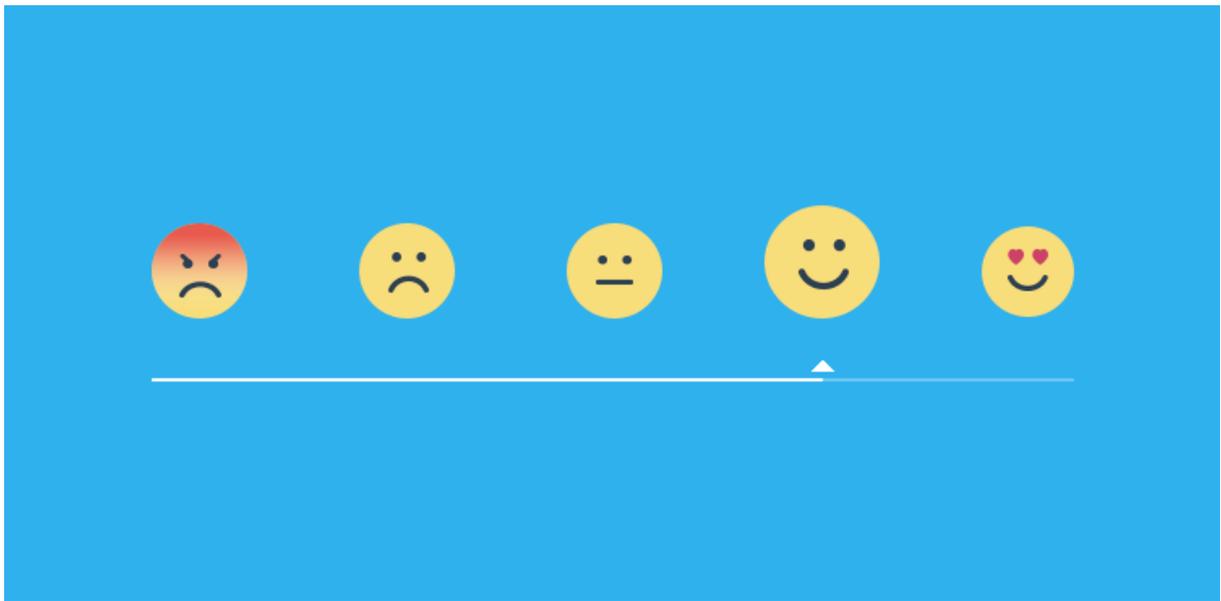# The influence of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction

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- the moderating effect of customer contact channels

Open University of the Netherlands

Program   : Master Management
Supervisor   : Suzanne de Bakker
Examiner   : Kees Gelderman
Student   : Robbert Gijsbertse
Student number   : 850894180
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SUMMARY

In response to the increasingly competitive markets and volatile market dynamics, firms nowadays should focus on service marketing strategies and tactics to differentiate themselves from their competitors. One way for firms to achieve a competitive advantage is by focussing on Customer Satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is especially important for service business because (dis)satisfaction is a prerequisite for complaint-, word-of-mouth behaviour and loyalty.

A substantial body of research has been devoted to the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction and utilizing the emotional contagion as the theoretical base. The implicit assumption is that in retail and service environments, the interaction (verbal cues, body language, and emotional displays) between customers and employees is likely to positively affect customer satisfaction. However, service organizations nowadays are increasingly utilizing advanced information and communication technologies, such as the internet to interact with customers. There is a clear movement away from face-to-face contact towards online and technology-mediated methods. Therefore, this early description of customer contact limited to physical presence needs to be updated to include virtual presence as well. Specifically, this study explores two major relationships: (H1) the direct relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction; and (H2) the impact of the type of Customer Communication Channel on customer satisfaction within service companies utilizing the emotional contagion and the information richness as the theoretical base.

This research is based on dyadic data, that is, data involving judgement by employees and their customers. Consequently, two survey instruments were needed to test proposed hypotheses, one to measure overall employee satisfaction and one to measure overall customer satisfaction. By applying this procedure, we received 95 usable dyadic cases, a total of 198 employees and 4114 customers produced the data which was used to test the hypotheses.

Regression analysis was utilized to empirically test (H1) the proposed direct relationship between the Employee Satisfaction and Customer Satisfaction. Analysis of covariance was utilized to empirically test (H2) the indirect effect of customer contact channels on the level of Customer Satisfaction. Findings suggested that Employee Satisfaction, was positively but not significantly related to Customer Satisfaction. Also, media richness theory poorly predicted an (in)direct effect of the Customer Contact Channel on the level of Customer Satisfaction. The complex interaction between employees and customers cannot completely be captured in a framework as simplistic as emotional contagion. The affect transfer alone is insufficient to account for the link between employee- and customer satisfaction.

An important direction for future research is to conduct more studies of the media richness theory that more closely examine the nature of tasks in the interaction between employee and customers. Researchers argue that task-oriented activities (such as information exchange, or problem solving) can be carried out equally well using any customer contact channel but that not all customer contact channels are suitable for tasks requiring high personal involvement (such as sales).

1   INTRODUCTION

In response to the increasingly competitive markets and volatile market dynamics, firms nowadays should focus on service marketing strategies and tactics to differentiate themselves from their competitors. One way for firms to achieve a competitive advantage is by focussing on Customer Satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is especially important for service business because (dis)satisfaction is a prerequisite for complaint-, word-of-mouth behavior and loyalty.

Research on the outcomes of customer satisfaction (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Szymansky & Henard, 2001; Yi, 1990) mainly focuses on three consumer's complaint strategies in reaction to dissatisfaction (Yi, 1990), affecting both market share and profitability. Firstly, dissatisfied consumers have the tendency to complain to the service organization. This has been discussed in the literature as one mechanism available to consumers for relieving cognitive dissonance when the consumption experience is dissatisfying (Szymansky & Henard, 2001; Yi, 1990). Complaining has also been discussed as a mechanism for venting anger and frustration and a mechanism for initiating or seeking redress for failed consumption experiences (Szymansky & Henard, 2001). Secondly, negative word of mouth (WOM) behavior, telling others about their unsatisfactory experience, offers consumers a mechanism for releasing tension. Getting back at the entity by informing others of disappointing encounters, regaining control over a distressing situation (Szymansky & Henard, 2001). Thirdly, Satisfaction is further thought to affect the likelihood that consumers will buy the offering again (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Szymansky & Henard, 2001). Oliver (1980), explicitly recognizes that satisfactory experiences influence future purchase intention as well as post-purchase attitude. Most consumer behaviorists would agree that a dissatisfying product purchase should decrease one's inclination to repurchase (Yi, 1990).

A substantial body of research has been devoted to the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. The implicit assumption is that in retail and service environments, the interaction between customers and employees is likely to importantly affect customer satisfaction. Therefore, service employees learn norms about which emotions are appropriate to express when interacting with customers. Most empirical research includes findings of a positive relationship between job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Bernhardt, Donthu, & Kennett, 2000; Brown & Lam, 2008; Chi & Gursoy, 2008; Du, Fan, & Feng, 2011; Harter, Schmidt, Hayes, Immigration, & Service, 2002; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Jung & Yoon, 2013; Mendoza & Maldonado, 2014; Payne & Webber, 2006; Wangenheim, Evanschitzky, & Wunderlich, 2007), while only some found negative (Silvestro & Cross, 2000) or non-significant (Brown & Mitchell, 1993; Loveman, 1998) relationships between job satisfaction and customer satisfaction, leaving in doubt the issues of its strength and substantive significance (Brown & Lam, 2008). The only study reporting a negative relationship between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction is Silvestro and Cross (2000). They report two limitations for their findings. Firstly, they argue that the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is complex. Their research has been grounded primarily on the service-profit chain conceptual model. They found that satisfaction and loyalty of employees are not "mirrored" by satisfaction and loyalty of customers (r = -0.64). It seems that performance is contingent upon many environmental and operational variables, which cannot all be captured in a model as simplistic as the service profit chain. Secondly, the sample size consists of only six stores and correlation must therefore be treated with particular caution. The only studies reporting a non-significant relationship between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction are Loveman (1998) and Brown and Mitchell (1993). The first study makes surprisingly little attempt to explain his

anomalies in its findings and concludes by calling for further research (Silvestro & Cross, 2000). Some significant limitations to the study are, however, acknowledged, concerning the validity of the measures used.

