

Full Paper

Alternative Linguistic Styles in Customer Complaints via Social Media

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The current work uses a service recovery lens to explore a product of sociocultural and technological changes that are introducing alternative language styles used by customers in realistic situations of social media complaining. This paper develops a measurement instrument to assess alternative linguistic styles in customer complaints (e.g., h8 ur terrible svc) made to firms via social media. The results show a valid and reliable measurement instrument for the conceptualized complaint linguistic style construct.

Introduction

A growing body of social media service recovery research is identifying new challenges uncommon in offline recoveries (Abney et al. 2017; Bacile et al. 2018; Bacile 2020; Bacile et al. 2020; Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020; Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Schaefer and Schamari 2016). A less studied focal point, though, is how service recovery is affected by how well a consumer communicates their problem to a firm on social media. Indeed, we are witnessing shifting sociocultural trends in technology and communication that are causing some consumers to communicate in an alternative, informal manner. Evidence for this point includes the widespread use of non-standard spelling in communication exchanges on social media, known as textisms (e.g., luv, gr8), thereby making it more common to see messages using non-standard grammar lacking detail (McCulloch 2019; Thurlow and Poff 2010). These trends also are causing a dramatic increase in rude and inappropriate communication exchanges online, with social media exchanges a common conduit for such incivility (Microsoft 2020). This use of aggressive or inappropriate language online also introduces additional complications to communication exchanges (McFarland and Ployhart 2015; Suler 2004).

Applying these trends to social media service recovery presents new challenges if some complaints are viewed as ambiguous, confusing, or overly aggressive due to popular language practices. It introduces numerous research questions that have yet to be examined. Are such messages complaints or acts of venting that firms should ignore? If a complaint includes non-standard language, should follow-up attempts for more detail be made? Aside from a firm (not)responding, how does the watchful audience react to such complaints and how firms handle them? There are no clear cut guidelines that marketing research can offer. This research investigates this topic that has yet to be studied: customers who complain about an actual failure, but do so using modern linguistic tendencies that diverge from standard, acceptable communicative messages, as perceived by a firm or a watchful audience. Accordingly, we conceptualize *complaint linguistic style*, defined as the degree of effectively and appropriately communicating details of an actual failure to a firm. Our study develops a measure for this newly conceptualized construct by following the work of Churchill (1979), Rossiter (2002), Gilliam and Voss (2013), and others who develop digital marketing and service measures. Thus, our work here offers a valid and reliable measurement instrument that reflects commonly seen behavior occurring in social media communication exchanges. Next, we discuss why evolving linguistic practices are prevalent on social media.

Changing Linguistics in Online Communication

There are a number of theories that identify language style changes via computer-mediated communication. Collectively, early research in computer-mediation communication, such as social context cues theory (Sproull and Kiesler 1986), social presence theory (Short, Williams, and Christie 1976), and media richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1986), all posit that people communicate with different, alternative styles compared to in-person communication. Fast-forwarding to the modern era of digital communication exchanges also shows that people will alter their language styles to adapt to these different communication tools and media (Menchik and Tian 2008; Walther, DeAndrea, and Tong 2010). Indeed, medium theory suggests media channels are social contexts fostering certain types of interactions that require alternative styles to improve usability and meaning (Meyrowitz 1997). Under medium theory, the belief

is that every medium can be an environment where language use changes in social interactions, such as using diverse linguistics to aid communication.

The potential for consumers to alter their language styles via digital communications is relevant to the current research, with recent linguistic styles evolving via digital infrastructures, platforms, and devices. A trend of advancing communication technology beginning from the mid-1990s to the present day has propelled new and innovative language use in computer-mediated communication. Labels such as netspeak, chatspeak, and textisms were initially linked to the semantics of web-related online discussions, instant messaging, and text messaging, respectively (Rosen et al. 2010; Squires 2010). In particular, *textism* is used here in this research to represent a change in a word's orthographic form as compared to traditional writing (Bernicot et al. 2012). Textisms use a word's misspelling, shortened abbreviations, homophones with letter-number combinations, gestures or utterances (i.e., emoticons) commonly disapproved of under formal language guidelines. In many ways, what is occurring is a spillover effect from consumers becoming conditioned to use informal language in their everyday lives. Consumers' smartphones are personal media channels (Bacile, Ye, and Swilley 2014), which enable informal language use with text conversations between friends and family. This alternative language practice is now becoming common on social media. Thus, in today's environment we are seeing online messaging, publishing tools, the pervasiveness of smartphones, and the popularity of text messaging all driving computer-mediated communication's informal language tendencies to include the use of textisms (McCulloch 2019).

