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Consumer Anger and Brand Reputation

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This is OUTRAGEOUS!:

**Understanding Consumer Anger and Brand Reputation on
Social Media**

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“As a consequence of social media, reputations built up over decades can be challenged in an instant.”~ Jennifer Evans, Chief Risk Officer for Australia and New Zealand Banking Group

Introduction

In a Deloitte study on strategic risk, leaders at 300 major global companies rated “reputation” as the highest impact risk area for their company in 2015. “Reputation risk is now the biggest risk concern, due in large measure to the rise of social media, which enables instantaneous global communications that make it harder for companies to control how they are perceived in the marketplace.” (Deloitte, 2015, p. 4).

Recent examples validate these leaders’ concern and illustrates how consumers are successfully spreading their messages via social media platforms to exact corporate, social or political accountability. For example, online outrage led to two human resource employees being fired from an \$800M health care company within days after indiscreetly placing an employment ad discouraging Haitian nurses in upstate New York from applying. (Lieberman, 2015) Such consumer behavior can be found across all industries and in both private and public sectors.

Emerging research is focusing on the trend of consumers who direct righteous anger toward brands via social media platforms to correct and prevent what the buyers perceive as injustice (Tripp and Bies, 2010) when they believe that a firm has opportunistically tried to take advantage of a situation.

Righteous anger on social media platforms arises suddenly and spreads quickly. Dollars spent on marketing campaigns and product development can be quickly negated by consumer reaction on social media, and can cost a company thousands of dollars to put right. (Igniye, 2015)

This research will contribute to the growing body of literature focusing on righteous or moral anger from consumers. Studies in marketing have examined righteous anger and its role in workplace revenge (Tripp and Bies, 2010), customer revenge (Grégoire, Laufer and Tripp, 2009), and stakeholders' reactions to cases of brand social irresponsibility (Romani, Grappi and Bagozzi, 2013; Lindenmeier, Schleer, and Pricl, 2012; Antonetti and Maklan, 2014). However, extant research has not clearly defined this type of behavior nor studied the underlying motives for consumers. In this increasingly connected digital age, when consumers perceive an injustice to themselves or others, it is easy to turn to digital technology to create and/or distribute content for the purpose of influencing corporate, social or political change.

We will contribute to the discussion by examining righteous anger within the context of social media to answer two questions. First, what are the underlying motives for consumers, when they perceive an injustice to themselves or others, utilize digital technology to create and/or distribute content for the purpose of influencing corporate, social or political change? Second, what is the impact of these motives and righteous anger on brand reputation?

We propose to define this unique form of consumer behavior that has been extensively studied, but not within this context, and will offer an analysis of differing degrees of consumer engagement based upon preliminary evaluation of activism situations on social media. This typology will serve as an updated response matrix for marketing and digital communication professionals who need to identify the difference between negative feedback regarding products and services and communication driven by persistent consumers fueled by a righteous anger to remedy a perceived injustice, while allowing companies to respond in an effective manner that will mitigate damage to brand reputation.

Methodology

Using a content analysis approach developed and tested by researchers for social media content (Makarem & Jae, 2015; Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012; Hoffman, 2011), this study will look at tweets, posts, blogs and videos to identify underlying motives related to righteous anger. Categories defined for the content analysis will serve as the foundation for developing our typology.

Significance

Existing literature on righteous anger has yet to address consumers who are now not just connected but are hyper-connected (Friedman, 2013, p. A27) to the confluence of social media sites, mobile devices, mobile apps, real-time video streaming, ultra-high-speed Internet bandwidth, and photo sharing networks.

This research will explore the underlying motives of consumers who are fueled by righteous anger and utilize social media as a way to call attention to a brand's behavior and to influence corporate, social or political change. Our primary outcome is to provide a typology that will enable digital marketing professionals to identify and respond to the public's righteous anger on social media in a manner that will protect brand reputation.

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