Beyond Enemy Lines: Sociality in Consumer Activism

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Consumers and companies clash in the marketplace. Rather than adopting a myopic view of the hero-enemy dyad in consumer activism, we investigate the supporting relationships that emerge from and influence activist efforts. We find that consumer campaigns are marked by liminal transitions, relationship fluidity, and community reorientations that facilitate the (trans)formation of relationships in the marketplace.

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INTRODUCTION

Consumers and market entities clash in the marketplace over competing values, goals, and practices (Kozinets and Handleman 2004). Drawing on battle myths and discourses, consumers give meaning to and narrate market conflicts (Giesler 2008). In particular, the identification and characterization of an enemy is a fundamental component of consumer activists’ ideology (Kozinets and Handleman 2004). Specific firms (e.g., Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Friedman 1991; Friedman 1996), hegemonic market discourses and movements (e.g., Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Kozinets 2002a), and “unenlightened” consumers (e.g., Kozinets and Handleman 2004; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010) alike have been cast as adversarial foes in various market conflicts. Consumer activists, contrastingly, characterize themselves as heroic, wise rebels (Giesler 2008; Kozinets and Handleman 2004). Extant research on counter-market activities and movements appears to focus primarily on describing and exploring activism in dyadic terms between adversary and activist in market conflicts, including organized boycotts, doppelganger image creations, and escapist retreats (e.g., Kozinets 2002a; Giesler 2008; Kozinets and Handleman 2004; Holt 2002; Thompson et al. 2006; Friedman 1991; Friedman 1996).

Although marketplace conflicts center on adversarial relationships between a focal consumer hero and corporate/market antagonist, “supporting” relationships can arise or transform in ways that contribute to the enactment of activist initiatives and the development of market interactions. Relationships outside of the hero-adversary dyad, such as alliances between unlikely partners or friends who rally together with the hero to fight a common enemy, may be necessary for desired goal achievement and create a lasting effect on long-term market interactions. We therefore propose that consumer activism is more complex than consumers fighting against market foes, and by extension, more socially dynamic than linear models of consumer resistance (e.g., Giesler 2008) have suggested.

In this paper, we explore consumer activism to extend theoretical and practical understanding of the underlying complexity of market relationships that underpin resistance activities. Integrating consumer resistance, consumer community, and business alliance literatures, we address questions regarding the interplay between consumer relationships and activism: how and why consumer campaigns, a specific site of consumer activism, create a space for influencing market-based relationships, the role of alliances during campaigns, and how consumer community relationships are internally transformed as a result of campaigning.

CONSUMER RESISTANCE AND ACTIVISM

Consumer resistance colors marketplace dynamics. Rather than passively accepting hegemonic producer domination, consumers exert their individual and collective power by opposing market structures and discourses through innovative, nonconformist activities (Holt 2002). In order to begin to understand the importance of relationships in activism, we first address what is meant by activism. From past research, it appears that the actualization of consumer resistance varies in the marketplace (Figure 1).

First, the goal orientation of resistance activities can range from goals centered on resistance within the market system that seek changes to the system, companies, or practices, to goals of emancipation from a market entity or system’s rules, constraints, or hegemony. Some consumer projects have attempted to bring about desired changes to specific practices, policies, decisions, or behaviors to market-based entities. On the opposing side of the goal orientation dimension, consumer resistance efforts focus on breaking free from market rules, constraints, or hegemonic discourses. By so doing, these movements and activities create new systems of exchange and values that run counter to the dominant market system (e.g., counter-cultural movements, hypercommunities, and so on; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Kozinets 2002a).
The second dimension organizes consumer resistance according to an identified adversary against whom consumers fight. Some resistance efforts primarily focus on micro-level resistance against a specific opponent, such as Starbucks, Wal-Mart, and Nike corporations (Thompson et al. 2006). Resistance activities can also challenge macro-level adversaries that include the capitalist market system (Giesler 2008) and dominant exchange discourses or norms (Kozinets 2002a; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Rather than focusing resistance efforts on a specific company, these movements or behaviors attempt to resist an established and pervasive structure or discourse (e.g., the Napster rebellion against the market’s music system).

