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The Silence of Dissatisfied Customers:

An Exploratory Research in an Online Context

by

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- Master Thesis -

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore the phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context.

Theoretical perspective: In addition to the strategic brand management a customer perspective is grasped. Furthermore, the study explores areas related to service recovery and consumer behaviour.

Methodology: We apply an explorative approach in the form of a case study of silent dissatisfied customers from a perspective of strategic brand management. Therefore, we chose to conduct focus groups to enable discussion of situations. Moreover, we applied interviews to discover encouragement of complaints to be voiced. Knowledge is gained from empiricism and therefore we employ grounded theory for our analysis.

Findings: There exists four situations when customers remain silent dissatisfied. These situations concern; pre-emptive actions by online businesses, customers' low expectations and previous negative experiences, customers experience lack of energy and time, and customers' perceive ignorance by online businesses. Furthermore, both customers and online businesses are more or less responsible for the silence depending on the situation.

Theoretical implications: This study highlights the phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context. Furthermore, the study provides a framework concerning different situations when customers remain silent dissatisfied. This study contributes to the body of knowledge within the field of strategic brand management from a customer perspective.

Managerial implications: With this study, online businesses achieve a deeper understanding of how silent dissatisfied customers are encouraged to forward their opinions to improve. That is practiced with the focus on empathy, easiness, and monetary drivers.

Originality: Strategic brand management is studied from the view of customers since brands solely exist within the mind of customers.

Keywords: Strategic brand management, dissatisfied customers, non-complainer, silent dissatisfied, and failure to satisfy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have focused on customers who voice complaints whilst little research has been conducted on non-complainers. Online businesses are restricted in their interaction with customers, and limited research concerning non-complainers has been identified. Hence, the silent dissatisfied customer is our choice of study, particularly since brands take place in the mind of customers. Therefore, the aim is to provide theory within the field of strategic brand management based on customers' view.

1.1 Background

Customer complaints are viewed as a valuable source of information, and businesses that do not encourage complaints reject the possibility to solve the problem and retain the customer (Gruber, 2011). Hence, a mantra in the literature is that customer complaints serve as an opportunity to rectify stronger customer relationships (Gruber, 2011; Priluck & Lala, 2009; Tronvoll, 2008). Contrary to this notion is the non-complaining customer. What does silence mean when the customer does not contact the online business? Specifically, since "brands only exist in the customer's mind" (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006, p.295). Is silence solely an indication of a good performance or does silence have more than one meaning? Not all dissatisfied customers express their dissatisfaction. However, if brands only exist in the minds of customers, does that imply that silent dissatisfied customers are interesting? Therefore, we aim to explore the phenomenon of the dissatisfied but silent customer.

A large number of studies focus on complainers and their reactions to failures in the traditional context. These studies repeatedly suggest that customers who are satisfied with complaint handling will return in comparison to customers who are dissatisfied with the complaint handling (Chang & Wu, 2014; Homburg, Fürst, & Koschate, 2010; Simon, 2013). However, there has been less focus on the dissatisfied silent customer (Ro & Mattila, 2015) and so far little research has emphasised an online context, which makes businesses unaware of their failures in this setting. For the purpose of this study, *failure* refers to when customers become dissatisfied in their interaction with businesses. The non-complaining customer is less noticeable. Therefore, resulted previous scholars have focused their attention on the opposite direction of the field, customers that voice complaints (Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu, & Okumus, 2016; Duverger, 2011; Presi, Saridakis, & Hartmans, 2014). Nonetheless, Chebat, Davidow and Codjovi (2005) argue for the importance of the silent dissatisfied customer, as only one out of twenty customers voice their complains. Simultaneously, Ro and Mattila (2015) argue that customers' feedback provides an

opportunity for businesses to improve. Therefore, we perceive silent dissatisfied customers as pertinent, particularly from a strategic brand management point of view.

To account for our view on research, the dissatisfied non-complainers are crucial for businesses to comprehend. Research illustrates the pressing situation, which amongst others conclude that ay a vast majority simply leave without communicating their dissatisfaction (Chebat, Davidow & Codjovi, 2005). A few scholars have explanations to why dissatisfied customers remain silent. Customers do not complain due to the belief that complaints do not lead to anything good, lack of time or energy, loyalty, and neglect (e.g. Chebat, Davidow & Codjovi, 2005; Ro & Mattila, 2015). These reasons are important since such information makes it possible to maintain customers and improve the business (Ro & Mattila, 2015; Rothenberger, Grewal & Iyer, 2008). This is even more important for businesses where customer interaction occurs online. Thus, customers perceive a higher risk for purchases online, and simultaneously, online businesses need to build a good reputation online in order to succeed (Nepomuceno, Laroche, & Richard, 2013).

The number of online businesses is increasing (Nepomuceno, Laroche, & Richard, 2013), whilst the reasons for customers to not voice their complaints are rather unclear. Moreover, there is a continuous development of new settings, particularly online (Berezina et al. 2016), which creates a gap in the existing literature, as it has not implemented an online perspective. The low number of studies on the dissatisfied non-complaining customer in the past creates a need for an exploratory research approach towards an online setting. Therefore, we have found that the phenomenon of dissatisfied non-complainers is pertinent for both scholars and practitioners in an online context. First and foremost, due to the insufficient research on the dissatisfied non-complainers, which has negative outcomes for brands, as customers switch brands in silence (Ro & Mattila, 2015). Second of all, the Internet is constantly changing businesses possibilities to provide products and services to customers, where interaction occurs between the customer and the website instead of face-to-face. Hence, online businesses are facing a difficulty in guaranteeing consistency (Yapp, Harvey, & Laison, 2014), which indicates how different online businesses are in comparison to traditional ones. The dissatisfied non-complaining customers' opinions are the key, in order for improvement, both for scholars and practitioners with an online focus.

1.2 The Research's Aim and Objectives

Our study embraces a customer-perspective that explores non-complaining customers and what online businesses might consider, according to customers, in order to receive complaints. The objective of this study is to provide theory with by means of a typology in the field of strategic brand management. To achieve this, **the purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context**. Based on the purpose, we have developed the following research questions to guide us:

- Why do dissatisfied customers stay silent in an online context?
- What encourages customers to complain to online businesses?

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

This study is based on the exploration of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context, which functions as the base for the study. Following the introduction, the second chapter entails an outline of previous research in order to convey what knowledge and ideas that have been settled. The third chapter provides an overview of our implementation in the methodological process, where a qualitative approach is taken. This chapter specifies how the study manages to utilise the phenomenon and collect appropriate data. Thereafter, the fourth chapter presents our empirical results from the focus groups and interviews. At this stage, coding, in vivo coding, and creation of themes take place. This is analysed in the fifth chapter, where the two research questions are investigated by dividing the analysis into two sections; situations and encouragement. Furthermore, we apply grounded theory in order to categorise and develop a typology of the dissatisfied non-complaining customers. Moreover, in the fifth chapter the findings of the study are analysed in relation to the findings from the literature review in chapter two. The sixth chapter highlights the significant findings in the discussion, followed by a conclusion to answer the purpose of the study. Finally, the sixth chapter also outlines the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

This chapter begins with the departure of research concerning the customers who determine businesses' prosperity. Thereafter, a review of the existing literature is presented concerning the knowledge of silent dissatisfied customers' reasons to not complain in a traditional setting. The different reasons are divided into categories; Characteristics of Loyalty, Traits of the Business, Relation with Employee, Switch of Business, Matter of Time, and Customer Characteristics. This chapter ends with Table 1, which illustrates customers' reasons to not complain in a traditional setting.

2.1 The Departure of Research

"It is the customer who determines what a business is, what it produces, and whether it will prosper" (Drucker, 1954, p.37 cited in Duverger, 2011, p.537). This quote depicts why we believe this viewpoint is required to grasp the non-complaining customers' perspective on a deeper level. The topic of research is approached from a strategic brand management view, with an online focus. Hence, an outside-in approach is consistently embraced with the purpose of exploring dissatisfied non-complainers' own perspectives. We grasp an explorative approach since the majority of scholars tend to delimit the research. An illustration of such studies, in a traditional context, are; Chebat, Davidow and Codjovi (2005), Magnini, Ford, Markowski and Honeycutt (2007), Mittal, Huppertz and Khare (2008), Ro and Mattila (2015), and Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers and Mainous (1988). However, a few scholars have conducted an exploratory study to understand the customer in-depth; Priluck and Wisenblit (2009), and Voorhees, Brady and Horowitz (2006). Therefore, the aim of our study is to delve into this in a deep and comprehensive manner. Our starting point begins with a literature review to unfold and gain valuable information within the field. Moreover, we have detected a limitation in the area where the traditional setting has been the focus in these studies; Etzel and Silverman (1981), Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987), Hirschman (1970) Rusbult et al. (1988), and Warland, Herrmann, and Willits (1975). Hence, an online focus is disregarded, which is one of the reasons for the relevance of our study.

2.2 The Existing Literature of Silent Dissatisfied Customers

In this subsection, six main areas are discussed. These are; Characteristics of Loyalty, Traits of the Business, Relation with Employee, Switch of Business, Matter of Time and Customer Characteristics. In literature, scholars have depicted the same areas but with different names.

Hence, we have chosen to name these areas after the ones that are most frequently used in the literature.

Characteristics of Loyalty

Hirschman (1970) is amongst one of the early scholars who depicted loyalty as a reason for dissatisfied customers to not complain. Such behaviour is explained to occur when customers have a strong bond with a business (Rusbult et al., 1988). In fact, scholars found that loyal customers take no actions at all since they believe that the situation will improve. Moreover, Rusbult et al. (1988) explain loyalty to be a passive-constructive behaviour. This view has been further researched by Rusbult, Zembrodt and Gunn (1982), who extended the view on loyalty, where customers are explained to resolve a problem passively by ignoring it through loyalty or neglect. Withey and Cooper (1989) explain neglect as a psychological withdrawal effect where the customer is unwilling to communicate dissatisfaction and is apathetic towards the relationship. The customer accepts that the situation will not become better in the neglection state, which is what keeps neglect apart from loyalty (Withey & Cooper, 1989). At the same time, loyal customers are unwilling to jeopardise their relationship with a business, which is a reason for customers to not complain (Mittal, Huppertz, & Khare, 2008). However, Voorhees, Brady and Horowitz (2006) argue that solely 1.36 percent of loyal customers remain silent when they become dissatisfied. This type of customer is illustrated to become less loyal in Fornell and Wernerfelts' (1987) research. However, the likelihood for repurchases from the specific brand still exists (Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987).

Another finding concerning loyalty was made by Namkung, Jang, and Choi (2010). This study created a loyalty matrix of the degree of loyalty and the degree of propensity for customers to complain within the restaurant industry. The findings from this research depicts that the silent potential customer, as the three scholars refer it, are explained to have a low loyalty and a low probability to complain. Another type of customer that was identified in the same research is the silent supporter. The silent supporter is not likely to complain after a failure due to a degree of loyalty. This type of customer is loyal due to previous positive experiences with the business. Moreover, the degree of dissatisfaction does not make customers more or less likely to complain (Namkung, Jang, & Choi, 2010). While, another research reveals that customers income indicates whether a customer remains a loyal non-complainer. Hence, customers with an income of $36 000 - $75 000 are more likely to not complain according to Ro and Mattila (2015). Therefore,

employees shall not ignore loyal customers (Namkung, Jang, & Choi, 2010), and customers should be rewarded if they provide constructive feedback to reinforce them to complain.

The relationship between a customer and the business affects customers' reactions to failures (Magnini et al., 2007). Researchers explain such relationships with social and emotional bonds between the customer and the business (Evanschitzky, Brock & Blut, 2011). Furthermore, customers with a social and emotional bond to a business are less likely to complain when a failure occurs (Priluck & Wisenblit, 2009). An explanation to this behaviour is due to the fear of negative consequences for the customer's relationship with the business (Mittal, Huppertz & Khare, 2008). Moreover, loyal customers are less dissatisfied when a failure occurs, whilst low loyalty customers, on the other hand, are less likely to complain (Namkung, Jang, & Choi, 2010). Emotionally bonded customers tend to forgive failures by businesses, which is viewed as a loyal response where the business is given another chance (Ro & Mattila, 2015).

Traits of the Business

Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006) study depicts that organisation-initiated recovery is a reason for customers to not complain, which was indicated by 15.60 percent of the respondents in the research. Hence, customers cannot complain since businesses act before. Such businesses have offered the customers more than what they paid for and/or charged less for the service or product. Thus, the situation that created a dissatisfied customer becomes solved (Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz, 2006). Although, some businesses are perceived by customers to have a lack of responsiveness, which make customers become non-complainers (Voorhees, Brady, & Horowitz, 2006). This reason is explained to be the second most common reason for customers to not complain. The study demonstrates that the perceived responsiveness influenced 19.70 percent of the respondents to not complain. Customers' reasons for not complaining are due to being unable to complain to staff, with other words, the lack of employees to complain to, ignorant employees, and lack of managers' presence (Voorhees, Brady, & Horowitz, 2006). On the other hand, dissatisfied customers tend to be more forgiving if failures occur outside of the businesses' control (Magnini et al., 2007). Hence, it is vital for customers that the business provides transparency. That is, since customers become less dissatisfied if they have low expectations of the failure to re-occur (Magnini et al., 2007).

