The Influence of Consumer Altruism on Complaining Behavior

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This paper examines the effects of consumer altruism on complaining behavior in the context of a dissatisfactory marketplace experience. Adult consumers participated in the data collection, and results show that consumer altruism is positively related to both consumer voicing and negative word-of-mouth when controlling for the severity of a marketplace encounter failure presented to respondents in a scenario format. The findings suggest that appealing to altruistic motives might facilitate consumer voicing, thus, benefiting companies by providing feedback about problems arising in the marketplace and preventing negative word-of-mouth. Consumer protection agencies might also consider altruistic appeals in soliciting information about shoddy practices in the marketplace.

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Extended Abstract
This paper examines the effects of consumer altruism on complaining behavior in the context of a dissatisfactory marketplace experience. Complaining behavior is conceptualized as consumer voicing directed at the company at fault and negative word-of-mouth communicated to others (Singh 1988). Altruism can be conceptualized as a constellation of actions performed by individuals to assist others that make people performing these acts feel good about themselves. Price, Feick, and Guskey (1995) introduced the concept of market helping behavior defined as “acts performed in the marketplace that benefit others in their purchases and consumption.” Although market helping behavior was studied in the context of consumers helping each other in shopping tasks and providing marketplace information, this construct also captures altruistic tendencies that might motivate dissatisfied consumers to warn others of negative experiences in the marketplace context. Past research has investigated a number of antecedents of complaining behavior including severity of dissatisfaction leading to complaining (Singh and Wilkes 1996), consumer self-confidence (Bearden and Teel 1980), a psychological need to vent dissatisfaction (Kowalski 1996) and culture (Huang 1994, Keng 1995).

Altruism has been examined in past research in the context of charitable donations (Strahilevitz 1997); however, research has not examined the potential influence that altruism may have on consumer complaining behaviors. The purpose of this study is to examine whether consumer altruism is indeed related to the likelihood for both consumer voicing and negative word-of-mouth. Importantly, research on complaining behavior has demonstrated the impact of the severity of consumer satisfaction. Specifically, Singh and Wilkes (1996) have shown that dissatisfaction intensity affects the consumer complaint response process: the greater the dissatisfaction the more likely the consumer is to engage in a complaint action. Bearden and Oliver (1985) provided evidence that a greater problem cost stimulates both voicing and negative word-of-mouth. Additionally, Richins (1983) has shown that severity of the problem experienced by consumers increases the likelihood of negative word-of-mouth. Thus, severity of dissatisfaction is included as a control variable in this study for both voicing and negative word-of-mouth.

A survey methodology with scenarios manipulating the severity of marketplace encounter failure was used in this study. A mailing of 321 questionnaires to a convenience sample of adult, non-student consumers (25-54 years old) recruited by college students resulted in 280 complete and valid responses (87 percent response rate). Respondents were asked to read a description of a dissatisfactory marketplace experience and then indicate their likelihood to engage in voicing (i.e., complaining directly to the company at fault) and negative word-of-mouth (i.e., letting others know about the negative experience). The measure of voicing included two items (Pearson r=.78) and the construct of word-of-mouth included three items (Cronbach’s alpha=.88). Both measures of consumer complaining were derived from past literature (Day and Bodur 1978, Villarreal-Camacho 1983, Blodget and Tax 1993). Additionally, a five-item measure of consumer altruism, developed based on the market helping behavior measure (Price, Feick, and Guskey 1995), was included in the survey (Cronbach’s alpha=.85).

Two multiple regression equations were used to examine the relationships between consumer altruism, the severity of the dissatisfaction with the encounter and the dependent measures of voicing and negative word-of-mouth. The results indicate that consumer altruism is a statistically significant predictor for both voicing (Adjusted $R^2=.23$, $\beta=2.23$, t=4.24, p<.001) and negative word-of-mouth (Adjusted $R^2=.28$, $\beta=.266$, t=5.24, p<.001), when controlling for the severity of the encounter failure (also a statistically significant predictor, $\beta=.455$, t=8.98, p<.001). These results have important implications for marketers and consumer protection agencies. Past research has indicated that, in general, the incidence of consumer voicing is low and this behavior needs to be facilitated (TARP 1986, Vavra 1992). Additionally, past studies have provided ample evidence that consumer voicing can be beneficial to companies in providing negative feedback quickly, improving consumer satisfaction, and preventing negative word-of-mouth among consumers (Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987, Tax et al. 1998, Nyer 2000).

