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Examining the Effect of Webcare in the Online Buying Service Recovery Context

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ABSTRACT

In web 2.0, the connectivity of online users is beyond imagination. Whether it is electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) communication or negative comments, as long as it is spread through any kind of social platform, it can cause certain damage to the business. Companies and consumers still mostly interact and communicate through the social media platforms. The timing and method of webcare is the key to whether the companies can restore the hearts of consumers. This study mainly explores the impact of companies on webcare from the two perspectives of Post-acceptance model of IS continuance and service recovery to find the role of webcare.

Keywords: *Webcare, Service recovery, Post-acceptance model of IS continuance, EDT*

1. Introduction

With a single click or a swipe button on your mobile device or computer, consumers can immediately get an impressive product or service. Individuals can interact with others by asking question and getting answers immediately. The same interactions that take place with a seller in the shopping mall can also happen online, but even faster and more conveniently. The use of social media such as Facebook, blogs or Twitter has become omnipresent (Migacz et al., 2018; Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). Some local internet businesses or famous shopping sites who sell their products via Facebook Live show and respond to the users' comments almost immediately. Thus, resulting in the number of users has been growing rapidly (Haimson and Tang, 2017).

When technology gives consumers more power, they can exchange the negative feelings of products and brand impressions in the social media. (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). Consumer behavior is often explained by sharing information, experiencing recommendations and evaluating brands, and building brand service value with other consumers. (e.g., Gensler et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

While consumers feel dissatisfaction on a transaction, their negative word of mouth (NWOM) can easily spread on any platform of social media (Migacz et al., 2018). Therefore, companies not only need to grasp the preferences of customers, but also provide correct and effective service recovery when service failure occurs (McCullough and Berry, 2000). When the service goes wrong and the customer feels that the experience is not good, the service failure will be occurred (Webster and Sundaram, 1998). Service providers often try to solve problems and reverse the bad perceive of customers. These actions are collectively referred to as service recovery (Gelbrich and Roschk, 2011). If a service failure without remedies proposed by the company, customers' dissatisfaction will be increased; more seriously, it will be the critical reason for company's profit decreased (McCullough and Berry, 2000).

Unfortunately, service failure is still inevitable on social media platforms (Culnan et al., 2010). Even if the company can't completely eliminate the online service failure, but the effectiveness of the service recovery after the customer complaints, has great value for improving customer satisfaction and retention (Harris et al., 2006; Schoefer and Ennew, 2005). In addition, if the company provides good service recovery policies can turn a potentially negative situation into a positive one (Gustafsson, 2009; Hart et al., 1990).

Previous research has shown that a successful service recovery can have a positive effect on a customer attitude as well as behavioral intentions, such as customer satisfaction, repurchase intention, and spread of positive WOM online. However, providing a successful service recovery remains a challenge for many online service organizations (Grewal et al., 2004; Harris et al., 2006; Sousa and Voss, 2009). Moreover, studies on service recovery have provided limited empirical evidence on the influence of service retailers' responses to customer complaints following a service failure in the context of online services (Cho et al., 2002; Harris et al., 2006).

In the past, researchers have called for response strategy to cope with NWOM from online consumers (e.g., Berry et al., 2010; Fournier and Avery, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Lee and Song, 2010; Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). Their focus is on negative forms of consumer engagement, as negative online interactions "are found to have detrimental effects on all stages of the consumer decision-making process" (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). It emphasizes that companies need to increase positive consumer engagement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Schamari and Schaefers, 2015; Vivek et al., 2012).

Therefore, the main purposes of this study are exploring the role of webcare on consumer shopping confirmation, satisfaction and repurchase intentions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Expectation-confirmation theory (ECT)

Expectation-confirmation theory (ECT) is also called Expectation-disconfirmation theory (EDT), which was developed in Social Psychology, Consumer Psychology and Organizational Behavior. Currently used in consumer satisfaction and post-purchase behavior (e.g., repurchase, complaints...etc), service marketing (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993; McGrath and Kelly, 1986; Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1993; Sandelands and Bucker 1989) or any online information system (Bhattacharjee, 2001a; Chou et al., 2010; Lee, 2010; Lin, 2005; Valvi and West, 2013; Wen et al., 2011). It also broadly used in not only pre-behavior (expectation) but also post-behavior (perceived performance) variables (Lin et al., 2005).

