



Consumer social voice in the age of social media: Segmentation profiles and relationship marketing strategies



Joanna Phillips Melancon^{a,*}, Vassilis Dalakas^b

^a Gordon Ford College of Business, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY 42101-1059, U.S.A.

^b College of Business Administration, California State University San Marcos, San Marcos, CA 92078, U.S.A.

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Abstract Service failures, once handled quietly by customer service departments, are now played out on a highly public social media stage. These failures can result in not only the loss of a loyal consumer but also can negatively affect relationships with those watching the dialogue between disgruntled customers and organizations. The phenomenon of seeking resolution to service failures online is distinct from both traditional word-of-mouth and voice behaviors. This article introduces *social voice*: public complaining behavior that aims to change the behavior of the organization. A qualitative methodology defines eight dimensions of social voice and categorizes them by the strength of the relationship to the organization. Results indicate that appropriate response strategies differ based on social voice segment.

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1. The rise of social media as an outlet for unhappy customers

Marketers have fully embraced social media, with over 96% of businesses using social media as a marketing tool and 92% saying social media is important to their business goals (Stelzner, 2015). Heralded as a new paradigm in marketing, social

media stands to give consumers a powerful and undeniable voice in their relationships with organizations. Marketing communication is now evolving toward two-way conversations rather than one-way, mass-media sermons. However, influential and frequently negative consumer comments on social media have left many companies unsure of how to address public criticism; marketers cite negative consumer response on their social media sites as their number one fear (Gillin, 2009). Many companies have experienced the sting of widespread negative social media backlash from consumers, resulting in bad press, falling stock prices, forced

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: joanna.phillips@wku.edu (J.P. Melancon), vdalakas@csusm.edu (V. Dalakas)

reversals on social issues and, in some extreme cases, in businesses closing their doors altogether (Grégoire, Salle, & Tripp, 2015; Kim, Wang, Masłowska, & Malthouse, 2016).

Consumers have quickly embraced social media as an outlet for complaints. A growing percentage of consumers would rather contact a company to complain via social media as opposed to in-person or on the telephone (Gesenhues, 2013), yet 64% of consumers report that their customer service inquiries were not resolved via social media. When consumer issues are not addressed on social media in a timely manner, 38% of respondents will have more negative attitudes toward a brand and 60% are more likely to take a negative action toward the brand in terms of negative word-of-mouth, escalating complaints through other avenues, and buying less from the company or switching altogether (Gesenhues, 2013). Seventy-two percent of consumers expect brands to respond to complaints on Twitter within an hour. The benefits of meeting consumer expectations when responding to social media complaints are obvious; timely and satisfactory responses to complaints resulted in 47% of consumers more likely to recommend the brand through social media and increased purchase intentions for 34% of consumers (Gesenhues, 2013). Other studies indicate that consumers will spend 21% more if they receive good customer service through social media sites (Bennett, 2012).

With 2.4 billion conversations about brands taking place every day in online media, it is clear that marketers must understand and have strategies in place to handle consumer voice in order to preserve and nurture consumer relationships. Furthermore, marketers must be prepared to identify and execute appropriate responses to consumer complaints very quickly in order to meet minimal customer expectations for service on social media. However, there is little research in the field of social media that addresses how managers should handle social consumer voice in a manner that benefits the organization. This study seeks to identify and categorize the different types of complaints on social media. Our in-depth, qualitative analysis using a netnographic method (Kozinets, 2010) allowed us to produce a typology of public complaint behavior on social media sites; we introduce eight types or segments of social media voice (or complaint) with illustrative quotes. This approach rejects a one-size-fits-all recovery strategy and instead focuses on the best way to recover the consumer relationship and minimize damage from negative word-of-mouth as a starting point for effective (and public) service recovery strategies.

