
웹사이트에서 상황적 지각과 감정의 역할이 소비자의 적극적 커뮤니케이션 활동에 미치는 영향

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The Effect of Situational Perceptions and Anger on a Consumer's Communication Activeness

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요약 본 연구는 인터넷 웹사이트에서 소비자운동을 설명하는데 있어서 인지적인 요인과 감정적 요인의 효과를 살펴본 연구이다. 특히, 인지적 요인을 설명하는 그루닉의 상황적 이론과 감정적 요인을 설명하는 분노활성화 이론을 결합하여 통합모형을 제시하였다. 이 모형을 검증하기 위해서 소비자에 웹사이트에서 이슈화된 제품과 관련 소비자들의 커뮤니케이션 활동을 살펴보았다. 웹사이트에서 멤버들의 커뮤니케이션 활동을 분석하기 위해 가입자를 대상으로 온라인 설문을 실시하였다. 분석결과, 상황적 이론 및 분노는 온라인에서 소비자들의 능동적인 커뮤니케이션 활동을 유의미하게 설명하였다. 더불어 상황적 이론의 요인과 분노를 결합한 모델은 더욱 설명력이 높았고 그 중에서도 분노는 강력한 요인으로 판명되었다.

주제어 : 인터넷 웹사이트, 소비자운동, 상황적 이론, 그리고 분노.

Abstract In this study, we consider the integration of cognitive components and emotion to account for communication behaviors and activism on a consumer advocacy website. The challenge of integrating situational theory and anger activism model was empirically explored utilizing an online survey with the members of the virtual community, which was designed to raise issues and to protest against the product defects of a product. Our findings indicated that along with the cognitive perception in the situational theory, anger as a negative emotion was the most significant predictor strongly associated with communication behaviors and activism on the organization. More interestingly, the model that integrates anger with cognitive components significantly improves its explanatory power compared with one including only cognitive components as explanatory variables.

Key Words : Internet Website, Consumer Activism, Situational Theory, and Anger

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication scholars have found that the Internet has empowered consumers with an effective and efficient communication medium to create interpersonal relationships with publics[10][48]. Online communication tools, such as websites, emails, and chat rooms, permit consumers to interact with each other at a relatively low cost and great speed. Consequently, marketing and

public relations (MPR) practitioners are facing with ever-increasing challenges in handling various issues created by the new medium.

A consumer's online activity, or "cyberactivism," is similar to offline activism, but occur in cyberspace[31]. This nomenclature was not proposed on a particular theoretical ground but simply offers a designation to describe the new phenomenon on the virtual space. One characteristic of cyberactivism is that previously

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논문접수: 2012년 8월 23일, 1차 수정을 거쳐, 심사완료: 2012년 9월 30일

unrelated publics gather together to form issues through the interconnection among many different kinds of players. A website plays a vital role as a virtual community for new types of publics to share, disseminate, or exchange information via different communication tools available on the web community[8][38][40].

All of the members joining a web community may not be considered as “activists.” Individuals may vary in terms of communication activity, issue involvement, issue recognition, and emotional involvement towards issues[31]. Therefore, using Grunig’s situational theory and Turner’s (2006) anger activism model, our study aims to integrate cognitive components and emotion to provide a more comprehensive explanation of communication behaviors in the online context[50].

The situational theory is based on cognitive beliefs (issue involvement, constraint recognition, and problem recognition) in identifying types of publics whereas the anger activism model emphasizes an affective component. Previous studies have demonstrated that the situational theory is a critical predictor for the communication behaviors of consumers[35][39][25][24][23][21]. As Lazarus (1991) pointed out, anger associated with motivational tendencies is an important variable associated with consumers’ communication behaviors and activism[36]. To our best knowledge, however, little research has been conducted on neither the situational theory nor the anger activism model under an online environment.

In this study, we investigated the feasibility of integrating the situational theory with the anger activism model in the online context. For our empirical investigation, data were collected from the consumer advocacy website where the members of the web community voiced up their complaints and dissatisfactions against a defective product. An online survey was performed to ask their issue perceptions, level of anger, and communication behaviors regarding the defective product.