ECT is a consumer behavior model that is widely used to interpret and predict consumer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. Oliver (1980) argues that the consumers are willing to pay more for a product or service,

depending on how satisfied they are with the product or service. The decision of the satisfaction is based on "disconfirmation", "pre-purchase expectations" for goods or services, and "perceived performance after purchase". Among them, the influence of "disconfirmed" facet on "satisfaction" is the most direct. Generally, confirmation is mainly divided into three situations:

- (1) negative disconfirmed: actual performance does not meet the expected standard;
- (2) confirmed: actual performance meets the expected standard;
- (3) positive disconfirmed: actual performance exceeds expected standard (Chiu et al. 2005; Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Hsu et al., 2004).

Churchill and Surprenant (1982) added "perceived performance" as the first influence construct of satisfaction in EDT, and proposing both "expectation" and "perceived performance" affect "disconfirmation".

Bhattacharjee (2001a) believes that expectations do not confirm the constructs in theory and are inconsistent and questioned. For example, ECT ignores the degree of consumer expectations and will change with the consumption experience, resulting in different cognitive effects. Furthermore, ECT still has many conflicts and contradictions in the interpretation of the concepts of "satisfaction" and "expectation" (Oliver, 1980, 1993; Tse and Wilton, 1988; Yi, 1990). He points out that the continuous use decision of the IS users has similar characteristics to the consumer repurchase intention. He will expect to make a modest correction without confirming the theory, and to integrate the relevant arguments used by the information system to propose a Post-acceptance Model of IS continuance, which can continue in the individual's information system. There are more reasonable constructs and higher explanatory powers on the research topic of intentional use.

The model includes four facets and five hypotheses, such as "Confirmation", "Perceived usefulness", "Satisfaction", and "IS continuance intention". The results of the study show that the five hypotheses proposed are supported, which proves that this model does have a high degree of explanatory power on the issue of continuous use of information systems.

Compared with ECT, the Post-acceptance Model of IS Continuance model presents three differences. First, it emphasizes post-adoption expectation. It's because that users gain experience, which of using IT should be different from the expectation before use. Second, this post-adoption expectation is expressed by perceived usefulness, which is the only structure that always affects user intent during the adoption phase and the post-application phase. Third, perceived performance is not included because the construct "confirmation" is taken.

It is appropriate to apply the Post-acceptance Model of IS Continuance to e-commerce and social media usage platforms (Dabolkar et al., 2000; Starbuck and Webster, 1991; Webster et al., 1993) and discuss the repurchase intention (Chiu et al., 2005; Lee and Chen, 2014; Lin et al., 2005; Roca et al., 2006). As user behavior can affect their willingness to repurchase. In addition, Bhattacharjee (2001a) extends the model to explain the user's continued use of the website. User expectations may change usage time. Any website wants to increase user loyalty and it is necessary to understand their continued behavior. Therefore, perceived usefulness presents ex-post expectation, the cognitive belief salient to IS use, and consist with the definition of expectation in ECT/EDT (Lin et al., 2005).

In the past, many IS continuous studies have neglected individual user differences, or their higher levels of internal demand. Ironically, this usually does not reveal its external or internal differences, which may cause a lot of user resistance in IS implementation (Wang 1997). Therefore, future research should consider these missing variables.

2.2 Webcare

There is an old saying, "Bad news has wings."

Web 2.0 has empowered consumers to send messages to a company on the platform of social media to a

company. With just one click, they can post their dissatisfaction with a consumption experience, which is called NWOM. It might serve as a deliberate action to harm the company (Grégoire et al., 2009). So far, little attention has been paid to checking effective webcare strategies to deal with NWOM (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012), or discussing to put the “Caring” resources so much, and ultimately bring some benefits (Schamari and Scharfers, 2015).

“Webcare” is first proposed by Van Noort and Willemsen (2012), which evolved in order to refer to any action of a company that involves monitoring and intervening in eWOM (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). Webcare has been defined as “the act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns and complaints)” (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). It has been discussed with respect to both positive and negative aspects.

For firms, a well-timed monitor and answer to an online complaint which is displayed on multiple public social media platforms can show the sincerity to the customers. It leads to the loyalty and builds brand equity (Breitsohl et al., 2010; Lee and Song, 2010; Van Laer and De Ruyter, 2010). However, if the complaint cannot be resolved, it may get out of control, causing a vicious circle of NWOM, which hurts the company. Hence, some researchers have argued that webcare is an online complaint management system (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012).

