

THE CONSUMER-MARKETPLACE INTERACTION MODEL: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG CONSUMERISM, CONSUMER SATISFACTION, CONSUMER DISCONTENT, AND ALIENATION

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This article investigates the nature and interrelationships of four marketing-related constructs: Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction, Consumer Discontent, Consumer Alienation, and Consumerism. The initial intent of this study is to establish the unique form and meaning of each construct. A model is presented that illustrates the conceptual relationships among the constructs, incorporating Locus-of-Control as a mediating factor.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Bartels (1968) once wrote that new ideas pass through three stages. The first stage is **Identification**. Bartels described this stage as being when the idea is perceived. It is given a name in order to establish a basis for continued discussion. The second stage is **Conceptualization**. Bartels states that in this stage the idea becomes defined and has a distinct form and meaning. The third stage is **Assimilation**. Here Bartels refers to the process by which the idea becomes a part of the larger body of thought. At this stage the idea becomes an accepted avenue for the development of new theoretical discovery and explanation.

More recently, Singh (1991) detailed a methodology for investigating the relationships among conceptualized ideas. Singh's methodology is predicated on the belief that there are redundant constructs within many disciplines. Redundant constructs are ideas that have passed through the three stages, but are not necessarily distinct from one another in terms of their respective assimilation. As Singh points out, redundancy leads to the proliferation of constructs, but not necessarily to the advancement of knowledge.

Whether by intent or chance, it would appear that Singh has identified a very important source of redundancy within consumer oriented literature. The two constructs that Singh elected to use to illustrate his methodology are Consumer Discontent and Consumer Alienation. Through his analysis Singh indicates that these two constructs have been conceptualized as being distinct, but that the empirical measure of them does not reflect the distinction. In other words, their assimilation has not progressed in keeping with their conceptualizations. When one considers the nature of these two concepts, in concert with other ideas to which they have been linked in theory, (e.g., Consumer Satisfaction and Consumerism) the importance of resolving this inconsistency becomes apparent.

The following paper examines literature relevant to four constructs: Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction, Consumer Discontent, Consumer Alienation, and Consumerism. The purpose of the review is to redefine the discussion from the perspective of Conceptualization, in order to establish the form and meaning of each construct. Following this discussion, the paper reviews literature pertaining to the construct of Locus-of-Control. A model is then presented that illustrates the conceptual relationships among the four consumer-oriented constructs, incorporating Locus-of-Control as a mediating variable. The paper

concludes with remarks concerning the future of research in this area.

Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

That Consumer Satisfaction is an essential precept of marketing is very clear. The American Marketing Association states that "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that **satisfy** individual and organizational objectives". One need only to consult virtually any of the myriad "Principles of Marketing" texts available today to find these words, or words to this effect. Consumer Satisfaction should be the predominant goal of all marketing activity. Within the marketing literature there has been much discussion of the construct and its meaning and measurement. An example of this is the work of Andreasen (1977).

Andreasen defines Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction as being "the extent to which consumer needs and wants are met". The purpose of his work was to identify various measures of the construct, and to determine how the measurement of the construct contributes to the goal of increasing satisfaction or minimizing dissatisfaction. In his discussion of the research, Andreasen makes it clear that he is conceptualizing satisfaction/ dissatisfaction as being related to the purchase of specific products and services. That is, that the construct refers to a particular incidence of purchase-related behavior.

Clabaugh, Mason, and Bearden (1979) present an investigation of Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction from the perspective of Complaint Behavior. Specifically, this work is directed at determining what causes a Dissatisfied consumer to complain. In their discussion, the authors define Consumer Dissatisfaction as being "a perception (i.e., a psychological state) of the individual about imbalances within the marketing system" (from McGuire 1976). This definition makes it obvious that the identification of satisfying/ dissatisfying conditions is subjectively dependent on the consumer as an individual.