2. The evolution of consumer complaint behavior

2.1. Service failures and voice

Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty framework explores consumer reaction to the survey failure. *Exit* suggests that consumers may leave the organization or switch to another organization. *Loyalty* suggests that a consumer holds strong enough ties to an organization to resist exiting after a failure; rather, a loyal consumer may either remain silent and continue patronage or be more likely to use voice. *Voice* is when a consumer expresses his/her dissatisfaction with a business interaction to a representative of the organization in the hopes of arriving at a satisfactory solution that prevents exit from the organization (Hirschman, 1970). Voice is considered an active and constructive complaint behavior, which attempts to salvage the business relationship by suggesting means in which a dissatisfactory experience can be made satisfactory to the aggrieved party (Vidal, Fenneteau, & Paché, 2016). Historically, voice takes place in a private forum (speaking to someone with the authority to address your issue such as a manager). However, a growing number of consumers now say social media is their first and most preferred touch point for interacting with organizations (Grant, 2013).

2.2. Negative word-of-mouth

While voice is typically a complaint response directed toward the offending organization, negative word-of-mouth has typically been a complaint response about the offending organization directed to other individuals outside the organization. Traditionally, word-of-mouth took place between the individual and a few receivers. However, online forums, review sites, and, more recently, social media sites result in the ability of negative word-of-mouth to reach large networks of individuals connected via online technology. Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) differs from traditional word-of-mouth in that it is usually expressed in writing, is presented in public forums, and can be stored and searched electronically (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009). The extent of the phenomenon is far-reaching. In the U.S. alone, 65% of adults use social media sites (Cohen, 2015) and half of those people have submitted product reviews or rated products on social networking sites (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016). Baldacci (2013) reported that 80% of reviews posted on social networking platforms are negative or critical. The negative E-WOM has led to negative effects concerning other consumers, including

brand awareness, attitudes, purchase intentions, sales, and revenue (Kim et al., 2016).

Where E-WOM has been studied, the focus has traditionally been on its impact on viewers' subsequent behavior rather than on the motivations or intentions behind the individual actually constructing the comments (see Balaji et al., 2016). Some literature has explored antecedents to individuals posting negative E-WOM on social media channels (Balaji et al., 2016) or the effects of negative E-WOM on the future consumption behavior of those who choose to post on social networking sites (Kim et al., 2016), but there has been limited exploration of the nature and types of complaints that are commonly posted on social networking sites or what strategic approach might best address various types of complaints.

2.3. Social voice

The phenomenon under investigation in this research is a hybrid between the typical categorization of E-WOM (intended for an external audience with the motivation of spreading a negative viewpoint or doing harm to the organization) and voice (intended for an internal/organization audience with the motivation of rectifying the service failure). Thus, we propose a new construct called *social voice*, which is defined as public complaining behavior taking place on one or more of an organization's official social media sites. These complaints are public, negative, and explicitly or implicitly attempt to change the company's actions in some manner. This study uses a netnographic approach to define dimensions of social voice by categorizing social media complaints into themes that represent different segments of complaint with implications for a customized and timely company response to each type of voice.

2.4. Relationship marketing and stages of relationships

The profitability of building and sustaining long-term relationships with consumers is well documented in the relationship marketing literature (Berry, 1995; Reichheld, 1996). Social media stands to provide a powerful relationship management tool where companies can interact, engage, and provide customized value to consumers (Clark & Melancon, 2013). Business relationships typically cycle through stages that can give guidance to organizations on how best to maintain commitment and profitability of long-term consumers (Dwyer, Shurr, & Oh, 1987). Given that over 80% of the followers of an organization's social media sites are likely existing