The findings of this research imply that one of the important motivators for consumer complaining is an inclination of consumers to help others by warning them about dissatisfactory marketplace experiences and preventing them from experiencing such negative encounters. It appears that the greater the consumer altruism, the greater the likelihood for voicing the concerns to the company at fault and the greater the propensity to engage in negative word-of-mouth to others. Companies interested in facilitating consumer voicing to find about problems quickly so they can be addressed before a major fallout occurs could use altruism appeals to encourage consumers to voice their concerns by emphasizing the helpfulness of complaining not only for the company at fault but also for the welfare of the current and future consumers. Consumer protection agencies might also consider the use of altruistic appeals in soliciting information about shoddy practices in the marketplace.
The Impact of Culture Orientation on Consumption Impulsiveness and Beer Consumption

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Beer consumption is an extremely important consumer phenomenon. Given this importance, the lack of research examining the determinants of consumer beer consumption is striking. Further, research has never investigated the role of culture orientation in consumers’ beer consumption decision. In this paper, we propose that individualism versus collectivism culture orientation has a systematic impact on beer consumption and consumers’ self-construal and the consequent consumption impulsivity are two factors that systematically affect consumers’ likelihood of engaging in beer consumption.

Examining the role of self-construal in impulsive consumption decision like beer consumption is a unique contribution of our work. More generally, this research is important for four reasons. First, we fill a conceptual gap in the beer consumption literature by investigating the role of culture orientation. Second, we provide ways to reconcile the seemingly conflicting results in the literature. Our results provide a plausible conceptualization to reconcile the divergent results in the literature. Third, we provide both managerial and public policy implications. Through demonstrating the impact of culture orientation and self-construal on beer consumption, we provide a constructivist view on beer consumption, suggesting that beer consumption is a malleable process and there is ample room for policy makers to exert efforts. Fourth, we offer the first ever experimental evidence on the relationship between self-construal and consumption impulsiveness. Accordingly, we provide the complete causal knowledge among the constructs of culture orientation, self-construal, consumption impulsiveness and beer consumption.

Hypothesis Development

What determines consumers’ beer consumption tendency? As reviewed by Hirschman (1992), impulsiveness plays a large role in beer consumption tendency. Given this underlying process, our key argument is that a construct that can systematically affect consumers’ impulsive tendency should theoretically affect their beer consumption. We posit self-construal to be one such construct.

Self-construal has been defined as “the relationship between the self and others and, especially, the degree to which they [people] see themselves as separate from others or as connected with others” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). Two prominent dimensions of self-construal include the degree of independence and/or interdependence of a person.
Research also posits a relationship between self-construal and consumption impulsivity (Kacen & Lee, 2002). Specifically, when an independent self-construal is activated consumers tend to be impulsive. In contrast, when an interdependent self-construal is activated, consumers tend to be less impulsive.

If self-construal systematically affects beer consumption tendency, then consumers from collectivistic cultures should show less beer consumption tendency than those from individualistic cultures. Formally:

H1: Cultural orientation will influence consumers’ beer consumption tendency. Specifically, consumers with a collectivist orientation will tend to have lower beer consumption tendency than consumer with an individualistic orientation.

H2: Self-construal will influence consumers’ beer consumption tendency. Specifically, consumers with an interdependent self-construal will tend to have lower beer consumption tendency than consumers with an independent self-construal.

H3: Consumption impulsivity will mediate the effect of self-construal on beer consumption tendency.

Next we report results from three studies. Study 1 and 2 are designed to test hypothesis 1, while Study 3—building on Study 1 and 2—tests hypotheses 2 and 3.

Study 1a, b, & 2
Beer consumption per capita data of forty-two countries in 1999 were used to test hypothesis 1. The consumption per capita of liters serves as the measure of central tendency of each specific country’s beer consumption.

Country scores on culture orientation are taken from the Hofstede’s cultural analysis website (2005). Income data are from United Nation’s website.

Hypothesis 1. We ran a regression on per capita beer consumption level. Specifically, the effect of individualism versus collectivism was significant (r (1, 40)=3.29, p<.05). Thus, hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

Beer consumption tendency data of fifty states in 2002 were used to test hypothesis 1 in Study 2. State scores on culture orientation are taken from existing study (Vandello and Cohen, 1999). Hypothesis 1 was confirmed through this approach too.

Study 3
A total of 75 undergraduates from a large southwestern U.S. university participated for course credit. We used a 2 (Self-Construal: Interdependent vs. Independent)—between-subjects design.

Participants were told that they were taking part in two different studies. The first study consisted of the priming material for activating the self-construal. This approach of priming self-construal was adapted from past studies (Mandel, 2003).

After this, participants were probed on their attitude toward drinking beer on question of “How do you feel about drinking beer at this moment?” They rated drinking beer on bad vs. good and dislike vs. like (r=0.92), with higher scores indicate more positive attitude.

Lastly participants were asked their thoughts on the study purpose and then debriefed. No one was correct in guessing the research purpose.

Hypothesis 2. To test hypothesis 2, we ran a regression on the beer consumption attitude scale. We coded the independent self-construal as 1 and interdependent self-construal as -1. Specifically, the effect of self-construal was significant (r (1, 73)=2.29, p<.05), indicating that independent tends to hold more positive attitude toward drinking beer than those with interdependent. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3. We ran a set of regression analyses based on Baron and Kenny’s (1986) suggestions for testing for mediation. We found that consumption impulsivity mediated the effect of self-construal on the beer consumption tendency. These results fully support hypothesis 3.

