

## **An examination of consumer embarrassment and repatronage intentions in the context of emotional service encounters.**

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# **An examination of consumer embarrassment and repatronage intentions in the context of emotional service encounters.**

## **ABSTRACT**

Using an experimental repeated-measures design (n=240), this study examines the level of felt embarrassment and repatronage intentions in relation to 13 embarrassing service encounters. The manipulation of two independent variables i.e. *embarrassment source* (i.e., service provider, others present and consumer) and *embarrassment stimuli* (violations of privacy, awkward acts, forgetfulness/error, image appropriateness and criticism) are represented by 13 hypothetical scenarios included in a self-report survey. The findings have relevance for theory and practice and provide direction for future research in this area.

## INTRODUCTION

In the quest for customer satisfaction and service quality is the implicit assumption of the link between a customer's positive evaluation of their experience and their intentions to repeat their purchase/consumption behavior (Fader, Hardie, Lee 2005; Gabbot and Hogg 2000). Therefore, where service products are concerned, issues relating to customer evaluations, satisfaction and loyalty have largely been explored in the context of the service encounter. Commonly referred to as the "moment of truth", the service encounter has received considerable attention in the literature (e.g., Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994; Bitner, Booms, and Tetrault 1990; Verhoef, Antonides, and de Hoog 2004) and this is deservedly so given the strong link between service encounter experiences and customer satisfaction. In fact, Mattila and Patterson (2004) argue that the social content of the service encounter is a crucial component of customer satisfaction, so much so that it often overshadows the economic benefit. However, unlike the production and consumption of physical goods, where product attributes, benefits and experiences are largely under the control of the marketer, the service encounter is an unpredictable period of time. This is so because "service is often based primarily on personal interaction or information processing" (Rust and Chung, 2006, p. 567). Thus, predictability is difficult and surprises, both positive and negative, often abound. Moreover, the actions of people are likely to produce unintentional effects (Gerstner and Libai, 2006), which, ultimately, represent interruptions to tasks in relation to the production and consumption of the service, and the result of such arousal (affect) is consumption emotion (Pieters and van Raaij 1988).

"Consumption emotion refers to the set of emotional responses elicited specifically during product usage or consumption experiences, as described either by the distinctive categories of emotional experience and expression (e.g., joy, anger, and fear) or by the structural dimensions underlying emotional categories, such as pleasantness/unpleasantness, relaxation/action, or calmness/excitement" (Westbrook and Oliver 1991, p. 85). In relation to services, the study of

consumption emotion has been relatively limited to examining broader affective states in relation to satisfaction (e.g., Menon and Dubé 2000) and behavioral intentions (e.g, Babin and Babin 2001). More specifically, van Dolen et al. (2001) examined basic emotion categories such as disappointment, irritation, pleasure, content and positive surprise in relation to the affective component of service satisfaction. Matilla and Enz (2002) looked at positive and negative mood states and displayed emotion in relation to service encounter evaluation and Foxall and Greenley (1999) established a link between pleasure, arousal and dominance and behavioral responses in service settings. From these and other similar studies (e.g., Babin and Darden, 1996; Johnson and Zinkhan 1991; Knowles, Grove, and Pickett 1999), we know that the degree to which the customer evaluates the experience as either positive or negative and adopts approach or avoidance behaviors, is largely influenced by the emotions experienced during service encounters.

What is not known is what type of events trigger specific emotions and how these events differ in their influence on the consumer's affective reactions and repatronage intentions. In uncovering such detail in relation to emotions, service providers will be better informed about how emotion-inducing encounters occur and their effects on the consumers felt emotion and future intentions. This study, therefore, addresses the current lacuna in this area by examining how the various sources and triggers identified by Grace (2007) influence the degree of felt emotion and repatronage intentions in the context of consumer embarrassment. In doing so, a number of practical and theoretical considerations emerge and avenues for future research are uncovered.