Finally, Westbrook (1980) presents a discussion of the Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction construct from the perspective of identifying its antecedents. Westbrook states that "typically, efforts to account for satisfaction/ dissatisfaction involve considerations of consumers' expectations and perceptions of product performance." The central focus of Westbrook's work is to determine whether or not satisfaction/ dissatisfaction is solely the result of a cognitive comparison of the individual's expectations of the purchase relative to the outcome. Through his analysis, Westbrook determines that satisfaction/ dissatisfaction is a function of both the cognitive examination of expectation relative to outcome, as well as affective predispositions within the consumer him/herself. That is, that the individual brings to the interaction certain personality traits that are not necessarily defined by the interaction itself.

Using these works, it is possible to identify a conceptualization of the Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction construct. Consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a psychological state within individuals. It is developed relative to the outcome of specific interactions with the market place. Its genesis is in both the cognitive expectations regarding the outcome of the interaction, as well as more enduring psychological states inherent within the consumer. This conceptualization is consistent with that provided by Balasubramanian and Kamakura (1989).

Consumer Discontent

Lundstrom and Lamont (1975, 1976) provide efforts directed at the assimilation of the Consumer Discontent construct. As discussed by Singh (1991), this work is suspect due to the question of how the construct has been empirically measured relative to the related construct of Consumer Alienation.

Lundstrom and Lamont present their work as being directed toward the goal of establishing a valid measure of Consumer Discontent. However, in their discussion, they use a variety of terms to describe what they are measuring. At times they seem to equate Discontent with Consumerism (1975, pg. 238; 1976), and Dissatisfaction (1975; 1976.). While

Singh is primarily concerned with the redundancy issue at the assimilation stage, it appears that Lundstrom and Lamont have fallen prey to this problem at the identification stage.

Lundstrom and Lamont (1976) do provide a clear conceptualization of what they identify as being Consumer Discontent. Here they state that Consumer Discontent is:

...the collection of attitudes held by consumers toward the product strategies of business, business communications and information, the impersonal nature of business and retail institutions, and the broader socio-economic forces which are linked with the business system.

This conceptualization is reinforced by Balasubramanian and Kamakura (1989) and Singh (1991). This conceptualization is also in keeping with the original intent of the construct as proposed by Barksdale and Darden (1972) and others (e.g., Hustad and Pessemier, 1973). That is, that it reflects a more general assessment of the attitudes held by consumers with regard to the market place.

The above reflects the conceptualization of Consumer Discontent to be used here. Consumer Discontent is a psychological state of consumers. It is held relative to business and business related activities in general, rather than toward a specific business, or marketplace entity. Its **formation** is based on repeated occurrences of dissatisfying marketplace interactions on the part of the consumer.

Consumer Alienation

Singh (1991) identifies the work of Allison (1978) as one of the principal efforts in marketing to measure empirically the construct of Consumer Alienation. Allison's scale, based in large part on the social-psychological literature of Seeman (1959) and others (e.g., Pruden and Longman, 1972), has been incorporated into continued efforts to extend the assimilation of this construct in marketing (e.g., Bearden and Mason, 1983). As discussed above, Singh questions the strength of this assimilation due

to the degree of redundancy between Allison's measurement of Consumer Alienation and Lundstrom and Lamont's (1976) measurement of Consumer Discontent. Allison himself recognized the existence of this problem, when he stated:

...major differentiation between these two indices is that the alienation index includes items that reflect the self and how it relates to the market place.

However, in his discussion, Singh does establish that the conceptualizations of the two constructs are different. Singh states that "while the two constructs share causal factors, they differ remarkably in their structure and response outcomes." Reinforcement of this belief can be found in Balasubramanian and Kamakura (1989).

Through his analysis, Allison (1978) establishes that Consumer Alienation from the marketplace is defined as:

...feelings of separation from the norms and values of the marketplace. Such a state includes a lack of acceptance of or identification with market institutions, practices, and outputs as well as feelings of separation from the self when one is involved with the consumption role.

Examination of the conceptualization of Consumer Discontent presented in the preceding section reinforces Allison's inclusion of "self" in the measurement of Consumer Alienation. It does not resolve the redundancy issue raised by Singh. Kanungo (1979) provides a possible explanation of what has happened in his discussion of the Alienation construct. In his discussion Kanungo identifies several sources of confusion arising in the literature. In identifying one such source, he states that confusion:

...results from a failure to maintain the distinction between the **antecedent conditions** of alienation and the **consequent states** of alienation. (emphasis added)

Singh (1991) provides further support for the idea that psychological constructs must be separated from antecedent causes and the resulting behavioral outcomes.

