

Getting Emotional about Quality: Questioning and Elaborating the Satisfaction Concept

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Abstract

Consumption has generally become more fragmented, hedonic and individual specific, satisfying not only functional but also emotional needs. In parallel, customer satisfaction is now thought to be both a cognitive and affective response, and the closely related concept of job satisfaction is commonly seen as an emotional reaction. The reasoning within quality management does, however, still lean heavily toward cognitive judgements (i.e. performance ratings), the emotional component clearly being under explored. Further, performance variables have shown not to be significant in predicting satisfaction for certain “experience products”, the effect fully mediated by emotions. As a consequence a cognitive judgement based quality concept has lost its ability to predict satisfaction, which clearly contradicts with the modern quality definition, stressing quality as the ability to satisfy the customer.

Emotions have however entered the quality discourse and it has been proposed that having customers that are merely feeling satisfied will not suffice. Instead, there has been a plethora of executive exhortations in the trade press calling on business to “delight the customer”. Strategies for doing so have however usually been imprecise and unclear, and the different drivers of delight and satisfaction are not well explored.

This paper aims to complement the previous cognitive dominance by exploring the multiple emotional responses involved in customer satisfaction. A conclusion being that we currently are measuring something, in terms of satisfied, that is more or less independent of what we aim for, in terms of delight. It is also most likely that - depending on the situation, product, and person - other positive and negative emotions are more important outcomes of purchase and usage than merely satisfaction. It is questioned whether a single, summary response such as satisfaction is feasible or even desirable.

1. Introduction

Consumption is currently widely described as having become more fragmented, hedonic and individual specific, satisfying not only functional but also emotional needs (e.g. Mossberg,

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2003). In fact, it has been argued for some time (Featherstone, 1990; 1991) that we are entering the so called era of post-modern consumption, where the primary goal of consumption is emotional experiences. Such development is reflected in a change among the rank of terminal values in favour of a sense of accomplishment and an exciting life (Rokeach, 1989), and the shift from values which emphasise physical sustenance and safety to values which emphasise belonging, self-expression and the quality of life (Inglehart and Abramson, 1994). The essence is well summarized in what can be seen as a motto of our time "if it feels good, do it". As pertinent remarked by Csikszentmihályi (1990), people who do not devote to their emotions are, in our modern western society, likely perceived as somewhat ridiculous, reserved and simply not totally present and alive.

Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999) elaborates such a future when claiming that experiences that have always been at the heart of the entertainment business now are to take root in business in general. Experiences that create value by offering sensations engaging the customers in an emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual level. In parallel, customer satisfaction is now thought to be both a cognitive and affective response (Oliver, 1989; Mano and Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1993). Other researchers argue similarly that satisfaction results from processing the affect in a consumption experience (e.g. Yi, 1990; Hunt, 1977). Still others refer to customer satisfaction as a purely emotional response (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999). Further, the definition that probably had the most influence in the related field of job satisfaction of Locke (1969, 1976) stresses that job satisfaction is an emotional reaction that "results from the perception that one's job fulfils or allows the fulfilment of one's important job values, providing and to the degree that those values are congruent with one's needs (1976, p. 1307). Research in the quality-of-life literature also shows the same dual processing mechanism, including both cognitive and affective components (e.g. McKenel and Andrews, 1980; Horley and Little, 1985).

The reasoning within quality management does and has traditionally, however, leaned heavily toward cognitive judgements (i.e. performance ratings), the emotional component clearly being under explored. Quality judgements, being largely attribute-based, are thought to be primarily cognitive (se e.g. Dabholkar, 1993; Iacobucci *et al.*, 1994). In fact, researchers use performance ratings as indicators of quality expressions by the consumer (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; Brady *et al.*, 2002). Results from semantic studies with customers further show that the concept "quality" is predicted by cognition (performance) only, the affect coefficients being non significant (Oliver, 1994). In other words, as Söderlund (2003) conclude, there is likely no emotion researcher that yet has claimed quality to be an emotion. Oliver (1996) even assumes that only cognitive judgements (i.e. performance ratings) are instrumental in defining quality for the consumer.

