



Social media revenge: A typology of online consumer revenge

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to present a detailed typology of online revenge behaviors that identifies the differential factors affecting this behavior in terms of triggers, channels, and emotional outcomes across two countries: Jordan and Britain. Based on a qualitative approach from a sample of Jordanian and British customers who had previously committed acts of online revenge (N = 73), this study identified four main types of online avengers: materialistic, ego-defending, aggressive, and rebellious. The findings show that British consumers were motivated by core service malfunction failures and employee failures. In contrast, Jordanian consumers' acts of revenge were triggered by waste service failures and contract breach failures. Moreover, Jordanian consumers tended to employ more aggressive and sometimes illegal ways to get revenge, whereas British consumers often used social media platforms and review websites. The findings have implications for the prevalence of online consumer revenge acts and for extending theoretical understanding of why and how consumers employ the Internet for revenge after a service failure in addition to how to respond to each avenger.

1. Introduction

After purchasing a broadband flash drive that was maxed out and then failing to receive a satisfactory response from the company, a young Jordanian consumer hacked the web domain of the largest broadband and mobile firm in the country, automatically redirecting anyone who visited the firm's website to a web page he had created for the purpose of insulting and vilifying the firm (Tech-wd.com, 2012). Another young customer in Britain, after a store refused to compensate her for a newly bought hairdryer that was broken, even though she had a warranty for the product, unleashed a Twitter campaign with her friends to damage the store's reputation (Obeidat, 2014). Indeed, such widespread online revenge activities are worldwide phenomena that cause different levels of damage to businesses.

With the prevalence of the Internet and social media platforms, scholarly findings show that consumers around the globe have adapted to the technological advancements, and now commit online acts of revenge after a service failure rather than simply complaining or exiting the relationship with the misbehaving firm (Joireman et al., 2013; Tripp and Grégoire, 2011). With firms now increasing their social media presence as a way of promoting their offerings, more and more

angry customers are using these platforms to strike back at firms that have wronged them (Grégoire et al., 2018). As a result, the rate of occurrence of such acts of consumer revenge is increasing at a disturbing rate (e.g., Funches et al., 2009; Zourrig et al., 2009; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). A survey conducted by NewVoiceMedia revealed that 60% of Americans share their service failure stories on social media (Gutbezahl, 2014). Consumers normally engage in these acts to restore fairness when they feel that firms have treated them unfairly (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Daily, new acts of online consumer revenge appear on social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) and consumer advocacy websites (e.g., consumeraffairs.org). The Internet and its social media platforms provides angry consumers with a riskless and high-reach medium for getting back at misbehaving firms. These mechanisms widen the scope of consumers' actions from a limited audience to an international audience of millions, while requiring minimal effort and no significant cost (Obeidat et al., 2017).

Despite increased research interest in consumer revenge behavior (Joireman et al., 2013; Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches et al., 2009), the majority of the literature has focused on the forms (e.g., Huefner and Hunt, 2000; Funches et al., 2009) and the process models (e.g., Grégoire et al., 2010) of consumer revenge. Therefore, limited scholarly

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Table 1
Definitions of key constructs in the consumer revenge literature.

Constructs & Definitions	Common Aliases	Representative Papers
Triggers		
Service failure severity: The perception of the seriousness and intensity of the service failure	The degree of problems, inconvenience, and losses caused by the company	Obeidat et al. (2017); Zourrig et al., 2014; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008
Double deviation: Refers to company failures after first service failure and recovery	Two continuous incidents	Grégoire et al. (2010); Joireman et al., 2013; Tripp and Grégoire, 2011
Dissatisfaction: Customer dissatisfied with the service provided by a company	Dissatisfaction	Bonifield and Cole (2007); Huefner and Hunt (2000)
Antecedents		
Procedural justice: Refers to the fairness that is provided by companies when dealing with customers' complaints	Fairness is reflected by how firms address customers' complaints in terms of their procedures, policies, and methods	Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches et al. (2009); Grégoire and Fisher, 2008
Interactional justice: Refers to the fairness that frontline employees provide to customers	The treatment and attitudes that frontline employees show to customers	Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches et al. (2009); Grégoire and Fisher, 2008
Distributive justice: Refers to the outcome fairness that is provided by companies when dealing with servers	Outcome and compensation received by complaint customer	Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches et al. (2009); Grégoire and Fisher, 2008
Blame attribution: Refers to how much the company should be accountable for the causation of failed recovery		Grégoire et al. (2010)
Negative emotion: Negative emotion that is caused by the service failure recovery	Consumers' feelings of anger, irritation, perceived betrayal, helplessness; desire for revenge; the desire to exert some harm on the firm	Grégoire et al. (2010); Grégoire and Fisher (2008); Obeidat et al. (2017); Bechwati and Morrin (2003)
Perceived power: Refers to customers' perceptions of their own ability to influence the firm's activities	Leverage over the decision; a firmly held belief that the company has done something wrong	Grégoire et al. (2010); Obeidat et al. (2017)
Perceived firm greed: Consumer believes the firm has taken advantage of the situation	Take advantage, avoid taking responsibility	Grégoire et al. (2010)
Allocentrism–idiocentrism trait: Allocentrism refers to personal level of collectivism; idiocentrism refers to personal level of individualism	How people react to the service failure	Zourrig et al., 2014

