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Investigating Consumer Advocacy, Community Usefulness, and Brand Avoidance

Abstract:

Purpose: This paper examines the behavioral outcomes and effectiveness of organizational response to open complaints by consumers following a dissatisfactory service experience.

Design/methodology/approach: Three natural communities (WhatsApp groups) were used with reference to online food and grocery retailing. The respondents comprised community members sharing negative experiences on the group. A scenario implanted in a survey was used as the research approach.

Findings: Consumer advocacy, a form of complaining, is a way to help other community members. The relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness strengthens the argument of consumers' collective concern as one of the motivational frames for consumer advocacy. Consumer advocates show stronger reactions, resulting in brand avoidance following voice complaining. An effective organizational response can mitigate brand avoidance.

Practical implications: Finding ways to restrict and alleviate brand avoidance is an area that is of major interest to practitioners. Our study finds that prospective explanations could be a very effective antidote to brand avoidance.

Originality/value: The social side of complaining is a relatively under-researched area. This study examines the relationship between consumer advocacy, community usefulness and brand avoidance. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the moderating effect of organizational response on consumer advocacy and its outcomes in the virtual context.

Keywords: Consumer advocacy, community usefulness, brand avoidance, brand avoidance antidote, prospective explanation, retrospective explanation

Paper type: Research Paper

Investigating Consumer Advocacy, Community Usefulness, and Brand Avoidance

1.0 Introduction

For over two decades, researchers and service firms have recognized the detrimental effects of negative word of mouth (NWOM) on firms' revenues (Reichheld *et al.*, 2000). NWOM could pertain to individual negative experiences with products, services, and service firms at all stages of the consumption process (Lee and Song, 2010). With the ever-increasing ubiquity of the internet and consumer-empowering technologies, customer power has now reached unprecedented levels (Urban and Hauser, 2004). The internet and social sharing platforms ensure quick dissemination and easy access to such negative consumption experiences shared by individuals (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2015), in their study on the "tweeter effect," found higher diagnosticity of negative tweets, meaning negative tweets stood out for its stronger effects.

There is growing evidence that consumers share negative marketplace experiences to not only *vent and cope* with the negative emotion elicited following a dissatisfactory service experience but also help other community members. In other words, consumers share unfavorable consumption experiences to shelter others from having similar unfavorable experiences (Litvin *et al.*, 2008). Such social sharing of NWOM with a preventive focus is referred to as consumer advocacy (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011). Past studies indicate that consumers resort to such marketplace helping behavior for reasons varying from reciprocity (Brown *et al.*, 2007) to anticipating remedial action from the company that is at fault (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011). Verhagen *et al.* (2013) found that community usefulness moderated the relationship between NWOM and consumers' response behavior, thus adding to the growing support for the social side of complaining. Naylor *et al.* (2012) call this virtual presence, which is customers using computer-mediated exposure to other consumers to voice complaints.

Given the reputational damage and potential revenue loss caused by NWOM, service firms need to find effective ways to deal with it. Prior studies on the organizational role are limited to enhancing demand for products (Miller *et al.*, 2009) or influencing consumer choice (Godes *et al.*, 2005). In particular, knowing how to deal effectively with open complaining is a prerequisite for organizations intending to use open complaining to showcase their commitment to customers and the transparency of their operations (Hart *et al.*, 1990; Spreng *et al.*, 1995). Despite consumers using virtual presence to a significant extent, organizations seem to be reluctant to “publically handle complaints” (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015).

The primary purpose of this study is to examine effective organizational responses to consumer advocacy in the virtual-presence context. This will help service firms to use social media and other technology-mediated channels as a service channel to resolve voice complaints. To our best knowledge, the current study is the first one to examine the effectiveness of the organizational response to open complaints by consumers following a dissatisfactory service experience. We are particularly interested in examining the reaction of individuals who resort to NWOM to prevent others from having similar dissatisfactory marketplace experiences (consumer advocates) when service firms respond in virtual presence. In particular, we would like to evaluate the effectiveness of the “service provider’s explanation” on perceived community usefulness and brand avoidance. The study intends to make the following contributions:

- a. Examine the relationship between consumer advocacy and perceived community usefulness as perceived by the sender. In doing so, we intend to contribute to the growing evidence on the social side of consumer complaining.
- b. Examine the moderating effect on community usefulness and brand avoidance of two specific organizational responses to voice complaints: namely, retrospective explanation and

prospective explanation. This would provide much-needed clarity on plausible ways in which service firms could effectively handle complaints publicly as well as contribute to the literature on social media as a service channel (Schaefers and Schamari, 2015).

- c. Empirically test the relationship between consumer advocacy and brand avoidance, thus contributing to the broader anti-consumption literature.
- d. Since the study is in the context of an emerging market hyper-local online food and grocery service, the study also responds to the call for more research on anti-branding in the service context (Kavaliauskė and Simanavičiūtė, 2015).

The current study has many practical implications, as practicing managers have traditionally focused on making consumers choose their brands, hence brand avoidance attitude and behavior have been ignored. Ignoring brand avoidance may lead to a “branding crisis” (Thompson *et al.*, 2006), which in turn could result in unknown financial and reputational loss to the brand and could possibly set off downward spiral effects.

In the following sections, we review the literature on organizational response, community usefulness and brand avoidance. Subsequently, we discuss the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses.