Table 1 lists linguistic practices that are now widely used by some consumers on social media. This changing language phenomenon – and recent occurrence of complaining to firms via social media -- has never been the focus of study. This research fills this gap by developing a construct to represent perceptions of the use of newer linguistic practices in a complaint and recovery context via social media.

Table 1: Linguistic Examples of Alternative Communication Practices on Social Media

Specific Type of Orthographic Word Form	Description (Example)
All Caps / Block Capitals	Suggests a louder voice to highlight attention/mood: (My experience at your store WAS A COMPLETE NIGHTMARE)
Expressive lengthening	Adding extra characters to a word for emphasis: (The service was very sloooooooooooooow)
Aesthetic typography	Symbols, multicolored text, upside-down text, or unique fonts for emphasis: (The worst experience of my life was at your store today)
Sparkle punctuation	A series of keyboard punctuation characters used for emphasis: (You have the ...~*^^*~... worst ...~*^^*~..._ service)
Letter/number homophones	Combining letters and numbers to shorten words: (2day was the last time I will ever buy from you)
Minimalist typography	A complete lack of punctuation and capitalization when writing: (i was at your store and your cashiers treatment of me was terrible can i talk to you about this i may not come back)
Typographical tone of voice	Using different font styles to convey a feeling or situation: (Your sandwiches used to be the best , but now are terrible)
Shortenings and Clippings	Shortened words by deleting the ends or other characters: (My sis bought your new jeans, but the qlty is weak)
Misspellings/Phonetic spellings	Misspelling a word to shorten it, based on phonetic sound: (My fone does not work with ur nu app)
# (Hashtag)	To link to a topic on a platform or add emphasis in a message: (Your service is #terrible)
Emoticons	Keyboard characters portraying facial expressions of mood: (My visit was not a good one :-(and I may not come back)
Emoji / Emblems / Gestures	A digital image/icon to emphasize an emoticon or idea: (Your customer service staff = 😊)
Pseudo-code	A play off of HTML tags to direct attention to a word/phrase:

Defining and Identifying the Domain of Complaint Linguistic Style

Literature Search

We adapted the multi-stage procedure recommended by Churchill (1979) for the formal construct development process. Within this process, the first stage recommends specifying the domain of a new construct with an accurate definition based on a literature search of related concepts. During this first stage, Gilliam and Voss (2013) note the importance of using a preliminary definition based on personal knowledge or experience of witnessing a phenomenon. This preliminary definition prior to the literature search may broaden later, but the initial narrow focus avoids confounding views with extant concepts (Gilliam and Voss 2013). On this advice, the initial preliminary definition of complaint linguistic style begins as the perception of a complainant's online communication of a complaint to a firm, in which the perception is from the non-complainant's perspective such as third-party customer observers or the service provider.

An obvious starting point in our literature search examines online and social media complaint and recovery research, since this is relevant to the domain of how customers communicate a complaint online. For clarity regarding the current scope, the typology by Grégoire, Salle, and Tripp (2015) shows the different publicly visible online places where customers can complain, such as directly to a firm on social media to seek a recovery or on third-party review sites to spread negative word-of-mouth (WOM). The scope of this research examines the former type, so other types of online complaints such as sharing WOM on review sites and consumer-generated sites (Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux 2009; Sparks and Browning 2010; Ward and Ostrom 2006), or through private channels such as e-mail (Holloway and Beatty 2003) are outside of the current scope.

