

## The use of humour in order to deliver bad news in an efficient way

**Auteur :** Grossman, Lorian

**Promoteur(s) :** Delcourt, Cécile

**Faculté :** HEC-Ecole de gestion de l'Université de Liège

**Diplôme :** Master en sciences de gestion, à finalité spécialisée en international strategic marketing

**Année académique :** 2020-2021

**URI/URL :** <http://hdl.handle.net/2268.2/11116>

---

### *Avertissement à l'attention des usagers :*

*Tous les documents placés en accès ouvert sur le site le site MatheO sont protégés par le droit d'auteur. Conformément aux principes énoncés par la "Budapest Open Access Initiative"(BOAI, 2002), l'utilisateur du site peut lire, télécharger, copier, transmettre, imprimer, chercher ou faire un lien vers le texte intégral de ces documents, les disséquer pour les indexer, s'en servir de données pour un logiciel, ou s'en servir à toute autre fin légale (ou prévue par la réglementation relative au droit d'auteur). Toute utilisation du document à des fins commerciales est strictement interdite.*

*Par ailleurs, l'utilisateur s'engage à respecter les droits moraux de l'auteur, principalement le droit à l'intégrité de l'oeuvre et le droit de paternité et ce dans toute utilisation que l'utilisateur entreprend. Ainsi, à titre d'exemple, lorsqu'il reproduira un document par extrait ou dans son intégralité, l'utilisateur citera de manière complète les sources telles que mentionnées ci-dessus. Toute utilisation non explicitement autorisée ci-avant (telle que par exemple, la modification du document ou son résumé) nécessite l'autorisation préalable et expresse des auteurs ou de leurs ayants droit.*

---



# **THE USE OF HUMOUR IN ORDER TO DELIVER BAD NEWS IN AN EFFICIENT WAY**

Jury:  
Promoter:  
Cecile DELCOURT  
Reader(s):  
Carmen MARTENS  
Charlotte FERRARA

Dissertation by  
**Lorian GROSSMAN**  
For a Master's degree in Management  
with a specialization in International  
Strategic Marketing  
Academic year 2020/2021



## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisor, Cecile Delcourt, for her availability and her recommendations. Her support and our various meetings were really helpful to maintain this work on the right direction.

I also want to thank Carmen Martens and Charlotte Ferrara for their time and their investment as readers of this thesis.

I want to express my gratitude to Jean-Pierre Clerinx, the supervisor of the Renault site in Seraing, for his time and his kindness regarding the interview as well as the place to shoot the videos.

Eventually, I want to thank my friends who helped me in different manners. Denis Dubois for his contribution to the video's creation, Nicolas Stefenatto for his huge investment as proof-reader of this thesis and Edin Spahic for his reviewer role and for his advices concerning the statistical part.



## **Abstract**

The delivery of bad news is an unavoidable process in the managerial context, and more precisely, in services. However, little is known about it and the aim of this study is to fulfil that gap. Frontline employees interacting with customers during emotionally charged service encounters can have a real impact on the customer satisfaction as well as on his perception of the company. If these employees are trained and use adequate tools, they can be able to affect customer emotions and transform negative ones into positive ones. One tool that could help employees is the use of humour as it allows to cope with stressful situations but, here again, it has been poorly investigated. The purpose of this thesis is to better understand the bad news delivery phenomenon and to test how the use of humour can have an impact on the customer satisfaction. To do so, an experimentation based on videos staging different situations of bad news delivery in a car repair service has been implemented. Moreover, this study also investigates the impact of the communication channel used to deliver the bad news as well as the sex and the age of the customer. Even if interesting, the results from the analysis of the 168 responses gathered highlight only a few significant impacts and further research are necessary to develop the model presented in this paper. Despite the lack of significance, it can be observed that the use of humour tends to decrease the satisfaction. Voice-to-voice interactions seem to be preferred over face-to-face ones and the use of humour might be more appreciated by females and young adults than males and older adults.

## **Table of content**

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>1.1 Context</b> .....	5
<b>1.2 Research motivation</b> .....	7
<b>1.3 Problem statement</b> .....	9
<b>1.4 Contributions and approach</b> .....	10
<b>2. Literature review</b> .....	11
<b>2.1 Bad news delivery</b> .....	11
<b>2.2 Humour</b> .....	17
<b>2.3 Hypothesis and Model</b> .....	25
<b>3. Research design</b> .....	27
<b>3.1 Specification</b> .....	27
<b>3.2 Methodology</b> .....	30
<b>3.3 Measures</b> .....	32
<b>4. Results</b> .....	33
<b>4.1 Manipulation checks</b> .....	33
<b>4.2 Main hypothesis</b> .....	35
<b>4.3 Moderating hypothesis</b> .....	41
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	45
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	51
<b>6.1 Thesis summary</b> .....	51
<b>6.2 Theoretical implications</b> .....	52
<b>6.3 Managerial implications</b> .....	53
<b>6.4 Limitations and further research</b> .....	54
<b>References</b> .....	57
<b>Appendices</b> .....	I
<b>Appendix A – Interview transcription</b> .....	I
<b>Appendix B – Different scripts</b> .....	XII
<b>Appendix C – Questionnaire items</b> .....	XV
<b>Appendix D – Qualtrics Online Survey</b> .....	XVI
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	XXIV

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

The service industry is continuously creating new activities and being more important than the resource industry and the manufacturing industry. Indeed, in 2019, services represented 73.98% of the total added value for the European Union while they only reached 69.86% in 1999 (OECD, 2020). Given the wide range of services that this industry includes, it would be an error to consider all of them as a whole, each category of services having specific features. The services we are interested in for this study are those in which service encounters play an important role and can change the way the customer feels about the service, in other words, services containing emotionally charged service encounter. These services are the focus of this study because this kind of services is the most likely to influence the customer satisfaction by having an impact on his emotions (Bailey et al., 2001; Delcourt et al., 2017).

Prior the 80s, little attention was given to customers in the way manager viewed their business, but the emergence of services forced them to change their mind. The evolution of service marketing brought new theories and new concepts to the point that nowadays, customers are at the centre of the preoccupations of the company and this change involved new roles for employees. They now have the task to get the customer satisfied and they have a role of differentiator. It is especially the case for employees interacting with customers for whom social skills are a must-have in order to impact positively the quality of the service and are key for maintaining customers in the current context of prices not being differentiator anymore (Bowen, 2016; Hurrell & Scholarios, 2014).

However, Bitner et al. (1990) reported that, in the past years, customers were subject to a declining service quality, notably during contacts with firms. Moreover, they emphasized the impact of the interactions between customers and employees on the overall customers satisfaction the service provided, and pointed out that these interactions are important for customers evaluations. It is therefore possible to conclude that the general satisfaction of customers is decreasing. This conclusion is supported by the work of Oh (1999) who analysed the interaction between the service quality and the customer satisfaction in the hospitality management, which is a type of service containing emotionally charged service encounter and is thus relevant in the context of this study. His findings showed that the perceived service quality was indeed influencing the overall customer satisfaction.



Several authors already explained the relation between the customer-employee interaction and the evaluation of the service by the customer. Berry et al. (2006) provided interesting observations about customer satisfaction among services. According to them, customers give more importance to performance than to physical objects. Moreover, the customer evaluation of the performance is based on three different aspects: the technical part, the tangibles elements around the service and the human part. The latter is mainly the results of the behaviour of the employee providing the service and is a key point to impact positively the satisfaction of the consumer. Mattila & Enz (2002) also explored this kind of interactions and demonstrated the importance of the behaviours and of the emotions of the frontline employee regarding the customer satisfaction. Recently, Wieseke et al. (2012) suggested that the attention given to the customer and the capacity of employees to show empathy increase the customer satisfaction.

As evidence point out that employee interaction can lead to an increased customer satisfaction for the service, it also implies that employee interaction can conduct to dissatisfaction if something goes wrong. Employee interaction is a wide concept that includes various aspects. A key aspect is the delivery of bad news, which is the main focus of this thesis. As Delcourt et al. (2017) explained, when a service provider has to deliver bad news, the service encounter becomes emotionally charged leading to negative emotions for customers, including stress, which impact the customer's evaluation of the service. Furthermore, it follows that when employees deliver bad news to a customer, the situation creates negative emotions which will increase the likelihood of the customer being dissatisfied if employees are not able to deal with that emotionally charged situation correctly, or if they do not give it enough attention (Berry et al., 2006; Wieseke et al., 2012)

The use of humour could be a solution to avoid undesirable customers reactions such as dissatisfaction with the bad news delivery while also increasing the customer satisfaction. This hypothesis was presented by Francis et al. (1999) who reported that when doctors use humour to deliver bad news to a patient, their objective is to “build rapport, to calm and reassure, or to reduce embarrassment or other distancing emotions” (Francis et al., 1999, p.172). They also presented humour as having a role of emotion controller in emotionally charged situations, as is the case with frontline employees delivering bad news. Emotions are at the heart of these interactions (Mattila & Enz, 2002). Thus, if humour can help control negative emotions during such interactions, it could prove to be a useful tool for employees that cares about customer satisfaction. This thesis will try to show that humour is effective at controlling negative emotions during bad news delivery, hence increasing the overall customer satisfaction.

## **1.2 Research motivation**

From an academic point of view, the concept of bad news has already been investigated, but it is important to differentiate two kinds of bad news delivery: the one that occurs when doctors or physicians have to deliver something bad to patients and the one presents in managerial fields – i.e. inside a company or between firms and customers. Even if the first has been examined extensively (Ptacek & Eberhardt, 1996), the latter was rather neglected. McKee & Ptacek (2001, p.246) say that “Although it is ubiquitous in nature, surprisingly little is known, theoretically or empirically, about the bad-news process”. By exploring this topic, the objective is to better understand the important and inevitable act of bad news delivery, as a clear knowledge gap remains in the literature of the bad news delivery process in a managerial context in service encounters.

For managers, this paper should increase their understanding of the bad news delivery interactions and propose them innovative solutions to be sure that employees will be able to deal with emotionally charged service encounters in an efficient manner. By training their employees adequately, managers can teach them how to behave and react in those situations. This will in turn allow them to keep customers satisfied and provide positive feedback to potential new customers. As Bodet (2008) explained, having satisfied clients has various consequences but the most important one is that they become loyal to the company and will prefer to come back than to try the service of another firm. Moreover, as the service profit chain model describes, getting customers loyal is the last but necessary step to maintain a growth in revenue and to increase profitability (Heskett et al., 1994).

The work of Yu & Dean (2001) is in line with this observation as they highlighted the need for managers to give more importance to the emotional experience during encounters, based on previous research that showed that it is cheaper to retain existing customers than trying to attract new ones. That means that it is better to have loyal customers who return to the company than attempting to reach customers that the company does not already own. Even managers believing to have an efficient bad news delivery process could benefit from improving their standards and deepen the loyalty of the customers to transform satisfied customers into delighted ones. These customers tend to become “totally satisfied customers”. The difference is small but significant as “totally satisfied customers” are six times more likely to remain loyal to the business (Schneider & Bowen, 1999, p.35).

Interestingly, bad events have more consequences than good events in people's everyday life. As Baumeister et al. (2001) explain, people tend to forget good events faster than bad ones. It follows that if there is no bad news to announce, there is no reason for the consumer to remember the quality of the service. However, if the employee has to announce bad news, the consumer will recall this event for a long time, creating an opportunity for customer to positively remember the company. Of course, the company must be sure that the employees are able to deal with such situations. Indeed, when bad news delivery is not dealt properly, the consumer will recall both the bad news and how badly it was handled. On the contrary, if dealt competently, the customer will recall how well the situation was handled. The role of the employee is to transition the consumer from a bad situation to a more comfortable one. As shown by the service recovery paradox, the satisfaction of the consumer is higher when a failure is properly handled than when there is not any failure (De Matos et al., 2007).

The use of humour in bad news delivery has mainly been studied in clinical context, and only a few papers focused on a managerial point of view. To the author's knowledge, no empirical study has yet been conducted on the impact of humour in the delivery of bad news to customers in services encounters. The present study aims at fulfilling this gap. From an academic point of view, the results will bring more understanding on the possible use of humour and its consequences. Managers would benefit from this study as it would allow them to try a new efficient strategy to deal with bad news delivery. Humour could also be used by managers to differentiate themselves from competitors as it is not a common technique, seldom taught in trainings or seminars. Up to now, humour might be under-used by fear of not be taken seriously (Francis et al., 1999). Indeed, little is known about it and it has yet to demonstrate any potential.

To conclude, it is important for managers to empower employees with new tools about delivering bad news in order to keep the consumer satisfied and, in the long term, increase the profitability of the company. Following a discussion with a real industry actor, we realised that delivering bad news in services is a really common thing. The manager of a car repair service - a service where bad news is reportedly highly prevalent, and emotionally charged (Delcourt et al., 2017)- stated delivering bad news to his customers on a daily basis. This further demonstrates the importance of the phenomenon for actors in the service industry (Clerinx, 2020). Lastly, it is noticeable that, according to Groth & Grandey (2012), having dissatisfied customers even if it is due to unintentional behaviours from the employee, will conduct to have more dissatisfied employees and that will create a negative spiral of interactions that should be avoided.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The research question of this thesis is:

*“What is the impact of the use of humour in the delivery of bad news to customers, in emotionally charged service encounters?”*

First of all, it is important to define the key concepts involved in this research. Bies (2013, p.137) defines bad news as “information that results in a perceived loss by the receiver, and it creates cognitive, emotional, or behavioral deficits in the receiver after receiving the news”. Bad news is unavoidable part of our lives and everyone should be prepared to deal with it, either as receiver or giver. That observation is particularly true in jobs where employees are directly confronted to customers, so-called the “contact employees”. According to Bettencourt & Brown (1997, p.39), “contact employees deliver the promises of the firm, create an image for the firm and sell the firm’s services.”. That is why it is important for contact employees to be able to manage the delivery of bad news to customers.

There are many ways to define humour. Crawford (1994, p.57) proposed a definition based on the existing literature: “humor is a verbal or nonverbal activity eliciting a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners”. The impact of humour is measured by assessing the satisfaction of customers on the way employees deliver bad news. Levesque & McDougall (1996, p.14) considered customer satisfaction as “a composite of overall customer attitudes towards the service provider”. Emotionally charged service encounters have been elected because they offer the possibility of having a real impact on customer as they are stressful, memorable and may involve negative emotions such that the behaviour of the employee will determine the perception of the service by the customer (Delcourt et al., 2017).

## **1.4 Contributions and approach**

The objective is to go deeper concerning the techniques used to deliver bad news in emotionally charged service encounters and more precisely to understand what the impact of the use of humour is. The overall aim is to provide managers with key recommendations and suggest managerial actions in order to improve their employees' ability to deliver bad news to customers. Several studies examining the impact of humour in stressful situation (Cann et al., 1999; Martin & Lefcourt, 1983) showed that humour can act as a moderator of stress by reducing both the impact of stress and the negative emotional consequences of stress-inducing experiences. It is, therefore, expected that this study will find comparable results in bad news delivery. This would, in turn, allow to recommend the use of humour to managers for delivering bad news. Moreover, on an academic level, it is the opportunity to fulfil a gap in the scientific literature, which is, as proposed earlier, the use of humour in a managerial context to deliver bad news to customers.

To do so, the existing academic literature is reviewed and summarized to highlight the current knowledge on the use of humour in bad news delivery. The aim is to emphasise useful theories to provide a rationale to the current study. Based on the literature review, a model and several hypotheses are proposed. This study will use a 2x3 variables model: three techniques of humour, demonstrated by the frontline employee, are tested in two different communication channels. The three humour techniques are: no use of humour, positive use of humour and negative use of humour. The two communication channels are face-to-face situation and voice-to-voice.

A causal research design is implemented to test the developed 2x3 model. As there are six different combinations in this 2x3 model, six videos pills are created, each video representing one situation. In the study, respondents are assigned a random video out of the 6 available. They are then asked to answer a few questions to assess their evaluation of the employee's performance. Once the data is recovered, it is statistically analysed. The results are then interpreted and discussed, bearing in mind that the objective is to provide manager with new tools to increase customer satisfaction regarding the bad news delivery process. Eventually, the conclusion provides recommendations, discusses the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Bad news delivery**

As detailed previously, the medical aspect of bad news delivery has been more investigated than the managerial one. Fortunately, although the medical literature is not at the centre of our attention, some of the theories or findings are still applicable to this study. Indeed, even if it is not exactly the same context, the overall situation is similar enough. In both cases, it includes an emotionally charged encounter and remains a stressful situation for both the recipient and the donor of the bad news (Delcourt et al., 2017; Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004). In their paper, Fallowfield & Jenkins (2004), expressed that if the medical staff were inadequately or poorly trained for the delivery of bad news, it could lead to wrong ways of doing it inducing even more stress and reducing the capacity of understanding and acceptance of the patient. According to doctors surveyed, the lack of training was one of the main reasons leading to the stress experienced in such situations.

So as to address this issue, there are protocols such as the SPIKES one that are taught to doctors to train them and make them more able to deliver bad news (Baile et al., 2000). This protocol is one of the most recognized and is widely taught in seminars (Buckman, 2005; Marschollek et al., 2019). Baile et al. (2000) developed this six-step protocol to help clinicians specialized in oncology to deliver bad news. However, as Buckman (2005, p.139) precises, “it is a strategy and not a script”. The first “S” stands for setting; the physician has to assure privacy, involve significant others, sit down, look attentive and calm, listen and be available for enough time. The “P” is for perception; the doctor has to catch how the patient is seeing the situation. The “I” stands for invitation because it is important to ask the patient if he wants to know all the details or not. “K” is the knowledge part and where the patient is informed of the bad news. It is important to start by explicitly say that bad news is coming. The physician should use the same language as the patient, avoid specific and technical terms as well as bluntness and do not give all the information in one go. The “E”, known as the hardest part, is for empathy; the clinician has to observe and detect the emotions developed by his patient, identify the reason or the cause of the emotion and lastly show that he understood the patient by expressing an empathic statement. The last “S” stands for strategy and summarize; it is important to finish the interview with a clear idea of what are the next steps and the doctor may ensure that the patient understood everything by summarizing the information once more.

Not all steps of this protocol may be relevant to the managerial context, though a link can be established between the fifth stage (the “E” of empathy) and a concept developed in the managerial literature that is the Employee Emotional Competence (EEC). No matter what the situation is, when someone has to deliver bad news, to a patient or to a customer, the one delivering the bad news needs to empathise with the one receiving it. Delcourt et al. (2016, p.82) define EEC as “employee demonstrated ability to perceive, understand, and regulate customer emotions in a service encounter to create and maintain an appropriate climate for service”. Furthermore, it is important for the employee to be able to manage the three aspects of EEC at the same time and not to focus on only one or two dimensions (Delcourt et al., 2016). If the employee succeeds in correctly demonstrating EEC, the customer will be positively affected which will in turn affect his evaluation of the encounter and his global satisfaction (Giardini & Frese, 2008). Matute et al. (2018) also examined the impact of EEC in emotionally charged services and proposed similar results. The authors discovered that customers in contact with employee displaying high EEC would evaluate more positively the service and would be more likely to develop a trust and personal relationship with this employee. This relationship would then increase the customer loyalty to the company.

