Joy and Regret: Positive and Negative Consumer Emotions at restaurants

Abstract

In the marketing discipline, scholars argue that emotion is determinant for consumer´s choice during the consumption decision process. The present research investigated different types of emotions and connected them with positive and negative affects regarding consumption at restaurants. Additionally, the study identified triggering factors in the perspective of participants that might lead to repurchase or abandonment behavior regarding the experience in restaurants. Twelve individuals were interviewed between June and August 2019, resulting in 24 reports of positive and negative experiences in 23 different restaurants in Sao Paulo, Brazil, resulting in 32 pages transcribed. Based on the hierarchical model of Laros and Steemkamp (2005), the findings of this research confirmed that there are dominant emotions that anticipate the potential future costumer behavior towards the restaurant offer. Also, the research reaffirms previous studies, when it demonstrates that positive emotions lead consumers to share the positive experience and tend to become regular customers. However, negative emotions generate ambiguous valence that can culminate or not in abandonment behavior or formal complaints.

Key words: emotions; consumer behavior; restaurant.

1. Introduction

Emotions are mental conditions of readiness that arise from evaluations of events or from the thoughts themselves (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Positive consumer expectations are associated with positive emotions and negative expectations are connected to negative emotions. Both can be felt by the individual, during the consumption experience (Laros and Steenkamp, 2005). In this sense, consumption experience means all instances of a service consumption episode in the pre-purchase, interaction and post-purchase phases. These phases conceptualize a relationship perspective (White and Yu, 2005).

In order to analyze the emotions and behaviors connected to consumer experiences, this research has as a study scenario, restaurants. According to the Brazilian Association of Bars and Restaurants (ABRASEL), in 2017, the sector accounted for one million businesses and generates six million direct jobs across Brazil, currently representing 2, 7% of the national GDP (ABRASEL, 2018). Therefore, eating out-of-home is part of the entertainment sector in Brazil.

According to studies by Liljander and Strandvik (1997), consumer can demonstrate a change in feeling and his action (attitude) on the service received, depending on the actions taken by the employees involved in the service.

Based on the findings regarding the hierarchical model of consumer emotions (Laros and Steenkamp, 2005) and the term affect, considered as a set of mental processes for emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999), the present study uses these denominations to classify emotions in the context of out-of-home eating. The research proposal consisted on investigating the emotional feeling memorized by consumers after a consumption experience at a restaurant and the direct resulting behavior towards the restaurant. In this context, the question raised in this research is:

How emotions are connected to the repurchase or abandonment regarding consumption in restaurants?

The present research aimed to add new findings to the set of previous investigations that are dedicated to the theme of emotions in consumption, as well as to studies applied to the out-of-home food sector. Overall, the finding suggests the need for advancements in the discussion regarding the management commitment with the consumer´s expectation in the service sector.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory of emotions

Psychology scholars say that emotions play a vital role in determining people's behaviors and actions (Gaur et al., 2014).

