
Consumer Exit, Voice, and ‘Power’ on the Internet

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a new conceptualization of Hirschman’s (1970) exit and voice theory in the light of discussions about rising consumer power on the Internet. Exit and voice, in this context, are discussed in relation to consumer power sources (technologic, economic, social and legal) and consumer behavioural orientation (consumer as market actor or citizen). The paper defines two new forms of consumer empowerment on the Internet: exit-based and voice-based consumer power. The discussion highlights new perspectives for understanding the effects of newly defined exit and voice behaviours on the Internet with case examples. Thus, the paper (1) highlights the components of rising consumer empowerment on the Internet, (2) suggests consumer approaches for becoming an active market participant rather than a passive recipient of company-generated consumption cycles and (3) presents possible public policy approaches to enhance consumer power for better functioning markets on the Internet.

ARTICLE

Introduction

Hirschman’s (1970) seminal work “*Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*” inspired scholars in many different fields (Hibbard, Kumar and Stern 2001). Marketing scholars primarily used his work as a springboard to develop two major theories: consumer complaint behavior (Singh 1988, 1989; Singh and Wilkes 1996) and marketing channel relationships (Ping 1993, 1995, 1997; Hibbard, Kumar and Stern 2001). From a consumer complaint behavior perspective, exit and voice are defined in light of Hirschman’s study as: exit; or the refusal to consume, thus leaving the market; and voice: complaining about companies and products, thus raising consumer voice in the market (Keeley and Graham 1991).

With recent developments in online shopping environments, consumer exit and voice are strengthening (Rezabakhsh et al. 2006) and are also interpreted as strong indicators of rising consumer power on the Internet (Urban 2004; Hoffman, Novak and Venkatesh 2004; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007). Thus, there is a need for a re-conceptualization of Hirschman’s exit and voice theory which incorporates the changes in today’s digital markets. This re-conceptualization is likely to help determine which consumer power source is more dominant in shaping the nature of online markets and societies: exit-based or voice-based power sources. In this respect, this paper is the first of its kind to provide a discussion platform that defines the consumer power facilitated by the Internet as an antecedent and precondition of consumer exit and voice behaviors.

In analysing the aforementioned issues, the paper first briefly discusses changing consumer power and its dimensions on the Internet and the potential implications of these power sources on consumer exit and voice behaviours with the use of cases. Then, the paper proposes novel suggestions for policy makers and companies in the light of ongoing exit, voice and power discussions. This includes ways to help maximize consumer access to, and acceptance of, the Internet in order to increase exit options and encourage widespread usage of voice as a means of bringing wider community values to the forefront of company awareness.

Consumer Exit and Voice

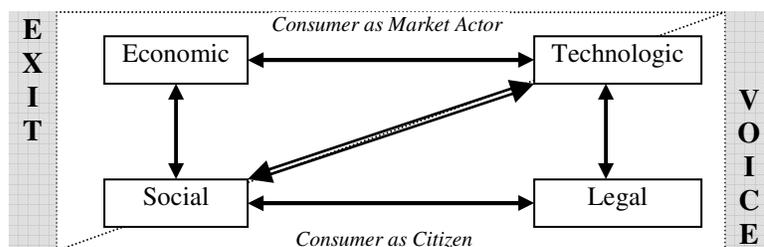
The phenomena of exit and voice each signal to companies that the customer is not satisfied. Some consumers voice their dissatisfaction while exiting markets; others stay in the market but raise their voice about their dissatisfaction to attract company attention. However, exit and voice are used for different purposes in different fields. Exit has been the focus of economists - in keeping with their fondness for the theory of *Invisible Hands*, but political scientists have addressed voice as a feedback mechanism that provides actual and valuable information about *why* the company has lost the consumer (Keeley and Graham 1991; Lessig 1999; Nunziato 2000). On the other hand, market researchers use both exit and voice as leading indicators of brand strength to address consumer dissatisfaction in order to reach long-lasting consumer-brand relationships (Aaker 1996).