When it comes to the delivery of bad news in services, EEC is unmissable but not sufficient to have a major impact on customers negative emotions. As Delcourt et al. (2017) demonstrated, in a study about the delivery of bad news in emotionally charged service encounters, employees must also show Employee Technical Competence (ETC) which is the ability to identify and solve a problem. Delcourt et al. (2017) also defined the EEC as a moderator of the ETC. Even if each competence is positively influencing the negative emotions of the customer and thus its satisfaction, taken separately the influence of the demonstrated competence is relatively mild. Nevertheless, when employees have enough competencies in both EEC and ETC, they have a significantly greater impact on the customer’s perception of the interaction during the emotionally charged service encounter. This conclusion is in line with the paper of Gibbs & Slevitch (2019) who explained that hospitality students should receive ETC and EEC courses. According to them, recent graduates must be able to show technical competences but also emotional competences as they are often experiencing emotionally charged situations. An interesting result of their study is that both EEC and ETC training improves students’ performances, but only ETC increases it significantly. These findings highlight the fact that both ETC and EEC are necessary competencies of frontline employees.

In their paper, Delcourt et al. (2017) recognized the importance of the Cognitive Appraisal Theory which aims to describe how customer will emotionally respond to a stressful situation. This theory is also relevant to this study given that the services we are interested in are the emotionally charged ones, with service encounters bringing emotions to the consumer and especially negatives ones. As previously stated, it is crucial for employees to deal with those emotions to try to keep the customer satisfied with the service. This theory has been acknowledged by several authors as one of the main and is described as genuinely useful when it comes to understand customer behaviours based on emotions (Johnson & Stewart, 2005; Malhotra, 2007).

According to Folkman et al. (1986, p.992-993) Cognitive Appraisal is “a process through which the person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his or her well-being, and if so, in what ways”. In other words, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory claims that subjects automatically analyse the situation based on how they perceive it, how this situation is in line with their objectives, and how much the impact is important for them which leads to the expression of a suitable emotion. For example, someone getting harmed will judge the situation as bad for him, not in adequation with his objectives, and, depending on other criteria such as the context and the origin of the injury, express anger, shame or sadness (Folkman et al., 1986; Johnson & Stewart, 2005).

A key element of the Cognitive Appraisal Theory is the appraising process, composed of six different dimensions. The first one is the direction of the goal congruence; according to whether the situation is helping for the accomplishment of personal objectives or not, the individual will either demonstrate positive or negative emotions. Then come the agency, which is the identification of the person responsible of the situation. Four cases are possible: the individual himself, other people, object(s) or none, each leading to a different emotion. These first two dimensions are seen as the most crucial ones. Afterwards, the emotion will be balanced by the certainty of the situation. The fourth dimension is the moral compatibility and consists of evaluating if the situation is normal, in view of the context, or not. The two last dimensions only concern the intensity of the emotion. The emotion is more intense if the goal of the individual is very important to him, and if the situation is far from the goal (positively or negatively). Conversely, the intensity is lower if the goal is not that important for the individual or if the final situation is close to his goal (Johnson & Stewart, 2005; Watson & Spence, 2007).



While the Cognitive Appraisal Theory allows to identify the emotion felt, the Coping Theory informs on how the emotion is processed. According to the Coping Theory, coping consists of dealing with the emotionally charged situation either with a focus on emotions or with a focus on the problem. In the first case, individuals try to moderate the emotions felt, by modifying the way they perceive the situation whereas in the second case, they will try to find solutions to solve the problem causing the stressful situation. Keeping in mind the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, the emotion-focused coping process involves a modification of the goal according to the current context while the problem-focused coping involves implementing a strategy or actions to reach the initial goal without modifying it. It is important to notice that those two functions of coping are almost always present even though the problem-focused function is more prevalent when the individual believes that something can be done, that is, the situation is not totally out of his control (Carver et al., 1989; Folkman et al., 1986; Johnson & Stewart, 2005). At the managerial level, this theory is interesting because almost all customers experience an emotionally charged situation. In other words, every customer receiving bad news implements a coping strategy. If employees are aware of this fact, they may be able to help the customer whether for the emotional aspect or for the problem resolution.

Taken all together, these theories and concepts show that emotions are at the centre of the bad news delivery process. No employee would be able to manage properly a stressful situation for the customer, as it is the case when he has to announce an unpleasant news, without understanding which emotions are expressed by the customer. Moreover, it is harder for employees to show empathy to customers when they are not able to correctly identify their emotions. The same holds for the appreciation of the goal of the consumers because if the contact employee wants to help him coping with the emotionally charged encounter, the employee must at least have an idea of what may be the goals looked for by people using the service. It would not be possible for the employee to intent to adjust the initial goal of the consumer, to propose him another point of view of the situation or to implement concrete actions to approach his goal if he does not know what the goal of the customer in front of him is. Of course, not all employees have the same capacity to understand emotions and experience empathy, it may not be natural for some of them, hence why managers should implement training. All situations are different but trained employees would have a basis of knowledge allowing them to anticipate the majority of emotions and making them able to respond adequately by displaying the right behaviour.

Nowadays, several channels of communication are available for companies willing to address their customers. More specifically, bad news can be delivered in face-to-face conversations but not only, other solutions such as phone call, text message or email can also be used to inform the customers. The Media Richness Theory (MRT) developed by Daft & Lengel (1983; 1986) suggests that each media has different characteristics and does not have the same impact. The MRT classifies the communication channels according to their richness, which is the capacity for a media to convey information (Daft & Lengel, 1983). The more a media allows the sender of a message to be accurate, complete and reduce equivocality, the more it is seen as rich. Richer medias are also those which permit direct feedback, personalisation and visual observation (Daft & Lengel, 1983; 1986; Rice, 1993). Moreover, the MRT stipulates that for each communication, the right media must be used in order to avoid either overcomplication or oversimplification (Daft & Lengel, 1983).

The Social Presence Theory (SPT) is another interesting theory to help rank the communication channels used to communicate. The SPT emphasizes the same characteristics as the Media Richness Theory but does not measure the same aspect. Instead of looking for the richer media, the social presence is representing the ability of a media to convey the presence of the sender, that both interlocutors are somehow connected (Biocca et al., 2003; Rice, 1993). The three criteria defining the social presence are the copresence represented by the feeling of being together mentally and physically, the behavioural engagement which is simply depicted by the variety of exchange of behaviour and the psychological involvement which is notably composed of the intimacy and the immediacy of the communication and how much the sender is implicated in it (Biocca et al., 2003). A channel of communication in which those three aspects are possible to experience will be qualified as allowing a high social presence.

The ranking among medias according to MRT or SPT is quite similar and in nearly all situation, the face-to-face communication is perceived as the best one as it fulfils all requirements of both theories. Furthermore, it is the only medium enhancing eye contact and body language. At the second place, there is the telephone since the only difference between it and the face-to-face conversation is the lack of visualisation and physical proximity. However, emotions are still identifiable during a phone call thanks to the tone used or the way of speaking. Then comes the voice mail because contrary to the telephone the receiver cannot directly respond to the sender, there is no real interaction. At the last position, there are the written communications, whether by email or text messages (Daft & Lengel, 1983; Rice, 1993; Rice et al., 1998).

That being said, even if face-to-face interaction is clearly the best way to communicate, phone call does not have to be excluded. In their paper, Westmyer et al. (1998), stated that, in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness, oral channels are better than written channels to meet the needs of communication. Appropriateness has been defined as involving “adherence to social rules or norms” and effectiveness as occurring “when goals set for the communication interaction are fulfilled” by the authors (Westmyer et al., 1998, p.30). Still according to them, telephone is as competent as face-to-face in many situations. The work of McHenry et al. (2012) is supporting the idea that voice-to-voice may not be that far from face-to-face interaction. They analysed phone conversations between patients and oncologists who had to announce bad news and they pointed out that listeners were noticing differences between the neutral call and the bad news delivery. In the second case, the speaking rate was slower, and the pitch used was perceived as more caring. These changes were depicted as favourable given that the patient established a link between them, and the empathy shown by the physician. In addition, as Whiting & Donthu (2006) explained, the use of the telephone nowadays is widely democratized, and has advantages over face-to-face interaction. Indeed, it is less time consuming as customers do not have to come to the office. Some customers may prefer this channel of communication in view of its ease of use.

While this evidence seems promising for the use of telephone, others information must be taken into consideration. While empathy can be demonstrated in phone calls, it does not necessarily imply that empathy will be automatically perceived by the customer. As suggested by De Ruyter & Wetzels (2000), how the receiver is feeling listened to will have an impact of his perception of the communication and on his satisfaction. Listening is a complex task which require mental et behavioural activity. In their study, De Ruyter & Wetzels (2000) identified three main components of the listening behaviour that influence satisfaction, the trust of the customer, or both. These components are attentiveness, perceptiveness and responsiveness. That main idea is that communication skills are essential to satisfy the customers after a call. Other authors tried to identify factors that could also influence the perception of communication by telephone. For instance, Rice et al. (1998) aimed at understanding how the national culture, regarded as either individualist or collectivist modifies the point of view of customers. Even if they did not find significant results, they noticed that members of both cultural values were appreciating the use of telephone but that those from collectivist society preferred it even more than individualist did. As no consistent cultural differences have been discovered, it can be assumed that phone call is a medium globally accepted and liked to communicate.

## 2.2 Humour

As for the bad news delivery, looking at the medical literature is useful for this thesis as several authors worked on the topic of humour. Some of their findings may, therefore, be applicable to the managerial context. It is the case for the concept of humour in emotion management which was first defined by Francis (1994) and then revisited and improved by Francis et al. (1999). According to those authors, the use of humour has an impact on the emotion of other people who are part of the interaction and it can turn negative sentiments into positive ones. This process is based on four criteria that must be respected to be sure that humour participate in emotion management. First, the provider (i.e. the person intending to use humour) must be in line with the spatiotemporal and cultural context. Second, the provider must logically create something humorous. Third, it has to involve a positive situation, for example by lowering an external threat. Lastly, at least another participant of the interaction must be able to identify the use of humour. This method of using humour as an emotion management tool is consistent with what has been discussed earlier on emotion-focused coping given that its objective is to modify the emotion of the interlocutor, for example in stressful situations such as when a physician announces bad news (Francis et al., 1999).

Other studies pointed out that the use of humour was correlated with positive emotions and was related to higher satisfaction in interactions (Beach & Prickett, 2017; Penson et al., 2005; Sala et al., 2002). Even if these papers are focused on medical interactions, they are also mainly looking at oncologists who are arguably physicians that have worse news to announce and quite often. These authors showed that in stressful situations, oncologists may use humour to either relax the patient or to create a deeper relationship. Here again, it is important to notice that humour will only have positive effect if it is used in an appropriate manner, the physician must be sensitive to the patient's emotions and to the context. This is especially true as oncology is generally perceived as sad and related to death. However, used adequately, humour can lighten the patients' mind and help them to manage their emotions and deal with the bad news. Doctors using humour are perceived as more supportive which has a direct positive impact on how patients evaluate their interactions. It follows that these benefits could also be garnered by frontline employees engaged in emotionally charged service encounter. Therefore, if frontline employees were trained to the use of humour, they could deliver bad news in a more efficient way, thus improving the customer satisfaction.

Setting the medical literature aside, there are three main theories about the origin of humour (Boyd, 2004) as explained by Meyer (2000) and Whiting & Donthu (2006). Before presenting each theory, it is important to note that humour may stem from more than one origin theory and that a specific funny situation may be explained differently by each theory according to the point of view of the analyst. The first origin theory is called the Relief Theory and suggests that humour is used in stressful or unpleasant situations. It is more focused on the laughter phenomenon assuming that the psychological consequences of laughing are why people are using humour. Indeed, mirth and gaiety induce a cognitive shift and a reduction of the anxiety or a release of the tension. According to the Relief Theory, someone using humour wants to relax a tense situation and it is the visual demonstration of humour by its interlocutor(s), such as laugh, smile or grin, who would tell him that it was successful. A typical example illustrating this theory is the use of a preliminary funny remark in stressful encounter. Starting the conversation or the meeting by a joke would make the situation more pleasant and the interlocutor would be more prone to deal with it. Moreover, it appears that laughing during the interaction facilitate the communication between participants, in addition to lowering the stress level.

The second theory (Meyer, 2000; Whiting & Donthu, 2006) is the Incongruity Theory which depicts the humour as a consequence of an anomalous situation. According to this theory, two elements are necessary to make a situation funny: the surprise and the difference between the present situation and normative one. It means that, according to the Incongruity Theory, what is provoking humour is the fact that the situation is not what it should have been. The unexpected aspect of this difference is strengthening the laughter as it goes for jokes. If the interlocutor already knows the joke he is listening to, the punch line will certainly not make him laugh because the surprise is not present anymore. It is also important to notify that if this difference must be big enough to be remarkable, it should not be too important to avoid negative reaction. Additionally, the Incongruity Theory induces a certain level of social intelligence as the protagonists must be able to recognize and know what the normal situation is and then understand that there is an incongruous difference. For instance, a child, who would not be aware that wolves are carnivorous, may not laugh at a humorous picture depicting the wolf eating vegetables with rabbits. So, to be more accurate, the Incongruity Theory assumes that three elements are necessary: the surprise, the mental representation of the situation that will normally happens and the visualization of the actual situation. To create humour, it is important that both situations can be conceivable and understood by the participants of the interaction.

The last origin theory (Meyer, 2000; Whiting & Donthu, 2006) is the Superiority Theory which is based on the hypothesis that people are laughing at others because they feel superior to them. However, it is important to keep in mind that it may not be pleasant for the person who is laughed at and that is why this type of humour may not be adequate in a conversation between only two persons if one is laughing at the other. In fact, the Superiority Theory is more focused on group interactions and has two major implications: by laughing together at the same people or event, it reinforces the sense of belonging to the same group and it ensures that out of the norm behaviours are socially excluded because those who are not following social norms will be laughed at and, as explained earlier, it is uncomfortable to be the one mocked. Even if it may seem as unlikable, this type of humour is often encountered. Several examples are well depicting this theory such as the fool who was making laugh the king and his relatives or when adults find children reactions or remarks funny or even candid camera which is a concept totally derived from the Superiority Theory when someone is getting tricked. In a way, according to the Superiority Theory, humour could act as a unifier for a social group as well as a divisor between that specific social group and people outside this group, people who are laughed at.

In addition to these three theories, Meyer (2000) identified four key functions that humour could serve. As for the theories, it is important to remember that someone using humour may be looking for different functions at the same time and can develop humour from various origin theories. So, the four main functions are the identification, the clarification, the enforcement and the differentiation. The identification can be related to the Relief and Superiority Theory as it serves to associate the communicator and his listeners by reducing a potential tension (e.g. by laughing during or before a stressful situation) or promoting the feeling of belonging to the same group. The clarification is the function of humour sought by people who want to summarize their opinion or intention in one short and memorable sentence such as a slogan. It is linked to the Incongruity Theory as the unexpected aspect of a slogan helps to remember it. The enforcement is directly related to the Superiority Theory as it represents the capability of humour to reenforce norms. As presented before, people who are laughing at because they are not following norms will certainly change their behaviour and respect norms. Eventually, people using humour as differentiator are those who want to be distinguished from others or those who want to separate their social group from another. This time, this function is connected to the Superiority Theory as well as the Incongruity Theory which are both supporting the idea of differentiation.

Several authors have also taken an interest in the topic of the relation between humour and stress moderation. The primary goal of those authors was to understand how the use of humour could be correlated to the Coping Theory. As explained previously, coping has two different aspects: on the one hand there is the emotion-focused coping consisting of managing personal emotions in front of a stressful situation, and on the other hand there is the problem-focused coping described as trying to find a solution to the stressful issue (Folkman et al., 1986). Some of the first authors to study this relationship were Martin & Lefcourt (1983) and Lefcourt et al. (1997). According to them, humour can be a great support for both coping mechanisms by reducing the impact of stress. More precisely, the use of humour is favouring the emotion-focused coping because it is reducing the significance of the stress emotions as well as helping the problem-focused coping as it may directly modify the stressful event.

Kuiper et al. (1993; 1995) also investigated that topic and presented similar results. They discovered that people using humour were more capable of distancing themselves from stressful situations compared to people who did not or were less likely to use humour. Surprisingly, they also found that those same people were more prone to directly challenge a problematic situation. While their first finding is in line with the emotion-focused coping, the second one concerns the problem-focused coping. Thus, this is in adequation with the hypothesis that the use of humour is allowing people to take advantage of both mechanisms of the Coping Theory. Moreover, they emphasized the fact that people using humour were also more able to reappraise a stressful situation in a positive manner. Abel (2002) proposed similar findings in his study about cognitive-appraisal shift induced by humour.

Other articles offer more insight into the link between humour and coping. Nezelek & Derks (2001) described a social phenomenon where the more people experience enjoyable social interaction, the more likely they are to use humour to cope with stressful situations. Just as importantly, they also identified that the level of intimacy between interlocutors was not influencing how people were coping with humour. Cann et al. (1999) noticed that even an external source of humour could be helping for the coping process. That means that the use of humour does not have to come from one of the participants in the interaction as humour from other source is still having a positive impact on the respondent. It can lower the anxiety, that is, reducing the stress level, and put the stressed person in a more positive mood and so supporting him to cope with the situation.

Having described the conceptual sources and the basic functions of humour, the variety of techniques that can be used to make people laugh remain to be explored. Indeed, there are a multitude of way to develop humour, but all techniques may not be good to use in this specific context of bad news delivery. Van Dolen et al. (2004, p.135) exposed that “a service encounter with an unfavourable outcome in which related humor is used is evaluated more positively than a service encounter with an unfavourable outcome in which unrelated humor is used”. The categorisation of humour techniques proposed by Martin et al. (2003) and supported by Kirsh & Kuiper (2003), Kuiper & al. (2004), and Wood et al. (2014) is useful to better understand which techniques might be relevant or not. These authors identified two dimensions of humour: its valence (from positive to negative) and its focus (from self-focused to other-focused). The two-axes graph presented in Figure 1 and adapted from Wood et al. (2014) is well depicting that, each possibility being represented by one quadrant of the graph.

Techniques of humour localised in quadrant 1 and 2 are those who are defined as positive. That means that this type of humour is not threatening the well-being of anyone and is socially adapted. The first quadrant is gathering techniques identified as positive and focused on the person itself under the label of self-enhancing humour. This kind of humour is particularly useful when people have to deal with negative emotions as people able to show self-enhancing humour are more prone to cope with stressful situation by viewing it with a humorous perspective. The second quadrant includes techniques of social humour (also called affiliative humour) which is a category where humour is positive and reinforce social relationships. This category is also helpful to reduce tension. However, in this category, the effect is due to a sole person that appease the situation for the whole group, for instance by telling a joke.

The two remaining quadrants are related to negative humour meaning that this humour may be seen as bawdy, inept, boorish or maladaptive as well as hurting others. Negative and other-focused humour techniques are found in the third quadrant and defined as aggressive or rude humour. It can take the form of sarcasm, teasing or all techniques that rely on making fun of someone. People using this king of humour want to denigrate or ridicule and, in that sense, may have considerable consequences. It can also be expressed by people who are making jokes without taking account how others will perceive it such as sexist or racist jokes. The last quadrant is for humour called self-defeating and it consists of negative and self-focused techniques of humour. Someone presenting this specific humour may intend to join a social group by laughing at himself or acting as the fool of the group but in an excessive manner up to the point that it can be detrimental for his psychological well-being.



Based on the previous work of Berger (1976; 1993), Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004) identified 41 humour techniques. Their aim was to create categories of humour including several techniques in order to have a few clusters of techniques instead of 41 different mechanisms. Eventually, they achieved to make seven categories, each of them containing from four to nine techniques. The seven clusters are: clownish humour, surprise, misunderstanding, parody, satire, irony and slapstick. Moreover, some humour techniques could not be associated with one specific cluster (e.g. sexual allusion, imitation or eccentricity) either because it belongs to several category or because it does not have any link with other techniques.