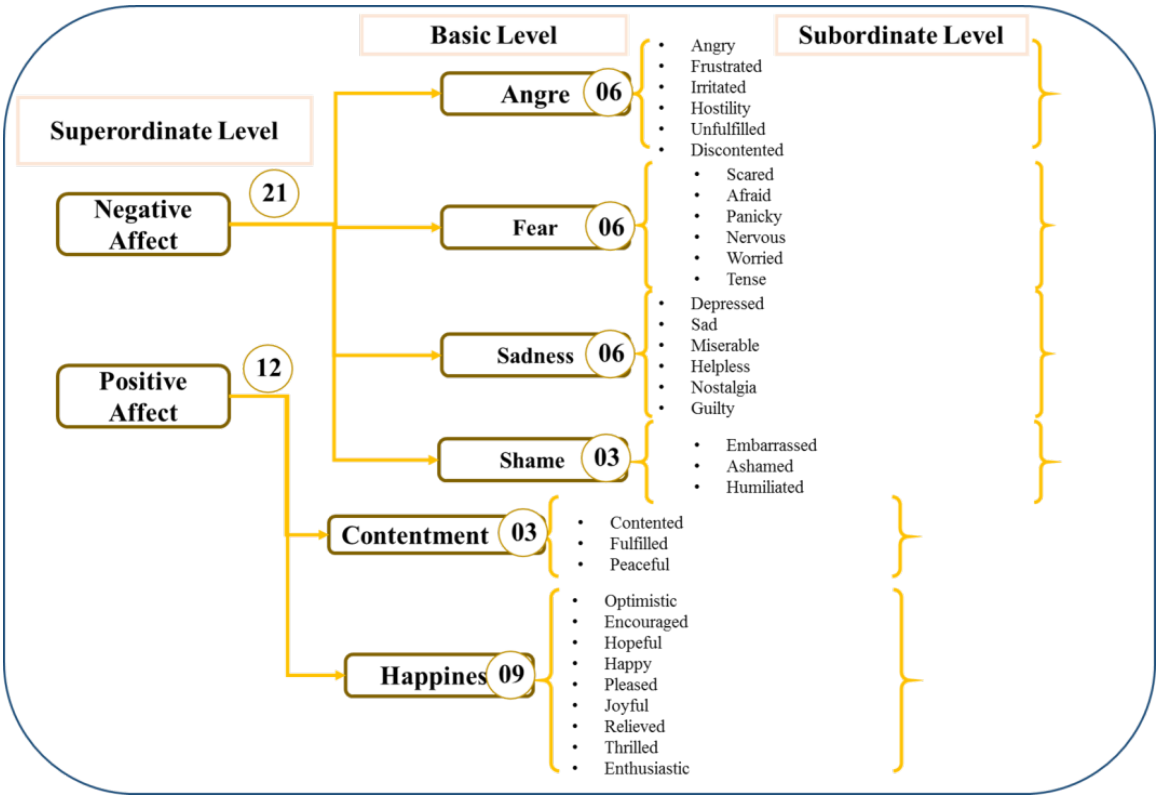
Emotions are directly related to actions and achievement of goals. Negative emotions such as anger, sadness and fear are considered imbalances, with an immediate desire to return to normal. A positive emotion carries out an action to share: someone's good luck, good experience, among other actions (Lazarus and Lazarus, 1991).

In this sense, according to Lazarus and Lazarus (1991), there are two coping processes commonly used: the one focused on the problem, in which one tries to relieve the sources of suffering and the one focused on the emotion, in which the meaning of the source of suffering is changed (for example, the existence of a threat is denied or the source of distress is pushed way).

In the field of sociology, prior research were dedicated to the investigate the relationship between emotions and the individual especially regarding to how people react to social experiences and what are their resulting actions (Turner, 2006).

The theoretical framework applied in the present study is based on Laros and Steenkamp (2005). In their study, the objective was twofold: a) to integrate research avenues in psychology and in marketing (consumer behavior), and b) the development of a hierarchical model of consumer emotions, as shown in Figure 01. Different researches in the last two decades were reviewed by the authors and compared with Richins´ (1997 Consumption Emotion Set (CES) scale. The author´s proposed hierarchy consists of three levels: the superordinate level with positive and negative effects, the basic emotions level with two positive emotions and four negative emotions, and the subordinate level with 33 specific emotions. The authors established a seminal hierarchy model used as a reference to order the consumer's emotional experience.

Figure 01. Hierarchical model of consumer emotions



Source: Elaborated from Laros and Steenkamp (2005)

Different emotions result in different behavioral consequences. It seems, for example, that a failure in a product or service can cause feelings of anger or sadness. Angry people feel that something has been doing wrong, but behaviors depend on emotion. In the case of sadness,

the sad person becomes retract (shy), while the angry person can become enraged and more energized to fight (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

2.2. Studies of emotions and behaviors in restaurant consumption

The recognition that excitement plays an essential role in emotion, - considered the consumer's response to a stimuli caused by marketing actions - , places an emphasis on the increased consumption based on the adequacy of store environments, internal sound, packaging colors , employee training, among other marketing stimuli (Schachter and Singer, 1962).

Tsaur et al, (2015) demonstrated that sensorial marketing to stimulate consumer positive emotional reactions have effective results in terms of positive emotions and the consumer behavioral at 'a la carte service' restaurants.

