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The effect of affective and normative commitment on helping behaviour in different online contexts

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Background: Despite the benefits provided by online communities and online retailing, administrators and managers are faced with several challenges to successfully manage these platforms. Helping behaviours may assist to overcome these challenges; however, knowledge about this construct in different online environments is limited.

Objectives: To investigate the influence of affective and normative commitment on helping behaviour within non-commercial and commercial online environments.

Method: Data were collected through online questionnaires. The sample included residential online community members who actively participated in the community during the last 12 months (non-commercial sample) or had made an online purchase during the last 12 months (commercial sample). Non-probability sampling was used and the data analysis included descriptive statistics using SPSS and structural equation modelling using Mplus software.

Results: In both online environments, affective commitment positively influenced the helping behaviours of online community members and online customers; however, the relationship between normative commitment and helping behaviour was only significant for the non-commercial online environment. Informational support, satisfaction and subjective norm were confirmed as antecedents of affective and normative commitment for both online environments.

Conclusion: Affectively committed online community members and online retail customers are likely to perform helping behaviours and will become affectively and normatively committed when the community and online retailer provide satisfactory service to the members and customers. Online community members who are normatively committed will help fellow members to use the service of the online community; and should online community members and online customers experience subjective norm, they will become normatively committed.

Keywords: affective commitment; normative commitment; online communities; online retailing; relationship marketing.

Introduction

During the past decade, online retailing and online communities have grown significantly. Using the internet, customers can make online purchases and join online communities where they reap benefits such as convenience, information, product variety and social- and functional support (Chiang, Lin & Huing 2018; Khan 2016). However, despite the benefits, online retailers and online community administrators are struggling to successfully manage these platforms. Online retailers face fierce competition, high switching and low customer retention (Chiu et al. 2011; Chou & Hsu 2016; Kaur & Kochar 2018), whereas administrators have the endless challenge to manage user participation and discourage inappropriate member behaviour (Kraut & Resnick 2011; Malinen 2015).

It seems that helping behaviours by individuals may help to overcome these challenges, because these behaviours result in reduced costs, increased satisfaction, the creation of a sense of belongingness and increased level of service delivery (Anaza 2014; Chu 2009; Yi, Gong & Lee 2013; Yu-Hong, Da-hai & Sheng-nan 2013). Initially introduced in the offline environment (Gruen, Summers & Acito 2000), technological innovations such as online self-services and social media are extending helping behaviours to online environments (Frasquet-Deltoro, Alarcón-del-Amo & Lorenzo-Romero 2019). In the absence of direct employee involvement, customers in a commercial context such as online retailing can now turn to fellow customers for help to use the retailer's online self-service (Van Tonder et al. 2018). Similarly, within a non-commercial environment,

such as online communities, members are able to assist fellow members to use the community correctly (Malinen 2015).

Grounded in the social exchange theory, helping behaviours are viewed as a dimension of citizenship behaviour that are voluntary in nature and provide assistance to others (Bove et al. 2009; Yi & Gong 2013). Even though citizenship behaviour is a contemporary topic (Chiu et al. 2019; Godwin & Wright 2019), the helping behaviour dimension has received limited attention within the online environment. Commitment, grounded in relationship marketing, has been established as an antecedent of citizenship behaviour (Hashim & Tan 2015; Yong, Sachau & Lassiter 2011). However, prior research has generally narrowed the focus to only investigate the influence of affective commitment on citizenship behaviours (Curth, Uhrich & Benkenstein 2014; Mpinganjira 2016) and ignored the effect that normative commitment may have on helping behaviours.

The purpose of this study, is therefore, to provide more insight on the helping behaviours of individuals, as preceded by both affective and normative commitment and their relevant antecedents. The novel conceptual model was furthermore tested in diverse online contexts, which provided a unique contribution to the online retailing and online community environments. Ultimately, the research findings may provide a better understanding of the helping behaviour dimension that can assist managers and administrators to increase participation, purchases and social interaction. The research also aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of commitment, as a multidimensional construct by investigating both affective and normative commitment in a non-commercial and commercial environment. Through a better understanding of commitment, managers and administrators will be in a more favourable position to implement strategic tactics to increase the level of commitment of members and online customers.