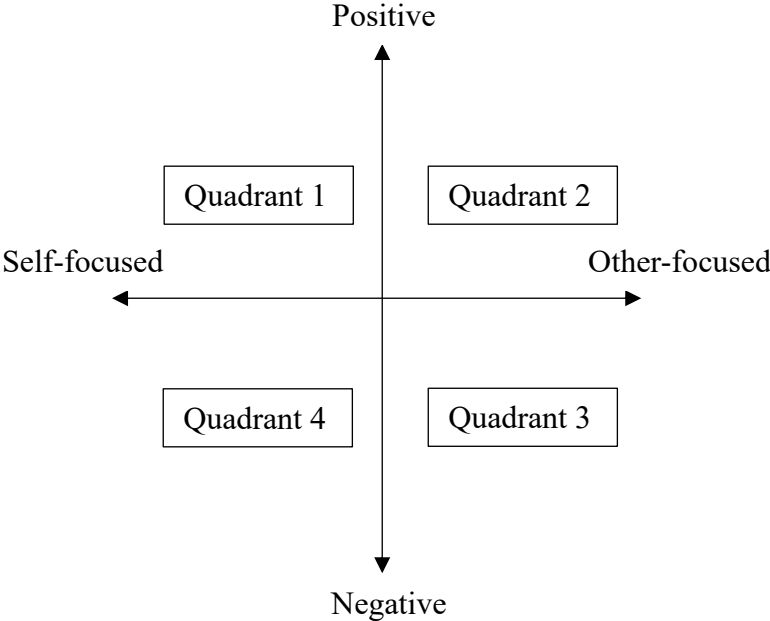
The first four categories are the easiest to implement and the most innocuous ones. Clownish humour involves, as its name indicates, the imitation of a clown by having excessive movements or chasing. Surprise entails unexpected changes of the environment, images or concepts. Misunderstanding even if perceived as innocent, can sometimes hurt if the misunderstanding comes from the ignorance of a specific person. Parody consists of a humorous reproduction of something widely recognised and may be more complex as it requires that all listeners identify the initial situation. Satire and irony are less well-meaning than other techniques. Irony gather together techniques such as sarcasm, puns, or embarrassment and may be relatively complex to understand. Satire suppose laughing at someone, at something or at a situation. The last category is the slapstick humour and depending on the context may be innocent as well as hostile. It is clustering techniques used by fool such as acting in a ridiculous way, taking a peculiar voice or face, being clumsy and so on. It is in the case of using these techniques to imitate someone that it may be perceived as hostile.

Each of those categories can be associated to one of the three theory explaining origin of humour. For example, the Incongruity Theory is explaining the comical of the clownish humour, the surprise, the misunderstanding and the parody due to their surprising aspect and, in most of the case, their benevolence regarding others. The theory explaining the use of satire and irony of humour is the Superiority Theory considering that these techniques are more aggressive and take roots in making fun of someone. The last category, the slapstick humour, may be depicted by the Relief Theory because this kind of humour can be used to appease tensions due to a stressful situation. However, even if each category can be linked to one theory, it is important to notice that some categories can be explained by more than one theory, sometimes depending on the context. For instance, the use of slapstick humour can be related to Superiority Theory if someone is being imitated in a ridiculous way.

Several authors intended to identify sex differences about how humour is perceived (Brodzinsky et al., 1981; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Hay J., 2000; Martin et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2014). There is a clear and widely accepted consensus that sex may imply differences in the view of humour. However, this difference is not yet theorised as many other factors are influencing it and there are no predefined patterns. The first interesting remark is that it is more the psychological sex than the biological sex that is influencing the response to humour. This is due to the fact that humour is a cognitive task, and individuals will react to it in function of their level of socialisation and how their psychological sex is modifying their perception of their environment. Secondly, the level of stress of the situation is also impacting the perception of humour. Authors have shown that males were more likely to develop beneficial responses to humour in high stress situation than females, while this opposite is true in low stress situation. Of course, individual characteristics are influencing humour uses and responses too. Notwithstanding, some general assumptions can be made such as, for example, males are more responsive to sexual allusions and appreciate it more than females do who on their side prefer absurd humour. Moreover, men tend to use a more aggressive kind of humour like sarcasm as well as self-defeating techniques of humour. Therefore, the humour technique used is another factor influencing the sex differences among humour perception.

Besides this sex difference, the age can sometimes create different responses to humour (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin et al., 2003). As for the sex, the effect of the age cannot be predicted in a sure way as each individual has other specific characteristics and a certain level of socialisation but some overall hypothesis can be done. For instance, older adults are less likely to express affiliative humour as well as aggressive humour than teenagers are. This may be explained by the fact that generally, adults have fewer social activities than adolescents. Nevertheless, adults have also more chances to use humour as a coping mechanism than teenagers, which is particularly true for women. Another hypothesis is that humour comes from different theory according to the age of the protagonists. Thus, humour among children may be explained by the Incongruity Theory as it lies on clonish humour and misunderstanding, teenagers' humour in turn can be explained by the Superiority Theory as they are prone to use aggressive humour by laughing at others even if it is made in a friendly manner and adults' humour comes from the three theories depending on the context but no specific theory is at stake. Unsurprisingly, some techniques are more used in certain age group such as sexual humour or puns for adults compared to cartoons and physical transformation for kids.

**Figure 1.** Illustration of the humour quadrants



### 2.3 Hypothesis and Model

Different aspects of the bad news delivery process are tested out in this study and the first one concerns the communication channel used. As previously stated, face-to-face interactions remain the best for communication channel, with the use of phone call as close second (Daft & Lengel, 1983; Rice, 1993; Rice et al., 1998). Both of those medias have different characteristics and, in that sense, may influence differently the customer satisfaction. As the face-to-face channel is widely accepted as the more powerful one, it is expectable that the use of it is having a bigger impact than with the use of phone call.

*H1: the use of face-to-face communication is positively impacting the customer satisfaction with employee response comparing to the use of phone call.*

The second hypothesis is about the use of humour. This study predicts that the use of humour will have an influence on the consumer satisfaction based on the previous works depicted in the literature review. However, the direction of the relation between humour and satisfaction may depend on the technique of humour used. As several authors pointed out (Sala et al., 2002; Van Dolen et al., 2004), if humour is not used in an appropriate way it may have negative consequences. Moreover, the specific technique used can be perceived as threatening by the customer if it is an aggressive humour based on the Superiority Theory (Martin et al., 2003; Meyer, 2000; Wood et al., 2014).

*H2a: an appropriate use of humour is positively influencing the customer satisfaction with employee response.*

*H2b: an inappropriate use of humour is negatively influencing the customer satisfaction with employee response.*

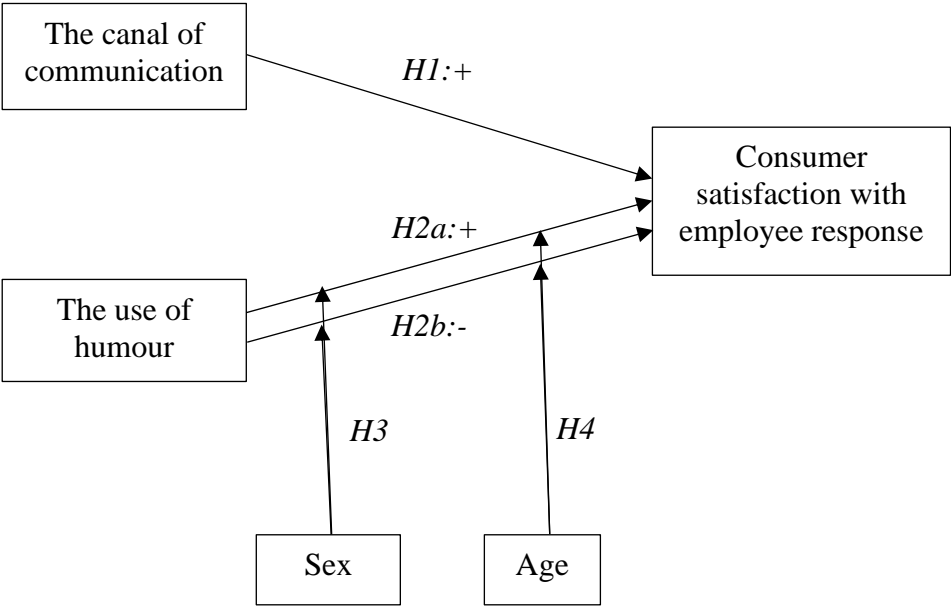
The dependant variable of this model is the consumer satisfaction with employee response during the announce of bad news. It has been retrieved from the work of Delcourt et al. (2017) who analysed the interaction between employee emotional and technical competence and the satisfaction with employee response in bad news delivery. According to them, it is necessary for employee to be able to handle emotionally charged service encounter because it will directly influence the opinion of the customer regarding the company. On top of that, according to the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, after having experienced a stressful situation, the customer will evaluate to what extent the encounter has been positive for him or not and so if he is satisfied with it or not (Folkman et al., 1986).

Lastly, two variables may also be moderating the influence of the use of humour. Sex can be expected to influence the perception of humour as well as the emotional response to it but this influence, as explained before, can hardly be predicted. The individual psychological traits, the level of socialisation and the specific technique used are all characteristics that are modifying the differences between sexes. However, it can be assumed that men are more appreciative of the use of humour in stressful situation than women (Brodzinsky et al., 1981; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Hay J., 2000; Martin et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2014). Concerning the age, similar remarks can be made. Differences due to the age exist but are impacted by specific aspects of the individual as well as the context such that it is difficult to generalise these differences. That said, people with less social interaction are less prone to enjoy humour and, in that sense, young adults may be more appreciating humour than older ones as they may have a more active social life (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Martin et al., 2003; Nezelek & Derks, 2001). The overall model is depicted in Figure 2.

*H3: the sex is moderating the relationship between the use of humour and the customer satisfaction with employee response and males are more appreciating it than females.*

*H4: the age is moderating the relationship between the use of humour and the customer satisfaction with employee response and young adults are more appreciating it than old adults.*

**Figure 2.** Conceptual model



### **3. Research design**

#### **3.1 Specification**

Given the predominance of the service industry in the current economic system (OECD, 2020), the range of possible services is too wide to consider this sector as homogeneous. Each service displays specific characteristics and does induce different kinds of encounters. For example, a customer would not react the same way if the receptionist of the railway station has to announce to him that his train for Brussels, where he must be in one hour to participate at an important meeting, is cancelled than if the postman of his village tells him that he does not have letters today. What is important to understand is that certain services include service encounters in which employees may have to deliver bad news that will affect the consumer. This thesis is focused specifically on the type of service that involves such emotionally charged encounters. Practically, a specific service had to be elected to conduct the field research. The main inclusion criterion was that the selected service provided the kind of encounters that allows employees to impact the customer satisfaction by influencing its emotions (Bailey et al., 2001; Delcourt et al., 2017). Since the aim of this research is to better understand emotionally charged service encounters and how humour can influence it, the empirical part of this study is targeting one sort of service allowing such investigation: car repair services.

This choice is particularly relevant for this study because auto repair services contain, as Delcourt et al. (2017) explained, emotionally charged service encounters and employees regularly have to deliver bad news to consumer. Additionally, Delcourt et al. (2017) have themselves suggested that further research on that specific service could be interesting because emotions are an important aspect of the interaction in car repair services. Andreasen & Best (1977), for their part, pointed out that car repair was the service with the higher dissatisfaction rate (22.9%) with 21.5% over the 22.9% coming from non price-related issues. Huefner & Hunt (1992) noticed that department stores, restaurants, grocery stores and car repair accounts for 81% of all the avoidance stories. They define brand or store avoidance as “the intentional refusal to buy/use a brand or shop/buy at a store.” (Huefner & Hunt, 1992, p.228). Both remarks depict well the context of auto repair services, in which an overall high level of dissatisfaction remains but not specifically due to prices. Thus, the observed dissatisfaction could arise from the interaction between employee and customer. For instance, when bad news is delivered. There is place for improvement about customer satisfaction, hence why car repair is interesting for this study. On top of that, one inhabitant out of two owns a private car, in Belgium, in August 2020 (Statbel, 2020), which shows the relevance and the importance of car repair service.

In order to better understand this service and to ensure that it is pertinent to this study, we had the opportunity to interview a real actor of this sector. The person interviewed, Mr. Clerinx, is the supervisor of the Renault repair service located in Seraing, Belgium. The transcription of the entire interview is available in the appendices (Appendix A). First and foremost, it is important to note that Renault is a well-known car company in Belgium as it had the biggest market share with 10.6% in 2015 (Renault, 2020) thus Renault is quite representative of the industry. As expected, several remarks from Mr. Clerinx demonstrates that the choice of car repair services is relevant to this thesis. For instance, he explained that his staff have to deliver bad news on a daily basis (Clerinx, 2020) which shows the importance of that aspect of encounters in that sector. He also explained that these bad news may be announced in face-to-face interaction but that they are mostly delivered by phone so that the customer does not need to come to the garage to know that his car has an issue and lose time (Clerinx, 2020). This supports the assumption that this service is adequate to test the influence of the canal of communication as both face-to-face and phone call are used. Eventually, he declared that they sometimes use humour to announce bad news, depending on their relationship with the customer (Clerinx, 2020). Here again, that confirms that auto repair services are a good area of focus for this research as the use of humour can lead to improvement in the satisfaction of the bad news delivery process.

Ideally, many humour techniques should be compared in order to identify the best one in the context of bad news delivery. However, due to time and resources constraints, it is infeasible to test every humour technique. A choice had to be made to elect one technique supporting H2a (an appropriate use of humour) and another supporting H2b (an inappropriate use of humour). Every technique comes from a particular origin, according to the theory of humour origin, even if certain may involve different theories at the same time and induce various reactions due to their specificity (e.g. the positivity/negativity of the humour or the focus of it). They can be perceived differently based on the sex and the age of the respondent. This mean that the choice of the techniques influences the results of the empirical part. Given that there is no universal understanding of humour since every individual may react differently to the same joke, there is certainly not only one appropriate humour technique and one inappropriate, but this study intends to select the most appropriate ones by relying on the theoretical consideration highlighted earlier.

According to Martin et al. (2003) and Wood et al. (2014), the best humour techniques to cope with negative and stressful situations would be those from the first quadrant, the self-enhancing humour. However, this kind of humour is focused on the customer itself, thus the employee cannot influence it. If the first quadrant is eliminated, the second one remains the better one. Indeed, it contains affiliative humour which is reinforcing social relationships and is helpful to reduce tensions. Of course, the Relief Theory is the best one to rely on in order to reduce negative emotions (Meyer, 2000). The technique that has been elected to test the appropriate use of humour is the exaggeration. Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004, p.153) define it as follows: “making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way; exaggerating the qualities of a person or product » and classified it in the surprise category meaning that it may also involve the Incongruity Theory, helping the customer to remember the positive response of the employee in the stressful encounter (Meyer, 2000). To recapitulate, the idea is to provoke laugh or smile by the unexpected use of an exaggeration during encounter, in order to reduce tensions of the stressful situation. On top of that, the supervisor of the Renault site of Seraing explained that he sometimes uses exaggeration before announcing bad news, demonstrating that this technique is not senseless for the context of this study and may be appropriate (Clerinx, 2020).

Concerning the inappropriate use of humour, it seems logical to look at the third quadrant, composed of aggressive humour which is a negative and other-focused humour and may have negative consequences as it often implies making fun of someone (Martin et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2014). Techniques related to the Superiority Theory are the best fitted ones to test the hypothesis of an inappropriate use of humour as these techniques are based on a feeling of being superior and a tendency to laugh at others which can put the customer in an uncomfortable situation (Meyer, 2000). The two categories of humour identified by Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004) and linked to the Superiority Theory are the use of satire and irony. Sarcasm, as part of the irony category and depicted as aggressive by Martin et al. (2003) and Wood et al. (2014), has been chosen to test the inappropriate use of humour. Buijzen & Valkenburg (2004, p.154) depicted sarcasm as a “biting remark made with a hostile tone” and noted that “sarcasm is always a verbal put-down”. This time, it is assumed that the use of sarcasm, instead of triggering a laugh and appeasing tensions due to the stressful encounter, may make the customer feel laughed at and induce negative reactions or emotions from him. In other words, if the employee uses sarcasm, the customer might be unsatisfied with the delivery of the bad news



### **3.2 Methodology**

In order to answer the research question, a causal research design has been implemented as the objective is to analyse a causal relationship, between the use of humour and the satisfaction of the consumer with the employee response during the delivery of bad news. The experiential part has been based on videos to test the hypothesis. This method has already proved its worth in previous studies working on the same kind of research (Delcourt et al., 2017; Lemmink & Mattsson, 1998). According to Bateson & Hui (1992, p.278), the use of videos is actually evoking “the same psychological and behavioral phenomena as the actual service setting did” and Seawright & Sampson (2007) noticed that the video method allows a more realistic perception of the environment that would do written scenarios. The videos took place in a real car repair service located in Seraing (Belgium) thanks to the contact with Mr. Clerinx, who is the supervisor of the site. Videos were recorded in a real agency to increase the ecological validity of the results (Delcourt et al., 2017). To avoid that the potential customer reactions influence the perception of the respondent and then the results, no customer were filmed and an actor played the employee behind the reception desk (Grandey et al., 2005). Moreover, to improve the realism of the scenario, the actor wore an appropriate uniform and acted as a normal employee would do (Grandey et al., 2005).

In all, six (2x3) videos were designed in order to emulate the three possible uses of humour (appropriate, inappropriate and no use) for both canals of communication (face-to-face and voice-to-voice). The voice-to-voice videos are more or less the same as the face-to-face but without any visual, taking the form of an audio recording with the same script adapted to fit into a usual phone call. To reduce the possibility of bias, all six scripts have approximately the same length and use the same dialogue, except when using humour or when phone call induce specific remarks. In the same idea, the actor playing the front employee is identical for the six videos. Even if the speech of the employee varies a little bit, the global scenario is consistent and exactly the same in all cases. First of all, the employee welcomes and greets the customer and mentions the customer car that is being repaired. Then, the bad news is delivered by the employee who explains to the customer that during the revision of the car, the mechanics found an issue and that further reparations are required involving an extra cost for the customer. Then, at the last step of the SPIKES protocol, the summary step, the employee uses humour or not. According to Clerinx (2020), this is a recurrent situation which is not unusual in a car repair services and is one of the bad news that they most often have to deliver. The various scripts are available in appendices (Appendix B).

To identify the moderating impact of the age, respondents have been classified in two categories, the generation X and Y. People belonging to the generation X are the older adults and those belonging to generation Y are the younger ones. This choice has been made because these two generations are widely recognized and present differences between them (Jorgensen, 2003). Moreover, due to time constrain, it would have been too complicated to divide the population in smaller clusters. Various dates are quoted when it comes to the end of the generation X but in order to simplify the analysis, it has been decided that respondents born before or during the year 1980 were part of the generation X and that respondents born after were forming the generation Y (Jorgensen, 2003; Jurkiewicz, 2000).

Since this study is focused on car repair services, the respondent targeted were people who have a driving licence, to be sure that they feel concerned by the situation. To reach that population, a snowball sampling has been implemented. This method consists of identifying an initial group of participants based on their characteristics and ask them, after having answered to the survey, to send it to other people they know, and so on (Malhotra et al., 2017). This method ensured that each demographic was represented, especially regarding the age differences. 227 people participated in the survey but after having cleaned the data and removing people who notified that they do not have the driving licence, incomplete survey and preview realised, a sample of 168 respondents has been obtained. Among them, 47% were males and 55% were young adults, from the generation Y.

