

Channel-switching behaviour and customer deviance

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Abstract

Purpose – Unacceptable behaviour in retailing – negative customer deviance (NCD) is rising, damaging retailers financially. Current research investigates forms of NCD by addressing its impact on employees but overlooks its effects on bystander-customers and their retail channel preferences. As channel switching within retailing is increasing unprecedentedly, this research investigates its correspondence with NCD encounters.

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses structural equation modelling, based on data collection administered through a web-based survey of 1,008 customers of at least 16 years of age, to analyse the research model.

Findings – The findings reveal unexplored forms of NCD perceived by bystander-customers in retailing and their consequences, linking it to bystander-customers' ill-being, dissatisfaction with the shopping experience, a decrease in store commitment and an increase in their retail channel-switching intentions. Additionally, the research uncovers moderating variables.

Practical implications – This research tests NCD dimensions and effects on bystander-customers, which indicate the need for retailers to address shopping values, attitudes and commitment through corrective, proactive and long-term strategic actions.

Originality/value – As one of the first studies to investigate the impact of NCD on bystander-customers' intentions to switch from store-based to online shopping, strategies for retailers are developed to help diminish and control NCD-induced threats to bystander-customers.

Keywords Retail channel switching, Customer deviance, Bystander-customer reactance

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In recent years, more than 10 billion USD of financial losses have been attributed to customer fraud (PWC, 2022). Since then, negatively deviating customers have been on the rise (Mayr and Teller, 2023) and are damaging retailers. Not only that, such behaviours threaten bystander-customers' wellbeing (Grybś-Kabocik, 2016) and their shopping experience (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020), driving them out of stores. Not surprisingly, bystander-customers switch services due to toxic clients (Cai *et al.*, 2018).

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Despite this, current research corroborates their effects on employees (Mayr and Teller, 2023) but leaves the impact on bystander-customers mostly aside. As a phenomenon prevalent in the service industry, research addresses customer-to-customer interactions (Nicholls, 2010) and contagion effects limited to customer misbehaviour (Schaefer et al., 2016; Srivastava et al., 2022). This is concerning, as negative customer deviance (NCD), a behaviour which describes subtle forms of social norm infringements, does not only unfold within the customer-customer dyad. Moreover, it goes beyond self-centred misbehaviour and its contagion effects on bystander-customers within the service sector.

While research effectively addresses the need for NCD research, it leaves unexplained how bystander-customers are affected by NCD in retail stores, and how retail-channel-switching intentions are formed as a consequence. This is even more concerning as, since the recent crisis, consumers have been switching retail channels, in the form of both brand switching and across-brand switching at an unprecedented rate (Charm et al., 2020). Moreover, within the vast availability of retail channels, retailers face increasing pressure in terms of profitability and return on capital (Catena et al., 2023). Thus, to diminish the financial risk posed by NCD, retailers need to understand how NCD affects bystander-customers and specifically its impact on retail-channel-switching.

Accordingly, we aim to reveal NCD effects on bystander-customers in stores and to examine its correspondence with the formation of switching intentions from store-based to online shopping. Therefore, an NCD effect chain in store-based retailing, from the view of bystander-customers, is revealed.

This is one of the first studies to examine the effects of NCD in retailing in correspondence with store-based to online retail-channel-switching. The findings indicate that NCD affects retail-channel-switching intentions directly and indirectly, as this effect precedes mediation in the form of shopper ill-being, shopping experience dissatisfaction, affective decommitment, negative attitude, and the influence of moderating variables. Based on that, strategies for retailers are suggested to help diminish and control NCD-induced threats to bystander-customers.

We contribute to current research by (1) examining multiple dimensions of bystander-customers' NCD perceptions in retail stores, (2) explaining NCD's impact on those customers and their retail-channel-switching intentions, and (3) providing practical implications for retail management.

2. Conceptual frame

2.1 Literature review

Customer deviance comprises negative and positive forms of customer behaviour according to normative theory (Mertens et al., 2016). While NCD refers to badly behaving customers (Mayr and Teller, 2023), positive deviances (Mayr and Teller, 2024) entail pro-social (Kim and Kim, 2024) and customer citizenship behaviour (Le et al., 2024). However, we focus on NCD due to its detrimental impact on retailers and the risk it poses to abandon bystander-customers from stores.