customers, most interaction on social media sites will take place with individuals who are in one of these stages. Though there is different terminology in the literature for various stages in business relationship development, authors typically cite an initiation phase where both parties are exploring the possibility of a relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000; Wilson, 1995). Given that commitment is just developing here, it may be unlikely that these consumers utilize social voice. Following the initiation phase, a maintenance phase where both business and consumer develop and maintain commitment is commonly cited (Dwyer et al., 1987; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2000; Wilson, 1995). The maintenance phase is the critical phase of relationship marketing because in this phase, long-term and mutually beneficial relationship exchanges take place (Wetzels, de Ruyter, & van Birgelen, 1998). Maintenance can continue indefinitely so long as there is commitment from both parties. The final stage of relationships is dissolution, or the termination of the relationship (Dwyer et al., 1987). The dissolution phase is the least-researched phase in the relationship marketing literature (Coulter & Ligas, 2000; Dwyer et al., 1987; Wilson, 1995) and can be a drawn out process; it seems that much of social voice may take place during this process, and that company response can either seal the termination or prevent the consumer's exit.

Roos and Strandvik (1997) discussed stages of termination. In the initial stage, the consumer perceives a lack of commitment from the business and in the trigger stage, the negative event occurs that causes the consumer to contemplate terminating the relationship. The termination phase is marked by complaining behavior and tense interactions with the service provider. The final outcome of the dissolution stage occurs when the consumer actually exits the organization. Given the public nature of social media and the widespread use of social media as a complaint mechanism, the dissolution stage now has the potential to play out on social media in front of other consumers who are in various relationship stages. Thus, there may be value in understanding how social voice occurs across different relationship stages as well as what strategies might be useful, depending on the consumer's level of commitment to the organization.

3. A qualitative look at complaint behavior on social media

This article is based on a qualitative research study that involved a content analysis of various instances of negative consumer voice on organizational social

media pages in the tradition of netnography (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography is a form of grounded theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and does not test specific hypotheses but rather identifies emergent themes in data (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009).

Specifically, we examined Facebook pages of sixteen organizations across various industries in 24-hour time blocks and captured all comments¹ made by consumers that were negative or critical. Data were collected from a variety of business-to-consumer organizations and industries including airlines, clothing retailers, sports teams, beverage makers, restaurants, cellular service providers, car manufacturers, insurance providers, satellite television providers, banks, athletic brands, amusement parks, and hotels.

Our analysis entailed an iterative reading strategy where similar patterns of complaints were discovered, grouped together, and then categorized by common themes in a process called open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Connections between categories were made during axial coding. Open and axial coding happened simultaneously, as researchers identified themes that might not fit the existing framework, and thus had to revise to be sure that all themes were captured by the emerging model. This method has been used in marketing literature in past studies with success in establishing models of previously unexplored phenomena (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009).

Analysis of 250 comments, 49 pages of data and over 17,000 words yielded a framework with eight primary dimensions of social voice, reflecting a wide array of underlying motivations and service failures that range from feeling one's dinner was overpriced to feeling an organization should reverse its commitment to sponsor the Olympic Games. We organized the eight themes into three broader categories based on the stage of the relationship typically indicative of each theme. The disparate nature of the themes leads to implications for a customized approach to service recovery based on complaint type. Each theme, along with the frequency in which it was noted in our data set and pertinent literature to assist in explaining the theme, is described below.

4. The types of complainers you will meet on social media

The themes were organized into three larger categories according to the relationship phase of each

type of complainer. As mentioned earlier, the initiation phase occurs before consumers have actually patronized an organization, thus making social voice unlikely.

4.1. Early squabbles

The first category, labeled *early squabbles*, reflected themes where the issue underlying the comment did not indicate that the relationship with the consumer might be in danger, and that the consumers were still committed to the relationship. Thus, individuals in these situations were in the maintenance phase of the relationship. Furthermore, these comments allowed for an opportunity to deepen the level of consumer loyalty if the organization engaged with the consumer in a significant manner. Themes in this category include the *help seeker* and the *(unsolicited) advisor*.