Additionally, the authors evidenced that the aesthetic stimulus is important since the client reacts to the numerous interactions with employees. Among the aesthetic issues are: friendly smile, clean teeth, cut hair, appropriate body proportions, having the appropriate voice and accent. Some of these characteristics are developed through training and resources such as the use of uniform, body language and makeup (Tsaur et al., 2015).

For the present research, the hierarchy model of consumer emotions elaborated by Laros and Steenkamp (2005) was used as the baseline for the emotions identifications and categorization. The choice for the authors 'model is due to the systematic review of previous studies on consumption and emotions and for having carried out an empirical research on food consumption, similar to this investigation. However, due to the exploratory qualitative characteristic of the present research, some propositions were established to guide the investigation and interpretation process as follow:

(P1). Regarding consumption in restaurants it´s expected new emotions to emerge related to the basic and subordinate levels;

(P2). Positive affect will result on positive word-of-mouth and repurchase.

(P3). Negative affect will result on complaint and abandonment.

The abandonment concept was based on Diniz (2014) conceptualization meaning the intention to migrate to the competition.

3. Method

Due to the latent nature of emotions, the research investigation opted by a qualitative approach based in-depth interviews. Such decision is based on the fact that emotion is a state of readiness, not being stored and recovered, although it is possible to recreate the conditions by producing them in our memory and obtaining the emotional reaction linked to the thoughts generated (Bagozzi, 1992).

In this study, narrative research especially the retelling technique was chosen aiming to capture individual's perception of a certain experience relevant to the research problem investigation (Creswell, 2014).

The interviews were taken in person and individually. The participants were encouraged to narrate a consumption episode in restaurants occurred in the last six (6) months prior the interview meeting in the city of São Paulo. A semi-structured script guided the interview so that the interviewer has the freedom to explore the phenomena, as they appear (Godoy, 1995).

3.1. Research approach and interviewee selection

To capture eating out-of-home experiences that are connected with expectations and emotional involvement, we decided to explore consumption perception at a defined category of restaurants named “a la carte”. This type of enterprise offers a regular menu with the table assistance for order taking. In Brazil, this category accounts to around 38% of the revenue from the out-of-home food sector that also is compounded by the fast casual category with 19%, portrayed by the system per kilo or self-service; fast food units with 31%, and finally, bakeries with 12% (ABIA, 2019).

The research sample was conventional selected based on the following criteria: individuals over the age of 40 years and frequent customers of a la carte restaurants in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Also, the snowball technique was applied to amplify the research recruitment.

During the period of June to August 2019, 12 individuals performed in-depth interviews. All respondents signed a free consent term to participate in the research. The script contained three parts that explored a) the individuals´ social profile and consumption habits in out-of-home eating, b) a positive affect episode, and c) a negative affect episode of a consumption experience at a restaurant. The interviews were recorded on audio generating around 32 transcribed pages of 24 reported positive and negative experiences.

3.2. Data analysis and data validation

The content analysis technique was adopted following Bardin´s (2010) recommendations: pre-analysis, material exploration and treatment of results.

By the narrative technique, the interviewer, at the moment of transcribing the audio interviews, might perform the interpretation and organization of the material (Creswell, 2014). In the present research, the main objective consisted on identify, highlight and organize emotions as reported by respondents.

Additionally, validation methods were applied to certify the partiality of data interpretation thus ensuring the reliability of the result obtained (Creswell, 2014). The codified material of the reported emotions was analyzed by a pair of marketing scholars that debated the emotions description and fitness regarding the Laos and Laros and Steenkamp (2005) hierarchical model. As the original model is in English language, a great effort was applied to match the correct translation of the Portuguese word (emotion) to its counterpart in English and then to the original authors´ hierarchical model (positive and negatives).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Profile of respondents

Table 01 summarizes the 12 participants´ age and occupation. The sample was balanced between men and women, in the same age group, above 40 years of age. Regarding the restaurants mentioned by the interviewee in positive and negative affections, the majority are ranked above grade 3.5 in the Tripadvisor Brasil website[1].

[1] The score ranges from 0 to 5.