As a research field which is dominated by psychological and service marketing research, only a few studies investigate NCD within retailing (Dootson et al., 2023), testing the severity of one specific NCD dimension, opportunistic deviance, in relation to service robots. Current research effectively captures various forms of NCD relating to abusive behaviour, verbal aggression, and fraud (DeCelles et al., 2019; Okan and Elmadag, 2020), customer misbehaviour (Chaouali et al., 2022), dysfunctional behaviour (Huang et al., 2022), disruptive behaviour (Cai et al., 2018), and customer incivility (Hur et al., 2022). While each of these terms addresses one aspect of NCD in a specific context, such as for example incivility or misbehaviour, entailing product or property damages, broken policies, impatience, and frustration (Srivastava et al.,

2022), a whole range of other forms of NCD specifically directed at bystander-customers (e.g. harassment or arguments with other customers) and within the context of store-based retailing are scarcely tackled within the literature presently. While NCD entails norm violations targeting bystander-customers, frontline employees and store assets, other forms of negative customers behaviour captured within research, such as misbehaviour (Chaouali *et al.*, 2022), is characterised by an inappropriate behaviour which concerns mainly customers' self-centredness. Since NCD is not exclusively and intentionally associated with egocentrism, such behaviours are rather subtle. We therefore expand prior research by addressing multiple subtle forms of NCD and their effects.

Overall, within retailing, NCD research corroborates frontline employees' perspectives and NCD's effects on them (Mayr and Teller, 2023) but rarely discusses bystander-customers' NCD encounters (e.g. Fisk *et al.*, 2010) or their reactions to them. The effects of forms of NCD on bystander-customers draw attention to services marketing research as it confirms that switching services can occur as a consequence of encountering toxic clients in restaurants (Cai *et al.*, 2018). The effects of NCD on bystander-customers within the context of retailing and their switching behaviour are unspecified, as within retailing, research links switching behaviour either to channel attributes (Obeng *et al.*, 2016) or to customers' characteristics (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2022), leaving it unclear how multiple forms of NCD in retail stores impact bystander-customers' emotions and their attitudes.

To close these research gaps, we test NCD empirically, taking the viewpoints of bystander-customers within retail stores, linking multiple NCD dimensions to bystander-customers' affective states, attitudes, and retail-channel-switching intentions, which is crucial for developing strategies to mitigate NCD's negative outcomes.

2.2 Reactance theory

As a psychological behavioural theory, reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981) explains the emotional and behavioural responses of people in case their freedoms or choices are restricted. In the case of NCD, bystander-customers are restricted in their way to act when they encounter such behaviours while shopping in stores. Accordingly, psychological reactance arises as the freedom to act autonomously in a desired way is threatened (Steindl *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, individuals who feel threatened grasp at restoring this lost freedom (Matarazzo and Diamantopoulos, 2022) and thus, retail-channel-switching intentions are likely to be formed if bystander-customers encounter NCD while shopping in stores. Reactance theory suggests that it takes the form of cognitive and affective responses, translating into affective, attitudinal, and behavioural actions in response to a threat (Dillard and Shen, 2005), such as NCD for bystander-customers. Within this notion, reactance is affective when a person reacts in the form of feelings, attitudinal when they form a specific attitude, and behavioural if their behaviour is adjusted due to a threat. The theory elucidates the emotional and attitudinal processes that arise in response to perceived threats, including the sequence of effects leading to the restoration of an original state. In this context, we utilize this theory to explore how bystander-customers perceive NCD as a threat to their freedom to enjoy a positive shopping experience. This perceived threat triggers reactance in the form of reduced commitment and intentions to switch retail channels as bystander-customers seek to regain their sense of autonomy and restore their shopping satisfaction.

2.3 Hypothesis development

2.3.1 NCD perception effects: affective and attitudinal responses and behavioural reactance. NCD, characterised by negatively socially deviating customer behaviours within retail settings (Mayr and Teller, 2023), is proposed to significantly undermine the retail experience. Previous research supports that unethical customer behaviour fosters negative attitudes

towards the shopping experience, potentially leading to the avoidance of shopping in stores as a matter of customer expectation disconfirmation (Mayr *et al.*, 2022). Given that shopping experience satisfaction is crucial for customers' contentment with their stores and future return intentions (Klaus and Maklan, 2013), we suggest that NCD encounters adversely affect the shopping experience. Not only that bystander-customers' shopping experience is diminished, but they also encounter emotional distress and ill-being as a result of witnessing aggressive or unethical conduct (Grybś-Kabocik, 2016; Okan and Elmadag, 2020). As exit behaviours and service provider switching is prevalent among bystander-customers witnessing customer rage (Dorsey *et al.*, 2016; Cai *et al.*, 2018), similar effects concerning NCD and retail-channel-switching are expected. Hence, we infer:

H1a-c. NCD perceptions affect, **(a)** shopping experience satisfaction negatively, **(b)** shopper ill-being positively, and **(c)** intentions to switch from offline to online retail channels positively.