4.1.1. The help seeker

This type of social voice typically represents a minor concern, comment, or question directed at the organization. Often, this individual is seeking an answer to a simple question, or is asking to be pointed in the right direction. These types of comments typically are presented without blame or any indication of the emotionally charged failure of other themes. This theme emerged 42 times in our analysis, and appeared more commonly in industries with heavy service components such as cellular service providers, restaurants, and insurance providers. In some cases, customers had simple issues about service usage or minor failures on the part of the organization:

- “What’s up with your website? The homepage will come up but anything I click on all I get is a blank screen.” (Gap)
- “Why is it that me and everyone I know can not place a call right now?????” (AT&T)
- “I’m trying to find the link to order my \$40 in over the counter medical supplies but cannot find the link. help, please.” (Humana)

In other situations, consumers were placing simple requests to know more about the workings or future offerings of the organization in order to facilitate their level of enjoyment with the provider.

- “Do you have any idea when your autumn squash soup will be disappearing?? I can’t get enough of it and just want to mentally prepare myself for when it’s not offered anymore.” (Panera)

¹ Reproduced here including grammatical/typographical errors of original Facebook posters.

- “When can we expect to see a WP8 app? I switched to WP8 not long ago, but now I have no app for my favorite bank! I need to scan checks into my account frequently. Any update?” (Ally Bank)
- “Is there any chance that womens/girls Alterego line is going to expand to superheroes other than Batgirl, Wonder Woman, and Supergirl?” (Under Armour)
- “I have a suggestion. Would it be possible to add PopMoney to the Transfer page on your mobile app? It would really make paying I.O.U.s to friends and family much easier. . . thanks!” (Ally)
- “We love the score guide for the MLB that includes the standings. Realize it is a lot of work, but if you could just include league leaders, like pitching/home runs/etc. it would be really awesome. Thanks.” (Direct TV)

4.1.2. The (unsolicited) advisor

In addition to requests for help in resolving questions about an organization’s products or services, a theme also emerged that was characterized by individuals offering suggestions to the organization regarding how they might serve consumers better. These suggestions arose without any prompting by the company. Some suggestions were given as a disguised complaint as a consumer voiced displeasure with some aspect of the business:

- “Delta, loyal diamond medallion for years. Your new same day confirm is the worst. Why did this need to take effect? Such a terrible inconvenience. Taking perks away is bad for morale. My two cents.” (Delta)
- “Asked if there were raisins in the carrot cake and was told by three different employees (including a manager) that there wasn’t. This is an OD amount of raisins too! It didn’t bother me enough to complain (I still ate it). I just want you to know that educating your employees is important. I could have been allergic to raisins.” (Panera)
- “The jeans should come prepackaged with iron-on patches to repair the wholes which developed after just a few wearing’s and washes!” (Gap)

However, at other times, the consumer is actually offering altruistic advice to the company on how to truly improve products or services. Often, these consumers are loyal with extensive knowledge of the organization’s offerings and want to help the organization. Coproduction (when consumers take on marketing activities of the firm such as advocating others use the service or suggesting improvements) is a consequence of affective commitment, and thus the sign of a consumer who is still committed to the organization (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). This theme emerged 31 times in the data and was present across both service and product-oriented firms:

- “I love my Chevy Equinox, but the only thing I don’t like and don’t understand why most of your Chevy’s have the gas tank on the passenger side.” (Chevrolet)

4.2. On the rocks

The second category of social voice involved relationships that were *on the rocks*, meaning the consumer had experienced a breakdown trigger that caused them to lose faith in the organization and to consider exit (Coulter & Ligas, 2000). These consumers had not yet made the decision to actually leave the organization, but exit seemed to be imminent and many of these consumers exhibited the beginning of the termination phase, where negative word-of-mouth was likely. These themes include *Dear John*, *story of my life*, and the *social activist*. However, in these themes, there typically existed some contextual clues that the relationship might be salvaged if the firm made appropriate recovery efforts.

