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THE JOURNEY TO HEALING: DOES SHARING UNSATISFACTORY HEALTH SERVICE EXPERIENCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA ENHANCE PATIENTS’ WELL-BEING?

Service failures are pervasive in service encounters. These events can be detrimental to companies and negatively affect customer satisfaction and behaviour (Chebat and Slusarczyk, 2005). Understanding when and how consumers cope with service failures is, therefore, important. Prior research examines how personality traits and situational factors influence the way customers cope with service failures (Gabbott et al., 2011; Tsarenko and Strizhakova, 2013; Strizhakova et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, a topical, yet hitherto, unanswered research question relates to the role of social media (SM) sites in acting as a conduit towards encouraging consumers to share their experiences of service failure, and importantly, how the act of sharing influences consumer coping and well-being. Sharing service failure experiences on SM sites is especially relevant in the context of health services, given that failed health services cause heightened stress and negative emotions (Berry and Bendapudi, 2007).

Seeking to address the above research question, this study proposes a conceptual framework on how sharing health service failures through SM impacts consumer coping, and in turn, well-being. The proposed framework is grounded in social motivation theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Weiner, 1993), which contends that social motivations of selfishness and otherishness (selflessness) influence well-being. The study argues that the act of sharing experiences can benefit the individual, or it can backfire, depending on consumer motivations. When driven by motivations of otherishness, sharing experiences through SM can benefit consumer coping by helping them to vent discontent, and it can
enhance consumer well-being. This process results from enhanced self-efficacy and feelings of being valued. By contrast, when driven by motivations of selfishness, sharing experiences through SM is likely to preclude coping and enhancements in well-being. This is because rumination increases, along with perceptions that there is no resolution to the failure (Strizhakova et al., 2012).

The study aims to test the proposed framework by employing, first, a content analysis of social media posts in order to identify the types of health service failures consumers share on SM and how these offer social support to other consumers, and second, a scenario-based experiment informed by insights from the content analysis. The study seeks to advance service failure research by investigating how consumer coping with health services failures and well-being can be enhanced through the use of SM. It also introduces social motivations and well-being as antecedent and outcomes of coping with service failures, respectively. From a managerial perspective, the study informs healthcare service providers about how SM sites can be best used in order to manage service failures, and improve patients’ well-being.

References available upon request.