2.3.2 Shopper ill-being effects: attitudinal response and affective reactance. Shopper ill-being corresponds with disharmonious consumption experience and is mainly examined within the hospitality sector (Abbes *et al.*, 2019). Customers who engage in store based shopping typically anticipate a positive experience, encompassing cognitive, affective, social, and physical responses (Bustamante and Rubio, 2017). In alignment with reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981), NCD disrupts enjoyable experiences in stores for bystander-customers, thereby triggering ill-being and a negative impact on their shopping experience satisfaction and affective commitment. As a critical factor which denotes a favourable emotional attachment to a store (Dean, 2007) and fosters long term loyalty to a shopping channel (Maggioni *et al.*, 2019), affective commitment and the effect of ill-being on it is crucial for retailers. Research in the field of marketing suggests that ill-being has a negative impact on long-term relationships (Sirgy and Lee, 2008), as it compels customers to diminish their allegiance to the channel in question. Thus, we propose:

H2a-b. Shopper ill-being affects **(a)** shopping experience satisfaction and **(b)** affective commitment to the store negatively.

2.3.3 Customer shopping experience satisfaction effects: affective and attitudinal reactance. Research underlines the pivotal role of shopping experience satisfaction in determining customers' overall satisfaction with their in-store shopping encounters (Klaus and Maklan, 2013) and suggests that the quality of customers' experiences is significantly linked to affective commitment to a brand (Khan *et al.*, 2020). It implies an interplay of shopping experience satisfaction and customers' emotional investments in the retailer.

Furthermore, the attitude towards the affective experience at the store (Chun *et al.*, 2017), that is the level of enjoyment, fun, and overall satisfaction derived from a shopping experience, is influenced by customers' critical cognitive evaluations of their experiences (Anshu *et al.*, 2022) and they manifest in the development of a loyal attitude towards the retailer (Lucia-Palacios *et al.*, 2018). This underscores the importance of customer satisfaction in nurturing long-term affective commitment. Therefore, we propose:

H3a-b. Shopping experience satisfaction affects **(a)** affective commitment and **(b)** positive attitudes towards the affective experience positively.

2.3.4 Mediation of affective, attitudinal and behavioural response reactances. Emotions, motivations, and attitudes serve as precursors to the decisions customers make and ultimately lead to behavioural outcomes (Schiffman *et al.*, 2013), which is important for understanding retail-channel-switching behaviours. In retail environments, emotions and individual traits significantly influence customers' decision-making processes positively (Martinelli *et al.*, 2021). Research has shown that attitudinal factors (beliefs, behavioural

tendencies) and affective processing play a critical role for shaping consumers' decision-making process (Puccinelli *et al.*, 2009) and they influence customer loyalty positively through affective commitment (Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2006). Based on that, we propose:

H4. Affective commitment affects the attitude towards the affective experience in stores positively.

Building upon the findings of Van Nguyen *et al.* (2022), who identified social influence, customer characteristics, and risk perception as key drivers of retail-channel-switching intentions, we argue that the emotional and psychological factors that shape customers' attitudes also play a crucial role in the formation of switching intentions. Additionally, studies display, that such behavioural intentions are positively influenced by individuals' attitudes (Martinelli *et al.*, 2021) which implies a correspondence between attitudinal factors concerning the shopping experience and customers' intentions to switch shopping channels. Therefore, we conclude:

H5. Customers' positive attitude towards the affective experience affects their retail-channel-switching intentions negatively.

According to previous research, which examines emotional and attitudinal dynamics in retail contexts, customers' emotions, satisfaction and behavioural intentions to repatronise are impacted by store characteristics and in-store interactions (Terblanche, 2018). Negative behavioural responses correspond with angry customers (Bougie *et al.*, 2003) and omnichannel retail-channel-switching is influenced by social groups' behaviour (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2022).

Similarly, and in alignment with our proposed research model and reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981), NCD in stores represents a threat, provoking an affective response (shopper ill-being), triggers an attitude formation (shopping experience dissatisfaction), translates into an affective reactance (affective decommitment), engenders an attitudinal reactance (negative attitude towards the affective experience), and results in a behavioural reactance (intention to switch from the store-based retailer to online shopping). Thus, we assume:

H6. The effect of NCD on retail-channel-switching intentions is mediated by shopper ill-being, the shopping experience satisfaction, the affective commitment, and the attitude towards the affective experience.