4.2.1. The social activist

Social media has become a place for consumers to voice their disapproval or dissatisfaction with a company’s stance on social issues. Social activists use social media as a platform to demand companies reform their actions or ideology regarding some social, political, cultural, religious, philanthropic, or environmental issue. In these cases, complaint on social media does not stem from a personal service failure. The motivation behind these comments is trying to change the organization’s position or actions regarding these issues typically with a threat to discontinue use if the organization does not respond in some meaningful manner. In extreme cases, consumers invite others to unite behind them in boycotting the company due to these issues. Social activist quotes appeared 26 times in the dataset and included issues involving racial equality, LGBT rights, animal cruelty practices, labor practices, and environmental issues. Sample quotes are included below:

- “Dear Cola Cola, I feel it is important you know that this month I have ceased purchasing your products due to your sponsorship of the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. I need not explain why; your company is no doubt well aware of the storm brewing in public relations at present. I enjoy your products, however there is ample competition in the soft drink market, and readjusting my purchase choices from here on will not be difficult. You may ignore this message and the many others like it if you wish; that is your choice. However I think it’s in your best interests commercially if you did not.” (Coca-Cola)
- “Reinstate the waitress you suspended . . . bigotry cannot be rewarded. I refuse to eat in your restaurant until you change this.” (Red Lobster)

4.2.2. The Dear John

Dear John consumers are typically consumers who have been loyal to the organization for some time and have experienced some sort of failure that is significant enough for them to consider leaving the organization. These messages generally emphasize the relationship the consumer has kept with the organization in terms of either tenure with the organization or money spent with the organization. These complaints contain a threat or stated intent to switch providers over the failure. Oftentimes, there is a suggestion of how the company should have handled the failure better and recognized the consumers’ status as a good customer. Many times, there is a sense of entitlement to better treatment as a result of long patronage to the organization. It is clear that in this situation, consumer expectations of service recovery have not been met, which jeopardizes the loyalty of these consumers (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). However, this consumer represents the best example of the concept of voice or expressing dissatisfaction before exit. There were 34 instances of Dear John comments in our data set.

- “I’ve been a loyal Delta supporter for 10+ year and Diamond for several, but with the new MQD requirement I think I’m gonna be taking my business to a new carrier. For the last few years miles have been harder to earn and harder to redeem. Time to find a new airline!!” (Delta)
- “Dear Red Lobster, My wife and I have been customers of yours for many years, we are retired and on a fixed income so our funds have to go further today than in years past. We ate at your place in Amarillo the other day and was really surprised at your prices and the quantity of food

we received, the potato I got was about 6 bites, I would have been ashamed to have sent that out to a customer. We enjoy your food but at those prices we will have to look for another Sea Food place.” (Red Lobster)

- “7 years as a customer and over \$28,000 paid in for services—one would think you would want to consider an early upgrade so that LOYAL customers could get in on the new i-phone—but I have been told no. So maybe I take my family plan with (5) lines to Verizon instead—horrible treatment of good customers.” (AT&T)

4.2.3. The story of my life

These consumers use social media platforms to give extensive, blow-by-blow details of service failures. Typically, these types of complaints reference effects of the failure that are personally or emotionally troubling to the consumer, or speak to how the failure made the consumer feel. These comments seem to be characterized by some form of catharsis or venting for the consumer and often include an implicit or explicit plea for a response from the company, most typically or appropriately (in the eyes of the complainer) a sincere and personalized apology and assurance that the failure will not happen again. This theme occurred 24 times. Due to the lengthy nature of these quotations, only one example quote is provided:

- “In my entire lifetime I have never been made to feel this way . . . today October 4 2013 my character was defamed thanks to the service manager at Fields BMW in Winter Park, Florida. I never raised my voice nor said any profanity yet this manger had the audacity to say that I was ‘terrorizing’ his staff . . . Then people can see the predicament I’m in. I spoke to a police officer because I felt threatened by the manger and was advised that if I actually did do anything to terrorize his staff the police would have been called and further action would have been taken. However, since there was no ‘terrorizing’ on my behalf the service manager and his service advisor just threw threats at me. I am now fearful and believe that anytime I need service I can no longer go into the service department at Fields BMW in Winter Park like a normal customer. I might not be wealthy plus I have Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and I only a few years left before I’m not able to drive due to my MS but being able to own a BMW is an accomplishment that I am proud of. I want to continue being a proud BMW owner and having the ability to feel ‘free’ while I drive my BMW. Having MS is not an easy disease; due to the