2. CASE BACKGROUND

In September 2004, the website, Consumer Power, was launched by a consumer who was far exasperated over S company’s defective mobile phone. The mobile phone had several major defects such as malfunction of the camcorder, poor voice quality, fuzzy screen, and broken text messages. A large number of consumers experiencing similar problems joined the website; currently, the website’s membership counts over 10,000. The virtual place of Consumer Power was then used to protest against the manufacturer and to publicize the issues created by the defective product. For facilitating effective interpersonal communication, the website was designed with numerous functional features including a bulletin board, member service area, Q&A page, complaint area, bug board, bug picture room, and links to other useful sources of information. By aid of these practical features, the members of the website interacted with each other to its fullest potential and signed a petition that was, in turn, filed with the Consumer Protection Institute.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Consumers on the Internet

Issues are referred to as topics that publics form as communicating over their problems[23] [26]. The Internet is generally described as an interactive medium that offers a public platform for consumers to share, analyze, activate, or publicize a problem or an issue. Wernli and Frank (2000) developed the theory of “issue and cyberactivism lifecycle” on the web space; and argued that there exist three identifiable stages in the lifecycle. In the early stage, a website is created as a virtual place for consumers[54]. In the next stage, interested consumers participate in the web community as members to share and discuss their specific issues, utilizing available web tools such as chat, message, email, video, voice chat, file share, blog, and discussion group. The activities on the web community publicize

or escalate the issues as drawing active involvement from journalists, a consumer service department, or a governmental agency. The final stage involves physical activism that may take a various range of forms including a boycott, an effort to collect signatures for a petition, and/or lobbying.

An advanced stage in the lifecycle, however, does not necessarily mean an increase in the degrees of communication activity and engagement from all the members who jointed a website. Searching and joining a web community to obtain information regarding an issue is an example of active rather than passive consumers[20][31]. Morris & Ogan (1996) argued that the Internet is a mass medium because it utilizes the source-message-receiver features of the traditional mass communication model[42]. In this sense, the Internet allows for both information seeking and information processing; individuals motivated by an issue can take part in either - or both - activities. Such difference in communication activities might be driven by an individual cognitive and affective engagement towards an issue.

Individual customers arrive to a web community with varying degrees of issue involvement: problem recognition may differ, most may perceive their abilities to impact and/or correct a problem differently, and emotional engagement may vary. To better understand the cognitive and affective components, we attempt to apply situational theory and the anger activism model to the case of the consumer advocacy *website Consumer-Power*.

3.2 Situational Theory

Situational theory has typically been employed to identify issue publics and predict communication behaviors[35][25][24][23][22][21]. The theory assumes that publics' communication behavior (i.e., information seeking and information processing) is dependent upon three factors: *problem recognition*, *constraint recognition*, and *level of involvement*. *Problem recognition* indicates how often a person thinks about

an issue, while *constraint recognition* refers to the individual's perception regarding what he or she can do about an issue. *Level of involvement* refers to how much a person considers an issue to be personally relevant. High problem recognition, low constraint recognition, and high level of involvement regarding a situation or an issue bring about active communication behavior (information seeking), while low problem recognition, high constraint recognition, and low level of involvement lead to less active communication behavior (information processing). Hamilton found that highly active people engaged in overt activism regarding political issues[27], and within a consumer behavior context, Cameron connected active consumers (high involvement, high problem recognition, and low constraint) with effects resulting in recall and recognition memory[9].

Kim and Grunig refined the concept of information seeking as active communication for problem solving[34]. Assuming that information seeking, however, is not sufficient to explain various human communication activities during a problematic situation, they conceptualized active communication behaviors in more details, including information selection, information acquisition, and information transmission during a problem-solving process. We will use communication activeness as a dependent variable in evaluating the activities of the members on the *Consumer-Power* website in order to deal with the issues over the defective product. Consumers' communication activeness on the website would depend on the degrees of involvement, problem recognition, and constraint recognition.

3.3 Anger activism model

In some contexts, affective variables may play an important role in understanding and predicting consumers' behaviors[11][15][41][49]. In relations with a product or service, consumer activism and satisfaction are often influenced by emotional status[45], although consumers' responses have

traditionally been conceptualized and measured only using cognitive indicators. Consumers' emotional bond with a service or an issue is strongly associated with their future purchase intentions or activism[16]. According to McGuire [41], in relations with an attitude object, the affective components include emotions, feelings, or drives, while the cognitive components include beliefs, judgments, or thoughts. Therefore, a multivariate model employing both affective and cognitive components as covariates would enhance the explanatory power of the model about communication behavior.

According to Dillard & Meijnders[13], there are three perspectives of emotion—the uni-dimensional, the positive and negative emotions, and the discrete emotion [29][36][52]. Anger is a discrete emotion with a unique function and capacity to motivate different action tendencies independently, according to functional emotion theory[32]. Anger has attracted considerable attention from scholars who are interested in risk communication, health communication, and marketing. Anger is elicited from an individual's appraisal of high other-responsibility for negative events and high other-control over these negative events[5].