2.3.5 Moderation of affective and attitudinal response reactance. As reactance is impacted by (1) personal and (2) social factors (Miron and Brehm, 2006), we navigate through a series of moderators (see Figure 1):

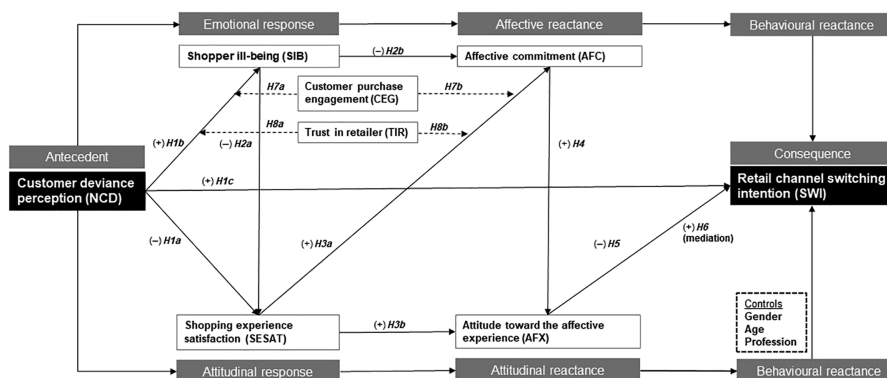


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

(1) Customer purchase engagement

Customer purchase engagement encapsulates the multifaceted dimensions of customers' conscious attention, their enthused participation, and their social connection while shopping in stores (Vivek *et al.*, 2009). Building on findings from organizational research, prior research has demonstrated the moderating role of stakeholders' engagement in the dynamics between relationship of negative psychological climate in one's surroundings (comparable to NCD) and individual wellbeing (Shuck and Reio, 2014), with the impact being stronger for those who are engaged. In parallel, within digital services, research anticipates stronger effects between service satisfaction and customers' service usage continuance, as a sign of commitment, among those who are more engaged (Thakur, 2019). Despite the notable contextual divergences between these studies and our own setting, we expect customer purchase engagement to moderate affective and attitudinal effects in response to NCD in retail stores. Thus, we expect:

H7a-b. Customer purchase engagement affects the effects of **(a)** NCD on shopper ill-being and **(b)** shopping experience satisfaction on affective commitment.

(2) Trust in the retailer

Trust in the retailer refers to customers' willingness to rely on a retailer in which they have confidence (Moorman *et al.*, 1993). Prior research indicates that trust plays a moderating role in various retail contexts. For instance, trust has been found to moderate, in the context of NCD, the effects of employees' ill-being on their job satisfaction (Mayr and Teller, 2023). Within online shopping, research reveals that trust moderates the impact of social influence on online shopper behaviour, including commitment (Davis *et al.*, 2021). This suggests that customers who have a high level of trust in a retailer are likely to be more positively engaged and less susceptible to the effects of negative influences on their shopping behaviour. Given these insights, it is reasonable to expect a moderating influence of trust between NCD and ill-being as well as satisfaction and commitment. Thus, we propose:

H8a-b. Trust in the retailer affects the effects of **(a)** NCD on shopper ill-being and **(b)** shopping experience satisfaction on affective commitment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample characterisation and measures

Customers ($n = 1,008$) at least 16 years represent the sample for the web-based survey used in this research, obtained through representative quota sampling in Austria, a typical western European retail market in terms of high store intensity and an average online retail penetration. We selected in-store and online shoppers as only those who use both channels are eligible for switching. Among the customers, 50% were females, 49.9% males and 0.01% diverse, and the majority was between 25 and 64 years old, with each age group making up 18–20% of the total sample. More than 50% were in employment, 9% were self-employed, and 23% were retired. The data were collected with the help of an online panel provider which we have used for previous studies. The measurements were retrieved from academic literature (see Table 1).

3.2 Common method variance

As the study design consisted of web-based surveys with self-administration, common method variance (CMV) (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017) could have been a problem. In order to avoid CMV, certain remedies were imposed. *Procedural remedies:* The web-based survey was designed to avoid any biases due to proximity effects (Weijters *et al.*, 2009) or item wording