2.0 Literature review

The study followed two-step approach to review the extant literature on consumer advocacy. First a key word based search was carried via Google Scholar, EBSCO & ProQuest for identifying the studies that have examined the constructs of concepts that are relevant for the current study. Terms such as “consumer advocacy”, “Consumer advocacy & complaining”, “Consumer advocacy

& NWOM”, “service failure & consumer advocacy”, “Complaining & Community Usefulness”, “Consumer advocacy & brand avoidance”, “Consumer advocacy & Organizational response”, “Consumer advocacy & Informational fairness” and “Consumer advocacy & explanations” were used to identify relevant literature. The abstracts were carefully read to identify the relevance of the studies for the present research.

Subsequently, studies citing the pioneering work by Chelminski & Coulter (2011) were identified and carefully examined for its relevance for the current study. A key take away from the above exercise, is that consumer advocacy has received very limited attention. Even though there is evidence for NWOM motives such as, desire to help community members, concern for others, preventing others from experiencing problems like the one faced by the focal customer, often sender of the NWOM behaving in accordance with the contents of his message, no study has comprehensively examined them in a single study. In the following section, the literature pertaining to the constructs of concepts of interest for the current study are presented.

2.1 *Consumer advocacy*

Table 1(a) lists studies identified as an outcome of the systematic search for literature on consumer advocacy. In this section, we present a summary of the pioneering work on consumer advocacy by Chelminski & Coulter (2011). Consumers are known to exhibit marketplace helping behavior. Voluntary actions by consumers helping others to ensure that the recipients get a positive experience in their marketplace activities are well documented in the marketing literature. Consumer advocates are very similar to market mavens who believe & display marketplace helping behavior. Consumer advocates indulge in complaining behavior, hoping that such NWOM will have a

multiplier effect, resulting in individuals becoming aware of focal service firms' below par services (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011, p. 362).

Table 1(a) < to come here>

2.2 *Community usefulness*

To the best of our knowledge, research on consumer advocacy and community usefulness is scant. This is surprising given that broader 'motivation for complaining' literature recognizes the prosocial motive for complaining. Table 1(b) presents a summary of the important studies on NWOM and community usefulness. It is quite apparent that individuals engage in voice complaints, consumer advocacy, open complaining and similar marketplace helping behavior to inform others (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998; Chelminski and Coulter, 2011). Thus, the consumer's willingness to help others by sharing their own experiences can be equated with community usefulness (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Community usefulness is argued as concern for others that is pro social and altruistic in nature (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). Jayasimha and Billore (2014) found consumer advocacy to be an amalgamation of altruism and ego. Verhagen *et al.* (2013) found community usefulness to moderate the relationship between re-patronage and switching following negative online word of mouth. This finding is crucial, as it underlines the altruistic motivations, the primary determinant of community usefulness, as well the social side of voice complaining.

< Table 1 (b) to come here>

2.3 Brand avoidance

Brand avoidance is a relatively under-researched area in marketing. Oliva *et al.* (1992) referred to brand avoidance as the antithesis of brand loyalty. However, in their study Oliva *et al.* (1992) used the terms brand avoidance and brand switching interchangeably. Thompson *et al.* (2006) mentioned brand avoidance as a consequence of inauthentic brand meaning. Lee, Conroy & Motion (2009) defined brand avoidance as “the incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand (Pg.422)”. This provides the much-needed conceptual clarity. Brand avoidance particularly considers consumers rejecting the brand when they have an option to do so (active rejection when choice exists). Brand avoidance is part of the larger anti-consumption agenda where consumers have the ability to purchase as well as access to brands, yet they decide not to purchase the brand due to certain brand experiences (Hogg and Banister, 2001). Lee, Motion & Conroy (2009) recognize that brand avoidance can be as multi-dimensional as the brands themselves and hence there could be multiple reasons for consumers avoiding a particular brand.

The premise of brand avoidance entails the disconfirmation paradigm, in which consumers compare initial expectations with the actual experience. Thus, consumers could face a dichotomous situation in which the expectations are either confirmed or disconfirmed (Halstead, 1989). Negative disconfirmation might result in brand avoidance (Lee, Motion & Conroy. 2009). In that sense, it is similar to experiential avoidance (Bitner, 1992). Lee, Conroy & Motion (2009) in their pioneering work also recognize identity avoidance as well as moral avoidance as the key dimensions of brand avoidance. Identity avoidance refers to avoiding brands perceived as incongruent with the desired or actual self-concept (Hogg and Banister, 2001). Brand avoidance motivated by ideological incompatibility is referred to as moral avoidance.

2.4 Organizational response

One of the primary normative expectations following a service failure is to receive an explanation from the service firm as to “what went wrong” (McCull-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003). Prior research (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998) recognizes the following four categories of explanations following a failed service encounter: excuses, justifications, referential and apologies. The findings of the previous studies on explanations as an organizational response are inconsistent. Shaw *et al.* (2003) in a meta-analysis found excuses to be more effective than justifications. However, Bradley and Sparks (2009) found justifications rather than excuses to result in more favorable consumer evaluations.

Customer–company interaction is said to be at the core of the organizational response following a failed service encounter (Schaefer and Schamari, 2015). Particularly when such customer–company interactions happen in the presence of (actual or implied) consumers, it is known to affect the individual’s affective and behavioral response (Latane, 1981). Virtual presence has been found to amplify negative reactions to unsuccessful service recoveries and vice versa (Schaefer and Schamari, 2015). The social support literature also underlines the importance of information support (such as providing information and advice) to help deal with the problem. Particularly in the service failure domain, informational support (the service firm providing explanations for the failed service encounter) has been recognized and offers typologies such as *retrospective information* and *prospective information* (Mattila, 2006).

Retrospective information provides the aggrieved consumer with causal information on why a failure occurred as well as why the service firm could not avoid it (Matilla, 2006). Prospective information refers to the service firm’s information on future failure occurrences (Matilla, 2006).