Research into social media complaining examines the influence of communication styles, but mostly of firm-side communication characteristics in replies to complaints (e.g., a brand's conversational style, defensiveness, formality, length, and personalized response; Abney et al 2017; Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020; Schamari and Schaefer 2015; Van Noort and Willemsen 2012). Moreover, numerous works study communication and language aspects of a brand's response, yet the study of such aspects of the complainant is largely lacking. Instead, studies investigating any type of communication arising from the customer-side typically examine third-party customers who are virtually present (Schaefer and Schamari 2016), without much focus on the communication style of a complainant. Their participation aside, the presence of non-complainants is important, as several works link outcomes to observers' insights (Bacile et al. 2018; Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Hogreve, Bilstein, and Hoerner 2019; Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017).

In reviewing all of the social media service recovery works published in marketing journals, the closest inquiry of complainants' communication characteristics is found in the work of Johnen and Schnittka (2019), who examine what they refer to as 'level of reasoning'. They posit it is the degree of evidence or supportive explanation in a complaint. Their work shows level of reasoning in a complaint affects audience perceptions of a brand's response strategy. Adapting their work to the current investigation provides a supportive link that communicative content by complainants are perceived by others as influential information cues during social media service recovery. This is consistent with earlier works that imply social media complaints are communication signals being scrutinized by a watchful audience (Bacile, Hoffacker, and White 2014). When such signals are a reasoned complaint with explanation, this suggests length of response may include details serving as added informational cues (Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020). Yet, despite its inclusion by Johnen and Schnittka (2019), level of reasoning is a single-item ad-hoc measure (e.g., *the comments were well reasoned*) and stimuli lack any unconventional language, such as those listed in Table 1. Therefore, support exists, in general, for non-complainant perceptions of social media service recovery to be influenced by how well a complainant communicates details of a failure. Thus, effectively communicating clearly and providing details of a complaint is within the scope of the proposed construct.

A series of studies examine other customer-side communication aspects that are influential to observers. Broadly labeled as online incivility, the effects of norm violating uncivil language are impactful during social media service recovery (Bacile et al. 2018; Bacile 2020; Bacile et al. 2020). Yet, these customer-side studies focus on aggressive language coming from third-party virtually present customers (i.e., non-complainants) who target the complainants. Nonetheless, these works share some overlap with the position that inappropriate online messages are

a growing trend (Microsoft 2020). Relatedly, aggressive expressions of negative emotions are a natural post-failure reaction during some online (Weitzl and Einwiller 2019) and offline (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos 2008) recoveries. In all likelihood, some complainants potentially may communicate emotionally and inappropriately online to firms, which could be influential to observers. Thus, the appropriateness of language and emotional demeanor communicated within a complaint is within the proposed domain.

Aside from the aforementioned works, no other studies have a primary focus on the communicative attributes of complainants during social media service recovery. Therefore, the literature review continued with offline complaining and recovery frameworks to inspect how well (poor) complainants communicate a failure to service providers. Seminal customer complaining studies suggest the beginning of the redress process is a complainant taking action (Day and Landon 1977). Seemingly, the customer's complaining action in these early works is assumed to be sufficient and provide enough information for a firm to begin its recuperation mechanism (Hirschman 1970). A label of 'voice' is given to complaints made to a firm, which is viewed as a yes/no action (i.e., a customer did or did not complain to a firm), with no mention of a service provider having to deal with ambiguous or poorly communicated complaints (Singh 1988).

In all likelihood, these early works viewed customer-service provider exchanges as synchronous exchanges, meaning it would be easy to clarify or address alternative communication styles if ambiguous or problematic. Moreover, an interactive exchange perspective became the primary focus of a processual orientation in complaint-and-recovery situations (Smith, Bolton, and Wagner 1999; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998). Indeed, it is widely viewed, "service recovery is a process in all organizations," (Miller, Craighead, and Karwan 2000, p. 397). A synchronous exchange in-person or over the telephone allows for a recovery interaction to include follow-up or probing questions. In such an exchange, a poorly communicated complaint could be clarified by empowered frontline service staff who receive training on interpersonal communication as part of the recovery process (Boshoff 1999). Unsurprisingly, then, existing offline works of complainants' communication practices were not found.

