The role of emotional value for reading and giving eWOM in altruistic services

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ABSTRACT

To date there is limited research on the role of customer perceived value for reading and giving positive and negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) of an altruistic service within a singular study. Further, emotions have been shown to be important in altruistic services, yet there is no investigation of the role of emotional value for eWOM. This paper investigates these gaps by proposing and empirically testing a model with data from an online survey of 366 consumers of an altruistic service (blood donation) using structural equation modelling. The results show emotional value is a central value concept that mediates the relationship between reading eWOM and other value dimensions, whereas altruistic value is shown to be important for giving eWOM. The findings have theoretical importance for understanding the nature of customer perceived value in altruistic services and are also useful to managers of altruistic services seeking to increase eWOM as a customer recruitment and retention strategy.

1. Introduction

Altruistic services, whereby consumers take active roles in civic participation through volunteering and donating time and effort to assist in creating a service, are becoming increasingly important to address many global issues such as blood shortages and natural disasters (Cheung, McColl-Kennedy, & Coote, 2017). However, many altruistic service organisations have limited resources (e.g. infrastructure, staff and funding), which can hinder their ability to provide service offerings and also to recruit and retain consumers who assist in their creation (Alfes, Antunes, & Shantz, 2017). Dropping rates of consumer participation in altruistic services is of increasing concern in countries such as the United States (Ellingson et al., 2017), the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2017) and Australia (Oppenheimer, Haski-Leventhal, Holmes, Lockstone-Binney, & Meijis, 2015). Scholars and practitioners have called for greater theoretical and practical insights into how such trends can be reversed, and consumers retained or recruited to ensure altruistic services are sustainable and continue to deliver important, and at times vital, services to the community. This research therefore sets out to contribute new theoretical and practical insight into how altruistic services can recruit and retain

consumers to assist in the continued delivery of these important services. We aim to provide this insight by examining electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and customer perceived value, two constructs which are noted for providing insight into the recruitment and retention of customers (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006; Leroi-Werelds, Streukens, Brady, & Swinnen, 2014). Specifically, the findings demonstrate the impact of reading and giving eWOM on customer perceived value for an altruistic service. We further contend that emotional value has an important role in providing these insights.

Many traditional marketing efforts for altruistic services use paid forms of communication to recruit and retain consumers (e.g. organisations using advertising messages such as 'We need your help!', 'You can save lives!'). However, there is growing recognition of the importance of unpaid marketing efforts such as eWOM. eWOM has often been studied in contexts whereby self-orientated benefits are present; for example, hotel services, finance and healthcare (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2014). Most of these studies hold to the perspective that understanding eWOM is important, as it is one of—if not the most—uncontrollable and influential forms of marketing (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Liu, 2006). This is due to eWOM's ability to shape consumers' perceptions of a service experience through

communication exchanges such as reading and giving online commentary (Goyette, Ricard, Bergeron, & Marticotte, 2010). These informal, reciprocal communication exchanges have increased the need to understand consumers' experiences and how eWOM communication influences behaviour. This is due to eWOM being independent from producers, service providers and marketers (Abubakar, Ilkan, & Sahin, 2016), which in turn imbues greater trust and credibility in the messages they communicate (Schindler & Bickart, 2012). It is therefore plausible to suggest the reading and giving of eWOM is important for furthering the understanding of the recruitment and retention of consumers to altruistic services, but there is little evidence which provides this in a single study.

Scholars and practitioners are often interested in the '*giving*' of eWOM as it is seen as an outcome measure of marketing effort or post-purchase influences, similar to loyalty and satisfaction (Swan & Oliver, 1989; Westbrook, 1987). Scholars, however, have recently begun to investigate '*reading*' eWOM as an antecedent which shapes consumer' perceptions and future behaviours (e.g., Kim & Johnson, 2016; López & Sicilia, 2014). Given the potential of eWOM to be both an antecedent (reading) and outcome (giving), it is timely to investigate both in a singular model. The interrelationships between reading and giving eWOM and other constructs is also likely to differ for altruistic services in comparison to commercial services as the benefits are less self-orientated (e.g. What do I get out of participating in this service?); rather, they more other-orientated (e.g. What do others get from my participation in this service?). One framework which can provide understanding of self- and other-orientated benefits of altruistic services is customer perceived value.

Customer perceived value, also referred to as perceived value or customer value in the literature, remains a central concept in marketing (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Williams, Soutar, Ashill, & Naumann, 2017). In this study, customer perceived value is taken from the perspective of the customer and refers to their '*interactive relativistic preference experience*' (Holbrook, 2006, p.g.715). Scholarly interest in understanding customer perceived value has remained, as it is consistently shown as an important antecedent for marketing outcomes (Cronin Jr, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Williams et al., 2017; Zainuddin, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2013). Further, customer perceived value is a context- and situation-specific concept; that is, the value created and experienced by customers varies by consumption context (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Given the literature acknowledges that customer perceived value differs from setting to setting, it is important to not assume that its characteristics and relationships with other constructs, such as eWOM, are entirely generalizable. For instance, there has been heightened interest from scholars and practitioners in investigating services that are not solely commercially focused but that provide transformative benefits to both individuals and the community. Therefore, as new services and perspectives emerge, such as altruistic services, research is needed to understand the changing role of customer perceived value—namely how it is influenced by reading eWOM and also how it influences giving eWOM. Past research suggests customer perceived value dimensions are experienced simultaneously or have a similar level of importance. However, studies outside of customer perceived value literature suggest emotions (or emotional value) as being central to consumer experiences, particularly those that are not commercially focused (Parkinson, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2018; Schuster, Tossan, & Drennan, 2017). These findings suggest reassessment is needed about the positioning of value dimensions and their interrelationships. In this paper we take a new perspective to customer perceived value based upon current literature to investigate emotional value as a mediator for the relationship between reading eWOM and other dimensions of value, and emotional value as an indirect driver of giving eWOM via other dimensions of value.

Our research purpose is therefore to identify the role of emotional value as an outcome of reading eWOM and also as an indirect influencer of giving eWOM in an altruistic service. In conducting this study, we

address two research questions: RQ1 *What is the relationship between reading eWOM and customer perceived value for an altruistic service?* and RQ2 *What is the relationship between customer perceived value and giving eWOM for an altruistic service?* To answer these research questions, we deployed an online survey of both blood donors and non-donors in Australia. There were several reasons for selecting blood donation services as an altruistic service to operationalise our model, and for selecting donors and non-donors. First, blood donation in Australia is voluntary and unpaid, and thus altruistic in nature. Second, blood donation rates within Australia are dropping dramatically, with a drop of 1,830,003 first-time donors in 2005 to 1,324,980 in 2015, which is a decrease of 27.6% (Australian Red Cross Blood Service, 2016). Finally, the sampling of non-donors and donors allows the study to explore eWOM as a tool for recruitment and retention.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. First, the eWOM literature and customer perceived value literature is reviewed. Next, the conceptual model and hypotheses are presented, followed by the method and results. A discussion of the results, theoretical and practical implications then follows we then outline directions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Altruistic services and eWOM

Insights into altruistic services advance understanding of how service organisations and consumers can create experiences that have a positive impact on individual and societal wellbeing (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patricio, & Voss, 2015). In the following discussion, we contend that greater insights into reading and giving eWOM can support in recruiting and retaining consumers to assist in this goal, improving individual and societal wellbeing. Exploration of eWOM behaviours in this study focuses on how affective elements of consumers' rational cognitions—the reading and giving of positive and negative eWOM about altruistic services—may have consequences and/or be driven by consumers' perceptions of the service experience.

eWOM research suggests consumers receive psychological pay-offs, feelings of status and acknowledgement from others when engaging in eWOM about commercial brands and services (Abubakar et al., 2016; Zhang, Craciun, & Shin, 2010). Altruistic service behaviours, however, can be inherently private, and some consumers may feel conflict between the divergent consequences of egoism—giving positive eWOM accounts of what they know about a social behaviour (e.g. how it is performed)—and the societal welfare in carrying out 'good behaviours' for the benefit of others (i.e. other-orientated benefits). Some consumers may even feel sharing eWOM about altruistic services is unnecessary 'self-promotion' or bragging about performing charitable acts. This consumer inhibition or feelings of ambivalence could have adverse, long-term consequences for altruistic service organisations. Altruistic service organisations often rely on the normative influences of positive eWOM to drive behaviour, and thus also depend on the eWOM of friends, family and important others to ensure positive associations are maintained around the altruistic service. Understanding the mechanisms and aspects of the service experience which encourage the giving of positive eWOM and how the reading of positive eWOM impacts consumers' perceptions of an altruistic service therefore becomes important for altruistic service recruitment and retention strategies.

However, service experiences and eWOM are not always positive. Recent research suggests that an understanding of negative eWOM from both the receiver (reader) and sender (giver) perspective can provide a more holistic and in-depth understanding (Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Yap, Soetarto, & Sweeney, 2013). For instance, in Yap et al.'s (2013) study, they found the associated drivers of giving positive eWOM and negative eWOM to largely differ, emphasising the importance of understanding the links and motives for both. In Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi's (2016) study, they suggest that understanding

negative eWOM can provide guidance to service providers in terms of strategies to deflect negative eWOM, and also where to allocate service recovery efforts. In line with these prior studies, we suggest that understanding the reading and giving of negative eWOM for altruistic services will provide insights into the mechanisms within the service experience that can be managed or leveraged to assist in recruitment and retention strategies. Thus, to gain as much insight as possible, we investigate both the positive and negative aspects of reading and giving eWOM in altruistic services.

2.2. Customer perceived value and altruistic services

Customer perceived value has been of interest to marketers given the dynamic and changing nature of its creation and consumption based upon the contexts in which it is examined (Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011). This study recognises that customer perceived value has been conceptualised as a both uni-dimensional and multi-dimensional construct (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). However, scholars now agree that uni-dimensional conceptualisations of customer perceived value can be limited in providing understanding of the functional, affective and socio-psychological benefits consumers experience in an exchange (Williams et al., 2017). Thus, a multi-dimensional conceptualisation of customer perceived value guides this study.

There are multiple, multi-dimensional conceptualisations of customer perceived value which exist in the literature. From a review of the literature, three prevailing frameworks provide the foundation for the majority of customer perceived value studies: hedonic and utilitarian (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994), Holbrook's (1994) typology, and consumptions-value theory (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For this study we use consumptions-value theory, in particular Zainuddin, Previte, and Russell-Bennett's (2011) framework, for several reasons. First, consumptions-value theory has shown to be adaptive and useful in understanding the value of consumption beyond those of a commercial and/or self-orientated benefit (Chell & Mortimer, 2014; Gordon, Dibb, Magee, Cooper, & Waitt, 2018). For example, Gordon et al. (2018) used consumptions-value theory to understand the motivations for saving electricity and its benefits not only to the consumer by saving money but also other-orientated benefits such as saving the environment. For this reason, we adopt Zainuddin et al.'s (2011) consumptions-value theory framework as it includes not only self-orientated benefits but other-orientated benefits. This is also supported by other studies in non-commercial settings, such as healthcare and blood donation, which have used Zainuddin et al.'s (2011) framework in part or full to understand the diversity of benefits of non-commercial services (Chell & Mortimer, 2014; Gordon et al., 2018; Zainuddin et al., 2013). Further, other frameworks in the literature, such as Sweeney and Soutar (2001), are not as appropriate for this study as they include dimensions of value such as price value (also referred to as economic value in the literature), which is often not applicable to altruistic services; this is due to altruistic services often not involving a monetary (economic) exchange between the consumer and service provider.

The first dimension of customer perceived value examined in this study is emotional value, which is associated with affective states of a service experience (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zainuddin et al., 2011). These can be both positive affective states (enjoyment, happiness and entertainment) or negative (e.g. fear, anxiety and distress) (Zainuddin et al., 2011). In our study, emotional value is suggested to play an important role in comparison to other dimensions such as functional value, social value and altruistic value (defined below). We suggest emotional value will play a mediating role when consumers are reading eWOM and evaluating other dimensions of customer perceived value dimensions (e.g. reading eWOM➔emotional value➔functional/social/altruistic value). This is because emotions are known to be an important consideration for social behaviours (Parkinson et al., 2018), and

research in customer perceived value also suggests emotional value as a consistent significant driver of desired outcomes in comparison to other value dimensions. For example, marketing and service scholars now agree there is a need to move beyond attitudinal theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and use alternative models, such as the Model of Goal Directed Behaviour, due to the inclusion of emotions which assists in better understanding and predicting social behaviours (Parkinson et al., 2018; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001; Schuster et al., 2017). Customer perceived value studies, on the other hand, suggest that some value dimensions are experienced prior to others. For example, the study of Pihlström and Brush (2008) found conditional and epistemic value dimensions were experienced prior to other dimensions such as social value and functional value. This was due to conditional and epistemic value being two central and important dimensions in comparison to the other subsequent dimensions desired by consumers in entertainment and information mobile services. Thus, given the importance of emotions in our setting, we take a somewhat consistent but also new approach to prior research by suggesting emotional value as a mediator, and also as a driver, of other value dimensions.

Functional value is the second dimension of customer perceived value examined in this study, which refers to the performance, functionality and utility of the service (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zainuddin et al., 2011). In this research, functional value can be created by the convenience, speed and efficiency of an altruistic service. Social value is the third dimension of customer perceived value, and focuses on enhancing an individual's self-concept or identifying one's self as an opinion leader or acceptance within a group (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zainuddin et al., 2011). In this study, social value can be created via an individual's feeling that they will have heightened social status or are fulfilling a social obligation by partaking in an altruistic service. The fourth dimension of customer perceived value is altruistic value. This value dimension derives from the intrinsic benefit or sense of reward that is experienced from creating or consuming a service which assists others (Chell & Mortimer, 2014; Zainuddin et al., 2011). Further, of the previous three dimensions of value, altruistic value is the most other-orientated dimension. Altruistic value is particularly relevant for this study, situated within the service of blood donation, as altruism is often found to be a motivating benefit and reason for people to engage in blood donation (for a comprehensive review see Bednall & Bove, 2011).

3. Conceptual model and hypotheses

The proposed conceptual model explains relationships between customer perceived value and eWOM (see Fig. 1). On the right-hand side of the model, reading positive and negative eWOM is positioned as a driver of customer perceived value. On the left-hand side of the model, customer perceived value is shown to be a driver of giving positive and negative eWOM. Importantly, in the model, emotional value is positioned as mediating the relationship between reading eWOM and other dimensions of customer perceived value. Subsequently, in our model, emotional value is also shown to directly influence customers' perceptions of other value dimensions, and indirectly influence giving eWOM. The following section provides support for the relationships proposed in the conceptual model.

3.1. Reading eWOM and customer perceived value

There is scant direct empirical evidence of the relationship between reading eWOM and its impact upon customer perceived value. However, there is literature which suggests a link may exist. For example, multiple studies show the importance of online customer reviews on consumers' product perceptions (Lee & Youn, 2009) and purchase behaviour (Erkan & Evans, 2016). For example, Erkan and Evans' (2016) findings suggest that when eWOM is credible and useful this will influence consumers' purchase intentions. As argued earlier in the paper, we suggest that emotional value would be important and
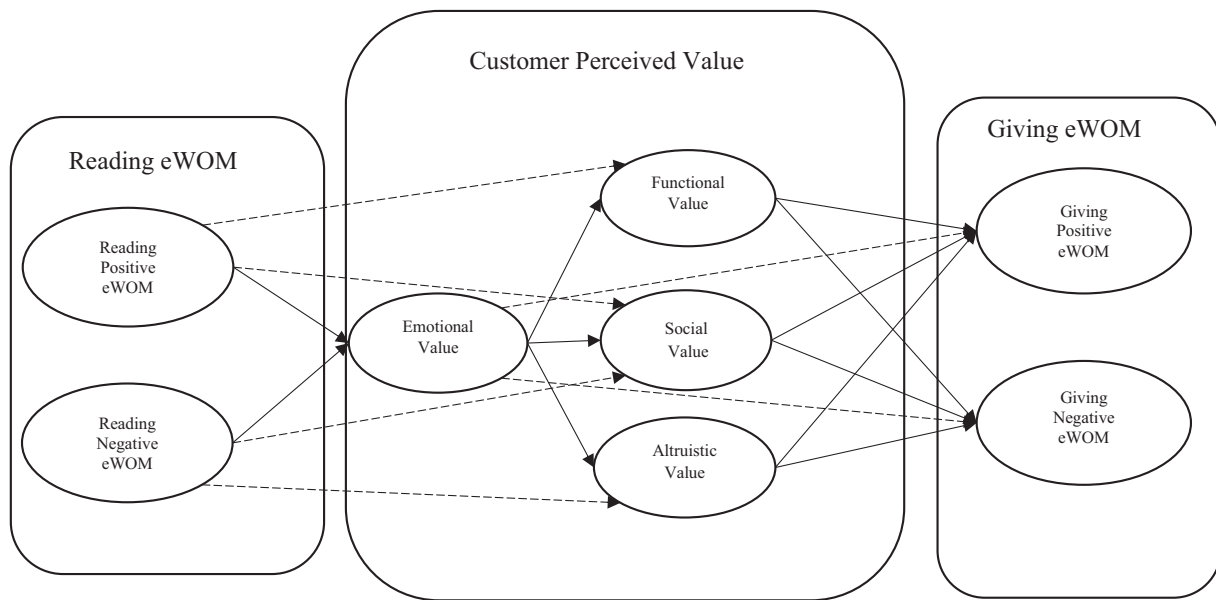
Fig. 1. Conceptual model.
Note: dashed lines indicate indirect effect.

experienced prior to other dimensions of value due to previous studies' findings (Parkinson et al., 2018; Pihlström & Brush, 2008; Schuster et al., 2017). We therefore suggest that emotional value will have a mediating role between reading eWOM and perceptions and experiences of other forms of value (altruistic value, social value, functional value). Therefore, based upon the prior literature in related fields to eWOM and those which suggest the importance of emotions, we propose the following relationships for altruistic services:

H1. There will be a direct relationship between reading (a) positive and (b) negative eWOM and emotional value.

H2. There will be a positive direct relationship between emotional value and (a) altruistic value, (b) social value and (c) functional value.

H3. There will be a positive indirect relationship between reading positive eWOM and (a) altruistic value, (b) social value and (c) functional value via emotional value.

H4. There will be a negative indirect relationship between reading negative eWOM and (a) altruistic value, (b) social value and (c) functional value via emotional value.

3.2. Customer perceived value and giving eWOM for altruistic services

Studies report customer perceived value could provide high levels of explanation (up to 80%) for traditional marketing outcomes and are thus a good predictor (Williams et al., 2017). While there is support for customer perceived value as an important predictor of marketing outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Williams et al., 2017), and WOM (Gruen et al., 2006; Olaru, Purchase, & Peterson, 2008) there appears to be limited evidence of the effect of customer perceived value on eWOM in non-commercial settings. Non-commercial studies which examine customer perceived value's influence on loyalty or intention outcomes include items which closely relate to WOM. For example, a study by Zainuddin, Tam, and McCosker (2016) examined customer perceived value's impact on intentions to reuse a self-service cancer-screening kit, using scale items which relate to individuals discussing their treatment with others, including family and friends.

Rather than hypothesising direct effects for all four value types on giving eWOM, we hypothesise an indirect effect of emotional value on giving eWOM, mediated by the other remaining customer perceived

value dimensions. Support for this positioning of emotional value as an indirect driver of giving eWOM can be seen in Pihlström and Brush's (2008) study. They contend that certain customer perceived value dimensions can be experienced prior to others, ensuing dimensions of value, and thus should be modelled to reflect these relationships. Therefore, in the context of giving eWOM, we propose that emotional value is an indirect driver of giving eWOM, which is mediated by other dimensions of value. Given this relationship, the following is hypothesised:

H5. Emotional value will have a significant indirect effect on giving positive eWOM through (a) altruistic value, (b) social value and (c) functional value.

H6. Emotional value will have a significant indirect effect on giving negative eWOM through (a) altruistic value, (b) social value and (c) functional value.

H7–H9 propose altruistic value, social value and functional value will have a direct relationship with giving positive and negative eWOM. Support for the relationship between customer perceived value and giving eWOM was previously examined in Gruen et al.' (2006) study. Using a uni-dimensional approach to customer perceived value, they found a direct positive relationship between the overall value of a firm's offering and consumers giving positive WOM. Similarly, a study by Olaru et al. (2008) used a uni-dimensional approach to examine the impact of overall customer value on consumers producing eWOM. From these studies' findings there is tentative evidence that multiple dimensions of customer perceived value will influence giving positive and negative eWOM for altruistic services which requires empirical investigation. We therefore predict the following:

H7. Altruistic value will have a significant direct effect on giving (a) positive eWOM and (b) negative eWOM.

H8. Social value will have a significant direct effect on giving (a) positive eWOM and (b) negative eWOM.

H9. Functional value will have a significant direct effect on giving (a) positive eWOM and (b) negative eWOM.

Table 1
Sample characteristics (%).

Characteristics	Total
Gender	Males 49.5%
	Females 50.5%
Age	18–29 50.7%
	30–65 49.3%
Marital Status	Married 36.6%
	De facto 11.9%
	Single 42.4%
Children	Yes, at home 24.1%
	Yes, not at home 18%
	No 57.9%

4. Method

4.1. Sample and data collection

To test the hypotheses, we used a purposive sample of Australians recruited through the Australian Red Cross Blood Service. The initial sample consisted of 149 current Australian blood donors (to represent current consumers of an altruistic service who can engage in giving eWOM) and 217 non-donors (to represent potential consumers of an altruistic service who can read eWOM), resulting in a total sample of 366 which is above the recommended minimum sample size of 200 for structural models with over five constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The inclusion of non-donors and donors was also advantageous as it allowed us to examine eWOM as both a tool to recruit new consumers and retain existing consumers of an altruistic service. Demographic information was attained from the sample, including gender, age, marital status, children, last donation type and last donation centre visited (see Table 1).

4.2. Questionnaire and instruments

The questionnaire was administered online, with the first section containing demographic questions about the respondent and past donation behaviour (e.g. type of donation made, type of donor centre visited and location). Section 2 contained items on giving eWOM. A screening question was included at the start of this section to identify if donors had experience giving eWOM about blood donation: 'Have you ever spoken about donating blood, plasma or platelets on social media or a blog?' The respondents who selected 'never' then skipped the section containing the giving eWOM measures and moved on to section three. The items for the giving eWOM measures were completed by the 149 donors who had engaged in this activity.

All items were sourced from previously validated scales and adapted to the current study. The measures for reading and giving eWOM were derived from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and used a seven-point semantic differential scale (Ajzen, 1991). The measures included three attitudinal items towards reading positive comments and the same three items in response to reading negative comments. Items for emotional value (Nelson & Byus, 2002), functional value (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001), altruistic value (Mostafa, 2010) and social value (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) were also adapted from the literature. Validated items for measuring giving eWOM were adapted from Goyette et al. (2010) and used seven-point Likert scales.

4.3. Data analysis

This study used structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis to test the hypotheses, and followed the two-step approach as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step involved testing the constructs for reliability and validity using a measurement model, and the second step involved testing the relationships hypothesised between

Table 2
Construct measurement summary.

Construct	Loading	C.R.	AVE
Reading Positive eWOM		0.903	0.692
When I see positive comments about donating blood on social media I think they are:			
Pleasant/unpleasant	0.797		
Good/bad	0.859		
Enjoyable/unenjoyable	0.947		
Reading Negative eWOM		0.963	0.897
When I see negative comments about donating blood on social media I think they are:			
Pleasant/unpleasant	0.946		
Good/bad	0.920		
Enjoyable/unenjoyable	0.976		
Emotional value		0.881	0.555
Donating makes me feel comfortable	0.620		
Donating makes me feel safe	0.820		
Donating makes me feel happy	0.809		
Donating makes me feel calm	0.819		
Donating makes me feel relieved	0.690		
Donating makes me feel proud	0.690		
Altruistic value		0.809	0.682
Donating benefits humanity	0.914		
Donating saves lives	0.728		
Social value		0.902	0.698
Donating helps me to feel acceptable	0.804		
Donating improves the way I am perceived	0.937		
Donating makes a good impression on other people	0.776		
Donating gives me social approval	0.818		
Functional value		0.837	0.638
Donating is an efficient use of my time	0.632		
Donating fits with my schedule	0.947		
Donating is convenient	0.786		
Giving eWOM positive		0.887	0.798
I recommend the blood service	0.820		
I speak of the blood service's good sides	0.962		
Giving eWOM negative		0.840	0.729
I mostly say negative things to others about the blood service	0.989		
I speak unflatteringly of the blood service to others	0.694		

these constructs in the structural model. To test for the indirect (mediated) effects, bootstrapping with 2000 samples was undertaken.

5. Results

5.1. Measurement model

The measurement model was assessed prior to testing the research hypotheses. The measurement model was shown to have a satisfactory fit with the goodness-of-fit indices under their recommended thresholds: CMIN/DF = 2.51 (< 3), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.929(> 0.90), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06(< 0.06). Following the procedures suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity was assessed by verifying the significance of the t-values associated with the parameter estimates. As seen in Table 2, the reliability of the measures was also established with the composite reliability (CR) scores for each construct being higher than the recommended threshold of 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The average variance extracted (AVE) scores shown in Table 2 were also above the recommended level of 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the AVE scores of each construct to the shared variance between the construct and all other variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 3, all AVE scores exceeded shared variances, confirming discriminant validity.

5.2. Structural model and hypotheses test results

After confirming the measurement model, the structural model and hypothesised relationships were tested. The structural model was

Table 3

Mean, SD, correlations and shared variances between variables.

Constructs	Mean	SD	AVE	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1.Reading eWOM positive	6.11	1.08	0.692		0.238	0.113	0.038	0.085	0.048	0.091	0.044
2.Reading eWOM negative	2.07	1.26	0.897	−0.488**		0.121	0.042	0.058	0.032	0.057	0.100
3.Emotional value	5.33	1.02	0.555	0.337**	−0.349**		0.187	0.158	0.224	0.149	0.001
4.Functional value	5.44	1.19	0.638	0.196**	−0.205**	0.433**		0.081	0.012	0.089	0.063
5.Altruistic value	6.56	0.68	0.809	0.292**	−0.242**	0.398**	0.286**		0.020	0.113	0.077
6.Social value	4.35	1.31	0.698	0.220**	−0.180**	0.474**	0.113*	0.144**		0.078	0.011
7.Giving eWOM positive	5.93	1.18	0.798	0.302**	−0.239**	0.387**	0.299**	0.337**	0.280**		0.033
8.Giving eWOM negative	1.61	0.92	0.729	−0.212**	0.317**	−0.038	−0.251**	−0.279**	0.107	−0.183*	

Squared correlations shown in top half of matrix.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

shown to have a satisfactory fit to the data (CMIN/DF = 2.49, CFI = 0.926, RMSEA = 0.06). Next, we report the results for reading eWOM and customer perceived value (H1–H4), followed by customer perceived value and giving eWOM (H5–H9).

5.2.1. Reading eWOM and customer perceived value (H1–H4)

As Table 4 indicates, H1 was supported, with reading positive eWOM ($\beta = 0.206$, $p < .01$) and reading negative eWOM ($\beta = -0.280$, $p < .000$) significantly influencing emotional value. As predicted in H2, emotional value significantly influenced functional value ($\beta = 0.420$, $p < .000$), altruistic value ($\beta = 0.473$, $p < .000$) and social value ($\beta = 0.496$, $p < .000$). H3–H4 contended that reading eWOM would have an indirect effect on functional, altruistic and social value via emotional value. As shown in Table 4, reading positive eWOM had a positive indirect effect via emotional value on functional value ($\beta = 0.089$, $p < .01$), altruistic value ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < .01$) and social value ($\beta = 0.101$, $p < .01$), supporting H3. Reading negative eWOM had significant indirect effects via emotional value on functional value ($\beta = -0.119$, $p < .01$), altruistic value ($\beta = -0.133$, $p < .000$) and social value ($\beta = -0.139$, $p < .01$), supporting H4.

5.2.2. Customer perceived value and giving eWOM (H5–H9)

As shown in Table 5, emotional value indirectly affects giving positive eWOM via altruistic value ($\beta = 0.172$, $p < .01$), supporting H5b. Emotional value did not have a significant indirect effect on giving positive eWOM via functional value or social value, rejecting H5a and H5c. The result supports H6a, with emotional value having an indirect effect on giving negative eWOM via functional value ($\beta = 0.180$, $p < .01$). There was no support for H6b. The indirect effect of

emotional value on giving negative eWOM via social value was significant ($\beta = 0.131$, $p < .05$) but in the opposite direct predicted, therefore rejecting H6c.

Functional value significantly reduces giving negative eWOM ($\beta = -0.350$, $p < .000$) but does not significantly increase giving positive eWOM ($\beta = 0.156$, ns), supporting H7b but rejecting H7a respectively. Altruistic value significantly increased giving positive eWOM ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < .01$) and significantly decreased giving negative eWOM ($\beta = -0.232$, $p < .05$), supporting H8 in full. Social value did not significantly increase giving positive eWOM ($\beta = 0.146$, ns), and significantly increased giving negative eWOM ($\beta = 0.188$, $p < .05$), which was counter what was hypothesised; H9 was therefore not supported by the data.

5.2.3. Rival model

It is generally agreed that rival models should be run to determine if the proposed and tested structural model is the best-fitting model to the data. A main defining feature of the originally proposed structural model was the role of emotional value as a mediator and antecedent of other dimensions of value, which was supported by the literature. However, it could be argued that emotional value holds a similar position to other dimensions of value, as per other studies in consumption value (e.g. Zainuddin et al., 2013). The rival model tested depicted all value dimensions being influenced by reading positive and negative eWOM at the same level, and value dimensions subsequently influencing giving positive and negative eWOM. The fit indices were borderline acceptable (CMIN/DF = 3.04, CFI = 0.900, RMSEA = 0.075), and inferior to the original structural model proposed and tested. We believe this provides further support to our conceptualisation and

Table 4

Reading eWOM and customer perceived value results.

H#	Relationship	β	Supported/rejected
	Reading eWOM and emotional value (donors and non-donors)		
H1a	Reading positive eWOM➜emotional value	0.206**	Supported
H1b	Reading negative eWOM➜emotional value	−0.280***	Supported
	Emotional value and other value dimensions (donors and non-donors)		
H2a	Emotional value➜functional value	0.420***	Supported
H2b	Emotional value➜altruistic value	0.473***	Supported
H2c	Emotional value➜social value	0.496***	Supported
	Emotional value as a mediator (donors and non-donors)		
H3a	Reading positive eWOM➜emotional value➜functional value	0.089**	Supported
H3b	Reading positive eWOM➜emotional value➜altruistic value	0.097**	Supported
H3c	Reading positive eWOM➜emotional value➜social value	0.101**	Supported
H4a	Reading negative eWOM➜emotional value-➜functional value	−0.119**	Supported
H4b	Reading negative eWOM➜emotional value-➜altruistic value	−0.133**	Supported
H4c	Reading negative eWOM➜emotional value-➜social value	−0.139**	Supported

ns = non-significant. Note: moderated mediation analysis was conducted on emotional value as a mediator between donors and non-donors; no significant differences were found between groups.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .000$.

Table 5
Customer perceived value and giving eWOM.

H#	Relationship	β	Supported/rejected
	Emotional value and giving eWOM mediated by other value dimensions (donors only)***		
H5a	Emotional value➜functional value➜giving positive eWOM	.095 *ns*	Rejected
H5b	Emotional value➜altruistic value➜giving positive eWOM	0.172*	Supported
H5c	Emotional value➜social value➜giving positive eWOM	.127 *ns*	Rejected
H6a	Emotional value➜functional value➜giving negative eWOM	−0.180**	Supported
H6b	Emotional value➜ altruistic value ➜giving negative eWOM	−.123 *ns*	Rejected
H6c	Emotional value➜ social value ➜giving negative eWOM	0.131*	Supported
	Functional value and giving eWOM (donors only)		
H7a	Functional value➜giving positive eWOM	.156 *ns*	Rejected
H7b	Functional value➜giving negative eWOM	−0.350***	Supported
	Altruistic value and giving eWOM (donors only)		
H8a	Altruistic value➜giving positive eWOM	0.276**	Supported
H8b	Altruistic value➜giving negative eWOM	−0.232*	Supported
	Social value and giving eWOM (donors only)		
H9a	Social value➜giving positive eWOM	.146 *ns*	Rejected
H9b	Social value➜giving negative eWOM	0.188*	Rejected

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .000$.

structural model testing. Further, we suggest our originally proposed structural model and its superior fit to its rival provides a more appropriate and empirically supported foundation for future research.

6. Discussion

Research into eWOM and customer perceived value predominantly focuses on commercial self-orientated products (Abubakar et al., 2016; Gruen et al., 2006; Sweeney et al., 2014). Limited consideration has been paid to eWOM and customer perceived value in altruistic services, where a main motive for consumers is other-orientated and is focused on the wellbeing of others. The findings from this study address this gap in the literature by examining the interrelationships between reading eWOM, customer perceived value and giving eWOM in the altruistic service of blood donation. We specified nine hypotheses, which were tested within a theoretical framework. Informed by the literature, we posited emotional value to have an important role as a mediator for reading eWOM, and a direct driver of other dimensions of customer perceived value, and to be an indirect influencer of giving eWOM (Parkinson et al., 2018; Schuster et al., 2017). We now discuss our findings relative to our proposed research questions.

RQ1 proposed: *What is the relationship between reading eWOM and customer perceived value for an altruistic service*? Reading eWOM had a strong and significant influence on customer perceived value. However, the position and role of emotional value in our model outlines some important nuances regarding the study's findings in comparison to other reported studies in the literature. For this study of altruistic services, the findings suggest emotional value is a mediator between reading eWOM and other dimensions of value—functional, social and altruistic. The positioning of emotional value as a mediator, which also subsequently directly influences other dimensions of value, is consistent with prior studies which suggest dimensions of customer perceived value can act as antecedents to others (Pihlström & Brush, 2008). Therefore, this research suggests emotional value has a unique position as a mediator for the relationships between reading eWOM and other customer perceived value dimensions in altruistic services. Furthermore, this lends support to studies which suggest emotional value or emotions are important considerations for non-commercial services (Schuster et al., 2017; Zainuddin et al., 2013; Zainuddin et al., 2016). A proffered explanation for this result is that the altruistic service under investigation in this study, blood donation, often attempts to exert positive emotions (e.g. feelings of calm, safety and happiness) and minimise negative feelings (e.g. fear, discomfort and anxiety) due to the use of needles and other medical equipment during the service (Bednall & Bove, 2011).

Thus, our results suggest emotional value can play an important role prior to consumers' recognition or processing of other dimensions of value.

The second research question proposed: *What is the relationship between customer perceived value and giving eWOM for an altruistic service*? Our model specified that emotional value would indirectly influence giving eWOM via other customer perceived value dimensions, and that the remaining customer perceived value dimensions would directly influence giving eWOM. Emotional value was found to be a significant indirect driver of giving negative eWOM when mediated by functional value and social value. In contrast, emotional value was found to be a significant indirect driver of positive eWOM only when mediated by altruistic value. Functional value was found to not significantly influence positive eWOM, but in contrast was found to significantly reduce negative eWOM. This finding is somewhat consistent with prior research, which suggests functional value significantly influences outcomes (Zainuddin et al., 2013) but suggests this can be situation-specific. Further, the results appear to demonstrate that when functional value is experienced (e.g. convenient) in altruistic services this can result in a reduction of negative eWOM. Altruistic value was found to significantly increase giving positive eWOM, as well as reduce giving negative eWOM. This demonstrates the importance of other-orientated benefits in altruistic services, as they can assist in encouraging others to participate (Chell & Mortimer, 2014; Gordon et al., 2018) as well as also potentially negate other negative aspects of altruistic service experiences by significantly reducing the likelihood of giving negative eWOM. This finding is distinct from prior research, as other-orientated benefits such as altruistic value are often not incorporated. We also show altruistic value can be used to encourage greater amounts of positive eWOM, and also that it is a defence mechanism to reduce negative eWOM (recall the negative beta coefficient between altruism and negative eWOM). Thus, this study's findings shed new theoretical insight into the dual purpose of altruistic value for giving eWOM.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

First, our model contributes to the eWOM literature by specifying the effect of reading eWOM (positive and negative) and the antecedents which influence giving eWOM (positive and negative) within a singular model. Prior studies have rarely investigated reading and giving eWOM in a singular model, as well as the positive or negative aspects of these constructs. Thus, the model brings together these two streams of eWOM literature, reading and giving, into a singular model to provide a more holistic understanding of eWOM.

Our study also provides a second theoretical contribution relating to the role of emotional value. In contrast to prior research, we theorised and have empirically shown emotional value to have a more important and different role to those of other customer perceived value dimensions. To do so, we utilised a multi-dimensional framework of customer perceived value, which contrasts the uni-dimensional frameworks used by prior studies (e.g. Gruen et al., 2006; Olaru et al., 2008). Our theorising and findings specifically show emotional value plays an important mediating role between reading eWOM and experiences and perceptions of other customer perceived value dimensions. The importance of emotional value, however, appears to lessen as customers transition from reading eWOM to experiencing the service and transmitting (giving) eWOM, which allows us to highlight another important theoretical implication of our study relating to other-orientated benefits.

The third contribution of our study relates to the incorporation of other-orientated benefits in customer perceived value frameworks, namely altruistic value to motivate the giving of eWOM. Our results show that as consumers transition from reading eWOM to giving eWOM, altruistic value becomes important for giving positive eWOM and negating negative eWOM. This has important theoretical implications, suggesting to scholars of altruistic services or other prosocial consumption behaviours (e.g. purchasing a good which may assist others, donating to charity) to incorporate other-orientated benefits within their frameworks. This approach will move beyond the traditional suite of self-orientated benefits used in commercial studies. In this study we demonstrate the importance of utilising multi-dimensional frameworks of customer perceived value to gain a more fine-grained understanding of the impact reading eWOM has on customer perceived value, and customer perceived value on giving eWOM.

6.2. Managerial contributions

Our results have important managerial contributions, providing insight as to what forms of eWOM content could be directed and/or stimulated for reading, and how the giving of eWOM could be encouraged. First, based upon our reading eWOM and customer perceived value results, we suggest that altruistic services should encourage consumers to create content to be read by other consumers which first relates to the emotional aspects (emotional value) of the experience, followed by content relating to other subsequent benefits. Given the adoption of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, altruistic services have an opportunity to encourage consumers to provide emotionally orientated (emotional value) reviews or online commentary which can easily be read by other consumers. For example, altruistic services could prompt online reviews after the altruistic service experience ("Was your experience today comfortable, enjoyable or relaxing? Tell others about your experiences on Facebook."). In line with other studies (Yap et al., 2013), we also suggest to altruistic service practitioners that they identify ways to rank reviews and commentary by subject and content matter to improve consumers' perceptions of the service. For example, in online review platforms such as Amazon Customer Reviews, the eWOM given by customers can be ranked or sorted according to key characteristics. Thus, for altruistic services, we recommend eWOM for reading by consumers align with value dimensions, first commencing with emotional value (e.g., emotion laden commentary such as enjoyment of the experience). This is then followed by social value (e.g., commentary highlighting connections with others), altruistic value (e.g., giving to community) and functional value (e.g., commentary focused on ease of use in the service).

Second, in relation to giving positive eWOM, our results suggest to altruistic service practitioners that they should leverage other-orientated benefits, namely the altruistic value of the experience. Altruistic services could therefore suggest to consumers how they could further assist the organisation by encouraging recruitment of other consumers to the cause by posting positive eWOM content online ("Thanks for the helping hand! Can you help us further? Spread the word!"). The results also show altruistic value can significantly reduce giving negative eWOM; this also provides important practical insights. It suggests that when service failures occur in an altruistic service, key personnel should emphasis the other-orientated benefits of consumers' participation in the service to defend against possible negative eWOM. For example, in the context of this research, a blood donation experience may take longer than expected or be more painful than usual experiences. In identifying such factors, the altruistic service provider should ensure employees place a strong emphasis on the altruistic value of the service experience in service recovery efforts to reduce the chances of that consumer producing negative eWOM.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

Studies of altruistic services in contexts such as blood donation privilege a view of customer behaviour motivated by altruistic value. In this study we have demonstrated the complexity of customer perceived value and how its dimensions are influenced by the reading of eWOM or can motivate the giving of eWOM, which are mobilised via consumers' eWOM. Many studies have examined the value of customer eWOM, yet these studies are dominated by commercial marketing perspectives and benefits that accrue to the organisation. The customer perceived value findings established in this study could be further extended through research that adopts an experimental approach to examine more closely the influences of value and how donors react in specific contexts. Additionally, a longitudinal approach following an altruistic service customer cohort would also provide rich insight, as a donor's journey can be interrupted or changed by life experiences. Documenting the value connections throughout the altruistic service user at different life stages could add valuable insight into donor recruitment and retention. Finally, our discussion of the customer perceived value for altruistic services is strongly influenced by the nature and content of blood-donor experiences. Future research could explore and draw comparisons between customer value experiences in other altruistic service contexts, including monetary and non-monetary donor behaviours.

7. Conclusion

This research contributes to understanding eWOM and customer perceived value in altruistic services. The thought-provoking findings of the importance of emotional value as a mediating influence on *reading* eWOM, and the importance of altruistic value in giving, can motivate researchers to take a more holistic approach to studying eWOM in the future. As altruistic services face challenges with consumer recruitment and retention, these findings have important implications for practitioners and provide suggestions to think strategically as to how managers in altruistic services can understand and better deploy the influence of eWOM on consumer behaviour.

Acknowledgment

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