A common characteristic of all previous research devoted to the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is that most present studies have focused on service employees who are in direct face-to-face contact with customers (Du et al., 2011; Wangenheim et al., 2007). Du et al., (2011) have shown that verbal cues, body language, and emotional displays lead to greater satisfaction in face-to-face service encounters. But service organizations nowadays are increasingly utilizing advanced information and communication technologies, such as the internet, to interact with customers (Froehle, 2006). There is a clear movement away from face-to-face contact towards online and technology-mediated methods. Therefore, this early description of customer contact limited to physical presence needs to be updated to include virtual presence as well (Froehle, 2006). The impact and influence of the various types of customer communication channels have not received much attention yet. As new technologies that support customer interaction become widely used, the question of how this affect customer satisfaction could be important for service organizations. Nowadays it is still unclear how service personnel and these new technologies interact to influence customer satisfaction. This exploratory research examines the effect of media richness, represented by three different technology contexts (telephone, e-mail, and chat) and their influences on customer satisfaction. We specifically focus on the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction emphasizing different technology contexts. This relationship will be studied from the viewpoint of emotional contagion because this concept has been used previously in marketing research to explain the link between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Homburg & Stock, 2004; Wangenheim et al., 2007). Emotional contagion refers to the transference of emotion between interacting individuals (Wangenheim et al., 2007).

The aim of this study is twofold. Firstly, in this research, we attempt to test the hypothesized relationship between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction. Secondly, we aim to explore the moderating effect of customer communication channels in the employee satisfaction – customer satisfaction relationship. Hence, the research questions underlying the present study are as follows: (1) "To what extent does employee satisfaction influence customer satisfaction?" And (2) "To what extent does the customer contact channel moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction?"

An answer to these questions is important for both researchers and practitioners. For the researchers because we attempt to address a fundamental question in the marketing literature and aim to further narrow the gap in the contemporary literature. For practitioners because the analysis will indicate if and how employee-customer linkages differ across customer communication channels, highlighting conditions in which customer responses could be especially sensitive to employee satisfaction. Such findings could provide guidance for managers in formulating human resource policy and managing the workforce in a manner commensurate with customer relationship objectives within different customer communication channels.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section briefly reviews related literature and develops hypotheses to be tested. The third section reviews the methodology used to generate the dataset. The fourth section presents the data analysis and results. Finally, the last section

draws conclusions from the findings, discusses some limitations and offers implications for practitioners, and extensions for future research.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1   Customer Satisfaction

While everyone knows what satisfaction means, it clearly doesn't always mean the same thing to everyone. The satisfaction literature has not yet, explicitly or implicitly, established a generally accepted definition of satisfaction (Day, 1980; Giese & Cote, 2000; Westbrook & Reilly, 1983; Yi, 1990). Generally, there are two types of definitions that differ in terms of emphasizing consumer satisfaction either as a process or as an outcome (Yi, 1990). More precisely, consumer satisfaction definitions have either emphasized an evaluation process or a response to an evaluation process (Giese & Cote, 2000).

On one side of the spectrum, there are investigators who argue that consumer satisfaction is a process. These definitions include: "*An evaluation that the chosen alternative is consistent with prior beliefs with respect to that alternative*" (Engel & Blackwell, 1982); "*An overall post-purchase evaluation*" (Fornell, 1992, p.11); "*An evaluation rendered that the (consumption) experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be*" (Hunt 1977, p459); "*An evaluation of the surprise inherent in a product acquisition and/ or consumption experience*" (Oliver, 1981, p.27).

On the other side of the spectrum, there are investigators who argue that customer satisfaction must be constructed as an outcome resulting from the consumption experience. These definitions include: "*an outcome of purchase and use resulting from the buyer's comparison of the rewards and costs of the purchase relative to anticipated consequences*" (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982, p. 493); "*The evaluative response to the current consumption event... the consumer's response in a particular consumption experience to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations (or some other nor of performance) and the actual performance of the product perceived after its acquisition*" (Day, 1984, p.496); "*A transaction-specific affective response resulting from the customer's comparison of product performance to some pre-purchase standard*" (Halstead, Hartman, & Schmidt, 1994, p.122) "*The buyer cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifices he has undergone*" (Howard & Seth, 1969); "*The summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer's prior feelings about the consumption*" (Oliver, 1981, p.27); The consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature. Or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under- or overfullfillment (Oliver 1997); "*Consumer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectation (or some other norm of performance) and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its acquisition*" (Tse & Wilton, 1988, p.204); "*An emotional response triggered by a cognitive evaluative process in which the perception of (or beliefs about) an object, action, or condition are compared to one's values (or needs, wants, desires*" (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983)).

As shown by the above definition, researchers define customer satisfaction in various ways. Some of the definitions provided in the customer satisfaction literature are fundamentally inconsistent with one another. In other cases, the definitions have overlapping components but are partially inconsistent (Giese & Cote, 2000). But most definitions contain elements of appraisal and comparison, although the concepts being compared are different (Oliver, 1981).

We can sum up the literature on defining consumer satisfaction as follows, using the framework provided by Giese and Cote (2000):

1) Consumer satisfaction is a response. Consumer satisfaction has been typically conceptualized as either an emotional or cognitive response (Giese & Cote, 2000). For example, Westbrook and Reilly (1983) refer to satisfaction as "*an emotional response*," while Howards & Seth (1969) refer to it as "*a buyer's cognitive state*". As noted by Giese and Cote (2000) there is little agreement about the type of satisfaction response, although more current definitions suggest satisfaction is a global affective summary response. Limiting satisfaction to affective response is consistent with Oliver's (1992) proposal that, "*satisfaction and dissatisfaction reflect the general affective ton*e" (Giese & Cote, 2000).

2) The response pertains to a particular focus. In order to more clearly delineate the conceptual domain, many researchers limit the focus of the satisfaction response (expectations, product, consumption experience, salesperson, etc.). For example, Halstead et al., (1994) focus on "*product performance compared to some prepurchase standard,*" while Oliver and Swan (1989) focus on the "*fairness, preference, and disconfirmation with the salesperson,* " and Hunt, (1977) focuses on the experience by stating: "...*the evaluation rendered that the experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be.*" The focus identifies the object of a consumer's satisfaction and usually entails comparing the performance of some standard. This standard can vary from very specific to more general standards. There are often multiple foci to which these various standards are directed including product, consumption, purchase decision, salesperson or store/acquisition (Giese & Cote, 2000). There is no clear consensus of what satisfaction focus should be, only that a satisfaction focus exists.

3) The response occurs at a particular point in time. Satisfaction can be determined at various points in time (after consumption, after choice, based on accumulated experience, etc.). For example, Fornell, (1992) determine satisfaction as "a*n overall post-purchase evaluation*," while Tse and Wilton (1988) suggest a different timing of the response "*the consumer response to the evaluation...as perceived after its consumption.*" Adding the restriction that the product must have been consumed before satisfaction is determine (Giese & Cote, 2000). But it is generally accepted that consumer satisfaction is a post-purchase phenomenon (Yi, 1990).

According to Yi, (1990) the process-oriented approach, rather than the outcome-oriented approach, seems useful because it spans the entire consumption experience and points to an important process which may lead to customer satisfaction, with unique measures capturing unique components of each stage. But Giese and Cote, (2000) emphasize the outcome-oriented approach rather than the process-oriented approach. Focussing on the response rather than the process facilitates the operationalization of consumer's satisfaction as a single construct unencumbered by various antecedent or consequences.

Researchers have used discrepant terms to describe satisfaction as determined by the final user: consumer satisfaction, customer satisfaction, or simply, satisfaction are terms that are somewhat interchangeable. In this study, we will use the term customer satisfaction and consistent with the literature, we will define the consumer as the ultimate user of the product or

service. Additionally, we will define customer satisfaction as a post-purchase overall affective response.

2.2   Employee Satisfaction

The academic literature has a long history of investigating employee satisfaction. Early definitions describe job satisfaction as "*the feeling a worker has…*" about his/her job Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969, p.6) or according to Locke, (1968, p.1300) job satisfaction is "*the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values*" and that it is "*a function of the perceived relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one perceives it as offering or entailing*" (Locke, 1968, p.316). In other words, satisfaction is the degree to which employees have a positive affective orientation towards employment by the organization (Vroom, 1964). A more recent definition describe employee satisfaction as an "*affective or emotional response toward various facets of one's job*" (Kim, 2005, p.246).

Some investigators have argued that satisfaction is a function of the discrepancy between needs and outcomes. Schaffer, (1953 p.3) claims that *"overall job satisfaction will vary directly with the extent to which those needs of an individual can be satisfied are actually satisfied…"*. Morse (1953) and Porter (1963) view satisfaction as the result of the degree to which job needs are perceived as being fulfilled on the job. However, according to Spector (1997) the latter approach has been de-emphasized because today most researchers tend to focus attention on cognitive processes rather than on underlying needs. The attitudinal perspective has become the predominant one in the study of job satisfaction.

The literature on employee satisfaction tends to converge on the fact that the employee satisfaction construct is composed of numerous facets related to the fulfillment of various and evolving individual needs and to the fit with numerous and changing organizational levels variables (Cantarelli, Belardinelli, & Belle, 2016).