Table 01. Respondents profile

Name	Age	Occupation	Restaurant Positive Affection	Restaurante Negative Affection
Adriana	48	Teacher	Outback - Interlagos	Applebees - Moema
Bart	56	Commercial area	Abraccio - Shop Morumbi	Miawa - Morumbi
Carla	50	Psychologist / Businesswoman	Quinta do Marques - Rod Castello Branco km57	Arabesco - Shop Morumbi
Edson	52	Economist	Outback - Tamboré	Temakeria - Al Santos
Fabiana	41	Adm companies	Good Wine - Alphaville	Pizzaria Principal - Caraguatatuba Litoral
José Luiz	41	Businessman	Sky - Brigadeiro L. Antonio	Eataly - Itaim Bibi
Leandro	40	Journalist	Trio 19 - Vila Olimpia	Viena - Cj Nacional Av Paulista
Marcelo	47	Commercial	La Nonna di Lucca	Nonna Paola - Interlagos
Patrícia	55	Project management	Harburgueria 162 Shop Frei Caneca	Joint Burguer - Jardins
Paulo Cezar	49	Teacher/ Advertising	Novilho Prata - Mag Tietê	Cantina Roperto - Bixiga
Sandra	47	Businesswoman	Frutaria - Alphaville	Quinta do Marques - Rod Castello Branco km57
Simone	45	Dentist	Boizão Grill- Marg Tiete	Rei do Filé - Santana

Source: Research data

4.1. Basic and subordinate emotions

The research premises are presented and discusses vis-a-vis the data interpretation under the guidance of the hierarchical model of consumer emotions of Laros and Steenkamp, 2005).

(P1). Regarding consumption in restaurants it´s expected new emotions to emerge related to the basic and subordinate levels.

Respondents expressed narratives for positive and negative affections that pointed out for new emotions when their responses are compared to the parameters established by Laros and Steenkamp (2005).

Overall, 27 new emotions at the subordinated level resulted from the field research being 13 related to positive affections and 14 for negative affections (Table 02).

Table 02. Additional research emotions

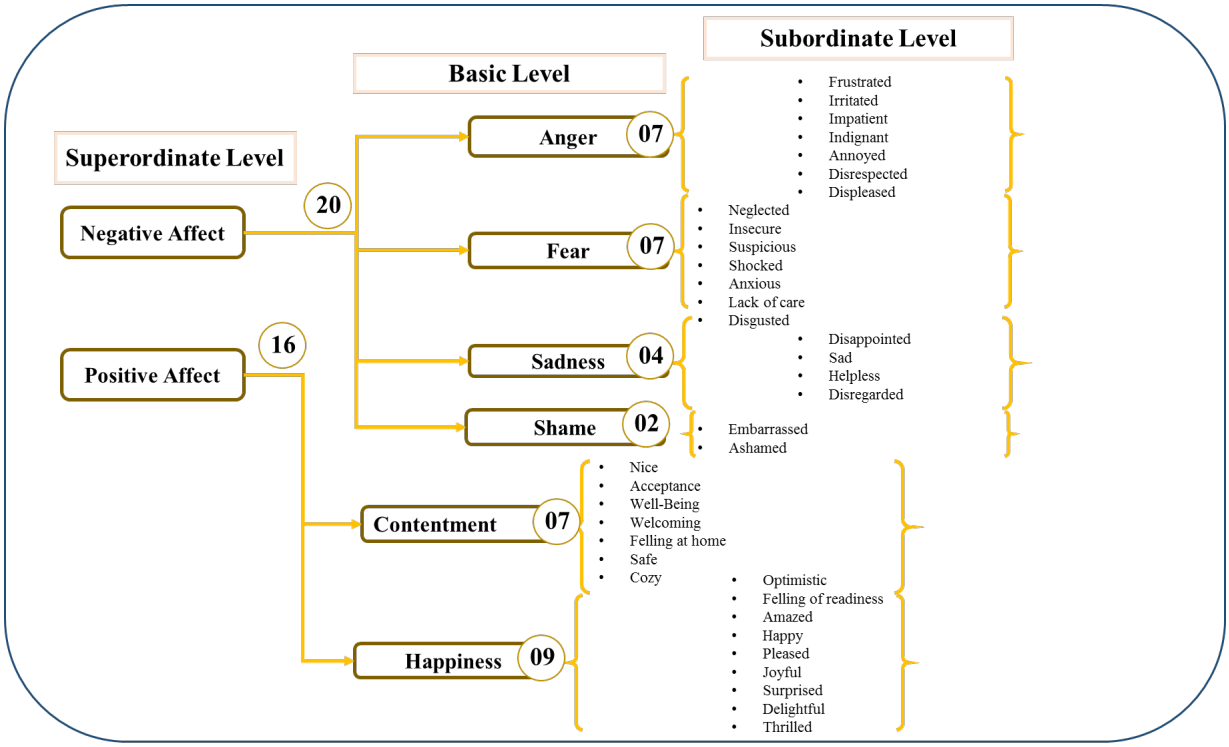
Additional emotions of research	
Positive Affection	**Negative Affection**
Acceptance	Anxious
Welcoming	Displeased
Cozy	Disappointed
Well-Being	Neglected
Amazed	Suspicious
Feeling of readiness	Disregarded
Nice	Disrespected
Delightful	Lack of care
Feeling at home	Shocked
Safe	Impatient
Surprised	Annoyed
	Indignant
	Insecure
	Disgusted