This explanation would indicate that one of the two constructs, Consumer Alienation and Consumer Discontent, is a possible cause of the other. It is argued here that Consumer Discontent is an antecedent state of Consumer Alienation.

This argument is supported in Singh's (1991) discussion of the Alienation construct. Drawing on Kanungo (1979), Singh states that Alienation is "largely associated with a cognitive state of "dissociation" from the marketplace and not necessarily with feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction". He goes on to say that "this is because (dis)-satisfaction is episode-specific while alienation is an enduring state of mind." Singh maintains that Alienation is the result of situations that "constantly frustrate" the consumer. That is, that Alienation occurs when a consumer has repeated instances of being dissatisfied by interactions with the marketplace. As discussed above, these repeated instances of dissatisfaction are the cause of Consumer Discontent. This Discontent, which has also been referred to as General Dissatisfaction (Lambert, 1980, Singh, 1991), may create a sense of Alienation from the marketplace. That is, one's attitude toward the marketplace may, over time, facilitate the development of an attitude that reflects the individual's relationship to the marketplace.

The construct of Consumer Alienation is conceptualized here as follows: Consumer Alienation is an enduring state of mind (Singh, 1991). It is a cognitive belief (Kanungo, 1979) that the individual has become separated from the norms and practices of the marketplace (Allison, 1978).

Consumerism

As discussed above, Lundstrom and Lamont (1975) appear to equate Consumer Discontent with Consumerism. However, the marketing literature provides evidence that this is not the case (Day and

Aaker, 1970, Barksdale and Darden, 1972, Lambert, 1980, Finch and Gallagher, 1989, Tiemstra, 1992).

Day and Aaker (1970) conceptualize Consumerism as referring to a:

...range of activities of government, business, and independent organizations that are designed to protect individuals from practices (of both business and government) that infringe upon their rights as consumers.

That the goal of Consumerism is to "safeguard the rights and interests of consumers" is supported by Barksdale and Darden (1972) and Lambert (1980).

More important to the current discussion is the conceptualization of Consumerism as being a "range of activities". This conceptualization is supported by Finch and Gallagher (1989), who state that:

Consumerism and the consumer movement are terms which have been applied to describe an amorphous collection of activities that have sought to assert the preeminence of the consumer within an economy.

Tiemstra echoes this conceptualization when he states that the consumer movement "voices consumer dissatisfaction with business practices".

The research cited above allows for the following conceptualization of Consumerism. Consumerism is a collection of activities directed at placing the needs of consumers at the forefront of all activities undertaken within the marketplace. It is not a psychological state of an individual, but is a behavioral outcome that arises when it is felt that the marketplace is not adequately addressing the concerns of the consumer.

SUMMARY

The preceding discussion identifies four constructs that appear in the marketing literature. These constructs have been conceptualized as being distinct, but have not, as yet, been assimilated within the

literature according to their respective conceptualizations. The current discussion is intended to facilitate such an assimilation.

Consumer Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction is conceptualized as referring to specific instances of consumer interaction with the marketplace. When these interactions do not result in the needs of the consumer being met, the consumer is dissatisfied (Balasubramanian and Kamakura, 1989, Singh, 1991).

Repeated instances of dissatisfaction create an attitude on the part of the consumer that is broader in scope, and more enduring (Balasubramanian and Kamakura, 1989). It is an attitude encompassing the marketplace as a whole, rather than a specific entity within the marketplace. This generalized attitude of dissatisfaction is identified here as being consumer discontent.

A general state of discontentment may create an attitude of alienation in the consumer. Alienation, while also broad in scope (Balasubramanian and Kamakura, 1989) differs from discontent in that the individual becomes the central focus of the attitude, as opposed to the marketplace centrality of discontent. An alienated consumer is one that has come to feel removed from the norms and values of the marketplace (Allison, 1978). In other words, his or her needs are not being met by the marketplace because he/she does not share the values and norms making up the marketplace.