Items	Construct (references)	λ	Factor loading	<i>t</i> -value	CR	AVE	Scale
Customer deviance perception (NCD) (Mayr and Teller, 2023)							
<i>In the last three months, I have observed the following behaviours in other consumers: Other customers ...</i>							
NCD1	... harass other customers	0.873	0.806	39.578*	0.888	0.503	1 = strongly disagree
NCD2	... argue with other customers		0.823	36.496			5 = strongly agree
NCD8	... are impatient with employees		0.689	15.123			
NCD9	... disrespect employees		0.542	11.670			
NCD10	... abuse employees		0.754	31.300			
NCD11	... unload emotions at employees		0.696	19.837			
NCD13	... complain illegitimately at employees		0.707	19.666			
NCD18	... mistreat products or store assets		0.806	24.234*			
Shopper ill-being at the store (SIB) (El Hedhli et al., 2016)							
SIB2	Retail stores do not play an important role in my social wellbeing	0.729	0.852	31.117*	0.844	0.644	1 = strongly disagree
SIB4	Retail stores do not play an important role in my leisure wellbeing		0.758	19.465*			5 = strongly agree
SIB6	Retail stores do not play an important role in enhancing the quality of life in my community		0.794	21.137*			
Shopping experience satisfaction (SESAT) (Klaus and Maklan, 2013)							
SESAT1	My feelings towards physical stores are very positive	0.895	0.853	78.615*	0.922	0.703	1 = strongly disagree
SESAT2	I feel good about coming to physical stores for the offerings I am looking for		0.844	75.353*			5 = strongly agree
SESAT3	Overall, I am satisfied with physical stores and the service they provide		0.864	91.493*			
SESAT4	I feel satisfied that physical stores produce the best results that can be achieved for me		0.801	41.143*			
SESAT5	The extent to which physical stores have produced the best possible outcome for me is satisfying		0.829	55.914*			
Attitude towards the affective experience (AFX) (Chun et al., 2017)							
AFX1	To what extent are your shopping experiences in physical stores enjoyable?	0.889	0.901	95.481	0.924	0.754	1 = not at all enjoyable 2 = very enjoyable
AFX2	To what extent is shopping in physical stores fun?		0.765	46.101*			1 = not at all fun 2 = very fun
AFX3	To what extent are your shopping experiences in physical stores good?		0.898	85.416*			1 = not at all good 2 = very good
AFX4	To what extent do you like shopping in physical stores?		0.901	92.177*			1 = very much dislike 2 = very much like

(continued)

Items	Construct (references)	λ	Factor loading	<i>t</i> -value	CR	AVE	Scale
Affective commitment (AFC) (Evanschitzky <i>et al.</i> , 2006)							
AFC1	I feel that I can trust the [retailer]	0.766	0.803	49.392*	0.865	0.682	1 = very unlikely 5 = very likely
AFC2	I identify with the [retailer]		0.86	43.271*			
AFC3	I feel emotionally attached to the [retailer]		0.814	58.182*			
Customer purchase engagement (CEG) (Vivek <i>et al.</i> , 2009)							
<i>Conscious attention (CEG – A)</i>							
		0.926			0.937	0.598	1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree
CEG1	Anything related to shopping in retail stores grabs my attention		0.811	72.195*			
CEG2	I like to learn more about the retail stores where I shop		0.750	39.000*			
CEG3	I pay a lot of attention to anything about shopping in retail stores		0.823	73.045*			
<i>Enthusied participation (CEG – P)</i>							
CEG4	I spend a lot of my discretionary time shopping in stores		0.752	44.635*			
CEG5	I am heavily into shopping in stores		0.744	44.006*			
CEG6	I am passionate about shopping in stores		0.842	74.248*			
CEG7	My days would not be the same without shopping in stores		0.786	51.123*			
<i>Social connection (CEG – C)</i>							
CEG8	I love shopping in stores with my friends		0.785	46.148*			
CEG9	I enjoy shopping in stores more when I am with others		0.688	26.907*			
CEG10	Shopping in stores is more fun when other people around me do it too		0.739	36.154*			
Trust in retailer (TIR) (Tax <i>et al.</i> , 1998)							
		0.903			0.932	0.775	1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree
TIR1	I believe I can trust the retailers I shop with		0.883	97.859*			
TIR2	I can rely on retailers I shop with		0.909	118.262*			
TIR3	I believe retailers I shop with are reliable in keeping their promises		0.882	87.872*			
TIR4	The retailers I shop with are likely to have high integrity		0.846	58.797*			
Retail-channel-switching intention (SWI) (Pookulangara <i>et al.</i> , 2011)							
SWI1	I intend to change from physical stores to online stores for shopping	0.842	0.923	90.350*	0.927	0.863	1 = very unlikely; 6 = very likely
SWI2	I plan to change from physical stores to online stores for shopping		0.936	110.968*			

Note(s): *All factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$; λ stands for Cronbach's alpha; CR stands for composite reliability; AVE stands for average variance extracted

Source(s): Authors own work

effects (Harris and Bladen, 1994). Therefore, the order of the measurement items was counterbalanced (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017). To control the effects of item wording, item characteristics, item ambiguity, and double-barrelled questions (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012), only validated measurements were used (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Additionally, we included an attention check and pre-tested the survey. *Statistical remedies*: In terms of statistical remedies used to uncover any biases, we tested all construct correlations by applying correlation matrix procedures (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017). We used an unrelated marker variable (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) and we conducted Harman’s one-factor analysis (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). As the correlation scores for all variables were <0.90 (Bagozzi and 1988), and as partialling out the marker variable (Tehseen *et al.*, 2017) produced scores below 0.3 (Lindell and Whitney, 2001), we deduced that CMV had been detected. Harman’s one-factor test indicated that a single factor explained 25.9%. We therefore assume that this research is unbiased.