Recently, Internet technology has brought an increasing number of market players and increased the diversity of the market value offerings. This newfound richness of options, in turn, makes exit easier for many consumers, allowing them to abandon one market or product and enter or buy another. Such developments lead to interpretations that exit might be the more meaningful mechanism for expressing an individual consumer's *economic* preferences and values in cyberspace (Nunziato 2000). On the other hand, the Internet also socially empowers consumers to connect with others. This can result in collective actions in exit, which not only maximize the consumer's individual economic self-interest, but also serve to protect society's collective moral and ethical values. This increase in consumer involvement on a collective level may signal to law makers and agencies a need for greater regulation in the market. As pointed out by Stiglitz (1994), collective value systems reverse economists' *Invisible Hands* explanation, making governments and third party independent control mechanisms more active in the development of well-functioning and balanced markets. Similarly, Lessig (1999) discussed exit-voice interaction in terms of the "commerce" vs. "legality" polarization on the Internet. Lessig's concern was that cyberspace should not be regulated by commerce, or economic rules—but rather legal mechanisms that better represent society's value systems. In other words, cyberspace should not be governed only by exit because markets that are governed solely by exit will not incorporate society's collective values (Nunziato 2000). More importantly, exit might put collective values in danger because of the lack of strong or balanced "voice" in such markets.

Exit and voice, by nature, have different presumptions. According to exit, consumers solely act with economic self-interest and thus new social values can easily be dictated to consumers as long as economic self-interests are satisfied. Voice reverses exit's perspective and emphasizes the consumer's role and involvement in social value development with the support of legal systems in markets. Although they have different presumptions, both exit and voice are strengthened as a result of rising consumer power on the Internet (Urban 2004; Hoffman, Novak and Venkatesh 2004; Rezabakhsh et al. 2006; Kucuk and Khrishnamurthy 2007; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2008). Thus, a discussion of changes in exit and voice in terms of consumer empowerment in cyberspace is indispensable.

Consumer power sources have been recently categorized as *technologic, social, economic* and *legal* sources (Kucuk and Khrishnamurthy 2007). Exit is derived from economic, technologic and social consumer power sources. Economically (depicted in the top, left-hand of the triangle in figure 1), because Internet technology provides price transparency, it is easy for individual consumers to maximize their outcomes by switching to better value offerings. Also, this technology harbours collective anti-consumption movements or consumer exit behaviours in the market. Although small businesses may feel the individual consumer exit immediately, such as in the case of exit of a loyal consumer, exit can solely be felt at the macro level when consumers leave the market *together* (Andersen 1999). Therefore, as a result of the synergy created by exit's consumer power sources, a new sector evolved of consumers who are able to find the best deals in the market and influence like-minded consumers' preferences, thus acting as alternative "reflexive market agents" (Cherrier 2005) or "market actors" (Reisch 2003) with the ability to change the direction and modes of consumption. This synergetic interaction between exit's power sources is also indicated in the upper triangle of figure 1.

Figure 1: Consumer Exit, Voice and Power on the Internet



The lower triangle on the right of figure 1 depicts the second function in the double-functional role of technologic and social power sources for consumers. Supported by legal entities and/or governments, consumers are able to use voice as a mechanism for responsible citizenship as opposed to simple economic well-being. Speech equality provided by Internet technology and online community group identity empower consumers to create alternatives to marketer-generated brand identity and values. In some countries, such as the United States, consumers are legally protected by free speech rights that allow them to voice their opinions. Many consumer acts are not consumption-oriented but rather can be discussed more in terms of responsible citizenship. This group can be named "consumer citizens" (Lessig 1999; Nunziato 2000; Roper 2002; Reisch 2003).

In other words, social and technologic power sources are shared by the upper (number of consumers involved in anti-consumption and ease of exiting the market together) and lower triangles (speech equality and creation of alternative social value systems) in figure 1. These power sources function differently for exit and voice – leading to "consumer as market actor" and "consumer as citizen" respectively.

Consumer Exit and Power

Consumer “exit” (Hirshman 1970), “alienation” (Lambert 1980) and “escape” (Kozinets 2002) from the markets all refer to how and why consumers liberate themselves from company-created brand and market meanings. However, consumer alienation or escape can be interpreted in a different way (Kozinets 2002). Instead of liberating themselves, consumers can create alternative new meanings and social codes – which are defined in liberatory postmodernism (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) – in order to differentiate themselves from the perceived meaningless automatic consumption cycles of company-created consumption systems (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Exiting from company-created consumption systems and from social value systems with like-minded consumer groups is getting much easier on the Internet, as also discussed in light of Johnson and Post’s (1996, p.1398-1399) Net Libertarian Model:

As compared to real space, in cyberspace any given user has a more accessible exit option, in terms of moving from one virtual environment’s rule set to another’s, thus providing a more legitimate “selection mechanism” by which differing rule sets will evolve over time.