Activism, from this resistance mapping, appears to be a subset of market resistance movements and behaviors. Consumer activists attempt to change an external entity (organization, business, and so on) or marketing norms, practices, and policies (Kozinets and Handleman 2004) in order to protect consumers from amoral, destructive, or undesirable corporate/marketer actions (Trentmann 2001). Consumer campaigns represent an organized, communal effort of activism. Campaigns are visible and vocal manifestations of a breach between consumers and producers, and can include campaigns that arise within pre-existing communities and communities that arise with particular campaign causes. As campaigns are a type of consumer resistance, it is likely that they arise in markets and exchange relationships marked by transitions and instability. In campaigning, activists group together and engage in deliberate activities oriented to achieve specific goals, often one primary goal, during a condensed time frame. Because campaigns are primarily goal driven, leveraging or forming new relationships may be necessary and beneficial tactics for consumers to pursue in order to attain desired goals.

**CONSUMER SOCIALITY & ALLIANCES**

Consumer activism is a social endeavor that is facilitated by communities formed by like-minded consumers (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001). Consumer communities, though gathering spaces both online and offline for consumers who exhibit similar interests, values, goals, tastes, lifestyles, skills, and consumption preferences (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 2002; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008; Muñiz and Schau 2005), are not homogenous. Rather, collectives vary in purpose, participation, relationships, and core practices of the community (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau 2008; Schau, Muñiz, Arnould 2009). Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau (2008) distinguished different consumer collective classifications according to their goal orientation (i.e., tele-specific and communo-ludic) and contributor distribution (i.e., high and low), with activist communities engaged in campaigning exhibiting tele-specific qualities. Boundaries between community types are considered fluid, allowing for the possibility that communities may shift between one “type” to another over time due to new goals or contributor distribution, though the transformation process over time has been little discussed in the existing literature.

Changes in the environment and market uncertainty experienced in a consumer community may provide a catalyst for mobilizing a community to action, thereby transforming a community’s goals in ways that simultaneously facilitates the formation of new alliances and propels a community from its previous orientation. In an organizational context, firms respond to external threats, such as likely losses, by altering internal and external practices, structures, and goals (Chattopadhyay, Glick, and Huber 2001) and exploring opportunities for alliances with other companies to control or mitigate market uncertainty (e.g., Thompson 1967; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Alliances between businesses can generate various benefits such as resource pooling (Das and Teng 2000), risk sharing (Ohmae 1989), and competency development (Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad 1989). The concept of alliances and the potential benefits derived from business-to-business alliances may be extended to explain and analyze relationships between consumer groups and other market entities that emerge in response to market instability.

Consumer communities, like organizations, must navigate problematic market changes utilizing a myriad of tactics and resources in order to survive and thrive in the marketplace. Organizing and enacting a consumer campaign represents a site of destabilized market conditions in which consumers’ communal actions address a breakdown between consumers and producers. The act of campaigning may transform consumer communities in systematic ways, and incorporate the strategic use of consumer-generated alliances in order to actualize campaign and community goals. Breaking out of the hero-enemy myopia that has previously characterized consumer resistance research may therefore bring to light previously neglected phenomena occurring at the intersection of consumer relationships and activism.

**METHOD**

We investigated the social relationships associated with the three consumer-generated campaigns that emerged in pre-existing communities: “Save Polaroid,” “Nuts for Jericho,” and “Save Chuck.” Each campaign arose as a result of the core production company either discontinuing or threatening to discontinue production of the community’s central product. We selected these sites as prime candidates for exploring the sociality of consumer activism, as these communities negotiated past and present goals, relationships, and market tensions, and thus were more suitable for the purpose of this study than campaigns that did not originate in a pre-existing community.

To begin unpacking the complex system of relationships in consumer activism, we first conducted an historical analysis of fan campaigns. By so doing, we identified previous activities and relationships noted in the accounts as formed during the consumer campaigns, which in turn guided protocol formation. In order to capture a more inclusive picture of the social relationships impacted by the campaigns, we then conducted ten in-depth interviews with campaign leaders/organizers. Following McCracken (1988), the primary author elicited a “grand tour” overview of each informant’s experience and probed for further detail about relationship formation and transformation using emergent prompts and pre-determined questions. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes each, with interview times ranging from 45 minutes to 150 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim by the author.

We triangulated the interview data with netnographic data (Kozinets 2002b; Kozinets 2010) obtained through group message boards, media articles, and websites devoted to the activist campaigns. The primary gathering place for the consumer communities and organizing space for campaigns occurs online. By investigating the consumer-generated content and conversations on the websites, we were able to examine the members’ negotiation of relationships and initiative enactment throughout the campaigns.