Performance variables have however shown not to be significant in predicting satisfaction

for certain “experience products” like recreational whitewater rafters, the effect fully mediated by emotions (Price *et al.*, 1995). The seeking of emotional arousal is also posited to be a major motivation for the consumption of certain type of products e.g. novels, plays and sporting games (Holbrook, 1980). Further, emotional involvement has shown to be tied to the consumption of e.g., cigarettes, food and clothing (Levy, 1959). Even in the context of functional products or services such as automobiles, cable television, or university courses, researchers have found that emotions evoked in the consumption situation are an important influence on satisfaction (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1993; Oliver *et al.*, 1997; Westbrook, 1987; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). Much effort is also currently focused on creating truly loyal customers which often is described in terms of customers with strong feelings for the product/brand, being emotionally tied (e.g. Bergman and Klefsjö, 2003). According to Shoemaker and Lewis (1999), truly loyal customers are customers “who feel so strongly that you can best meet his or her relevant needs that your competition is virtually excluded from the consideration set; these customers buy almost exclusively from you”. Griffin (1995) argues similarly that an emotional attachment to the product or service that is high compared with that to potential alternatives is critical for loyalty to flourish.

The quality movement is however not being uninfluenced. Emotions have in fact entered, and in a way rapidly become the core of, the quality discourse by leaps and bounds in terms of the recent accentuation of delight. It has been widely proposed that it will not suffice to have customers that are merely satisfied, explicitly or inexplicitly stressing that customers should be delighted (e.g. Deming, 2000; Chandler, 1989; Schlossberg, 1990; Kondo, 2000, Kano *et al.*, 1996). Delight has also increasingly been stressed as a key for survival in today’s markets among executives from leading companies in the quality movement and consultants (see e.g. Whittaker, 1991), and emotion is the key word (Schlossberg, 1993). Emotions seem hence to be central to modern quality management. The question is however if we are aware of what this redirection of target in terms of customer response, from a purely cognitive to an emotional, denotes for quality practice.

As we all know, different definitions of quality have been proposed at various times in response to the constantly changing demands of business (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). As the focus of the increasingly strong consumers currently have turned towards experiences and emotions it becomes critical to relate quality to emotions, and this article aims to contribute towards such evolution.

2. An Emotional Creature

Few have considered the emotional involvement in customer satisfaction and almost no

one has considered the emotional involvement in quality. The customer is however, as a human being, by nature an emotional creature. Lazarus and Lazarus (1994) even claim that humans are the most emotional creatures on earth, and emotions seem to have a vital impact on our behaviour. Research has for instance lately shown that we tend to let our future behaviour be directed by anticipated emotions (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999). Customers have further been shown to behave in a way that is thought to maximize the positive emotions and avoid the negative (e.g. Parker *et al.*, 1995; Bagozzi *et al.*, 1998). Johnston (1999) similarly suggests that the common currency that underlies all of our decisions, and indeed all of our transactions, is a hedonic tone. It is further biological shown that emotions such as joy, rage, envy, guilt, passion, love, lust, despair, rejection, and host of others, originate in parts of the brain, the midbrain substructures, other than those associated with thought, reasoning, and deliberation (Damasio, 1994). The specific emotion of interest, delight, is accentuated as one of the most fundamental emotions of human beings, together with distress being the only emotions that a newborn infant, with its premature brain, can express, and not easily subject to cognitive control (Lang, 1995). In relating emotions more directly to evaluation, experiments have shown that the emotional capability is demanded for human decision making Goleman (2004). The ability to evaluate seems simply to be dependent upon our ability to feel. Similar findings are also reported from experiments with monkeys (Johnston, 1999). Söderlund (2003) even speculates that emotions might be the underlying mechanisms of our needs, aiming to maximizing positive and minimizing negative emotions, which is similar to the pain-minimizing and pleasure-maximising goals proposed by appraisal theorists (e.g. Roseman and Evdokas, 2004). Researchers have however only recently begun to study the role of anticipated emotions in decision making (see e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999). Returning to satisfaction affect seems necessary for satisfaction. Yi (1990) argued, as did Hunt (1977), that satisfaction results from processing (i.e. evaluating) the affect in a consumption experience.