Research background

An online community refers to a group of people who share a purpose, interest or goal on an online platform (Preece 2000). Since inception, online communities have evolved into a platform that has massive influences on diverse parts of the society such as the economy, government and cities (Baek & Kim 2015). Although different forms of online communities exist (Ling, Guo & Yang 2014; Stokburger-Sauer & Wiertz 2015), this study focuses on residential online communities on Facebook, which include residents of a city who share a common interest, for example, the 'Potchefstroom' Facebook group. Residential online communities provide a platform for members where they can become more aware of the city's activities and can ask fellow members for assistance and information. Local businesses advertise their products and solve problems, whilst the local government use online communities to communicate and interact with residents. Interactions on residential online communities are social in nature and these social interactions provide members with the opportunity to access and exchange information whilst resources are distributed in the community (Chen, Boh & Mo 2018).

Online retailing refers to the adoption of digital technology that allows for purchasing or selling transactions to take place (Okonkwo 2010). Compared to offline shopping, online shopping provides instantaneous and accurate information about each purchase, enable customisation through customer accounts and store all payment information (Chen, Sain & Guo 2012). Online retail purchases in South Africa have reached the R14-billion mark in 2018, representing 1.4% of total retail, with forecasts indicating that 2019 may see a 20% growth in online retail sales (World Wide Works 2018).

Theoretical framework

The key theories and constructs of the study are discussed in the subsequent sections.

Social exchange theory

The social exchange theory is based on the principles of voluntary actions where individuals are motivated by the expected returns from an interaction. This means that the social exchange by one individual in a relationship motivates the other individual to respond with benefits at their preference (Blau 1964). Reciprocity is viewed as a core element of the social exchange theory (Tanskanen 2015) because the beneficial deeds towards other people are reciprocated through service and expression of gratitude. Therefore, when customers benefit from other customers or the organisation, they feel obligated to react by performing behaviours that are not expected or required of them, which are also known as customer citizenship behaviours.

Customer citizenship and helping behaviours

Voluntary behaviour of customers that delivers value to the organisations but are not required to be performed by the customer is known as customer citizenship behaviour (Hau & Thuy 2016). Performed towards the organisation, employees or other customers, these behaviours positively influence the performance and experience of these stakeholders (Bove et al. 2009). Online community members are in an ideal position to assist fellow members by teaching, helping and giving advice of how to accurately and correctly use the online community (Chou & Hsu 2016; Yi & Gong 2013). Online retail customers also perform helping behaviours towards fellow customers (Anaza & Zhou 2013) when for instance they assist fellow online customers to make an online purchase (Ponnusamy 2015). Online customers can, for example, help other customers by showing or telling them how to make a purchase on the online retailer's website or who to contact when they want to return a product.

Relationship marketing

Relationship marketing refers to the process of 'attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships in a

multi-service organisation' (Berry 1983) that are characterised by long-term relationships between the customer and the organisation with a customer-participation focus (Gummerus, Van Koskull & Kowalkowski 2017).

Digital, mobile and social technological developments have impacted the dynamics of the customer–organisation relationships (Payne & Frow 2017). In the online environment, no face-to-face interaction takes place; and all exchanges are mediated by the internet, and relational exchanges that are facilitated by the internet and take place within a human-to-technology environment (Steinhoff et al. 2019).

Commitment

Commitment is a key underpinning of relationship marketing (Benouakrim & El Kandoussi 2013) and is viewed as a multidimensional construct that consists of affective, normative and continuous commitment (Meyer & Allen 1991). This study only includes affective and normative commitment because research has indicated that continuous commitment has a negative influence on citizenship behaviour (helping behaviour) and is therefore excluded.