## **CONSUMER EMBARRASSMENT**

Given the nature of the service encounter as opposed to other consumption situations, it is important to identify those emotions that may have particular relevance or even be peculiar to this consumption setting. In fact, Menon and Dubé (2000) advocate that detailed investigations in relation

to specific emotions and their attributions are needed so that retailers can effectively control and engineer consumer emotions. One such emotion, which has particular relevance *only* to the face-to-face service encounter (which largely characterizes exchanges in retail environments) is that of embarrassment. As embarrassment “involves complex cognitive processes – such as the evaluations of one’s behavior from another’s perspective” (Keltner and Buswell 1997, p.251), it is entirely dependent on the presence of others, just as is the face-to-face service encounter. For example, other emotions such as anger, discontent, worry, sadness, fear, etc. are all emotions that can occur in consumption situations pertaining to either goods or services because, to be experienced, they are not dependent on the presence of others. Embarrassment is somewhat different because this emotion is induced when a social transgression has been *witnessed* (or perceived to be witnessed) by others.

To date, little is known about consumers and embarrassment. Largely, research within this domain has concentrated on examining embarrassment in relation to the purchase of sensitive or embarrassing products. Such research includes studies regarding the purchase of impotence drugs (Fost 1996), hearing aids (Iacobucci et al. 2002), “unmentionables” (Wilson and West 1981), and attitudes towards the advertisements of embarrassing products such as contraceptives and feminine hygiene products (Rehman and Brooks 1987). Furthermore, embarrassment has been investigated within the realms of coupon usage (Bonnici et al. 1996) and in relation to the role of social presence and purchase familiarity in the purchase situation of an embarrassing product (Dahl, Manchanda, and Argo 2001).

Early work by Miller (1992) provided the first classification of embarrassing circumstances. Miller (1992) broadly categorized embarrassment as emanating from situations relating to individual behavior, interaction behavior, audience provocation and bystander behavior. Miller (1992) described such behaviour as involving awkward acts and forgetfulness along with empathetic embarrassment from bystanders. Although Miller (1992) provides an excellent description of embarrassment in general

situations, what was of primary interest in this study is the effect of embarrassment within the service encounter which contains key actors such as service providers, customers and other customers. Given the dearth of research regarding this emotion in the context of service encounters, Grace (2007) conducted an exploratory examination of affective reactions associated with embarrassment in the service setting and the resultant model was deemed appropriate as the theoretical framework for this study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to facilitate an exploratory examination of consumer embarrassment in service encounters, Grace (2007) conducted a functional analysis of consumer embarrassment (FACE). Using critical incident technique, Grace (2007) gathered data in relation to embarrassing consumption situations and this resulted in the development of the FACE Model, comprising of embarrassment causes, dimensions of embarrassment and consequences. In terms of causes, Grace (2007) used Sharkey and Stafford's (1990) six categories of embarrassing situations (e.g., criticism, awkward acts, image appropriateness, forgetfulness/lack of knowledge/error, environment/surroundings, and violations of privacy) in order to classify embarrassment stimuli and further sub-divided these causes by source (i.e., service provider, customers, others present). Embarrassment dimensions are shown to be emotional (e.g., anger, self-consciousness), physiological (e.g., blushing, nausea) and behavioral (e.g., flight, threaten retribution) and the longer-term consequences of consumer embarrassment are related to word-of-mouth communications (e.g., positive and negative) and repatronage intentions (e.g., boycott, use as normal). As such, the FACE Model provides an appropriate framework upon which to further empirically examine the effect of the source and stimuli on the degree to which one experiences the emotion (embarrassment) and, more importantly, the degree to which future patronage intentions are affected.

## Embarrassment Sources

Grace's (2007) FACE Model clearly shows that consumer embarrassment can emanate from three sources i.e. the *service provider*, the *consumer* and *others* present (i.e., shopping companions or other customers). Some might argue that the product is also another source of embarrassment for the consumer but this is not so as explained by Grace (2007), "it is not the *consumption* of a sensitive product that is embarrassing to the individual, but rather the *purchasing* of the product, particularly when this is facilitated by a face-to-face service encounter in a retail environment. That is why some consumers prefer vending machines or mail delivery of sensitive products in order to avoid the embarrassment of making the purchase at a retail outlet in the presence of others" (Grace 2007). In other words, it may be a suggestive comment made by a sales assistant in relation to the sensitive product that is the source of embarrassment – not the product itself. As such, the sales assistant becomes the source of the emotion-inducing encounter.