Relation with Employee

Some customers develop ties with a business' staff (Mittal, Huppertz, & Khare, 2008). An illustration is that a customer has a stronger tie with an employee that the customer sees on a regular basis, than with an employee that the customer only sees at certain occasions. Hence, customers are less likely to complain in a situation when the tie between the customer and the employee is strong. Then, customers are more hesitant to complain, since the customers themselves may be more affected by the complaints (Mittal, Huppertz & Khare, 2008). Priluck and Wisenblit (2009) also discuss this reason, but call it relational history. These customers that are explained to have a relational history with a particular person at a specific business are more likely to disregard poor performances (when the person is to blame). Additionally, Priluck and Wisenblit (2009) explain that customers who have a relationship with an employee at a business are less dissatisfied and remain loyal. Such customers are less likely to create negative word-of-mouth (WOM) even when the employees may have been able to prevent a failure. Moreover, the relationship plays a higher role in order to decrease negative effects when failures occur (Priluck & Wisenblit, 2009).

Switch of Business

Hirschman (1970) illustrated exit as a reason for customers to not complain after a failure. The means that dissatisfied customers stop buying from the business. Hirschman (1970) continues to explain that the result of the exit option is a decrease in revenues and drop in membership among customers. Consequently, managers are forced "to search for ways and means to correct whatever faults have led to exit" (Hirschman, 1970, p.4). Two scholars that have elaborated on the concept are Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987) who developed a model. Exit was concluded to be a dominant response among dissatisfied non-complaining customers, especially for businesses in a competitive environment. Furthermore, Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987) describe that exit is a form of escape from an unpleasant situation and customers that exit also switch brands or stop buying from the business. Moreover, Chebat, Davidow, and Codjovi (2005) explain that emotions indicate if customers switch or not. Such behaviour is referred to as redress-seeking, which moderates the extent of customers complains. Customers' emotions should be further looked into for businesses to discover which customers that are less likely to complain. For instance, emotions as anger have a direct affect on complaining behaviour, where redress-seeking propensity moderates the effect of such emotions. This means that a low level of redress-seeking affects customers to complain less (Chebat, Davidow, & Codjovi, 2005). An opportunity is created for businesses if they know what encourages customers to complain. That makes

businesses able to establish procedures and policies to boost customers to complain. Therefore, scholars have identified that improved customer employee training is required in physical stores to pay attention to customers' emotions (Chebat, Davidow & Codjovi, 2005). Respondents in another research by Voorhees, Brady and Horowitz (2006) decided to not complain due to negative experiences, which made them cut the relation with the business. The scholars call such behaviour taken by dissatisfied customers for *alternative action*. These customers are not dependent on the specific business since they are provided with other alternatives. Illustrations of this is when failures have occurred at a restaurant on a holiday, or simply because other businesses provide similar or even the same products. However, the alternative action is demonstrated to be the least common reason for customers to not complain, yet a reason to why customers choose to not complain. Thus, 12.20 percent of the respondents that participated in Voorhees, Brady, & Horowitzs' study (2006) do not complain.

Matter of Time

Singh (1990) explains that episode-specific characteristics help to understand complaining behaviour. The episode-specific characteristics that affects whether a customer complains or not are; cost/benefit evaluation, attributions of blame, and probability of successful redress. Additionally, the type of product or service matters if a customer becomes dissatisfied. Singh (1990) even suggest for future research to profile these episode-specific characteristic in order to utilise more variables. Two other episode based reasons for customers to not complain are time and effort, which are the main reasons if a complaint occur or not (Voorhees, Brady, & Horowitz, 2006). In fact, the study illustrates that these reasons make 21 percent of the respondents unwilling to complain about a failure. Explanations for this is due to lack of time, unwillingness to spend extra time, the time to replace a product, and hassle (Voorhees, Brady, & Horowitz, 2006). Furthermore, respondents in another study choose to not complain for a similar reason, which is when they realised the failure a while after. That made the non-complainers feel that a complaint becomes irrelevant because they have missed the moment and due to the time it takes to go back. Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006) categorised such action and called it miscellaneous. The study demonstrates that 14.30 percent of the respondents choose to not complain due to this reason.

Customer Characteristics

Warland, Herrmann, and Willits (1975) conducted a study of different response styles among consumers that had at some point become dissatisfied. One of these response styles was

consumers that were dissatisfied but did not take any action, the Upset-No Action group, Warland, Herrmann, and Willits (1975) found several characteristics for dissatisfied consumers that did not take any action, such as having a lower income and being less educated than consumers that did take action. Later on, Singh (1990) identified four clusters, where one is called *passives,* which refers to customers that are dissatisfied but do not complain. Passives are customers that are less alienated from the marketplace, and have a less positive attitude to complain due to social benefits and personal norms. Singh (1990) found that demographic characteristics such as income, profession and education, did not affect consumers' intention to not complain. Moreover, Singh (1990) questions the usefulness and profiling customers into different demographics. Another research by Mittal, Huppertz and Khare (2008) ourlines information control to be a person's degree of managing social exchange to exert control over quality and quantity. This control is gained by actions to ask for information, to seek clarifications and to withhold relevant information for the exchange. Moreover, customers that are educated and have higher incomes are more actively searching for information than those who are less educated and with less income. Therefore, customers with a lower information control are less likely to complain than the ones with higher information control. This means that education is a factor that matters in customers' intention to complain (Mittal, Huppertz & Khare, 2008).

Warland, Herrmann and Willits (1975) describe the Upset-No Action group that they often do not know what to do when becoming dissatisfied. This is due to lack of knowledge, lack of experience or that they had a fatalistic attitude, meaning that the consumer believed that the dissatisfied situation was meant to happen to them (Warland, Herrmann & Willits, 1975). Singh (1990) found that self-confidence and assertiveness impact consumers complaining behaviour, meaning that consumers that have not complained before are less likely to complain. Singh (1990) states that complaining provides consumers with self-confidence and a positive attitude towards complaining. Also, age is a factor found to impact customers' intention to complain, where non-complaining customers tend to be younger (Singh, 1990). Moreover, Voorhees, Brady and Horowitz (2006) found that the third most common reason for customers to not complain is due to their personality. This means that the reasons for the respondents to not complain are due to empathy for the service provider, which in the study's case, was a waitress. Also, some feel sorry for employees or simply since the respondents know how a certain industry is like due to previous work experiences (Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz, 2006).

2.3 Overview of the Reasons in an Offline Context

In Table 1 is an overview of the literature review presented. The table is divided into *area*, *author* and *reasons for dissatisfied customers to not complain*. The *area* concerns the different categories presented in the literature review, *author* illustrates what scholars and in what years different research has been conducted. The last category *reasons for dissatisfied customers to not complain* depicts scholars' findings.

Table 1. Illustration of customers' reasons to not complain in a traditional setting.

AREA	AUTHOR	REASONS FOR DISSATISFIED CUSTOMERS TO NOT COMPLAIN
CHARACTERISTICS OF LOYALTY	Hirschman (1970)	• Loyalty to a business.
	Rusbult, Zembrodt & Gunn (1982)	• Ignoring the situation due to loyalty or neglect.
	Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers & Mainous (1988)	• Strong bonds to a business, believe that the situation will improve itself.
	Withey & Cooper (1989)	• Unwilling to communicate dissatisfaction due to a neglecting state in the relation to the business.
	Mittal, Huppertz & Khare (2008)	• Unwilling to jeopardize their relationship with a business. • Fear of negative consequences in the relationship with a business.
	Evanschitzky, Brock & Blut (2011)	• Social and emotional bonds to a business.
	Ro & Mattila (2015)	• The income is an indication for loyal customers.
TRAITS OF THE BUSINESS	Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz (2006)	• Due to an organisation-inaction recovery (the business reacts before the customer has complained). • Customers' perception of lack of responsiveness • Lack of managers/employees (or ignorant employees) to complain to.
	Magnini, Ford, Markowski & Honeycutt (2007)	• If the occurrence happens outside of businesses control. • Transparency of the failure.
RELATION WITH EMPLOYEE	Mittal, Huppertz & Khare (2008)	• When the tie between the customer and the employee is strong.
	Priluck & Wisenblit (2009)	• Relational history with a particular employee.

SWITCH OF BUSINESS	Hirschman (1970)	• Exit and stop buying from a business.
	Fornell & Wernerfelt (1987)	• Exit and stop buying from a business in a competitive environment.
	Chebat, Davidow, & Codjovi (2005)	• Redress-seeking (emotions) indicates if customers switch or not.
	Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz (2006)	• Customers provided with alternative actions cut the relation with the business.
MATTER OF TIME	Singh (1990)	• Episode-specific characteristics as; cost/benefit evaluation, attributions of blame, probability of successful redress.
	Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz (2006)	• Episode-based reasons such as time and efforts.
	Brady & Horowitz (2006)	• Due to miscellaneous, meaning customer has realised the failure after a while and it becomes irrelevant to complain.
CUSTOMER CHARACTERISTICS	Warland, Herrmann & Willits (1975)	• Customer's characteristics such as; lower income and less education. • Due to lack of knowledge. • Due to lack of experience. • The dissatisfied situation was meant to happen (fatalistic attitude).
	Singh (1990)	• Customers are passive due to social benefits and personal norms. • Low self-confidence, assertiveness and young customers.
	Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz (2006)	• Empathy and previous work-experience (personality).
	Mittal, Huppertz & Khare (2008)	• Degree of managing social exchange to exert controls over quality and quantity (informational control).

3. METHODOLOGY

This section provides argumentation about our methodological choices. The chapter begins with our views on the philosophical orientation. Thereafter, a qualitative approach is applied to explore customers' situations to not complain to online businesses. The chapter continues with arguments to the choices of the exploratory approach consisting of a case study, focus groups and interviews. Moreover, empirical data is analysed by means of grounded theory. Additionally, our considerations concerning social and ethical issues are portrayed.

3.1 Philosophical Orientation

We agree with Berger and Luckmann (1991) who state that constructionism views reality as being socially constructed and produced through interaction. Thus, we believe silent dissatisfied customers take part in the creation of reality and are constantly constructing the view of reality as well as being. Furthermore, brands are eminent examples concerning customers' symbolic interaction, and as mentioned earlier Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) brands exist in the minds of customers. Hence, this study has chosen the constructive approach since a customer perspective was taken. Bryman and Bell (2011) describe the constructive approach as a part of the ontological orientation, which is the understanding of reality and being. As our objective is to understand the silent dissatisfied customers, we aim to interpret the subject from our respondents' view of the social world. Hence, we chose an interpretative approach concerning our epistemological orientation. Interpretivism was chosen to understand what situations make the respondents remain silent when a failure has occurred. Such behaviour is down to the individuals' own situation, thus we believe the truth lies with the respondents, since dissatisfaction occurs within the individual. Bryman and Bell (2011) explain the production of knowledge as the view of an interpretative approach where individuals together with their institutions construct reality and meaning.

3.2 Research Strategy

In this study, we used elements of both a deductive and an inductive approach. We found a deductive approach necessary since we went through the existing literature of silent dissatisfied customers in the collection of theory. This was performed to obtain existing knowledge within the field of the traditional offline-setting. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) argue that theory is the foundation for research in the deductive approach. However, the subject is rather unexplored in an online context and we also wanted to be open for new theory to emerge. Hence, an inductive approach was also used and according to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005), the inductive

approach derives conclusions on empirical findings where theory is the outcome. We believed that the two approaches, inductive and deductive, create an understanding of dissatisfied silent customers. Also, Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) further argue that the inductive and deductive approaches involve certain elements of one another.

We deemed the qualitative strategy as appropriate since the study sought to obtain depth in the collection of data. This strategy was implemented by considering the study's aim, as well as the constructive and interpretive approaches. With a qualitative strategy, Bryman and Bell (2011) mean that words, rather than numbers, should be emphasised to go deep into the object of study. Moreover, Robson (2011) describes that a qualitative strategy emphasises individuals' interpretation of a phenomenon, which was inline with our interpretative approach. The strategy enabled us to understand our respondents' own view in their context, which was pertinent since our respondents' situations were subjective. Consistently, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) state that qualitative strategy enables for insight into a subject. The inductive approach enabled for us to fulfil our exploratory purpose and Robson (2011) explains that qualitative data serves as a base for theory to emerge.