Prospective information caters to the normative expectations of consumers to know what the service firm would do to prevent the problem in future (Johnston and Fern, 1999). Table 1 (c) lists important studies on in tangible organizational response primarily in the form of explanations following a dissatisfactory service experience.

< Table 1 (c) to come here >

3.0 Conceptual model and hypotheses

The research model is presented in Figure 1. It models the relationship between consumer advocacy, community usefulness and brand avoidance. Organizational response is modeled as a moderator.

< Figure 1 Conceptual Model to be placed here >

3.1 *Consumer advocacy and community usefulness*

That consumers are increasingly using social media and other platforms to voice complaints as well as to post service inquiries is well documented. As more and more consumers embrace the internet and other technologies, public complaining is expected to increase. Schaefer and Schamari (2015) use the term “voice complaints”, which is contrary to the conventional classification in the service literature (see Singh, 1988). Historically, voicing referred to consumers complaining directly to businesses. However, seen in the backdrop of consumer empowering technologies, the new terminology “voice complaints” seems acceptable. Similarly, virtual presence refers to individuals voicing complaints so as to leverage the computer-mediated exposure that amplifies such voice complaints to probably millions of other consumers (Naylor *et al.*, 2012). The theory of social sharing argues that people communicate their emotions openly for a wide variety of reasons. Getting

help & support, getting social attention, strengthening social ties are some the known reasons for people communicating emotions openly (Rime, 2009).

Besides the theory of social sharing, social capital too offers a robust explanation for the pro-social behaviors exhibited by consumers, particularly in the online space. The key difference between social capital and other forms of capital (such as human or financial capital) is that social capital is anchored in the social realm, unlike other forms of capital that are based on assets or individuals. Putnam (1995) argued that social capital is rooted in the fabric of relationships between (and in) individuals' and their connections with their communities.

Within the services marketing literature too there is support for the felt need to help others or the desire to do social good as a motivation for complaining (Simon, 1993). Past research on marketplace helping by individual consumers has investigated many forms of prosocial behavior such as opinion leaders, market mavens and purchase pals. Webster (1968) and Tauber (1972) were pioneers in documenting the existence of social interactions involving strangers in the shopping context. Flynn *et al.* (1994) found that opinion leaders have a disproportionate amount of influence on other consumers. Market mavens are highly involved consumers and represent a key source of marketplace information (Clark and Goldsmit, 2005). Research on market mavens indicates that they are actively involved in helping others in the marketplace (Feick and Price, 1987). Purchase pals are known even to chaperone individuals on their shopping trips (Kiecker and Hartman, 1993).

Consumer advocates are individuals who are altruistically motivated, hence following a dissatisfactory service experience they indulge in NWOM to prevent others from having a similar marketplace experience (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011). In the context of online NWOM, prior

research considers community usefulness as concern for others and as primarily social and altruistic in nature (Sundaram *et al.*, 1998). Past studies indicate that consumers resort to marketplace helping behavior (including sharing dissatisfactory service experiences) for reasons varying from reciprocity (Brown *et al.*, 2007) to remedial action from the company at fault (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011) as well as to help other community members (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). Hence, we posit that:

H1: Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on community usefulness.

3.2 *Consumer advocacy and brand avoidance*

Prior research in services marketing has found evidence for consumers developing negative feelings toward brands following failed service encounters. Research specifically recognizes two specific behavioral outcomes of such negative feelings toward brands: *viz.*, talking badly about the brand (NWOM) and stopping patronizing the brand (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). Prior research (Bryson *et al.*, 2013) in the services marketing domain identifies consumer dissatisfaction as one of the antecedents of brand hate. A major limitation of the existing research is that it does not distinguish between consumers talking badly about the brand (NWOM as a means of coping and venting following a service failure) and other forms of complaining such as voice complaining and consumer advocacy, which are prosocial and altruistically motivated. Second, in terms of the consumer–brand relationship continuum, brand hate represents one of many plausible relationships, with brand avoidance, brand satisfaction and brand love being other dimensions (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014).

There is limited research on brand avoidance in the academic literature. However, Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan (1992) and Thompson *et al.* (2006) are exceptions. Nevertheless, Oliva, Oliver and MacMillan (1992) used brand avoidance as synonymous with brand switching and suggested

that dissatisfaction leads to brand avoidance/switching. Lee, Conroy & Motion (2009) defined brand avoidance as “rejecting brand because of negative consequences/meanings associated with the brand” (Pg. 422). Hence, as conceptualized by Lee (2009), brand avoidance pertains to consumers actively choosing to avoid and not to scenarios where consumers do not have a choice, as in non-availability, unaffordability and so on (Hogg, 1998; Rindell *et al.*, 2013).

Consumers are known to exhibit marketplace helping behavior. Voluntary actions by consumers helping others to ensure that the recipients get a positive experience in their marketplace activities are well documented in the marketing literature. Chelminski and Coulter (2011) identified consumer advocates, who are very similar to market mavens and others who believe and display marketplace helping behavior. Therefore, consumer advocates indulge in complaining behavior, hoping that such NWOM will have a multiplier effect, resulting in individuals becoming aware of focal service firms’ below par services (Chelminski and Coulter, 2011, p. 362).

Given that increasingly consumers are sharing NWOM online, understanding how individuals are influenced by the presence and behavior of others is important. Social influence theory (SIT), specifically on the basis of social facilitation (Zajonc, 1965), argues that individuals show stronger reactions in the presence of others. The mere presence of others is known to generate higher levels of drive and arousal, which then facilitate emotional and behavioral responses (Schmitt *et al.*, 1986). Social presence is known to increase “self-presentation behavior” (Argo *et al.*, 2005). In the context of online NWOM, it is found that when consumers reveal their concern for others in their messages, it strengthens their behavioral intentions (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). This leads us to speculate that consumer advocates are likely to stop patronizing the brand after they resort to open complaining.