Attribution theories have been widely adopted by marketing scholars in order to understand causal inferences, how these are interpreted, and their behavioral implications (Swanson and Kelley 2001). These theories have been applied in the context of many studies, which include advertising effectiveness (Sparkman, Jr. and Locander 1980), service recovery (Boshoff and Leong 1998; Swanson and Kelley 2001), donation behavior (Dean 2003), consumer scepticism (Forehand and Grier 2003) injurious consumption outcomes (Griffin, Babin and Attaway 1996) and service failure (Folkes, Koletsky and Graham 1987). However, to date, very little is known in relation to the attribution of blame (or credit) in relation to negative (or positive) emotions of the consumer.

Clearly, Grace's (2007) study shows that emotions can be derived from different sources. What we don't know is how these different sources influence the consumer's emotional experience (level of embarrassment) and, furthermore, their future behavioral intentions in relation to the service provider.

It may be that the level of embarrassment experienced by the consumer might depend on its source. For example, actions by the service provider or other customers may cause less embarrassment to the consumer than embarrassment emanating from their own actions. This may be so because the consumer may well see their own actions as a reflection of themselves to others and, therefore, they may internalize their embarrassment to a greater extent than if the source was external to them. In relation to behavioral intentions, this may be a different matter. The customer may be more likely to boycott the store if the embarrassment has been sourced from the service personnel rather than being due to something that they, or other people present, did or said. Regardless, in both cases, whether in relation to *degree of embarrassment* experienced or *repatronage intentions*, it appears that the source of the embarrassment may well have a significant influence. On this basis, the following research questions are proposed.

*RQ1a: To what extent does the source of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the level of embarrassment felt by the customer?*

*RQ1b: To what extent does the source of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the likelihood of customer repatronage?*

## **Embarrassment Stimuli**

In relation to embarrassment stimuli, Grace's (2007) FACE model depicts six particular categories (i.e., *criticism*, *violations of privacy*, *awkward acts*, *image appropriateness*, *forgetfulness/error* and *environment*), which are spread across the three sources (refer to Figure 1). *Criticism* relates to verbal criticism (e.g., unsolicited negative comments, accusations, discrimination, stereotyping, etc.) and non-verbal criticism (being made the focus of attention, rejections, ignoring, etc.). *Violations of privacy* are exemplified by body/clothing exposure, invasion of body/clothing through an intimate act, invasion of one's space and revealing privacy/secretcy. *Awkward acts* refer to

improper or inappropriate acts, ungraceful/clumsy/awkward acts, expression of emotions and verbal blunders. *Image appropriateness* encapsulates the look of one's body, clothing and/or possessions (e.g., shopping bags, etc.). The next category relates to *forgetfulness*, lack of knowledge or understanding and mistakes/errors. Finally, *environment* refers to equipment, layout or process failure (Grace 2007). However, although all categories were found to induce consumer embarrassment, it cannot be assumed that the degree of embarrassment or future patronage intentions would be the same across all stimuli categories. For example, it could be expected that *violations of privacy* or *criticism* may well induce a greater degree of embarrassment than would *awkward acts* or *forgetfulness*. Furthermore, it may be that *environment* and *image appropriateness* could have the greatest influence on future patronage intentions, over and above the others. This being the case, the following research questions are posed:

*RQ2a: To what extent do the stimuli of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the embarrassment felt by the customer?*

*RQ2b: To what extent do the stimuli of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the likelihood of customer repatronage?*