manager labeling me a terrorist (terrorizing employees) has caused me grief and the stress can cause me to [come out of] remission. In today's society it is not easy to come across a job. I feel that when working in the public eye one should have the utmost respect towards their customers/clients regardless of a customer's behavior. The Fields BMW manager's behavior was unacceptable and should be addressed immediately. As you will be able to tell from the video, the manager had this grudge towards me since day one due to the fact that he volunteered to stay longer so I could return the loaner. There are plenty of companies that go above and beyond to help their customers/clients get what they need; on Friday this did not happen at BMW. Not only was I told and called a terrorizer but the manager continued to belittle me by yelling in front of my girlfriend, other employees and clients. From what I researched before buying my BMW was that BMW does not tolerate this behavior by any of their employees regardless of the situation. The only thing I am asking for the issue to be corrected before it happens again in the future to other clients; I would greatly appreciate someone reaching out to me in order to keep my faith with BMW." (BMW)

4.3. The exes

Finally, there were some consumers whose anger and contempt made it evident that they were actively severing their ties with the organization. These consumers were deeper into the termination phase. Often, the consumer was highly contemptuous of the organization in these quotations, yet left no indication of how the company should correct the issue or move forward with the consumer. These quotes seemed to serve the purpose of embarrassing or harming the organization. The only strategy moving forward with these comments was likely to be mitigating adverse effects on current or prospective consumers viewing the comments. This category of consumers, called *the exes*, included the themes of *passive-aggressive*, *whistle-blower*, and *trolls*.

4.3.1. The passive-aggressive

Passive-aggressive comments occurred more frequently than any other theme in the dataset with 49 occurrences. Passive-aggressive complainers are those consumers who leave angry, negative, and often cryptic quotes on company social media sites. It is clear that the consumer perceives some serious failure on the part of the organization, yet the consumer does not clearly express the root or cause

of the anger in the post; when the failure is alluded to, it is often in a sarcastic manner:

- "It boggles my mind how your company's employees can blatantly lie to customers and not be held accountable." (AT&T)
- "Thanks for adding MQD details to my online account . . . reminds me how much Delta sucks for this change." (Delta)
- "Coke is a Joke on the world—creating Insulin Resistance One Drinker at a time." (Coca-Cola)
- "Just an FYI I will never do business with your institute and will discourage anyone else from doing business." (Ally)
- "Counting down the days until my contract is up with DirectTV." (DirectTV)

4.3.2. The whistle-blower

This consumer perceives some practice of the organization to be unsafe, unfair, or unethical and posts on the organizations' social media with the intention of 'warning' other consumers against the perceived danger or the product/service or the unethical treatment the complainer perceives others will receive. In all cases, there was not any evidence presented with these quotations. Whistle-blower quotes occurred 36 times. Here are some examples:

- "Your artificial sweeteners in your diet products are NOT safe." (Coca-Cola)
- "BEWARE AT&T CUSTOMERS. THE CANCELLATION PROCESS TAKES 3 MONTHS TO COMPLETE. UNACCEPTABLE!" (AT&T)
- "EVERYONE STOP GOING TO TARGET THEY WILL STEAL YOUR CREDIT CARD INFO!" (Target)

4.3.3. The troll

This consumer category represents everything that marketers fear when they delve into social media. The troll is an individual that constantly fills social media pages with messages of dissatisfaction and contempt for a company, its consumers, and its products/services. These individuals may have experienced service failures that were never handled properly and take out their frustration on a regular basis on social media, or they may just provide unprovoked attacks on a company's social media for their own purposes of gaining attention or making life hard for the company and other consumers

on social media. This consumer type may voice their dissatisfaction with the organization loudly and regularly, attempt to get other consumers to voice their own dissatisfaction by redirecting them to anti-brand sites, or they may even taunt and harass other consumers posting on a company's social media. There were only nine instances of trolling in our dataset. However, some of these comments suggested that the companies had taken down previous posts by the commenters, which might have explained the small number of examples the authors were able to capture.