### 3.3 Measures

An online survey has been created to collect data. At the very beginning of this survey, respondents were asked if they had a driving licence. This step helped filtering out ineligible participants. One of the six videos was then randomly assigned to each participant (the distribution is depicted in Table 1 hereunder). Before watching it, a small instruction explained the context: the respondent had brought its car to the garage and is now either coming back to retrieve the car or getting a call from the garage, according to the situation (face-to-face or phone call). For every item, a seven-point Likert scales (1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”) was used to be able to implement all statistical techniques needed and because it is particularly well adapted for online survey (Malhotra et al., 2017). Right after the video, respondents were asked to mark the perceive realism of the video that they watched by responding to the question “I believe that such an incident can happen in real life” (Baron et al., 2005). The mean score of 5.35 suggests respondents perceived the scenarios as realistic.

**Table 1.** Distribution of videos among respondents

Number of respondents	No humour	Exaggeration	Sarcasm
Face-to-face	n = 38	n = 25	n = 26
Voice-to-voice	n = 25	n = 28	n = 26

The second part of the survey consists of a few questions to catch respondent feelings and perception of the bad news delivery process. To be sure that humour was correctly perceived by respondent, three questions (see Appendix C), with a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.85, were asked to them. To measure the satisfaction regarding the employee response during the delivery of bad news, three items from Delcourt et al. (2017) have been retrieved, having a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.91. Lastly, some demographic data such as sex and age were asked at the end of the survey. This choice was made because sex and age may represent sensitive information for respondents and they would be more willing to give it if these questions are placed at the end of the questionnaire (Malhotra et al., 2017). Moreover, an interval scale was used for the age, again to be sure that respondents were prone to answer it. The different item used and the whole transcription of the survey are available in appendices (Appendix C and D).

## 4. Results

To analyse the data of the experimentation, it has been retrieved from Qualtrics and imported into Excel. Afterwards, SPSS and JASP have been used to conduct either independent samples T-tests when only two means had to be compared or one-way and two-way ANOVAs when more than two means were at stake. For all these tests, the alpha level was of 0.05.

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

First of all, it was important to be sure that humour has been correctly manipulated. To do so, a variable called “humour perception” has been created as the mean of the three questions concerning the humour used by the employee. As said earlier, these three items had a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.85. Then the perception of humour has been analysed and small differences appeared thanks to some independent samples T-tests such as the fact that women were reporting more humour than men did ( $M_{\text{females}}=3.47$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.40$ ;  $t(166)=0.284$ ,  $p=0.777$ ). Respondents from the generation Y were also rating humour higher than adults from generation X did ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.35$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=3.52$ ;  $t(166)=-0.66$ ,  $p=0.510$ ). Moreover, humour was more perceived during the voice-to-voice interaction than during the face-to-face ones ( $M_{\text{F2F}}=3.40$ ,  $M_{\text{V2V}}=3.48$ ;  $t(166)=-0.324$ ,  $p=0.777$ ). Even if differences exist, they are minor and none of them are significant (see Table 2).

A one-way ANOVA allowed to check if the difference between situation which was not presenting humour was in fact detected as less humorous by the respondents than scenarios with exaggeration or sarcasm. The test showed that the model was significant ( $F(2,165)=37.215$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), that is, the technique of humour used, or the absence of humour, was modifying the humour perception and the *post hoc* tests revealed that the exaggeration case was not significantly different from the sarcasm one ( $M_{\text{exaggeration}}=4.08$ ,  $M_{\text{sarcasm}}=4.18$ ,  $p=0.923$ ) meaning that both situations were perceived as comic. Moreover, the same *post hoc* tests depicted that those two situations were significantly different from the basic situation, the one without any use of humour which was perceived as less funny ( $M_{\text{no humour}}=2.30$ ,  $p<0.001$  in both cases). That is the proof that respondents correctly perceived the presence or absence of humour in the videos (see Table 3).

**Table 2.** Independent samples T-tests about humour perception.

Humour perception	t	df	p
According to the sex	0.284	166.000	0.777
According to the age	-0.660	166.000	0.510
According to the canal of communication	-0.324	166.000	0.747

**Table 3.** One-way ANOVA concerning humour.

ANOVA - Humour perception

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Humour	132.604	2.000	66.302	37.215	< .001
Residual	293.962	165.000	1.782		

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

**Post Hoc Tests**

Post Hoc Comparisons - Humour

		Mean Difference	SE	t	P <sub>tukey</sub>
exaggeration	no humour	1.784	0.249	7.171	< .001
	sarcasm	-0.100	0.261	-0.382	0.923
no humour	sarcasm	-1.884	0.250	-7.532	< .001

## 4.2 Main hypothesis

Some overall conclusions can be made with the analysis of a two-way ANOVA which examined the effect of the canal of communication and the use of humour on satisfaction with the employee response (see Table 4). Four important information can be retrieved from this test. Firstly, there was no significant interaction effect between the two independent variables ( $F(2,162)=0.874$ ,  $p=0.419$ ). Secondly, the canal of communication used to announce the bad news was not significantly impacting the satisfaction of the customer ( $F(1,162)=2.312$ ,  $p=0.130$ ). Thirdly, the impact of the use of humour on the satisfaction was significant ( $F(2,162)=5.273$ ,  $p=0.006$ ). To better understand that impact, *post hoc* tests (see Table 5) have been realised concerning the humour variable. There was only one significant difference among the various usage of humour, concerning the exaggeration and the lack of humour ( $p=0.007$ ). Lastly, the R Squared (0.078) indicated that the relationship between the model and the dependent variable is not strong. Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics concerning the canal of communication and the use of humour and Figure 3 shows the results on a graph.

**Table 4.** Two-way ANOVA.

<b>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects</b>						
Dependent Variable: Satisfaction						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	29,513 <sup>a</sup>	5	5,903	2,738	,021	,078
Intercept	2403,096	1	2403,096	1114,629	,000	,873
Canal	4,985	1	4,985	2,312	,130	,014
Humour	22,739	2	11,369	5,273	,006	,061
Canal * Humour	3,768	2	1,884	,874	,419	,011
Error	349,266	162	2,156			
Total	2840,550	168				
Corrected Total	378,779	167				

a. R Squared = ,078 (Adjusted R Squared = ,049)

**Table 5.** *Post hoc* tests concerning the humour variable.

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Tukey HSD

(I) Humour	(J) Humour	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
exaggeration	no humour	-,844*	,2737	,007	-1,492	-,197
	sarcasm	-,451	,2866	,259	-1,129	,227
no humour	exaggeration	,844*	,2737	,007	,197	1,492
	sarcasm	,393	,2751	,329	-,258	1,044
sarcasm	exaggeration	,451	,2866	,259	-,227	1,129
	no humour	-,393	,2751	,329	-1,044	,258

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 2,156.

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

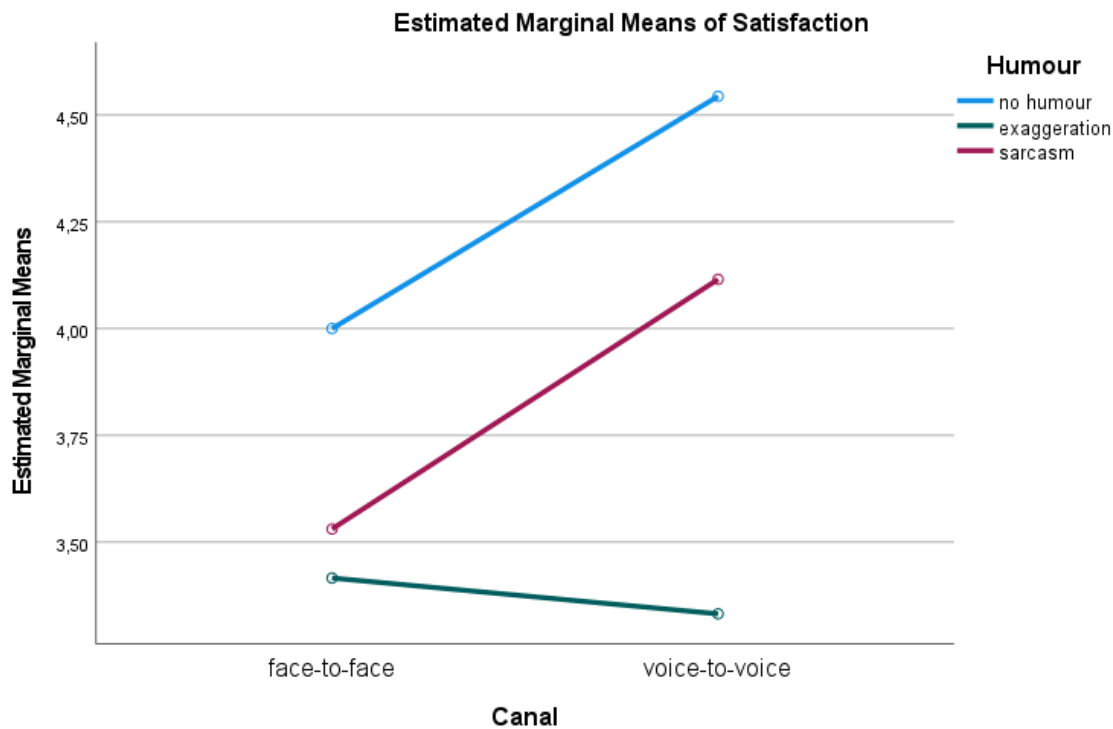
**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics.

**Descriptive Statistics**

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

Canal	Humour	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
face-to-face	exaggeration	3,416	1,6144	25
	no humour	4,000	1,5033	38
	sarcasm	3,531	1,6728	26
	Total	3,699	1,5894	89
voice-to-voice	exaggeration	3,332	1,3752	28
	no humour	4,544	1,2094	25
	sarcasm	4,115	1,3707	26
	Total	3,973	1,4020	79
Total	exaggeration	3,372	1,4787	53
	no humour	4,216	1,4096	63
	sarcasm	3,823	1,5427	52
	Total	3,828	1,5060	168

**Figure 3.** Interaction effects between humour and the canal of communication.



This being said, more focused tests would help to better understand all the links and relations between the independent variables and the dependent one. A few independent samples T-tests have been realised concerning the canal of communication to get more information about it (see Table 7). In each of those tests, the face-to-face situations were compared to the voice-to-voice ones. A general test regarding the satisfaction in both cases showed that the canal of communication was not significantly modifying the satisfaction ( $M_{F2F}=3.70$ ,  $M_{V2V}=3.98$ ;  $t(166)=-1.181$ ,  $p=0.239$ ). However, we also compared satisfaction according to the two canals for each specific category of humour and even if no significant difference has been found, the results were more encouraging than the ones from the two-way ANOVA. It showed that when no humour was used, voice-to-voice bring more satisfaction than the face-to-face interaction ( $M_{F2F}=4.00$ ,  $M_{V2V}=4.54$ ;  $t(61)=-1.514$ ,  $p=0.135$ ). The same was true for the use of sarcasm ( $M_{F2F}=3.53$ ,  $M_{V2V}=4.11$ ;  $t(50)=-1.378$ ,  $p=0.174$ ) but it was the opposite for the use of exaggeration ( $M_{F2F}=3.42$ ,  $M_{V2V}=3.33$ ;  $t(51)=0.204$ ,  $p=0.839$ ). Moreover, the effect sizes were moderately high for the lack of humour (-0.390) and the use of sarcasm (-0.382) and the p-value was relatively low. Graph of the effects of the canal of communication is depicted in Figure 4.

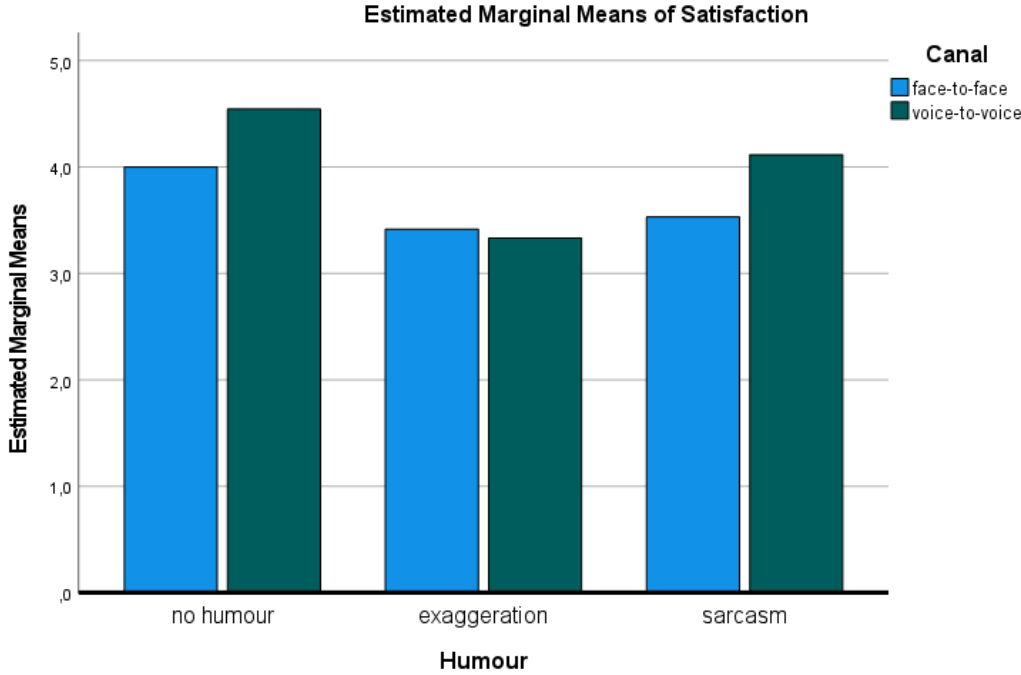


**Table 7.** Independent samples T-tests about the canal of communication.

	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Satisfaction	-1.181	166.000	0.239	-0.183
No humour	-1.514	61.000	0.135	-0.390
Exaggeration	0.204	51.000	0.839	0.056
Sarcasm	-1.378	50.000	0.174	-0.382

Note. Student's t-test.

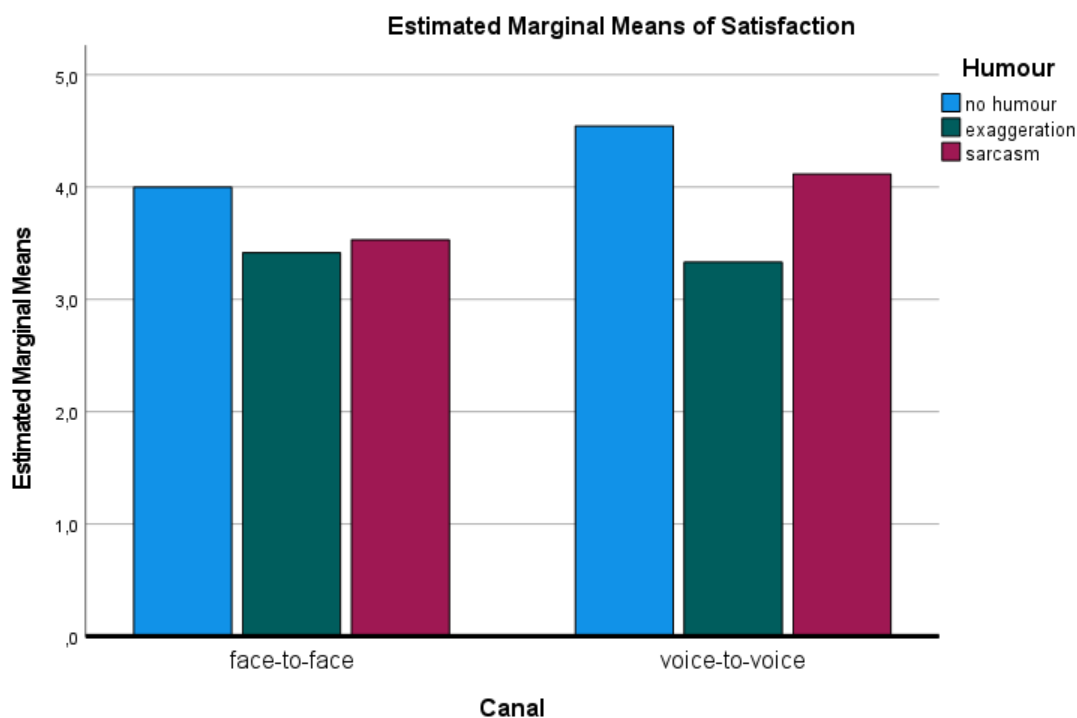
**Figure 4.** Effects of the canal of communication.



Additional one-way ANOVA tests concerning the humour allowed to further the understanding of this variable (see Table 8). As for the canal of communication, the three different uses of humour have been compared in terms of satisfaction. The first test concerned the overall satisfaction according to the technique of humour used. It showed, as it was the case in the two-way ANOVA, that humour was significantly impacting the satisfaction ( $F(2,165)=4.724$ ,  $p=0.010$ ,  $\eta^2=0.054$ ). *Post hoc* tests revealed that there was only one significant difference which was between the situation without any humour and the use of exaggeration ( $p=0.007$ ) in the sense that respondents were more satisfied when the employee did not use humour than when he used exaggeration.

Two more one-way ANOVAs have been implemented to compare more specifically the use of humour in both canals of communication. In the face-to-face videos, humour does not have a significant impact ( $F(2,86)=1.230$ ,  $p=0.297$ ,  $\eta^2=0.028$ ) while in the voice-to-voice it has ( $F(2,76)=5.759$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $\eta^2=0.132$ ). As for the general results, the *post hoc* tests demonstrated that the only significant difference was between the use of exaggeration and the lack of humour ( $p=0.004$ ). The results will be discussed further in a following section. However, some early remarks can already be made: the ranking of the humour techniques was the same for all the tests (exaggeration, sarcasm, no humour), the differences were higher in the voice-to-voice situations and the majority of the effect sizes, measured by Cohen's *d*, were not negligible. Figure 5 presents the plots of the results.

**Figure 5.** Effects of the humour techniques.



**Table 8.** One-way ANOVAs about techniques of humour used.***Satisfaction***

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta^2$
Humour	20.515	2.000	10.257	4.724	0.010	0.054
Residual	358.264	165.000	2.171			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

## Post Hoc Comparisons - Humour ▼

		Mean Difference	SE	t	Cohen's d	P <sub>tukey</sub>
exaggeration	no humour	-0.844	0.275	-3.074	-0.586	0.007
	sarcasm	-0.451	0.288	-1.569	-0.299	0.262
no humour	sarcasm	0.393	0.276	1.423	0.267	0.332

***Face-to-face***

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta^2$
Humour	6.181	2.000	3.090	1.230	0.297	0.028
Residual	216.129	86.000	2.513			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

## Post Hoc Comparisons - Humour

		Mean Difference	SE	t	Cohen's d	P <sub>tukey</sub>
exaggeration	no humour	-0.584	0.408	-1.431	-0.377	0.330
	sarcasm	-0.115	0.444	-0.258	-0.070	0.964
no humour	sarcasm	0.469	0.403	1.163	0.298	0.478

***Voice-to-voice***

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	$\eta^2$
Humour	20.178	2.000	10.089	5.759	0.005	0.132
Residual	133.137	76.000	1.752			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

## Post Hoc Comparisons - Humour

		Mean Difference	SE	t	Cohen's d	P <sub>tukey</sub>
exaggeration	no humour	-1.212	0.364	-3.328	-0.932	0.004
	sarcasm	-0.783	0.360	-2.173	-0.570	0.082
no humour	sarcasm	0.429	0.371	1.156	0.331	0.483

### 4.3 Moderating hypothesis

In order to check if sex moderates the effect of humour on the satisfaction, several independent samples T-tests have been made (see Table 9). The satisfaction was not significantly impacted by the sex ( $M_{\text{females}}=3.98$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.66$ ;  $t(166)=1.391$ ,  $p=0.166$ ). Neither techniques for the use of humour lead to significant results and, except for the script without humour ( $M_{\text{females}}=4.15$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=4.30$ ;  $t(61)=-0.439$ ,  $p=0.662$ ), women always rated their satisfaction higher than men, even when exaggeration was used ( $M_{\text{females}}=3.54$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.22$ ;  $t(51)=0.780$ ,  $p=0.439$ ) or when sarcasm was present ( $M_{\text{females}}=4.16$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.40$ ;  $t(50)=1.799$ ,  $p=0.078$ ). Once more, some effect sizes must be taken into consideration, especially for the use of sarcasm (Cohen's  $d=0.502$ ) and, to a lesser extent, for the overall satisfaction and the use of exaggeration (Cohen's  $d=0.215$  in both cases). Even if it is not at the main focus of this study, it is noticeable that same results were encountered when sex was used to compare the satisfaction following face-to-face interactions ( $M_{\text{females}}=3.93$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.45$ ;  $t(87)=1.432$ ,  $p=0.156$ , Cohen's  $d=0.304$ ) and voice-to-voice interactions ( $M_{\text{females}}=4.04$ ,  $M_{\text{males}}=3.90$ ;  $t(77)=0.451$ ,  $p=0.654$ , Cohen's  $d=0.102$ ). Figure 6 represents those findings.