However, it would be naive to assume that the embarrassment source and the embarrassment stimuli would operate independently of one another in relation to both the *degree of embarrassment* and *repatronage intentions*. In fact, quite the opposite would be expected given that one cannot exist without the other. For example, it could be expected that criticism (stimuli) coming from the service provider (source) may well have a significant influence on repatronage intentions over and above that of awkward acts (stimuli) pertaining to others (source). Similarly, it might be expected that image (in)appropriateness (stimuli) of self (source) would produce a greater degree of embarrassment to the consumer than the forgetfulness (stimuli) of the service provider (source). Thus, the following research questions are posed:

*RQ3a: To what extent does the interaction between the source and the stimuli of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the level of embarrassment felt by the customer?*

*RQ3b: To what extent does the interaction between the source and the stimuli of embarrassment in an emotion-inducing service encounter influence the likelihood of customer repatronage?*

## METHODOLOGY

### Instrument

A self-report survey was developed in order to address the research questions of this study. Given the nature of the survey, which explored issues in relation to personal embarrassment, the anonymity of the self-report survey was considered to be beneficial in collecting the necessary data. In relation to the independent variables of this study, a number of hypothetical consumption scenarios were developed and these represented a manipulation of the two independent variables (i.e., embarrassment source and embarrassment stimuli). *Embarrassment source* had three levels (i.e., service providers, others, and consumer), while *embarrassment stimuli* had five levels (i.e., violations of privacy, awkward acts, forgetfulness/error, image appropriateness, and criticism). Environment, as shown in Grace's (2007) model, was not used as a stimuli in this study because of its close relationship with only one of the source levels, that being, the service provider. Therefore, given the number of levels of the independent variables (3 x 5), a total of 15 cells (15 scenarios) resulted, however, only 13 scenarios were developed for this study. This is so because, in relation to the consumer (self), the embarrassment stimuli of *criticism* and *violation of privacy* is not applicable. For example, criticizing oneself or violating one's own privacy (if that is at all possible) is not likely to occur or, for that matter, induce embarrassment in a service encounter setting. Upon development of the 13 scenarios, three judges were given a description of the independent variables and were asked to read the scenarios and nominate which variables had been manipulated in each. The ratings of all three

judges agreed with the manipulations of 12 of the scenarios developed. One scenario, however, produced different results and this was rewritten to comply with the judges' comments. The final scenarios, used in the survey, appear in Table 1 and these are presented in their respective cells according to the IV manipulations.

In relation to the dependent variables (repatronage intentions and degree of embarrassment), a single item for each was used because of the repeated measures aspect of the survey. Given that 13 scenarios were presented in the survey, it would have been overly taxing to subjects if they had to respond to multiple measures for each one. Thus, a similar rationale to that of Brady, Bourdeau and Heskell (2005), who also used single dependent variable measures in their scenario-based study of brand cues, was adopted. Therefore, repatronage intentions were measured via one item asking, "*Having experienced the incident described above, how likely would it be for you to shop in this store again?*" This question was identical for all scenarios except where the context had to be adapted. For example, where the scenario described an incident in a restaurant, the question was "*Having experienced the incident described above, how likely would it be for you to go to this restaurant again?*" Respondents were asked to respond via a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "*not at all likely*" to "*extremely likely*". In relation to *degree of embarrassment*, respondents were asked, "*How embarrassed would you feel in the above situation?*" and responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "*not at all embarrassed*" to "*extremely embarrassed*". Finally, demographic variables such as *gender* and *age* were included. Prior to distribution of the surveys, the scenarios were randomized in relation to order so that order effects would not contaminate the results.

**Insert Table 1 here**

## Data Collection

A snowballing sampling procedure was used whereby students in a 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate marketing class were asked to take three surveys and distribute them to their family and friends. Of the 540 surveys distributed, 240 were returned and completed, which represented a 44% response rate. The resulting sample comprised of 63% females and 37% males and respondents were aged between 18 and 79 years of age with a mean age of 26 years.

