recoveries from an input-output transaction value perspective. The results of this study suggest that consumer's tendency to ruminate on a service failure incident and distract themselves from the incident has different influences on CCB. Angry rumination increases direct complaints, dissemination of NWOM, and exiting, whereas distraction buffers NWOM. The findings suggest that academics and practitioner should have a closer look at consumer's inner coping mechanism, and be aware of the detrimental effect of angry rumination in service encounters. Angry rumination even increases aggression toward those who had nothing to do with the initial provocation (Pedersen et al., 2011), implying that angry rumination can ruin others' experiences as well. Thus, managers should put their best efforts to recover service failures immediately so that consumer's angry rumination can be reduced while distracting them from a service failure incident.

Another important finding of this study is the level of brand loyalty moderates the effect of angry rumination and distraction on CCB. When angry rumination presents, loyal consumers are more likely to complain about dissatisfaction directly to service providers (e.g., loyal voicer), whereas they are less likely to spread NWOM to others and exiting the service providers than non-loyal consumers. Further, when distraction presents, loyal consumers are less likely to be engaged in CCB (e.g., Voci and NWOM). The findings imply the important role of loyal consumers in improving service quality. The loyal consumers provide an opportunity for a service provider to identify and prepare

solutions rather than spreading NWOM to others and exiting. Hence, managers should be aware of the value of loyal consumers and put their best efforts to establish and maintain close relationships with potential and existing loyal consumers.

Although this study provides academics and practitioners with a new perspective in viewing service failure encounters and implications regarding consumer complain behaviors, it is not free of limitations. The generalizability of the results may be restricted by factors related to a hypothetical scenario used. Investigation in a real service failure encounter which accompanies with the different levels of service failure severity and situational factors would enhance the generalizability and external validity of the results. In addition, further investigation on the influence of rumination and distraction for consumers with different dispositional traits will deepen the understanding of CCB in service failures.

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### Appendix A. Service Failure Scenario

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You booked a three-night stay at the same chained-brand hotel one month prior to your departure. You have just arrived at the hotel to check in. It is 4pm in the afternoon and you are looking forward to getting to your room so you can manage to unpack and freshen up. You make your way to the front desk and provide your name to check in. The receptionist at the desk appears to be confused when she enters your details into the computer. After working on the computer for about five minutes, she says that your room is not available as they are overbooked and it seems the room won't be ready until tomorrow morning. You are transferred to another hotel to stay overnight.

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