Consumerism is identified as being a collection of activities. Insofar as consumerism is behavioral, it is distinctly different from the three preceding psychological constructs. It is used to describe any activity that is directed at placing the needs of the consumer at the forefront of marketplace activity.

The following section of the current discussion introduces the construct of Locus-of-Control. This discussion identifies the construct as an intervening variable that moderates the relationships among the above constructs with regard to individual consumers.

LOCUS OF CONTROL

In its most general context, Locus-of-Control refers to a person's beliefs about the degree to which they have control over events and outcomes. Specifically, the term has been used to identify a stable personality trait that describes the extent to which individuals attribute the cause or control of events to themselves (**internal** locus of control) or to external environmental factors beyond their power (**external** locus of control).

Internals believe that success results from hard work and that failure is an individual responsibility. Extreme externals, in contrast, do not believe that success or failure is related to ability or effort. Externals lack a generalized expectancy that their own actions will lead to the attainment of rewards or the avoidance of punishment (Spector 1982). Thus, locus of control describes the degree to which people accept responsibility for what happens to them (Kren 1992).

The role of Locus-of-Control in moderating marketplace behavior has received relatively little attention. Although the potential for this personality construct to affect consumer behavior was first suggested more than twenty years ago (Howard and Sheth, 1969), very little research has been done until recently.

Information Search

Srinivasan and Tikoo (1992) examined the impact of locus of control on consumers' information search behavior. As expected, they found that persons possessing a high internal locus of control will engage in a greater degree of information search than those with a high external locus of control. "Internals" were also more likely to believe that greater benefits will result from extended information searches and regard the purchase process as less stressful than "externals." In fact, externals regarded extensive information search and shopping as counterproductive--making the purchase decision more difficult rather than easier. The cost-benefit

schema held by internals suggests better payoffs from greater information search and regards the search process as less work than externals.

Internals consider the information environment as less complex than externals and they are less influenced by prior beliefs about the marketplace. That is, internals are less restricted by past beliefs about brands in their evaluation of new purchases. In addition, internals rated themselves as more knowledgeable and generally more self-assured in the marketplace than externals. The approval of purchases by family and friends was found to be more important to externals than to internals.

It is unclear from the research of Srinivasan and Tikoo whether the relationships described above can be generalized to all classes of goods. Their study focused on information search behavior with respect to high involvement purchases. Involvement may be an important mediating influence in several of these results. The finding that externals seek the approval of purchases by family and friends to a greater degree than internals, for example, may not emerge in low involvement contexts.

Participation In the Workplace

In a number of work-related settings, it has been demonstrated that locus of control moderates the impact of performance-contingent incentives and participation on performance (Kren, 1992). Internally-oriented individuals perceive a greater correlation between their own actions and subsequent outcomes. Therefore, they are more likely to respond to monetary reward structures and exhibit greater willingness to participate in the process since they believe their own efforts can secure the reward. That is, since internally-oriented individuals believe that their own actions determine outcomes, they are more likely to take an active posture with respect to their environment. Externals, in contrast, may adopt a passive role in response to what they perceive as an "unfair" or arbitrary environment.

Locus of control has also been shown to mediate individuals' perceptions of procedural justice and fairness in the workplace. Research studies in this

area have addressed several types of workplace processes: performance appraisal (Greenberg, 1986); compensation systems (Folger and Greenberg, 1985); dispute resolution (Brett, 1986); and occupational selection (Nacoste, 1987). A consistent pattern observed across these studies suggests that individuals who believe they have had significant influence in a decision-making process regard both the process and the outcomes as fairer than those who have not.

Sweeney, McFarlin and Cotton (1991) have confirmed that internals are more likely to believe in a positive relationship between perceived influence in decision making processes and procedural justice. Similarly, the opportunity to participate in process is more meaningful to internals than externals. These findings about the role of locus of control in mediating workplace behavior have significant implications for the development of the model to be presented here.

