

Integrating Emotion and the Theory of Planned Behavior to Explain Consumers' Activism in the Internet Web site

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Abstract

The present research integrates the core aspects of anger with the theory of planned behavior to investigate factors influencing online activism in a Web site. This study conducted online survey, and the sample was members who joined the *V4400 Sobi-ja-heem* Web site. The Web site *V4400 Sobi-ja-heem* was initiated by a consumer who was irritated at the cell phone manufacturer Samsung Inc. because its model, "Any-Call V4400," had major product defects such as the malfunction of the camcorder, poor tone quality, fuzziness of the screen, and broken text messages. The findings suggests that adding anger in Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) enhances the explanatory power of the theory in predicting an intention to participate in activities to correct the issue, which indicates the possibility of combining emotion and the TPB in the prediction of online activism.

Introduction

In today's society, an organizational Web site is a necessity for a corporation to thrive and meet consumer needs. Businesses use web sites to provide product information for potential customers as well as to allow consumers to purchase goods and services. It can also be argued that a Web site is a powerful tool for publics through which they can pressure a company regarding an issue, such as correcting a defective product or poor services provided by a company. With the proliferation of Weblogs and other consumer activism Web sites, it is increasingly important for public relations practitioners to monitor and understand cyber activism. To date, there has been no theoretical framework developed to explain how issue publics behave within consumer activism Web sites designed to pressure organizations to address product or service issues. This study attempts to contribute to the theoretical building through combining the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and anger to explain the actions of consumers responding to defective phones manufactured by Samsung.

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behavior & Anger Activism Model

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) extended from the theory of reasoned action has been used extensively to explain socially significant behaviors. In consumerism context, a number of studies have applied the TPB to predict consumers' purchasing behavior, consumption of a product, or consumerism. Meta-analysis (Armitage & Conner, 2001) has

shown that TPB accounted for 27% and 39% of the variance in behavior and intention, respectively.

However, the model has been limited to consider affective influences on behavior (Bagozzi, 1988; Zanna & Rempel, 1988), because attitude, subjective norm, and perceived control in TPB are based on cognitive belief. For some behavior and contexts, affective variables may be important for understanding and predicting behavior. Many researchers have argued that attitude refers not only cognitive components but also affective ones (Batra & Ahtola, 1990; Edwards, 1990; McGuire, 1969; Trafimow & Sheeran, 1998). According to McGuire (1969), the affective component includes emotions, feelings, or drives associated with an attitude object, while the cognitive component includes beliefs, judgments, or the thoughts associated with an attitude object.

Recently, Bae's (2008) study in an organ donation context found that adding emotions such as empathy and sympathy toward the individual needing a cornea transplant to TPB enhanced the explanatory power of the theory in prediction intention. Arvola et al. (2008) employed affective and cognitive attitude to explain consumers' intention to purchase organic food, and the findings of the study supported the usefulness of incorporating affective attitude into the framework of TPB.

The current study also attempts to add affective attitude to TPB for obtaining a parsimonious model to explain consumers' activism in online context. According to the emotion literature (Dillard & Meijnders, 2002), there are three perspectives of emotion. First, the uni-dimensional model depicts emotion as ranging from intensely positive to intensely negative affect. Second, emotions have two dimensions in which positive and negative emotions are distinct. Finally, the discrete emotions refer to diverse emotional states and have relatively specific functions (Hullett, Loudon, & Mitra, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Weiner, 1986). This study focuses on anger as an intense negative emotion that frequently appears in consumers' response to product defects and service failures. Anger is elicited as a result of individuals' appraisals of high other-responsibility for negative events and high other-control over these negative events (Averill, 1983). What consequences are expected from a consumer's anger?

Lerner and Keltner's (2000) appraisal tendency framework argued that anger has a mediating effect between consumer appraisals about service failure and his/her retaliatory intentions or behaviors. The retaliatory behaviors refer to consumer activism: signature movement to petition, publicizing an issue through mass media or Internet, talking to their friends, organizing an event, joining an activist group, writing letters to key officials, organizing a sit-in, boycott, or so on. Similar to the appraisal tendency framework, the anger activism model (Turner, 2007) supports that anger contributes to the explanation of how actively a consumer participates in communication regarding a negative issue of a company. The model assumes that individuals possessing high levels of anger are likely to engage in activities to correct the issue.