In this context, one of the major antecedents to consumer liberation can be explained by rising consumer empowerment on the Internet. In this way, consumers may now choose to exit the market for ideological reasons that are supported by online communities, as opposed to the simple product or company dissatisfaction that has traditionally led consumers to exit in the past. This is a new form of consumer exit behavior that has not resulted from direct consumer dissatisfaction and deserves more attention. Exit, therefore, will be discussed more specifically in terms of exiting brands and consumption styles in order to provide a more focused discussion.

Economically, exit has never been easier than it is currently on the Internet. This is true because switching costs that have often been a deterrent to consumer switching in brick and mortar shopping venues are generally low in cyberspace, allowing the unsatisfied consumer to switch with no financial cost to him or her (Rezabakhsh, et.al. 2006; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007). However, while there is little to no financial cost when switching on the Internet, the consumer may still harbor emotional or psychological attachments that will make switching difficult (Reisch 2003; Rezabakhsh, et al. 2006). With the developments in Internet technology, consumers now have access to better value and even have the ability to construct economic value as in the case of consumer-to-consumer markets and online communities (Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007).

Technologically, the Internet introduces important shopping conveniences such as enhanced price transparency in many markets. Shopping bots (intelligent agents tasked with finding the best price combinations for consumers) can lower the physical searching and switching costs, thus increasing consumers’ economic power. The Internet also provides an effective platform for consumer protest. Previously, the economic effect, and thus success, of a boycott might take years to be realized (Gelb 1995); but this is not the case on the Internet (Vengh 2003). Now the results of a boycott can be felt in days or even hours. In other words, consumers are now armed with powerful technologies that make it easier and faster to exit markets.

Socially, consumers who, prior to the Internet, likely saw themselves as rather powerless in the face of huge corporations, are now realizing the collective power (both in terms of numbers and purchasing power) of a consumer movement enabled by the connectivity of the Web (Gronmo and Olander 1991; Crumlish 2004). Recently mushrooming numbers of consumer-organized anti-brand sites are good examples of today’s empowered consumers raising their voices while exiting the market (Kucuk 2008, Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2008). Such sites are providing a

greater level of information transparency and creating economic pressure on brands by stimulating a boycott of the consumption of the targeted brands and leading like-minded consumers to competitive alternatives or alternative consumption patterns (Dobscha 1998; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Shaw and Newholm 2002). In other words, such sites may function as alternative market agents and organize anti-consumption movements. These consumer-organized anti-brand sites facilitate the efficacy of boycotts because of their ability to reach such a large audience at little to no cost, thus creating great technological and social advantages for consumer advocates. As boycott participation increases, the economic pressure on the target increases because of the greater number of severed exchange relationships (Garrett 1987). The Internet facilitates this process due to the increased number of online social networks.

Thus, the economic power source is closely tied with the technologic and social power sources. This, in turn, is discussed in Case 1 to showcase how such power sources function to enhance exit-based consumer power.

Case 1: Delocator.net-Consumer-Supported Brand Switching

The delocator.net is a user-driven counter-marketing device created by an ordinary consumer, Christine Hanson, who realized that the only café choice while visiting the artsy Soho District of New York City was Starbucks. Hanson explains the situation as follows: *"They are all exactly the same. And I guess that's what my problem is...it's a lack of choice. The complete homogenization is bothersome"* (Dizon 2006). Hanson actually worked as a Starbucks barista for six weeks, and she said; *"I felt very coglike while I worked there- like I was a cog in the wheel"* (Dizon 2006). Therefore, Hanson created delocator.net. Her site serves as the converse of Starbucks's online "locator" function – rather than finding Starbucks, the delocator.net points consumers in the direction of independent cafes that might offer more of a unique experience than a corporate chain store. The delocator.net site was wildly popular, with many visitors taking the affirmative step of adding their favorite cafes to the site for others to visit. The site, which had more than 6,000 posted cafes compared with 7,661 Starbucks stores in the U.S. as of January 2006, responds to consumers' queries by listing all independent coffee houses within a 5-mile radius of an entered ZIP code (Schwartz 2005). A visitor has also the opportunity to share comments about why they would recommend a particular coffee spot.

Clearly, Delocator.net provides evidence that an ordinary consumer can exit a company-created consumption cycle by using the same technology and creating a system that informs other consumers about options outside of the corporate-constructed norm. Delocator.net is a good example of how consumers can articulate their anti-consumption philosophy by targeting specific corporate brands and connecting with other consumers through the co-creation of messages and inspiring consumers to change their behaviours and create economic pressure on the targeted brand. This has become an important indication of exit-based consumer power on the Internet.