- “Dear BMW, You keep taking my post off of your site. I think people should be aware of this situation. You never contacted me after I wrote to you. That’s OK, you just keep taking it off. I’ll post it on all other luxury car sites, they won’t take it off!” (BMW)
- “In 44 years I have never seen such terrible insurance coverage. I’ll be back every day . . . as well as spread the word on Facebook, Twitter, my radio show, and in everyday conversation . . . ” (Humana)

5. A guide to addressing social voice

Negative consumer interaction is the number one fear of marketers engaging in social media (Gillin, 2009). Rightfully so, as 85% of customers say they will now complain or retaliate if their needs are not met by a company, and Gen X and Gen Y consumers are likely to use a company's social media sites to complain (Grant, 2013). Based on our analysis, we offer the following step-by-step guide on how to recognize and respond to various types of consumer negativity on social media.

5.1. When/if to delete negative feedback

E-WOM allows everyone to see negative comments posted on a company's social media account. Therefore, marketers may be tempted to remove critical negative posts, especially when they may feel the posts are unfair or inaccurate. However, deleting negative feedback could potentially generate further negative attention either by the person who posted the original post or by others, and is typically not the best approach for handling such comments (Gillin, 2009).

A key goal for companies engaging in social media dialogue with consumers is to portray authenticity. In order to appear so, the company must keep all feedback posted on its page for people to see, not just the positive. This would apply to all profiles

from our analysis except for likely the troll. Deleting such posts is less likely to infuriate other consumers. Moreover, troll posts are often offensive, which gives the company a legitimate excuse for removing them without appearing oversensitive to negative criticism.

5.2. When to respond to negative feedback

Ignoring negative posts can be detrimental, potentially creating a relationship problem where there was not one to begin with; this would be the case with segmentation profiles from the early squabbles stage. However, there may be two cases where silence may be preferable to posting a response. One would be in relation to troll posts and the other in relation to social activist posts. For troll posts that the marketer does not delete, there is not much benefit in interacting with the person posting it. Often, such posts are made with the intention of stirring the pot and getting a reaction, which is why silence may be a wise reaction.

In the case of the social activist posts, the challenge is that such posts often address controversial issues where people's views can differ. If they take a position, marketers need to be aware of the risk of alienating consumers from the other side. Therefore, in some cases, the option of no response may be worth considering.

5.3. How quickly to respond to negative feedback

While it is important for marketers to not respond hastily, extensive delays can also be harmful and either create new problems or aggravate existing ones. Timely responses are helpful for all profiles for different reasons. Timely responses to a help seeker communicate that the consumer is important and the company cares and wants to help. A timely response to unsolicited advisors communicates that the company pays attention and appreciates their input and engagement, a message that likely would encourage them to stay engaged with the brand.

However, quick responses that are automated may be worse than delayed responses. For example, American Airlines developed a policy to respond to all consumer tweets but with automated responses. When consumers left passive aggressive comments congratulating the airline on being the largest and worst airline “in the history of the world,” the automated response from American Airlines was an immediate but standardized, “thanks for your support” message (Stampler, 2013). Progressive had

a similar issue with robo-tweets in response to consumer complaints, infuriating consumers so much that Progressive's 'Buzz score' (measuring sentiment of brands online) fell significantly in comparison to competitors (Stamper, 2012).

5.4. How to respond to negative feedback

The different profiles that emerged from our analysis highlight the fact that the same standardized response to different posts is not beneficial. The social media dialogue needs to be authentic and tailored to each individual communication. Although this is something that marketers should have always been doing, now that communications are public, it can be much more embarrassing and potentially costly to do it poorly.