attention has been given to exploring this subject in detail in the online context (Grégoire et al., 2010; Funches et al., 2009). Regarding the forms of consumer revenge, the majority of the literature has focused on examining the forms of revenge behavior in the traditional market context (e.g., Huefner and Hunt, 2000; Funches et al., 2009). A few attempts, however, have examined the forms of revenge actions in the online context, although they have only identified methods such as the creation of revenge websites (Ward and Ostrom, 2006), third-party complaining for publicity (Grégoire et al., 2010), and complaining to consumer platforms and complaint websites (Grégoire et al., 2018). Responding to the theoretical and managerial importance of the subject, this study aims to identify and develop a more detailed typology of online consumer revenge that answers significant and previously unexamined concerns. The research investigates what motivates consumers to commit revenge and why they choose to do so online, how they carry out online revenge, and how it makes them feel to have taken revenge in this way. The question of what types of differences there are in consumers' responses to service failures is also central to the study. Although some previous studies suggest that cultural differences influence consumers' approach to and avoidance of revenge, the understanding of what and how country differences influence consumer revenge patterns and their motives, in particular via online platforms, is still far from complete (Zourrig et al., 2009). This study confirms the existence of four main types of online avengers: materialistic, ego-defending, aggressive, and rebellious. Consequently, this study presents a detailed typology of four prototypical online avengers who are motivated by different types of service failures, have different reasons for choosing the Internet for revenge, select different online channels, and have different emotional reactions to the online revenge act. In addition, drawing from the service recovery literature, we propose a suitable recovery strategy to deal with each type of online avenger.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section will provide an examination of the literature related to online consumer revenge. Next, the methodology and rationale for collecting the data are explained, before the research findings are presented. Finally, there is a discussion of the findings and their managerial implications.

2. Literature review on consumer revenge

2.1. Revenge behavior

Generally, revenge is a “basic human impulse and a powerful motivator of social behavior” (Bradfield and Aquino, 1999, p. 2). Consumer revenge, specifically, is an action taken in response to a harm or offense inflicted by a firm on the consumer (Funches et al., 2009). Moreover, revenge is not a spontaneous act; rather, it is often the result of a cognitive appraisal process (Grégoire et al., 2010). Through the various literatures, revenge is seen as a coping instrument for restoring justice and fairness (Grégoire et al., 2010; Aquino et al., 2006). While studies have found significant links between acts of revenge and the concept of negative reciprocity (Friedman and Singh, 1999), revenge acts are distinguished from acts of negative reciprocity by the greater emotional and behavioral intensity affiliated with acts of revenge (Aquino et al., 2006).

Because online platforms are now so prevalent and accessible, online revenge acts are increasingly used by angry consumers as an “e-weapon” against misbehaving firms (Tripp and Grégoire, 2011). Consequently, the term “online consumer revenge” refers to online actions (both legal and illegal) of consumers who wish to get back at a firm after a service failure (Obeidat et al., 2017). Two primary research themes appear in the consumer revenge literature. The first is concerned with identifying the antecedents and the processes of consumer revenge, while the second focuses on exploring the forms and types of consumer revenge actions. Though both approaches provide significant insights into consumer revenge behavior, the studies address behaviors in the traditional brick-and-mortar context and very broadly in the online context (Funches et al., 2009), and therefore do not provide a sufficient basis for our study.

2.2. Antecedents of consumer revenge

The first emerging set of studies examines the process of consumer revenge acts more directly. This literature, generally referred to as “antecedents of consumer revenge,” focuses on motivational, emotional, and behavioral aspects of revenge in the brick-and-mortar

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