So what is an emotion then, and how does it relate to other familiar concepts such as affect and mood? Unfortunately, emotion seems not to be commonly defined. As shown in for example, Plutchik's (1980) review of 28 definitions and Kleinginna and Kleinginna's (1981) report of 92 definitions condensed into 11 categories. By emotion we mean, as suggested by Ortony *et al.* (1988), positive or negative reactions to events, agents, or objects. Certain emotions are thought to have biological origins such as anger and joy, while others require additional cognitive processing, such as gratitude. When it comes to the concepts of emotion, affect and mood, they are frequently used interchangeably in literature, but can be differentiated. In short, emotions usually fade after some time but can leave behind a trace in the form of certain mood. Further, positive and negative emotions and moods are jointly referred to as affects (Cohen and Areni, 1991).

3. Making a General Assumption Explicit

Some authors have argued that there are distinct differences between quality and satisfaction (e.g. Oliver, 1993b; 1996) pointing at confusion between the conceptual boundaries of quality and satisfaction. Given the meaning inherent in the word quality as voiced by the customer such a distinction seems to be motivated, among others because of the purely cognitive meaning customers seem to give to the word quality (see e.g. Teas, 1993).

However, given the definitions of quality as proposed in academia the situation becomes another sine quality more or less has become generally defined in terms of customer satisfaction (e.g. Dale, 1999; Dahlgard *et al.*, 2002; Shiba, 1993), and customer satisfaction has generally been stated as the final target of total quality management (e.g. Kondo, 2001). The meaning given to the word quality as voiced by the customer should hence not be confused with the meaning given to quality within academy and within modern quality management. Note then that quality, in accordance to modern quality definitions, not is wisely measured by asking our customers to rate "quality" as the general interpretation of the word seem to divert from what we want to achieve. It is further reasonable to expect a great variety in the meaning given to the word as even the quality community seem unable to give it a common meaning (e.g. Reeves and Bednar, 1994; Garvin, 1984), and the concept is continuously evolving. As a result, we currently tend to use customer satisfaction as a measurement of quality. This is a logical reflection of the notion that the aim of total quality management currently is seen as to increase external and internal customer satisfaction with a reduced amount of resources (Bergman and Klefsjö, 2003).

4. Getting Emotional

Modern quality management is often described as being in early stages of theory development, continuously evolving (i.e. Dale *et al.*, 2001). Different definitions of quality, with various weights given to emotions, have consequently been proposed in response to the constantly changing demands of business (Reeves and Bednar, 1994). The emotional content of the quality concept was however clearly accentuated in the very beginning. Shewhart (1931) even stressed that what is of commercial interest is the subjective quality which refers to "what we think, feel, or sense as a result of the objective reality" (p. 53). As we all know, the achievement of objective quality has nevertheless come to dominate our subsequent history. It is however clear that affective components, such as emotions, already are incorporated within quality studies, consciously or not. One example being the past two decades use of the Kano model, or theory of attractive quality, that has gained increasing exposure and ac-

ceptance (Watson, 2003). The theoretical roots of the model in terms of the motivator-hygiene theory (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959) clearly refer to the two “feelings” of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, for a recent review see Herzberg (2003). As a result the Kano model initially stressed an emotion in terms of “satisfied feeling” (Kano *et al.*, 1996), by some more recently exchanged for delight (e.g. Magnusson *et al.*, 2003), as the very target of quality creation. Reflection and investigations into these basic affective assumptions of the model have however been sparse.