As discussed earlier, the premise of brand avoidance is the disconfirmation paradigm, in which consumers compare initial expectations with the actual experience. It is established that unwanted consumer behavior (such as brand avoidance) can be triggered by negative emotions that consumers experience toward brands (Romani *et al.*, 2012). Prior research has established that emotions are evoked by specific stimuli (Watson and Spence, 2007). Failed service encounters are events that trigger such emotions. Service failure is fundamentally a negative disconfirmation. Negative disconfirmation is likely to result in brand avoidance (Lee *et al.*, 2009) as it is similar to experiential avoidance (Bitner, 1992). Hence, we posit that:

H2: Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on brand avoidance.

3.3 Moderating role of organizational response

Customer–company interaction is said to be at the core of the organizational response following a failed service encounter (Schaefers and Schamari, 2015). Bobocel and Zdaniuk (2005) have called for more research on factors that moderate the effects of explanation following a service failure. Moreover, one of the consumer’s primary normative expectations following a service failure is to receive an explanation from the service firm as to “what went wrong” (McCull-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003). Both the social support literature as well as the informational support literature within the services marketing domain underline the need for and importance of customer–company interaction following a failed service encounter.

The social support literature too underlines the importance of information support (such as providing information and advice) to help deal with a problem. Particularly in the service failure domain, informational support (the service firm providing explanations for the failed service

encounter) has been recognized and typologies are offered such as *retrospective information* and *prospective information* (Mattila, 2006). Past research has investigated the moderating effect of explanations and found support for what is popularly known as the “fair process effect”, which is that as outcomes worsen, process factors (such as explanation) play an influential role in fairness and other judgments (Bradley and Sparks, 2012).

Past research on the quality of explanation as a potential moderator has found that ‘explanation quality directly affects attitudinal and behavioral outcomes’ (Shaw *et al.*, 2003). We extend the logic behind these past studies in predicting that as the magnitude of consumer advocacy increases, organizational response in the form of explanation (retrospective versus prospective information) will moderate the effects of consumer advocacy on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes such as community usefulness and brand avoidance. Thus, we posit that:

H3(a): The effects of consumer advocacy on community usefulness are moderated by organizational response.

H3(b): The effects of consumer advocacy on brand avoidance are moderated by organizational response.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 *Study context*

Online food and grocery retailing is largely hyper-local. Most retailers operating in the context where this study was carried out promised same-day delivery. Some aggressive retailers were promising delivery within three hours from the time of placing the order. Expectation is an outcome of brand promise and such expectations brands create may be explicit or implicit (Gronroos, 2006).

Three large housing societies were chosen as they not only form a natural stratum, but also have a very high chance of residents being part of a natural network in which exchange of information happens. The presence of a community-specific WhatsApp group (a housing society community group) made them ideal for our study. Members of the community actively used the community WhatsApp group to share a wide range of issues that they perceived were of common interest.

This method is in line with the practice of using forums for researching online word of mouth (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). The inclusion of three distinct community forums (WhatsApp groups) from the same city provides greater external validity. At least one member of the research group was a member of the WhatsApp community.

Specifically with reference to the online food and grocery retail service, members freely shared messages pertaining to the availability of seasonal fruits and vegetables (for instance, mango during the summer), returning packaged goods nearing their expiry date, arrival of the delivery van later than the usual time, special discounts, addition of new items to the catalogue (for instance, homemade cookies), missing items, fruits and vegetables being “not fresh”, last-minute cancellation of orders and so on.

The focus of the study was restricted to examining the organizational response and its impact on consumers’ behavioral outcomes following unmet expectations. Dissatisfaction may result when the actual consumer’s experiences do not match with the expectations shaped by the brand promise (Halstead, 1989; Oliver, 1980) and as a consequence brand avoidance may occur (Lee and Conroy, 2005; Oliva *et al.*, 1992; Thompson *et al.*, 2006).

Past research has established unmet expectations as a motivator of brand avoidance behavior using the expectancy disconfirmation and dissatisfaction theories (Lee *et al.*, 2009a, b). The context fills an interesting research gap, as past research on brand avoidance has paid less attention to services and their brands (Kavaliauskė and Simanavičiūtė, 2015).

4.2 *Method and procedure*

We used a scenario implanted in a survey method to test the effects of consumer advocacy on community usefulness and brand avoidance. We exposed participants to scenarios that differed with respect to the organizational response (explanations in the form of retrospective or prospective information). The study used a between-subjects design. Subjects were members of the three WhatsApp communities described above. The subjects were randomly assigned to one of the two scenarios, each containing two sections.

Section 1 confronted the respondents with the WhatsApp message that they shared. This helped the respondents to keep the right frame of reference.

In Section 2, we manipulated the organizational response (explanation provided) by adding different information to the basic scenario. Organizational response was manipulated by including the information on the assumed cause of last-minute cancellation of the order by the online grocer. In the retrospective information scenario, the respondent found out that “out of stock” was the reason for last-minute cancellation; and in the prospective information scenario for the same cause (i.e. out of stock), additional information was included that explained the steps initiated to prevent such a scenario in future. Having read through the scenarios, the respondents were asked to imagine

themselves in the scenario in which the online grocer offered the said explanation in response to the message they had shared on the community WhatsApp group. This self-referencing is in line with prior research (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1989) and is known to enhance participant engagement.