Along those lines, responses to posts like ones in the help seeker category can focus on opportunities to build and enhance the relationship with the consumer. This means addressing their question or concern quickly, but also—if and when applicable—providing a bit more than what was asked for. For example, within moments of a consumer tweeting a question about a fee applied to a standby flight, Jet Blue had cleared up the consumers' confusion effectively and efficiently. However, a Jet Blue representative in the same airport actually sought out the consumer in the terminal (using his Twitter profile picture to find him) to make sure he had no further questions and to give him a care package as he waited on his flight (Kolowich, 2014). By implementing a quick response, Jet Blue avoided an angry consumer. The encounter could have ended there, and the relationship would likely have been preserved. However, Jet Blue, by taking one more step, created an advocate who immediately tweeted about the extraordinary customer service experience with the airline. The idea of exceeding both adequate and desired levels of service has long been a way to achieve "unwavering customer loyalty" (Parasuraman et al., 1991, p. 47) and coordination of social media and traditional customer service may be a powerful way to achieve these means, particularly when the consumer begins the conversation on social media. Having a consumer voluntarily broadcast the service delight on social media gives the company additional goodwill.

Responses to an unsolicited advisor can focus on building coproduction opportunities. Marketers can communicate that they value feedback and even actively encourage it. For example, Starbucks has used Starbucks MyIdea website as an outlet for consumer suggestions. It has led to consumer submitting more than 150,000 ideas/suggestions to

Starbucks, 277 of which have been implemented by the chain (BusinessWire, 2013). Such coproduction strengthens affective commitment in service relationships and also serves to reduce marketing costs to the firm (Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000).

Dear John posts aim to communicate the value of the consumer a company is potentially losing. In those cases, it is important for the company to provide front line social media empowerment to handle those issues quickly, publically, and meaningfully. The story-of-my-life posts are a case that clearly highlights the need for customized responses rather than automated standardized one-liners. Consumers who take the time and make the effort to write such detailed accounts of their experience would expect and value company responses that communicate similar effort. In both of these cases, consumer expectations have not yet been met, but consumers may be willing to give the company a second chance. The service recovery paradox states that dissatisfied customers may end up happier after meaningful attention was given to their issue than if there was no issue in the first place (De Matos, Henrique, & Rossi, 2007). These consumer relationships may be salvaged, but in order for such great recoveries to happen, the people handling the social media accounts should do more than simply acknowledge the issue. Consumer expectations must be far exceeded for this to happen.

For the profiles in the termination stage, often the possibility for recovery may be gone. In that case, the company's response is more about mitigating potential damage to others who are reading the comments. Standardized response options are unlikely to appease this consumer.

Passive-aggressive posts are hard to handle as they are, by their nature, rather cryptic. Marketers should publically volunteer outreach to discuss the issue further in private messages so that other consumers witness the effort to get to the bottom of the issue. For example, a sarcastic passive-aggressive complaint to Whole Foods about the removal of a product the consumer liked led to a prompt response by the company with specific questions to clarify what the consumer was angry about, with the promise to look into the issue for the consumer and follow up.

Negative posts by whistle-blowers should be met with education of consumers that provide additional information regarding the alleged issues about the company in terms of the accuracy of the claims and, in cases where the claims are true, transparency in information on what the company is doing to address it.

6. Limitations

As with all qualitative analyses, there is a trade-off between the richness of the data gathered and generalizability of the results. Though we looked at a variety of industries, made an effort to include both service and product-dominant firms as well as both hedonistic and utilitarian services, and a variety of comments were captured at random times, caution should be used about generalizing to other contexts without empirical validation. Additionally, we explored Facebook, as it represents the largest population of both consumers and organizational social media presence and the functionality of Facebook means that consumers can post directly to the organization's social media site; however, future studies should explore whether these social voice types hold across other social media sites populated by businesses such as Twitter and Instagram. Future research might also explore antecedents and consequences of each type of social voice. This study serves as an initial foray into a typology of social voice.

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