We would expect that internals who believe that they have little influence in work decisions would be most likely to manifest behaviors that indicate dissatisfaction. These internals should, for example, be more likely to look around for other jobs and to leave if good opportunities present themselves, especially if those other jobs might involve greater say in their work environment (Sweeney, McFarlin and Cotton, 1991).

The authors of the study do not speculate, however, on how externals might respond to dissatisfaction and perceived injustice in the workplace.

MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion identifies the component parts of the Consumer-Marketplace Interaction Response (CMIR) model illustrated in Figure 1. The CMIR model conceptualizes the cause and effect relationships among the constructs summarized above, while taking into consideration the effects of time and multiple marketplace interactions.

The CMIR model shows that an individual brings to the marketplace a predetermined and stable cognitive state, his or her locus of control. This cognitive state remains consistent regardless of the immediate need or want that is driving any specific marketplace interaction.

In any marketplace interaction, there are basically two possible outcomes from the consumer's perspective: satisfaction or dissatisfaction. A satisfying outcome could be one where the consumer's expectation has been met, which may result in a neutral outcome with regard to attitude change. The satisfying outcome may also exceed the consumer's expectations, which may result in a positive change in the consumer's attitude (Clabaugh, Mason, and Bearden, 1979). A person that experiences nothing but satisfying outcomes with the marketplace could be described as being generally content.

In the case of an interaction being dissatisfying, the CMIR model identifies three possible outcomes. The first two of these involve some form of complaint behavior on the part of the consumer. These types of complaints, hypothesized here to be specific to the marketplace entity, could be referred to as being instances of micro-consumerism. This is in keeping with the conceptualization of consumerism presented earlier. The third outcome of a dissatisfying interaction would be typified by the absence of constructive complaint behavior on the part of the consumer.

Purposeful complaining behavior creates the possibility that the dissatisfying interaction may be resolved. It is also possible that the dissatisfaction may not be

resolved. It is expected that "no complaint" behavior does not allow for a resolution of the dissatisfaction.

The legend of Figure 1 identifies the outcome probabilities of the paths identified in the CMIR model. A person that has an Internal Locus-of-Control (LOC) is expected to have a higher probability of being satisfied with any given marketplace interaction than a person with an External LOC. A direct implication of this

expectation is that people with an Internal LOC are more likely to be generally content with the marketplace as a whole. This can also be seen through the expectation that a person with an Internal LOC has a higher probability of being satisfied with any given interaction than that person has of being dissatisfied.

In the event that the interaction has led to a dissatisfying result, one of the three outcomes discussed above occurs. It is not possible to identify the probability that a complaint behavior will lead to a resolution of a problem. It is expected that a person with an Internal LOC does have a higher probability of evidencing an overt behavior aimed at resolution. Further, persons with a high Internal LOC will be more successful in resolving their dissatisfactions through complaint behavior than will persons with a high External LOC.

The time orientation of the CMIR model identifies the cause of consumer discontent. In keeping with the conceptualization of this construct presented earlier, consumer discontent is the consequence of multiple dissatisfactions with the marketplace. As the model shows, it is possible for a person to become discontented over time, even if each of the dissatisfying interactions has been resolved. This is because the memory of the dissatisfaction-complaint-resolution interaction will be retained over time. As these occurrences repeat over time, discontentment may result. As the CMIR model demonstrates, consumer discontent is thus a function of time, as well as the number of dissatisfying interactions, and the degree to which the dissatisfaction has been resolved. It is expected that a person with an External LOC will not require as many dissatisfying interactions over time to become discontented.