General Discussion
Our results are consistent with the existing literature on self-construal and impulsiveness. For example, Kacen & Lee (2002) found that consumers with independent self-construals tend to be more impulsive than those consumers with interdependent self-construals. We extend this literature in a number of ways. We provided a stronger test of this connection by manipulating self-construal rather than measuring self-construal only. In addition, we extended the causal linkage between self-construal and consumption impulsiveness to the domain of beer consumption.

References


Stinkin’ Inconvenience!
How Consumers Experience and Respond to Disgust
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Abstract
We explore how consumers deal with feelings of disgust in consumption situations. We look at the common elicitors of disgust, and discover two categories not previously documented in the literature: (1) ignorance, and (2) things that did not work out as planned, desired, or imagined. In Study 2 we use scenarios to look at responses to disgust in consumption situations, and in Study 3 we manipulate scenarios to see if reported responses in study 2 are how people actually behave.

Introduction
What disgusts consumers? How do consumers respond to their feelings of disgust? Disgust can be elicited in response to physical objects, and to social violations (Haidt 1997; Rozin et al. 2000). Several researchers take the view that the disgust emotion grew with human evolution, from a way to guard the human body from bacteria and illness (Haidt 1997; Rozin et al. 2000), to an emotion that helps humans know how to behave in society (Haidt 1997). In other words the emotion disgust serves an important function in society.

Disgust, as it is researched now, is divided into two major categories, core disgust and socio-moral disgust. Core disgust elicitors include food, animals, body bi-products, sexual deviance, poor hygiene, and contact with death (Haidt 1997). Socio-moral disgust is elicited by contact with evil, or objects that are associated with evil or dirt (i.e., a shirt worn by an evil person). According to Haidt et al (1997), the following are often categorized as disgusting: “racism, brutality, hypocrisy, political attitudes, and violations of important social relationships.”

Linked to social wellbeing and social interests, disgust is considered a moral emotion (Rozin et al. 2000). It motivates people to act in a particular ways, and to avoid certain actions.

Disgust has been identified as an emotion with relevant implications for advertising (Batra and Holbrook 1990; Holbrook and Batra 1987). Thus, it is curious that more research on the relationship between disgust and consumer behavior has not been conducted.

In the current study we are interested in how consumers deal with feelings of disgust that arise in consumption situations, and how feelings of disgust influence future perceptions, behaviors, and intentions in similar situations.

Study 1
Methodology. We gave questionnaires to 108 undergraduate students at a northeastern university. Because disgust is a little-studied topic in the marketing literature, our first goal was to verify the meanings of disgust that have been found in the psychology literature. We asked participants to define disgust, to give examples of times when they felt disgusted, or experienced disgust, and to describe what they did in these situations.

Results. Our participants’ definitions of disgust overlapped with previous definitions of core and socio-moral disgust. When asked to list what disgusted them, core and social disgust elicitors were equally prevalent. 91.7% and 90.7% respectively.

In line with existing disgust research, our respondents indicated that disgust, or a disgusting object or situation made them angry (20.4%), annoyed them (22.2%), and upset them (22.2%).

Taking existing research further our study revealed that the objects and situations that cause disgust, as well as emotions facilitated by disgust have broadened. The participants included two categories of disgust not previously documented in the literature. These two categories are (1) ignorance, and (2) inconvenience, things that did not work out as planned, desired, or imagined. 19.4% of our respondents stated that they are disgusted by situations that are inconvenient to them (i.e. waiting in a line; going to an early morning class; walking in the cold, etc.), and that these situations are disappointing (23.1%) and frustrating (10.2%).

According to Nabi (2002) there is a difference between the theoretical definition of disgust, which refers to core disgust, and the common use of the word, which takes on a broader meaning including irritation, annoyance, or anger. It is our observation that the experience of disgust has gone beyond physical or social survival situations, to include perceptions of inconvenience, and interruptions to individual comfort. Perhaps this is a by-product of today’s high-technology and web-based world, in which individuals are increasingly isolated.

Based on this observation, we see a need to look more closely at a definition for disgust in the consumption context. Our first goal is to create a current definition of disgust, and to describe its elicitors and how people respond to it. We propose that in addition to current definitions of disgust, feelings of disgust are also felt any time an individual’s personal space and “ways-of-being” are invaded.

Proposed Studies
Consumer responses to feelings of disgust in consumption situations are not well understood. According to past research, and verified by our participants, disgust yields a passive response.

We are curious about how individuals respond to disgust in consumption situations, where the consumer has more control. Do disgusted consumers try to escape situations, or do they take corrective action? Does the response vary by the nature of the disgust elicitor? Do customers try to avoid socio-morally disgusting situations (i.e. avoid a store in which employees are not treated fairly) and inconveniences while taking action to have a core disgust elicitor fixed (i.e. have the dirty table top at a restaurant cleaned)? We propose two additional studies to investigate these questions.

Study 2
In Study 2 participants will read scenarios about situations that evoke either socio-moral or core disgust. Participants will complete a questionnaire about each situation to indicate the emotions they would feel in each situation, and how they believe they would respond.