3.3 Research Design

As the field of silent dissatisfied customer in an online context is rather unexplored, we choose an exploratory approach to our research. Bryman and Bell (2011) state that an exploratory approach is appropriate in unexplored circumstances. Thus, according to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005), exploratory is of advantage when a subject is poorly understood. Furthermore, this approach enabled us to generate theory and contributed with a deep understanding of the phenomenon. According to Aaker, Kumar, Day, and Leone (2010), an exploratory approach provides high flexibility and freedom in the collection of data. Hence, this enabled us to obtain deep and rich data.

As research design, we have chosen a case study that enabled us to focus on silent dissatisfied customers. Furthermore, the case study provided a detailed exploration of customers. Arguably, the lack of theory in an online context stressed the importance to open up and deepen the knowledge of customers' own perspectives. To deepen the knowledge is relevant, according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), in order to grasp the complexity and distinctive nature of an unexplored topic. Additionally, our focus on one phenomenon created an extended

understanding. Also, such focus added an in-depth exploration to the current literature and functions as a base for future studies.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

For this study, we used primary data, meaning that the data was gathered directly from our respondents where questions were asked in connection to the study's aim. Consistent with Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012), primary data enables researchers to obtain relevant material in-line with the objectives set forth. Moreover, the choice of primary data collection was directed from the previous choices discussed, to explore the phenomenon to obtain qualitative data. Primary data is deemed by Bryman and Bell (2011) to be appropriate when there is a lack of theory. In order to make this study manageable, a sample was used to represent the whole population. Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) explain that including every unit in a whole population is neither possible nor controllable. Therefore, this form of sampling allowed us to involve a small set of respondents regarding reasons to remain silent when dissatisfied. There were not any criteria set for the respondents' participation. Therefore, aspects as age, gender, region of residence and occupation were not used as criterion for this study since demographics are not considered relevant for this research. However, respondents interested in our topic were primarily chosen to bring forth discussions. Bryman and Bell (2011) state that participants selected in the sample must be interested in the study's topic to obtain appropriate information. The different data collection methods used to gather primary data were focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The sampling procedure for each method is separately explained below.

3.4.1 Focus Groups

The first data collection method implemented was three focus groups, which performed a discussion. The respondents freely revealed their own dissatisfied experiences, which is why we found focus groups to be appropriate. A desire was that our focus groups would maintain discussions concerning silent dissatisfied situations. Hence, consistent with Bryman and Bells' (2011) explanation, who state that focus groups make respondents interact and jointly construct a meaning. The advantage when collecting data was that we, with the role as moderators, were able to take a step back as to not impact the discussion. We functioned as facilitators in the interactions of the groups, which was in accordance with purpose. Also, we assured that all respondents were a part of the discussion, which Kitzinger (1995) explains to be an approach to overcome the disadvantage of dominant influencers in the groups. We used focus groups as a first

step in the data collection to obtain as much data as possible, and this laid the foundation for the interviews.

The three focus groups consisted of three to four participants. In two of the focus groups, three respondents participated while four participated in the third focus group. This number of respondents in each group is considered ideal when the interest is to obtain everyone's thoughts and opinions. Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that to include a larger number of respondents is risky in the aspect of obtaining thoughts and opinions. Each focus group was offered coffee and cake to make the respondents feel comfortable and relaxed. Also, we let the respondents decide the location to make the participation convenient and to make them feel comfortable throughout the session. In addition, we created different scenarios as a base for some questions where respondents described their actions based on the scenarios. This was carried out in order to position the respondents in the shoes of a dissatisfied customer to understand their actions and reasons behind. An example of such scenario used in the focus groups was;

'You have ordered an item online worth 100 SEK. The delivery date is expected to be within five working days. You have already paid for the item, but it takes time for it to be delivered. You have now waited two weeks and you have neither got the item nor heard from the company. What would you do?'

An advantage with the scenarios was that our respondents recalled their own experiences, which were not mentioned earlier in the session. A belief was that scenario based questions eliminated the respondents' feeling of being in the focus. Hence, it made them less sensible and less aware that they attended. Furthermore, the focus groups were recorded since we did not want to disturb the discussion by taking notes. A recorder provided the possibility to be flexible throughout the group interview and enabled us to dedicate our full attention. Also, recording allowed us to listen to the discussion again where other interesting thoughts were found. In total, each focus group lasted for one hour.

The sampling procedure began with inviting one respondent per focus group in our own vicinity, hence we used convenience sampling. These three respondents were asked to invite from two to three friends per group (all respondents are found in Table 2). Therefore, snowball sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011) was used as complement. The idea with such a sampling procedure was to guarantee our respondents to feel comfortable by knowing the other respondents beforehand. This was implemented to decrease the feeling of being observed and condemnatory by other

respondents. These two sampling techniques are non-probability, which according to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) infers that not everyone in the population had an equal chance to be selected. However, our aim was not to generalise any findings, which makes the non-probability sampling technique ideal.

Table 2. Respondents in the focus groups.

Respondents Focus groups:	***Name:***	***Age:***
Respondent 1	Anna	27
Respondent 2	Dana	25
Respondent 3	Victoria	23
Respondent 4	Sofie	24
Respondent 5	Tina	24
Respondent 6	Ellie	23
Respondent 7	Alice	23
Respondent 8	Thea	27
Respondent 9	John	28
Respondent 10	Tracey	32

3.4.2 Interviews

The other primary data collection was the use of interviews. As previously mentioned, words are more relevant than numbers and measurements to understand the phenomenon studied. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012) state that interviews are a part of qualitative research. This collection of data aimed to understand what encourages customers to voice complaints to online businesses. The interview questions were based on the findings we gathered from the focus groups. Our interest was to understand the participants' view and in accordance with the following; "uncover meanings and interpretations that people attach to events" (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012, p.251). Furthermore, we wanted to understand underlying reasons for how to encourage customers to voice their opinions, which Aaker et al. (2010) mean that interviews bring forward. The questions in the interviews were semi-structured, which according to Bryman and Bell (2011) provides freedom to include follow-up questions throughout the session. We view the semi-structured process as suitable for this study considering our exploratory purpose in order to obtain deep answers. This process is also claimed to be appropriate in exploratory studies according to Aaker et al. (2010).

The respondents selected for the interviews were based on our judgement, since availability and accessibility were important to conduct this study. Thus, convenience sampling was used in the selection of respondents (Robson, 2011). This was considered as appropriate to obtain a deep

understanding of the non-complaining customers through obtaining in-depth data. The amount of interviews was based on theoretical saturation, which Bryman and Bell (2011) describe as the point when a pattern emerge in the collected material and another interview was considered unnecessary. However, there was a risk that we would not reach theoretical saturation due to time constrains. Therefore, a maximum of twenty respondents were set in advance, which meant that more interviews might have been needed. Inversely, we were open to acknowledge if theoretical saturation was reached before interviewing twenty respondents. We reached theoretical saturation after interviewing nineteen respondents, which are found in Table 3. When we reached this state, another interview was considered superfluous and would not contribute with any new data. Each interview was conducted in person and lasted from five to ten minutes.

Table 3. Respondents of the interviews.

Respondents interviews:	***Name:***	***Age:***
Respondent 1	Mats	55
Respondent 2	Robin	28
Respondent 3	Lilly	56
Respondent 4	James	25
Respondent 5	Kajsa	23
Respondent 6	Caroline	27
Respondent 7	Lisa	30
Respondent 8	Jennifer	26
Respondent 9	Emelie	24
Respondent 10	Linda	28
Respondent 11	Lisette	24
Respondent 12	Emma	25
Respondent 13	Michaela	20
Respondent 14	Richard	21
Respondent 15	Malin	24
Respondent 16	Moa	23
Respondent 17	Johan	28
Respondent 18	Niklas	24
Respondent 19	Amanda	23

3.5 Method for Data Analysis

The first part of the data collection was the implementation of focus groups. The process aimed to understand customers' reasons and situations when they remain silent dissatisfied. The transcripts from the focus groups were analysed in different steps, which are illustrated in Figure 1. Firstly, we read through the 42 pages of transcripts and extracted interesting quotes describing situations and reasons for why the respondents remained silent (Step A in Figure 1). When the first order concept process was executed, the quotes generated 14 different segments (Step B in Figure 1), by segment we mean a group of quotes with similar meanings. Hence, similar quotes were grouped together and created one segment. We used coding for the second order concept since it

enabled us to shape and label our own codes (Step C in Figure 1). The codes were labelled with the respondents' own words, which Bryman and Bell (2011) refer to as in vivo codes. Furthermore, the coding process is an aspect of grounded theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, the process proceeded through combining the 14 segments and resulted in seven codes (Step D in Figure 1). Bryman and Bell (2011) explain coding as "the key process in grounded theory, whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names" (p.577). Additionally we wanted to obtain some kind of pattern and structure in the collected material, which Christensen, Engdahl, Grääs, and Haglund (2010) mean that coding will constitute the base for. In the final step, codes were aggregated and created four final themes (Step E in Figure 1). The themes emerged based on the frequency of the occurrence in the collected material, thus respondents' words shaped the themes. The procedure of theming the material emulates what Bryman and Bell (2011) refer to as thematic analysis. Moreover, the final themes illustrated silent customers' reasons to not complain and were analysed in detail to put the reasons into situations. Hence, these steps lay the foundation for creating a typology of four situations when customers remain silent dissatisfied.

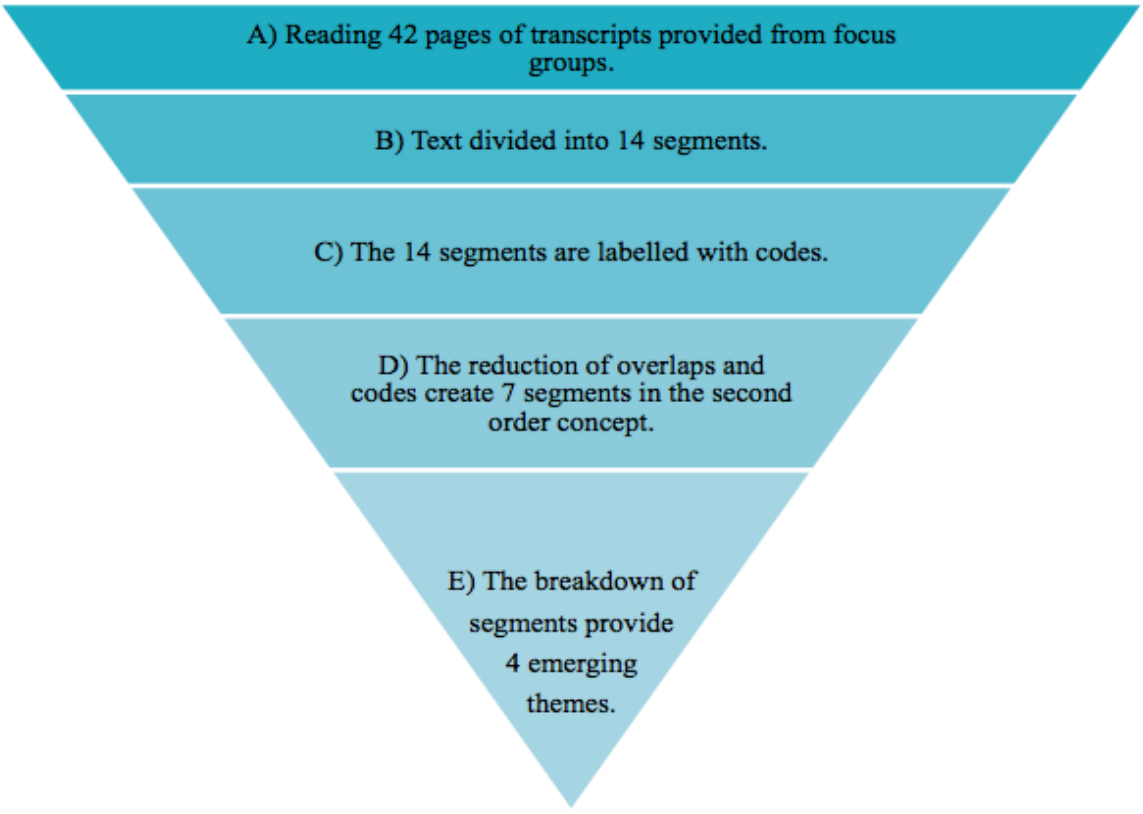

Figure 1. The process of data analysis.