Lastly, the literature review identified one more area of offline complaining outside the current scope, but it is important to acknowledge it as a boundary for the conceptualized construct. Illegitimate (i.e., untruthful) complaints focus on customers lying about a failure. This research area discusses customer dysfunctional behavior of illegitimate (i.e., fraudulent complaints; Reynolds and Harris 2005) or opportunistic complaints (Ro and Wong 2012). Complainants are claimed to be purposely lying and deceiving a service provider to attain something of value or revenge. For the current scope, to label a complaint about an actual failure as 'illegitimate' or 'opportunistic' due to alternative language practices is an inaccurate portrayal. As a result, we noted that the domain of the proposed construct should not include or be associated with illegitimate, untruthful complaints arising from dysfunctional behavior.

The literature review also provides evidence of a notable research gap. Much of the research focuses on a service provider as the focal communication exchange partner during the interactions between a complainant-service provider. Evidence to this point is clear when examining the various constructs in service recovery research, such as interactional justice (Blodgett, Granbois, and Walters 1993), employee effort (Mohr and Bitner 1995), and communication style/empathy (Boshoff 1999). All of these are framed as how well a service provider communicates with a complainant during a recovery. Yet, the customer-side, aside from dysfunctional works which are not a part of the conceptualized construct here, are largely lacking. A critical component of the recovery process is when employees are perceived to communicate with a lack of explanation or in an inappropriate manner. However, no parallel evaluation of complainants exist, even though this is a crucial step to initiate the recovery process. It is ironic, then, that several of the aforementioned social media service recovery works use the same focus of examining the service provider's communicative attributes, but fail to examine a complainant's communicative attributes. In closing, the current research seeks to fill this notable gap.

Upon reflection on all of the works from the literature review, the definition of the proposed construct can now be updated, which is consistent with the recommendations of Churchill (1979). A complainant effectively communicating clearly the information associated with a service failure is within the boundary of its scope. The appropriateness of language and emotions exhibited within a complaint is within the boundary of its scope. In contrast, illegitimate or untruthful complaints arising from dysfunctional behavior is outside the boundary of the current scope.

Therefore, this definition represents the concept of complaint linguistic style: the degree of a complainant effectively and appropriately communicating information to a firm in regard to an actual service failure, as perceived by other customers and/or the service provider. Worth noting is that a customer's language style that produces an ambiguous complaint varying in effectiveness and appropriateness has not been a focus of any existing studies. We now proceed to the next stage of the development process.

Generating the Item Pool

Several steps were followed to develop an initial sample of manifest items. These steps in the construct development process are consistent with interactive marketing scale development (Relling et al. 2016) and service scale development (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos 2008). First, existing measurement instruments from the literature review were scrutinized for relevant items to possibly include, while also avoiding measures outside the domain of complaint linguistic style. Illegitimate complaint measurement items were worded in ways to suggest a complainant was purposely lying or acting in a deviant way. Such items represent concepts outside the core meaning of complaint linguistic style and were not included. Still, the search did yield 14 items that, when adapted to the current context, overlap with the proposed construct and, thus, were added to the initial pool.

The next step involved the use of experience surveys for a "sample of persons who can offer some ideas and insights into the phenomenon," (Churchill 1979, p. 67). Social media ads captured a sample of 45 consumers who had complained to firms on social media in the past. These participants completed open-ended comments via a Qualtrics survey that asked them to comment on what constitutes complaints to a firm on social media that enables the organization to proceed or not proceed with a recovery. This provided several message characteristics suggestive of standard (i.e., aligning more to traditional communication standards) versus alternative (i.e., aligning less with traditional communication standards) complaint linguistic style.

The information collected from these 45 participants was useful because it enabled us to create mock screenshot images of a firm's social media page and two different complaints possessing some of the characteristics uncovered in these experience survey. To avoid confounds of stimuli with a single brand or situation (Rossiter 2002), two complaints were each paired with a fictitious restaurant, hotel, or airline (i.e., services that feature complaint handling). One complaint directed to the restaurant contained standard message attributes / language practices (i.e., non-ambiguous, appropriate, standard linguistic style) versus the other restaurant complaint's message attributes aligning with some of the alternative language practices in Table 1 (i.e., possibly ambiguous, inappropriate, alternative linguistic style). A new sample of 60 participants with online complaint experience were recruited via social media ads, with each subject shown one of the paired complaints for the three industries shown in random order. Participants provided open-ended feedback in a Qualtrics survey about thoughts or emotions each complaint elicited. Using insight-stimulating examples during initial item pool development is recommended by Churchill (1979), who also notes sharp contrasts (e.g., standard versus alternative complaint linguistic style attributes) are very productive. In total, the two samples provided 105 experienced complainants' open-ended feedback, from which 16 complaint message and complainant attributes were added to the item pool.