Generally, there are three main perspectives of research into employee satisfaction (Schyns & Croon, 2006; Yang, 2010). (1) The first views employee satisfaction as an antecedent to intention to leave (Mulki et al., 2013) and organizational outcomes, such as: business performance (Kim, 2005) and organizational commitment (Brashear, Boles, Bellenger, & Brooks, 2003; Brown & Peterson, 1993; Mulki et al., 2013). (2) The second treats employee satisfaction as an outcome of organizational conditions, such as task demands, leadership and social structure (Schyns & Croon, 2006). (3) The third examines employee satisfaction regarded as a disposition influenced by personality traits (Dormann & Zapf, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001). Several explanations have been given for the relation of employee satisfaction and personality traits. Employee satisfaction may be affected by emotion-related personality traits because employee satisfaction has been equated with "*a pleasurable emotional state*" Locke (1968, p.1300). But at present, it is concluded that it is more likely that dispositions only indirectly affect job satisfaction via selection and self-selection processes (Dormann & Zapf, 2001).

Researchers have used discrepant terms to describe satisfaction as determined by the employee: job satisfaction, work satisfaction, employee satisfaction or simply, satisfaction are terms that are somewhat interchangeable. In this study, we will use the term employee satisfaction and consistent with the literature, we will define employee satisfaction as the degree

to which the employee has an overall positive affective orientation towards employment by the organization.

2.3   The influence of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction

The view that employee satisfaction positively affects customer satisfaction has been grounded in the literature primarily on three conceptual models: emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993), the service-profit chain (e.g. Silvestro & Cross, 2000), and service climate (e.g. Wangenheim et al., 2007). These conceptual models differ in terms of the levels of analysis they address, their temporal horizons, causal mechanisms, and conceptual scope.

To justify the main effect in our model, we draw on the concept of "emotional contagion". The concept of emotional contagion has been used in marketing research to explain the link between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Du et al., 2011; Homburg & Stock, 2004; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Wangenheim et al., 2007). Emotional contagion refers to the transference of emotions between interacting individuals (Wangenheim et al., 2007). Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, (1992) suggest that the emotions displayed by an individual (positive or negative) produce a corresponding change in the emotional state of the observer, by 'catching' another's emotions in several ways. During each employee customer transaction, it is likely that customers imitate employee's facial, vocal, and postural movements, thus creating inner cues contributing to their experiencing of employee's emotions (Hatfield et al., 1992; Tsai, 2001). In other words, customers catch the positive or negative emotions from the employees (Tsai, 2001).

Emotional contagion refers to how expressed moods infect others via an automatic process involving two mechanisms (1) mimicry and (2) feedback (Barger, Grandey, Barger, & Grandey, 2006; Hatfield et al., 1993, 1992). *Mimicry* is the synchronous rapid imitation of other's facial expression, voices, postures, movements, and instrumental behavior of other people (Hatfield et al., 1993, 1992). Barger et al., (2006) demonstrated in their research that mimicry occurs between strangers and in a natural context. The theory of emotional contagion further suggests that mimicked expression mediated the effect of an observed expression on felt mood via *feedback* mechanisms (Barger et al., 2006). The link between emotion and facial expression can be quite specific. When people produced facial expressions of fear, anger, sadness or disgust, for example, they were likely to feel the emotion associated with those specific expressions (Hatfield et al., 1993). According to Hatfield et al., (1992), people tend to feel the emotions consistent with the facial expressions they adopt and have trouble feeling emotions inconsistent with those poses.

To make the mechanism driving emotional contagion more concrete we will provide an example described by Homburg and Stock, (2004, p.147): *'The level of experienced job stress has been shown to be a negative correlate of job satisfaction. (e.g., Sullivan and Bhagat 1992). Thus, a highly-dissatisfied salesperson will exhibit a significant level of emotional tension that will be felt by the customer and affect the customer's satisfaction via the process of emotional contagion. This, in turn, will create cognitive tension for the customer, thus reducing customer satisfaction. On the other hand, employees with a high level of job satisfaction will appear to the customer more balanced and pleased with their environment. In this case, the process of emotional contagion will*

lead to a positive influence on the level of customer satisfaction'. This happens relatively automatic, unintentional, uncontrollable and largely unconscious (Hatfield et al., 1992).

Service employees learn norms about which emotions are appropriate to express when interacting with customers; thus, it is important to distinguish between experienced and expressed emotions because according to Pugh, (2001, p. 1019) "*there is no simple match between the emotions that organizational members feel and the emotions they learn to express*". Yet despite the fact that the employees may be taught to express emotions they do not feel, felt emotions remain a powerful influence on displayed emotions. Felt emotions may exert an influence over displayed emotions because it is simply difficult to fake emotions that are not felt for a long period of time (Pugh, 2001).

In line with emotional contagion theory and based on empirical findings, job satisfaction is expected to influence customer satisfaction via the employee's display of emotion that produce corresponding changes in the customer's affective state'. In view of the existing empirical evidence, the following hypothesis was formulated:

> *H1:   Employee satisfaction has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.*

2.4   The link between employee, - and customer satisfaction across customer contact channels.

A common characteristic of all previous research devoted to the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is that most present studies have focused on service employees who are in direct face-to-face contact (Wangenheim et al., 2007). But service organizations nowadays are increasingly utilizing advanced information and communication technologies, such as the internet to interact with customers (Froehle, 2006). There is a clear movement away from face-to-face contact towards online and technology-mediated methods. Therefore, this early description of customer contact limited to physical presence needs to be updated to include virtual presence as well (Froehle, 2006). The impact and influence of customer contact channels have not received much attention yet. As new technologies that support customer interaction become widely used, the question of how this affects customer satisfaction could be important for service organizations.

Wangenheim et al., (2007) claim that employee job satisfaction affects customer satisfaction even for employee groups that are not in direct interaction with customers, although effects seem to be slightly stronger for higher interaction groups. Du, Fan and Feng, (2011) have shown that the presence of verbal cues, body language, and emotional displays are important. As a possible explanation for this finding, the information richness theory is worthy of investigation. However, before predictions can be derived from the theory and subjected to empirical tests, one needs an understanding of the theory's essential core. Because, like many important ideas the theory has evolved since it was first proposed, a historical introduction is useful.

2.4.1   Information richness

Information richness theory, as originally proposed, was a prescriptive model in which achieving a match between information processing requirements and communication channels was posited as essential for organizational effectiveness (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft, Lengel, &

Trevino, 1987; Markus, 1994). However, other researchers have treated information richness theory as descriptive and explanatory (Markus, 1994; Suh, 1999).

Daft and Lengel (1986) discuss two types of richness: information richness – the ability of a message "*to change understanding within a time interval*" and media richness, defines as a medium's "*capacity to process rich information*" (p. 560). The media richness theory described organizational communication channels as possessing a set of objective characteristics that determine each channel's capacity to carry rich information (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). The term richness refers to the ability of information and media to change human understanding, overcome differing conceptual frames of reference or clarify ambiguous issues in a timely manner (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Markus, 1994). Communication media, like customer contact channels, can differ in their ability to facilitate understanding (Froehle, 2006). Customer communication channels can be characterized as high or low in "richness" based on their capacity to facilitate shared meaning (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987). The reasons for richness differences include the medium's capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987; Markus, 1994; Rice, 1993). The richness of each medium is based upon a blend of four criteria (Daft et al., 1987). Each criterion will be discussed in turn.

Feedback: instant feedback allows questions to be asked and corrections to be made (Daft et al., 1987). According to Dennis et al., (1998) there are two types of feedback: concurrent and sequential. Concurrent feedback is feedback provided simultaneously with the delivery of the message. Concurrent feedback often takes the form of nonverbal gestures (e.g., head nods, quizzical expressions) or very brief messages that do not take the communication turn from the sender (e.g., "uh huh,"). Sequential feedback occurs when the sender pauses, and the receiver communicates to confirm understanding or to redirect the sender's presentation of the message. Here, the receiver takes a speech turn but quickly returns the floor to the sender. Consequently, rapid mutual feedback enhances the richness of a medium.

Multiple cues: an array of cues may be part of the message, including (such subtleties as verbal, para-verbal and nonverbal communication (Froehle, 2006)) physical presence, voice inflection, body gestures, words, numbers and graphic symbols (Daft et al., 1987). Verbal and nonverbal cues enable senders to include information beyond the words themselves when the message is transmitted (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Nonverbal cues include general appearance and dress, body movements, facial expressions, eye contact and gaze, smell, paralanguage, space and distance, and touch. Three of these types of nonverbal cues can be communicated to a limited extent when leaner media are employed (Kahai & Cooper, 2003). Consequently, the presence of multiple simultaneous cues enhances the richness of a medium.

Personal focus: the extent to which the sender can customize the message to meet the individual needs of the receiver (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). Some messages can be tailored to the frame of reference, needs, and current situation of the receiver (Daft et al., 1987). Dyadic interactions provide fertile ground for personal communication (Dennis & Kinney, 1998) and a message will be conveyed more fully when personal feelings and emotions infuse the communication (Daft et al., 1987). Consequently, the ability of a medium to customize a message enhances the richness of a medium.