## ANALYSIS

Initially, descriptive statistics were computed for each of the experimental conditions (13 scenarios) across the two dependent variables (*level of embarrassment* and *repatronage intentions*). Please refer to Table 2 for means and standard deviations. In order to address the research questions, two repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted. This method is appropriate when the judgments of the same individual are being assessed over a variety of conditions (Huddleston, Good and Stoel 2001). The analysis of within-subject factors was used to determine whether the consumer's level of embarrassment and their intention to repatronize is influenced by the source of the embarrassment (three levels – *service provider*, *others*, *consumer*) and/or the embarrassment stimuli (five levels – *violation of privacy*, *awkward acts*, *forgetfulness/error*, *image appropriateness*, *criticism*). As discussed previously, two of the fifteen possible cells (scenarios) were not measured due to them being non-existent. This being the case, two of the data cells were empty (referred to as structural zeros). Therefore, prior to the analysis, dummy variables were assigned to the empty cells. These were coded as zero in order for the analysis to have the least nonlinear disturbance.

**Insert Table 2 here**

## RESULTS

Two separate repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted; one in relation to *level of embarrassment* and one in relation to *repatronage intentions*, and the results are presented accordingly.

### Level of Embarrassment

Mauchly's test showed that the sphericity assumption for *source* and *stimuli* was violated (P value=0.014 and P value= 0.001 respectively). The results indicate that, in relation to *stimuli*, there is a significant main effect , ( $F= 271.10, p = .001$ ), and there is also a main effect for *source*, ( $F=103.06, P=.001$ ). The rmANOVA resulted in a significant interaction between the within-subject factors (*stimuli* and *source*) with  $F=295.67, p=.001$ . These results are presented in Table 3.

**Insert Table 3 here**

### Repatronage intentions

In relation to repatronage intentions, Mauchly's test showed that the sphericity assumption for *source* and *type* is violated (P value=0.001 for both). The results show a main effect for *source*,  $F= 472.39, p = .001$ , and also for *stimuli*,  $F=717.29, P=0.001$ . Furthermore, the rmANOVA indicated a significant interaction between the within-subject factors (*type* and *source*) with  $F=266.05, p=0.001$ , and these results can be found in Table 3.

## DISCUSSION

In relation to embarrassment source, there was a significant effect on both level of embarrassment and repatronage intentions. Thus, it appears that the degree of embarrassment and the likelihood of repatronage changes depending on who instigates it. The results clearly show that

consumers are more likely to boycott the service when the embarrassment experienced by them is triggered by the service provider. On this basis, it appears the assignment of causal inferences (attribution theory) is pertinent in the context of emotions. Therefore, it would be expected that when consumers perceive other negative emotions (e.g., guilt, fear, etc.) to have been triggered by the actions of the service provider then these experiences would also be expected to have a significant negative impact on future patronage. On the other hand, it would be interesting to determine whether the attribution of positive emotions to the service provider has a similar positive effect on future patronage and loyalty.

In relation to embarrassment stimuli, both the level of embarrassment and future patronage intentions did differ across the different types of embarrassment stimuli. When considering the level of embarrassment, the most embarrassing stimuli included *criticism*, *awkward acts* and *violation of privacy*. However, in relation to repatronage intentions, *criticism*, *violation of privacy* and *image appropriateness* were strong contenders for consumers to boycott the service. Interestingly, while *image appropriateness* did not rate that highly in terms of degree of embarrassment, it was shown to be quite relevant in relation to repatronage. This highlights that, from a marketing perspective, it is not necessarily the degree to which an emotion is felt that is important, but, rather, the impact the emotion has on the consumer's future behavior.

The interaction between source and stimuli, however, provides the richest information in relation to this phenomenon. The most embarrassing scenarios included *criticism by the service provider*, *image inappropriateness of self* (consumer), *awkward acts of self* (consumer) and *violation of consumer privacy by the service provider*. In this respect, consumer embarrassment triggered from others did not rate very highly at all in comparison to embarrassment being triggered by the service provider and by the consumer themselves. This may be so because the embarrassment experienced by

the consumer (in relation to the acts of others) may be of a vicarious nature, rather than being experienced first-hand as is self-inflicted embarrassment. Moreover, consumer embarrassment triggered by the acts of the service provider may well be viewed as social transgressions directed specifically at the consumer that are avoidable (i.e., under the control of the service provider). In this sense, the embarrassment is not only felt directly, but also, in many cases, quite unexpectedly.

