

CONSUMERS' PROPENSITY TO RESIST: THE VOLITIVE DIMENSION OF CONSUMER RESISTANT BEHAVIORS

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ABSTRACT

Earlier researches on the topic of consumer resistance permit better understanding of the causes, manifestations and consequences of the phenomenon, mainly focusing on the situational contexts of consumers' resistant action. This paper examines consumer resistance in an individual perspective, analyzing the propensity to resist as an individual variable antecedent to these behaviors. Our aim is to explore an individual disposition, consumers' propensity to resist (CPR), which in appropriate situations would explain why some consumers and not others tend to offer resistance. Thus, we model actual resistance behaviors as a function of personal (or psychological) and situational factors.

The research field on consumer resistance has steadily developed since its conceptualization by Peñaloza and Price (1993). Consumer resistance is approached as a socio-cultural phenomenon as it occurs in the marketplace and is related to marketplace ideologies and practices (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Consumer resistance is also a contingent reaction (Roux 2007); it represents a specific type of response that occurs at the intersection of individual and their interpretation of a situation. This paper is an effort to understand consumer resistance in an individual difference perspective and lays emphasis on the conception of the psychological reasons why some people are more likely to resist than others under the same situational context. Several individual traits have been however linked to consumer resistance: consumer self-confidence (Bearden et al. 2001), consumers' skepticism (Dobscha 1998; Fournier 1998); and suspicion (Kramer 1998; Darke 2004). All these studies used assessment instruments that have been designed for other purposes and that are only indirectly related to a consumer's disposition to resist marketers' influences. Thus, in the present study, we try to formulate a conception of consumers' propensity to resist marketers' influences. Our work is in the vein of some works on resistance to change (Oreg 2003) and resistance to persuasion (Knowles and Linn 2004; Briñol and al. 2004), which define resistance as a quality of a person; these authors dealt with the study of individual differences in resistance that are expected to be constant across topic, sources and situations. This work does not suggest that consumer resistance is solely a personality trait; indeed, it occurs in the marketplace and is related to marketplace ideologies and practices. However, as it is admitted and recognized that some consumers may be more susceptible to interpersonal influence than some others (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989), this work assumes that some consumers may be less susceptible to marketers' influence than other. We thus suggest that these may have a higher propensity to resist marketers influence.

Given that the aim was to cast light on a tendency to oppose perceived influences in market interactions, a qualitative exploratory methodology was adopted to thoroughly analyze the speech of consumers (Goulding 2000). We explored three themes in particular (a) our respondents' consumption practices; (b) their perceptions or the absence of these, of influence attempts in market contexts, the nature of these influences and the type of reactions they provoked; and (c) their more general attitudes toward companies' practices and the functioning of the market. The final sample comprised of 13 men and 9 women, between 22 to 60 years old (average age 33), covering the spectrum of diverse backgrounds and professional situations. The results allow us to qualify consumers' propensity to resist as a volitional construct organized around two dimensions, self-regulation and self-control and are linked to approach-avoidance strategies. In detail, the analysis process identifies three main themes: (1) the will and determination to resist, (2) the motivation to resist and (3) the tactics of resistance. From these categories, the findings draw out the central concept that permits to better understand CPR, its dimensionality and its connection with the individual factors of resistance. In the same vein the findings posit that the behavior of resistance is related more to the will and determination of the consumer than to the perception of influence attempts or to the ability to resist. This central idea of will and decision of CPR is a concept well understood in psychological research by the concept of volition, a concept which remains underexplored in marketing (Bagozzi 1993). We thus suggest that CPR through its volitional nature would be an excellent predictor of consumers' oppositional behaviors. The main contribution of this research is to propose consumers' propensity to resist as an individual personality feature that explains resistant behaviors and delineate and define consumers' propensity to resist through self-regulation and self-control of their consumption decisions.

References available upon request