Consumer Voice and Power

Consumers are not just exiting markets but are also raising strong voice and consciousness in markets; hence, consumer voice and awareness are also heightened on the Internet (Rezabakhsh et al. 2006; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007). Consumers who are raising their voice can also be conceptualized as “members rather than customers” (Lessig 1999, Nunziato 2000). In this way, consumer voice is not just a preference-expressing mechanism on the Internet, but also a way for responsible and ethical individuals dedicated to society’s collective value system to express themselves. These kinds of member consumers, in turn, can also be empowered by the interaction of technologic, social and legal consumer power sources on the Internet.

Technologically, the Internet introduces a non-hierarchical distributed network system, which allows all parties to be equal to each other in status in the networked structure. Strictly from a technological standpoint, individuals are now on the same footing with the corporation—the corporation has a web site and so does the consumer (Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007). In other words, the Internet is a technologically transforming platform where free speech, hence voice, can easily be exercised. Now, many companies provide additional comment and complaint options for consumers, such as email addresses or web-based discussion sites, thus making complaint easier for consumers and collecting information from consumers less costly for companies (Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987; Kucuk 2008). In other words, companies are actually enhancing customers’ “voice” by providing them with a direct line of communication to the company. (Andersen 1999). If the customer is satisfied with the steps the company has taken to rectify the situation, the company may have effectively enhanced the customer-company relationship by offering the online complaint forum. In addition, individual consumers now can create their own communication and media tools (blogs, websites) in order to express their views effectively and be heard by a large sector of the market. With the increasing connectivity on the Internet, activists can use technology to increase the efficacy of their offline demonstration in terms of organization and mobilization (Garrett 1987). Internet-based activism might include more proactive and aggressive online methods of protest such as cyber attacks, e-mail campaigns (e-mail bombs), virtual sit-ins, and website defacement (Vengh 2003). All of the aforementioned developments indicate the enhanced role of Internet technology in empowered consumer voice, especially in technologically savvy western nations.

Socially, the Internet might be the most powerful tool to organize people to date. Online networks and communities are actually producing and creating new value systems on the Internet. In the past, it was easy for consumers to feel alienated from the seller and marketplace, and, therefore, many felt helpless and powerless when it came to redressing wrongs (Allison 1978). Previous studies have shown that consumer alienation often leads to consumer silence when it comes to registering complaints (e.g., Singh and Wilkes 1996). The Internet, however, has increased the probability that even consumers who feel alienated will take the affirmative step to complain because they can connect with online communities (Hagel and Armstrong 1997). Many consumer-organized anti-brand sites include discussion forums or other online community spaces (Hagel and Armstrong 1997; Kucuk 2008) where consumers can participate by discussing unethical and/or harmful implications of specific brands in order to develop community identity and meanings alternative to company-created market meanings (Hogg and Michell 1997; Wilk 1997; Banister and Hogg 2001; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002). Such alternative meanings and messages can easily be disseminated to the markets to inform other like-minded consumers. Online word-of-mouth (WOM) can reach limitless individuals making it a far more powerful (and potentially harmful) weapon against companies than traditional WOM, which is likely to only reach a small number of friends or family (Rezabakhsh et al. 2006). In this study’s

context, consumer voice (including e-WOM and other consumer-generated content created in online communities) can be perceived by consumers as more credible than marketer-generated messages on the Internet (Bickart and Schindler 2001; Johnson and Kaye 2004; Armstrong 2006). (See Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2008 for more examples of different online consumer complaint forums). Therefore, it can also be interpreted that voice might have better potential to create collective value systems in cyberspace than exit, as long as voice successfully captures society's needs and potential legal rights in the name of protecting individual consumers' rights.

Legally, consumer voice is protected by the First Amendment right to free speech in the United States¹. The law protects many consumer-organized anti-brand sites if they are not profit generating, thus limiting the effect of corporate legal action and enhancing the legal power of these sites, and hence consumer voice. In *TMI, Inc. v. Maxwell, 2004*, the court held that the website owner could share his complaint with other consumers on his site or on his domain name. The court in *Lucas Nursery & Landscaping, Inc. v. Grosse, 2004*, found that the plaintiff was not trying to benefit financially by using the defendant's trademark. There is at least one legal ruling which holds that a trademark in domain names created by non-licensed sites or users is generally not treated as trademark infringement because such use does not lead to trademark dilution due to brand confusion (see the discussion of *Bally's vs. Faber* case in Kopp and Suter 2000, p.126).