Affective commitment

Affective commitment refers to the attachment, identification and involvement of the customer towards the organisation (Bansal et al. 2004). When an online community member has an emotional connection or attachment towards the community and can identify themselves with the community, the member is said to be affectively committed (Cheung & Lee 2009). In addition, affective commitment occurs in commercial online environments, where the online customer becomes affectively committed to the online retailer through the emotional connection formed between the parties (Boateng & Narteh 2016).

Normative commitment

Normative commitment indicates the individual's sense of obligation to continue with a relationship where the individual and organisation or brand share important norms and values (Fullerton 2011; Meyer & Allen 1991). Normative commitment with organisations therefore happens through the development of a strong correspondence between the values of the organisation and that of the customer (Fullerton 2014). Although limited research exists, both online community members and online customers can become normatively committed when they feel obligated to remain as a member of the online community or as a customer of the online retailer (Boateng & Narteh 2016; Cheung & Lee 2012).

Conceptual model and hypotheses development

The following section provides arguments for the development of the conceptual model.

Consequences of affective and normative commitment

Marketing scholars seem to agree that commitment facilitates citizenship behaviour (Hashim & Tan 2015; Yong et al. 2011). Online community members with a strong emotional attachment towards the online community will perform helping behaviours by replying to posts of fellow members (Bateman, Gray & Butler 2011), and affectively commitment online customers will act beyond only purchasing a product when they assist fellow customers to use the service of the online retailer (Van Tonder et al. 2018). Although not yet investigated within an online community and online retail environments, in offline environments, normative commitment has been established to positively and significantly influence citizenship behaviour (Fullerton 2011; Spik 2016).

For the present study, based on the above-mentioned research, it is plausible to argue that when a residential online community has personal meaning for the members and they feel emotionally attached to the community, then the members might be likely to perform helping behaviours. This same argument is also valid for online retail customers, where affectively committed online customers assist fellow customers when they need help to use the service of the online retailer.

Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Affective commitment has a positive effect on helping behaviour within a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

Although limited studies exist, based on the research by Spik (2016) and Fullerton (2011), when online community members and online retail customers become normatively committed towards the online community and online retailer, they may also perform helping behaviours towards fellow members or customers, where they assist, teach and help them to use the services correctly. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Normative commitment has a positive effect on helping behaviour in a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

Factors influencing affective and normative commitment

Informational support

Part of the social support theory, informational support refers to the providing of guidance and/or information and takes place when an individual assists another individual to have a better understanding of a difficult event and what resources and coping strategies are needed to resolve the problem (Kim et al. 2008). Informational support in online communities is provided through messages, normally in the form of recommendations, advice or knowledge. The informational support by online community members are grounded in their own knowledge and past experience and can also act as a supplement to the organisation's information

(Zhu, Sun & Chang 2016). Informational support in an online retail setting is provided when online customers, for example, communicate their experiences concerning the purchase of the product, the timing of the delivery and features of the product to fellow customers (Lal 2017).

When members of an online community offer suggestions and information to overcome problems, the receiving member will become more emotionally connected towards the online community (Chen et al. 2013). Confirmed by Mpinganjira (2016), affective commitment is positively influenced by informational support, as part of the social support construct. Even though the relationship between informational support and affective commitment within a commercial environment has not yet been tested, based on the above-mentioned studies, when online retail customers receive suggestions and information from fellow customers, these customers may also become emotionally attached to the online retailer. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

> **H3:** Informational support has a positive effect on affective commitment in a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a post-consumption evaluation process, which indicates that the experience was as good as it was supposed to be (Oliver 1980). Viewed as a direct outcome of brand experience, customer satisfaction is emotional and psychological in nature and results from individual customer experiences (Chahal & Dutta 2015; Lin 2015). The satisfaction of online community members is dependent on the quality of interactions taking place; hence, the quality of the posts, comments and discussion topics will influence how satisfied an online community member is with the community (De Valck, Wan Bruggen & Weirenga 2009). A strong sense of satisfaction will therefore enhance the likelihood that an online community member continues to participate and engage with the community. When a member has a strong sense of satisfaction, they are likely to participate and engage with the community (Chiu et al. 2013). Customer satisfaction is regarded as one of the essential elements of organisational success because it is closely associated with an organisation's competitiveness and revenue creation (Liao et al. 2017).