Source: Research data

Figure 02 shows the hierarchical model of consumer emotions build upon the research findings and context. Throughout the transcribing process and data interpretation, the final material indicated a total of 36 emotions collected spontaneously (positive and negative affects) through the retelling narrative. It is worth mentioning that this method differs from that applied by Laros and Steenkamp (2005), since, in the original study, emotions are previously presented to respondents, who choose, from a list provided, the emotion they perceived as better proxy to describe how they feel. In the present study, respondents attribute emotions (words) that express something narrated through their memories, spontaneously and without pre-established parameters.

For a better understanding, the final model emerged from the research findings is presented with the same graphic scheme of the original (Figure 01) as demonstrated in Figure 02.

Figure 02. Hierarchical model of consumer emotions with the findings of this research



Source: Research data

Basic emotions remain identical to those prescribed by Laros and Steenkamp (2005). The differences are found at the subordinate level of emotions. The negative affections such as Anger, Sadness, Fear and Shame are all emotions caused by others or by circumstances (Laros and Steenkamp, 2005). Within the basic level Anger, 7 new subordinate emotions emerged from the study, being: Frustrated, Irritated, Impatient, Indignant, Annoyed, Disrespected and Displeased. Only 'frustrated and irritated' emotions are in the original model.

At the basic Fear level, all 7 emotions mentioned are new and have no similarity to the emotions in the original model. The emotions mentioned are: Neglected, Insecure, Suspicious, Shocked, Anxious, Lack of care, and Disgusted. Regarding the 'Disgusted´ mentions, the episodes are directed connected with the respondents´ experience of finding bugs or strange things mixed with the served meal. Nevertheless, the intensity of the emotion and the sequential action are greater for those whose were accompanied with other fellows at the restaurant. In these cases, the emotion 'Disgusted' is followed by the emotion of basic level 'Shame' demonstrating the participant´s discomfort and embarrassment with the situation. Shame emotion as defined by Laros and Steenkamp (2005) is caused by a negative felling experience

by the consumer himself without the direct action of others. One participant who pointed out 'Disgusted' emotion mentioned that she also felt Distrust towards the restaurant.

In another narrative of 'Disgusted' emotion, the participant was with her family at the restaurant to celebrate her birthday. In this scenario, the emotional memory reaches a strong intensity resulting in two negative emotions of basic levels: Fear and Anger without pointing to other expected basic emotions: sadness or shame.

> *(...) we were all serving the buffet together. I put the salad on my plate and that's when I saw a bug in my salad. I called a waiter, who was nearby, I called a manager. I asked to take the salad from the buffet, which was full of bugs (..) I felt a lot of disrespect and lack of care for myself and the people who were serving themselves, because that salad was not clean enough*. (Sandra)

Regarding the basic level of Sadness, the subordinate emotions emerged from the findings are: Disappointed, Sad, Helpless, Disregarded. Sad and Helpless are also in the original model. In the basic level Shame, the two emerged subordinate emotions are the same as in the original model: Embarrassed and Ashamed. Nevertheless, the affection 'Humiliated' didn´t was reported by any respondent when retelling negative experiences at the restaurant.