A focus group was then employed in the next step of the development process. A focus group of six executive MBA students (three females/three males; $M_{age}=39$) from a U.S. university took part in a 90-minute in-person session to discuss the phenomenon of interest. Each had complained to firms before via social media; and each had experience working in customer service and complaint handling, making them ideal candidates in this study. Multiple social media complaints with various linguistic styles were projected on a screen for the group to view, thus providing insight-stimulating examples leading to discussions about complaint message attributes. Concepts relating to all 30 existing items in the pool were identified by the group, lending confidence in the items generated to this point. Additionally, the group added four new items to the pool, bringing the total to 34 items.

Evaluations from qualified judges then occurred in the next step of the development process. Two expert academic judges separate from the authorship team reviewed the 34 items. These judges had knowledge of customer complaints and service recovery topics; and each was formally trained in survey design. The judges were given a description of the scope of the research and the definition of complaint linguistic style. They reviewed the items to identify redundancy, as well as for content validity (Rossiter 2002). Feedback confirmed the use of several items in the pool, with some minor edits suggested. Also, the judges recommended the removal of 16 items with similar

wording or overlapping meaning. Thus, the pool was reduced to 18 items to use in the subsequent scale development. As a last point of judgment, we had a team of three customer service managers from industry review the items for face validity. Their approval allowed us to proceed to the next stage.

Scale Development

A Qualtrics survey with seven-point likert scales anchored with strongly agree / strongly disagree included the 18 items to further refine the scale. The survey included one of two randomly presented stimulating examples of a social media complaint. Each complaint stimulus included a varying degree of certain message attributes and textisms based on feedback during item pool generation, thus representing complaints with standard versus alternative complaint linguistic style. This scenario approach with stimuli of different magnitude is used in scale development works (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos 2008); and scenarios reduce the threat of real world negative implications (McCollough, Berry, and Yadav 2000). Participants were asked to imagine they were on a fictitious restaurant’s social media page and were randomly presented with one of the two stimuli of a complaint posted by another customer. After viewing the complaint, all survey items and demographic questions were presented. The survey was administered to 404 U.S. respondents from Amazon’s mechanical turk platform. Twenty-four subjects failed one or more of the five quality checks in place and were thus removed from the analysis, bringing the final sample size to 380 respondents (mean age=37; mean income=\$50,000; 57% male).

This data was then used in an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with IBM SPSS Statistics version 24. We used the principle axis factoring extraction method with oblique (direct oblimin) rotation per the advice of (Field 2009). In an effort to establish the robustness of the proposed measure, it was important to assess if it was a valid and reliable measure for complaints that ranged from standard to alternative complaint linguistic style. Therefore, the sample was split into two sub-samples, based on which of the two stimuli subjects viewed. The first sub-sample (n=192) analyzed responses from subjects who viewed a stimulus showing message attributes associated with alternative complaint linguistic style. Initially, three factors each with an eigenvalue greater than 1 was produced; however, nine items had cross loadings exceeding .32 and were removed per the guidelines of Costello and Osborne (2005). After removal, a two-factor solution was produced with the remaining nine items. A second EFA was then conducted on the second sub-sample (n=188) of subjects exposed to the stimulus showing message attributes consistent with standard complaint linguistic style. This second EFA again began with all 18 items from the initial pool and yielded highly similar results of an initial three factor solution, which was reduced to two factors consisting of the same nine items after removing cross loaded items. Worth noting, the factor structure was consistent in an EFA with all 380 subjects, with suitable inter-item correlations among the five items on the first factor ($r = .81$) and the four items on the second factor ($r = .70$). Table 2 presents the entire sample’s (n=380) information for each factor’s items, standardized loadings, reliability, and variance explained.