Appraisal theory supported the specific function of anger influencing an action. The appraisal theory, first suggested by Lazarus (1991), says that in consumer research literature[36], anger has been described as a common consumer reaction to product failure[17][18][55][54]. Folkes (1984) found that anger was driven by increased desires to damage the organization that is responsible for product failure[17]. Anger also induces the inclination to complain directly to the organization[18], and such inclination is associated with active communication behavior or activism.

Recently, public relations scholars have explored anger to better understand publics' behaviors regarding crisis and issue management, as a crisis or an issue is generally related with negative emotion. Coombs and Holiday emphasized the public's anger in terms of

attribution to crisis responsibility[12]. Jin & Cameron examined the negative effects of a crisis and the influence of the public's evaluations on organizational responses to the crisis[33]. Coombs, Fediuk, and Holladay also found that stakeholders' anger resulting from an organizational crisis response (accommodative crisis response) influenced purchase intentions and positive word of mouth[9]. Cho & Jo applied to anger to theory of planned behavior and found that anger was a significant variable to predict consumer's complain behaviors[9].

Regarding the classification of issue publics, anger could be a meaningful dimension, and the intensity of anger might represent the types of publics in terms of their behaviors. Turner proposed the anger activism model to explain how anger is associated with motivational action tendencies[50]. The model suggests that anger motivates people to act when they believe that there is something they can do. Moreover, when anger interacts with the perception of efficacy, the degrees of engagement involved in an issue increase. Lerner and Keltner's(2000) appraisal tendency framework argued that anger has a mediating effect between consumer appraisals on service failure and one's retaliatory intentions or behaviors[37]. A retaliatory behavior is a type of consumer activism, such as signing a petition, publicizing an issue through the mass media or the Internet, talking to friends, organizing an event, joining an activist group, writing letters to key officials, or organizing a sit-in or boycotting.

4. HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Consumer Power exemplified consumer activism. Several factors contributed to the successful campaign: active communication among members using the website's practical features for communication, media coverage of the issue, and petition movement. Such

activeness might vary in individual levels of engagement. As discussed in literature review, level of cognitive perception to a situation has been coincided as a significant factor explaining consumer activism. Thus, we testify its role in the online context.

H1: Problem recognition, constraint recognition, and level of involvement will be significant predictors of communication behavior activeness among members of the *Consumer Power*.

According to anger activism model, anger is a critical booster facilitating active engagement and involvement. Little research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of anger activism in online communities. The following hypothesis seeks to the functional role of anger in consumer activism.

H2: Consumer Power website members' level of anger will be positively associated with their communication activeness.

The relationship of emotion to cognition has been discussed for a long period and includes various perspectives. Cognitive appraisal theorists have argued that each emotion is characterized by appraisals of facing a situation, and cognitive appraisal is considered as causes of emotions [8][43][44][46][47][52]. In contrast, Zajonc believed that "affect and cognition are separate and partially independent system and that although they ordinarily function conjointly, affect could be elicited without a prior cognitive process"[60]. The long period of two sides' debate about the relationship of cognition to emotion has developed theories and models how emotion is intertwined with cognitive process. The current study tries to assess the integrated effects of emotion and cognition on a consumer's activeness. In other words, we investigate whether the model integrating anger with the situational theory better account for consumers' communication behavior and activism within the online framework of a consumer advocacy website.

H3: Adding anger into the situational model will increase its explanatory power in predicting the activeness of communication behaviors.

5. METHOD

5.1 Sample

Data were collected from the target population including all the members of the Consumer Power website. To access a complete email list of the members, we contacted the administrator who was in charge of maintaining the website. Permission was granted to conduct a survey, and an email invitation with a URL address to the survey website was distributed to each member. In four weeks, email reminders were sent twice. A total of two hundred eighty members returned their surveys. The majority of survey participants were male (86%) and their average age was 25. Most of the respondents were employed (55%) and the rest were students (45%).