4. Analysis

Structural equation modelling: To test the research model, partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used as it is suitable for predicting and comparing complex relationships (Hair *et al.*, 2020). This component-based approach conceptualises latent variables as weighted composites (Cho and Choi, 2020) and tests the strengths and directions of path correlations based on statistical significance (Tenenhaus *et al.*, 2005). *Measurement model assessment*: Following methodological recommendations (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Hair *et al.*, 2020), we tested the convergent and divergent validity before assessing the measurement model. Confirmatory composite analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2020) indicates highly significant ($p < 0.001$) factor loadings higher than 0.70 (Hulland, 1999). Reliability testing illustrates excellent results, with all latent constructs higher than 0.70 (Bland and Altman, 1997). Composite reliability (CR) scores coincide with the Fornell Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) as all values are above 0.70. Further, the average variance extracted (AVE) demonstrates values higher than 0.50 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) (see Table 1). Following this, we assessed the discriminant validity by comparing the squared AVE values with the correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (see appendix) and by performing the heterotrait monotrait test (HTMT) (Ab Hamid *et al.*, 2017). The HTMT displays satisfactory discriminant validity as all values are below 0.90 (see Table 2).

5. Results

5.1 Direct effects

The direct effects reveal that all hypotheses are supported by the SEM, following Chin (1998) (see Figure 2). The results confirm the impact of NCD on shopping experience satisfaction

	AFC	AFX	NCD	SIB	SESAT	SWI
Affective commitment (AFC)						
Attitude towards the affective experience (AFX)	0.629					
Customer deviance perception (NCD)	0.18	0.098				
Shopper ill-being (SIB)	0.228	0.303	0.128			
Shopping experience satisfaction (SESAT)	0.775	0.595	0.195	0.181		
Retail-channel-switching intention (SWI)	0.147	0.225	0.253	0.169	0.256	

Note(s): HTMT_{0.90} < 0.90

Source(s): Authors own work

Table 2.
Discriminant validity
assessment (HTMT)

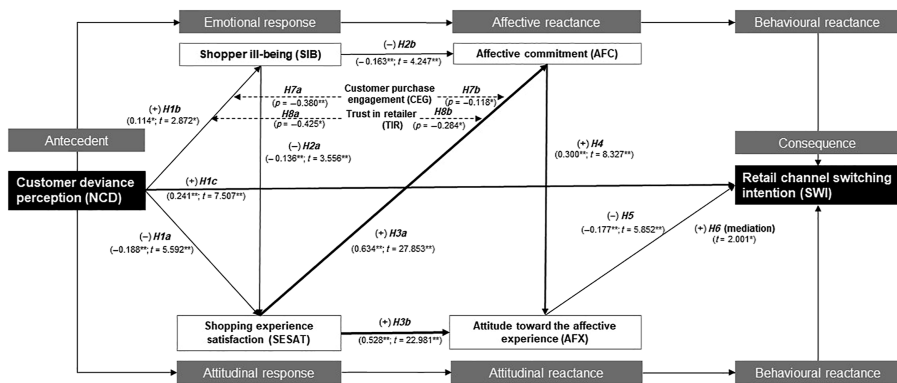


Figure 2.
Results

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.0001$; t -values calculated by applying bootstrapping procedure with 1000 sub-samples chin (1998)

(H1a) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 5.592$) and on shoppers' sense of ill-being (H1b) ($p < 0.05$; $t = 2.872$), and between NCD and bystander-customers' intentions to switch to online retail channels (H1c) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 7.507$). Shopper ill-being directly affects the shopping experience satisfaction of bystander-customers (H2a) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 3.556$) and their affective commitment (H2b) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 4.247$). The strongest effects are found between shopping experience satisfaction and affective commitment (H3a) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 27.853$) and for that between shopping experience satisfaction and bystander-customers' attitude towards the experience in the store (H3b) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 22.981$). A strong impact is evident between affective commitment and attitude towards the affective experience (H4) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 8.327$). The findings reveal that the attitude towards the experience affects retail-channel-switching intentions directly (H5) ($p < 0.001$; $t = 5.852$).

5.2 Mediation effects

We confirm the affective-attitudinal response-reactance chain between bystander-customers' NCD perceptions and their intentions to switch from retail stores to online shopping as a result of shoppers' ill-being, their shopping experience dissatisfaction, their affective decommitment, and their negative attitude towards the affective experience (H6) ($p < 0.05$; $t = 2.001$). This effect is fully mediated even without the presence of affective commitment and attitude towards the affective experience, as shopping experience satisfaction has a direct effect on retail-channel-switching intentions, which indicates the importance of attitudinal components for switching intentions.