Language variety: Language is a system of spoken or written symbols that can communicate ideas, emotions and experiences (Daft & Wiginton, 1979). They identified nine different types of languages: art, nonverbal cues, poetry, general verbal expression, jargon, linguistic variables, computer languages, probability theory and analytical mathematics. Daft et al., (1987) broadly group these alternatives into two categories: natural language and numbers. High variety languages are those in which symbol use is not restricted and the language can communicate a wide range of ideas an can be used to convey an understanding of a broader set of concepts and ideas. (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Low variety languages are those in which the use of symbols is restricted and the language can communicate convey greater precision of meaning than does high variety languages (Daft et al., 1987). Consequently, high variety languages are considered to be rich.

In general, oral media (e.g. face-to-face and the telephone) are believed to be richer than written media e.g., mail and chat). And synchronous media (i.e., those that provide for immediate feedback, like the telephone) are believed to be richer than asynchronous media (those that interpose delays between the origination of a communication and its completion, like mail) (Markus, 1994).

2.4.2   Customer Contact Channels

Each customer contact channel utilizes differences in feedback, cues and language variety (Daft & Lengel, 1984). The four customer contact channels studied here and often used in a service environment for customer contact – face-to-face, telephone, chat, and addressed written communication, (like e.g. email)– exist along a continuum of increasing media richness potential. A schematic representation of this increasing media richness potential can be found in Figure 1 Information Richness and Customer Contact Channels.

Face-to-face communication is considered the richest communication medium (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Daft et al., 1987; Markus, 1994; Suh, 1999). Face-to-face communication allows rapid mutual feedback (Daft et al., 1987). Face-to-face communication allows the simultaneous communication of multiple cues (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Head nods, smiles, eye contact, tone of voice and other nonverbal behaviour can be used to regulate, modify and control the communication exchange. Face-to-face communication also uses high variety natural language and conveys emotions beyond the spoken message (Daft et al., 1987). According to Daft & Lengel, (1984) in one study of face-to-face communication, only seven percent of the content was transmitted by verbal language. The remaining ninety-three percent of information received was contained in the tone of voice and facial expression. A sarcastic versus enthusiastic tone of voice conveys as much meaning as the specific statements processed between the customer and the employee.

Telephone communication is somewhat less rich than face-to-face communication. Feedback capability is fast, but visual cues and body language are filtered out (Daft & Lengel, 1984). But people may also respond to other types of emotional information. They can listen to other people's words, to the volume, rhythm, pitch and speed of their speech or to the length of their pauses (Hatfield et al., 1992). Individuals rely on language content and audio cues such as tone of voice to convey messages (Daft & Lengel, 1984). Vocal feedback can also influence emotional experience. Research indicated that those emotions are linked with specific patterns of intonation, voice quality, rhythm, and pausing. Happy people, for example, produce sounds with small amplitude variation, large pitch variation, fast tempo, a sharp sound envelope and

few harmonics (Hatfield et al., 1993). The telephone medium is personal and uses natural language which makes it relatively rich (Daft et al., 1987).

Chat is defined here as the sending and receiving of short, text-based messages where the sender and recipient communicate with usually no (or very minimal) delays (i.e., high synchronicity (Froehle, 2006)). Social media platforms such as e.g. Facebook and Twitter incorporate highly interactive mechanisms that enable organizations to communicate or provide customer support to their customers (Shang, Wu, & Li, 2016; Zhang & Lin, 2016). Social media has the ability for real-time conversations between all users without time or physical constraints (Zhang & Lin, 2016). Results from Dennis et al., (1998) indicates that media richness theory may be useful for the "old" media, such as letters and memos, whose levels of feedback and cues are far below those of the "new" media tested in their study". But they claim that: "*one study cannot cause us to discard a well-established, albeit aging, theory*." (Dennis et al., 1998, p.269).

Addressed written communication such as mail are lower in media richness. Feedback is slow. Only written information is conveyed, so voice cues are absent and visual cues are limited to those on paper (Daft et al., 1987). A few additional cues can be communicated through the formality of language and can be tailored to the individual recipient and personalized (Daft et al., 1987). On the other hand, e-mail is both written and asynchronous, suggesting that it is relatively low in richness, but its use of computer technology makes it much faster than paper-based communication (Markus, 1994). While essentially eliminating the aural and visual channels present in face-to-face media, adds back the opportunity to review messages multiple times and edit new communications prior to sending – features not available in face-to-face communications (Froehle, 2006). Therefore most researchers have rated it as falling somewhere between the telephone and non-electronic written communication in richness (Markus, 1994).

Figure 1 hierarchy ranks customer contact channels in terms of their capacity to process rich information (adapted from Daft and Lengel (1984).
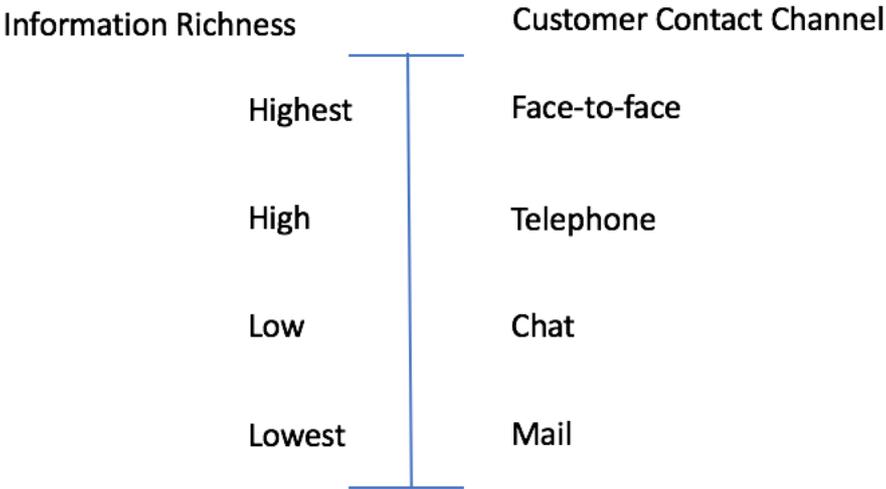

Figure 1 Information Richness and Customer Contact Channels

2.4.3 Moderating the link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

In this study, we relate the media richness theory with the concept of emotional contagion. Building on previous research there is evidence that people are capable of mimicking (rapid imitation) and synchronizing with other people's facial expression, voices, postures, movements (Hatfield et al., 1993, 1992). Additionally, feedback has been described as an automatic preconscious process where the brain receives signals via the automatic nervous system of nonverbal expressions and behaviors, which are processed and assists in the formation of the emotion to be experienced (Dallimore, Sparks, & Butcher, 2007). We posit that:

If the emotions displayed by a salesperson produce a corresponding change in the emotional state of the customer, by 'catching' another's emotions in several ways and with that influencing the customer's satisfaction. We propose that some communication channels provide more opportunities for customers to 'catch' these cues than other channels. The absence of cues not otherwise available in the medium can hamper the transmission of emotions between individuals.

Additionally, rich customer communication channels convey multiple cues and enable rapid feedback. Less rich customer communication channels may, due in part to technical constraints, not be able to exchange sufficient information, personal feelings, emotions or feedback to alter customer satisfaction and to converge emotionally.

In view of the existing literature, the following hypothesis was formulated:

> *H2:* *The positive relationship between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction will be greatest for employees who are in direct face-to-face contact with the customer, followed by employees who use the telephone as customer communication channel, then followed by employees who use the chat as customer communication channel, but will be the lowest for employees that use addressed written communication channels.*

2.5 Theoretical Model Summary.

The proposed theoretical model is presented in Figure 2.
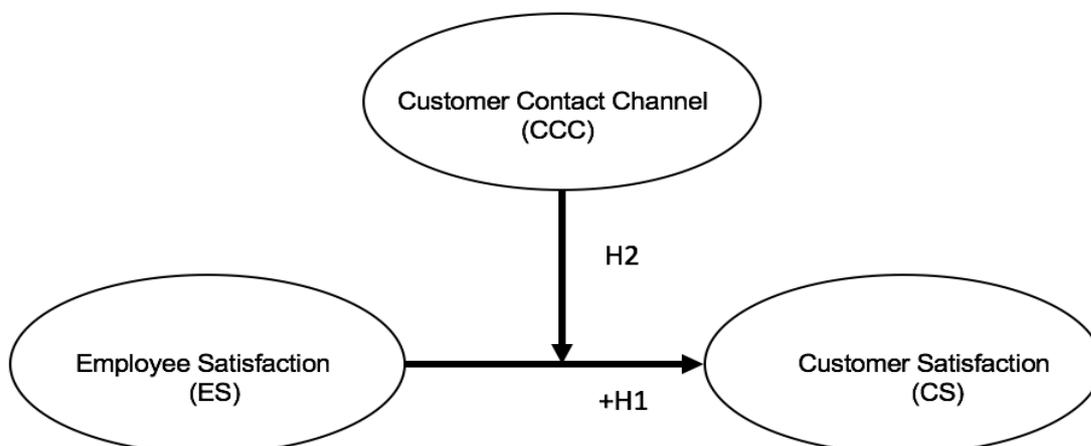

Figure 2 Proposed Theoretical Model

3   METHODOLOGY

To reduce the possibility of common method bias, our research is based on dyadic data, that is, data involving judgment by employees and their customers. Consequently, two survey instruments were needed to test proposed hypotheses, one to measure employee satisfaction and one to measure customer satisfaction. This study was administered with the cooperation of one of the leading leisure tourist companies in Europe.