With respect to the organizational goals, webcare includes marketing strategy, public relations, and customer care. Webcare teams are assembled by the company to address and solve the customers’ questions, improve their satisfaction, and even exceed their expectations in the social media platform. From a PR perspective, webcare can prevent negative comments from causing an emergency. Second, It also aims to manage and restore a company’s reputation and relationship with the customers (Van Noort et al., 2014). Third, it can be a marketing tool. The insights that derive from monitoring what people are saying about a company can be used to affect to valence of online sentiment and positively affect customers evaluation of the company (Willemsen et al., 2013).

2.3 The role of webcare in service recovery

When service failure is happens, the firm has to respond and learn how to control the accident more efficiently. It’s a part of service recovery. Oliver (1980) developed Expectation-confirmation Theory (ECT) which has been widely used to explain how customers react in service recovery satisfaction. According to ECT, consumers increase their positive response when they get more service recovery than service failure (Ding and Lii, 2016). Conversely, when service recovery cannot satisfy the consumer, they will experience negative disconfirmation and hence dissatisfaction with the recovery effort.

Service recovery refers to the action taken by the service provider in response to service failure. (Gronroos, 1988). It’s also the bundle of resources that an organization can employ in response to the failure. Compared to complaint management, which is based on customers’ complaints that might be triggered by service failures, service recovery places emphasis on the company’s reaction to it immediately and tries to solve the problems at the service encounter before consumer complaint or service encounter dissatisfaction (Lewis, 1983). To sum up, service recovery converts customer from dissatisfaction to satisfaction.

Service recovery management integrates customer relationship concepts (Nee, 2016). Customer relationship management primarily establishes strong bilateral trading relationships in order to build a broad loyal customer base. Show brand loyalty through customer trust and brand satisfaction and satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Moorman et al., 1993).

Furthermore, researchers consider service recovery management as a potential tool to cope with negative online customer reviews. They assume that service recovery is part of webcare and the basis for action decisions (Van Noort et al., 2014). However, they have no reason why service recovery management is a appropriate tool to mitigate the negative impact of negative eWOM on the users’ willingness to purchase.

3. Methodology

3.1 Hypothesis development

Previous studies have applied ECT and the Post-acceptance Model of IS continuance successfully to explore the influential factors in explaining customer satisfaction and continued use. There are also many studies that consider the experiences or effectiveness of an event in the past as a key determinant of behavior or perception (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Bagozzi, 1981; O’Cass and Fenech, 2003). In addition, from the ECT perspective, the user's continuous intent of the IS user system primarily determines the satisfaction of their previous IS usage.

As previous research has argued, consumers’ perceptions of a brand’s socialness or humanity positively influence attitudes and intentions (Delbaere et al., 2011).

In the positive side, webcare can increase the consumer engagement (Van Noort and Willemsen ,2012; Weitzl et al., 2018). Besides, webcare as a reaction to positive engagement becomes an effective marketing tool for reinforcing observing consumers' engagement intentions, especially on consumer-generated platforms (Schamari and Schaefer, 2015). From the perspective of social learning theory, Schamari and Scharfers (2015) found that webcare is a marketing tool that affects the consumer's intention to participate, the degree of surprise of consumers, explains this strengthening effect, and the personal webcare is promoting consumers' intention to participate. This process of participation, as Bhattacharjee (2001a) mentioned the concept of confirmation.

In the negative side, consumers reduce the cost of sharing negative complaints through the social platform. Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) believed that the effective way for companies to respond to complaints is to take webcare in the form of a "voice" generated by messages in an active and passive manner. Weitzl et al. (2018) explored the impact of webcare actions from the perspective of service failure and negative word of mouth. Different webcare types have different effects if the client has not experienced a service defect in the past. Other consumers defending online reviews of brands can increase the effectiveness of marketing remedies for marketing personnel. Webcare will positively shape the complainant's failure attribution, affecting satisfaction and negative word of mouth for post-webcare actions.

In the online buying context, consumer behavior can be enhanced if online companies pay more attention to them, including one word, after-sales service, and service failures and recovery (Gensler et al., 2013; Grégoire et al., 2009). It is assumed that webcare can also enhance or moderate the consumer engagement, which is based on a post-acceptance model of IS continuance.

In summary, no matter what kind of influential role webcare plays, it is unclear and remains a contradiction result. Therefore, this present study applies Bhattacharjee’s (2001a) Post-acceptance Model of IS Continuance model, to examine the independent or moderator role of webcare respectively. This is done to confirm whether the webcare is the “initiator” (antecedent) or the “catalyzer” (moderator).