5.3 Moderation effects

To establish the moderation effects, we applied multi-group analysis (MGA) (Henseler, 2012). Moderation effects were deduced if the p -value of the path coefficients within the group comparison was smaller than 0.05 or larger than 0.95 (Hair et al., 2020). Before employing MGA, we demonstrated metric invariance following the steps outlined by Putnick and Bornstein (2016). Accordingly, we ran multiple PLS-SEM analyses to assess group differences in the measurement model. As no differences were revealed, metric invariance was concluded.

5.3.1 Moderation effects of customer purchase engagement (CEG). The findings reveal significant results for all moderation effects of customer purchase engagement. The MGA

displays that with decreased purchase engagement, the impact of NCD on shopper ill-being is stronger ($\beta = -0.380^{**}$; CEG_low, 0.297; CEG_high, -0.083) (H7a). This indicates that purchase engagement surprisingly impacts negative emotional states positively. Additionally, with increased bystander-customer's engagement, the effect of shopping experience satisfaction on their commitment strengthens ($\beta = -0.118^{*}$; CEG_low, 0.528; CEG_high, 0.646) (H7b). This suggests a correspondence between customers' purchase engagement and their satisfaction and emotional bonding with the retailer, with the latter being more pronounced when engagement levels are higher.

5.3.2 Moderation effects of trust in retailer (TIR). We confirm all the moderation effects of trust in the retailer. With high trust in the retailer, the effect of NCD on bystander-customers' shopper ill-being is equally high ($\beta = -0.425^{*}$; TIR_low, -0.284 ; TIR_high, 0.143) (H8a), whereas with low trust, this effect is reversed, which means that shopper ill-being is not affected by NCD if bystander-customers' trust in the retailers is low, which is rather counterintuitive.

Affective commitment is also stronger when there is trust, supporting the moderation by trust in the retailer of the effect of shopping experience satisfaction on affective commitment ($\beta = -0.284^{*}$; TIR_low, 0.313; TIR_high, 0.597) (H8b). The findings underline the importance of trust in the retailer when it comes to NCD's negative effects on affective and attitudinal dimensions, displaying stronger effects for those customers who highly trust retailers.

6. Theoretical and practical implications

6.1 Theoretical implications

Our research contributes theoretically to reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981) as we display the application of this theory in the context of NCD. Our findings reveal that bystander-customers exposed to NCD (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020; Mayr *et al.*, 2022) while shopping in stores correspond with their switching retail channel behaviour (Jebarajakirthy *et al.*, 2021) by shopping online instead, which is crucial for store based retailers. We expand on channel-switching research by highlighting its correspondence to non-cognitive dimensions (NCD perceptions) and emotional factors. This focus contrasts with existing studies that mainly emphasise attitudes (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2022) or best-deal-seeking behaviour (Chiu *et al.*, 2011). Thus, we fill a critical research gap in current research and we provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of channel switching behaviour.

We significantly advance research on customer deviance by shedding light on the impact of different NCD dimensions on bystander-customers – findings that have been overlooked in previous research (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020; Mayr and Teller, 2023). We expand this research area as we test NCD effects in a retail context contrary to prior research which centres around service marketing. By uncovering multiple NCD dimensions beyond customer misbehaviour (Chaouali *et al.*, 2022), abusive behaviour, verbal aggression, and fraud (Okan and Elmadag, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2023), we successfully broaden the view of negative customer behaviour. Furthermore, we demonstrate the flip side of the narrative of positive deviances (Mayr and Teller, 2024) as outlined in normative theory (Mertens *et al.*, 2016). Our findings display NCD effects beyond mere contagion (Schaefers *et al.*, 2016) as we reveal complex dynamics of NCD and its linkage to retail-channel-switching intentions relating to emotional and attitudinal shifts within bystander-customers. Contrary to existing research (Dorsey *et al.*, 2016; Nicholls, 2010), these NCD effects not only relate to customer-customer interactions, but also to customer-employee and customer-firm interactions.

In contrast to prior research which corroborates the customer experience evaluation in relation to the product, the delivery of the product, and the perceived convenience (Anshu *et al.*, 2022; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), we powerfully underscore the importance of affective and attitudinal parameters that shape the evaluation process that drives behavioural intentions.

These findings provide novel insights for managerial strategies within the retailer-customer dyad.