The second part of the data collection was semi-structured interviews with the aim to understand what encourages silent dissatisfied customers. The analysis of interviews emphasised practical suggestions of how online businesses should encourage customers to complain. Hence, the analysis process was less comprehensive than the focus groups. Similar to the focus groups, the transcripts were first read through and then we extracted interesting quotes concerning encouragement. The quotes were placed into six different segments that were labelled with suitable codes. Thus, the use of quotes is referred to as in vivo coding (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Also, we wanted to obtain structure of the interview material, which Christensen et al. (2010) suggest to be gained through coding. The second step of this analysis consisted of coding the quotes and generating concepts, by concept we mean the emerged areas when customers are encouraged. Thus, the segments were aggregated into three concepts, which illustrated what encourages customers to complain. Conceptualisation is explained by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson (2012) to be the stage where significant concepts are developed in order to understand the material, and therefore, the concepts were based on codes. We analysed the material and discovered links to the situations created from the focus groups.

3.6 Social and Ethical Issues

The aspect regarding social and ethical considerations was vital for us throughout the whole process. The chosen topic, dissatisfied customers, was considered as an inoffensive research for participants to be a part of. Hence, the research was carried out all respondents in this paper were asked they wished to participate. Moreover, the ones who chose to participate in this paper were provided an explanation of the research and informed that the session was recorded. In this way, all participants were able to make an informed decision about their participation (Christensen et al., 2010). In accordance with Bryman and Bell (2011), the respondents were declared to stop their contribution at any time throughout the session. Respondents from the focus groups contributed to the discussion when they wanted, whilst the respondents from the interviews were able to decline questions that were perceived as invasive. Our view of deception is crucial to minimise, which is why all sessions were recorded. However, such an act is not adequate by itself, which is why the respondents had the chance to listen to the recordings and read the transcription. These acts are believed to make us represent the respondents correctly where Bryman and Bell (2011) explain that one shall weigh the gains against the costs in human dignity.

3.7 Overview of the Methodology

Table 4 below illustrates an overview of the different methodological choices that we have selected and discussed in this chapter.

Table 4. Overview of the Methods Selected.

Philosophical Orientation • Social Constructionism • Interpretative Approach
Research Strategy • Elements of Inductive and Deductive • Qualitative Strategy
Research Design • Explorative Approach • Case Study
Data Collection Methods • Primary Data • Focus Groups *Convenient and Snowball Sampling* • Semi-structured Interviews *Convenient Sampling*
Method for Data Analysis • Grounded Theory • Segmenting text • In Vivo Coding • Theming • Typology

4. EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

This chapter provides a detailed account of the material obtained from the focus groups. The material consists of three steps that depict how the four themes emerged. Also, the material from the interviews is demonstrated, which illustrates the three concepts that emerged.

4.1 Presentation of Focus Group Material

The transcriptions of the focus groups were created after the collection of data. Hence, this section intended to find out why customers do not complain in an online context. The first step in this process was to divide the text into segments consisting of quotes, which are depicted in subsection 4.1.1. In the second step, depicted in subsection 4.1.2, segments that are similar or overlap with each other were combined in order to create codes. In the third step, presented in subsection 4.1.3, different themes emerged through aggregating of the codes.

4.1.1 Transcript Divided into Segments

Table 5 is a simple version of the empirical data that was first implemented. This was the first order concept where quotes describing the phenomenon were segmented. The first step generated 14 segments, which are illustrated with one quote each in Table 5. Hence, the full version of all quotes are found in Appendix A; Focus Groups - First Order Concept.

Table 5. First order concept - quotes segmented.

Segments	Quotes from the focus groups
Energy	"Because you don't have the energy I think. You are already angry, which makes it easier to forget about it instead of reminding yourself even more. Then you have to spend more time on it"
Hassle	"I skip returning it because that's the hassle"
Time	"The procedure online might take a while and be dreadful"
Previous experiences	"I got bad customer service at some point, so I would never buy from them again"
Everyone knows it's wrong	"It's easier to say something if it's obvious that it has been done wrong, like everyone knows it's wrong"
Blame yourself	"When you order online, it is more of a blame yourself thing"
Nothing out from it	"They will not listen to me anyway so why should I spend time to write down and complain to them when I probably will not get anything out of it"

Informed	"I would also go into my order, I mean often it's possible to check order statuses to see how it looks"
Degree of dissatisfaction	"It depends on how bad it is and how disappointed you get in the particular situation"
Price, energy and procedure	"I mean, to contact Ryanair and complain when they have been late then I think; I spent like 150 SEK on the flight ticket. Is it really worth the trouble and effort to contact them and complain when they've been late?"
The feeling of bothering the business	"I didn't contact the company about the clothing that broke when I tried it on for the first time, because I didn't want to be annoying"
Online Business acts on own initiatives	"I didn't even contact them about it, this all happened automatically since they were aware of the volcano-problem"
The tiny customer against the powerful business	"Yeah really, but this isn't something that I would contact H&M about and tell them, because again they are a really big chain"
Stop purchase	"But it's ugly that companies charge for it. I think maybe you decide to stay away from such company. Then you rather pick another store where they don't charge you for returning it"

4.1.2 The Reduction of Segments and Codes Created

The different created segments from the first order concept were, in the second order concept, combined into seven different codes. Each code is separately explained below with quotes from our respondents. Hence, each quote is displayed together with the respondent's name as well as their age. A full table with all of the quotes from the second order concept is found in Appendix B; Focus Groups - Second Order Concept.

Code; Energy and Time

The segments *Energy* and *Time* were added together into one code (*Energy and Time*). The tendency among our respondents was that they choose to not complain due to absence of energy, which also was linked with their time. The following quote depicts the reason for a respondent to not complain; *"The thing is that people are too comfortable, I mean if I got a note where they asked me to evaluate the situation. Then I maybe...maybe would have done it. But I can't say for certain. But it would probably have a higher likelihood"* (Thea, 27). An assumption is that the respondents choose to not complain due to being comfortable, which Thea (27) also stated;

"You're too comfortable, that's why you don't complain". Furthermore, respondents stated; *"I don't have the energy"* (Dana, 25) and *"I believe it's laziness"* (Victoria, 23). Additionally, Alice (23) provided a further evaluated insight to this; *"Because you don't have the energy, which makes it easier to forget about it instead of reminding yourself even more. Then you have to spend more time on it".* Another comment, which might be closely associated to energy was the following; *"The procedure online might take a while and be dreadful"* (Dana, 25).

Thereafter, respondents said; *"It takes time"* (Victoria, 23) and *"Offline is managed really quickly, but online...yuck"* (Anna, 27). Moreover, Thea (27) added; *"Because it takes so much time to go somewhere to print the return form and then send it back. That's smart of them"*, which demonstrated that energy and time are reasons that make respondents keep orders that they are dissatisfied with. Also, Thea (27) commented; *"It was not our first priority to write to them and complain to get money from them and explain about the incident"*, which might be an indication that energy and time are reasons to not forward complaints.

Code; Hassle

The segment *Hassle* and a part of the segment *Stop Purchase* created a new code (*Hassle*). The respondents indicated that they find complaints to be difficult to forward by the following statements; *"I skip returning it because that's a hassle"* (Victoria, 23),*"It's a process to complain"* (Anna, 27) and *"go through the trouble to send it back"* (Victoria, 23). By this, respondents illustrate that complaints might be problematic to declare. Others comments that took place were; *"I don't know how to send things back"* (Anna, 27) and *"it is hassle to send them back"* (Tracey, 32). Demonstrating that the respondents simply did not know how to return orders, which might make them avoid such situations. Another respondent evaluated on this thought in the following way; *"It's difficult to know if another size would fit so it's a lot of hassle if they don't, but it depends on how much you like them if you know that the next pair will fit"* (Sofie, 24). Another respondent said; *"Well, I also skip returning it, because that is the hassle and then I rather have the clothes in my closet"* (Tracey, 32). Illustrating that respondents experience returns to be difficult and they spare themselves the trouble by not returning orders.

Code; Dissatisfied Experiences and Expectations

The two segments *Previous Experiences* and *Degree of Dissatisfaction* created a new code (*Dissatisfied Experiences and Expectations*). The lack of complaints, in some situations, might be due to previous experiences. One respondent illustrates that in this way; *"I have never thought*

about complaining to H&M about charges for their shipping costs, even if I think that they shouldn't" (Anna, 27). Another respondent exemplified similar behaviour and stated; *"Also, I expect some of the things I order to not be good, so I rather make a large order so that I can try many things and then send back the ones I don't like"* (Sofie, 24). This demonstrates that the respondents expect dissatisfaction to occur, which tends to make them act in accordance. Hence, an assumption is that they do not complain since the dissatisfied feeling is not new to them. John (28) provided more insight to such situation in the following way; *"When you get denied in a situation where you know you are right"*. Thea (27) illustrated how she gained the following expectation from past experiences; "*I always think like, if they say it takes 5 days, then I add a couple of days since I never get it on time anyway. I add like 3 days"*.

Code; Uncertainty

The two segments *Blame Yourself* and *Everyone Knows it's Wrong* were viewed to overlap each other, which is why they were put together as a new code (*Uncertainty*). Dana (25) stated *"When you order online, it is more of a blame yourself thing, because you never know what it will look like in real life when you put the clothes on",* which might be an indication that some respondents accuse themselves when certain failures occur. Moreover, the following quotes; *"When it is wrong sizes and such things, then it is your own fault"* (Victoria, 23) and *"this situation with the bag was more of a thing that I can blame myself"* (Victoria, 23), seems to demonstrate a certain degree of guilt. Another reason might be illustrated in this quote; *"It's easier to say something if it's obvious that it has been done wrong, like everyone knows it's wrong"* (Tina, 24). Hence, an assumption is that some respondents are, in some cases, uncertain concerning when they are able to forward complaints.

Code; Price, Energy and Procedure

The segments; *Stop Purchase, Price, Energy and Procedure*, and *Nothing Out From it* were added together to a new code (*Price, Energy and Procedure*). Hence, some respondents seemed to be unwilling to contact online businesses to complain due to the price of the product in relation to the procedure. The following quote depicts this; *"I mean, to contact Ryanair and complain when they have been late then I think; I spent like 150 SEK on the flight ticket. Is it really worth the trouble and effort to contact them and complain when they've been late?"* (Anna, 27). Thus, the cost spent illustrates to be taken into account whether complaints are forwarded or not. John (28) expressed his opinion concerning another cost expense, returning costs; *"It's ugly that companies charge for it. I think maybe you decide to stay away from such company. Then you*

rather pick another store where they don't charge you for returning it". Alice (24) stated the following in the same context; *"I rather keep them and lose 300 SEK with the thought that they might suit sometime in the future".* Meaning, some respondents were willing to keep an order that did not fit rather than paying for the return. Also, the perceived importance of an order seems to be a reason if a customer stays silent or not. Thea (27) demonstrated in her focus group the following*; "It depends on the product, for instance, if it was a facial mask, then I'd have talked to the company, because I need it. Though, I wouldn't care if it was a funny thing or something I wanted for the moment".*

Some of the respondents expressed that complaints do not make any difference, hence do not generate to anything good. Following opinions were stated; *"It wouldn't make any difference to complain"* (Victoria, 23), *"It feels like I will not get anything out of it and they will not listen to me anyway so why should I spend time to complain to them?"* (Thea, 27), and John (28) continued; *"You want your complaint to result in something, but if you feel it won't bring any advantage then it doesn't matter".* An indication is that the respondents want complaints to generate into something.

Code; Online Business' Actions

The two segments *Online Business Acts on Own Initiatives* and *Informed* were added together as one code (*Online Business' Actions*). *"I didn't even contact them about it, this happened automatically because they were aware of the volcano-problem"* stated Anna (27) and described a situation when she had booked flight tickets with Ryanair, but the flight was cancelled. Also, Dana (25) stated; *"Zalando are very good at this, they sent a sticker together with the package so it was super easy for me to send it back".* In such situations, online businesses take own initiatives, hence respondents did not complain since online businesses acted before. Respondents find it hard when they are not informed about what is happening, Dana (25) said; *"I get disappointed when I don't get any information and due to this don't know what's happening".* Victoria (23) agreed; *"Yes it is hard when you don't know".* Other respondents did certain precautions to find information about online businesses, and Sofie (24) said; *"Yea Google it is good. Also, to make sure that you haven't gotten tricked by them".* Another respondent, John (28), became disappointed when a leather jacket broke, and he said; *"They said it was okay to send it back to them and I got a whole new one. So I was disappointed but then got saved, if I put it that way".* The respondents did not complain when online businesses acted on own initiatives or kept the respondents informed.

