Collaborating to co-create of value in social networks following a crisis

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In line with the current research priorities for the science of service to further demonstrate the societal impact of marketing; this research program will examine how vulnerable customers use available resources to recover from negative events encountered across the life cycle: from dealing with a minor health incident to coping with the devastation following a natural disaster (Ostrom, Bitner, Brown et al 2010). All people experience some form of vulnerability when they face difficult circumstances. Customers experience vulnerability in situations where they lack control and experience an imbalance in the exchange process (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005). Often, in dire circumstances, customers turn to their social networks to look for resources, solutions, information and emotional support. Consumption activities pursued in a time of crisis usually require collaboration with others to achieve beneficial and sustainable solutions.

This research examines the consumption activities associated with negative events through the lens of services marketing. In particular, it focuses on understanding the motivations that drive collaborative consumption, that is, consumption activities in which one or more actors integrate their resources in collaboration with others to co-create value and contribute to meaningful service for the benefit of themselves or others (Felson and Spaeth 1978; Belk 2010; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2006). This collaboration involves integrating an array of available resources from private, market-facing and public sources to co-create value (Vargo and Lusch, 2006; Baron and Harris 2008; McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger and Sweeney 2009). Within the marketing literature relatively few studies have focused on the consumption activities associated with enhancing social wellbeing (Berry and Bendapudi 2007; Ostrom, Bitner, Brown et al 2010). In addition, the relatively small number of studies that do report on customer driven health-care have, by and large, adopted the perspective of the firm or healthcare provider, rather than that of the customer and overlooked the importance of collaboration to achieve positive outcomes (Bury and Taylor 2008; Auerbach 2001; Porteous, Ryan and Bond et al 2006; Howe 2006; Nazereth

and Murray 2010). Understanding the contribution customers make in collaborative consumption activities with private, marketing-facing and public sources remains under-explored, as do the specific processes employed by actors in a social network to co-create value. This research will seek to observe, describe and classify the collaborative consumption activities involved in improving customer wellbeing following a negative event (Felson and Spaeth 1978; Holt 1995; Belk 2010).

The key research question to be addressed in this research program is:

> How and why do customers collaborate within a social network to improve their health and social wellbeing following a negative event?

A preliminary conceptual model has been developed from the extant literature, in particular, using the theories of Affective Events Theory (AET), S-D Logic, Consumer Culture Theory and Holt's typology of consumption (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996; Price, Arnould and Malshe 2006; Maglio, Vargo and Caswell 2009, Holt1995) and will be further developed, refined and tested as part of this research program. It proposes that the interaction between the firm and the customer through the exchange of operant and operand resources in co-creating value is achieved through the meaningful and useful application of skills and competences for the benefit of the self and others.

The first study (Study 1) will be based on 25 depth interviews that will inform the description of resource integration processes and assumptions that underpin collaborative consumption activities deployed in social networks. This work will inform the design and measurement of variables for the second phase of the research, an ego-based social network study. The second study (Study 2) will use a social network analysis methodology to map the patterns of resource integration and the application of resources used in the processes of collaborative consumption within a network. This study aims to map and measure the interaction processes customers encounter within social networks. The third and final study (Study 3) will be an experimental design, a survey of collaborative consumption that will test a conceptual model developed from the first two studies.

The contribution of this research may improve the understanding of the drivers and barriers to collaborative consumption following a crisis. In particular, it seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how customers utilise existing social and community networks to co-create solutions that may improve social and individual health and wellbeing.

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