These issues, in turn, are showcased in Case 2 to illustrate how such consumer power sources can function in order to enhance voice-based consumer power.

Case 2: Themeatrix.com - Revealing the Ugly Truth behind Factory Farming

Themeatrix.com is dedicated to educating consumers about the truth behind factory farming and shows online videos critical of factory farms. The theme of the site is a take-off of the science-fiction movie the Matrix. Themeatrix.com was viewed by more than one million people in the week after its launch², and a total of 15 million had seen themeatrix.com films as of November 2007³. Themeatrix.com developed its third "viral video" (or video that is spread from person to person on the Internet like e-WOM) and the site's popularity skyrocketed on YouTube and elsewhere on the web (Ebenkamp and Wasserman 2006). As evidenced by the high traffic on the themeatrix.com, the site's viral videos raised important public awareness and consumer consciousness about a wide variety of negatives of factory farming such as environmental pollution, animal abuse, exploitation of farm workers and loss of traditional family farming. Blogs and discussion forums surrounding the themeatrix.com have become popular, bringing an important message to other consumers regarding the environmental and public health problems that may be stemming from what a consumer brings to the dinner table. Themeatrix.com was able to successfully apply journalism practices by bypassing corporate broadcasting filters and raising consumer voice in the markets.

¹ The United States is used as an illustrative example. Many other Western countries have similar free speech protections.

² <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=btdownload17&date=20031117&query=meatrix>

³ <http://www.themeatrix.com/about/filmfests.html>

Themeatrix.com successfully orchestrated consumer voice with short but influential viral videos and by putting pressure on factory farming. As such, the site created a forum for public voice and rallied consumers around an important market message. Such consumers are educated on the digits of meatrix.com and gain greater consciousness and voice regarding important issues surrounding the food we eat, indicating the success of voice-based consumer power on the Internet.

Overall, exit is a relatively more silent mechanism than voice (individual exit has a limited impact on changing or protecting collective value systems) unless the idea of exiting reaches the minds of a majority of consumers in society. In other words, voice is more advantageous when it comes to bringing about actual change in the market (Hirschman 1970; Keeley and Graham 1991; Lessig 1999; Nunziato 2000), especially in terms of consumer empowerment because voice is likely a better tool for making the collective values of consumers known.

Discussion

Since exit is generally a slow indicator of consumers' real intentions and expectations for markets, consumer voice can be used as an early detection mechanism to take precautionary steps before market exit causes destructive results for overall market welfare. Thus, the double functional form of technologic (exit: easy to exit; voice: speech equality) and social (exit: leave together or anti-consumption acts; voice: development of group identity) power sources as crucial antecedents of consumer exit and voice (see double lined arrows in Figure-1) can tell much about how cyberspace will be shaped in the future. Both technologic and social power sources can provide a platform for more balanced market interactions and might fundamentally change the direction of online markets.

Therefore, the following suggestions can also be proposed to achieve well-functioning markets in the context of this study:

Technology Issues: Although the information asymmetry among market players and consumers is improving as a result of the digitalization of markets, there are still unequal practices and barriers to accessing markets and market information. This, in turn, is likely to reinforce inequality in opportunities for economic mobility and social participation (DiMaggio et al. 2004), thus negatively influencing both exit and voice. The inequality of consumer access to the Internet, in terms both of limited access to computers and limited or poor quality connections to the Internet, is discussed at length in the Digital Divide (DD) literature. As a result of these technologic barriers, technologically disadvantaged consumers are losing their relative economic power and thus are unable to act either as effective market agents or as citizen consumers to impact the direction and the meaning of consumption and markets on the Internet. Without consumer accessibility to market information, consumers' right to be informed as well as right to be heard, are at serious risk.

Consumers who find themselves on the other side of the DD are generally minorities, marginalized societies or sub-cultures within societies; or alternatively consumers in less developed countries in global markets. In an attempt to solve the DD problems, many have proposed providing computers, software and Internet connections to those technologically neglected. On the other hand, understanding the lifestyle of a minority in marginalized societies is crucial, as is exploring their social dynamics and the way they interact with technology. Another way of eliminating DD effects could be providing open content, free software and open

access to social movements, which are the heart of the open source software (OSS) philosophy. Some governments in developing countries even use open software (Linux) because they cannot afford branded software (e.g., Microsoft). Thus, OSS eventually reduces the DD effects in the markets and enhances both exit-based and voice-based consumer power, especially in developing nations.