Code; Ignorant Online Business and Tiny Customer

The segments *The Tiny Customer Against the Powerful Business* and *The Feeling of Bothering the Business* were added together as one code (*Ignorant Online Business and Tiny Customer*). One respondent, Anna (27) said; *"I wouldn't contact H&M and tell them, because they are a really big chain"*. Hence, the respondents seem to not complain to online businesses that are viewed to be large and powerful. Furthermore, John (28) said the following; *"It feels like it's something in their business-deal, the more trouble for the customer the less chance that they will return the products. So you get stuck with a product that you bought online because you don't have the energy to send it back"*. Thus, some of the respondents indicated that complaints neither would make any difference nor that the online business would listen. Moreover, some respondents highlighted that one complaint would not make any difference and stated; *"It doesn't make any difference if one or two customers say anything"* (Dana, 25), and *"You turn to the company to get help, but you don't get it"* (John, 28). Therefore, some respondents in the focus groups remain silent in situations recently explained. Also, some did not complain when they believe online businesses already were aware about the issues. *"I didn't contact the company about the clothing that broke when I tried it on for the first time, because I didn't want to be annoying"* (Victoria, 23), which also John (28) claimed; *"In general I feel like I don't want to be annoying and difficult"*. Hence, the respondents felt they were annoying and difficult if they would have complained. *"I mean you never want to be a bothersome customer, because you think that the company is right and they know what they are doing, most of the times"* (Anna, 27).

4.1.3 Development of Themes

The overlapping codes created from the second order concept were combined and reduced from seven into four themes in this part of the process. The concepts were aggregated, which together created themes that illustrate a clear understanding of the silent dissatisfied customers. The whole table of this phase in the process is found in Appendix C; Focus Groups - Aggregated Concepts.

The following four themes that emerged from this process when our respondents were dissatisfied but silent are; *The Lack of Energy and Time, Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences, The Ignorance By Online Businesses,* and *Pre-emptive Actions by Online Businesses.* The code *Hassle* from the second order concept was added to the code *The Lack of Energy and Time*. Also, some parts of the code *Price, Energy and Procedure* were added to the same theme. The developed theme, *Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences,* was built on the codes *Price, Energy and Procedure* together with *Dissatisfied Experiences and*

Expectations. The third theme, *The Ignorance by Online Business* was expanded by the codes *Price, Energy and Procedure*, as well as *Uncertainty*. The final theme, *Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business* was kept the same from the second order concept in this part. A reason to why the code *Price, Energy and Procedure* was divided into three of the new themes was since the code had three directions that pointed towards the different themes, which was not discovered until this part of the process. These themes are presented in the figure 2 below and further analysed in chapter 5.

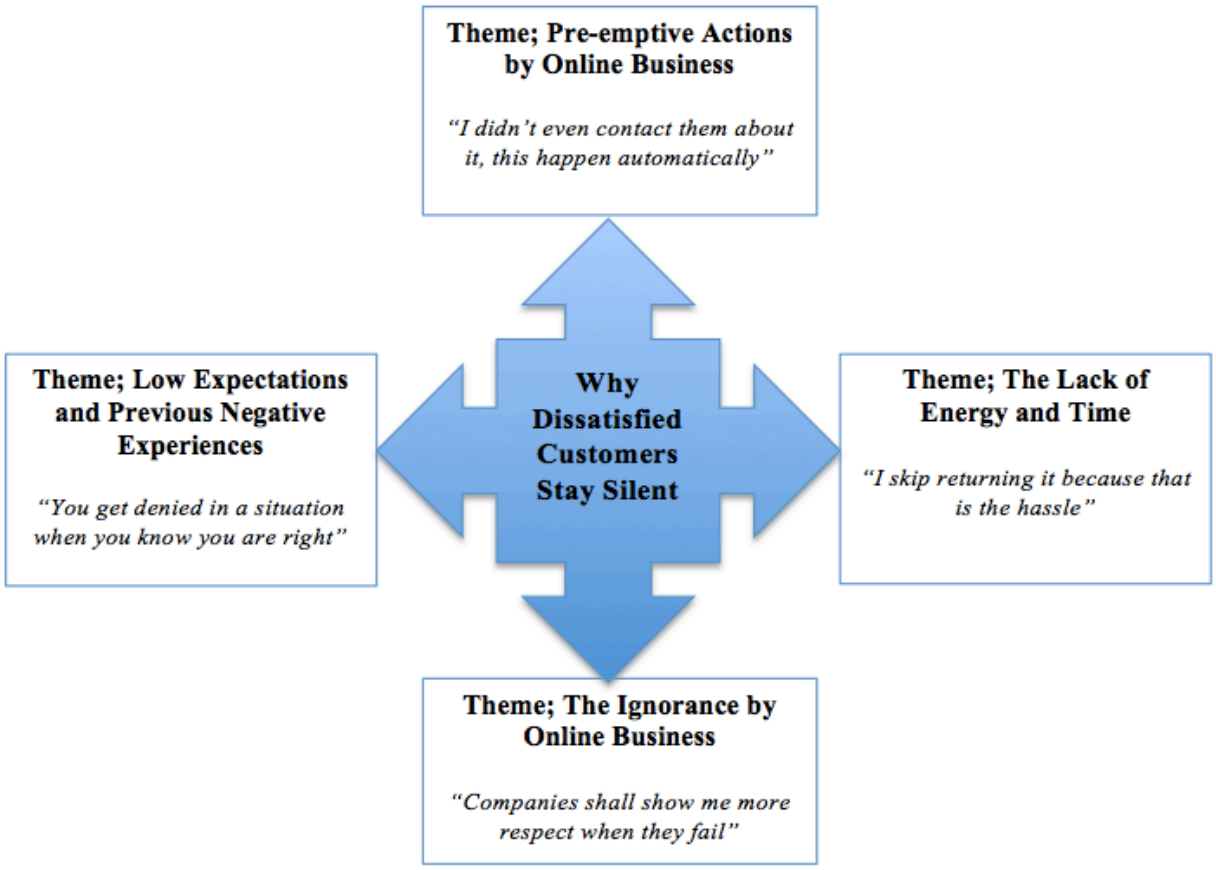

Figure 2. Why dissatisfied customers stay silent.

4.2 Presentation of Interview Material

Table 6 illustrates the concepts that emerged from the interviews. The different quotations were taken from the interview transcripts and describe what encourages the respondents to share their opinions. The quotations were firstly coded and divided into six different parts. Thereafter, the codes were aggregated into three final concepts. These concepts are; *Show Empathy*, *Make it Easy* and *Monetary Drivers*. The concepts are further analysed in chapter 5.

Table 6. Concepts of interviews.

Concept	Quotes from the interviews
Show Empathy	• "I would let the sail company know if their service was bad since I care about them and I know they listen." • "To show that the complaint made a difference." • "Sometimes I feel like businesses online don't really care about the customers." • "Companies should embrace complains and from this, tell how they can improve." • "Show that they care and answer with a personal email since often you complain on their website or through email. It shouldn't be an automatic response from the company." • "That they apologise and are accommodating." • "To be polite when customers contact them. I feel I'm an annoying customer, but if they are nice when contacting them, I believe it would be easier to contact them."
Make it Easy	• "Businesses should have an email-based customer service that replies within 24h." • "It needs to be easy to find information on their website of how one can forward the complaint and it must be easy to contact them." • "It needs to be easy to contact the company." • "I will complain if it's not too difficult to do." • "I want it to be easy to review products. There shouldn't be too many questions or become a member in order to write to them. Preferably a thumb up or down, or emoji to click on to show my experience." • "To email and ask for my opinion regarding the product and experience with the company. It must be easy." • "But it needs to be easy to forward my opinion, a short yes or no question. Or a scale 1-5. It needs to be simple, I don't want to write anything." • "I buy almost everything I need online and I think there should be easier ways to send stuff back, and also easier for the customers to comment on the product." • "It needs to be easy to complain or contact the company, preferably contact through email, I don't want to call them." • "It must be simple, they should have something on their website where you can fill in a prepared form. Or that you can call someone that can help you." • "Companies should be easy to reach/get in contact with. Maybe they can send an email after making a purchase and ask if the customer was satisfied." • "I want businesses to be helpful and have prepared forms to fill in."
Monetary Drivers	• "That they ask for my opinion through offering for instance 50 SEK in discount for my next purchase." • "Compensate me with any discount or something similar" • "In this case it would be preferable that the company would cover the cost with an agreement from the customer that if the right package would reappear that the customer would send back the unbroken package or pay for both. Understandable this is a hard situation for the company due to there is a lot of history with frauds. But it's not practical for the customer to pay twice even if it's temporary." • "One time a company offered 20 percent off my next purchase, if I wrote a review… I didn't do it though, but I think it is a good idea for companies to do." • "Offer 10 percent discount or free shipping for my next purchase."

5. ANALYSIS

The analysis is divided into three parts, where the first part analyses the four themes from the empirical investigation. These themes emerged from customers' different reasons to why they do not complain. The second part takes the themes into consideration, hence the base for the four situations when dissatisfied customers do not complain. The third part constricts what online businesses might do in order for non-complaining customers to voice their opinions.

5.1 Dissatisfied Customers' Reasons to Stay Silent

This part of the analysis outlines themes created on why dissatisfied customers stay silent. The themes are; *Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business, Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences, The Lack of Energy and Time,* and *The Ignorance by Online Business*. Each theme consists of several reasons to why customers remain silent when dissatisfied. The exploring character of the paper makes us analyse the reasons deeply in order to grasp customers' situations.

Theme; Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business

A theme that emerged in the reduction of overlaps and codes is *Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business*, which indicates that some customers experience online businesses to handle failures. Therefore, this type of customer feels that complaints are unnecessary since the situation is sorted before interacting with the online business. Illustrations are when refunds, information, and transparency are provided to customers. This is consistent with the literature where Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006) depict similar actions taken by businesses as an organisation-initiated recovery, and hence, we expected this finding. Also, the discussions provided in the focus groups reveal that customers may be dissatisfied but silent since they are aware that the online business has discovered and is solving the failure.

Moreover, some of the investigated customers demonstrate some online businesses to be pre-emptive where they for instance prepare return packages together with the order. A thought is that this type of online business accepts that dissatisfaction occurs among their customers, which is why some customers have experienced accommodating online businesses in this circumstance. Hence, some customers indicate that online businesses are transparent, which makes complaints unnecessary even when customers are dissatisfied. Additionally, this was claimed by Magnini et al. (2007) who explain that transparent businesses are vital where customers are less dissatisfied if customers sense a low probability for the failure to re-occur. Therefore, this was an expected finding due to the aspects uncovered in the literature review. This theme, from the investigated

customers' perspective, is an acceptable behaviour by online businesses. Also, customers are aware that orders online might dissatisfy them, however they overlook such dilemmas when online businesses implement pre-emptive actions.

Theme; Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences

Another theme that emerged in the reduction of overlaps and codes is *Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences.* Our investigated customers depict that previous negative experiences create low expectations for future purchases. Hence, this type of customers disregards failures to satisfy due to the frequent and common occurrence of negative experiences. An interpretation is that these customers become blind in negative experiences and choose to not complain since they are unable to see the relevance for complaints. This finding was unexpected to us and contradictive to the existing literature where Singh (1990) explains that complaints create self-confident customers, which encourage them to complain again. Although, this research demonstrates that previous negative experiences teach customers that complaints neither encourage them to complain nor generate satisfaction. An illustration is that when dissatisfaction occurs due to perceived bad quality of a product and customers expect to have the same poor quality exchanged.

Furthermore, a finding demonstrates that previous experiences where the shipping costs result in considerations of purchase by customers. An interpretation amongst the investigated customers was their dilemma of proceeding an order with the risk that return expenses are included in the worst scenario. A belief is that customers weigh pros and cons against each other when shopping online. This finding was evident, nevertheless not discovered in the process of the literature review, where a belief is that this aspect has been overlooked. Even if weighing pros and cons might be the case, customers tend to carry out orders even when they are dissatisfied with the shipping costs. Hence, our interpretation is that this scenario is an ordinary reason for customers to become dissatisfied, which makes customers unable to see shipping costs as a reason to complain. A tendency amongst some of the investigated customers is to purchase many items in the same order. A prospect is that such an act is performed by customers to guarantee satisfaction. Another finding illustrates that previous experiences concerning delayed delivery dates or conflicts with online businesses result in silent dissatisfied customers. Some investigated customers demonstrate that they protect themselves against this type of dissatisfaction by adding days to the estimated delivery date. Also, this process is implemented in order to not put themselves in situations where there exists risk of conflicts with online businesses. From our

point of view, this finding is significant since customers should not be afraid to forward their opinions. Our interpretation is that customers' negative experiences create low expectations for online businesses.