The procedure followed for the study is apt, as dissatisfaction and negative feelings are argued to be antecedents of brand avoidance (Khan and Lee, 2014). Last-minute cancellation of an order is a service failure. Failed service encounters are known to result in dissatisfaction as well as negative feelings. The study context pertains to experiential avoidance (Lee, 2009).

4.3 *Pretest*

The scenarios were checked for face validity. Expert researchers evaluated the scenarios for pragmatism and comprehension. Expert researchers also reviewed the items used for measuring the independent and dependent variables. A pretest was carried out involving the members of the three communities mentioned above. ANOVA results suggested that the experimental factors varied as intended ($f=81.05$, $p<.000$). The retrospective explanation score was significantly higher in the retrospective explanation condition ($M=4.78$) compared to the no-explanation condition ($M=1.34$). There was a similar case with the prospective explanation condition ($M=5.45$) when compared with the no-explanation condition ($M=1.28$).

4.4 *Participants and measures*

The participants were adult members of the housing society (home owners and their spouses). The housing society had between 300 and 800 individual dwelling units in the form of row houses and multi-storied apartments. There were approximately 1500 members in total. Over 80% of the respondents were female, college educated, in the age group of 24–38 and married. Following

Lee, Park and Han (2008), the respondents were approached after they had shared a negative experience on the WhatsApp group. A total of 101 members participated in the study. As a principle, the sample size is expected to be ten times the number of predictors of either the most complex construct or the largest independent construct leading to a particular dependent construct (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). With 101 valid respondents, this study meets the rule and hence testing the model using PLS3 is justified.

We used existing, validated measures and operationalized them using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree). Following a pretest, the scales were slightly modified to make them contextually relevant. Dissatisfaction was measured using a two-item scale that was adopted from Garcia and Perez (2011). Consumer advocacy was measured using the following four items adopted from Jayasimha & Billore (2014). Similarly, community usefulness was measured using the four items adopted from Verhagen *et al.* (2013). Measures for brand avoidance were adopted from Lee *et al.* (2009) and Delzen (2014). The organizational response in the form of retrospective and prospective information was measured using items adopted from Gelbrich (2010). **Table 2** lists construct wise items used along with their loading.

5.0 Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we used the partial least squares (PLS) approach and PLS3. The primary advantage of using PLS-structural equation modeling was that it allows for testing the conceptual model as a whole. Past research argues for the superiority of PLS in testing interactions as it does not inflate measurement errors in multiplicative terms (Chin *et al.*, 2003). As suggested by Chin (1998), a bootstrapping procedure was also performed.

5.1 *Measurement model*

The measurement model was assessed before the structural models (Hair *et al.*, 2012). Composite reliability above 0.7 is recommended by Nunnally (1978) for acceptable internal consistency. **Table 3** reports the composite reliability for the variables used in the study. The variables' convergent validity denoted by average variance extracted is 0.5 and above, as suggested by Fornell and Larker (1981), and was found to be as desired. Discriminant validity is tested by taking the square root of the average variance extracted, which should be less than the correlation between the other latent variables (Fornell and Larker, 1981). The results are shown in **Table 4**. To check for multi-collinearity of the constructs, VIF, was used, which was found to be less than 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Bootstrapping samples (500 resamples were generated from 101 responses) were used to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients and calculate the standard error (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

< **Table 3 to be placed here** >

< **Table 4 to be placed here** >

5.2 *Structural model*

Using the beta values and explained variance as the criteria, our model demonstrates very strong predictive validity. We see that the model has a good fit to the data. The results of hypothesis testing are shown in **Table 5**. The path coefficients of the structural equation model along with their t-values provided direct evidence of data supporting the hypotheses, resulting in their acceptance or rejection. According to Table 3, consumer advocacy is significantly related to community usefulness ($\beta=0.37$, $t=5.19$), thus supporting H1. According to H2, consumer advocacy has a positive effect on brand avoidance, as hypothesized ($\beta=0.58$, $t=10.92$). Hence, consumer advocates not only talk the

talk but also walk the walk. H3(a) and H3(b) pertained to the moderating relationship. H3(a) ($\beta=0.335$, $t=4.311$) indicates strong data support for organizational response moderating the relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness. H3(b) ($\beta=0.330$, $t=3.612$) indicates strong data support for organizational response moderating the relationship between consumer advocacy and brand avoidance. Past research argues for dissatisfaction as an antecedent of brand avoidance. Hence the model tested for the said relationship, which the data strongly supports ($\beta=0.448$, $t=4.591$).

The Q square value was greater than zero and hence has predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) is 0.036, which is less than 0.08 and hence is considered a good fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

<Table 5 to be placed here>

H3(a) and H3(b) pertained to the moderating role of organizational response. For ease of understanding and interpretation, the visual binning procedure of IBM SPSS 23 was used to categorize consumer advocacy and organizational response into two groups, using the median as a cutoff value. Above median values represent the high and below median values the low end of the respective distributions. Thus, consumer advocacy, brand avoidance and community usefulness can be seen on the weak–strong continuum. Similarly, organizational response is depicted on the adequacy–inadequacy continuum. The ANOVA procedure was used to check the moderating effect of organizational response.

Prospective explanation not only meets normative expectations but also builds confidence that a service firm will not subject the consumer advocate and other community members to a similar dissatisfactory experience to that recently experienced. Slope analysis (Figure 2) very clearly demonstrates this. When consumer advocacy is strong and organizational response was perceived to be adequate, perceived community usefulness was high. This is in line with the conceptualization of consumer advocacy as information exchange aimed at a larger good, which compels organizations at fault to take corrective steps. We observe a similar pattern with reference to the moderating effects of organizational response on consumer advocacy and brand avoidance (Figure 3). When consumer advocacy is strong, an adequate response from the organization could reduce brand avoidance (low).