Also, although some consumers have easy access to cyberspaces, unavailability of easy-to-use technologies hurts consumer involvement in online markets. Thus, development of technologies that are easy for consumers to use and eliminating the barriers to accessing market information are other major technologic challenges. Consumers' ability to access the Internet and use Internet technology directly maximizes their likelihood of accessing correct market information, which has been discussed as one of today's major new consumerism components of the Internet (Kucuk 2002). Recent government regulations in the US such as the "Rehabilitation Act" --also known as 508 Compliance-- require all Federal institutions to provide fair electronic applications for disabled applicants. The purpose here is to minimize accessibility discrimination to public information for people with disabilities and developed standardized web applications that can be easily accepted and used by all. In other words, inaccessibility to online markets equates to the degradation of consumer rights. Therefore, technologic innovations and improvements in software can help disadvantaged users by adjusting the Internet into their daily lives, with the result of minimizing barriers to these consumers' accessibility to the markets and market information.

Social Issues: Enhanced consumer learning of Internet technologies and cyberspace value systems at the individual and social level should be encouraged by governments, legal agencies and online communities. Consumer organizations and advocates should not just be involved in the consumer learning process of Internet technology, but should also test the effectiveness and legitimacy of consumer voice by closely monitoring companies that seek out consumer insight. Soliciting consumer suggestions and complaints can be more complicated than one might assume. A company should develop a complaint system so that it may respond efficiently to consumers who may be raising conflicting issues. But the company must take some form of action, as consumers quickly grow wary of companies that take complaints or suggestions but never make changes accordingly. As Sabin and Daniels (2001, p.462) indicated:

Simply "listening" to what consumers say does not create legitimacy. Meaningful consumer participation requires more than the kinds of appeals processes that form the centerpiece of legislative and regulatory "reform".

In light of ongoing discussions, I propose a new and balanced third option that would be neither entirely exit-based nor entirely voice-based. Previously, consumer voice was weak as it was limited to protest and boycotts. Exit had more dominant effects in physical markets. However, with the advent of the Internet, this imbalance between exit and voice has righted itself, and the future is promising more equality between exit-based and voice-based consumer power. This, in turn, indicates that business models which see consumers not just as simple buyers, but also as members who understand society's value systems and act responsibly, will reflect these values to markets. Individual blogs are a good example of this as many individuals work like independent journalists, drawing the attention of consumers, companies and government to actively influence the market. Business models that put consumer voice in the center of their strategies are already determining the future of cyberspaces and online markets (for example, YouTube and Facebook.com). Thus, it can be said that even though both exit and voice are on the rise on the Internet, voice is reaching more influential levels which directly influence consumer exit options in today's digital markets.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the major reasons behind the revolutionary transformation in consumer exit and voice with a new conceptualization of consumer power on the Internet. This new conceptualization will hopefully shed light on arguments regarding whether exit-based or voice-based consumer power plays a more active role for consumer welfare and online markets in the future. Furthermore, the paper showcases consumer approaches for becoming an active market participant rather than passive recipient of company-generated consumption cycles with case examples. Finally, the paper presents possible public policy approaches to enhance consumer power in the context of active technologic and social consumer power interaction for better functioning markets for all on the Internet.

Overall, the Internet might be attracting more people as a strong voice tool rather than just a shopping tool in the markets. Consumers, in turn, are gaining more consciousness and awareness of the developments in the markets. All of these aforementioned developments are forcing companies to build more trustworthy relationships with consumers. One option for companies to eliminate the negative influences of voice on consumer exit is to invest more in consumer loyalty. Another alternative is for companies to transform the negative impact of voice by encouraging consumer involvement in company activities via online social groups or brand communities to create colleagues rather than competitors. Recently, many companies realized the opportunity for such improvements in consumer voice-based power and hired consumer bloggers to promote their products and brands (Armstrong 2006). However, such company-oriented approaches that are focused on influencing consumer voice might not accurately reflect the reality of consumer culture and movements. Consumers must carefully assess the information provided on blogs or other Internet sites, as not all information (whether created by individuals or company-paid bloggers) is accurate.

Social systems and business models that are capable of offering a combination of exit-based and voice-based consumer power will likely be dominant in shaping the future of markets and societies. Thus, companies and marketing systems that empower consumers to work closely with companies will be leaders in the transformation of societal value systems and the creation of strong immunity in markets. Markets can not progress without a strong consumer presence and involvement as active market players on the Internet.

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