5. Satisfaction and Emotion

When it comes to emotions and consumption in general, most attention has been on the role of affect in prepurchase processes within the field of marketing and affect in post-purchase processes has been relatively limited. As stated by Oliver (1996), from the earliest works in customer satisfaction, when satisfaction was viewed as unemotional cognition (i.e. summarated performance ratings), few had considered the possibility of emotional involvement at all. Seemingly strangely, as customer satisfaction in psychological terms is conceptualised as an attitude that by definition (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) is an affective (emotional) reaction people hold about attitude objects based on the way they evaluate the attributes they associate with those objects (see Pinder, 1998, p. 231). A few comparison standards paradigm researchers have however gone beyond the cognitively toned formulations to consider the affective nature of satisfaction and the usual finding has been that both positive and negative emotions significantly impact satisfaction (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Oliver *et al.*, 1997; Westbrook, 1987; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). These clearly suggest that research within the Comparison Standards (CS) paradigm has likely underrepresented the emotional aspects of satisfaction. An interesting approach that combines the perspectives from the CS paradigm has however recently been presented by Phillips and Baumgartner (2002), introducing affective expectations which were shown as having a more important influence on satisfaction than the cognitive variables for situations where consumers use more of an experiential perspective. The experiential perspective being defined in terms of when consumers are concerned with the “multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of experience with products” (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). It is further interesting that although the related concept of job satisfaction traditionally has been defined as an emotional reaction (Locke, 1969; 1976). Locke doesn't speculate about the particular emotions being involved, and it is still largely a matter of speculation, insofar as virtually no empirical work has been done to isolate the emotions that compromise job satisfaction.

The situation within academia can hence be described as a slowly rising attention given to

emotions in the consumption processes. However, for the concern of quality measures, a most critical issue is what meaning customers give to the word "satisfied". As indicated in the review by Oliver (1996) one common meaning of satisfied appears to be contentment, which is a passive response and results when pleasant homeostatic states are maintained or prolonged. A state characterized by low levels of arousal and may entail disinterest. This common meaning may explain why reports of satisfaction levels in surveys are inordinately high, and why satisfaction is not a sufficient condition for loyalty (Heskett *et al.*, 1997). Oliver (1996) further proposes that if a survey focuses on an ongoing-use situation, like many quality surveys, most subjects will be responding from this perspective. It is possible that the potential disinterest expressed in this mode could indicate a general unemotional response. This would represent an extreme of low-arousal postpurchase response where satisfaction may mean the absence of dissatisfaction.

The emotional basis for satisfaction is then not well documented in the literature and it is unclear whether satisfaction is phenomenologically distinct from many other emotions. Satisfaction is apparently neither a basic emotion nor a central emotional category in leading theories of emotions (e.g. Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Oatley, 1992; Roseman, 1991; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). Satisfied may however be related to other emotions by an emerging body of theory and evidence available to suggest that emotions can be described in terms of two primary dimensions that define a circular configuration, shown in Figure 1 (e.g. Russel, 1980, 1989; Watson and Tellegen, 1985; Oliver, 1994; Westbrook, 1987; Plutchik, 1980). This configuration, commonly referred to as a circumplex, can be generally described as based on the two primary independent dimensions positive and negative affectivity, note however that presentations may differ in their graphical rotation. The structure has been widely supported by data attesting its replicability using for instance factor analysis (e.g. Chamberlain, 1988; Mano, 1991; Meyer and Shack, 1989; Storm and Storm, 1987). More interestingly some studies have attempted to place satisfied within this circumplex with various results. Although not in perfect unanimous, satisfied appears to "float" around in the upper left quadrant as seen in Figure 1. Further, a number of studies have shown that satisfied is more closely related with low negative affect than with high positive affect (e.g. Russel, 1980; Havlena *et al.*, 1989). Note also that Watson and Tellegen (1985) in their reanalyze from 10 studies found that the word satisfied was interpreted as the absence of negative affect. Nonetheless, the authors, seemingly unmotivated, graphically placed satisfied between high positive affect and low negative affect in the circumplex, instead of at the low end of the negative affect axis. The understanding of the emotional meaning given to satisfied is then perhaps best described, as the absence of being dissatisfied, as also found in the clustering solutions of Oliver and Westbrook (1993).