To conclude the analysis of the data retrieved, the same type of tests has been applied to the age, to seek for a possible moderating effect (see Table 10). Despite the fact that the generation Y, who are the young adults, felt slightly more satisfied than adults from the generation X, there was no actual significant difference ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.70$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=3.93$ ;  $t(166)=-0.991$ ,  $p=0.323$ ). As for the sex, the results have been analysed separately, technique by technique with independent sample T-tests and it came out that, although all these differences are not significant, the generation Y declared to be a little more satisfied than the generation X did when no humour was used ( $M_{\text{genX}}=4.00$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=4.37$ ;  $t(61)=-1.038$ ,  $p=0.303$ ) as well as with the use of sarcasm ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.61$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=4.04$ ;  $t(50)=-1.007$ ,  $p=0.319$ ) but it was the opposite when exaggeration was used ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.48$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=3.28$ ;  $t(51)=0.496$ ,  $p=0.622$ ). Again, even though it is not at the heart of this study, the generation Y was more satisfied with both canals of communication, whether with face-to-face interactions ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.59$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=3.78$ ;  $t(87)=-0.556$ ,  $p=0.579$ ) or with voice-to-voice ones ( $M_{\text{genX}}=3.82$ ,  $M_{\text{genY}}=4.11$ ;  $t(166)=-0.935$ ,  $p=0.353$ ). It is noteworthy that the Cohen's  $d$  of all these tests was relatively small (between 0.100 and 0.300). Figure 7 depicts the results of the impact of age on satisfaction.

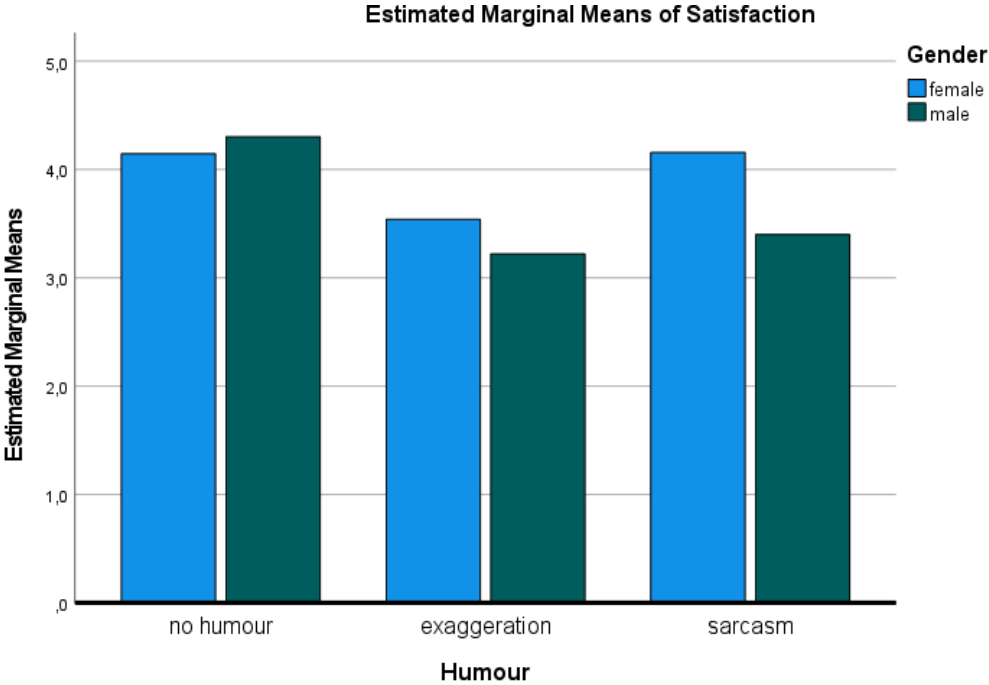
**Table 9.** Independent samples T-Tests about the sex.

	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Satisfaction	1.391	166.000	0.166 <sup>a</sup>	0.215
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
No humour	-0.439	61.000	0.662	-0.111
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Exaggeration	0.780	51.000	0.439	0.215
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Sarcasm	1.799	50.000	0.078 <sup>a</sup>	0.502

Note. Student's t-test.

<sup>a</sup> for those tests, the assumption that the variances are equal was violated ( $p < 0.05$  at Leven's test) but as the sample was approximately the same for both cases, it is negligible.

**Figure 6.** Effects of the sex on the satisfaction.

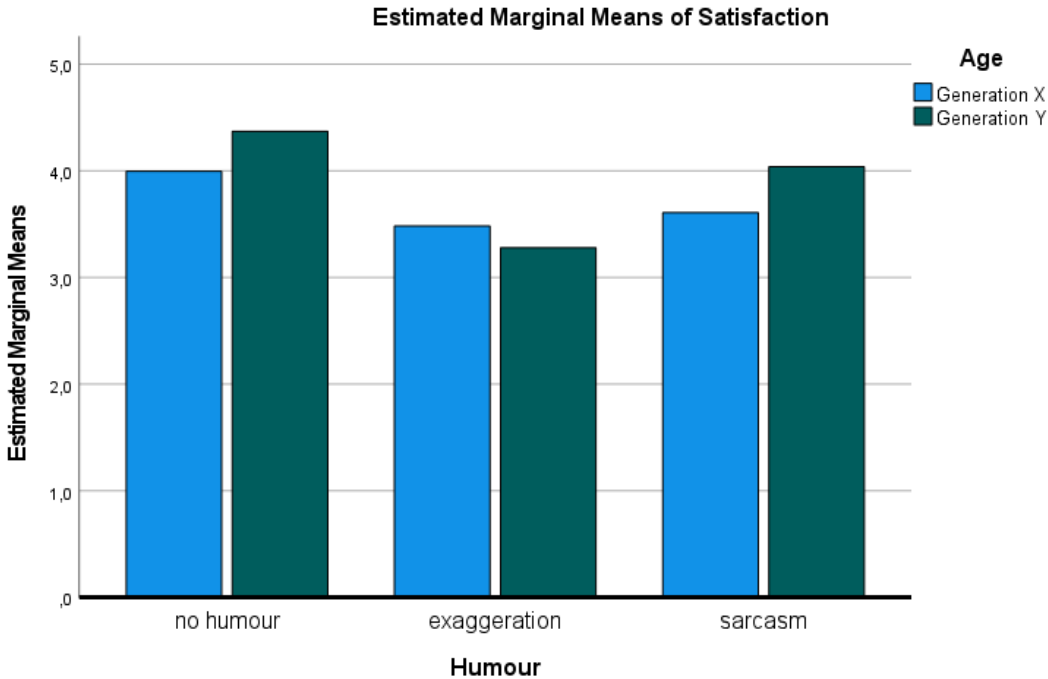


**Table 10.** Independent samples T-Tests about the age.

	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Satisfaction	-0.991	166.000	0.323	-0.154
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
No humour	-1.038	61.000	0.303	-0.266
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Exaggeration	0.496	51.000	0.622	0.137
	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Sarcasm	-1.007	50.000	0.319	-0.279

Note. Student's t-test.

**Figure 7.** Effects of the age on the satisfaction.





## 5. Discussion

Those results will be explained by following the same order as in the previous section to be as clear as possible. The analysis of the manipulation checks was necessary to be sure that the humour variable had been correctly employed, that is to say that respondent perceived humour when the employee demonstrated one or another technique of humour or that he did not perceive humour when the employee did not use any humour technique. The significance of the differences between the no-humour case and the two others allows to state that humour has been adequately manipulated and that the results of this study can be properly interpreted. However, even if scenarios with exaggeration or sarcasm have been rated more humorous than the scenario without humour, it is noticeable that they only reached the half of the seven-point Likert Scale, corresponding to the neutral opinion, with an average score of 4.08 and 4.18, respectively. Other techniques of humour or a different expression of the humour technique used could have led to interactions perceived as more comic. It is also interesting to see that differences concerning humour perception between males and females, according to the specific canal of communication used or between young and old adults were not significant indicating an absence of bias concerning the humour perception.

The two-way ANOVA was helpful to analyse the model tested. As a reminder, the model represents the influence of the canal of communication used to deliver bad news as well as the impact of the humour expressed during this interaction, both concerning the satisfaction of the customer. It was expected that these two variables would have an effect on satisfaction but, on one hand, the two-way ANOVA showed that the canal of communication made no significant difference. On the other hand, the humour used was having an influence on satisfaction, but this influence was significant in only one case, when the scenario without humour was compared to the one with exaggeration. This latter scenario led to a lesser degree of satisfaction than the situation without humour did. So far, neither *H1*, *H2a* nor *H2b* are supported but further analysis has led to a better understanding of how these variables interacted with the satisfaction. Before looking at those tests, it is important to note that the interpretation of the R squared indicated that this specific model was not accurate. Indeed, only 7.8% of the changes regarding the satisfaction were explained by this model (i.e. by the canal of communication or by the technique of humour used). It can then be assumed that other variables, not developed in this model, are at stake concerning the satisfaction in the bad news delivery process.



The first hypothesis predicted that the canal of communication would influence the satisfaction with face-to-face interaction assumed to lead to more satisfaction than voice-to-voice. This first hypothesis was related to the Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1983; 1986) and the Social Presence Theory (Biocca et al., 2003; Rice, 1993) which both ranked face-to-face as the best way to communicate, followed by phone call in second position. Therefore, face-to-face is at the top of the communication channel ranking, in particular because it allows visual interaction and physical proximity permitting employees to express more emotions and possibly empathy through eye contact or the use of body language.

However, tests showed that it was not necessarily the case for every situation. Since no significant difference were detected when both canals were compared in terms of satisfaction, *H1* is not supported. Conversely, in the situation without humour and the situation with the use of sarcasm, voice-to-voice encounters led to more satisfaction than face-to-face ones. The remaining situation, with the presence of exaggeration, was in line with the prediction and face-to-face situations led to more satisfaction than voice-to-voice did but none of these results were significant. That being said, given the fact that effect sizes were not negligible and that the various p-values were relatively low, except for the exaggeration case, it is assumable that with a bigger sample, the results of these tests could have been significant. Another assumption that can be made is that the test assessing the overall satisfaction might be compromised by the result of the use of exaggeration since it counterbalances the nearly significant results of the use of sarcasm and the absence of humour.

In light of these elements, results could have been significant, with a larger sample and/or with another technique than the exaggeration but even if it would have been significant, it would not have been in the way predicted by *H1*, in the sense that voice-to-voice would be preferred than face-to-face. One of the reasons that may explain these unexpected results is linked to the specific context of this study and has been introduced by Whiting & Donthu (2006) as well as by Clerinx (2020) during his interview. Mr. Clerinx explained that most of the time, when employees announce bad news to customers, they prefer to call them directly than to wait for the customer to arrive at the garage to deliver the bad news face-to-face. This arrangement avoids losing the customers time and energy creating frustration by coming to the garage for nothing, especially when it can be avoided by a phone call. Hence, results could be different if the study was focused on another service sector.

*H2a* and *H2b* are linked to the humour variable and intended to predict how humour techniques would influence satisfaction. *H2a* stated that an appropriate use of humour would increase satisfaction compared to a situation where no humour is present while *H2b* depicted that an inappropriate use of humour would decrease satisfaction. The use of exaggeration had been qualified as appropriate and the use of sarcasm as inappropriate. Mainly based on the origin of humour theories (Meyer, 2000), these hypothesis rest on the assumption that humour from the Relief and the Incongruity Theories would be helpful to deal with stressful situation and that aggressive humour techniques from the Superiority Theory could lead to negative results (Martin et al., 2003; Meyer, 2000; Wood et al., 2014).

The analysis of the data allowed to see that the only significant difference was found between the use of exaggeration and the situation without humour. In spite of the significance of the relation, *H2a* is not supported because this relation went in the opposite as it has been predicted. Indeed, the use of exaggeration led to less satisfaction than when no humour was present. *H2b* is not supported neither because even if the use of sarcasm brought less satisfaction than when no humour was used, this difference was not significant. In both situations, either with face-to-face interactions or voice-to-voice ones, the non-use of humour led to the most satisfaction, followed by the use of sarcasm and eventually the use of exaggeration. These results mean that, even if it has not been significantly demonstrated, it seems that the situation without humour has been preferred than when humour was present. Interestingly, the differences among each humour technique were more important with voice-to-voice than with face-to-face interactions, which is in line with the conclusion made concerning *H1* that, with improvement, the canal of communication could be significantly impacting the satisfaction. Here again, in most cases, an effect size was not negligible and a larger sample could have conduct to significant results concerning the humour variable.

Several reasons may account for those results concerning *H2*. The primary reason being that specific humour techniques had to be chosen to represent the appropriate and inappropriate use of humour. It is possible that in that context or according to the manner the employee demonstrated exaggeration, it may have been interpreted by respondents as an inappropriate use of humour leading to results which would be in line with *H2b*. Yet, this study does not allow for any conclusion about that possibility. In more general terms, it is conceivable that the choice of the specific humour techniques was not adequate or that the introduction of humour in the script and/or the expression of humour in videos was not sufficiently well done therefore that other techniques of humour and/or interpretation of them would give different results.

The last variables that must be discussed are the moderating factors: sex and age. In the model presented, both of these factors were supposed to moderate the impact of humour on the satisfaction (i.e. the appreciation of the use of humour would be different according to the sex and the age of the customer). Although it was anticipated that those aspects would bear an influence on satisfaction, the direction and strength of their influence were unknown. Actually, many other aspects are enhancing or reducing the differences among sex or generation, such as individual psychological traits and the level of socialisation. Moreover, the impact may be different according to the specific humour technique developed such that one use of humour can be preferred by males and another by females and the same goes for the age. However, it had been predicted that men would be more appreciative of humour than women due to the fact that it would be perceived as a stressful situation. Similarly, young adults, the generation Y, were predicted to be more satisfied by the use of humour than older adults, the generation X, because younger adults tend to have more social interactions (Brodzinsky et al., 1981; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Hay J., 2000; Martin et al., 2003; Nezlek & Derks, 2001; Wood et al., 2014).

Concerning the first moderating variable, the sex, *H3* is not supported because no significant difference has been detected when males and females were compared in terms of satisfaction. Although the results are not significant, it is interesting to see that women were more satisfied than men. It was also the case when sex was used to compare satisfaction following an interaction including the use of exaggeration or the use of sarcasm and this, whether in face-to-face or voice-to-voice scenarios. The only case where men were more satisfied was when no humour was used by the employee. All this suggests that females were more appreciating humour than males, at least in this specific context. It is important to keep in mind that these assumptions are only based on interpretation of data but cannot be generalised since none of those results were significant. Explanations concerning the fact that, contrary to what was planned, women were more appreciative of humour than men may be encountered in previous paragraph. Indeed, it may come from the fact that the situation could not have been perceived as stressful or from the specific choice of humour techniques. As it has been explained before, it is difficult to anticipate the effect of sex on appreciation of humour because it may differ for each use of humour. To conclude with the sex, it can be assumed that with a larger sample results could have been significant, at least for the use of sarcasm and potentially for the use of exaggeration and for the overall model which stated that sex is moderating the satisfaction resulting from the use of humour, given the effect size values and p-values.

The second moderating variable, the age, proposed results in adequacy with what *H4* predicted. Even though the generation Y was slightly more satisfied by the use of humour than the generation X, the difference was not significant, so that *H4* is not supported neither. The various tests have shown that young adults felt more satisfied than old adults when no humour was used as well as when the employee demonstrated sarcasm and this was true for both communication channels, face-to-face and voice-to-voice encounters. In contrast, the scenario including exaggeration from the employee was preferred by older adults. Again, a bigger sample could have led to significant results though it is less certain for this variable given effect sizes values which were lower than in tests concerning previous variables. The reasons explaining why exaggeration presented opposite results are more or less the same as for the sex since the age is also impacting differently the appreciation of humour according to each technique of humour and to individual characteristics. It is possible that another expression of humour, instead of exaggeration, would have conducted to different results and, with a larger sample, the age could be significantly moderating the satisfaction coming from the use of humour.

An additional remark could be made concerning the different values of all those results. The various means of satisfaction were around 4 which represents the middle of the seven-point Likert's scale and the neutral opinion with a standard deviation of 1.51. This signifies that some people were not satisfied and rated their satisfaction below 4 and that other people were satisfied and rated over 4 (e.g. for the use of sarcasm, the minimum was 1 and the maximum was 7 for face-to-face interactions and went from 1 to 6 for voice-to-voice encounters with a standard deviation of respectively 1.67 and 1.37). This observation is supporting two assumptions made earlier: that the model is incomplete and that everyone reacts differently to the use of humour. The model developed explains only a few of the changes of the satisfaction as we can see that, for the same use of sarcasm, some respondents were not at all satisfied while others were totally satisfied demonstrating that other variables influenced the respondent satisfaction. It is also in line with what have been explained previously concerning the fact that each individual responds differently to humour according to its own personality (Brodzinsky et al., 1981; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Hay J., 2000; Martin et al., 2003; Wood et al., 2014).



## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Thesis summary**

The delivery of bad news is an unavoidable task for services, especially for those that involve emotionally charged service encounters (Delcourt et al., 2017). It is, therefore, critical for employees to be able to deal with such situations to ensure that the customer retain a positive image of the company. It is even more the case when we know that the customer satisfaction is directly related to the behaviour and the emotions displayed by the employee (Berry et al., 2006; Mattila & Enz, 2002). This study focused on the use of humour since previous authors showed that humour impacts the emotions of other people and can turn negative feelings into positive ones (Francis et al., 1999). The difference amongst communication channels was also investigated as face-to-face interactions were expected to lead to higher level of satisfaction (Westmyer et al., 1998). For this study, the sector of car repair services has been elected as it was directly relevant for the aim of the study (Clerinx, 2020; Delcourt et al., 2017).

In this study, six video pills depicting an employee of the garage delivering bad news in different manners were created. Three videos simulated a face-to-face encounter with the employee and demonstrated either exaggeration, sarcasm, or no use of humour. The three other videos were voice recordings of a phone call from the employee displaying, again, the three different uses of humour. 168 responses have been collected to the survey which allowed to conduct many analyses. The following conclusions should be treated with caution since poor significance has been achieved. This study showed that voice-to-voice interactions might be preferred to face-to-face ones, and that the use of humour can decrease the customer satisfaction of the employee interaction. Moreover, two demographic criteria may be influencing the appreciation of humour: sex and age. Indeed, females were slightly more receptive to the use of humour than males, and younger people were more appreciative of humour than older ones. In addition to the fact that nearly none of the results were significant, it is important to keep in mind that the observations could be different in another service sector or with different techniques of humour given the difficulty to categorise them, and the uniqueness of each technique.