<Figure 2 & Figure 3 to come here>

6.0 General Discussion

Both consumer advocacy as well as, social side of complaining are relatively under-researched areas. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the organizational response to consumer advocacy in the virtual-presence context. Specifically, the study investigated the relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness, as well as consumer advocacy and brand avoidance. The study context particularly used the experiential avoidance resulting from an unmet expectation following a dissatisfactory service experience. The study context was motivated by the fact that consumer's actual experiences' is the most influential factor in shaping the meaning of the brand (Berry, 2000). The study also tested the moderating effect of organizational response on the said relationships.

Given the primary purpose, which was to examine the social side of complaining, the study was carried out in three WhatsApp communities in a large Indian city. Online food and grocery service as the context was apt given the study's hyper-local focus, and was in line with the choice of WhatsApp group, as together they form a natural network in which exchange of information happens and thus constitutes a prominent context for interpersonal exchange (Miller *et al.*, 2009). Unlike previous studies, this design allowed us to collect responses from respondents immediately after they shared a dissatisfactory service experience with members of the community.

The Key findings of the study are:

- a. Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on community usefulness. This finding strengthens the altruistic motivations for consumer advocacy. Hence consumer advocacy is different from other forms of NWOM.
- b. Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on brand avoidance. This finding is novel because it underlines the fact that consumer advocates 'Walk the talk', particularly when they use social media for sharing their dissatisfactory experience.
- c. The effects of consumer advocacy on community usefulness are moderated by organizational response. This finding has significant implications for service firms. Effective organizational response can create a 'Good Second Impression'.
- d. The effects of consumer advocacy on brand avoidance are moderated by organizational response. This novel finding is a welcome respite for service firms, as appropriate organizational response can mitigate brand avoidance.

Following an adequate response from the service firm (prospective information), the respondents are likely to attribute (internal attribution) the organizational response to their advocacy efforts. This is consistent with "self-serving bias", a tendency in which people attribute positive

outcomes to internal factors (Fournier, 1998). Since prospective information caters to the normative expectations of knowing what the service firm would do to prevent the problem in future, it is likely to reassure consumer advocates that community members do not have to face negative marketplace experiences.

On the contrary, when consumer advocacy is strong and the organizational response was perceived to be inadequate, the perceived community usefulness was low. Even though during the pretest the retrospective explanation score was higher than that for the control group, simply meeting the normative expectations of a response following a service failure might be inadequate. In other words, retrospective information is better than no communication at all. However, retrospective information is not adequate to satisfy the consumer advocates. Hence the perceived community usefulness could be low.

We observe a similar pattern with reference to the moderating effects of organizational response on consumer advocacy and brand avoidance. An adequate response from the organization could reduce brand avoidance. From a managerial point of view, this finding is very significant. A prospective explanation could be a very effective antidote to brand avoidance. Ways and means to restrict and alleviate brand avoidance form a major area of interest to practitioners. Prospective information first and foremost meets consumers' normative expectations. Explanations pertaining to the steps initiated by the organization to prevent recurrence of the problem might build enough confidence about the service firm and its services that in turn mitigates the brand avoidance attitude. Genuine change is a known brand avoidance antidote (Lee, 2009). Prospective explanation signals an organizational intention to make things better. This is a welcome contribution to the literature.

6.2 Theoretical Implications:

The study offers new and novel findings that enrich the body of literature, as well as have significant relevance for practice.

The study is novel as it investigates the relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness. This relationship assumes significance given the increasing use of social media and other consumer empowering technologies for open complaining. In our study context (WhatsApp community groups), the members are part of the natural network that encompasses both online and offline presence. A positive relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness strengthens the argument that consumer advocacy is altruistic and not just venting. This finding adds to the growing evidence supporting the theory of social sharing, which states that one of the primary reasons for people communicating their emotions openly is to strengthen their social ties (Rime, 2009). Support for H1 also underlines the reason for consumers participating in communities where social relationships with others are developed and strengthened by sharing product and service consumption experiences. Thus, community usefulness is social and altruistic (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013) and consumer advocacy, a form of complaining, is a way to help other community members.

The study offers fresh insights by investigating the relationship between consumer advocacy and brand avoidance. There is a growing recognition that knowing what motivates consumers to choose not to consume is important (Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013). By studying brand avoidance, we respond to the call for studying brand avoidance in the service brand context and the emerging market context. Our methodology is unique compared to the single case-study context used in the past for studying brand avoidance. The focus of the study was brand avoidance, which is a brand-level rejection of consumption and is part of the anti-consumption phenomenon (Kim *et al.*, 2013).

H2, which investigated the relationship between consumer advocacy and brand avoidance, provides support for the argument that one of the motivational frames for brand avoidance is consumers' collective concern (Iyer and Muncy, 2009; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Given the fact that a negative consumption experience can be constructed within a social context, the positive effect of consumer advocacy, a form of social complaining and brand avoidance, is natural. This finding is a welcome addition to both the consumer advocacy as well as the brand avoidance literature.

Being the first study to investigate the moderating effects of organizational response on consumer advocacy and community usefulness, the study offers fresh insights. H3 and H4 pertain to the moderating effects of organizational response. Slope analysis reveals an interesting pattern. When consumer advocacy is strong and organizational response was perceived to be adequate, perceived community usefulness was high. This is in line with the conceptualization of consumer advocacy as information exchange aimed at a larger good, which compels organizations at fault to take corrective steps. This finding underlines the informational and instrumental (problem-solving) value of participating in virtual communities (Dholakia *et al.*, 2004) and might lead to social enhancement.