6. Relating Satisfied and Delighted

As previously emphasized, emotions have entered the quality discourse by leaps and bounds in terms of delight, and it has been proposed that it will not suffice to have customers that are merely satisfied (e.g. Deming, 2000; Chandler, 1989; Schlossberg, 1990). A most interesting issue is then to discuss how the proposed final target delighted refers to the traditional satisfied in terms of position in the two-dimensional Circumplex. Delighted, also known as elated, emerges when tested with small divergence as a high positive affect (e.g. Russel, 1980; Watson and Tellegen, 1985) in accordance to the note of Plutchik(1980) that delight is a combination of joy and surprise. Further, satisfied, as already pointed out, is interpreted as the absence of negative affect, low negative affect. The relationship between feeling satisfied and delighted then form an angle more or less close to 90° , as seen in the circumplex in Figure 1, indicating that the emotions of being satisfied and delighted are roughly independent.

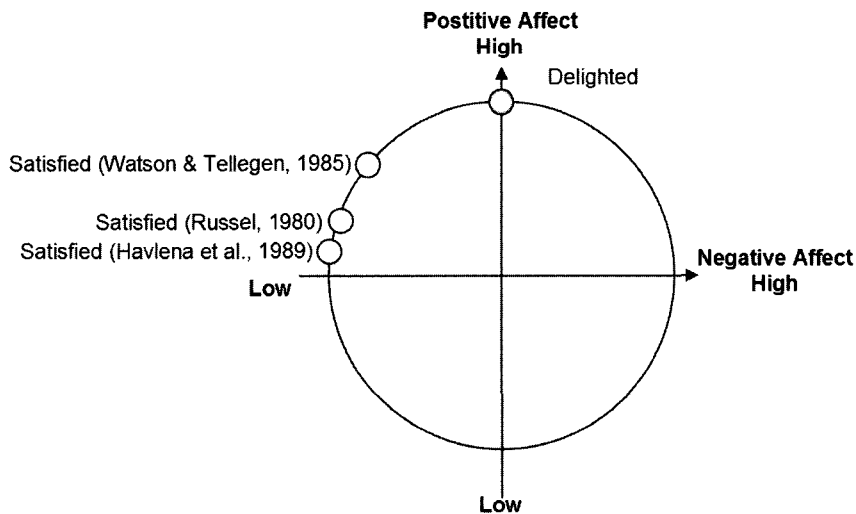


Figure 1. The affect circumplex containing the positions of the emotions satisfied and delighted, indicating a roughly orthogonal relationship (rotated in accordance to Watson and Tellegen, 1985)

The proposed change of final target of total quality management, from making the customer feel satisfied to making the customer feel delighted then appears as a total redirection, an orthogonal shift in terms of emotions. This kind of independence has also been shown empirically by Oliver and colleagues (1997), their conclusion being that delight apparently assumes a role parallel to satisfaction as an outcome of consumption. This also provide

some support to for instance Chandler (1988) in seeing customer delight as being fundamentally different from customer satisfaction and the implication that while satisfaction may be induced by avoiding problems, delight requires more.

7. Questioning the Dominance of Satisfaction

The overly simplified question “are you satisfied?” can mean a variety of things (Oliver, 1996). From an affective perspective most evidence suggests at least a two-dimensional nature of emotional reaction which naturally demands two measures, at least. It is therefore reasonable to question the traditional dominance of one indicator in terms of customer satisfaction. It might even be as Bagozzi *et al.* (1999) state that the centrality of satisfaction perhaps is more due to being the first emotion to receive scrutiny in postpurchase behaviour research than to constituting a unique, fundamental construct in and of itself. Indeed, it is likely that, depending on the situation, product, and person, other positive and negative emotions are more important outcomes of purchase. In support for such approach, Nyer (1997a; 1997b) found that post-consumption responses as repurchase intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, and other reactions are predicted best by using measures of satisfaction plus measures of other emotions. Consumption related emotions might also be more complex than two- and three-factor solutions as Richins (1997) argue when identifying sixteen clusters of emotions related to consumption.