Satisfaction positively influences affective commitment in various diverse contexts (Jin, Park & Kim 2010; Muhammad et al. 2014; Zhou et al. 2012). Satisfied online community members will become more affectively committed towards the community resulting in them feeling emotionally attached and having a strong sense of belonging towards the community (Jin et al. 2010; Zhou et al. 2012). In addition, based on the existing research mentioned, when online customers are satisfied with the service they receive from the online retailer, these customers may also become affectively committed towards the retailer. Subsequently, it is hypothesised that:

> **H4:** Satisfaction has a positive effect on affective commitment in a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

The effect of satisfaction on normative commitment has not yet been extensively explored. However, within an organisational environment, a high level of job satisfaction will result in the employees feeling obligated to continue with their employment (Aydogdu & Asikgil 2011). In addition, offline banking clients become normatively committed towards their bank when they are satisfied with the service received (Fatima, Razzaque & De Mascio 2016).

Taking into consideration the mentioned research, the same positive relationship may also exist in a non-commercial and commercial environment. When online community members are satisfied with the service they receive from the residential online community, they may also feel obligated to continue using the online community and participate in discussions. Also, when online retail customers are satisfied with the service they receive from the online retailer, these customers may become normatively committed and feel obligated to continue using the online retailer. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

> **H5:** Satisfaction has a positive effect on normative commitment in a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

Subjective norm

The perception of a person that most of the individuals who are important to them are of the opinion that they should perform a certain behaviour, which is known as subjective norm (Ajzen 1991). This suggests the influence of expectations of other individuals and is often referred to as social normative compliance or social pressure to act in a certain way (Shen et al. 2011). The subjective norm of an online community member indicates the effect of another individual's opinion on the member's behaviour; hence, the member will participate in the community when they are of the opinion that influential individuals approve participation (Zhou 2011). Online customers also experience subjective norm in the form of referent individuals such as friends and family who want them to use an online retailer and, therefore, directly influence their purchase behaviour (Lin, Liu & Ngo 2016; Siti, Mohammed & Nik Kamariah 2012).

Research amongst customers of luxury brands (Shukla, Banerjee & Singh 2016) and users of online social networks (Chen et al. 2013) indicated that subjective norm has a positive and significant effect on normative commitment. The same result might also occur in the online community and online retail environments. Within these environments, when people who influence their behaviours, such as friends, are of the opinion that they should participate in discussions or that they should use the online retailer, then the members/customers may feel obligated to do so. Consequently, it is hypothesised that:

> **H6:** Subjective norm has a positive effect on normative commitment in a non-commercial and commercial online environment.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the conceptual model for the study is presented in Figure 1.
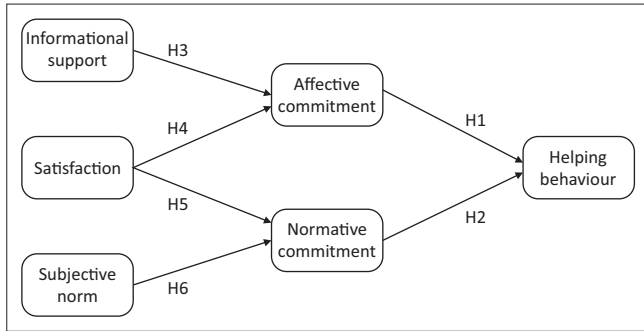
FIGURE 1: Conceptual model.

Research methodology

Population, research design, data collection and sampling approach

The non-commercial sample (online community members) included males and females older than the age of 18 years, who are currently active members of a residential online community on Facebook in South Africa. The commercial sample (online retailing) included male and female members of residential online communities on Facebook in Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal, who are older than 18 years of age and have purchased products from online retailers during the last 12 months. Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal were selected because these provinces are the most economically active provinces in South Africa and have the highest economic growth rate (Watkins 2019).