5.2 Measurements

5.2.1 Predictors in situational theory

Problem recognition was measured on a 4-point scale as responses (never, rarely, sometimes, or often) to the question, "How frequently do you think about the issues created by the defective cellular phone?" Level of involvement was measured by the question, "Do you see a connection between yourself and the phone problem?" with responses recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree - Strongly agree). Constraint recognition was assessed by the question, "Do you think that you could affect the way these issues are handled?" with responses recorded on a 5-point scale (Strongly disagree - Strongly agree). The question for constraint recognition was revised in a positive way. The original question was "Do you think that you could not affect the way these issues are handled?" Each concept regarding cognitive and affective variables was measured by one question, but these questions have

been evident to be strongly reliable in measuring each concept of the variables in the previous studies [22][27][39]. In survey, the descriptive statistics for each question were summarized as follows: problem recognition (M=3.18, SD=.94), level of involvement (M=4.11, SD=.98), and constraint recognition (M=3.83, SD=.91).

5.2.2 Activeness of communication behaviors

To measure the level of communication activeness (information selection, information acquisition, and information transmission) adopted by Kim and Grunig[34], we asked participants the following items: (1) “How often do you visit the website to get information about the phone issue?” measured using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1= none, 6 = daily); (2) “How many times did you upload information about the phone issue?” measured using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1= none, 6 = more than 10), (3) “How many hours do you spend on the website weekly?” measured using a 6-point scale (1= none, 6= more than 6 hours), and (4) the frequency of writing to address an opinion, measured on a 6-point scale (1= never, 6 = more than 31 times). The reliability analysis for these four items resulted in a Chronbach’s α value of .71. The mean value and standard deviation for each item was summarized as follows: frequency of visits (M=3.708, SD=1.17), uploading information (M=1.6, SD=1.00), time spent (M=3.708, SD=1.17), and frequency of writing (M=2.16, SD=.85).

5.2.3 Anger

Anger items adopted from Roget’s International Thesaurus were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree–Strongly agree)[7]. Participants were asked to respond to the following questions: (1) “I feel anger against the phone company regarding the phone problem,” (2) “I feel displeasure against the company regarding the phone problem,” and (3) “I feel rage at the company regarding the phone problem.” The reliability analysis for these three items measuring

anger resulted in a Chronbach’s a value of .84. The mean score of the items was 4.26 (SD=.78).

6. RESULTS

The first hypothesis conjectured that the three independent variables, including constraint recognition, problem recognition, and issue involvement, would be significant predictors regarding the members’ activeness of communication behaviors on the website. Scores on the three items representing the activeness of communication behaviors were summed and averaged to compute the overall activeness of communication behaviors. To test the hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was performed, and the results that are summarized in Table 1 indicated that all of the three variables were significant predictors for the activeness of communication behaviors, i.e., constraint recognition ($\beta=0.33, p<.001$), problem recognition($\beta=.20, p<.05$), and issue involvement ($\beta =.15, p<.05$). The adjusted R^2 value of this model was 0.24, indicating the three issue perceptions of situational theory accounted for 24% of the variance in the activeness of communication behaviors (see Table 1). As reported from Table 1, constraint recognition was the most significant predictor associated with the activeness of communication behaviors.

<Table 1> Multiple Regression Analysis Between Issue Perceptions and Activeness

Independent Variable	Activeness			Adjusted R ²
	Beta	SE Beta	B	
Issue perceptions	Constraint recognition	0.23***	0.05	0.33
	Problem recognition	0.14**	0.05	0.20
	Issue involvement	0.11*	0.05	0.15

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The second hypothesis surmised that anger would be a significant predictor for the activeness of

communication behaviors within the *Consumer Power* website. Scores for the three items were averaged to calculate an overall anger measure. To test the hypothesis, a simple linear regression model was employed. As seen from Table 2, the fitted model showed a significant relationship between anger and the activeness of communication behaviors ($\beta=.41$, $p<.001$). The R^2 value of this model was .16, which means that anger accounts for 27% of the variance in the activeness of communication behaviors.

〈Table 2〉 Simple Regression Analysis Between Anger and Activeness

Independent Variable	Activeness			Adjusted R ²
	Beta	SE Beta	B	
Anger	0.35***	0.06	0.41	.16***

Note. * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

The third hypothesis conjectured that integrating anger with the situational model would increase the explanatory power of the model to product the activeness of communication behaviors. To test this hypothesis, anger was added to the multivariate regression model that was used to test the first hypothesis, which results in a combined model of situational theory and the anger activism. As summarized in Table 4, the model 2, with anger added to the model 1, accounted for 32% of the variance in the activeness of communication behaviors. When anger was added to the model 1, the adjusted R^2 value was increased from 24% to 32%.