In terms of repatronage intentions, it is clearly the acts of the *service provider* (i.e., *criticism*, *image appropriateness* and *violation of privacy*) that rated the highest. Therefore, consumer embarrassment resulting from others in the service encounter or by the consumer (no matter what that trigger may be), while still socially uncomfortable, is not enough for the consumer to avoid future encounters. However, being the recipient of public criticism, having one's privacy violated by the service provider or the service provider portraying an inappropriate image are all good reasons why customers don't want to go back. This is understandably so given that all of these stimuli are viewed by the consumer as being under the control of the service provider and, thus, avoidable. Therefore, the findings represent good news for service providers, given that the minimization of these negative occurrences is under their control.

Using Grace's (2007) FACE framework as the theoretical backbone of this study, our understanding of the influence of negative emotion on consumer behaviour is significantly enhanced. While Grace (2007) used a qualitative approach to delve into the possible nature and sources of consumer embarrassment within service encounters, this study has used quantitative methods to further test the existence of and strengths between the antecedent variables of embarrassment, not yet attempted. In doing so, the findings here are more conclusive as the cause and effect of relationships become much clearer.

## **Practical Implications**

Clearly from the findings there are three specific areas within which service providers can concentrate their efforts in order to enhance the likelihood of repatronage i.e., staff/customer interaction, servicescape and image communication. Overwhelmingly, the most potent embarrassing encounter was one where the service provider instigated the embarrassment through some form of criticism. This finding is in line with that of Grace (2007) who found that in 43% of embarrassing consumption incidents reported, the source was the service provider and the stimuli was criticism. This being the case, service marketers must turn their focus to the interpersonal interaction between their staff and their customers in order to eradicate this problem. Some service providers may be under the impression that younger or inexperienced service personnel know how to act with customers and, thus, fail to guide them in the area of interpersonal communication. This is obviously a mistake and one that requires urgent attention. For whatever the reasons, customers are becoming targets for unprovoked verbal attacks from service personnel. This is evident in, not only these findings, but also that of Grace (2007). In saying this, it is acknowledged that customers also behave badly and this has been evidenced in many studies. However, this study is one of the first studies to provide evidence that unprovoked attacks emanate from both sides of the counter and thus the aberrant behavior of service personnel is also alive and well. Whether this behavior is the result of their own mood swings, having a “bad attitude” towards customers or simply ignorance of appropriate social behavior, this needs to be acknowledged and rectified accordingly. Maybe, one way of minimizing this problem is to give a heavier weighting to good communications skills over and above task ability during the recruitment and selection process. In doing so, staff may be able to better deal with their own feelings, issues and situations in the work environment as well as appropriately and professionally handle those difficult customers.

The second area of improvement concerns not only service personnel but also the design of the servicescape. Given that violations of consumer privacy were not only found to be very embarrassing, but also detrimental in terms of repatronage, consumer privacy issues warrant attention. However, different service providers will address this issue in different ways. For example, a retail service provider of clothing will need to consider the degree to which they accommodate the privacy of the customers when they try on clothes. Not only should they ensure that service personnel are not being invasive, they also need to consider the configuration and physical layout of their fitting areas in order to ensure maximum privacy. On the other hand, a pharmacy should consider providing some privacy to customers when discussing sensitive medication issues (maybe a small consultation room or area) or a medical practitioner may appear more empathic to customers if they section their waiting rooms to accommodate for severely ill or uncomfortable individuals. In fact, many service providers may well have overlooked privacy issues in relation to their customers and this is a significant oversight warranting consideration.

