Rightist Resistance to the Market

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Most resistance paradigms rely on critical theory and postmodern perspective, providing little insights on the influence of rightist ideology in resistant behaviors. This conceptual paper justifies the need for a paradigmatic update, characterizes conservative and right-wing resistance to the market in an integrative theoretical framework for consumer resistance.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In comparison with most social sciences (Blee and Creasap 2010; Diamond 1995; Lo 1982; Warnick 1982), there is little to no marketing scholarship about rightist resistance (Izberk-Bilgin 2010; Peñaloza and Price 1993; Roux 2007). This paper presents three potential conflicts between rightist ideologies and the market. It then discusses four avenues for future research.

The consumer research on resistance articulates two main paradigms (Izberk-Bilgin 2010). The Critical Theory based on the critique of social structures founded on capitalist ideology (Hetric and Lozada 1994; Murray and Ozanne 1991). Building on Marxism, it understands resistance to the market within a general framework of mass revolution aiming to the destruction of capitalism and its subjugation by socialism. The postmodernist perspective considers that it is not possible to escape from the market (Kozinets 2002). It understands resistance at an individual level, using the codes of the market and re-interprets its symbols (De Certau 1990; Holt 2002; Roux 2007). While they differ in their theoretical and political approach, both share the same emancipatory perspective and overlooks those behaviors resisting the market in order to exclude, perpetuate or increase inequalities (Lo, 1982). A body of research looks at nationalism and religiosity (Izberk-Bilgin 2008; Russel, Russel, and Neijens 2011; Sandikci and Ekici 2009; Varman and Belk 2009) but it does not question the resistance to the market as a liberal institution, and overlooks Western countries. The tacit assumption that consumers sharing rightist values are unlikely to engage in resistance against the market overlooks the diversity of rightist thoughts, and the current right-wing criticism of mainstream conservative parties in Europe and in the United States (Hawley 2016).

While one branch of conservatism accepts liberal economic doctrine against socialism, another remains opposed to both social and economic liberalism (Meyer 1964). The former are also labelled conservative and the latter right-wing (Blee and Creasap 2010). Three common characteristics oppose the market and the consumer culture. First, rightist individuals tend to be patriotic and nationalistic (Femia 2012; Huntington 1957) while the market is global (Levitt 1983) and consumer culture promotes a global consumption ethos (Ger and Belk 1996). Second, conservative favor traditions and are skeptical towards modernity and progress (Femia 2012) while the market builds on novelty (Fiske 1989; Twitchell 2000). Finally, rightists tend to put the social order before the individual rights (Scruton, 1980) while the market and the consumer culture emphasize individualism (Behr 2010). In short, there are potential conflicts between rightist beliefs in the national ethos, traditions and limited individual freedom; and the market’s institutions of a global consumer, search for continuous novelty, and promotion of individualism.

In order to facilitate further research on rightist resistance to the market, we integrate conservative and right-wing values with the existing paradigms. We distinguish four approaches varying in term of intensity (radical or moderate) and ideological orientation (restoration or emancipation). The critical and postmodernist approaches detailed above share an emancipatory orientation, whereas the new approaches are based on restoration of tradition. The right-wing approach is the radical form of conservative consumer resistance to the market aiming to replace capitalism by a traditional economic system. They conceive market resistance as a part of a wider political project aiming at changing society. The conservative approach is a moderated rightist resistance to the market. Through their consumption choices, consumers express their conservative values: resistance to innovations, alien or immoral brands characterizes their consumption.

We identify four main avenues for future research. The first direction relates to the rightist groups and their targets. Social scientists point to several existing rightist movements, some of them inviting to boycott companies (eg. The Tea Party, the Alt-right...). Sociologists mention but overlook their opposition and mobilizations against alcohol, pornography, gambling, condoms and other birth control (Blee and Creasap 2010; Lo 1982). Consumer researchers could contribute to these efforts by focusing on their discourses and actions towards consumption practices and their influence on other consumers. The second direction relates to the individuals, either members of rightist groups, or performing individual conservative resistance. A first line of inquiry could look at the negotiation between their beliefs and interests. It would be interesting to investigate which particular brands or products they oppose and focus on the motivations (religious, xenophobic...). As more extreme right-wing wish to replace the liberal capitalist society by another system (Hawley, 2016), how would be the market in their ideal alternative social structure in comparison from Murray and Ozanne’s (1991)? A third direction is methodological. Rightist movements are usually less visible because they directly target decision makers (Diamond 1995; Lo 1982). They are sometimes skeptical about academics’ intentions (Blee and Creasap 2010). Sociologists suggest using secondary sources and discuss the possibility of covert research (Blee and Creasap 2010). Are consumer research’s methods compatible with such constraints? A fourth and last direction is theoretical. Rightist movements are usually considered countermovement as they define themselves in opposition with another movement (Gross, Medvetz, and Russel 2011; Warnick 1982). The theoretical framework of movement-countermovement interactions (MC-M, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) offers promising research perspective in resistance to the market. While much existing research focuses on the actions of the resistant movement against the market as an institution, this framework looks at the interactions between: a resistant movement, a countermovement, a regulator, and market actors.

In sum, this article contributes to social sciences’ research on the influence of the new right in Western societies. It also invites reconsidering the emancipatory potential of the market. Existing research widely discusses the alienating power of the capitalist market, in line with the ideological panorama of the late 1980s and 1990s. However, in comparison with recent right-wing cultural and electoral offensives, the market appears as an institution promoting openness, progress, and individual freedom.

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