An explanatory research design was followed with the aim to explain the empirical relationship between the variables (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016). Quantitative data were collected using online self-administrated questionnaires that were posted on the different residential Facebook groups. Because no sample frame exists, the study employed non-probability sampling which included quota- and convenience sampling. For the non-commercial sample, the largest residential Facebook group in each province of South Africa was surveyed together with four smaller residential Facebook groups; and for the commercial sample, the biggest and four smaller residential groups in the Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces were selected. In addition, convenience sampling was used where the questionnaire was posted in the newsfeed of each Facebook group. The study included more than six constructs; hence a sample size of at least 400 respondents per contexts was obtained (Hair et al. 2014). A summary of the demographic information from the realised samples is presented in Table 1.

Measurement instrument

Existing, valid and reliable scales were adapted to develop the measurement instruments for two different environments. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale where '1' indicated 'strongly disagree' and '5' indicated 'strongly agree' to show their level of agreement with the statements measuring the different constructs in the study. The items measuring informational support, satisfaction and subjective norms were adapted from Chen et al. (2013) and Fatima et al. (2016); and the items measuring affective and normative commitment

TABLE 1: Demographic profile.

Variable	Category	N-C (n = 545) (%)	C (n = 408) (%)
Gender	Male	15	17
	Female	85	83
Age	18–26 years	14	19
	27–35 years	23	26
	36–47 years	31	26
	48–66 years	30	25
	67 years and older	2	2
Employment status	Full-time employed	48	52
	Full-time student	5	6
	Housewife or househusband	8	5
	Part-time employed	5	6
	Retired	5	6
	Self-employed	24	21
	Unemployed	4	2
	Do not want to answer	1	1

N-C, non-commercial sample; C, commercial sample.

TABLE 2: Assessment of convergent validity.

Construct item	Std. factor loadings		AVE		CR	
	N-C	C	N-C	C	N-C	C
CINFSUP	-	-	0.81	0.85	0.94	0.96
CINFSUP1	0.85	0.83	-	-	-	-
CINFSUP2	0.92	0.93	-	-	-	-
CINFSUP3	0.91	0.97	-	-	-	-
CINFSUP4	0.92	0.96	-	-	-	-
CSAT	-	-	0.72	0.85	0.89	0.96
CSAT3	0.86	0.91	-	-	-	-
CSAT4	0.82	0.91	-	-	-	-
CSAT5	0.87	0.96	-	-	-	-
CAFFECT	-	-	0.83	0.84	0.94	0.94
CAFFECT1	0.89	0.91	-	-	-	-
CAFFECT2	0.95	0.97	-	-	-	-
CAFFECT3	0.89	0.87	-	-	-	-
CSUBNORM	-	-	0.79	0.72	0.92	0.88
CSUBNORM1	0.80	0.78	-	-	-	-
CSUBNORM2	0.95	0.91	-	-	-	-
CSUBNORM4	0.91	0.85	-	-	-	-
CNORM	-	-	0.75	0.75	0.90	0.90
CNORM1	0.85	0.82	-	-	-	-
CNORM2	0.84	0.89	-	-	-	-
CNORM4	0.91	0.89	-	-	-	-
MHELP	-	-	0.87	0.86	0.96	0.96
MHELP1	0.91	0.92	-	-	-	-
MHELP2	0.96	0.97	-	-	-	-
MHELP3	0.96	0.94	-	-	-	-
MHELP4	0.91	0.89	-	-	-	-

CINFSUP, informational support; CSAT, satisfaction; CAFFECT, affective commitment; CSUBNORM, subjective norm; CNORM, normative commitment; MHELP, helping behaviours; N-C, non-commercial sample; C, commercial sample; AVE, Average variance explained; CR, composite reliability.
Note: All factors loaded significantly at $p < 0.001$.

and helping behaviour were adapted from Chen et al. (2013) and Yi and Gong (2013).