Finally, the presentation of the service must be carefully considered in relation to both the servicescape and the firm's marketing communications. In the context of the servicescape, issues relating to store furnishings, equipment and staff appearance require stringent planning and coordination in order to reduce inconsistencies in the portrayal of the service image. Moreover, the marketing communications of the service firm must correctly represent the firm's actual image so that consumer expectations, which are based on what is promised, are actually met by the service provider. Quite often consumers perceive the image of the service to be inappropriate purely because it wasn't how they expected it to be. Thus, image congruency in relation to the physical elements of the firm and their external communications is vitally important if customers are to be attracted and retained.

## **Future Research**

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that both emotional sources and triggers are important predictors of consumer emotion and subsequent behaviors towards service providers. In other words, not only do consumers respond differently to different events (emotional stimuli), their levels of emotion and future intentions are also altered by attribution to the emotion source. Therefore, attribution theory in the context of emotion may well be a fruitful avenue for future research. Such investigations could include in-depth studies of individual emotions (as undertaken here) or broader comparisons of attribution theory in the context of different valenced emotional states.

Another avenue for future research is in relation to individual differences. While this study accounted for an individual's susceptibility to embarrassment, there may be other variables such as gender, age and education, which warrant further examination in this context. Furthermore, this study could be replicated across different cultures where significant differences in communication styles and cultural values may exist (e.g., India, Japan). The findings of such investigations would surely provide valuable information to marketers of international service brands.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study, firstly, involve the use of hypothetical scenarios in the self-report survey. In fact, Garland, Sandefur, and Rogers (1990, p. 727) argue that “no matter how expert the respondent and how relevant the scenario, survey experiments cannot substitute for .....field settings.” While this may be so, it was not possible to manipulate embarrassment stimuli and source in a field experiment (i.e., during an actual service encounter), given that the individual (respondent) is one of the actual sources of embarrassment. However, given that scenario self-reports are often biased through underreporting (Soler-Baillo, Marx, and Sloan 2005), the results of this study, if anything, will represent an underestimation of felt embarrassment and patronage intentions, rather than a misleading

exaggeration. Furthermore, there may be some variation in terms of embarrassability possible within each category, however, the three judges involved in the development of the hypothetical scenarios all agreed on the appropriateness of the representations of the categories. In addition, although multiple measures were not used in the survey in an attempt to not “over-tax” the respondent, it should be noted that the use of single-item measures can be problematic. Finally, generalization of the results beyond Australia should be attempted with caution. However, it is expected that the findings could be applied appropriately to similar cultures (e.g., UK and USA) where only subtle cultural differences exist. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the snowball sampling method may be a limitation due to the possibility of limiting the randomness of the sample.

## **Conclusion**

While issues relating to customer satisfaction, value, intentions and loyalty have dominated the services literature for some time now, empirical evidence demonstrates that service providers, whether inadvertently or not, continue to drive their customers away. Whether this happens because of ignorance, complacency or sheer lack of commonsense, is unknown. What is known is that, to survive in the modern marketplace, service providers need to seriously understand how and why their customers behave the way in which they do, so that performance can be tailored toward achieving maximum patronage potential. In recognizing that customer behavior is directed by emotional experiences of past encounters, services providers will be one step closer to realizing that potential.

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**Table 1: Source x Embarrassment Stimuli Scenario Manipulations**