6.3 *Practical Implications:*

A positive relationship between consumer advocacy and community usefulness strengthens the argument that consumer advocacy is altruistic and not just venting. Consumers participate in communities where social relationships with others are developed and strengthened by sharing product and service consumption experiences. Thus, community usefulness is social and altruistic (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013) and consumer advocacy, a form of complaining, is a way to help

other community members. Service firms will have to learn to recognize and appropriately deal with consumer advocacy which is significantly differently from other forms of NWOM.

Data support for the relationship between consumer advocacy and brand avoidance, underlines the argument that one of the motivational frames for brand avoidance is consumers' collective concern (Iyer and Muncy, 2009; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Service firms should take this into account while designing the recovery strategies. Any mismatch between expectations and organizational response could result in double deviation.

The moderating effects of organizational response is of particular relevance to service managers. Genuine change is a known brand avoidance antidote (Lee, 2009). Prospective explanation signals an organizational intention to make things better. Hence prospective explanation, could win over consumer advocates and thus mitigate brand avoidance. This is a welcome contribution to the literature. The fact that effective organizational response can create a 'Good Second Impression' and mitigate brand avoidance should bring respite to service firms.

6.4 *Limitations & Future Research*

Online food and grocery service was chosen for the study. The choice of WhatsApp group was apt given the hyper local focus of the service. Unlike previous studies, this design allowed us to collect responses from respondents immediately after they shared a dissatisfactory service experience with members of the community. Future studies could consider non hyper local online retail as well as other offline services. The Uses & Gratification (U&G) vary significantly for social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instant Messaging Services. Future studies can use other social networking sites for their study context.

The study considered two forms of explanation provided by the service firm namely, retrospective and prospective explanation. A service firm's response could include many other forms of explanation such as apology, justification, referential and excuse. Future studies can investigate the moderation effects of other forms of explanation.

Even though the sample size ($n=101$) meets the principle requirement of sample size being ten times the number of predictors of either the most complex construct or the largest independent construct leading to a particular dependent construct (Wasko and Faraj, 2005) for testing the model using PLS3, future studies particularly using Facebook, Twitter and can aim for higher sample size.

Similarly, Replicating and extending this work in a different cultural context may offer interesting insights. Future studies may consider testing brand avoidance at two levels namely, corporate level and product level (Lim et al, 2016) as well as considering services on the SEC continuum (Search, Experience & Credence) may provide novel insights (Galetzka et al, 2006).

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Table 1(a): Summary of Literature - Consumer Advocacy

Study	Key findings
Chelminski and Coulter (2011)	Pioneering study that defined consumer advocacy as “a generalized tendency to share market information to warn consumers so that they can avoid negative marketplace experience”.
Chang et al (2013)	Identified consumer advocates as those who “courageously make their voices heard to enable corporations to quickly identify problems and provide solutions to minimize the effect of NWOM”.
Roy et al (2014)	A dyadic conceptualization of advocacy. Differentiates between customer advocacy and consumer advocacy. Consumer advocacy is conceptualized as “Practiced by the consumers that reflects a tendency to offer enthusiastic referral for a brand or a firm”.
Fu et al (2015)	Resonates the view expressed by Chelminski & Coulter (2011). Argues that “Consumers in communal relationship norms are likely to do something for other people without expecting anything in return”.
Song & Hollenbeck (2015)	Recommends service firms to actively engage with consumer advocates by “appealing to consumers’ desire to interact with firms by offering more opportunities for them to voice problems so that issues can be quickly identified and resolved”.
Jayasimha & Srivastava (2017)	Examined the specific emotions that cause idiosyncratic consumer advocacy. Investigated the direct relationship between regret & disappointment on consumer advocacy. The study found negative relationship between emotion regret & consumer advocacy.

Table 1(b): Summary of Literature - Community Usefulness

Study	Key findings
Dichter (1966)	Identified 'other involvement' which is to give something in return to the receiver as one of the motivations for WOM communication.
Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1993)	Concern for others, a "genuine desire" to help others make a better marketplace as one the motives for WOM communication.
Sundaram, Mitra & Webster (1998)	Helping the company (company usefulness) and altruism, to prevent others from experiencing problems encountered by the focal individual was identified as one the motives for WOM communication.
Verhagen et al (2013)	Examined Community usefulness (desire to help other community members) and company usefulness (provide feedback to company) as a moderator between NWOM & behavioral outcomes such as switching and re-patronage.

Table 1 (C): Summary of Literature – Explanation

Study	Key findings
Tax & Brown (2000)	Service recovery measures could include both tangible (for instance compensation) as well as intangible (for instance apology & explanations).
Mattila & Patterson (2004)	It is necessary to understand the appropriate recovery strategies (service firm's response) in a given situation.
Bies (1987)	Explanation is a broad term and could include excuse (attributing external cause), justification (admit responsibility), comparison (compare with others) and penitence (public expression of remorse). Adequate explanation can positively affect the perceived fairness which in turn can mitigate moral outrage. Thus adequate explanation can reduce the extent of negative emotions and dissatisfaction.
Wang et al (2009).	Explanation is a cost effective and frequently used recovery strategy.
McColl-Kennedy & Sparks (2003)	Expectation for explanation following service failure is normative and universal.
Mattila & Cranage (2005)	Informational fairness influences post service failure satisfaction.
Shaw et al (2003)	A meta analytic review, excuses are more effective than justifications.
Sparks & Callan (1995)	Explanations affect customer satisfaction by changing the attributions as explanations help customers reframe the failure event.
Davidow (2003)	Informational support can be retrospective (why failure occurred) or prospective (what is going to happen).