〈Table 3〉 Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Activeness

Model	Independent Variable	Activeness		Adjusted R ²
		Beta	SE Beta	
1	Constraint recognition	0.23***	0.05	.24***
	Problem recognition	0.14**	0.05	
	Issue involvement	0.11*	0.05	

2	Constraint recognition	0.21***	0.05	.31***
	Problem recognition	0.09*	0.05	
	Issue involvement	0.08	0.05	
	Anger	0.24***	0.05	

Note. * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

As further analysis, the likelihood ratio test was conducted to assess whether the increment of the adjusted R^2 value was statistically significant. The test statistic value, which is the log-transformed difference of the likelihoods between the nested model (model 1) and the full model (model 2), was consulted with its asymptotic reference distribution χ^2 with $df = 3$ to attain the p-value ($p < 0.001$). According to the test result, there was a significant model improvement with more explained variability when the predictor, anger, was added to model 1.

The table four summarized acceptance and reject of each hypotheses.

〈Table 4〉 Summary of the Results

Hypotheses(H)	Accept	Reject
H1: Issue perceptions and activeness	V	
H2: Anger & Activeness	V	
H3: Issue perception + Anger and Activeness	Partially Accepted	

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to extend and test the effectiveness of situational theory and the anger activism model by integrating the theories in the context of online issue communication. The findings in our study highlight the importance of factors in situational theory in predicting publics' online activities. Our results indicate the strongest predictor of online activism was constraint recognition among situational perceptions. The variable, constraint recognition, measures personal belief about one's capacity to change

or influence an issue, which could incite people's physical activism. The concept is similar to self-efficacy, which Eastin & LaRose (2000) and Yun & Trumbo(2000) have found to be a highly predictive variable in explaining behavioral intentions or behaviors in computer-mediated communication [14][59]. Ajzen & Fishbein found similar results in health behavioral research[4].

Another challenge in this study was to explore the impact of anger on the activeness of communication behaviors. The finding indicates that anger was positively associated with the activeness. Anger involves "exerting effort to deal with the situation"[47]. As such, active communication are efforts to cope with anger and in doing so, an individual complains about or protest a defective product through active communication. Typically, negative emotions, sad or disgust, elevate avoidance behavior, while anger promotes active behavior tendencies[30]. The link between anger and active behavior is easy to detect in our everyday life. We might say that we are angry at selling expired food, false advertising, price-fixing activities, or other corporate wrongful conducts, which motivates our behavioral tendencies against a company.

As one of most important findings in this study, adding anger to the situational model significantly increased the explanatory power in activeness on the website. These results demonstrate that anger is the most critical factor among all the variables, and integrating anger into situational theory becomes a more powerful theoretical model in explaining communication behaviors. The results also reveals that cognition and anger independently predicted consumer activeness of communication behavior. In this study, as Zajonc's argument, cognition and anger were independently considered and put into the integrated model. However, cognitive appraisal theorists suggested that cognition is the primary process of generating emotion[43][44][47], and recently scholars argue that cognition and emotion are intertwined and interacted. Our study did not employ these two

perspectives in explaining the relationship between anger and cognition, and future research will search an interaction or a casual relationship between them. Some other limitations exist in this study. A number of attributes, i.e., locus, stability, and controllability of an issue, in the past studies have been examined as independent variables for influencing consumer reactions to product failure [17][55][53]. According to attribution theory, people are presumed to search causes of a situation based on the three predictors by which people evaluate an organization's issue such as product defect or service, and these attributions would be excellent predictors of subsequent affective and behavioral response to event [53]. Employing those variables in an experimental design in the future might provide robust information about what conditions exacerbate consumers' activeness of communication behaviors reaction. In addition, prior reputation or image of a company may be a significant factor for predicting consumer reaction to a negative issue, because prior reputation can bias consumer perception.

In sum, our research has theoretical and practical implications for the study of emotion and issue management. Theoretically, it lends considerable support to situational theory in predicting activeness of consumers' communication behaviors within an online context. Unlike previous studies testing situational theory, this study benefited from multiple regressions, providing a comparable effect of the three variables posed by situational theory with regard to communication behaviors. In addition, the integration of situational theory and anger increased the explanatory power in relation with consumer activeness of communication behaviors within an online context. Practically, understanding how consumers perceive the issue and affectively respond to it facilitates the development of issue management programs that would help a marketing professional to better handle negative issues. This study challenges issue managers to develop effective ways to communicate with active consumers, specifically, to determine how to best

deliver messages to them within an online context. Future studies should also seek to develop effective strategies for online responses to issue consumers using social media platforms.

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