6.2 Managerial implications

6.2.1 Empowering employees. Our findings indicate the necessity of combatting NCD through proactive actions before it occurs. Frontline employees as boundary spanners within the customer-retailer dyad, need to be equipped with skills to monitor and manage bystander-customers' dissatisfaction and empower them to find suitable and prompt solutions for these customers. Therefore, retailers need to train and support employees to detect NCD, and to handle such incidents effectively by responding immediately, by means of a monitoring approach, and eventually with the help of surveillance technology. Further, retailers should consider a compensation scheme for bystander-customers (e.g. in the form of goodwill gestures), which would contain the negative outcomes for highly affected bystander-customers.

6.2.2 Servicing emotions. As affective commitment is key to retail-channel-switching, retailers are advised to foster a strong emotional bonding with their customers, for example by imposing loyalty programs that not only reward repeat purchases but also encourage customer feedback and interaction with the retailer. Such programs can enhance commitment and mitigate negative feelings associated with shopping in stores due to NCD encounters.

6.2.3 Designing the shopping experience. As wellbeing prompts the whole NCD response-reactance chain, retailers must prioritise a sense of wellbeing during the shopping experience, by monitoring the store atmosphere, making sure frontline employees are caring and friendly, and fostering proactive assistance in order to build strong ties with their customers and counteract the attitudinal reactance. Retailers must therefore invest in creating a positive and engaging shopping environment and they should reinforce desirable behaviours by actively showcasing examples of expected behaviours.

6.2.4 Enhancing trust and engagement. Considering moderating influences, retailers should keep customers engaged and foster their trust through encouraging feedback, personalised interactions, follow ups after purchases, and recovery measures such as taking responsibility, apologising to and empathising with bystander-customers, offering solutions, and setting boundaries through retail policies and by documenting NCD incidents. Retailers could also introduce participatory marketing strategies that encourage customer involvement by fostering in-store events and hands-on demonstrations to keep their customers' engaged.

6.2.5 Addressing NCD and monitoring retail channel dynamics. As NCD directly affects bystander-customers' wellbeing, satisfaction, and switching intentions, retailers are advised to penalise severely badly behaving customers in the form of a warning, temporary suspension, or the termination of services in the case of persistent, repeat offenders, as a matter of retail policy. As a strategic actionable step, we recommend the establishment of retail policies against NCD, technological surveillance to recognise NCD and enable fast counteractions, and omni-, multi-, or cross-channel solutions that offer shopping alternatives to highly affected bystander-customers.

7. Limitations and future research

As does all research, this research has limitations. The research analyses NCD encounters in retail stores, limiting its findings to offline store-based retailing services. As NCD is also likely to appear in online retailing, future research should address NCD effects in online shopping environments. Moreover, as bystander-customers encountering NCD in a specific

store may switch to another store and not necessarily to online shopping, future research could target switching between physical stores. Lastly, this research employs variance-based SEM to test the effects. Future research should test the phenomenon using an experimental design, allowing for causal assumptions.

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(The Appendix follows overleaf)

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Demographics	Frequency (n = 1,008)	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
female	504	50%
male	503	49.9%
diverse	1	0.1%
<i>Age in years</i>		
16–24	94	9%
25–34	184	18%
35–44	185	18%
45–54	182	18%
55–64	216	21%
65–74	121	12%
75 +	26	3%
<i>Main residence</i>		
in a city	456	45%
in a smaller city or suburb	214	21%
in a rural community or area	338	34%
<i>Household size</i>		
1 person	253	25%
2 people	388	39%
3 or more people	367	36%
<i>Profession</i>		
employed	542	54%
self-employed	88	9%
jobseeking/unemployed/not looking for work/currently not able to work/on maternity leave	60	6%
housewife/househusband	30	3%
pupil/student	50	5%
apprenticeship/training; civilian service/federal army/volunteer year	10	1%
retired	233	23%
<i>Retail employee</i>		
yes	94	9%
no	914	91%
<i>Educational classification</i>		
undergraduate	744	74%
graduate	264	26%
<i>Household income (per month before tax)</i>		
Up to Euro 2,000	317	31%
Euro 2,001–3,000	233	23%
Euro 3,001–4,000	177	18%
Euro 4,001–5,000	113	11%
Above Euro 5,000	69	7%

Table A1.
Sample description

Source(s): Authors own work

Variable	AFC	AFX	NCD	SESAT	SIB	SWI
Affective commitment (AFC)	0.826					
Attitude toward the affective experience (AFX)	0.518	0.868				
Negative customer deviance (NCD)	-0.126	-0.091	0.709			
Shopping experience satisfaction (SESAT)	0.646	0.532	-0.174	0.839		
Shopper ill-being (SIB)	-0.176	-0.246	0.098	-0.156	0.802	
Retail-channel-switching intention (SWI)	-0.119	-0.197	0.231	-0.222	0.138	0.929

Note(s): The square root of AVE values is shown on the diagonals and printed with bold, non-diagonal elements are the latent variable correlations

Source(s): Authors own work

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