In the first scenario, the consumer first feels the webcare from the official website personnel before collecting the purchase, and collects relevant information at the same time. Negative comments seen during the search process received a positive response from webcare. Such a mechanism, that is, after the webcare action, the company influences the consumer's confirmation and perceived usefulness, bringing out the final satisfaction and subsequent repurchase intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed, and a research model is also proposed:

H₁: Consumer’s satisfaction with online service recovery is positively associated with repurchase intention.

H₂: Consumer’s extent of service recovery confirmation is positively associated with their satisfaction with online service recovery.

H₃: Consumer’s extent of service recovery confirmation is positively associated with their perceived service recovery usefulness in online use.

H₄: Consumer's perceived service recovery usefulness of online use is positively associated with their satisfaction with online use.

H₅: Consumer's repurchase intention is positively associated with their perceived service recovery usefulness of repurchase intention.

H₆: Consumer's perceived service recovery usefulness is positively associated with their webcare.

H₇: Consumer's extent of service recovery confirmation is positively associated with their webcare.

Therefore, the research model is shown as Figure 1. As shown in the figure, this present study first regarded webcare as the antecedent to trigger the whole procedure from perceived usefulness and confirmation in the service recovery context, which in turn, resulting in the repurchase intention.

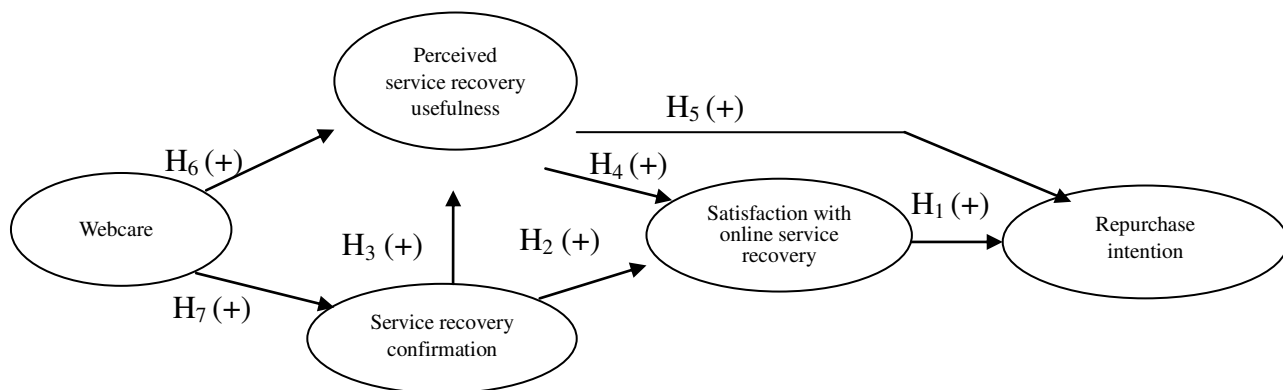


Figure 1: Research Model

3.2 Measurement development

Five constructs were measured in this study: webcare, service recovery confirmation, perceived service recovery usefulness, satisfaction with online service recovery, and repurchase intention.

Wherever possible, this study adopted the well-established valid instruments with minor changes in wording to fit with the service recovery repurchase intention Internet shopping context. Each item was measured on 7-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The items of measuring service recovery confirmation are originated from the study of Bhattacharjee (2001a) and Boshoff(1999).

The items of measuring perceived service recovery usefulness are originated from four items of Davis et al.'s (1989) study.

The items of measuring satisfaction with online service recovery are adapted from the study of Bhattacharjee (2001b), Chang et al., 2012, Oliver (1980), Spreng et al. (1996), Smith and Bolton(1998) which are originated from EDT.

The items of repurchase intention are taken from Bhattacharjee's (2001a; 2001b) scales in which two of these items are adapted from behavior intention scale of IS developed by Mathieson (1991)

The items of webcare are taken from Sreejesh and Anuree (2016) scales for the three dimensions of responsiveness, reliability, and personalization in which these items are adapted from consumers' perceived webcare.

4. Conclusions and Future Direction

In this paper, we try to use the post-acceptance model of IS continuance to explain how webcare affects consumer expectations, perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and repurchase intention. We believe that effective webcare strategy development will enable consumers to shop online more frequently.

The expansion of this study can be developed in two directions. First, empirical data are needed to evaluate models and hypothesis. We will invite participants with online shopping mistakes, fill out relevant questionnaires, and respond to the care they receive. Then, explore whether webcare at different points in time will have different effects and compare webcare practices.

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