## **6.2 Theoretical implications**

At an academic level, the aim of this study was to get more insight into the bad news delivery process. More precisely, this study tried to fill a gap regarding the use of humour in managerial field (i.e. in the employee-customer interactions) which received way less attention than the medical field (i.e. in the physician-patient relations) (McKee & Ptacek, 2001; Ptacek & Eberhardt, 1996). The second academic gap that this study addressed is the use of humour in emotionally charged service encounters that involve front employees and customers such as the delivery of bad news. As for the overall bad news process, the focus of previous research on humour as an emotion modulator was predominantly conducted on the medical field. More interestingly, to the author's knowledge, no empirical study has already been conducted to analyse the impact of humour in the delivery of bad news to customers in services.

This report should be seen as an initiator to the understanding of how to use humour in employee-customer interactions. The results show that the model developed for this research is incomplete since it did not account for the majority of the variations in the satisfaction level. Therefore, other variables should be taken into considerations. However, the fact that the results were in an opposite direction than what was predicted, that is that the situations without humour was preferred to one with humour, suggests that further comprehension of the satisfaction resulting from humour is needed. The gap concerning the use of humour in a managerial context is far from being fulfilled by this study, but it is a good starting point for further research. Differences, even if not significant, which appeared between generations are in line with previous works and adds information to them which could help to lead to a generalisation of the influence of the age on the humour appreciation. Eventually, a trend showing that voice-to-voice encounters is preferred to face-to-face interaction could conduct to a new way of ranking canal of communication, at least for the car repair service context, potentially taking into account new constraints or advantages of each method due to improvements of technologies and modifications in our lifestyle.

### **6.3 Managerial implications**

As mentioned in the introduction, the final aim of this paper was to provide managers with key recommendations and to suggest managerial actions in order to improve the skills of employees delivering bad news to their customers. Yu & Dean (2001) emphasised the importance of the emotional experience during the service delivery, pointed out the need for managers to be more aware of this aspect of service delivery. The present study intended to provide a better understanding of the bad news delivery process for managers, to allow them to grasp the importance of this process, and to help them to improve their own methods. For managers, humour is rarely perceived as a useful tool for employees as managers may not take humour seriously enough (Francis et al., 1999). Therefore, the present study needed to be relevant for managers and to test if humour could be used to deliver bad news and how it should be used.

Although virtually every manager in the service industry can benefit from the following implications, it is particularly the case for managers of car repair services as it was the focus of the study. Again, it is important to remember that the recommendations are based on non-significant tendencies or differences and that more accurate results would be needed to generalise those recommendations. In this study, the voice-to-voice interactions were preferred over face-to-face ones and so, if it is not already the case, managers could consider implementing phone call for bad news that must be delivered to clients. Moreover, the use of humour to deliver bad news seems counter-indicated, or at least the use of exaggeration, as it was the only significant result. Yet, it is not that simple. Indeed, what should be avoided is the automatic use of humour, in each bad news encounter. However, humour can still bring positive results with some customers and the employees could use sparingly it in specific cases, when they know the customer well enough to anticipate a positive reaction to humour. That means that employees should not demonstrate humour with customers that they meet for the first time. Furthermore, employees should be more prone to use humour when they are interacting with a woman as well as young customer since they seem to be more appreciative of humour.



## **6.4 Limitations and further research**

Several limitations have already been described but it is important to highlight them as they could conduct to potential further research. The first limitation of this study is the sample size used for the collect of the data, which seems to have had a substantial impact. It has been pointed out on numerous occasions that, at the light of the potential effect sizes as well as p-values, and even if it is not sure, it can be assumed that a bigger sample would have provide more significance to the results. It was not possible for this thesis, due to time and resource constraints, to reach a larger sample and this restricted the added value of this study since, from a scientific point of view, only significant results are interesting and can lead to conclusions. The fact that a larger sample could provide significance can be seen as an incentive for additional research concerning that topic.

Another limitation concerns the specificity of the field study in the experimental part. Indeed, due to time constraint, this part had to be focused on only one specific kind of service and although car repair service is a relevant one, it is not representative of every kind of service. In order to generalise the results and to provide adequate recommendations for the whole industry, other types of service should be investigated. Moreover, studies comparing results for different services could be interesting. Since this research concerns specifically bad news delivery, all category of services may not be relevant but those containing emotionally charged service encounters should be considered. Other service sectors in which stressful situations are usual and could therefore be of interest are amongst other: legal services, catering, hospitality or airline companies (Delcourt et al., 2017; Smith & Bolton, 1998).

Similarly, the techniques of humour tested in this study were limited as it would have taken too much time to analyse more techniques. Only two techniques have been elected: exaggeration and sarcasm. Moreover, the display of humour in the scenario may not have been ideal and another expression of the same kind of humour could have led to different results. The way the actor played his role may also be a possible limitation because it cannot be excluded that he did not act as needed when demonstrating humour. These two reasons could explain why the use of exaggeration was perhaps perceived as inappropriate. Anyway, deeper investigation on the use of humour to deliver bad news to customer is required, whether by expressing differently the exaggeration and/or the sarcasm or by testing other humour techniques in order to be able to generalise the findings.

It has been emphasised that the model developed for this study was not complete and that other variables, not investigated here, were also influencing the satisfaction of the announce of bad news. Indeed, less than 10% of the variations of satisfaction were explained by the humour or the canal of communication. The proposed model must, therefore, be improved and further research are needed in that goal. Future studies should aim to understand which variables must be taken into consideration and to what extent. The character of the customer or the kind of relationship he has with the employee, including their closeness and for how long they have known each other, are various lines of investigation that could prove interesting (Clerinx, 2020; Wood et al., 2014).

Finally, even if the use of videos is relevant for this study (Bateson & Hui, 1992), it is possible that real situations would lead to different results. Although respondent had to put themselves in customer's place, they knew that it was for the purpose of a study and that it was fake. Respondents may not have felt the same emotions as if their car would have had an issue for real. This is especially impacting the study since it was based on emotionally charged service encounters, meaning that emotions are at the centre of the research. Due to time constraint, videos were a pertinent choice, but it would be interesting for further research to intent to observe genuine situations, were customers would not know that they are being observed and would react with sincerity to the announce of the bad news.



## References

- Abel, M. H. (2002). Humor, stress, and coping strategies. *Humor, 15*(4), 365-381.
- Andreasen, A. R., & Best, A. (1977). Consumers complain-does business respond. *Harvard Business Review, 55*(4), 93-101.
- Baile, W. F., Buckman, R., Lenzi, R., Glober, G., Beale, E. A., & Kudelka, A. P. (2000). SPIKES—a six-step protocol for delivering bad news: application to the patient with cancer. *The oncologist, 5*(4), 302-311.
- Bailey, J. J., Gremler, D. D., & McCollough, M. A. (2001). Service encounter emotional value: The dyadic influence of customer and employee emotions. *Services marketing quarterly, 23*(1), 1-24.
- Baron, S., Harris, K., Elliott, D., Schoefer, K., & Ennew, C. (2005). The impact of perceived justice on consumers' emotional responses to service complaint experiences. *Journal of Services Marketing.*
- Bateson, J. E., & Hui, M. K. (1992). The ecological validity of photographic slides and videotapes in simulating the service setting. *Journal of consumer research, 19*(2), 271-281.
- Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of general psychology, 5*(4), 323-370.
- Beach, W. A., & Prickett, E. (2017). Laughter, humor, and cancer: Delicate moments and poignant interactional circumstances. *Health communication, 32*(7), 791-802.
- Berger, A. A. (1976). Anatomy of the joke. *Journal of Communication, 26*(3), 113-115.
- Berger, A.A. (1993). *An anatomy of humor*. NewBrunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Berry, L. L., Wall, E. A., & Carbone, L. P. (2006). Service clues and customer assessment of the service experience: Lessons from marketing. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 20*(2), 43-57.
- Bettencourt, L. A., & Brown, S. W. (1997). Contact employees: Relationships among workplace fairness, job satisfaction and prosocial service behaviors. *Journal of retailing, 73*(1), 39-61.
- Bies, R. J. (2013). The delivery of bad news in organizations: A framework for analysis. *Journal of Management, 39*(1), 136-162.

- Biocca, F., Harms, C., & Burgoon, J. K. (2003). Toward a more robust theory and measure of social presence: Review and suggested criteria. *Presence: Teleoperators & virtual environments*, 12(5), 456-480.
- Bitner, M. J., Booms, B. H., & Tetreault, M. S. (1990). The service encounter: diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents. *Journal of marketing*, 54(1), 71-84.
- Bodet, G. (2008). Customer satisfaction and loyalty in service: Two concepts, four constructs, several relationships. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 15(3), 156-162.
- Bowen, D. E. (2016). The changing role of employees in service theory and practice: An interdisciplinary view. *Human Resource Management Review*, 26(1), 4-13.
- Boyd, B. (2004). Laughter and literature: A play theory of humor. *Philosophy and literature*, 28(1), 1-22.
- Brodzinsky, D. M., Barnet, K., & Aiello, J. R. (1981). Sex of subject and gender identity as factors in humor appreciation. *Sex Roles*, 7(5), 561-573.
- Buckman, R. A. (2005). Breaking bad news: the SPIKES strategy. *Community oncology*, 2(2), 138-142.
- Buijzen, M., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2004). Developing a typology of humor in audiovisual media. *Media psychology*, 6(2), 147-167.
- Cann, A., Holt, K., & Calhoun, L. G. (1999). The roles of humor and sense of humor in responses to stressors.
- Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: a theoretically based approach. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 56(2), 267.
- Clerinx, J-P. (2020, January 21). Personal interview [Personal interview].
- Crawford, C. B. (1994). Theory and implications regarding the utilization of strategic humor by leaders. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1(4), 53-68.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1983). *Information richness. A new approach to managerial behavior and organization design*. Texas A and M Univ College Station Coll of Business Administration.
- Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management science*, 32(5), 554-571.

- De Matos, C. A., Henrique, J. L., & Alberto Vargas Rossi, C. (2007). Service recovery paradox: a meta-analysis. *Journal of service research, 10*(1), 60-77.
- De Ruyter, K., & Wetzels, M. G. (2000). The impact of perceived listening behavior in voice-to-voice service encounters. *Journal of Service Research, 2*(3), 276-284.
- Delcourt, C., Gremler, D. D., De Zanet, F., & van Riel, A. C. (2017). An analysis of the interaction effect between employee technical and emotional competencies in emotionally charged service encounters. *Journal of Service Management, 28*(1), 85-106.
- Delcourt, C., Gremler, D. D., van Riel, A. C., & van Birgelen, M. J. (2016). Employee emotional competence: Construct conceptualization and validation of a customer-based measure. *Journal of Service Research, 19*(1), 72-87.
- Fallowfield, L., & Jenkins, V. (2004). Communicating sad, bad, and difficult news in medicine. *The Lancet, 363*(9405), 312-319.
- Folkman, S., Lazarus, R. S., Dunkel-Schetter, C., DeLongis, A., & Gruen, R. J. (1986). Dynamics of a stressful encounter: cognitive appraisal, coping, and encounter outcomes. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 50*(5), 992.
- Francis, L. E. (1994). Laughter, the best mediation: Humor as emotion management in interaction. *Symbolic Interaction, 17*(2), 147-163.
- Francis, L., Monahan, K., & Berger, C. (1999). A laughing matter? The uses of humor in medical interactions. *Motivation and emotion, 23*(2), 155-174.
- Giardini, A., & Frese, M. (2008). Linking service employees' emotional competence to customer satisfaction: A multilevel approach. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 29*(2), 155-170.
- Gibbs, L., & Slevitch, L. (2019). Integrating technical and emotional competences in hospitality education. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, 31*(2), 99-110.
- Grandey, A. A., Fisk, G. M., Mattila, A. S., Jansen, K. J., & Sideman, L. A. (2005). Is “service with a smile” enough? Authenticity of positive displays during service encounters. *Organizational Behavior and human decision processes, 96*(1), 38-55.

- Groth, M., & Grandey, A. (2012). From bad to worse: Negative exchange spirals in employee–customer service interactions. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2(3), 208-233.
- Hay, J. (2000). Functions of humor in the conversations of men and women. *Journal of pragmatics*, 32(6), 709-742.
- Heskett, J. L., Jones, T. O., Loveman, G. W., Sasser, W. E., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994). Putting the service-profit chain to work. *Harvard business review*, 72(2), 164-174.
- Huefner, J. C., & Hunt, H. K. (1992). Brand and store avoidance: the behavioral expression of dissatisfaction. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, 5, 228-232.
- Hurrell, S. A., & Scholarios, D. (2014). “The People Make the Brand” Reducing Social Skills Gaps Through Person-Brand Fit and Human Resource Management Practices. *Journal of Service Research*, 17(1), 54-67.
- Johnson, A. R., & Stewart, D. W. (2005). A reappraisal of the role of emotion in consumer behavior. In *Review of marketing research* (pp. 3-34). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Jorgensen, B. (2003). Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y?: Policy implications for defence forces in the modern era. *Foresight-The journal of future studies, strategic thinking and policy*, 5(4), 41-49.
- Jurkiewicz, C. L. (2000). Generation X and the public employee. *Public Personnel Management*, 29(1), 55-74.
- Kirsh, G. A., & Kuiper, N. A. (2003). Positive and negative aspects of sense of humor: Associations with the constructs of individualism and relatedness. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*.
- Kuiper, N. A., Grimshaw, M., Leite, C., & Kirsh, G. (2004). Humor is not always the best medicine: Specific components of sense of humor and psychological well-being. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*.
- Kuiper, N. A., Martin, R. A., & Olinger, L. J. (1993). Coping humour, stress, and cognitive appraisals. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement*, 25(1), 81.

- Kuiper, N. A., McKenzie, S. D., & Belanger, K. A. (1995). Cognitive appraisals and individual differences in sense of humor: Motivational and affective implications. *Personality and individual differences, 19*(3), 359-372.
- Lefcourt, H. M., Davidson, K., Prkachin, K. M., & Mills, D. E. (1997). Humor as a stress moderator in the prediction of blood pressure obtained during five stressful tasks. *Journal of Research in Personality, 31*(4), 523-542.
- Lemmink, J., & Mattsson, J. (1998). Warmth during non-productive retail encounters: the hidden side of productivity. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 15*(5), 505-517.
- Levesque, T., & McDougall, G. H. (1996). Determinants of customer satisfaction in retail banking. *International journal of bank marketing.*
- Marschollek, P., Bąkowska, K., Bąkowski, W., Marschollek, K., & Tarkowski, R. (2019). Oncologists and breaking bad news—From the informed patients’ point of view. The evaluation of the SPIKES protocol implementation. *Journal of Cancer Education, 34*(2), 375-380.
- Malhotra, N. K. (2007). Review of marketing research. In *Review of Marketing Research* (pp. ix-xii). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Malhotra, N. K., Nunan, D., & Birks, D. F. (2017). *Marketing Research: an applied approach* (Fifth edition). Pearson education.
- Martin, R. A., & Lefcourt, H. M. (1983). Sense of humor as a moderator of the relation between stressors and moods. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 45*(6), 1313.
- Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of research in personality, 37*(1), 48-75.
- Mattila, A. S., & Enz, C. A. (2002). The role of emotions in service encounters. *Journal of Service research, 4*(4), 268-277.
- Matute, J., Palau-Saumell, R., & Viglia, G. (2018). Beyond chemistry: the role of employee emotional competence in personalized services. *Journal of Services Marketing.*
- McHenry, M., Parker, P. A., Baile, W. F., & Lenzi, R. (2012). Voice analysis during bad news discussion in oncology: reduced pitch, decreased speaking rate, and nonverbal communication of empathy. *Supportive Care in Cancer, 20*(5), 1073-1078.



- McKee, T. L. E., & Ptacek, J. T. (2001). I'm Afraid I Have Something Bad to Tell You: Breaking Bad News From the Perspective of the Giver 1. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 31*(2), 246-273.
- Meyer, J. C. (2000). Humor as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication. *Communication theory, 10*(3), 310-331.
- Nezlek, J. B., & Derks, P. (2001). Use of humor as a coping mechanism, psychological adjustment, and social interaction. *Humor, 14*(4), 395-414.
- OECD (2020), Value added by activity (indicator). doi: 10.1787/a8b2bd2b-en (Accessed on 07 October 2020)
- Oh, H. (1999). Service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer value: A holistic perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 18*(1), 67-82.
- Penson, R. T., Partridge, R. A., Rudd, P., Seiden, M. V., Nelson, J. E., Chabner, B. A., & Lynch Jr, T. J. (2005). Laughter: the best medicine?. *The Oncologist, 10*(8), 651-660.
- Ptacek, J. T., & Eberhardt, T. L. (1996). Breaking bad news: a review of the literature. *Jama, 276*(6), 496-502.
- Renault (2020). *Renault en Belgique*. Retrieved September 30, 2020, from <https://fr.renault.be/renault-en-belgique.html>
- Rice, R. E. (1993). Media appropriateness: Using social presence theory to compare traditional and new organizational media. *Human communication research, 19*(4), 451-484.
- Rice, R. E., D'Ambra, J., & More, E. (1998). Cross-cultural comparison of organizational media evaluation and choice. *Journal of communication, 48*(3), 3-26.
- Sala, F., Krupat, E., & Roter, D. (2002). Satisfaction and the use of humor by physicians and patients. *Psychology and Health, 17*(3), 269-280.
- Schneider, B., & Bowen, D. E. (1999). Understanding customer delight and outrage. *Sloan management review, 41*(1), 35-45.
- Seawright, K. K., & Sampson, S. E. (2007). A video method for empirically studying wait-perception bias. *Journal of Operations management, 25*(5), 1055-1066.

- Smith, A. K., & Bolton, R. N. (1998). An experimental investigation of customer reactions to service failure and recovery encounters: paradox or peril?. *Journal of service research*, 1(1), 65-81.
- Statbel (2020). *Parc de véhicules*. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://statbel.fgov.be/fr/themes/mobilite/circulation/parc-de-vehicules#panel-11>
- Van Dolen, W., Ruyter, K. D., & Streukens, S. (2004). The impact of humor in face-to-face and electronic service encounters. *ACR North American Advances*.
- Watson, L., & Spence, M. T. (2007). Causes and consequences of emotions on consumer behaviour: A review and integrative Cognitive Appraisal Theory. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(5/6), 487-511.
- Westmyer, S. A., DiCioccio, R. L., & Rubin, R. B. (1998). Appropriateness and effectiveness of communication channels in competent interpersonal communication. *Journal of communication*, 48(3), 27-48.
- Whiting, A., & Donthu, N. (2006). Managing voice-to-voice encounters: reducing the agony of being put on hold. *Journal of Service Research*, 8(3), 234-244.
- Wieseke, J., Geigenmüller, A., & Kraus, F. (2012). On the role of empathy in customer-employee interactions. *Journal of service research*, 15(3), 316-331.
- Wood, R. E., Beckmann, N., & Pavlakis, F. (2014). 13 Humor in organizations: no laughing matter. *Research Companion to the Dysfunctional Workplace*, 216.
- Yu, Y. T., & Dean, A. (2001). The contribution of emotional satisfaction to consumer loyalty. *International journal of service industry management*, 12(3), 234-250.



## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Interview transcription**

Transcription of the interview with Jean-Pierre Clerinx conducted on 21 January 2020 (total length of 42min). Mr. Clerinx is the supervisor of the Renault site in Seraing.

The interview has been realised in French since it is the native language of the respondent.