Theme; The Lack of Energy and Time

Another theme that emerged in the reduction of overlaps and codes is *The Lack of Energy and Time*. A recurring discussion from the investigated customers is the lack of energy where an interpretation is that customers are indolent in the aspect of voicing their opinions. However, this finding was not surprising since a similar discussion exists in the literature. An illustration is provided by Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006) who explain time and effort as main reasons for not complaining in a traditional setting, thus customers are unwilling to spend extra time on a failure to satisfy. Our findings clearly demonstrate that in the focus groups, that the lack of energy depends upon complex procedures for some of the customers. The finding was not surprising to us but it is significant in order to enable customers to share their opinions. Hence, the finding was consistent with Voorhees, Brady, and Horowitz (2006) who explain that customers avoid to complain in order to not expose them for hassle. An interpretation from our findings show that some of these customers face several obstacles, which makes them stay silent. An illustration of such obstacles are returns and exchanges, where customers spare themselves the time instead of satisfying the failure. The outturn in complex procedures is that customers tend to keep their orders even when they are dissatisfied. Furthermore, a repetitive discussion in the focus groups was the association of the required time to complain. An interpretation is that complaints are not highly prioritised by some customers, which is demonstrated to depend upon time consuming complaint processes. A belief is that customers decide to not complain since the complaint process takes time, hence it becomes unprioritised. An illustration is orders that are not made for any special occasion become unprioritised, thus customers have some patience in these contexts. Also, clearly demonstrated in our focus groups, is that customers do not complain if orders are perceived cheap, hence customers tend to move on without spending time and energy on the procedure.

Theme; The Ignorance by Online Business

An additional theme that emerged in the reduction and overlaps of codes is *The Ignorance by Online Business.* Our findings illustrate that some customers blame themselves in the occurrence of dissatisfaction. That was demonstrated to depend upon the fact that online businesses are intangible, where images and descriptions are, according to these customers, likely to be

misinterpreted. The tendency that customers blame themselves in these circumstances was unexpected since these items and orders are not physically accessible to customers. A belief gained from the discussions with these customers is that customers feel that they indirectly sign up for the possibility to be dissatisfied when purchasing online. Consist with existing literature, Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982) refer customers' apathetic acts to neglect where customers do not share dissatisfaction.

Another finding demonstrates that some customers are uncertain regarding when they are allowed to complain. That is explained by the investigated customers to be due to the fussy rules provided by online businesses. Hence, customers tend to not complain if the failure requires interpretations by customers. This finding was significant and unexpected where we did not discover this aspect in the literature review. The surprising part, from our point of view, is that customers become uncertain to complain due to the unclear rules when everyone has the right to forward opinions. Furthermore, another interpretation from the focus groups is that customers feel insignificant in their relation to online businesses, where they view some online businesses as powerful. These online businesses are perceived to complicate things for customers, which is believed to create uncertainty amongst customers. Some customers demonstrated that online businesses ignore them, which may be the perception of the powerful position that online businesses hold. An explanation given by one of our respondents was that one individual has nothing to remark on against large online businesses. Hence, it is likely that customers do not turn to online businesses to receive support since some online businesses are ignorant and act offensively. It was unexpected that some of the investigated customers' experienced online businesses to be ignorant since the customer has the power in the decision of where to purchase from. Another finding depicted in the discussions was the number of customers who explained that they do not complain due to careless online businesses. The perception of this creates the feeling of being annoying and difficult by some customers, which results in silent dissatisfied customers. A belief is that complaints are not forwarded since these customers believe in online businesses and that they act in accordance with the failure. It was unexpected that some customers experience the feeling of being annoying since the business' service is created in the need of customers.

5.2 Typology; Situations when Dissatisfied Customers Stay Silent

The four previously presented themes illustrate four situations when a dissatisfied customer stays silent. Hence, the creation of a typology occurred. The first theme in the creation of the typology is *Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business,* which turns into *I Never Reached the Bottom.* The second theme *Low Expectations and Previous Negative Experiences* turns into *It Occurred and it was Predicted* in the typology. A third theme, *The Lack of Energy and Time* turns into *Complexity Makes Me do Nothing***.** The fourth theme, *The Ignorance by Online Business* turns into *I Lost the Battle Before it Begun*. Furthermore, the four situations create two dimensions that construct the typology. One axis regards the feeling for the customer to have or to not have a choice, whilst the other axis concerns whether the online business is to blame or not to blame, which is illustrated below in Figure 3.

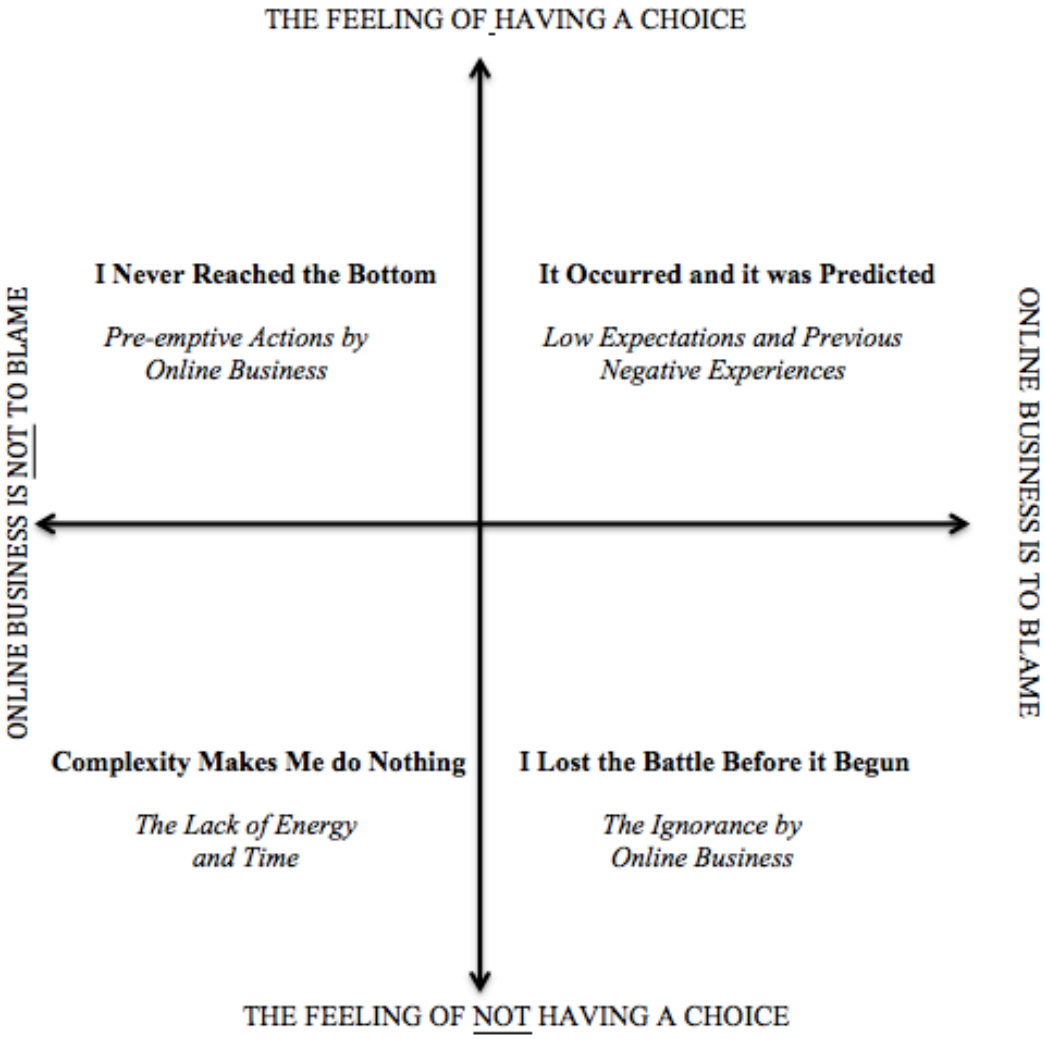

Figure 3. Typology of four different silent dissatisfied customers' situations.

I Never Reached the Bottom

This situation, illustrated in the upper left of the typology, characterises the online business' own initiative in the occurrence of failures where the customer finds complaints unnecessary to forward. Hence, the customer does not complain since the online business acts before the dissatisfied customer forwards complaints. From our point of view, the customer is rescued by the online business with different recovery processes. It is notable that the customer is still dissatisfied even though the online business takes actions. Hence, *I Never Reached the Bottom* refers to that the customer in this situation is dissatisfied but feels that the situation is not a complete disaster. Moreover, the online business is not to blame, which the typology demonstrates in the upper left. An illustration is that the online business has implemented actions to satisfy the failure, which depicts a positive performance. That is due to that the customer is less dissatisfied since some recovery actions are implemented even if the acting was not as desired in the first place. Therefore, the silence of the dissatisfied customer is down to the customer. Hence, the upper left of the typology illustrates that the customer feels that one has a choice to forward complaints yet choose to remain silent in this dissatisfied situation.

It Occurred and it was Predicted

This situation, illustrated in the upper right of the typology, characterises when the customer expects the online business to disappoint the customer before the failure has occurred. Hence, the customer does not complain since the failure is not a surprise. From our viewpoint, the customer stays silent since predictions make the customer unable to see failures. Hence, *It Occurred and it was Predicted* refers to that the customer expects dissatisfaction to occur. Furthermore, the online business is to blame in this situation, which the typology demonstrates. An explanation is that the online business has exposed the customer to negative experiences in the past. Additionally, as the typology demonstrates, the customer feels that the customer has a choice to voice complaints, but remain silent. In this situation, the silence depends upon the awareness that failures are perceived to occur. Furthermore, the dissatisfied customer remains silent due to that the blame is both the online business and the customer.

Complexity Makes Me do Nothing

This situation, illustrated in the lower left of the typology, characterises when the customer compares the failure to satisfy against the time and effort to forward complaints. Hence, the customer does not voice complaints due to the time-consuming and complex process. An assumption is that the customer becomes passive due to the frustrating situation. Hence,

Complexity Makes Me do Nothing refers to the customer who remains silent when the situation becomes difficult. In this situation, as the typology illustrates, the online business is not to blame. This depends on that the online business provides the customer one or several ways of forwarding complaints. However, the customer is not to blame for the absent complaints since the customer perceives complains difficult to forward. Hence, as the typology demonstrates, the customer experiences the feeling of not having a choice due to the complex process.

I Lost the Battle Before it Begun

This situation, illustrated in the lower right of the typology, characterises that the customer associates the online business to be powerful, which creates the feeling that the online business will not listen. Thus, complaints are not forwarded since the customer feels insignificant in the relation with the online business. An interpretation is that the customer experiences a hierarchy where the online business has the power. Hence, the situation *I Lost the Battle Before it Begun* refers to the customer who is silent due to the powerless feeling. In this situation, the online business creates a feeling that the customer is unable to forward complaints. Hence, the online business is to blame since the customer feels ignored. In this situation, the customer feels delimited in the choice to complain and accepts the failure.

5.3 How to Encourage Silent Customers to Complain

The semi-structured interviews included questions concerning what an online business might do in order to encourage customers to voice complaints. In this section, three main concepts are identified that an online business might consider. These are the following; *Show Empathy, Make it Easy, and Monetary Drivers*. Later, this section also serves as a vital input for this study's managerial implication.

Show Empathy

A concept that emerged in the reduction and overlaps of codes is *Show Empathy*. Our findings illustrate that some customers want online businesses to show empathy. This is demonstrated to depend on that some customers feel that online businesses are careless. The finding was expected based on the previous discussions from the focus groups concerning the theme *Ignorance by Online Business*. Another finding depicts that some customers wish online businesses to demonstrate personalisation. This is explained by the investigated customers to achieve the feeling of being significant. The finding was expected concerning the wish to be significant,

nevertheless personalisation was an unexpected encouragement. A belief is that personalisation results in the feeling that the online business provides attention to customers. Another finding demonstrates that some customers want online businesses to be polite when they access complaints. An interpretation is that complaints are difficult to forward where a polite manner tends to be vital for some customers. However, this was expected to be found since the focus group discussions brought attention to this subject. An account from our view is that politeness is an underestimated matter, but pertinent for the investigated customers.

Make it Easy

A concept that emerged in the reduction and overlaps of codes is *Make it Easy*. Our findings demonstrate that some of the investigated customers are encouraged to forward complaints by simplicity. This depends upon that some of the investigated customers view compliments as a rather complex process. Such a finding is expected, since customers from the focus groups clearly pointed out easiness several times. An interpretation is that some online businesses are depicted as unreachable, which is believed to depend on the chosen communication manners provided by online businesses. Another finding that was pointed out by the interviewed customers was the preference for clear information. This type of customer demonstrates a requirement for easy informative instructions. An interpretation is that some customers avoid to forward complaints in this context. Hence, a clear demonstration is that simplicity encourages customers to forward their opinions. Furthermore, the interviews indicate that time efficiency encourage customers. According to the interviewed customers, time efficient manners are obtained through asking short questions, ranking on a scale, and emoji. This finding was expected due to the discussions from the focus groups concerning the theme *Complexity Makes Me do Nothing*.