TUI Group is the world's number one tourism business. The broad portfolio gathered under the Group umbrella will consist of strong tour operators, 1,600 travel agencies and leading online portals, six touristic airlines with around 150 aircraft, over 300 hotels with 214,000 beds, 16 cruise liners and countless incoming agencies in all major holiday destinations around the globe. This integrated offering will enable us to provide our 20 million customers with an unmatched holiday experience in 180 regions. In 2017 financial year the TUI Group with a headcount of 67,000 recorded turnover of €18.5 bn and an operating result of €1.002 bn. The TUI Group's share is listed on the London Stock Exchange in the FTSE index and in the Quotation Board of the Open Market on the Frankfurt Stock Exchange ("TUI Group Web Page," n.d.).

Data were obtained from salespeople and their customers. Both the employee and customer survey instruments were coded (by ANVR store number) to be able to match them. The reason for this is because it was not feasible to pair each individual employee to an individual customer, simply because of the fact that the customers typically interact with more than one employee. Aggregating data to the unit or organizational level allows us to avoid individual bias in linking employee rating to organizational outcomes. A meta-analysis from (Brown & Lam, 2008) indicates that the correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction is stronger in studies conducted at the business-unit than at the individual level of analysis. As mentioned before, different constructs in our framework are measured with data obtained from different sides of the dyad. While the employee satisfaction was measured on the basis of the employee responses, customer satisfaction was based on data collected from customers.

After matching customers responses to employees' and eliminating all responses for which matches are not obtained, the final total is 4114 customers responses, or an average of 43 per ANVR store. By this procedure we received 95 usable dyadic cases, a total of 198 employees and 4114 customers produced the data which was used to test the hypotheses.

3.1   Employee Satisfaction Data

3.1.1   Procedure

The first set of data concerns employee satisfaction. Prior to the survey, a consent was acquired from several managers within the company. A surveyed employee came from one group with a distinct job description; the travel agency employees (front office). The travel agency employees interact with the customers using all four customer contact channels (face-to-face, telephone, chat, and email). A survey assessing employee satisfaction were distributed by email to all 650 travel agency employees across the Netherlands. Each travel agency agent was sent an email with a link to a digital self-administered questionnaire concerning their overall employee satisfaction (18 questions). All questionnaires were administered in Dutch (see APPENDIX 1). The employees were assured their responses would be treated anonymously, and,

they were asked to complete the questionnaire at their convenience (e.g., work vs. home) see APPENDIX 2). The researcher also re-visited or called individual participants that had not returned the questionnaire by the due date to re-invite them to participate. The travel agency employees were asked their ANVR store number, overall satisfaction as an employee of the company, and a few demographic questions. The employee demographics included age, gender, and length of time employed by the company. The employee demographic variables could potentially provide some additional independent explanatory power. To ensure a high response rate, we rewarded ten cash coupons of € 25. From all employees who completed the survey, ten participants are randomly chosen to receive this monetary award. This was also noted on the invitation. The literature shows that recruiting participants with monetary rewards greatly improves the quality of responses (Yee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2008). A total of 198 usable surveys were returned yielding a response rate of 30,5%.

Employee (*N = 198*) demographic characteristics are as follows. The survey was distributed to 650 individuals working as a travel agency employee within TUI the Netherlands. A total of 205 completed survey were returned, including 7 that were unusable. The response rate after deducting the unusable questionnaires was 30,5.%. Most of the respondents (44,4%) were in the age group of 36-50, and there were more females (94,4%) than males (5,6%) in the employee group. A majority of the respondents (50.5%) had worked at the current workplace for less than 10 years. About 39,4% of the employees had worked between 10 and 30 years, and 10,1% of the employees had been at the current workplace for more than 30 years. There were more males (62,7%) than females (37,3%) in the customer group. Table 1 provides a profile of the sample.

3.1.2   Operationalization

According to (Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989; Stanton, Bachiochi, Robie, Perez, & Smith, 2002) job satisfaction can be constructed along a continuum from '*global*', by focusing on single or multi-item overall job satisfaction to '*dimensionally*" by focusing on several constituents, or facets, of job satisfaction. But these measures are not equivalent (Ironson et al., 1989; Quinn & Shepard, 1972; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). Each provides unique and useful information (Ironson et al., 1989). The specificity of the measure should match the specificity of the criterion, as advocated by Smith (1976).

In general, 'global' measures are used to estimate the respondent's general feelings about the job when all aspects of the job were considered (Ironson et al., 1989). The global approach is used when the overall or bottom line attitude is of interest (Spector, 1997). Global measures can be divided into two categories: (a) single item measures, and (b) the sum of several items focused on overall job satisfaction. The first measure focuses on (general) overall job satisfaction by asking the respondent directly about overall feelings about the job. Global scales ask the respondent to combine his or her reaction to various aspects of the job in a single integrated response. They assume that some sort of processing takes place and ask for its end product (Ironson et al., 1989). During this process, the respondent may incorporate other aspects not measured in the facet scales or items. The respondent is asked something like "all things considered, how do you feel about your job most of the time?" rated on a seven-point Likert scale (1= extremely dissatisfied, 7= extremely satisfied) (Dolbier, Webster, McCalister, Mallon, & Steinhardt, 2005; Ironson et al., 1989; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983). Examples of single item global scale of this kind include those of Kunin (1955), and Dunham and Herman (1975). In

1955, Kunin published a measure of satisfaction, which used pictures, the "faces scale". The pictures were of men. Dunham & Herman, (1975) developed a female equivalent of the male faces scale. Both series of faces consist of an 11-point scale. The respondent is asked something like "circle the face which best describes how you feel about your job in general". Both series of faces run the gamut of feeling from extremely positive to extremely negative. These faces have been qualified so that attitude scales in which they are used can be scored in the same manner as can any other form of attitude measuring devices. They have, however, the advantage of eliminating the necessity for translating feelings into words (Kunin, 1955).

The second measure focuses on multiple-items on overall job satisfaction. This measure provides an index to overall job satisfaction rather than to specific aspects of the job situation. Multi-item scales include items asking how the respondent feels about his job in general, how he feels about some specific aspects of his job, how his job compares to other jobs, and sometimes, what are some of the characteristics of his job and overall job situation (Stephan et al., 1976). Perhaps the most systematic attempt to develop an index of job satisfaction was the one made by Hoppock in the early 1930s (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951). Hoppock's measure consists of a series of four questions related to various aspects of satisfaction with a person's job (Hoppock, 1935). The job satisfaction score is obtained by summing responses to the four questions, giving each questions equal weight, yielding a score between four and twenty-eight (Mc Nichols, Stahl, & Manley, 1978). The Job in General Scale (JIG; Ironson et al., 1989) was designed to assess overall Job Satisfaction rather than facets. Its format contains eighteen items. Each item is an adjective or short phrase about the job in general. The total score is a combination of all items. Ironson et al., (1989) argue that overall job satisfaction is not the sum of individual facets and that it should be assessed on a general scale like the JIG. The Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire contains a three-item overall satisfaction subscale (Bowling & Hammond, 2008).

In general, "dimensionally' measures focus on the sum of job facet satisfaction. Facet measures such as the Job Descriptive Index (JDI; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969) and the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967) treat satisfaction as a multidimensional construct and allow for the independent measurement of several of these components (Russell et al., 2004). Various dimensions, or facets, of satisfaction, are commonly distinguished. "Work", "Supervision", "Pay", "Promotion", and "Co-workers" are widely used dimensions (Smith et al., 1969). But a job satisfaction facet can be concerned with any aspect or part of a job. This is particularly useful when an organization is interested in improving the job satisfaction of its employees or in trying to explain why individuals are leaving the organization (Russell et al., 2004; Scarpello & Campbell, 1983; Spector, 1997).

3.1.3   Choice of method

Given its popularity as a research topic, it should be no surprise that numerous different measures/scales have been developed to measure job satisfaction. Some of them are listed above. According to Brown and Lam, (2008) the conceptualizations grounded on affect transfer and the positive relationship between positive affect and helping behavior, are more consistent with the global measurement of a simple job-related affect than with extensive measurement of multi-dimensionally job perceptions. That is, "*if affect is transmitted from employees to customers, it is more likely to be in the form of simple feelings related to one's work than as reactions to details perceptions of a myriad of job facets.*" (p. 247). Therefore this research uses the Job in General Scale (JIG: Ironson et al., 1989), in an adapted format for statistical reasons. The scale was designed to assess overall satisfaction with the job. The JIG consists of short lists of phrases and adjectives that describe the overall job. The total score is a combination of all items. There are seven response choices. For each item, respondents are asked to rate the statement on a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7). Negatively worded items are reverse-scored, and the total score is the sum of the responses. According to Ironson et al., (1989), the Employee Satisfaction scale: "Job in General" has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient reported of $\alpha = 0,92$. In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was $\alpha = 0,946$. Table 2 presents reliability statistics.