Finally, the CMIR model illustrates the consequences of chronic Consumer Discontent. One possible outcome is Consumer Alienation. It is expected that a consumer with an External LOC has the greater probability of becoming Alienated. Such a person has come to believe that they do not share the same beliefs and values as the marketplace, and that they do not have the power to change this relationship (Lambert and Kniffen 1975). The behavioral

LOCUS OF CONTROL

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

RESULT OF INTERACTION WITH THE MARKETPLACE

SATISFIED

DISSATISFIED

GENERAL CONTENTMENT

P1

P3

P4

P2

P3a

P3b

P3c

P2a

P2b

P2c

COMPLAINT --> RESOLVED

COMPLAINT --> UNRESOLVED

NO COMPLAINT --> UNRESOLVED

FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE AND SEVERITY OF INITIAL PROBLEMS OVER TIME

CONSUMERISM

DISCONTENT

ALIENATION

P5a

P5b

P6a

P6b

LEGEND

OUTCOME PROBABILITIES

$P1 + P3 = 1.00$

$P2 + P4 = 1.00$

$P5a + P5b = 1.00$

$P6a + P6b = 1.00$

$\sum_{i=1}^k P2i = 1.00$

$\sum_{j=1}^k P3j = 1.00$

$P1 > P2$ if P1 or P4 then: No Attitude Change

$P1 > P3$ if P2 or P3 then: $P3a > P2a$
 $P3b > P2b$
 $P2c > P3c$

$P2 > P3$

$P2 > P4$
 $P5a > P5b$

$P6a < P6b$

to effect change within the system (Hustad and Pessemier 1973).

It is inevitable in our increasingly complex marketplace that many consumers will make choices that leave them dissatisfied. The primary intent of developing the Consumer-Marketplace Interaction Response Model is to clarify the conceptual nature of several satisfaction-dependent constructs and to identify the relationships that exist between them. The CMIR model identifies locus-of-control as a mediating influence in the relationship between dissatisfaction, complaint behavior and discontent.

This framework also examines the mediating role performed by locus-of-control in determining consumers' responses to chronic discontent with the marketplace.

It is essential to improve our understanding of the relationships that exist between the constructs discussed here. Underlying the discussion and examination of the process identified in the CMIR Model is the need to advance consumer interests in the face of marketplace inequities. In this regard, there exist implications for both governmental and business policy makers alike in improving our understanding of the causes and preconditions that produce consumer discontent. As a society we cannot afford to have a significant segment of our population deciding to reject the marketplace as a consequence of its failures. In the long run, this form of revolt can not serve the common good, nor the narrow self-interest of those consumers who elect to drop out.

Future research should focus on the nature of what we have termed consumer alienation. It is unlike the alienation that stems from other forms of social injustice insofar as the perceived causes are not always clearly evident. It is possible that alienation from the marketplace may stem from two interrelated sources: a psychological basis and a philosophical basis.

Our discussion of the CMIR Model is based on the presumption that a high external locus of control is the driving prerequisite that may ultimately lead to consumers' alienation from the marketplace. It is hypothesized that because externals perceive a weak relationship between their own actions and subsequent outcomes, they are less willing to participate in the process of remedying dissatisfying experiences through productive or directed complaint behavior. Consequently, alienated externals may withdraw from the marketplace in response to what they perceive as an "unfair" or arbitrary environment.

Although there exists substantial evidence in support of the **psychological** principles discussed above, it seems equally likely that alienation from the marketplace may be a consequence of one's personal **philosophical** beliefs. It is quite likely that many persons who possess a high internal locus-of-control may simply reject the values that the marketplace represents. Recent years have witnessed a substantial increase in the development of

alternatives to the traditional marketplace in response to many social changes. Some consumer food cooperatives, for example, have developed out of a rejection of capitalistic and materialistic values. Some patrons frequent local co-ops because they reject the ways in which food products are managed, packaged and processed by "the system." Many of these consumers are not giving up on the traditional marketplace because they lack the sense of confidence or autonomy we associate with an internal locus of control, but precisely because they are willing to take matters in their own hands and assume responsibility for their own actions. Although these people are acting in the best traditions of what we term consumerism (asserting the preeminence of the consumer), the behaviors might be incorrectly construed as a consequence of psychological alienation.

Future research should strive to differentiate the true sources or bases for behaviors that we have heretofore viewed as a consequence of alienation. We need to identify the extent to which philosophical values or psychological predispositions determine these market-related behaviors. Appropriate marketplace responses from both business and social policy-makers must recognize these differences and policies must be developed to remedy consumer discontent, rather than treating potentially misleading symptoms.

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