#### ***Quel est votre rôle exact dans le garage ?***

Alors, moi je m'occupe de gérer le bâtiment donc au niveau de la partie gestion des personnes, gérer les travaux de carrosseries, recevoir les experts, prendre des décisions concernant le futur de l'entreprise donc on reçoit des informations et on doit faire face et prendre la bonne décision. Quand il y a des systèmes de vente qui évoluent ou le marché qui est en constant mouvement donc on s'intéresse à tout ce qui se fait et on navigue un petit peu en fonction de ce qu'on a comme informations. Après il y a des formations qui sont suivies pour apprendre à gérer à recevoir les clients, essayer de trouver les bons outils pour faire face aux différentes situations donc on s'occupe un peu de ça. Tout ce qui est à proprement parlé des finances, c'est plutôt mon épouse. On fait un rôle partagé parce que faire tout tous seul, ça peut se faire mais alors à ce moment-là je n'ai plus le contact client et on est sur un rôle d'arrière-plan, un peu comme un gestionnaire de société. J'ai envie encore d'avoir ce contact avec les personnes, il y a des personnes avec qui ça se passe super bien et on a vraiment un bon relationnel et il n'y a pas que les bons côtés non plus, il y a des mauvais coucheurs comme on dit mais ça fait partie du métier. Après ça ne reste pas monotone, c'est ça surtout.

#### ***Quel est votre titre exact dans l'entreprise ?***

Responsable de site, nous sommes deux, donc mon épouse et moi et on s'occupe de gérer. Elle me fait part de ce qui est administratif aussi mais voilà après on prend la décision, on fait avancer, les rappels factures clients, tient tel assurance on n'a pas encore été payé, si j'ai des informations éventuellement complémentaires ça permet de faire avancer les dossiers.

#### ***Quel type de mauvaises nouvelles êtes-vous amenés à donner aux clients ?***

J'ai eu un cas précis il y a quinze jours, un véhicule qui a été expertisé par un vendeur il y a quelques mois d'ici, une fiche de reprise a été effectuée. Cette voiture, au moment de la livraison, est déposée sur le parking, on prend une fiche d'expertise et on va faire le tour du véhicule et on observe si elle correspond. On avait noté qu'il y avait un bas de caisse qui était

abimé, il y avait une porte avec un coup, il y avait bien tous les documents du véhicule disponibles et le double des clés et puis nous c'est une voiture qui repart, on ne la gardait pas nous donc elle repartait au marchand. Je déplace le véhicule et en déplaçant le véhicule, j'entends un bruit important, donc à ce moment-là je prends le véhicule et je le mets dans le parking et là le bruit est vraiment trop fort. A aucun moment la cliente, car c'était la voiture d'une dame, ne mentionne qu'elle fait du bruit et là je ne peux pas laisser passer ça car c'est un bruit conséquent. Maintenant il y a bruit et bruit mais il y avait vraiment un bruit énorme, au départ je pensais même que la boîte de vitesse avait un souci, j'ai fait le tour à vingt à l'heure. Donc les gens sont dans mon bureau, je reviens avec ma fiche d'expertise et je dis, j'ai un problème avec votre voiture, il y a un bruit, il y a un bruit conséquent, ça peut venir de la boîte de vitesse mais bon je n'ai pas fait d'investigation, j'ai juste entendu ce bruit-là. Le client me répond « ben non ce n'est pas possible, moi je roule tous les jours avec ». Je lui dis que sa voiture n'est pas conforme, elle est conforme niveau extérieur, elle est conforme dans les points intérieurs, on a les documents, on a tout effectivement mais sur la fiche d'expertise il n'est mentionné aucun bruit et moi le véhicule je ne peux pas le remettre à mon marchand comme ça. Ça a pris trois heures l'ensemble. Elle téléphone à son père, elle lui dit de venir ici, son père qui dit qu'elle est conforme et je lui dis « vous êtes allez rouler, on peut aller chez Peugeot et ils vont vous confirmez ce que je dis, je suis formel », c'était une Peugeot. Je dis choisissez le garage que vous voulez, moi je suis ouvert à tout. Il voulait me faire signer un papier comme quoi je refusais de livrer la voiture mais le problème c'est que la voiture qui était dans le showroom était déjà immatriculée à leur nom donc je n'ai pas de solution si ce n'est que la voiture elle est avec un souci. Le marchand, j'arrive à le contacter et j'arrive à le faire venir, il vient ici et je leur dis « prenez la voiture et allez rouler avec, vous faites deux mètres et vous allez l'entendre ». Ils s'exécutent, ils vont faire un tour, le bruit était effectivement bien présent et costaud et pour finir la voiture, le marchand va chez qui il fait faire ses réparations car il n'a pas d'atelier personnellement et puis ils mettent la voiture sur un cric, ils prennent la roue et elle était prête à tomber par terre. Le père, complètement abasourdi, il revient et le marchand dit « prochaine fois que vous avez un bruit dites le quand même à votre père ». J'ai filmé cette voiture là au cas où un jour ça revient car il y a des enquêtes qui sont faites, si je vois l'enquête et ce qui a été dit, j'ai au moins moi mon dossier et je suis sûr de ce que j'ai fait. Donc le marchand a fait un geste et eux ont payé une partie mais donc ça a pris trois heures. On amène un véhicule avec un problème, on n'en parle pas. Si mon fils qui commence dans la vente, si lui fait cette livraison là et qu'il n'a pas le courage de dire qu'il y a un problème, des fois on se dit que ça va , c'est pas pour nous, elle va partir, le marchand vient la chercher, il prend la

voiture et il a un problème, on perd de l'argent et là le client est intervenu, ça lui a coûté 150€ et quand on voit l'état de la roue, c'était trop. Voilà, ça c'est une mauvaise nouvelle qu'il a fallu annoncer au client au moment de la livraison. Moi je fais un peu de livraisons et ici mon fils était occupé, c'est lui qui devait faire cette livraison mais il avait un client et on m'a demandé de faire cette livraison, ce n'était pas préparé, on me donne le dossier et je pars donc voilà ça c'est le souci auquel j'ai été confronté. Après on peut avoir des mauvaises nouvelles par rapport à un travail de mécanique mais en général, on prévient le client, on fait une estimation et on donne l'information, après il décide de faire ou ne pas faire, on fait en transparence.

***Justement, quand les clients amènent leur voiture au garage et qu'on se rend compte qu'il y a une réparation supplémentaire à effectuer, comment cela se passe-t-il ?***

On prend contact avec le client puisque c'est eux qui doivent donner l'information. Là on vient de souscrire à un service avec notre programme informatique pour pouvoir confirmer les rendez-vous, comme on a dans les hôpitaux maintenant, pour pouvoir prévenir le client d'un souci, soit on téléphone mais on peut avoir le sms avec confirmation de leur part comme ça on peut le mettre dans le dossier. J'ai eu le cas l'autre fois, on fait un travail de carrosserie, parechoc avant sur un Captur, il y a l'entretien qui est prévu comme ça ils ne font qu'une immobilisation, le chef d'atelier fait l'entretien et puis il téléphone au client puis le client me rappelle car il a mon numéro sur sa carte de rendez-vous et puis je vais trouver le chef d'atelier qui me dit qu'il y a les plaquettes de freins qui mangent sur le pont donc je dis voilà, il y a les plaquettes de frein, on lui annonce le montant complémentaire parce que d'un entretien normal, on met 110-115€ minimum en plus donc c'est pas un petit travail, j'ai eu son accord par téléphone donc voilà, on pratique toujours de cette manière-là. Maintenant, on va installer le programme dans quinze jours, trois semaines et on pourra le faire avec un petit SMS.

***Ce genre de mauvaises nouvelles liées à l'entretien en atelier, d'après vous, se produisent à quelle fréquence ?***

Tous les jours parce qu'on roule avec les véhicules, les véhicules font 30.000 ou 20.000 ça dépend des voitures ou 1 an. Donc sur cette période-là il peut y avoir plein de choses qui peuvent arriver, on peut découvrir un soufflet de crémaillère, une fuite à un amortisseur quand la voiture a un peu plus de kilomètres, ils ont peut-être accroché quelque chose en dessous de la voiture. Une dame qui vient pour un problème de dégât de gibier sur parechoc avant et elle me dit qu'elle a un bruit à l'avant gauche qui n'avait rien à voir avec l'impact, elle avait pris des nids de poules avant mais celui qui avait fait le travail, elle avait ça chez un marchand de pneus, on lui avait

changer les pneus mais ils n'ont même pas vu que la roue était décalée vers l'arrière donc elle en a eu pour 600 et quelques euros de frais. On lui a d'abord annoncé ben voilà, le bruit c'est ça, on a mesuré et la roue avait été décalée alors je demande ce qui s'est passé et elle m'explique qu'elle a eu deux fois deux gros nids de poules et qu'elle a dû changer deux fois ses pneus d'affilés, il y a quelqu'un qui n'a pas fait un contrôle de la géométrie, la roue est décalée donc il y a un triangle qui est à changer, les amortisseurs qui sont allés en butée et qui font du bruit, faut changer les pneus donc on lui a annoncé le forfait, pour les amortisseurs c'est 333€ et il y a le triangle en plus. Quand on a fait ça on a vu que les disques et plaquettes étaient aussi à changer donc de nouveau, tout point a été annoncé, elle est arrivée déposer sa voiture par après, on avait commandé les pièces mais elle savait à quoi s'en tenir. Donc voilà encore une mauvaise nouvelle inhérente à un contrôle en atelier.

***Est-ce que tous les employés du garage sont susceptibles d'annoncer des mauvaises nouvelles ou seulement certains ?***

Le chef d'atelier, un des vendeurs ou sont qui font les livraisons puisqu'on est susceptible de le constater au moment où on fait la livraison. Le magasinier c'est moins fréquent, lui on vient commander une pièce où il fournit les pièces au chef d'atelier donc ce n'est pas lui qui a un contact spécifiquement avec le client. Mon épouse et les mécaniciens, c'est rarement eux qui enfin ils peuvent être en contact avec les clients, ce n'est pas un souci, des fois c'est même bien pour pouvoir éviter les interprétations, ils ont un problème, ils expliquent directement à qui va travailler et il n'y a pas de déformation de l'information donc on a le ressenti du client qui est perçu par l'ouvrier qui va travailler sur la voiture mais ce n'est pas lui qui va annoncer, il va juste faire son compte rendu, voilà j'ai remarqué ça, ça et ça et c'est le chef d'atelier qui prendra la peine de contacter le client.

***Les employés amenés à annoncer les mauvaises nouvelles ont-ils reçu une formation spécifique à ce sujet ?***

Il y a eu des formations qui ont été faites aussi, au niveau de toutes les personnes contact client donc le magasinier, le chef d'atelier et moi j'ai fait la même formation, on a eu des outils pour pouvoir appréhender des situations de crise, des gens qui peuvent être énervés, qui peuvent monter dans les tours et bien il y a une manière de les aborder, il y a une manière d'annoncer puis après voilà. Ce sont des formations qui nous permettent d'avancer correctement, après des fois on n'est pas bien luné et ça peut partir mais en général on essaye de tenir compte un peu de tout ça et on arrive à trouver un accord sur certains clients majoritairement. Maintenant il y

a des gens qui ne veulent rien entendre et qui sont dans le tort mais il n'y aura jamais moyen de les résonner parce que ce n'est pas possible, ils sont loin dans la forêt comme on dit mais ça n'arrive pas trop souvent.

***Lorsque ces employés doivent annoncer une mauvaise nouvelle, est-ce qu'ils ont une procédure plus ou moins spécifique à suivre ou est-ce que c'est au cas par cas ?***

C'est au cas par cas parce que c'est difficile de mettre dans des cases, on va réagir de tel manière. Il faut que ça soit un dialogue et en fonction de la réaction de l'un ou de l'autre, on va faire. Après il n'y a pas une méthode universelle, on donne des outils, c'est ce que le formateur disait. Ça c'est la théorie, vous avez cet agissement là, vous allez avoir différentes phases quand il y a une personne qui va s'énerver. Pour pouvoir contrecarrer ces différentes phases, voilà comment on peut y arriver mais il faut que ça ne soit pas stéréotypé, il faut que ça vienne de la personne, si on doit se référer tient il faut que j'agisse comme ça et comme ça, ce n'est pas naturel et ça ne va pas, il faut vraiment. Après on ne sait pas s'exercer car on n'a pas des cas tout le temps, tous les clients ne sont pas compliqués. Après il faut aussi, pour éviter des conflits, il faut avoir un travail au préalable, le fait d'avoir un dialogue avec le client, le fait de le mettre en confiance, le fait de lui expliquer les choses, un travail a moitié préparé c'est un peu la même chose, on évite le problème final. Si on ne fait pas son travail de départ, on risque d'aller vers un conflit, ça c'est sûr. Maintenant on limite ce genre de situation mais non on n'a pas de procédures. Procédures ça peut être quand on parle des normes ISO, vous avez un dossier à monter avec tels documents à remplir, on peut suivre, on doit faire ça, en carrosserie je le fais, on a des photos à prendre et bien on doit les faire d'une certaine manière, les compagnies le demande, on respecte cette procédure-là, on fait les photos, on prend les photos des documents, on prend les photos du numéro de châssis, certains demandent un numéro de châssis gravé donc voilà on suit. Si un véhicule est accidenté et déclassé, on doit prêter le véhicule, ça ce sont des procédures qui sont bien actées et que l'on va suivre mais pour l'annonce et le dialogue non. On a reçu les outils et on adapte à la situation du moment.

***Avez-vous déjà eu des retours négatifs de client suite à l'annonce d'une mauvaise nouvelle ?***

Oui, j'ai des clients qui ne sont pas toujours objectifs, les clients sont auditionnés à chaque visite en atelier, en mécanique ou en carrosserie, il y a des adresses mails qui sont collectées de plus en plus, ces clients qui ont une facturation que ce soit en mécanique ou en carrosserie sont contactés par les services de chez Renault pour leur demander leur niveau de satisfaction sur différents points et là on se rend compte qu'il y a des gens qui raconte un peu n'importe quoi.



Nous on a le compte rendu, des fois ils ne s'identifient pas, il est marqué client anonyme mais par rapport à la situation on sait retrouver qui a dit quoi. Après vous avez des personnes qui sur les réseaux sociaux vont vous démolir, vous avez vendu la voiture, vous ne la voyez plus et puis ils viennent dire qu'il y a un problème sur l'auto que vous avez livré puis ils sont partis dans un garage à gauche et puis une fois à droite et puis après ils vous incriminent alors que vous n'avez pas fait d'intervention dessus, ce client a été identifié aussi de nouveau. J'ai eu un organisme qui est venu me poser des questions parce qu'apparemment il fait ça dans différents domaines, voitures, restaurants et il donne toujours des avis négatifs et il est pisté pour le moment parce que c'est une personne qui ne travaille pas, qui vit des allocations de son enfant qui est handicapé donc mari et femme quand on leur a vendu le véhicule ils ont eu le financement quand on a vu ce qu'ils touchaient comme indemnités par rapport au handicap de l'enfant et alors à mon avis ils sont rémunérés pour un peu démolir mais il y a un organisme qui est en train de le pister. Voilà, c'est le genre de chose qu'on peut avoir sur les réseaux. Il y a les influenceurs comme des youtubeurs mais il y a aussi des influenceurs, on peut prendre des sites comme TripAdvisor et vous avez des gens qui sont payés dans des pays étrangers qui sont payés pour rédiger des avis négatifs ou positifs pour faire monter les côtes dans un sens ou dans l'autre contre rémunération donc ça c'est la dérive des réseaux sociaux et d'internet à l'heure d'aujourd'hui, derrière un ordinateur on est très fort, on est tous seul et on peut dire ce qu'on veut. Après quand on commence à prendre dossier par dossier on peut démonter, chaque fois qu'il y a eu quelque chose qui était pas correct, je rétablis les chose pour que ce soit correct maintenant chacun est libre de mettre son avis, on a Google My Business, on a un site internet et je n'efface aucun commentaire, on peut avoir une mauvaise impression mais si on fait quelque chose de mal d'accord mais si on fait notre travail et ce qui est demandé et après on donne un avis qui n'est pas bon, après il faut rester logique et ne pas dire n'importe quoi. Quand c'est le cas pratiquement je réponds à chaque fois et généralement on n'entend plus jamais parler de l'élément.

***Est-ce que c'est déjà arrivé qu'un client qui n'aurait pas été satisfait de la manière dont une mauvaise nouvelle lui ait été annoncée ce soit tourné vers vous, en tant que responsable du site, pour se plaindre ?***

Oui ça peut arriver, en général ils veulent trouver un responsable. Ce qui est à faire c'est de prendre les bonnes informations, ici moi j'ai beaucoup de contacts avec tout le monde donc je ne suis pas dans un bureau sur le côté, je suis souvent dans l'atelier et je circule, j'ai beaucoup de contacts avec tout le monde. Je ne vais pas dire que je sais tout mais pas mal, après si dans

un dossier il y a un souci, il faut quand même savoir de quoi on parle, ce qui s'est passé, ce qui a été mis en œuvre, ce qui n'a pas été fait enfin un petit peu tout ça. On est toujours en relation avec la personne qui était en contact du client et alors après il y a discussion qui se fait et on trouve un accord ou on n'en trouve pas, majoritairement on arrive à des solutions, neuf fois sur dix, en pourcentage on n'a pas beaucoup de non-résolution. Après les non-résolutions, vous ne saurez jamais trouver de solution parce que le problème ou il incombe au garage et là on s'exécute et on remplace ce qu'il faut, on fait le nécessaire ou alors il y a une rouspétance qui n'est pas justifiée et là, on essaye de faire comprendre que ce n'est pas le cas. En carrosserie, on a des personnes qui viennent et qui regardent à la loupe le véhicule, il est mieux que quand il est sorti d'usine des fois et puis ils viennent rouspéter, j'ai déjà eu des experts qui sont venus faire le contrôle du travail parce que les gens rouspétaient, ce n'est pas un souci, on fait venir un expert. Les experts viennent et ils ne sont pas là être copain avec nous autres, ils sont mandatés par la compagnie d'assurance, ils ont un rôle neutre et ils ne peuvent pas dire n'importe quoi parce que si la personne prend un contre expert, il faut que ce soit cohérent. Les experts viennent, ils constatent puis demandent au client sur quoi il rouspète et généralement il regarde des fois des jours mais une voiture, si vous prenez une voiture dans un showroom, si vous la regardez à la loupe et vous prenez une épaisseur, vous pouvez avoir des petites différences, la voiture va rouler, elle va bouger, ce n'est pas toujours pile poil au millimètre près partout pareil. Il y a des fois où on se dit, tient celle-là on va la livrer et regarde le jour là comme il n'est pas bon mais ça passe, si on fait la même chose en carrosserie ça ne va pas passer, ce sont des réflexions que j'ai déjà eues souvent. Les gens comme s'ils avaient perdu confiance dans le véhicule parce qu'il était accidenté alors qu'il est réparé dans les règles mais ils se focalisent sur des trucs et donc chaque fois on appelle des experts, ce n'est pas non plus très courant mais c'est systématique.