Research findings

Measurement model validity and reliability

The scales were reliable, because all Cronbach alpha values were above 0.80 (Pallant 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that the measurement items were valid and reliable (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2014). Table 2 indicates that all factors loaded significantly on their

respective constructs ($p < 0.001$), and all standardised factor loadings were above 0.70. The average variance explained (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values of the constructs were higher than the cut-off values of 0.50 and 0.70, respectively (Hair et al. 2014).

In order to access for discriminant validity, the recommendation by Fornell and Larker (1981) was used. As indicated in Table 3, all correlations between the latent constructs were significant ($p < 0.001$) and the AVE for any two individual constructs was greater than the squared correlation estimates between them.

Subsequently to the confirmation of internal reliability and validity, the structural model was accessed. Adequate fit indices were obtained: Non-commercial sample: $\chi^2/df = 2.67$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.97; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.97; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.055; and commercial sample: $\chi^2/df = 4.39$; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.09 (Hair et al. 2014).

The structural relationships for the structural model were tested and are presented in Table 4.

Ethical consideration

The author confirms that the study has received the required ethical clearance from the Economic and Management Science Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) of North-West University. Ethical clearance number: NWU-00600-17-A4. Participation in this study was voluntary and confidential and participants were allowed to withdraw from the interview at any stage without any consequences. The questionnaire did not request any personal information from the respondent and no information was reported on an individual basis.

Discussion and implications

This study investigated the influence of affective and normative commitment on helping behaviours of online community members and online customers. The results indicated that for non-commercial environments such as online communities on Facebook, both affective and normative commitment positively and significantly influence the helping behaviours of the members. When members feel emotionally attached and/or have a sense of obligation towards the community, they will reciprocate by assisting fellow members to use the group correctly. The results extended the findings by Bateman et al. (2011) and studies within the offline environment (Fullerton 2011; Spik 2016) by indicating that within a residential online community on Facebook, the same relationship exists. The study furthermore provides a novel contribution by confirming that within a commercial environment, online customers will assist and help other customers to correctly use the service of the online retailer when they have had a sense of identification with and have developed an emotional connection with the online retailer.

Another original finding is that the relationship between informational support and affective commitment within the commercial context is both positive and significant. When online customers receive suggestions and information to use the online retailer's service, these customers will become more affectively committed towards the online retailer, which in turn will result in them performing helping behaviours. In agreement with the results of Muhammad et al. (2014), Jin et al. (2010) and Zhou et al. (2012), it was confirmed that in a non-commercial and commercial environment, when online community members and online customers are satisfied with their choice of provider and has an enjoyable experience, then they will become more affectively committed members and customers. Extending on studies within the organisational environment (Aydogdu & Asikgil 2011), it was also established that within both a commercial and non-commercial environment, satisfied online community members and online retail customers will continue to use the online community/

TABLE 3: Correlation matrix with the average variable explained on the diagonal.

Latent variables	SAT	INFOS	AFFECT	SUBN	CNORM	HELP
SAT						
N-C	-0.72	-	-	-	-	-
C	-0.85	-	-	-	-	-
INFOS						
N-C	0.27	-0.81	-	-	-	-
C	0.03	-0.85	-	-	-	-
AFFECT						
N-C	0.31	0.09	-0.83	-	-	-
C	0.16	0.07	-0.84	-	-	-
SUBN						
N-C	0.15	0.08	0.24	-0.79	-	-
C	0.01	0.31	0.09	-0.72	-	-
CNORM						
N-C	0.14	0.03	0.30	0.31	-0.75	-
C	0.06	0.10	0.55	0.11	-0.75	-
HELP						
N-C	0.16	0.08	0.13	0.14	0.14	-0.87
C	0.24	0.09	0.13	0.11	0.07	-0.86

Note: All correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.

SAT, satisfaction; INFOS, informational support; AFFECT, affective commitment; SUBN, subjective norm; CNORM, normative commitment; HELP, helping behaviour; N-C, non-commercial sample; C, commercial sample.

TABLE 4: Hypotheses testing statistics.