Table 1 Reliability statistics

Factor	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha (standardized)
Overall Employee Satisfaction	18	0,946	0,953

The instructions and items are as follows:

Think of your job in general. All in all, what is it like most of the time? Rate your answer on the following scale: "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7)

Pleasant	Good	Acceptable	Makes me content	Enjoyable
Bad	Undesirable	Superior	Inadequate	Poor
Great	Worthwhile	Better than most	Excellent	
Waste of Time	Worse than most	Disagreeable	Rotten	

3.2 Customer Satisfaction Data

3.2.1 Procedure

The second set of data, concerning the customers, was collected separately. This research only used the data derived from a company-made specific survey, distributed and owned by TUI. Customers were approached after their initial contact with TUI by email and were asked to complete a digital self-administered questionnaire concerning their overall customer satisfaction (1 question). The questionnaire also includes one question about the last customer contact channel type the customer used while communicating with TUI (e.g., "face-to-face", "email", "chat", or "the telephone) to investigate the moderating effect of the customer contact channel. The questionnaire also contained questions collecting demographic information from the customers (e.g., gender). All questionnaires were administered in Dutch. Each invitation contained a description of the purpose of the survey, a clear message that participation was optional and a unique hyperlink to the web-based survey instrument. The sampling frame consisted of customers of TUI who had used human-based direct customer support services or via telephone, email, or chat (instant messaging) less than 24 hours prior to being invited to participate in the survey. This short time frame between service and survey helped ensure that the customer's perception of the support they just experienced was still quite fresh in their minds.

Customers (*N = 4114*) demographic characteristics are as follows: The survey was distributed to 41.326 individual customers from TUI the Netherlands. A total of 5.624 completed surveys were returned including 1.510 that were unusable. The response rate after deducting the unusable questionnaires was 9,96.%. Responses collected within each customer contact channel were as follows: face-to-face = 3743 (91,0%), telephone = 284 (6,9%), e-mail = 81 (2%), and chat = 6 (0,1%). There were more males (62,7%) than females (37,3%) in the customer group. Table 1 provides a profile of the sample.

Table 2 Profile of the sample

Characteristic	Employee (*N* = 198)		Customer (*N* = 4114)	
	N	Percentage	*N*	Percentage
Age				
< 35 years	58	29,3%		
35 – 50 years	88	44,4%		
> 51 years	52	26,3%		
Gender				
Male	11	5,6%	2579	62,7%
Female	187	94,4%	1535	37,3%
Length of employment				
0 – 10 years	100	50,5%		
11- 30 years	78	39,4%		
> 30 years	20	10,1%		
Customer Contact Channel				
Face-to-face			3743	91,0%
Telephone			284	6,9%
Chat			6	0,1%
Email			81	2%

We acknowledge that this approach for obtaining dyadic data may introduce a systematic bias in the level of customer satisfaction because it is more likely that satisfied customers respond to our survey, rather than dissatisfied customers. But according to (Homburg & Stock, 2004) it is important to note, though, that such a positive bias would only lead to a generally higher level of the dependent variable (i.e., customer satisfaction). Since the causal modeling approach used for data analysis is entirely based on covariance between measured variables, such a positive bias would not affect the findings of this study.

3.2.2   Choice of method

The data required to obtain an overall multi-dimensional measure of customer satisfaction was not available within the company, and it was not possible and feasible to collect this data within the timeframe of this research. As stated earlier this research only used the data derived from a company-made specific survey, distributed and owned by TUI. Their survey contains seven questions and was designed predominantly to assess customer satisfaction with a retail store and more specific with a salesperson. The survey contains only one question to assess overall customer satisfaction with the company.

The instructions and items are as follows:

1. How likely is it that you recommend {company} to your family, friends and colleagues?

   There are ten response choices. Respondents are asked to rate the statement on a 10-point Likert scale from 1-very unlikely to 10-very likely.

Our research is based on the NPS score to assess overall customer satisfaction with the {company}. As with all single-item measures, no calculations of internal consistency could be computed (Nagy, 2002).

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The constructs of relevance to this study are overall employee job satisfaction and overall customer satisfaction. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of each item in relation to the constructs of interest in this study. The mean value of each item under employee satisfaction ranged from 1,20 to 6,11 on the 7-point scale. Respondents ranked "Enjoyable" ($M = 6,11$; $SD = ,962$) as the highest employee satisfaction attribute, followed by "Worthwhile" ($M = 6,10$; $SD = ,980$) Respondents ranked "Rotten" ($M = 1,20$; $SD = ,738$) as the least well performed employee satisfaction.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of variables

Variable	Mean	±SD
Overall Employee Job Satisfaction[a] (Ironson et al., 1989)		
ES_1: Pleasant	6,03	± 1,002
ES_2: Bad[c]	1,43	± ,874
ES_3: Great	5,57	± 1,054
ES_4: Waste of time[c]	1,32	± ,937
ES_5: Good	6,03	± 1,049
ES_6: Undesirable[c]	1,28	± ,876
ES_7: Worthwhile	6,10	± ,980
ES_8: Worse than most[c]	1,59	± 1,179
ES_9: Acceptable	5,46	± 1,556
ES_{10}: Superior	5,26	± 1,329
ES_{11}: Better than most	5,68	± 1,181
ES_{12}: Disagreeable[c]	1,36	± ,949
ES_{13}: Makes me content	5,81	± 1,068
ES_{14}: Inadequate[c]	1,79	± 1,279
ES_{15}: Excellent	5,66	± 1,136
ES_{16}: Rotten[c]	1,20	± ,738
ES_{17}: Enjoyable	6,11	± ,962
ES_{18}: Poor[c]	1,76	± 1,238
Overall Customer Satisfaction		
CS_1: Net Promotor Score[b]	8,79	± 1,356

Note: SD, standard deviation.
[a] All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree.
[b] Item was measured on a 10-point Likert scale from 1-very unlikely to 10-very likely.
[c] Reverse coded

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed a significant direct relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. A simple linear regression was calculated to predict customer satisfaction based on employee satisfaction (H1). A non-significant regression equation was found ($F(1,4112)= 2.765$, $p > 0,05$, with an R^2 of 0,001. It should be noted that only 0,1% of the variance in customer satisfaction can be explained by our model. This finding can be interpreted that other, not-included variables have an additional significant impact on customer satisfaction. Results indicate that the value of b for the customer satisfaction was 0,051. This value tells us that, other things being equal, if employee satisfaction increases by one unit, then the customer satisfaction should increase by just over half a unit (although there is nothing to suggest a causal link between the two).

The second hypothesis (H2), proposed that there is a moderating effect of the Customer Contact Channel on the Employee Satisfaction and Customer Satisfaction relationship, but because Hypothesis 1 is not supported, moderating effects cannot be present. In order to factor in the effect of the Contact Channel on Customer Satisfaction, we therefore conducted an analysis of covariance. Results indicate that there was a significant effect of the Customer Contact Channel on Customer Satisfaction after controlling for the effect of Employee Satisfaction, $F(3, 4110) = 5,98$, $p < 0,05$.

We can also report some contrasts. Table 4 shows the adjusted values of the group means. Table 5 shows the results of the Bonferonni corrected post hoc comparisons that were requested as part of the ANCOVA analysis. Our results indicate, based on the adjusted means and the contrasts, that levels of customer satisfaction were significantly lower in the face-to-face group compared to the telephone group. Levels of customer satisfaction were significantly higher in the telephone group compared to the chat group. Levels of customer satisfaction were significantly lower in the chat group compared to Email.

Contrary to our expectations using Telephone as a customer contact channel significantly increased Customer Satisfaction compared to using Face-to-face as the customer contact channel $t(4110) = 0,267$ $p < 0,05$. It is also clear that using Email as a customer contact channel significantly increased Customer Satisfaction compared to using the Chat as a Customer Contact Channel $t(4110) = 1,520$, $p < 0,05$. And in line with our expectations, using the Chat as a Customer contact channel significantly decreased Customer Satisfaction compared to using the Telephone as a Customer Contact Channel $t(4110) = -1,550$ $p < 0,05$. But although being statistically significant, these effect sizes are fairly small as the $r = 0,002$.