Table 2: EFA Results

Dimension and Psychometrics	Item Wording (All items began with: “ <i>In the message post, the complainant:</i> ”)	Standardized Factor Loading
Communication effectiveness $\alpha=.95$ $R^2=60\%$	communicates in an intelligent manner	.94
	uses a well written message post	.95
	uses acceptable grammar	.92
	communicates respectfully to the company	.85
	conveys the details of their experience	.81
Appropriateness of demeanor $\alpha=.90$ $R^2=22\%$	is reacting too harshly to what happened	.85
	is too emotional to clearly convey the problem they experienced	.79
	is only seeking revenge against the company	.86
	should not speak this way to the company	.83

A brief discussion of the findings from the EFA’s structure is as follows. The structure of the solution produced a two-dimensional representation of complaint linguistic style. The first factor included five items that represented communication effectiveness. These items denoted a complainant’s efficacy based on the communicated

substance within a complaint (e.g., clearly written, details of the failure). The second factor included four items that represented the appropriateness of emotions and demeanor. These items represented the degree of inappropriate emotional and excessive tone perceived within a complainant’s written message (e.g., overreacting, too emotional to convey substance, vengeful, etc.). Taken together, the factor analyses suggest typewritten characters and virtual tone are cues associated with complaint linguistic style.

The exploratory results then needed to be confirmed with a separate data collection and analysis. The next stage of the scale development process incorporated the 9 items from the EFA stage into a survey for a new sample from a Qualtrics panel of 420 subjects. A scenario was again used, but two new stimuli were developed to exemplify standard and alternative complaint linguistic style. Three executive MBA students experienced in customer service and complaint handling were given the definition of complaint linguistic style and provided with the attributes of the 9 items. The MBA students reviewed several U.S. firms’ Facebook pages for one week and captured via screenshots any complaints that they felt represented alternative complaint linguistic style. The group met to discuss which complaint best represented the concept. The chosen complaint was used as the alternative stimulus, with edits to afford anonymity to the customer and company. The group then minimally edited the complaint to construct one of what they believed illustrated a more standard linguistic style, without changing the failure’s subject. Length has been suggested as a control (Johnen and Schnittka 2019), so both stimuli were similar in length. The two complaint stimuli were then used in a scenario-based survey similar in design to the one in the EFA stage. See Figure 1 for the CFA’s stimuli.

Figure 1: Stimuli Used in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis



A quality check insured that the subjects spent enough time viewing the stimulus to intelligently answer the survey questions. Seven of the 420 subjects spent insufficient time (less than five seconds) viewing the randomly presented stimulus and were thus removed. Responses from this sample of 413 subjects (55% male, mean age=39, mean income=\$55,000) were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with Mplus 7.11 to assess psychometric fitness. The analysis revealed non-normality of the data, which is not uncommon since the normality assumption is frequently violated in practice, yet often not reported (Micceri 1989). To address the non-normality, the Mplus maximum likelihood MLMV estimator was used because it outperforms similar estimators (Gao, Shi, and Maydeu-Olivares 2020) by making mean and variance adjustments for non-normal data. Each item only loaded on its own factor and could not cross-load on the other, with both factors tested simultaneously. The results show the model had an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 105.8$, $df = 26$, $\chi^2/df = 4.1$; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .086; SRMR = .051). The RMSEA value was slightly elevated, however RMSEA often becomes inflated with non-normality estimators such as MLMV (Gao, Shi, and Maydeu-Olivares 2020) and when a small number of variables are used (Kenny and McCoach 2003) such as in the current analysis. Each item loaded significantly ($p < .001$) above .70 on its respective factor. Composite reliability (.94 and .86), average variance extracted (.77 and .60), and the correlation between the two factors ($r = -.61$) together exhibited convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). In the end, these confirmatory results were consistent in supporting the EFA’s results for the complaint linguistic style measure. Standardized loadings for all of the items and the psychometric properties for each dimension are listed within Table 3.

