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Sanam Akhavannasab

Danilo C. Dantas

Sylvain Senecal

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Consumer Empowerment: The Framework

Sanam Akhavannasab  
HEC Montreal  
Danilo C. Dantas  
HEC Montreal  
Sylvain Senecal  
HEC Montreal

ABSTRACT

There is mounting evidence that consumers possess more power now than they ever have before. Stories such as “United Breaks Guitars” (Tripp and Grégoire 2011) are regularly reported in the press as illustrative examples of this phenomenon. In our era of user-generated content, consumer power is an important issue for any business. For instance, an increasing number of companies are using social media monitoring tools to keep track of online conversations. However, the marketing literature on consumer empowerment is limited (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008; Kucuk 2009; Pranić and Roehl 2012). Generally adopting a conceptual approach (e.g., Kucuk, 2009); consumer empowerment research to date has either focused on specific contexts (e.g., In service recovery by Pranić & Roehl, 2012; in new product development by Fuchs, Prandelli, & Schréier, 2010) or has broadly covered the phenomenon without proposing a comprehensive conceptual framework to explain it (e.g., Hunter & Garnefeld, 2008; Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006). In addition, there is no consensual definition of consumer empowerment. In order to address this gap in the literature, our objective is to propose a conceptual framework underpinning the empowerment process which leads to consumer power. The empowerment literature in marketing and in other fields such as psychology, human resources, health care and rehabilitation was reviewed in building the framework.

In this theoretical paper, we illustrate how consumers are empowered at different stages of their decision-making process. The general model of consumer empowerment has been elaborated for the three main stages of consumer decision-making process: pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase stages. The roles of four main environmental factors, five main facilitators, three-dimensional consumer empowerment perceptions, and two types of consumer power have been proposed for each stage. Our research suggests that competition, technology, consumer-centric strategies and consumer policies, are the four main environmental factors, which provide consumer empowering facilitators. Consumer empowering facilitators are availability of information and options, consumer-to-consumer interactions, consumer-to-supplier interactions, and consumer-to-legal activists’ interactions. These facilitators increase consumer subjective feeling of empowerment which includes consumer self-efficacy, perceived choice and consumer knowledge. Finally, this subjective experience of empowerment enhances consumer feeling of social and personal power. Personal power is consumers’ control over own decisions, and their resistance to suppliers’ offerings. Social power is consumer influence over suppliers’ offerings and marketing efforts.
The proposed framework should help researchers and managers better understand the consumer empowerment formation process.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sanam Akhavannasab is Ph.D. candidate of marketing at HEC Montréal. Her research interests are in topics of online consumer behavior, brand management and service marketing.

Danilo C. Dantas is assistant professor of marketing at HEC Montréal. He obtained a Ph.D. from the Université de Grenoble, France, and his research interests are related to online communications and database analysis.

Sylvain Senecal is Professor of marketing and the RCB Financial Group Chair of Ecommerce at HEC Montreal. His research interests are online consumer behavior, decision-making, and consumer neuroscience.