The aim of this study is to examine how consumers' anger toward service failure of a company is integrated into a model of TPB in explaining consumer activism in the Internet Web site. To examine the research question, this study investigated a case reflecting consumers' online activism.

A Web site V4400 Sobi-ja-heem was initiated by a consumer who was irritated at the cell phone manufacturer Samsung Inc. because its model, "Any-Call V4400," had major product defects such as the malfunction of the camcorder, poor tone quality, fuzziness of the screen, and broken text messages. A number of consumers who had a similar experience with the product joined the Web site, and currently the total number of members for the Web site is close to

10,000. They strongly attacked the company and advocated for other users to join in publicizing the issue. The Web site provides various communication tools that allow members to interact with the Webmaster and other members (e.g., bulletin board, member service area, Q&A, complaint area, bug board, bug pictures room, links to other sources). Using these features, the members discussed the problems of the Anycall V4400 cell phone model and exchanged information about the issue. They also did signature movement as physical activism to file the issue with the Consumer Protection Institute and mass media. These messages and activities successfully attracted national newspapers and news channels.

Hypotheses

To test efficacy of TPB in online context, the following hypotheses are suggested;

H1: Subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control will account for a significant amount of the variance in the intention to participate in an activity to correct V4400 issue.

Another purpose of the current study is to determine if anger would be useful to explain online activism, and if integrating anger with TPB would provide a more powerful model to explain consumers' activism using the Internet.

H2: Anger will significantly account for the intention to participate in an activity to correct V4400 issue.

H3. Integrating anger and TPB will increase variance in the intention to participate in an activity to correct V4400 issue.

Finally, as assumption in TPB, this study tested whether intention is a significant predictor of behavior. Regarding V4400 issue, members in Web site have taken part in physical activism: signing of a petition to *Consumer Protection Institution*. Thus, people who have high intention to engage in an activity to fix V4400 would be likely to participate in the petition movement.

H4. Intention to engage into an activity to correct V4400 issue will significantly predict participation in the petition movement.

Method

Sample

This study conducted online survey, and the sample was members who joined the *V4400 Sobi-ja-heem* Web site. We sent an email invitation to the members with the URL address of the survey Web site. Two hundred eighty participated the survey, and the response rate was about 3%, which is in line with most commercial online surveys. About 86% were male, and the mean age of respondents was 25 years. In terms of occupation, most were currently employed (45%), some were college and graduate students (45%), and some reported other occupations (10%).

Measurement

Subjective norm. Subjective norm is based on individuals' perception of whether important other people in their life would want them to perform the behavior. To measure it, two

items were measured by 5-point scale items that ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; (a) “Most people who are important to me would approve if I participated in the movement,” (b) “Most people who are important to me think that I should participate in the movement.”

Attitude toward the movement. Attitude in TPB refers to the overall positive or negative evaluation of performing behavior. Participants responded to the statement, I feel this participation is: good, wise, beneficial, pleasant, satisfying, and favorable. Responses were made on 5-point scales ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Intentions to participate in an activity to correct V4400 issue. Two items were included to measure past and future intentions to take part in the movement using 5-point scales ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; (a) “I have the intention to get involve the movement for changing the problem of V4400,” (b) “I intend to participate in any movement to correct V4400 issue in the future.”

Perceived behavioral control. Perceived control over behavior was defined as “perceived controllability of behavior” based on PBC (Ajzen, 1991). To measure it, two item were asked to respond using 5-point scale ranging from 1 = very little control to 5 = complete control; (a) “How much personal control do you feel you have over participating an activity regarding V4400 issue,” (b) “How much do you feel that participating in an activity against V4400 issue is beyond your control.”