Table 3: CFA Results

Dimension and Psychometrics	Item Wording (All items began with: “ <i>In the message post, the complainant:</i> ”)	Standardized Factor Loading
Communication effectiveness $\alpha=.94$ $R^2=60\%$ AVE=.77	communicates in an intelligent manner	.90
	uses a well written message post	.94
	uses acceptable grammar	.88
	communicates respectfully to the company	.84
	conveys the details of their experience	.81
Appropriateness of demeanor $\alpha=.85$ $R^2=16\%$ AVE=.60	is reacting too harshly to what happened	.81
	is too emotional to clearly convey the problem they experienced	.79
	is only seeking revenge against the company	.73
	should not speak this way to the company	.76

General Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

The current research conceptualizes the complaint linguistic style latent construct and demonstrates its validity and reliability across several stages of the measurement development process. The lifeblood of marketing theory is the development of and eventual use of latent constructs. In order to use new constructs, a valid and reliable measure is required. Our work here can now offer the field a psychometrically sound measure for complaint linguistic style. Surprisingly, very little work in both online and offline studies of service recovery investigate how the communication and linguistic style used within a complaint may be influential. Our development of this measure will hopefully fuel future work in this area. The concept is timely, due to shifting sociocultural and communication trends causing a proliferation of informal message exchanges via social media, some of which undoubtedly will be used in complaints made to firms. As the social media service recovery works in the literature review note, the watchful audience of observers is consuming informational cues and forming opinions, meaning complaint linguistic style is one additional signal for the audience to digest.

The format and length restrictions for this conference submission prevents an additional study to assess complaint linguistic style’s relationship within a model of theoretically related constructs. However, a brief discussion here notes how the proposed construct is likely to influence several variables related to service recovery to further theory and inform practice. For example, it is likely observers’ perceptions of the degree of complaint linguistic style will influence observers’ service recovery expectations a complainant deserves. An alternative linguistic style may be deemed as something the firm should not attend to at all, or with little effort. Any subsequent (non)response by the firm is then likely to influence observers’ different justice perceptions and assessments of satisfaction of complaint handling compared to a complaint possessing a more standard linguistic style. These different perceptions across recovery expectations, justice, and satisfaction are likely to lead to diverse brand evaluations (e.g., purchase intent, trust, brand attitude) made by observers. Throughout these relationships several moderators and/or mediators are likely to have an impact, such as failure severity, product involvement, message length, and brand response type (defensive, accommodative, adaptive, etc.) to name a few. Relatedly, a service provider’s perceptions of an alternative versus standard complaint linguistic style may inform how the provider should respond. Collectively, future work can assess these relationships.

A prominent closing point that merits acknowledgment is that this work, in a broad sense, shows that there is still much to learn about service recovery. This may be surprising given the rich history of service recovery works beginning decades ago in traditional offline settings (e.g., Blodgett, Granbois, and Walters 1993; Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998). However, emergent offline service recovery research is still uncovering new discoveries for theory and practice (e.g., Wolter et al. 2019). The same can be said here with the current work in an online scope. Obviously, online service recovery research is not as rich or as mature as its offline counterpart. Yet, despite this domain’s recent emergence as a popular area of study, several social media service recovery works have produced important theoretical and managerial implications. The current research is a good example that shows the domain of online service recovery still is ripe for making new discoveries to benefit academic research and industry practice.

In relation to this last point is the future research opportunities directly associated with the implications of the current work here in the area of consumer complaining behavior. Moreover, the field needs a better understanding of consumer complaint behavior in online and social media environments. The results here show that new behaviors are developing in these digital channels. To date, most of the complaint behavior research is limited to negative online reviews (King, Racherla, and Bush 2014), which arguably are not service recovery situations in most cases. Therefore, more work is needed to understand new consumer complaint behaviors afforded by digital media as it relates to service recovery situations. An example of newer behavioral and technological phenomena are the use of imagery, digital photos, videos, and selfie pictures (e.g., Fox et al. 2018). These behaviors have yet to be investigated in great detail in the area of social media service recovery. An interesting future research question is how does complaining with text versus imagery change the audience's and/or the service provider's perceptions and reactions? This is one example of many that should be explored for newer service failure and recovery behaviors taking place in an increasingly digitally-connected world.

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