8. The Independence of Positive and Negative Affect

An issue that has received little attention in the quality community is whether to use unipolar or bipolar items to measure quality. The choice can however influence findings and their interpretation in fundamental ways. As noted, a number of studies have shown that positive and negative affect are independent which also is the essence of the circumplex model of affect previously described. The interdependence of positive and negative affect also appears fairly robust across many diverse contexts (e.g. Bradburn, 1969; Diener and Emmons, 1985; Zevon and Tellegen, 1982; Warr *et al.*, 1983, Goldstein and Strube, 1994; Larson, 1987). All these findings simply imply the possibility of simultaneous positive and negative affect. This independence seem further to be incorporated in the foundation of the Kano model, also known as the theory of attractive quality by its roots. Herzberg *et al.* (1959) clearly state that the two feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, seemingly given the meaning of positive and negative affect, are not opposites of each other, the opposite of

feeling satisfied being not feeling satisfied and the opposite or feeling dissatisfied being not feeling dissatisfied. Further, Egloff (1998) showed that the independence of positive and negative affect depends on the affect measure used, which can be explained by a confusion between moderately aroused affects such as pleased and displeased with highly aroused affects such as delight and anger.

9. Getting to Practice

The previous discussion has considerable implications for practice. Initially, the evidence of independence between pleasant and unpleasant emotions, in combination with delight as the final goal of modern quality management, clearly disqualifies a number of measurement scales currently used. See for instance the semantic satisfaction scales exemplified in Devlin *et al.* (1993), generally reaching from very dissatisfied to very satisfied.

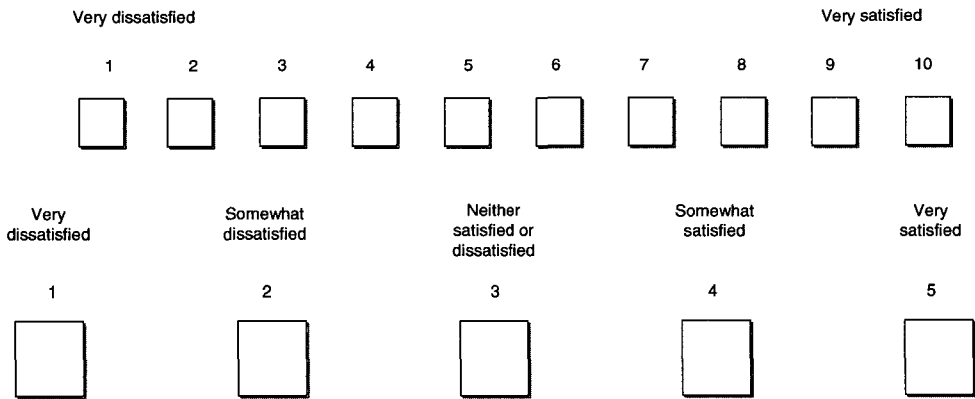


Figure 2. Two examples of commonly used bipolar semantic scales

Considering the common interpretation given to satisfied, as seen in Figure 1, the results from the scales in Figure 2 are roughly independent of how delighted the customer feels. Simply put, using this type of scales, we are in high risk of only getting a measure of the absence of negative affect among our customers. This is further supported by the fact that Cronbach's α is extremely high (e.g. 0.98 in Phillips and Baumbartner (2002), for the three 7-point scales ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 7 (very dissatisfied), 1 (very dissatisfied) to 7 (not at all dissatisfied), and 1 (very satisfied) to 7 (not at all satisfied), the second item reversed-scored. Basically indicating that "not at all dissatisfied" is interpreted similar to "very satisfied". A case from General Motors described by Hill and Alexander (2000, p.

131) indicates the problem with these type of scales as most customers, when using the lower scale in Figure 2, were found to be very satisfied. Symmetrical bipolar scales, as those seen in Figure 2, are however commonly used in practice (e.g. Ueltschy *et al.*, 2004; Hill, 1996).

Returning to the case of General Motors (Hill and Alexander, 2000), in search for a measure which correlated with loyalty and retention, their exploratory research convinced them that a positive biased semantic scale, as seen in Figure 3, was a more discriminating form of measure.

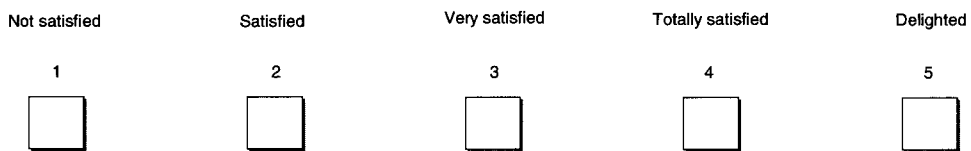


Figure 3. A positive biased semantic scale

This bipolar scale is however in many ways even worse than those seen in Figure 2. From an affective perspective it undoubtedly disregard the evidence for independence of positive and negative affect. It assumes, by being bipolar, that dissatisfied, in terms of “not satisfied”, and delighted are mutually exclusive, which they according to a number of sources are not. In fact, as the discussed evidence suggest, they are rather likely to be independent and may hence occur simultaneously. So, where should the customer put the mark? Are we measuring positive or negative affect? Respondents having equally delightful and not satisfying experiences will probably respond at the midpoint, at neither. The alternative is to use unipolar scales, as seen in Figure 4, that are more true to the discrete emotions approach. Here, respondent can report that they were delighted as well as dissatisfied or angry.

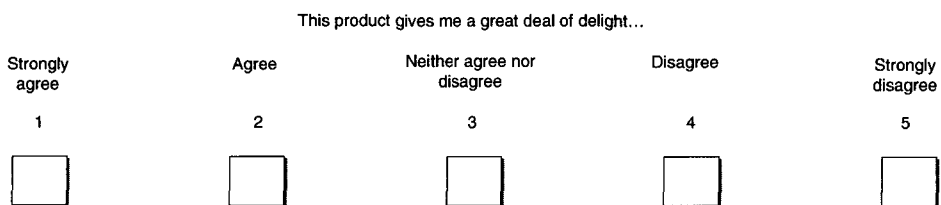


Figure 4. A unipolar scale exemplified for the emotion delight

This seems intuitively reasonable as loyalty is about building emotional relationships, and simultaneous positive and negative affect such as love-hate relationships seem to appear in relationships, for instance between a first-time mother and her infant (Lupton, 2000) or even between a company and its customers (Wescott, 2002).

10. Discussion and Conclusions

For both researchers and practitioners within quality management, understanding the nature of emotions is more than a philosophical issue. With the final target being increasingly proposed as a delighted customer, the understanding of and ability to measure delight becomes critical. Propose for instance that satisfied, as suggested and showed in a number of studies, is interpreted as the absence of negative affect. What consequences have, and will this have for modern quality management and its relevance in the post-modern society? Not feeling dissatisfied is hardly a rousing endorsement of an experience. It is currently stated within the quality community that “you get what you measure”, it seems however as though we currently are measuring something that is more or less independent of what we aim for.

It is generally acknowledged through a number of studies that consumption-related affect is a multidimensional and complex construct. This fact alone implies that a single measurement, like satisfaction, is insufficient for capturing the nature of the customers' affective post purchase response. It is hence highly uncertain whether a single, summary emotional response such as satisfaction is feasible or even desirable.

As further presented, findings of the independence of positive and negative affect appear fairly robust across many and diverse contexts which make it reasonable to question many of the scales that currently are used to measure satisfaction. Some seemingly limited to negative affect, which is unrelated to delight, and others demanding positive and negative affect to be mutually exclusive, which they evidently are not. As a result it is recommended to use unipolar scales that ask respondents to express to what extent each individual emotion describes their own subjective feelings.

Even more interestingly, from a quality management perspective, is however the notion that a number of evidence point at delighted and satisfied as more or less independent, being qualitatively different. This indicate that the frequently proposed change of final target of Total Quality Management, from satisfied to delighted, indeed is an extensive change of target. A change that reasonably should be accompanied by a far-reaching re-examination of modern quality management as we currently know it.

In closing, it might be wise to question whether a delighted customer is relevant for all type of offers and hence relevant as the general final target of total quality management. Oliver (1996) does for instance suggest that this kind of reaction only occurs for high-involvement products and services. The involvement constructs refers to the extent to which the consumer finds a product category interesting or exciting (Bloch, 1986; Goldsmith and Emmert, 1991). We are certainly only beginning to understand the role of emotions in quality.

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