	<b>Violations of Privacy (Stimuli)</b>	<b>Awkward Acts (Stimuli)</b>	<b>Forgetfulness / Error (Stimuli)</b>	<b>Image Appropriateness (Stimuli)</b>	<b>Criticism (Stimuli)</b>
<b>Service Provider (Source)</b>	1. You walk into a pharmacy and put in a prescription at the counter for a medication that is of a private nature. When ready, the pharmacist calls you over and starts telling you (in a loud voice for others to hear) what the medication is and how to use it.	6. You are in a restaurant. The waiter comes to serve your meal but accidentally spills it in your lap. He then proceeds to try and clean you up but only makes the stain on your clothes worse.	8. You purchase a coat in a department store. The sales assistant forgets to de-activate the security alarm attached to the clothing. On exiting the store, the alarm is activated for all to hear.	11. You decide to take your family for a weekend away to celebrate your recent success in your job. When you get to what you thought was going to be a very nice hotel, you find it is very run down and the staff have a very untidy appearance.	4. After entering a clothing shop, a sales assistant approaches you and tells you that there will be no clothes to fit you in this store, as you are too fat.
<b>Others (Source)</b>	5. You wish to try on an item of clothing in a store. You are forced to use a common-use dressing room where other customers are also trying on clothes in one big open room.	7. You are in a supermarket with a child aged 5 years old. The child, who is trying to help you, pulls a packet of biscuits off the shelf only for the entire shelf to fall down and spray biscuits everywhere.	9. You are in a theatre watching a play with a friend. Your friend has forgotten to turn off their mobile phone and it rings rather loudly.	12. You ask a friend to go to an important formal dinner with you. Your friend meets you at the venue and is dressed inappropriately (i.e. very casually).	13. You are at a coffee shop in the "outside smoking area". A fellow customer comes up to you and tells you that you are a bad person for smoking near others and demands you put out your cigarette.
<b>Consumer (Source)</b>		2. As you enter a crowded restaurant you trip on the top step and fall over in front a number of customers and the restaurant.	3. You pull into a petrol station and fill your car up with petrol. As you go into the store to pay you realize that you have left your money at home.	10. Your friend said he/she would treat you to a nice meal at a restaurant. As you thought your friend didn't have very much money, you dress casually. On entering the restaurant you realize that you are inappropriately dressed for the chic and expensive restaurant you have been taken to.	

**I have marked the scenario number on this table.**

**The analysis used was referring to questions A and B under each scenario. The embarrassability scale at the beginning of the survey was not used.**

**Table 2. Mean Values Across Experimental Conditions and DVS**

STIMULI	SOURCE						Overall Mean
	Service Provider		Others		Self (Consumer)		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<b>Privacy</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	4.85	1.57	3.89	2.06	n/a	n/a	<b>4.37</b>
Repatronage Intentions	3.25	1.71	3.69	2.11	n/a	n/a	<b>3.47</b>
<b>Awkward Acts</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	3.73	1.88	4.37	1.81	4.98	1.65	<b>4.38</b>
Repatronage Intentions	3.76	1.94	5.13	1.64	4.90	1.54	<b>4.55</b>
<b>Forgetfulness/Error</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	3.51	2.03	3.63	1.87	4.63	1.84	<b>3.94</b>
Repatronage Intentions	5.51	1.56	6.01	1.21	5.11	1.76	<b>5.54</b>
<b>Image Appropriateness</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	3.99	1.98	4.58	1.65	5.03	1.58	<b>4.53</b>
Repatronage Intentions	1.55	1.20	4.61	1.65	4.97	1.63	<b>3.72</b>
<b>Criticism</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	5.42	1.91	4.01	2.08	n/a	n/a	<b>4.71</b>
Repatronage Intentions	1.51	1.27	4.44	2.02	n/a	n/a	<b>2.97</b>
<b>Overall Mean</b>							
Level of Embarrassment	<b>4.31</b>		<b>4.11</b>		<b>4.88</b>		
Repatronage Intentions	<b>3.10</b>		<b>4.78</b>		<b>4.99</b>		

**Table 3. Two-way Repeated Measures ANOVA**

	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Level of Embarrassment</b>					
Source	2	596.96	298.05	103.06	.001
Error (source)	466	1347.63	2.892		
Stimuli	4	2460.11	615.02	271.10	.001
Error (stimuli)	932	2114.29	2.269		
Source x stimuli	8	5588.01	698.50	295.67	.001
Error (source x stimuli)	1864	4403.94	2.362		
<b>Repatronage Intentions</b>					
Source	2	2337.40	1168.70	472.39	.001
Error (source)	464	1147.93	2.474		
Stimuli	4	6225.94	1556.37	717.29	.001
Error (stimuli)	928	2013.27	2.170		
Source x stimuli	8	3954.69	494.35	266.05	.001
Error (source x stimuli)	1856	3442.56	1.855		