Business Horizons (2018) **xxx**, xxx—xxx

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

ELSEVIER

KELLEY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

www.elsevier.com/locate/bushor

Timeliness, transparency, and trust: A framework for managing online customer complaints

Jennifer L. Stevens [a], Brian I. Spaid [b,*], Michael Breazeale [c], Carol L. Esmark-Jones [c]

[a] *College of Business & Innovation, University of Toledo, 2801 W. Bancroft Street, Toledo, OH 43606, U.S.A.*
[b] *College of Business Administration, Marquette University, 606 N. 13th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233, U.S.A.*
[c] *College of Business, Mississippi State University, 324 McCool Hall, Mississippi State, MS 39762, U.S.A.*

KEYWORDS
Online complaints;
Negative online reviews;
Brand relationship;
Customer service response;
Brand transparency

Abstract This article discusses several practical solutions for dealing with online customer complaints. Online complaints are inevitable; how a firm responds can make the difference. There are techniques that managers can use not only to minimize the detrimental impact of online complaints, but also to produce beneficial outcomes. Herein, we introduce our 3T framework, designed to help managers and support teams respond to online complaints in a thoughtful and measured way. We build on word-of-mouth research and several theories from marketing, service marketing, journalism, and business ethics. With so many reviews posted online every second, firms must employ best practices grounded in empirical research and solid conceptualization to deal with this important component of online customer service.

© 2018 Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Challenges of the digital complaint department

One thing that e-commerce and social media have taught us is that consumers are not shy about making their voices heard online. These voices take the form of online comments, product reviews, blog

---

* Corresponding author
E-mail addresses: jls1554@msstate.edu (J.L. Stevens), brian.spaid@marquette.edu (B.I. Spaid), mbreazeale@business.msstate.edu (M. Breazeale), c.esmark@msstate.edu (C.L. Esmark-Jones)

0007-6813/$ — see front matter © 2018 Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.007

posts, and aggregated rankings. They can be shared on a multitude of platforms, including social media sites, corporate sponsored websites, and online review sites. Collectively, these communications are called *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM). eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). Unfortunately for marketers, dissatisfied customers generate more word-of-mouth and eWOM than satisfied customers, and the most highly dissatisfied customers are also most likely to leave online reviews and comments (Anderson, 1998; Richins, 1983). These online reviews play a large role in consumer attitudes toward firms and brands as "one of the most trusted sources of consumer confidence" in purchase decisions, despite the fact that research indicates that reviews may be biased and easily manipulated (Aral, 2014, p. 47). Indeed, a Cone Research study found that four out of five shoppers have changed their decision to purchase a product or service based only on a negative review they read online (Cone, 2011). These findings from this respected market research firm are consistent with academic research demonstrating that customers do indeed find eWOM from other consumers to be more useful in general (Bronner & de Hoog, 2010) and more trustworthy (Utz, Kerkhof, & van den Bos, 2012).

Online complaints are not always bad news for the reviewed firm though. Through ongoing social media dialogue, firms have direct access to consumer opinions and knowledge. Negative reviews can allow firms to quickly and easily identify existing problems. Smart marketers value this opportunity and utilize the information to improve upon weaknesses. Social media provides new channels for firms to interact with customers and recover from service or product failure. Because of the very public nature of social media, service recovery efforts that are well managed can shine a spotlight on superior customer service, impacting not only the original poster but other potential customers as well. Despite the increased power of the consumer, the firm now possesses the capacity to manage the potential damage from an online complaint effectively and do so in a way that even improves its reputation. The key, though, lies in the way the firm responds.

A firm must first be willing to recognize that traditional management and customer service approaches may not always translate perfectly to an online setting. Providing support to dissatisfied customers who express their displeasure online presents a unique set of challenges. Traditionally, a customer provides feedback through direct contact with the firm or another individual, but online reviews are grounded in the idea of sharing. Sharing operates outside the hours and channels controlled by the firm itself. Thus, an online review is not limited to a small number of people or to any posted hours of operation. The marketer is then forced to pay attention to this 'digital complaint department' wherever and whenever it may emerge.

To assist managers who may feel unprepared to navigate the potential pitfalls of online complaints, a team of researchers with backgrounds in retailing and relationship marketing presents best practices to online complaint management. The research presented demonstrates that there is normative, practical advice for managers that will not only minimize the detrimental impact of online complaints, but may even produce beneficial outcomes. By adhering to the framework outlined below, a firm can increase the chances that customer loyalty is undamaged and that customers' relationships with the brand are just as strong as before complaints were posted.

2. The 3T framework of managing online customer complaints

Consumer complaints are no longer a private matter. Instead, upset consumers now take to public forums and social media to express dissatisfaction with a firm (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Consumers can now spread negative WOM not just to their close network, but an almost infinite number of others. The increased power that consumers yield has changed the way a brand must develop and maintain its reputation since firms are no longer in total control of the posted message (Breazeale, 2009). Yet we suggest that firms that embrace the ability to hear, not ignore, the amplified voice of its consumers will obtain a competitive advantage. However, recent market research about American Express customers suggests that firms are still not adequately handling online complaints; only 21% of respondents report always receiving an answer and having their customer service issues resolved when using social media to complain (Ebiquity, 2014). How can firms embrace the negative and successfully turn it into a positive?

We conducted four empirical studies that examined customer reactions to several real-world scenarios related to online complaint management. These scenarios—the impact of the responding party, the nature of the response, and removal of the

دریافت فوری ← متن کامل مقاله

ISIArticles
مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات