Consumer Propensity to Deviate: Scale Development and Validation
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Why do some consumers engage in deviant behavior while others do not? Addressing this, a personality trait entitled, consumer propensity to deviate (CPD) is defined, and a scale measuring it is developed and extensively validated. Six studies, encompassing seven samples, are reported. The resultant seven-item scale is parsimonious and adaptable.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Deviance has had a bad rap. It can be seen as a source of new products and new-market creation. Conversely, many facets may not be so alluring, despite being “fun” for some consumers. Pornography is edging its way into the mainstream; now a $97 B global industry (CNBC 2014), 35% of Internet downloads are porn-related, and 40 million Americans regularly visit porn sites (Webroot 2014). Illegal software downloading is ubiquitous – 57% of computer users, worldwide, admit they pirate software (BSA 2012). Once flaunted by the “deviant” minority, seemingly most people now have tattoos – 40% of US adults aged 26-40, and interestingly, 29% say that it makes them feel rebellious (Pew Research 2013). Still, many consumers are not inclined to pursue deviance.

Why do some consumers engage in deviant behavior while others do not? The extant CB literature does not adequately address this research question, nor does it give sufficient attention to the important and pervasive subject of deviance. This is not surprising given the inherent challenges in studying this diverse topic. Conceptual boundaries vary, as does the nature of deviance itself: what is deviant to one person is not to another, and what was deviant many years ago might not be today. Sometimes referred to, in part, as the dark side of CB, deviance was recognized as being difficult and troubling (Hirschman 1991), while also being one of the most important new areas of CB research (Mick 1996). Notwithstanding, since Wells’ (1993) call for greater research into the dark side of CB, little advancement has been made.

In addressing the above research question, the present work is positioned within the limited CB literature on deviant consumption. In so doing, several key contributions are made: most importantly, an adaptable, consumer-focused scale is available to researchers (and managers); our understanding of deviant consumer behavior is enhanced; and the CB literature is enriched as theory from other disciplines (sociology, social psychology, and criminology) is applied.

Overarching procedural approaches for the present scale development research followed those of accomplished scale developers like Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma, where mainly survey methodology is employed. Initially, I explored, described and defined deviance, and then related it to the consumption experience to arrive at a conceptualization of deviant consumer behavior. Subsequently, I focused on consumers’ likelihood to engage in deviant consumer behavior by developing and defining a construct entitled, consumer propensity to deviate (CPD), which was hypothesized to vary across all consumers to a greater or lesser degree (like many personality traits). CPD was hypothesized as being unidimensional and defined as, the inclination or tendency for consumers to willfully contravene consumption norms as defined by members of a reference group.

The measure for CPD was developed via a comprehensive scale development process that consisted of six studies (two qualitative, and four quantitative) and encompassed seven samples. Exploratory in nature, the initial qualitative studies were intended to enhance fundamental understanding of the domain, as well as to foster item generation. An initial pool of 119 items was reduced to a set of 52 upon completion of these qualitative studies. This resultant set of items formed the basis for the following suite of studies.

The next four quantitative studies were conducted using Web-based survey methodology. Studies 1 and 2 focused on scale refinement by trimming the number of items. Via statistical analyses, conducted with full attentiveness to theory, the number of items was trimmed to a total of seven. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed and found to be acceptable as was reliability. Subsequently, Studies 3 and 4 examined and demonstrated external aspects of validity: known-group, predictive, and nomological.

Ultimately, a parsimonious, seven-item measure for CPD was developed with demonstrated reliability and validity. Extensive validation procedures were used that included examining relationships between the CPD scale and numerous consumer-related measures of attitudes and behaviors. A unique construct, CPD was shown to differ from conceptually similar constructs. The scale comprised the following items:

1. I try to use products that are the opposite of what others believe I should use.
2. The things I own express my rejection of society.
3. I seek out products, services, or experiences that make me feel like I am an outsider.
4. If most people believe that it is right to buy a certain product, I will buy the “opposite.”
5. I reject society’s values through my consumption.
6. I try to buy things so that I don’t fit in.
7. I actively buy products that others do not like.

Owing to its relatively short length, simplicity, and flexibility, the CPD scale can be applied to a variety of academic and managerial research areas, and modified to suit required research settings. Managers could use this tool as an aid to segment markets and target particular consumers. Consumer psychology and marketing researchers now have a tool that can measure a consumer’s propensity to deliberately contravene consumption norms.

REFERENCES