Table 4 Adjusted Means

Customer Contact Channel	Mean	Std. Error
Face-to-face	8,771	,022
Telephone	9,038	,080
Chat	7,488	,552
Email	9,008	,150

Table 5 Pairwise Comparison

Contact Channel	Contact Channel	Difference Value	Sig.
Face-to-face	Telephone	,267	,008
Telephone	Chat	-1,550	,033
Chat	Email	1,520	,048

5 CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Conclusions

Our findings suggest that Employee Satisfaction was positively but not significantly related to Customer Satisfaction. Results also indicate that there was a significant effect of the Customer Contact Channel on Customer Satisfaction after controlling for the effect of Employee Satisfaction. But the media richness theory poorly predicted an (in)direct effect of the Customer Contact Channel on the level of Customer Satisfaction. The complex interaction between employees and customers cannot all be captured in a framework as simplistic as emotional contagion. The affect transfer alone is insufficient to account for the link between employee- and customers satisfaction.

Firstly, in this research, we attempt to test the hypothesized relationship between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (H1). Hence, the underlying research question was as follows: "To what extent does employee satisfaction influence customer satisfaction?"

H1: *Employee satisfaction has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.*

Based on the regression analysis, a non-significant regression equation was found. So, hypothesis 1 is *not supported.*

Secondly, we aim to explore the moderating effect of customer communication channels in the employee satisfaction – customer satisfaction relationship (H2). Hence, the underlying research question was as follows: "To what extent does the customer contact channel moderate the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction?"

H2: *The positive relationship between employee job satisfaction and customer satisfaction will be greatest for employees who are in direct face-to-face contact with the customer, followed by employees who use the telephone as customer communication channel, then followed by employees who use the chat as customer communication channel, but will be the lowest for employees that use addressed written communication channels.*

Based on the Covariance Analysis, the four customer contact channel groups report significant differences in levels of satisfaction between the four groups. In this study, Face-to-face has been considered the richest medium because it allows rapid mutual feedback, permits the simultaneous communication of multiple cues (e.g. body language, facial expression, tone of voice) uses high variety natural language and conveys emotions. Telephone, Chat and email follow Face-to-face in a descending order. But contrary to our expectations the results suggest that no descending order exists in the level of satisfaction along with a continuum of decreasing media richness/customer contact channels. So, hypothesis 2 is *not supported.*

5.2 Discussion

Drawing from research on employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and media richness theory, this study tested hypotheses involving four customer contact channels and their interaction with the richness of the medium to influence customer satisfaction. Several findings merit further discussion.

5.2.1   Discussion on H1

Because a positive link between Employee Satisfaction and Customer Satisfaction has frequently been suggested, the nonsignificant direct effect of Employee Satisfaction on Customer Satisfaction, meaning our results do not support H1, is somewhat surprising. A reexamination of the data yields four possible explanations for this observation.

Firstly, the distribution of the sample size deviated from a comparable normal distribution. The Customer Satisfaction, D (4114) = 0.163, p = < .05, and the Employee Satisfaction, D (4114) = 0.157, p = < .05 were both significantly non-normal (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). And although according to Nevill and Lane (2007) a logarithmic transformation would be totally inappropriate for a number of reasons we explored this option to examine if the new transformed data is normally distributed. The SQRT_Customer Satisfaction, D (4114) = 0.205, p = < .05, and the SQRT_Employee Satisfaction, D (4114) = 0.188, p = < .05 were both still significantly non-normal. Figure 3 shows that the data is negatively skewed. The assumption of normality is important in research using regression because it assumes that errors in the model are normally distributed.
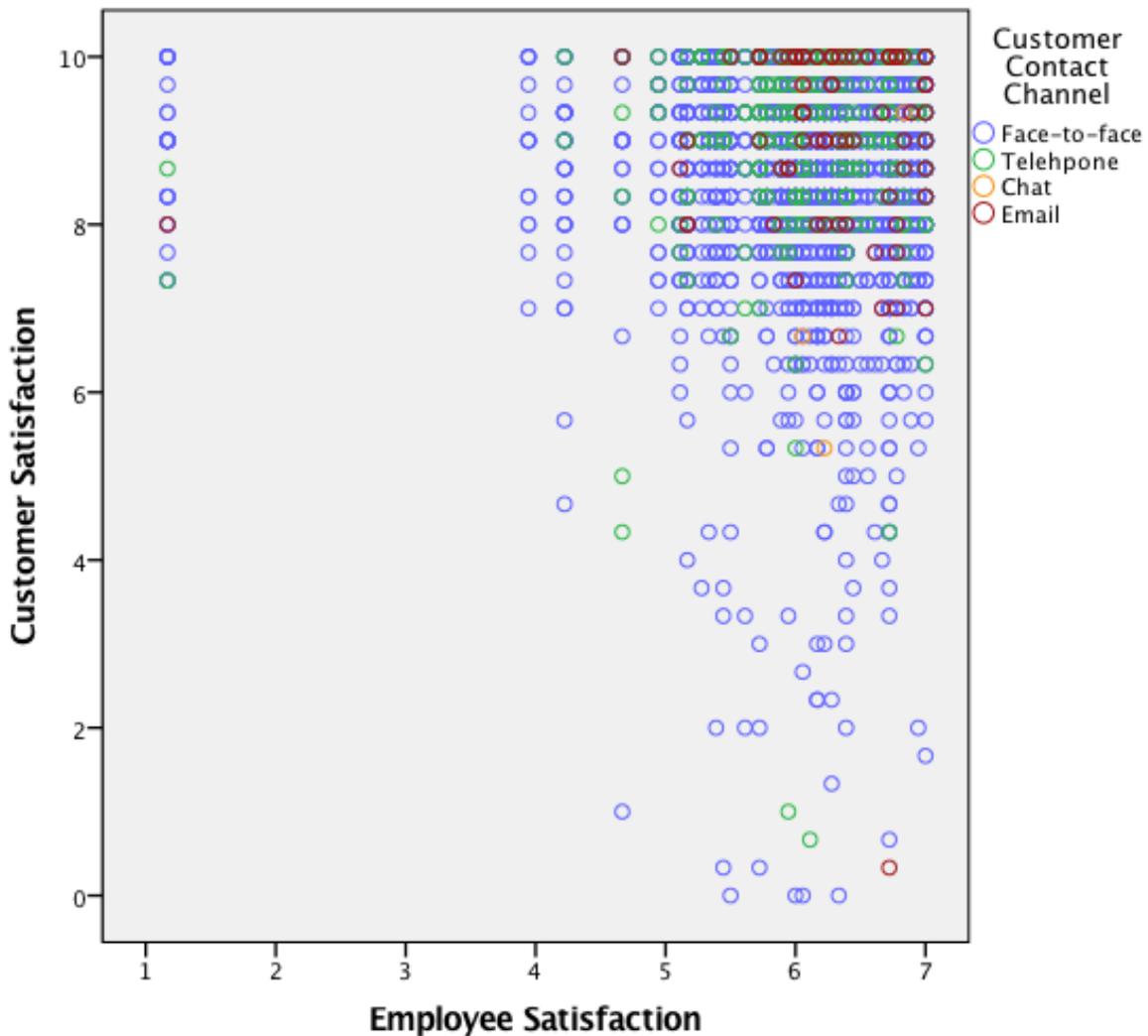

Figure 3 Scatterplot of Employee Satisfaction against Customer Satisfaction

Secondly, is the small sample size of the chat group ($N = 6$), and the small number of male subjects in our employee sample ($N= 11$). The chat group sample is too small to be statistically representative for all interactions between employees and customers. And although for the male group the numbers were not considered by the company's management to be untypical, we recognize that a larger male sample size would have been desirable.

Thirdly, unfortunately, the data required to obtain an overall multi-dimensionally measure of customer satisfaction was not available within the company and it was not possible and feasible to collect the data within the timeframe of this research. This research is based on a Customer Satisfaction survey provided by the company. 1 item adapted from the company survey was used to assess customer satisfaction. Inconsistent with our conceptualization of the Customer Satisfaction construct most of the items in the survey reflect a specific dimension of satisfaction (satisfaction with a salesperson) rather than overall customer satisfaction. The scale wasn't designed to assess overall customer satisfaction with the company. We therefore decided to use only the NPS in our study to measure overall customer satisfaction consistent with our conceptualization of the customer satisfaction construct to reflect overall satisfaction rather than any specific dimension of satisfaction. It could be argued that a customer's rating of NPS on a scale of 1 to 10 is not necessarily an accurate measure of overall customer satisfaction. Despite the obvious advantage of simplicity, the single item scale can be criticized on a number of grounds (Yi, 1990). Two things are worth mentioning concerning the use of single items. Firstly, the single-item scale cannot provide information on components, cannot assess separately various dimensions, and thus may not entirely capture the complexity of customer satisfaction. Secondly, the only estimate of reliability is test-retest, which can be confounded with a true change in Customer Satisfaction. But according to Wanous et al., (1997) the use of single item measures could be accepted when situational constraints limit or prevent the uses of scales.

Fourthly, the research method could be critiqued on the basis of the adoption of simple regression and variance analysis. It is arguable that more sophisticated statistical techniques would have facilitated a better understanding of the relationships between the variables in our model.