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

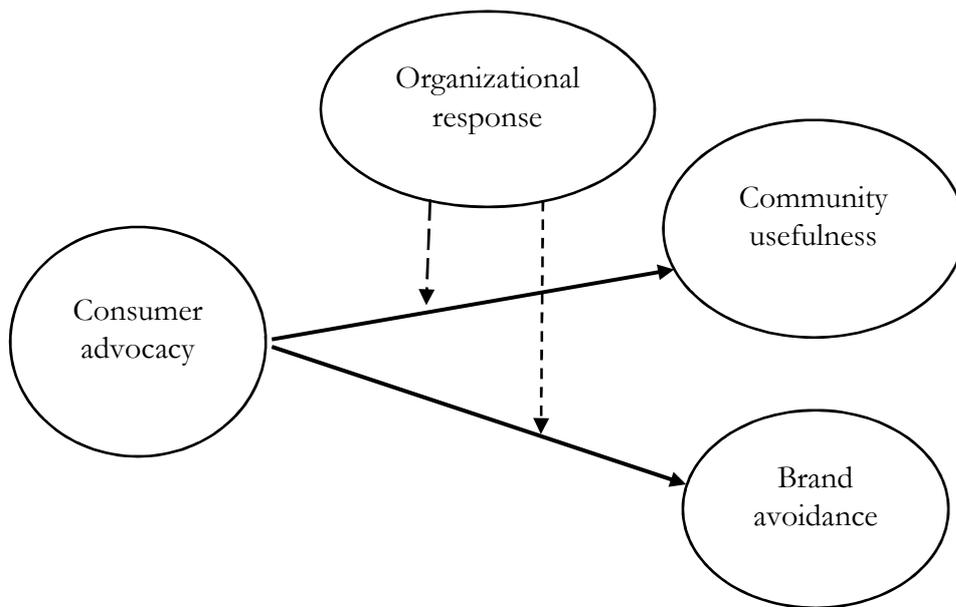


Table 2: Measurement Items & Factor loadings

Construct	Measurement Items	Factor loadings
Dissatisfaction	On the whole, I was dissatisfied with my experience with the service	0.998
	Overall, my negative experiences outweighed my positive experiences.	0.999
Consumer advocacy	I have warned others about this disappointing service experience	0.951
	I have warned others, hoping that they will inform me about similar disappointing service experiences	0.962
	I warn others, as it makes me feel good	0.951
	I warn others, to protect them from experiencing similar disappointing experience.	0.949
Community usefulness	I want to help others with my own experiences	0.982
	I want to give others the opportunity to buy right services	0.972
	I want to make it easier for others to choose the online food & grocer	0.980
	I want to provide others useful with useful advice to make a good decision.	0.981
Brand avoidance	The performance XYZ brand online grocer is poor	0.975
	This brand (XYZ online grocer) has caused inconvenience	0.972
	I don't like this brand because I am dissatisfied by it	0.974
	I would avoid this brand (XYZ online grocer) due its bad service.	0.973
Organizational explanation	The XYZ online grocer explained why the problem occurred	0.931
	The explanation provided by XYZ online grocer was adequate	0.944
	The information provided by the XYZ online grocer was satisfactory.	0.947

Table 3: Psychometric Properties

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
BA	0.982	0.984	0.986	0.948
CA	0.967	0.968	0.976	0.909
CS	0.997	0.997	0.998	0.997
CU	0.985	0.986	0.989	0.958
ORR	0.936	0.979	0.959	0.885

BA=Brand Avoidance, CA=Consumer Advocacy, CS=Satisfaction, CU=Community Usefulness, ORR=Organizational Response.

Table 4: Convergent & Discriminant Validity

	BA	CA	CS	CU	ORR
BA	0.974				
CA	-0.659	0.953			
CS	-0.432	0.179	0.998		
CU	-0.536	0.362	0.735	0.979	
ORR	-0.130	-0.043	0.453	0.326	0.941

Table 05: Hypotheses Results

Path coefficients	β value	T-Statistics	P values	Result
CA-- > BA	0.582	10.920	0.000	Accepted
CA -- > CU	0.376	5.109	0.000	Accepted
CS -- > BA	0.448	4.591	0.000	Accepted
ORR*CU	0.335	4.311	0.000	Accepted
ORR*BA	0.330	3.612	0.001	Accepted

Figure 2: Interaction effect: Community Usefulness

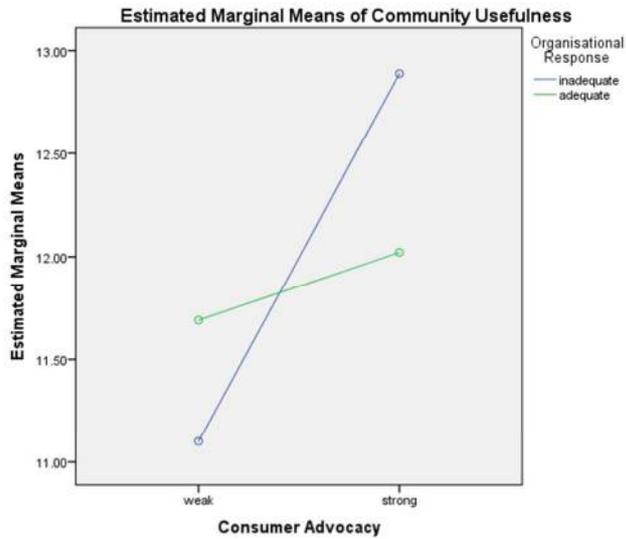


Figure 3: Interaction effect: Brand Avoidance