Hypothesis	β		S.E.		p		Result	
	N-C	C	N-C	C	N-C	C	N-C	C
H1: Normative commitment → Helping behaviour	0.27	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.001	0.884	Supported	Not supported
H2: Affective commitment → Helping behaviour	0.23	0.37	0.05	0.06	0.001	0.001	Supported	Supported
H3: Information support → Affective commitment	0.02	0.20	0.05	0.05	0.745	0.001	Not supported	Supported
H3: Satisfaction → Normative commitment	0.21	0.22	0.04	0.05	0.001	0.001	Supported	Supported
H4: Satisfaction → Affective commitment	0.57	0.38	0.04	0.04	0.001	0.001	Supported	Supported
H5: Subjective norm → Normative commitment	0.48	0.32	0.04	0.05	0.001	0.001	Supported	Supported

N-C, non-commercial sample; C, commercial sample; S.E., standard error.

online retailer out of a sense of duty and will feel guilty if they discontinue the relationship.

The subjective norm of online community members and online customers has not yet been extensively explored in literature. This study agreed with the findings of Shukla et al. (2016) and Chen et al. (2013) that when online community members are of the opinion that people who are important to them think that they should post and reply to post on the residential online community on Facebook, these members will feel obligated to continue using the service of the community. The same is true for online customers. When online customers experience the subjective norm of influential and important people, they will feel guilty if they stop using the online retailer and will use the online retailer partly out of a sense of duty.

It is vital that administrators of online communities acknowledge that online community members can become affective and normative committed towards the community, which will result in participation when members perform helping behaviours. Therefore, administrators should increase the level of satisfaction experienced by the members by introducing or welcoming new members to the community and identifying struggling members. In addition, administrators can also tag expert members in posts, to motivate members to assist and help fellow members when they ask a question. Because important and influential individuals of the members influence their participation in the online community, administrators can also launch a strategy such as refer a friend to increase membership numbers and level of participation.

As discussed, affective commitment online customers will perform helping behaviours that are beneficial to the online retailer. Therefore, online retail managers should aim to increase the information support provided and also the satisfaction levels of these customers. Online customers should be motivated and incentivised when they make suggestions and give information to fellow customers. In addition, online retail managers should get regular feedback from customers of how they can improve the online retail platform and should ensure that the correct product is delivered in a timeous manner.

Limitations and recommendations

Whilst this study provides various theoretical and managerial insights relating to helping behaviours in a commercial and non-commercial environment, the study also has some limitations. The study focused on affective and normative commitment and excluded continuous commitment; and therefore, it is recommended that future research should investigate continuous commitment, with the aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional nature of commitment. Only one dimension of citizenship behaviour was included in the model. Various dimensions have been established in the literature and although no study has determined the most relevant and important dimension, future studies might investigate some of the other dimensions not tested in this study. The study focused on certain

antecedents of affective and normative commitment, which the author deemed relevant to the environments of study. However, future studies may also investigate a wider range of antecedents. The study made use of non-probability sampling because no sample frame was available. Although non-probability sampling is widely accepted, it is recommended that future research should attempt to gain the contact details of online community members, as to utilise probability sampling. Additionally, stricter quota sampling is also recommended, to ensure the representativeness of the results.

Conclusion

Online communities and online retailing have grown substantially during the last decade and provide various benefits to members, customers, organisations, administrators and government. However, administrators and online retail managers are faced with various challenges to successfully manage their sites. The research aimed to provide knowledge that can assist managers with these challenges by investigating the influence of affective and normative commitment on helping behaviours in non-commercial and commercial environments. In both these environments, affective commitment is a key antecedent of helping behaviour; however, normative commitment also positively influences the helping behaviours of online community members. The study furthermore indicated that in a commercial environment, informational support and satisfaction have a positive influence on affective and normative commitment. However, it does seem that informational support received by online community members does not influence the level of affective commitment towards the community. Normative commitment has not received much attention in academic literature. This study, however, has indicated that normative commitment is relevant in both environments and that the subjective norm of online community members and online customers has a positive and significant influence on the normative commitment of these members and customers.

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Disclaimer

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