5.2.2   Discussion on H2

Our study suggests that there is a significant effect of the type of customer contact channel on customer satisfaction. But our results suggest that no descending order exists in the level of satisfaction along with a continuum of decreasing media richness/customer contact channels. A reexamination of the literature yields two possible explanations for this observation.

A first alternative explanation are the potential inaccuracies in the information richness scale. We drew heavily on Daft and Lengel, (1986) definitions in constructing the media conditions. The predictions derived from the information richness theory depend critically on the assumption that the customer contact channels exist along a continuum of decreasing media richness. The richness typology takes face-to-face communication as its standard and considers all mediated communication to be deficient relative to it. But according to Carlson and Zmud, (1999) relatively lean media can be used in seemingly richer ways such as the use of emoticons (combination of characters representing face's) in plain text (for example in emails and chat). For instance, a colon and parenthesis configured as ":)" is called a smiley face and is used to denote the presence of humor or irony in a text message where they are not otherwise apparent. Nonverbal cues like facial expression (e.g., a smile, a wink) may be communicated to a limited

degree via an emoticon or a smiley (Kahai & Cooper, 2003). If text-based customer contact channels like Chat and Email were ranked higher on the richness scale perhaps on a par or might even exceed traditional media like Telephone, a different set of predictions would follow. The "new capabilities hypothesis" for example by Markus, (1994) challenges the ranking of email as low in richness by focusing on technological capabilities not captured in the information richness scale. Furthermore, Markus, (1994) suggests that people could perceive a medium as higher in richness than information richness theorist have suggested. Consequently, our findings should not disconfirm information richness theory, but suggest the need to modify the information richness scale.

A second alternative explanation has to do with the nature of the communication between the customer and the employee, which was not explicitly factored into the analysis. Customers contacted the employee for various reasons, varying from exchanging information, problem-solving or booking a holiday. Reexamination of the literature found that the nature of the communication also matters (Froehle, 2006). According to Dennis and Kinney (1998) it may be that media richness theory is only appropriate for more simple communication tasks. Two primary types of technology-mediated communication have been found. The first is task-oriented communication, sometimes referred to as "task-oriented" which is oriented towards achieving goals, solving problems, and making decisions (Dennis & Kinney, 1998). The seconds is relationship-building communication, sometimes referred to as "person-oriented" or "relationship-oriented". More socio-emotional in nature, relationship-building communication seeks to create bonds and establish familiarity between participants (Froehle, 2006). So, it may be that our contrary findings are due to the inclusion of both person-oriented and task-oriented tasks.

5.3   Recommendations for practitioners

Perhaps the most relevant finding is for practitioners involved in managing multichannel customer contact centers. The answer to our original questions is clearly "no," managers do not need to formulate human resource policy or manage the workforce in a manner corresponding with customer relationship objectives within different customer communication channels as there is no difference between the employee-customer linkage across customer communication channels. Results indicate that there was a significant effect of the Customer Contact Channel on Customer Satisfaction after controlling for the effect of Employee Satisfaction. Consequently, retailers should include customer satisfaction as an evaluation criterion for all customer contact employee groups, regardless of the customer contact channel they are assigned to. Finally, regardless of our findings that employee satisfaction had no significant effect on customer satisfaction, it is not advisable to overlook this relationship entirely. Our results indicate, although statistically non-significant, that other things being equal, if an employee satisfaction increases by one unit, then the Customer Satisfaction should increase by just over half a unit (although there is nothing to suggest a causal link between the two). Many kinds of managerial actions can potentially enhance employee satisfaction and workforce moral (Brown & Lam, 2008). Managerial policies and actions that clarify role expectations and provide material support for employees on how to interact with customers across all customer contact channels are of primary importance.

5.4   Recommendations for further research

Like all research, this study involved trade-offs that limit it in certain aspects. This study examined the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction utilizing the media richness framework as the theoretical base. Obviously, one important direction for future research is to conduct more studies of media richness theory that more closely examine the nature of tasks in the interaction between employee and customers. Our study could be extended by incorporating the moderating impact of tasks-oriented tasks versus person- or relationship-oriented tasks on the relationship between employee and customer satisfaction. According to Dennis and Kinney (1998) tasks-oriented activities (such as information exchange, or problem-solving) can be carried out equally well using any customer contact channel but that not all customer contact channels are suitable for tasks requiring high personal involvement (such as sales).

Additionally, according to Hatfield et al., (1992, p.169) women have been taught to be more "sensitive" to other people's feelings and thus are more likely to experience and display other emotions than are men. Our Employee sample ($N= 198$) only contained 11 men. Future studies could investigate additional explanatory power on the moderating effect of gender on the direct link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

One of the main limitations of this study is that Customer Satisfaction was examined as a single item construct. However, studies suggest that nothing reported thus far should be interpreted as questioning the use of well-constructed scales in comparison to a single item measure (Stanton, Sinar, Balzer, & Smith, 2002; Wanous et al., 1997). Our measurement of Customer Satisfaction is therefore likely to limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should utilize well-constructed multi-items overall customer satisfaction scales to capture the true essence of customer satisfaction.

Lastly, the present study focuses on media richness scale, but similar analyses should be conducted using social presence scales. Because the media richness is closely related to the concept of social presence, which describes the degree to which others feel psychologically close or present (Kahai & Cooper, 2003; Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017; Schmidt, Montoya-weiss, & Massey, 2001). Short et al. (1976, p.65) stated that "*it is important to emphasize that we are defining Social Presence as a quality of the medium itself*," and that, "*communications media vary in their degree of Social Presence, and that these variations are important in determining the way individuals interact.*" From their perspective, people perceive some media as having a higher degree of social presence (e.g., video) and other media as having a lower degree of social presence (e.g., audio) (Lowenthal, 2010). A medium with a high degree of social presence is seen as begin sociable, warm, and personal, whereas a medium with a low degree of social presence is seen as less personal (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017).

5.5   Implications for research

Earlier research has demonstrated that employee satisfaction affects customer satisfaction, but predominately in a direct face-to-face context. But service organizations nowadays are increasingly utilizing advanced information and communication technologies, such as the internet to interact with customers. We extend the accumulated research by including a contextual influence of technology-mediated methods of communication. It seems clear that the theoretical explanation based on media richness theory and emotional contagion is not sufficient

for explaining the employee-customer satisfaction dyad. Also, the media richness theory poorly predicted an (in)direct effect of the Customer Contact Channel on the level of Customer Satisfaction. The complex interaction between employees and customers cannot all be captured in a framework as simplistic as emotional contagion. The affect transfer alone is insufficient to account for the link between employee- and customer satisfaction.

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APPENDIX 1

English Survey Questions "Employee Satisfaction".

Think of your job in general. All in all, what is it like most of the time? Rate you answer on the following scale: "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7)

Age:
Gender: Male/ Female
Length of time by {company}

1. Pleasant
2. Bad
3. Great
4. Waste of time
5. Good
6. Undesirable
7. Worthwhile
8. Worse than most
9. Acceptable
10. Superior
11. Better than most
12. Disagreeable
13. Makes me content
14. Inadequate
15. Excellent
16. Rotten
17. Enjoyable
18. Poor

Dutch translation Survey Questions "Medewerkerstevredenheid"

Denk aan uw werk in het algemeen. Al met al, hoe is het meestal? Gelieve aan te geven hoe tevreden u ben met {company} door de volgende stellingen te beoordelen op de volgende schaal: "Totaal mee oneens" (1) tot "Totaal mee eens" (7)

Leeftijd:
Geslacht: Man/ Vrouw
Dienstjaren bij {bedrijf}:

1. Aangenaam
2. Slecht
3. Geweldig
4. Zonde van de tijd
5. Goed
6. Ongewenst
7. De moeite waard
8. Slechter dan anderen
9. Acceptabel
10. Superieur
11. Beter dan anderen
12. Onaangenaam
13. Geeft me voldoening
14. Ontoereikend
15. Uitstekend
16. Afschuwelijk
17. Prettig
18. Matig

APPENDIX 2

Open Universiteit
www.ou.nl

Beste medewerker,

Allereerst wil ik u hartelijk danken voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Ik ben een laatstejaarsstudent Management Wetenschappen in de richting Marketing & Supply Chain Management aan de Open Universiteit. Voor mijn afstuderen doe ik wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de relatie tussen klanttevredenheid en medewerkerstevredenheid van de klanten van {bedrijf}

Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in de relatie tussen medewerkerstevredenheid en klanttevredenheid en in welke mate deze relatie beïnvloed wordt door het communicatiekanaal.

Het onderzoek zal ongeveer 5 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen. Er zal betrouwbaar met uw gegevens worden omgegaan en de resultaten worden geheel anoniem verwerkt.

Mocht u nog vragen of opmerkingen hebben over het onderzoek, neem dan contact met mij op via 06-30118807 of robbertgijsbertse@gmail.com

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Robbert Gijsbertse