Monetary Drivers

A concept that emerged in the reduction and overlaps of codes is *Monetary Drivers*. The findings depict that the customers are encouraged to complain when monetary drivers are involved. One monetary driver that is pointed out by some customers is compensation in the occurrence of a failure. This demonstrates that a failure to satisfy is desired by customers to be on the expense of online businesses. Thus, an interpretation from this aspect is that customers experience that they need to cover unpredicted expenses. This finding was presumed, but peculiar since that is not what the customer approved. A finding from the interviews is that customers prefer free shipping cost. That is also an evident aspect from the focus groups, who demonstrated dissatisfaction due

to shipping costs. An assumption is that free shipping encourages customers to share their opinions together with returns. Nevertheless, the investigated customers from focus groups claimed that they, at some points, did not return orders when shipping costs exist. Such illustration is unexpected, were dissatisfied orders are solely kept due to the shipping costs. Vouchers and discounts are two other monetary drivers that encourage customers to share their opinions with online businesses. The assumption is that some customers are willing to share opinions when they receive monetary rewards in return. This finding might go together with the theme *The Lack of Energy and Time*, where customers reconsider their time and energy if monetary drivers are involved.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section begins with a discussion and conclusion that illustrates reflections of significant findings from the analysis. Unwritten rules and powerful businesses are, amongst others, some of the findings reflected upon. Furthermore, the phenomenon demonstrates that silence occurs in the situation when the business is to blame, when the customer chooses to not complain, or a combination of both. Also, theoretical and managerial implications provide useful information for literature and online businesses. This chapter ends with this study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

This study's purpose is to explore the phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context. A use of two research questions was implemented, where the first question concerns why dissatisfied customers stay silent in an online context. The literature mentions several reasons when dissatisfied customers are silent in the context of physical stores. Hence, a limitation with an online focus exists, based upon our demonstration of the literature review. Nevertheless, some of the findings were consistent with the literature such as the lack of time and energy, and pre-emptive actions. Remarkably, concerning one of these findings, is the clear demonstration of pre-emptive actions' impact for customers to remain silent.

Furthermore, the illustration from the analysis depicts that negative experiences from past dissatisfaction influence customers to overlook the dissatisfaction to satisfy. This brings our curiosity to its impact on online businesses and what this means. Moreover, another interesting aspect is that customers weigh pros against cons concerning previous negative experiences. This makes us reflect upon online businesses degree of unawareness considering their negative performances due to the fact that customers stay silent. Additionally, the notion that customers avoid to expose themselves to uncomfortable situations is significant. Such illustration indicates that some online businesses may be unfamiliar with when customers feel exposed. Particularly, since this type of customer avoids circumstances that are uncomfortable. Besides, the indication that customers blame themselves for dissatisfaction is partly consistent with the literature. Although, a deeper understanding of this phenomenon is exciting to investigate further since this circumstance is suggestive.

The tendency that customers remain silent if interpretation is required in order to satisfy failures, is unforeseen. These customers evoked an understanding for us that there exist unwritten rules. Hence, the creation of the unwritten rules by customers is a finding that we are curious to learn more about. Some of the questions that we hold on to are, *what are these rules and when do*

customers use them? Another interesting aspect gained for this study is customers' perception of powerful online businesses. This insight is contradictory towards the common opinion about today's customer, which claims that the power has shifted to the customer's advantage.

The second research question used for this study concerns what encourages customers to complain to online businesses. Hence, two findings discovered in this research are noteworthy for online businesses. One of these aspects is a monetary driver where customers are encouraged to forward complaints when costs are not a barrier. This is an interested insight since online businesses may not perceive, amongst other aspects, returns as an information provider. Also, monetary drivers tend to create more patience amongst the customers who experience procedures to be complex. Hence, their time and energy are reconsidering in this context. Moreover, curiosity is created with these aspects in mind. One may speculate whether complaints are vital for online businesses in order to improve themselves or if complexity is a procedure to avoid complaints. Hence, an assumption is that complaints are overwhelming where online businesses may not know how to manage this effectively. However, complaints might not be the main issue since dissatisfaction is an indication that something else needs to be improved. Such a finding might demonstrate that the strategic brand management receives information from customers that needs to be reconsidered.

The phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers is demonstrated, in some situations, to solely depend on the online business. A suggestion on such situation is when the customer perceives ignorance by the online business. In another situation, the silence depends only on the customer who chooses to remain silent. An illustration when this occurs is when the customer experiences that the failure to satisfy is sorted by the online business. Furthermore, in some cases, both the online business and the customer are the reasons for the dissatisfied customers' silence. This is when the business has exposed the customer to negative experiences in the past. Also, the customer predicts the failure to reoccur, hence, choose to not complain. Moreover, in some situations neither the online business nor the customer is the reason for the lack of complaints. Thus, the online business provides a possibility for their customers to complain, whilst the customer experiences the procedure to be complex.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to the field of strategic brand management from the perspective of customers. More specifically, to the area of silent dissatisfied customers. We argue that there is a need to understand these customers, from their perspective, in order to enable their opinions to be voiced. Therefore, this study explored what makes customers silent dissatisfied and what encourage them. Based on this, we contribute with three theoretical implications.

The phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context is absent in the literature. Additionally, Ro and Mattila (2015) state that research has been insufficient concerning the dissatisfied non-complainers. However, our study provides a deeper understanding of this type of customer and several aspects have been identified that are pertinent for the literature. Our study reveals four situations when and why the phenomenon occurs. Moreover, our study provides ideas for the development in the field of the dissatisfied but silent customers. Hence, new aspects such as unwritten rules created among customers, the blame on the customer, the perception of powerful online business, and the overlook of negative performances are areas that our study addresses. Furthermore, the existing literature consists of limited exploratory studies that aim to understand the customer deeply (Priluck & Wisenblit, 2009; Voorhees, Brady & Horowitz, 2006). This study, on the other hand, has developed a typology that depicts four silent dissatisfied situations. Hence, the findings demonstrate that a dissatisfied customer is silent depending on the situation. This perspective is seminal and provides an insight to the field of strategic brand management from the customers' perspective. Furthermore, the rapid growth of the Internet makes it pertinent to explore new settings of silence. Based on our review of the literature, an online context is detected to be limited in the field of silent dissatisfied customers (e.g. Etzel & Silverman, 1981; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987; Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult et al., 1988; Warland, Herrmann, & Willits, 1975). Thus, our study has contributed with an exploration of this subject, which provides valuable knowledge to the literature.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings guide online businesses to understand the phenomenon of silent dissatisfied customers in an online context. From the view of strategic brand management, online businesses are able to encourage customers to share their experiences. That is achieved by showing empathy, making it easy, and offering monetary drivers.

Brand managers are able to implement strategic decisions to encourage customers to share their opinions through empathy. This is implemented by a personal approach when being in contact with the customer. For instance, send personal e-mails that are not obvious to be an auto-reply. Also, this proves the customer with the feeling that the online business listens. Another way to be empathic is to demonstrate that the complaint makes a difference through the use of follow-up e-mails. Also, empathy is provided to the customer when online businesses apologise and are accommodating for the dissatisfaction caused to their customers.

Another way to encourage customers is through making it easy to complain. This is achieved by availability where the customer is guaranteed an answer within a set timeframe. Furthermore, provide clear information on the website that is easy to find in order to contact the online business. Easiness is also acquired by providing prepared sentences, scales, and emoji that the customer can use to share opinions. Additionally, customers are encouraged to forward their complaints together with returns if the process is simple. Furthermore, the monetary drivers are acquired when covering unexpected costs. Hence, customers sense that failures are covered by the online business, which drivers them to voice their opinions. Other monetary drivers such as a discount on the next purchase, vouchers, and free shipping cost to return encourage the customer to share opinions. Last but not least, our research demonstrates that brand managers might take customers' negative experiences into account. Hence, a vital implication is to not look on complaints from a negative point of view but to view complaints as an opportunity for improvement. Such an implication may be of an obvious character, however the customers in our research perceive such action as disregarded.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

The findings reveal different situations when customers remain silent from their point of view. This study has purposely been designed with focus groups and semi-structured interviews. A suggestion for further research is quantifying the findings in order to confirm or reject them. One question that we have not investigated, but is of relevance, is the economical point of view. Hence, *what are the expenses of having silent dissatisfied customers and what are the costs to encourage customers to forward their opinions?* A critical question would be to investigate whether organisations and businesses avoid complaints simply by making the system of complaining complex.

A customer perspective was purposely comprehended for this study. Although, an interesting aspect to consider for future research is to understand online businesses perspective of this phenomenon. An assumption is that online businesses receive complaints and future research can therefore investigate how to manage complaints effectively. Furthermore, this study did purposely not focus on brands' impact on silent dissatisfied customers. A belief is that certain brands may influence the customers' actions and create a deeper understanding to the different situations found in this study.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A; Focus Groups - First Order Concept

Segments	Quotes from the focus groups
Energy	• I don't have the energy • I believe it is laziness • You're also comfortable that's why you don't complain. • The thing is that people are too comfortable, I mean if I got a note where they asked me to evaluate the situation. Then I maybe... Maybe would have done it. • Because you don't have the energy I think. You are already angry, which makes it easier to forget about it instead of reminding yourself even more. Then you have to spend more time on it. • It was not our first priority to write to them and complain to get money from them and explain about the happening.
Hassle	• Skip returning it because that's the hassle • Go through the trouble to send it back • Process to complain • I don't know how to send things back • It is hassle to send them back • It's difficult to know if another size would fit so it's a lot of hassle if they don't. But it depends on how much you like them and if you next that next pair will fit
Time	• Takes time • Offline is often managed really quickly. But online, usch • The procedure online might take a while and be dreadful, • Because it takes so much time then to go somewhere and print out the return note and then send it back. That's smart of them • And it takes so much time
Previous Experiences	• I got bad customer service some time, so I would never buy from them again • I've never thought about to complain that H&M have shipping costs, even if I think that they shouldn't have it • They are never on time • Dresses from Nelly, but then I usually order many dresses and then I think that yea maybe a few of them will be good. • Also, I expect some of the things I order to not be good, so I rather make a large order so that I can try many things and then send back the ones I don't like • But I always think like if they say it takes 5 days, then I add a couple of days since you never get it in time anyway. I add like 3 days • Yea. When you get denied in a situation where you know you are right.
Everyone Knows it's Wrong	• It's easier to say something if it's obvious that it has been done wrong, like everyone knows it's wrong, • (When is it allowed to complain?) When everyone knows that it is wrong. • But I think you are more allowed to be disappointed if it occurred online Since an image can't show it all. And you have no clue if it fits you, and the colours can look different on the image. • The train needs to be really late to actually be permitted to complain to them.
Blame Yourself	• When it is wrong sizes and such things, then it is your own fault, • Mean this situation with the bag was more of a thing that I can blame myself • When you order online, it is more of a blame yourself thing • Cause it feels you are doing wrong who bought it if you didn't want it so you shouldn't have bought it in the first place.
Nothing Out From it	• It wouldn't make any difference to complain • It feels like I will not get anything out of it. • Even if the company had given me a new pair, the quality would be the same and

	same thing would have happen again. • And there is no guarantee that you will get the money back • They will not listen to me anyway so why should I spend time to write down and complain to them when I probably will not get anything out of it. • I think a reason to why you don't share your opinions is because you don't know if it helps. I have never experienced that as a customer. • You want your complain to generate in something. But if you feel it won't bring any advantage then it doesn't matter. • It wouldn't make any difference to complain • Often, the one you talk to cannot take many decisions anyways.
Informed	• I would also go into my order, I mean often it's possible to check order status to see how it looks. • Yea Google it is good. Also, to make sure that you haven't gotten tricked by them. • Yes it is hard when you don't know • I get disappointed when I don't get any information and due to this don't know what's happening.
Degree of Dissatisfaction	• It depends on the level of dissatisfaction, if you are really dissatisfied then yes you should complain, but if you feel like whatever • I haven't been that dissatisfied. • It depends on how bad it is and how disappointed you get in the particular situation. • But I mean if it would have been a purse of something that I would have ordered for a special occasion and then order it in time but if it didn't arrive in time for the occasion then this would make me become angry.
Price, Energy and Procedure	• People don't have the energy to go though the procedure to get money back, even though this was 400 SEK • I mean, to contact Ryanair and complain when they have been late then I always think like; I spent like 150 SEK on the flight ticket, is it really worth the trouble and effort to contact them and complain when they've been late? • It depends on the product, for instance if it was a facial mask, then I would have talked to the company • I feel like 100 SEK is not worth spending too much time on, • But this was 1200 SEK that I had paid and I was a student then so then one can't afford to pay 1200 SEK for nothing. • Then I rather keep them and lose 300 SEK with the thought that they might suit sometime in the future • The thing that you need to pay when returning the clothes online, and if they should send something in return to you after this, then you need to pay again. That's why I start thinking if the clothes are really worth this money.
The Feeling of Bothering the Business	• I mean, I didn't want to be annoying; • I didn't contact the company about the clothing that break when I tried it on for the first time, because I didn't want to be annoying • In general I feel like I don't want to be annoying and difficult.
Business Acts on Own Initiatives	• I didn't even contact them about it, this all happened automatically because they were aware of the volcano-problem • Zalando is very good at this, they sent a sticker together with the package so it was super easy for me to send it back, • It means a lot to me that the company even offers a sticker so I easily can send it back if I want to for free. • They said it was okay to send it back to them and I got a whole new one. So I was disappointed but then got saved, if I put it that way.
The Tiny Customer Against the Powerful Business	• It doesn't make any difference if one or two customers say anything • Yeah really, but this it not something that I would contact H&M about and tell them, because again they are a really big chain • It feels like that is something in their business-deal, the more trouble for the customer it is less chance that they will send the products back. So you get stuck with a product that you bought online because you don't have the energy to send it back • Like now, people still buy from H&M online, obviously, since it is still a big thing to do, so people pay for that shipping cost, therefore H&M can have it this way. Of

	course they add 40 SEK to every order if they can and if it works • Maybe that was stated in their terms and conditions so you actually can find out about this if you spend time on it. • It's the feeling of being helpless. You turn to the company to get help, but you don't get it. • Companies shall show more respect when they fail. • As a customer you know which ones they are. An example is if SJ is delayed. You don't complain then since they don't care anyways. They also hear it everyday and they know it's bad.
Stop Purchase	• Then it's annoying if the whole process to get a new one gets delayed. Yea it ended with that I stopped making purchases there. And I don't think I will ever purchase anything there in the future. • But it's ugly that companies charge for it. I think maybe you decide to stay away from such company. Then you rather pick another store where they don't charge you for returning it.