Anger. The object of anger in this study was a party (*Samsung*) caused the V4400 issue. The anger was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (*Strongly disagree—Strongly agree*). Participants were asked to respond to the following three items: (1) “I feel anger toward *Samsung* company regarding the V4400 issue (2) “I feel displeasure toward *Samsung* company,” (3) “I am livid at *Samsung* company.” Reliability analysis for these three items measuring anger resulted in a Chronbach’s α value of .84.

Results

The first hypothesis proposed that the three independent variables-subjective norm, perceived control, and attitude-would significantly predict members’ intention to participate in activities to correct the V4400 issues. To test the hypothesis, multiple regression was performed and found that each perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .31, p < .001$) and attitude ($\beta = .34, p < .001$) significantly predicted the intention, but subjective norm was not significant, ($\beta = .08, p = .185$). R^2 value for this model was 0.402, which means that the three variables account for 40.2% of the variance in the intention to members’ participation to online activity.

The second hypothesis was proposed to see if the Web site member’s anger affects their intention to activism. To analyze it, linear regression was conducted. The analysis yielded that anger ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) significantly predicted members’ intention to participate in an online activity to correct V4400 issue. R^2 value for this model was 0.146, which means that the variables account for 14.6% of the variance in the intention to members’ participation to online activity.

Hypothesis three predicted that integrating anger and the TPB will significantly increase variance in the intention to participate in online activities to correct V4400. To test it, hierarchical multiple regression was performed. The findings showed that adding anger into the first model including subjective norm, perceived control behavior, and attitude increased variance in explaining the intention, R^2 change value for this model was 0.022 ($p < .001$), which means that the addition anger in the TPB accounted for an additional 2.2% of the variance in

members' intention to participate in activities to correct V4400 issue. Thus, integrating anger and TPB significantly increased the variance, and total R^2 value was 0.424.

The fourth hypothesis was proposed to see if the intention was significantly related to one form of activism, signing a petition. To test it, we conducted independent t-test. The results was that there was significant difference in the intention between people who signed the petition ($M = 4.40$, $SD = .71$) and people who did not ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .66$), $t(183) = 2.06$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The present study employed anger and the TPB to examine the role of emotional response and consumers' cognitive response to an issue to predict intention to engage in an activity to correct V4400 issue. The findings of the study provide empirical support for both anger and TPB as significant components to illuminate what should be considered regarding online consumer activism. That is, associating anger with TPB became a good model for explaining consumers' intention to participate an activity to correct the V4400 issue. Anger apparently provides sufficient impetus for the intention formation.

On the other hand, subjective norm in TPB was not found to be a significant factor in predicting consumers' intention to participate in an activity to fix V4400 issue. There are some reasons that might be considered. First, participants who took part in this online survey can be a skewed sample; the participants are likely highly involved with the issue and joined this Web site to do something to correct the problem. We analyzed skewness through descriptive statistics, but the skewness value (-0.4) obtained from the analysis indicated that the sample showed a normal distribution. Thus, sampling is not a problem causing subjective norm to be an insignificant predictor in the intention to engage in an online activity to correct V4400 issue. Another possibility is that the variable, subjective norm, was not fundamentally as important to explain consumers' activism in online context. This should be explored in future studies.

Regarding physical activism, as previous findings in TPB literature, the intention to participate in online activity in this study was significant in explaining participants' behavior, specifically, their action in signing a petition against Samsung. Participants who signed the petition had higher intention to take part in online activity to correct the V4400 issue than participants who did not sign.

In summary, this study contributed to the building of a theoretical framework to explain how cognitive and affective components influence the explanation of consumer activism in an online context. Anger, perceive behavior control, and attitude toward the V4400 issue were significant variables to predict participants' intention to correct the problems experienced. Intention was a significant predictor of physical activism, or the signing of a petition against Samsung. The results have implications for issue managers facing an issue activated and publicized by consumers' Web sites. Developing tactics to more effectively diffuse anger among an organizations' consumer publics, could be an efficient strategy to decelerate the expansion of a negative issue.

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