Regarding the basic level emotion 'Contentment', the 7 new subordinate emotions emerged from the research were: Nice, Acceptance, Well-Being, Welcoming, Feeling at home, Safe, Cozy. All emotions reported by the respondents at this level were different from the ones presented in the original hierarchical model (Contented, Fulfilled and Peaceful). There were two narratives where the description of the emotion 'Nice' appeared. The both experiences were related to the employee's empathy regarding the participants 'children giving them properly attention and toys to make them feel comfortable at the restaurant. In those cases the respondents described the situation as ´nice´ demonstrating that the employee´s action toward their children turned the restaurant experience more enjoyable and relaxing.

> *(...) this waiter did everything to make us feel at home. He adjusted the music, came with extra food, took my son in the crowded restaurant to get another dish from the buffet. The food was great, the atmosphere too. I felt like a happy family day. It was very nice*. (Carla)

In the hierarchical model of Laros and Steenkamp (2005), the positive basic emotions are Contentment and Happiness. The both basic affections appeared in the respondent´s narratives. Regarding the basic level Happiness, the findings indicated nine positive affections

related to the respondent´s narratives: Optimistic, Feeling of Readiness, Amazed, Happy, Pleased, Joyful, Surprised, Delightful e and Thrilled, totaling nine emotions, with five emotions coinciding with the original model: Optimistic, Happy, Joyful, Pleased and Thrilled.

The 'Delightful' emotion is narrated by the respondents regarding situations that indicated pleasure of being at the restaurant accompanied with a feeling of belonging. According to Gaur et al. (2014) the feeling of belonging towards a brand considerably increases the repurchase behavior, ensuring that the consumer shares the same values with the brand.

Additionally, the 'Delightful' emotion is connected to the food flavor that was considered well-prepared with homemade flavor. The narratives also mentioned other attributes associated with this emotion such as fresh ingredients, high gastronomy and healthy food.

> (...) *the most positive experience is the pleasure to taste of a well-done food. When you feel that the food is well prepared and you feel that you are having the supreme sum of a gastronomic experimentation.* (Leandro)

In the original model, the 'Surprise' emotion was excluded once it has an ambiguous valence resulting in difficulty to classify the emotion as positive or negative affection based on a survey instrument (Laros and Steenkamp, 2005). In the present study, thanks to the applied methodology it was possible to identify clearly to which affection the Surprise emotion was connected confirming its positive valence.

In one of the narratives the 'Surprise' emotion was referred to the employee´s body language and communication skills along with the correct dress code, demonstrating that these aspects are not usual in restaurant contexts. Tsaur et al. (2015) affirm that consumer perception of the employee´s efficient role in terms of communication and physical appearance will result into confidence regarding the waiter/waitress.

4.2. Positive affect and resulting consumer Behavior

The findings confirmed the P2: *Positive affections will result on word-of-mouth and repurchase behavior.*

Table 03 summarizes the strongest positive affect reported by the respondent regarding the whole experience at the restaurant along with the resulting action and the triggering factor.

Table 03. Emotions for positive affect, triggering factor and action

Name	Emotion	Trigerring factor	Resulting Action
Adriana	Joyful	Staff	Would certainly go back
Bart	Surprised	Staff	Would certainly go back and recommend
Carla	Happy	Staff	Would certainly go back and recommend
Edson	Joyful	Staff	Would certainly go back
Fabiana	Happy	Staff	Would certainly go back
José Luiz	Happy	Well decorated environment	Would certainly go back
Leandro	Delightful	Food well done	Would certainly go back
Marcelo	Joyful	Staff	Would certainly go back
Patrícia	Happy	Staff	Would certainly go back and recommend
Paulo Cezar	Feeling at home	Staff	Would certainly go back and recommend
Sandra	Happy	Staff	Would certainly go back and recommend
Simone	Happy	Staff	Would certainly go back

Source: Elaborated by the author, 2019.

The respondents were inquired the following question: *"Would you return and recommend the restaurant?*". The majority answered positively indicating that they would certainly return to the restaurant. The additional difference between the participants response was the act of recommend or not the restaurant. For a large group, they would not only return but also spread positive word-of-mouth. There were also respondents reporting that they would communicate to the restaurant´s employee regarding their decision to return.

Regarding the triggering factors, the repurchase behavior is connected to the positive feelings regarding the quality of service provided by the waiter and other restaurant´s employees. This result is consistent with Stefanini et al. (2017) that highlight the salient importance of the human element for a positive consumption experience in restaurants.

The centrality in the human being and interpersonal relationships imply in quality perception for the service consumer. Accordingly, to Camargo (2015) employee's actions cause a stimulus to the consumer and the result of that stimulus becomes an emotion (positive or negative) followed by action. Additionally, the interpersonal relationship is the basic component of hospitality.

4.3. Negative affect and abandonment

The findings offered a more broad interpretation of the P3: *Negative affect will result on complaint and abandonment.* Table 04 summarizes the strongest negative affect reported by

the respondent regarding the whole experience at the restaurant along with the resulting action and the triggering factor. The respondents were inquired the following question: *"Would you inform the restaurant staff regarding the negative episode? Would you return to the restaurant?*". Surprisingly, a great number of respondents affirmed that they would return independent of the trigger factor that caused the negative affect such as the staff behavior, odd things in the meal, noisy environment and cognitive dissonance with the meal flavor. For whom that were acquainted with the restaurant due previous experiences, the non-abandonment behavior was reported as 'second chance pass'

The majority resulting action was to address a formal complain to the restaurant´s manager after the negative episode. Nevertheless, some respondents reported that despite the negative affect they hadn´t expressed their dissatisfaction to the restaurant´s staff. In this sense, P3 was partially confirmed once the abandonment behavior was not plainly adopted by the respondents as well the complaining action.

Table 04. Emotions for negative affect, triggering factor and action

Name	Emotion	Trigger	Resulting Action	Abandonment
Adriana	Sad	Staff behavior	Complained to the manager	No
Bart	Irritated	Staff behavior	Complained to the manager	Yes
Carla	Irritated	Staff behavior	Complained to the manager	Yes
Edson	Irritated	Staff behavior	Complained to the manager	No
Fabiana	Disappointed	Staff behavior	Nothing	Yes
José Luiz	Disappointed	Staff behavior	Nothing	No
Leandro	Annoyed	noisy environment	Nothing	No
Marcelo	Disgusted	odd things in the meal	Complained to the manager	Yes
Patrícia	Frustrated	cognitive dissonance with the meal flavor	Nothing	No
Paulo Cezar	Irritated	Staff behavior	Complained to the manager	No
Sandra	Disgusted	odd things in the meal	Complained to the manager	Yes
Simone	Suspicious	odd things in the meal	Complained to the manager	No

Source: Research data

5. Final remarks

The present study was dedicated to the investigation of the different types of emotions that come from the consumption experience at restaurants, connecting them, first with the positive and negative affects to then check the correspondence with the resulting behavior.

New emotions were found at the subordinate level and the basic emotions contained in the original hierarchical model of Laros and Steenkamp (2005) were validated. Twenty-five (25) new emotions were mentioned by the participants regarding the consumption experience at restaurants.

The findings of this research differ from the Laros and Steenkamp (2005) in the sense it applied the narrative approach, as well as using the out-of-home eating as a unit of analysis. This narrative through the retelling technique allows greater understanding of the word meaning associated to the reported emotion taking into consideration the context to which the respondent wanted to report (Creswell, 2014).

In the context of the restaurants, emotions are enhanced, since it is not just the meal that is being tested, but the entire context of the service, passing through the facilities, decoration and comfort, ending with the relationship established between the customer and the restaurant staff.

The research findings reaffirms previous studies, when it demonstrates that positive emotions lead consumers to share the positive experience and tend to become regular customers. However, negative emotions generate ambiguous valence that can culminate or not in abandonment behavior or formal complaints.

Research limitations and Future studies

It is also known that positive and negative emotions are built based on intimate attributions that the consumer assumes as the result of his consumption experience. Nevertheless, beliefs or external factors such as advertising and word-of-mouth might affect the resulting emotion (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997). In this sense, a proposed continuity for the study consisted on exploring antecedents of the episode that might help to explain the emotions connected to the reported experience. Additionally, the cross cultural comparisons would clarify whether the cultural characteristics may be a salient factor to distinguished emotions considering the same evaluated context.

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