Appendix B; Focus Groups - Second Order Concept

Codes	Quotes from the focus groups
Energy and Time	• I don't have the energy • I believe it is laziness • You're also comfortable that's why you don't complain. • The thing is that people are too comfortable, I mean if I got a note where they asked me to evaluate the situation. Then I maybe… Maybe would have done it. • Because you don't have the energy I think. You are already angry, which makes it easier to forget about it instead of reminding yourself even more. Then you have to spend more time on it. • It was not our first priority to write to them and complain to get money from them and explain about the happening. • Takes time • Offline is often managed really quickly. But online, yuck • The procedure online might take a while and be dreadful, • Because it takes so much time then to go somewhere and print out the return note and then send it back. That's smart of them • And it takes so much time
Hassle	• Skip returning it because that's the hassle • Go through the trouble to send it back • Process to complain • I don't know how to send things back • It is hassle to send them back • It's difficult to know if another size would fit so it's a lot of hassle if they don't. But it depends on how much you like them and if you next that next pair will fit. • Then it's annoying if the whole process to get a new one gets delayed. Yea it ended with that I stopped making purchases there. And I don't think I will ever purchase anything there in the future.
Dissatisfied Experiences and Expectations	• I got bad customer service some time, so I would never buy from them again • I've never thought about to complain that H&M have shipping costs, even if I think that they shouldn't have it • They are never on time • Dresses from Nelly, but then I usually order many dresses and then I think that yea maybe a few of them will be good. • Also, I expect some of the things I order to not be good, so I rather make a large order so that I can try many things and then send back the ones I don't like • But I always think like if they say it takes 5 days, then I add a couple of days since you never get it in time anyway. I add like 3 days • Yea. When you get denied in a situation where you know you are right. • It depends on the level of dissatisfaction, if you are really dissatisfied then yes you

	should complain, but if you feel like whatever • I haven't been that dissatisfied. • It depends on how bad it is and how disappointed you get in the particular situation. • But I mean if it would have been a purse of something that I would have ordered for a special occasion and then order it in time but if it didn't arrive in time for the occasion then this would make me become angry.
Uncertainty	• It's easier to say something if it's obvious that it has been done wrong, like everyone knows it's wrong, • (When is it allowed to complain?) When everyone knows that it is wrong. • But I think you are more allowed to be disappointed if it occurred online since an image can't show it all. And you have no clue if it fits you, and the colours can look different on the image. • The train needs to be really late to actually be permitted to complain to them. • When it is wrong sizes and such things, then it is your own fault, • Mean this situation with the bag was more of a thing that I can blame myself • When you order online, it is more of a blame yourself thing • Cause it feels you are doing wrong who bought it if you didn't want it so you shouldn't have bought it in the first place.
Price, Energy and Procedure	• People don't have the energy to go though the procedure to get money back, even though this was 400 SEK • I mean, to contact Ryanair and complain when they have been late then I always think like; I spent like 150 SEK on the flight ticket, is it really worth the trouble and effort to contact them and complain when they've been late? • It depends on the product, for instance if it was a facial mask, then I would have talked to the company • I feel like 100 SEK is not worth spending too much time on, • But this was 1200 SEK that I had paid and I was a student then so then one can't afford to pay 1200 SEK for nothing. • Then I rather keep them and lose 300 SEK with the thought that they might suit sometime in the future • The thing that you need to pay when returning the clothes online, and if they should send something in return to you after this, then you need to pay again. That's why I start thinking if the clothes are really worth this money. • But it's ugly that companies charge for it. I think maybe you decide to stay away from such company. Then you rather pick another store where they don't charge you for returning it. • It wouldn't make any difference to complain • It feels like I will not get anything out of it. • Even if the company had given me a new pair, the quality would be the same and same thing would have happen again. • And there is no guarantee that you will get the money back • They will not listen to me anyway so why should I spend time to write down and complain to them when I probably will not get anything out of it. • I think a reason to why you don't share your opinions is because you don't know if it helps. I have never experienced that as a customer. • You want your complain to generate in something. But if you feel it won't bring any advantage then it doesn't matter. • It wouldn't make any difference to complain • Often, the one you talk to cannot take many decisions anyways.
Pre-emptive Actions by Online Business	• I didn't even contact them about it, this all happened automatically because they were aware of the volcano-problem • Zalando is very good at this, they sent a sticker together with the package so it was super easy for me to send it back, • It means a lot to me that the company even offers a sticker so I easily can send it back if I want to for free. • They said it was okay to send it back to them and I got a whole new one. So I was disappointed but then got saved, if I put it that way.

	• I would also go into my order; I mean often it's possible to check order status to see how it looks. • Yea Google it is good. Also, to make sure that you haven't gotten tricked by them. • Yes it is hard when you don't know • I get disappointed when I don't get any information and due to this don't know what's happening.
Ignorant Business and Tiny Customer	• It doesn't make any difference if one or two customers say anything • Yeah really, but this it not something that I would contact H&M about and tell them, because again they are a really big chain • It feels like that is something in their business-deal, the more trouble for the customer it is less chance that they will send the products back. So you get stuck with a product that you bought online because you don't have the energy to send it back • Like now, people still buy from H&M online, obviously, since it is still a big thing to do, so people pay for that shipping cost, therefore H&M can have it this way. Of course they add 40 SEK to every order if they can and if it works • Maybe that was stated in their terms and conditions so you actually can find out about this if you spend time on it. • It's the feeling of being helpless. You turn to the company to get help, but you don't get it. • Companies shall show more respect when they fail. • As a customer you know which ones they are. An example is if SJ is delayed. You don't complain then since they don't care anyways. They also hear it everyday and they know it's bad. • I mean, I didn't want to be annoying; • I didn't contact the company about the clothing that break when I tried it on for the first time, because I didn't want to be annoying • In general I feel like I don't want to be annoying and difficult.

Appendix C; Focus Groups - Aggregated Concepts

Themes	Quotes from the focus groups
Pre-emptive actions by online business	• I didn't even contact them about it, this all happened automatically because they were aware of the volcano-problem • Zalando is very good at this, they sent a sticker together with the package so it was super easy for me to send it back, • It means a lot to me that the company even offers a sticker so I easily can send it back if I want to for free. • They said it was okay to send it back to them and I got a whole new one. So I was disappointed but then got saved, if I put it that way. • I would also go into my order; I mean often it's possible to check order status to see how it looks. • Yea Google it is good. Also, to make sure that you haven't gotten tricked by them. • Yes it is hard when you don't know • I get disappointed when I don't get any information and due to this don't know what's happening.
Low expectations and previous negative experiences	• I got bad customer service some time, so I would never buy from them again • I've never thought about to complain that H&M have shipping costs, even if I think that they shouldn't have it. • They are never on time • Dresses from Nelly, but then I usually order many dresses and then I think that yea maybe a few of them will be good • Also, I expect some of the things I order to not be good, so I rather make a large order so that I can try many things and then send back the ones I don't like • But I always think like if they say it takes 5 days, then I add a couple of days since you never get it in time anyway. I add like 3 days • It depends on the level of dissatisfaction, if you are really dissatisfied then yes you should complain, but if you feel like whatever

	• I haven't been that dissatisfied. • It depends on how bad it is and how disappointed you get in the particular situation. • But I mean if it would have been a purse of something that I would have ordered for a special occasion and then order it in time but if it didn't arrive in time for the occasion then this would make me become angry. • I think a reason to why you don't share your opinions is because you don't know if it helps. I have never experienced that as a customer. • Even if the company had given me a new pair, the quality would be the same and same thing would have happen again. • The thing that you need to pay when returning the clothes online, and if they should send something in return to you after this, then you need to pay again. That's why I start thinking if the clothes are really worth this money.
The Lack of Energy and Time	• I don't have the energy • I believe it is laziness • You're also comfortable that's why you don't complain. • The thing is that people are too comfortable, I mean if I got a note where they asked me to evaluate the situation. Then I maybe... Maybe would have done it. • Because you don't have the energy I think. You are already angry, which makes it easier to forget about it instead of reminding yourself even more. Then you have to spend more time on it. • It was not our first priority to write to them and complain to get money from them and explain about the happening. • It takes time • Offline is often managed really quickly. But online, usch • The procedure online might take a while and be dreadful, • Because it takes so much time then to go somewhere and print out the return note and then send it back. That's smart of them • And it takes so much time • People don't have the energy to go though the procedure to get money back, even though this was 400 SEK • I mean, to contact Ryanair and complain when they have been late then I always think like; I spent like 150 SEK on the flight ticket, is it really worth the trouble and effort to contact them and complain when they've been late? • It depends on the product, for instance if it was a facial mask, then I would have talked to the company • I feel like 100 SEK is not worth spending too much time on, • Skip returning it because that's the hassle • Go through the trouble to send it back • Process to complain • I don't know how to send things back • It is hassle to send them back • It's difficult to know if another size would fit so it's a lot of hassle if they don't. But it depends on how much you like them and if you next that next pair will fit. • Then it's annoying if the whole process to get a new one gets delayed. Yea it ended with that I stopped making purchases there. And I don't think I will ever purchase anything there in the future.
The Ignorance by Online Business	• It's easier to say something if it's obvious that it has been done wrong, like everyone knows it's wrong, • (When is it allowed to complain?) When everyone knows that it is wrong. • But I think you are more allowed to be disappointed if it occurred online since an image can't show it all. And you have no clue if it fits you, and the colours can look different on the image. • The train needs to be really late to actually be permitted to complain to them. • When it is wrong sizes and such things, then it is your own fault. • Mean this situation with the bag was more of a thing that I can blame myself. • When you order online, it is more of a blame yourself thing. • Cause it feels you are doing wrong who bought it if you didn't want it so you shouldn't

	have bought it in the first place. • It doesn't make any difference if one or two customers say anything. • Yeah really, but this it not something that I would contact H&M about and tell them, because again they are a really big chain. • It feels like that is something in their business-deal, the more trouble for the customer it is less chance that they will send the products back. So you get stuck with a product that you bought online because you don't have the energy to send it back. • Like now, people still buy from H&M online, obviously, since it is still a big thing to do, so people pay for that shipping cost, therefore H&M can have it this way. Of course they add 40 SEK to every order if they can and if it works. • Maybe that was stated in their terms and conditions so you actually can find out about this if you spend time on it. • It's the feeling of being helpless. You turn to the company to get help, but you don't get it. • Companies shall show more respect when they fail. • As a customer you know which ones they are. An example is if SJ is delayed. You don't complain then since they don't care anyways. They also hear it everyday and they know it's bad. • I mean, I didn't want to be annoying. • I didn't contact the company about the clothing that break when I tried it on for the first time, because I didn't want to be annoying. • In general I feel like I don't want to be annoying and difficult. • Then I rather keep them and lose 300 SEK with the thought that they might suit sometime in the future • But it's ugly that companies charge for it. I think maybe you decide to stay away from such company. Then you rather pick another store where they don't charge you for returning it. • And there is no guarantee that you will get the money back • It wouldn't make any difference to complain • It feels like I will not get anything out of it. • They will not listen to me anyway so why should I spend time to write down and complain to them when I probably will not get anything out of it. • You want your complain to generate in something. But if you feel it won't bring any advantage then it doesn't matter. • Often, the one you talk to cannot take many decisions anyways. • Yea. When you get denied in a situation where you know you are right.