***Est-ce que vous vous sentez concerné par la problématique, à savoir, essayer d'annoncer les mauvaises nouvelles de manière à ce que le client soit satisfait ?***

Oui on se sent concerné mais on essaye de ne pas arriver à des situations de mauvaises nouvelles à annoncer, on fait tout au préalable pour éviter car c'est jamais agréable de dire à quelqu'un des mauvaises choses. Après il faut pouvoir avoir un peu de recul et faire la part des choses. C'est une question de perception aussi, nous on va peut-être penser que c'est une mauvaise nouvelle, la personne est peut-être consciente qu'elle risque d'avoir un problème et elle prend au second plan parce qu'elle s'y attendait et d'autres sont tout étonnés et absorbent le mauvais moment et en fonction des caractères, ça peut-être compliqués pour certains et pour d'autres ils

vont revenir plus facilement mais voilà, il y a cette préparation au préalable et puis toujours cette communication et cette transparence. Maintenant, pour les clients habituels qui savent comment on fonctionne et qui ne sont pas à leur premier coup d'essai, ils savent, ils ont cette confiance, ils viennent et on leur explique, on peut leur montrer des choses, il y a vraiment un contact. Pour les personnes qui viennent d'un autre endroit qui ont peut-être été déçu, ils viennent déjà avec un a priori, ils ne savent pas comment on peut travailler, il faut que ce climat puisse s'installer. Maintenant il y a des clients qui ne seront jamais contents nulle part et ça on le voit pratiquement dès les premières minutes de dialogue où ça se passe et vous voyez quelqu'un qui est fermé, qui ne va jamais être ouvert mais ça c'est une question de perception dû à l'expérience, moi je suis dans le commerce depuis très longtemps, station d'essence puis garage et donc les clients je les ai vus et revus et j'ai vu une évolution dans la manière dont on travaille. Tout le monde à évolué, internet n'existait pas donc il y a un paquet d'informations qui sont prises par les clients dans des forums etc et c'est pas toujours des bonnes informations parce que dans les forums, je suis allé quelques fois juste pour me rendre compte, quel que soit le domaine dans lequel on va, vous tombez sur un éventail de personnes et ceux qui vont sur les forums pour s'exprimer c'est souvent ceux qui ont des problèmes bien souvent, quelqu'un qui est satisfait il n'a pas besoin d'y aller donc on a toujours un mauvais côté avec certains qui dérivent et d'autres qui des fois essaient de remettre l'église au milieu du village mais des fois quand on voit les commentaires, comment ça peut partir.

*Avez-vous déjà eu recours à l'humour pour annoncer une mauvaise nouvelle ?*

Oui, on peut le lancer sur le ton de la plaisanterie mais on ne le laisse pas sur la plaisanterie trop longtemps. « Ah ben on va te changer ton moteur », ça m'est déjà arrivé et puis en réalité on ne va pas changer le moteur mais on va changer un gros élément mais là aussi c'est souvent de la garantie, oui c'est un gros travail et c'est pris en charge en grande partie en tout cas, on montera un dossier. Oui on a déjà eu recours à ça, ils déposent leur voiture et on dit « ah on va te changer une demi-voiture » tu viens à l'entretien et là on est obligé de téléphoner pour dire qu'on a remarqué ça, ça et ça, je l'avais dit sur le ton de la plaisanterie mais il y avait quelque chose. Mais c'est pas souvent, c'est plutôt avec des personnes que l'on connaît, il y a des clients où on a juste le rapport client bonjour au revoir et il y a des clients qui sont un petit peu plus ouverts et qui sont depuis très longtemps donc il y a un autre stade, il y a une autre approche, il y a des clients amis et ce n'est pas non plus le même rapport, il y a différentes catégories si on peut dire, il y a différentes relations. Il y a les clients avec qui ça se passe toujours très bien et il y a des clients où on n'a pas toujours des atomes crochus avec tout le monde et donc il y en a qui

sont sur la réserve et le chef d'atelier peut être sur la réserve ou moi je peux être sur la réserve et des fois ça peut basculer pour une anecdote, pour un problème où on a trouvé une solution par hasard ou en la cherchant et ça peut débloquent cette manière de voir les choses où ils se disent « ils ne sont pas là que pour faire de l'argent » parce que bien souvent c'est l'idée que certaines personnes peuvent avoir, je vais aller là et on va me taxer tout de suite quelque chose, oui tout travail mérite salaire mais le but est de trouver une solution qui correspond à tout le monde, si c'est pour aller mettre de grosses sommes tout de suite tout le temps vous faites du court terme, vous allez engendrer un peu des sous mais vous n'allez pas renouveler alors on est quand même attentif aux phénomènes, est-ce qu'on est bien par rapport aux autres années, est-ce qu'on est en progression dans le chiffre de pièces, il y a toujours une augmentation de ces valeurs chaque année donc on a une augmentation. Maintenant si on augmente le nombre de clients, si on récupère des clients d'autre part, c'est toujours valorisant aussi, ça veut dire qu'il y a le travail qui paye, il y a le bouche-à-oreille qui fait son effet. Vous avez des clients qui sont clients, il y a des clients qui changent de marque donc vous les perdez et il y a des clients qui ont une Renault et/ou une Dacia et qui ont une autre marque, des fois des personnes qui arrivent avec leur deux marques ici parce qu'ils ont confiance, ont fait essentiellement nos marques mais de temps en temps on a effectivement d'autres clients qui viennent déposer la voiture de madame ou le contraire donc voilà, ça permet de voir qu'on est quand même dans la bonne fonction et qu'on arrive à réunir un maximum de gens dans notre secteur. Si on a tous les temps des coups de gueule et des gens qui s'en vont, là on doit se poser vraiment des questions. On s'en pose toujours, il y a des périodes plus difficiles que d'autres, il y a des cycles. La vente, au mois de janvier on va avoir du monde, pour réussir une année on doit réussir un mois de janvier, si on rate un mois de janvier en vente on ne saura jamais rattraper ce qui a été perdu au mois de janvier. En atelier mécanique, on a une période qui est la période de juillet où on est fermé, on travaille une semaine mais le mois d'août il y a encore beaucoup de personnes en congé, il y a moins d'influence. Le mois de septembre, mi-septembre mi-octobre c'est la période la plus creuse en après-vente car reprise des classes, on sort des congés et on a fait un petit peu plus de dépenses, on va avoir les dépenses des fournitures scolaires et là, l'endroit où les gens font ceinture et bien ils vont postposer leur entretien donc il vont décaler donc mois de septembre octobre depuis qu'on fait les bilans, c'est depuis dix ans qu'on regarde ça, toujours un creux qui est présent et c'est général, c'est pas lié au garage mais c'est quelque chose de tout à fait général. Quand on est au sport d'hiver, période de carnaval aussi impacte un petit peu car il y en a qui partent et donc là on vend aussi beaucoup moins qu'en septembre, c'est des cycles comme dans les vêtements vous avez les soldes et les nouvelles collections, il y a aussi des moments

qui vont mieux que d'autres. En automobile, on vend bien janvier février et mars, les gens rachètent pour avoir un véhicule avant de partir en congé puis après il y a un ralentissement. Mois de septembre, il y a de nouveaux des personnes qui ont besoin ou qui recommencent un boulot ou il y en a qui doivent commencer à l'unif et ils cherchent des véhicules puis fin d'année on se dit qu'on va attendre le mois de janvier pour profiter des conditions salons. Les conditions salons sont souvent maintenant, ça fait trois ans que c'est le cas, exprimées déjà en décembre ce qui permet d'avoir une partie de clientèle, on travaille en décembre avec des personnes qui profitent de ces conditions salons mais la relation du client à ce moment-là est tout à fait différente, souvent enfin d'année, entre les fêtes de fin d'année, les gens peuvent être en congé et ils viennent ensemble, mari et femme, et les discussions sont totalement différentes par rapport au mois de janvier et pendant la période salon, la manière dont on va vendre les véhicules et bien la période entre les fêtes est beaucoup plus agréable, on sent que le client ne pose pas les mêmes questions, s'intéresse, de l'autre côté il faut vite les informations, courir à gauche et à droite et puis ils vont faire un choix mais en général moins cohérent, ils vont se laisser un petit peu avoir en se disant qu'il faut acheter pendant la période du salon, ils vont regarder les pubs etc mais il faut lire un petit peu ce qu'il y a eu petit comme je dis souvent et là ils ne le font pas tandis qu'au mois de décembre, ils vont prendre le temps de savoir de quoi ils ont besoin, tient est-ce que j'ai besoin de ça ou ça, telle voiture ou telle voiture, ce sont des questions qui font avancer pour le choix du véhicule, après on regarde si le budget et ce qu'on a choisi est dans les cordes et alors à ce moment-là c'est la vente donc on est vraiment sur deux types de clientèle différents et deux manières de vendre différentes.

***On a souvent une idée reçue que ce sont les hommes qui s'occupent des voitures, est-ce que vous le constatez en sur le terrain ? Est-ce que vous avez une idée de la répartition homme-femme de votre clientèle ?***

Il y a une augmentation du nombre de femme qui viennent déposer leur véhicule, qui choisissent aussi dans les décisions, elles ne sont pas uniquement cantonnées à qu'est-ce qu'on prend comme couleur, elles sont impliquées dans le choix du véhicule et dans certaines options. Pas plus tard qu'hier, j'avais un couple qui hésitait entre une finition d'un Captur par rapport à l'autre et la discussion était à parité égale par rapport aux équipements de la voiture, le choix de la couleur ils étaient assez d'accord à ce niveau-là mais c'était la finition, il y avait le budget qui était différent évidemment mais ça discutait et chacun mettait son argument en disait oui si on prend le tableau de bord est peut-être mieux dans tel finition mais il faut que je mette 1800€ de plus pour l'avoir, ceci dit il n'y a pas que le tableau de bord qui changeait donc voilà c'était

une discussion ouverte et maintenant la proportion, majoritairement quand même encore hommes mais on pourrait dire 60-40 ou 55-45 oui je pense qu'on est pas loin de ça. Ce n'est plus réservé uniquement, c'est l'homme qui doit s'y connaître et qui vient déposer son véhicule, ce n'est plus le cas. Maintenant déjà aussi dans les jeunes, le rapport à la voiture n'est pas le même que ce que nous on avait, nombre de jeunes le permis ils le passent, ils ne le passent pas, ils ne se tracassent pas enfin à mon avis tu dois le vivre aussi dans ceux qui sont de ton année, ils n'ont pas tous le permis. A mon époque, sans être très vieux, mon permis je le voulais, j'ai essayé de l'avoir avant 18 ans, à deux jours près ils ne voulaient pas me laisser passer, c'était vraiment dans tous ceux qui ont mon âge, le permis on le voulait vraiment, il y en avait très peu qui ne le passait pas à 18 ans, ici on le passe mais on ne se tracasse pas, on fait la fête et on verra après, il y en a d'autres qui disent de toute façon je n'ai pas de voiture pour rouler etc mais une fois qu'on a le permis, le jour où on finit ses études, si on a besoin de mobilité on est pas bloqué. Je le constate ce n'est pas une priorité donc ce rapport à la voiture que nous avons nous a évolué et ce n'est plus la même chose et les femmes elles ont continué, beaucoup de gens ne bricolent plus, ils ont une moto ou un vélo et ils ne savent pas travailler dessus parce qu'il n'y a plus cette culture de la personne de l'homme qui est avec un petit atelier dans son garage avec des tournevis et qui peut bricoler, c'était le cas avant, vous aviez dans toute les habitations au moins un coffre à outils avec un tournevis. J'ai un professeur qui était comme mécanicien dans un garage et qui a quitté le domaine privé pour aller dans l'enseignement, il me dit toutes les années il reforme un coffre à outils en réexpliquant ce que c'est un tournevis en croix, un tournevis plat etc donc les basiques mais il pensait ne pas devoir le faire, parce que les gens n'ont jamais vu un outil et puis ils se lancent dans la mécanique et il faut repartir sur les bases. C'est un constat que j'ai vu, que j'ai entendu voilà maintenant beaucoup d'informations peuvent être obtenues internet et donc c'est une première chose, maintenant les informations qu'on peut lire ne sont pas toujours toujours bonnes, elles peuvent provenir de différents sites et dans la voiture en tout cas on peut se dire, j'ai vu tel voiture puis on est renvoyé vers un site français ou un site allemand qui est traduit puis l'équipement qui est cité n'est pas le bon par rapport à ce que nous on a donc là il y a des fois des petits couacs, ils pensent qu'ils ont achetés une voiture, ils pensent connaître l'auto à 100%, oui ils connaissent l'auto mais ils n'ont pas la version qui est commercialisée donc ils peuvent être déçus après une livraison en disant « je pensais que j'avais ça », oui mais peut-être dans tel modèle on l'a et pour telle finition on ne l'a pas ici, on pense savoir et on ne sait pas toujours à 100%. Voilà, ce sont des constats vécus.

## **Appendix B – Different scripts**

The script of the videos. It was written in French because it is the native language of the respondents.

### **Script 1A (face-to-face without humour)**

Bonjour, approchez je vous en prie.

Je suppose que vous venez pour récupérer votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux.

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.

### **Script 1B (face-to-face with exaggeration)**

Bonjour, approchez je vous en prie.

Je suppose que vous venez pour récupérer votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, il faudra surement annuler vos prochaines vacances car la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux.

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.

### **Script 1C (face-to-face with sarcasm)**

Bonjour, approchez je vous en prie.

Je suppose que vous venez pour récupérer votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux. Si vous ne voulez pas revenir nous voir trop souvent, évitez de rouler sur l'autoroute en appuyant sur la pédale de frein

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.

### **Script 2A (voice-to-voice without humour)**

Bonjour, excusez-moi de vous déranger.

Je vous téléphone au sujet de votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux.

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.



### **Script 2B (voice-to-voice with exaggeration)**

Bonjour, excusez-moi de vous déranger.

Je vous téléphone au sujet de votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, il faudra sûrement annuler vos prochaines vacances car la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux.

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.

### **Script 2C (voice-to-voice with sarcasm)**

Bonjour, excusez-moi de vous déranger.

Je vous téléphone au sujet de votre véhicule que vous nous avez apporté hier.

J'ai malheureusement une mauvaise nouvelle à vous annoncer, lors de l'entretien de votre véhicule, notre mécanicien s'est rendu compte que vos plaquettes de freins étaient endommagées.

Je suis désolé pour ce contre-temps,

Si vous voulez que nous prenions en charge ces réparations supplémentaires, la somme de 400€ vous sera demandée et nous allons devoir garder votre véhicule encore un jour ou deux. Si vous ne voulez pas revenir nous voir trop souvent, évitez de rouler sur l'autoroute en appuyant sur la pédale de frein

Vous serez tenu au courant de la situation, merci pour votre compréhension.

Bonne fin de journée, au revoir.

## **Appendix C – Questionnaire items**

Realism of the videos (retrieved from Baron et al., 2005).

- (1) I believe that such an incident can happen in real life.

Humour

- (1) I noticed that the contact employee demonstrated humour.
- (2) The employee used a joke to make me feel better.
- (3) The employee teased me when announcing the news.

Satisfaction with the employee response (retrieved from Delcourt et al., 2017)

- (1) The handling of the encounter was done as well as it should have been.
- (2) I was happy with the handling of the encounter.
- (3) I was pleased with the manner in which the contact employee dealt with the encounter.

## **Appendix D – Qualtrics Online Survey**

Transcription of the online survey. It has been realised in French since it is the native language of the respondents.

### **First page - Introduction**

Cher répondant,

Dans le cadre de mon master à HEC Liège (Université de Liège) et plus particulièrement afin de réaliser mon mémoire, je réalise une enquête à grande échelle afin de mieux comprendre le processus d'annonce de mauvaises nouvelles.

Si vous possédez le permis de conduire, vous pouvez m'aider en répondant à ce questionnaire qui ne dure pas plus de 3 minutes !

A noter que vos réponses resteront anonymes et qu'il n'y a pas de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses.

D'avance, je vous remercie sincèrement pour votre aide précieuse et pour l'intérêt que vous porterez à cette enquête.

Lorian Grossman

### **Second page – Filtering question**

Possédez-vous le permis de conduire ?

Oui (1)

Non (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If Possédez-vous le permis de conduire ? = Non*

### **Third page – Video presentation (one of the six was randomly chosen)**

Video 1A :

Avant de visionner la vidéo, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celle-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

La vidéo met en scène votre interaction avec l'employé du garage lorsque vous venez pour récupérer votre voiture.

J'ai visionné la vidéo (1)

video 1B :

Avant de visionner la vidéo, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celle-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

La vidéo met en scène votre interaction avec l'employé du garage lorsque vous venez pour récupérer votre voiture.

J'ai visionné la vidéo (1)

video 1C :

Avant de visionner la vidéo, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celle-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

La vidéo met en scène votre interaction avec l'employé du garage lorsque vous venez pour récupérer votre voiture.

J'ai visionné la vidéo (1)

video 2A :

Avant d'écouter l'enregistrement, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celui-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

L'enregistrement audio met en scène un appel téléphonique d'un des employés du garage qui vous donne des informations concernant cet entretien.

J'ai écouté l'enregistrement (1)

video 2B

Avant d'écouter l'enregistrement, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celui-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

L'enregistrement audio met en scène un appel téléphonique d'un des employés du garage qui vous donne des informations concernant cet entretien.

J'ai écouté l'enregistrement (1)

video 2C

Avant d'écouter l'enregistrement, veuillez prendre connaissance du contexte de celui-ci :

Vous avez déposé votre véhicule au garage afin qu'un simple entretien soit effectué.

L'enregistrement audio met en scène un appel téléphonique d'un des employés du garage qui vous donne des informations concernant cet entretien.

J'ai écouté l'enregistrement (1)

#### Fourth page – Realsim and Humour measures

Veillez indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec l'affirmation suivante :

	Pas tout d'accord (1)	du (2)	Pas d'accord (2)	Plutôt pas d'accord (3)	Indifférent (4)	Plutôt d'accord (5)	D'accord (6)	Tout fait d'accord (7)
Je pense qu'un tel incident pourrait réellement arriver (1)	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Veillez indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes :

	Pas tout d'accord (1)	du (2)	Pas d'accord (2)	Plutôt pas d'accord (3)	Indifférent (4)	Plutôt d'accord (5)	D'accord (6)	Tout fait d'accord (7)
J'ai remarqué que l'employé de contact a fait preuve d'humour (1)	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

L'employé a  
utilisé une         
blague pour  
que je me  
sente mieux  
(2)

L'employé  
m'a taquiné         
quand il a  
annoncé la  
nouvelle (3)

## Fifth page – Satisfaction measures

Veillez indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les affirmations suivantes :

	Pas tout d'accord (1)	du Pas d'accord (2)	Plutôt pas d'accord (3)	Indifférent (4)	Plutôt d'accord (5)	D'accord (6)	Tout à fait d'accord (7)
La rencontre s'est déroulée comme elle aurait dû l'être (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
J'ai été satisfait de la manière dont la rencontre a été gérée (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
J'ai été satisfait de la manière dont l'employé de contact a géré la rencontre (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



### **Sixth page – Profile questions**

Gender : Vous êtes un(e) \_\_\_\_\_

Homme (1)

Femme (2)

Age: Vous avez \_\_\_\_\_

moins de 30 ans (1)

entre 30 et 39 ans (2)

entre 40 et 49 ans (3)

plus de 49 ans (4)



## **Executive summary**

The service industry is ever more prevalent in our society which means that the interactions between employees and customers occur more often and have more importance. From the point of view of consumers, employees represent the company. Therefore, the way employees interact with customers directly modify the customers perception of the company. Employees, particularly in emotionally charged service encounters, need to deliver bad news to customers and the behaviour of the employee in such a situation is key to keep the customer satisfied. The purpose of this study is to provide new tools for managers that could be taught to their employees by understanding the impact of the use of humour in those encounters. The results highlight some tendencies such that the use of humour tends to decrease the satisfaction of the customer. However, females and young adults might be slightly more appreciative of the use of humour than males and older adults. Similarly, phone calls seem to be preferred to announce bad news over face-to-face interactions. Although the present results are interesting, it is important to keep in mind that little significance was found and that further research are needed to be able to generalise these results to the whole service industry.