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ABSTRACT

Many service providers now use social media, both as a way to interact efficiently with their customers, and as a means of gathering customer data needed to better manage customer relationships. Thus, social media can both provide service and assist in developing better future service. In the present research, we examine in detail whether and how social media perform the first of these tasks by examining its use as a tool for online service benefit provision. Then, we consider how benefits customers receive from maintaining relationships with service providers via social media impact outcomes, including reported relationship strength, customer loyalty, commitment, and intention to continue with the service. We also consider how customer choices regarding characteristics of the relationship itself (duration and frequency of interaction) may impact its effectiveness at driving these outcomes.

The results of this study will contribute to theory by examining how existing relationship theory applies to relationships between online firms and their customers. We observe how moving a relationship online changes the impacts observed in more traditional environments. We also consider moderators (duration and frequency of interaction) that we do not believe have been considered previously in online settings. Finally, we offer managerial implications related to design of online services.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kendra Fowler is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Youngstown State University. Before obtaining her Ph.D. in Marketing at Kent State University, she was the senior marketing research analyst for a daily newspaper and worked as a freelance research consultant. Her primary research and teaching interests include service marketing and retailing.

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