Following the hermeneutic method of data analysis (Thompson 1997), we analyzed each interview separately, noting themes that both arose within the data and aligned with themes pre-determined from the literature. We then compared interviews and related themes in order to identify commonalities across the interviews within each campaign, and then across all three campaigns. It is significant to note that the initial impetus for data collection was to probe consumer campaigns from a strategy perspective. However, through the data collection process and analysis over subsequent rounds, a resounding theme of sociality appeared as a central component coloring much of the leaders’ discussion of their experiences with the campaign. The focus on internal and external sociality is therefore an emergent theme from the data.
FINDINGS

From the data set, three interrelated themes emerged that explored the complexity of consumer campaign relationships. As the consumer communities faced potentially community-threatening discontinuations of their core products, the communities experienced a shift in goals, identities, and focus that created transitory, liminal spaces for altering relationships within and external to the community. The fluidity of relationships experienced during the campaign periods not only facilitated the coordination of the strategic campaign efforts, but also impacted community relationships in the short and long term.

Communal Liminality

Consumer campaigns appear to be sites of communal liminality in which a consumer collective underwent transformations as they encountered and negotiated market threats. The campaigns represented liminal playspaces for the campaigners in which they could create new actions beyond their traditional methods and resources. Occurring during times of market unrest and change, the campaigns were organized in response to external threats, with the communities fighting to save their products and by extension, ensure their survival as vibrant, living communities. By organizing goal-oriented campaigns, the communities experienced a state of transition and flux, attempting to negotiate not only their community membership, but also their new identity as rallied troops armed for battle and the corresponding activities.

Before the discontinuations and subsequent campaigning, members identified the communities as predominantly fan collectives. Members gathered at their leisure to share consumption experiences, stories, opinions, knowledge, critiques, innovative ideas with one another. Community activities, such as the Polaroid Nerd-Outs (day gatherings of Polaroid users to go on Polaroid-taking excursions), enhanced the anti-digital and consumerism group identity of the Polaroid community. Both “Jericho” and “Chuck” communities were considered to be “fanatic” communities prior to their respective campaigns: actively debating storyline developments, dissecting plot twists, and judging episode quality as the respective seasons progressed. Informants noted that the core of active members were a relatively small group of contributors, although the communities were frequented by numerous lurkers who did not actively join in the community (Kozinets 1999).

Product discontinuation threatened the core reason for the groups’ existing. Informants responded by leading the community to shift the primary orientation of the community. In place of central interactions and activities that focused on the consumption experiences with the products, members adopted an overarching, task-oriented goal to rescue their beloved products. Succinctly stated by Christian, “Here’s the goal. The goal is to get the show back.” Additional campaign goals, such as spreading the word about the campaign, recruiting new members, and so on, supported the overarching, primary motivational goal of rescuing the products in question. The primary goals served as the rallying cry and unifying point for the consumers to exert a common, shared effort during the campaign periods that effectively mobilized communities to new, Telo-specific orientations.

As the campaigners enacted the campaigns, the identities of the overall communities also shifted. Previously loose collectives of individuals, informants described the communities no longer as just fan communities, but as troops, armies, and soldiers ready for the ensuing conflict. As Steve noted, “it was like a war we were in, and we were taking on CBS trying to bring the show back.” As armies of devoted, action-ready combatants, the communities and their leaders were positioned to enter into battle as a unified collective, focusing efforts and energies on rescuing the beloved products, though some individuals resisted the change in orientation.

However, the shift between states was not seamlessly accomplished. Steve described that in the “Jericho” community, “some pockets were still talking about the episodes, which was fine. Most of the rest of us were busy caught up in saving the show. During the show, fans…everybody was great in talking about the episodes. During the campaign, obviously people were fighting to save the show.Everybody was together and everything else to save it.” It therefore appears that shifting orientations is not without difficulty, as some consumers may resist the change. As a result, the communities experienced relative hybrid states of both fan and activist orientations that most likely further contributes to the feeling of instability and liminality.

Fluidity of Relationships & External Relationships

The relatively short time frame for coordinated action, as well as the specific and singularly focused goals of the campaigns, positioned community members to fluidly engage in or dissolve relationships both externally and internally. We define the construct of relationship fluidity as the mobility of individuals or organizations to form/reform relationship constellations or characterizations. Capitalizing on the changeable nature of relationships opened the door for campaigning consumers to incorporate desirable allies into their folds— all allies who could provide resources such as bargaining power with the networks, distribution and communication channels, and so on. Relationship fluidity also created an opportunity for communities to adjust course and manage emergent issues throughout the campaigns when faced with external opposition or change. Consequently, relationship fluidity played a key role in the management and negotiation of communal instability during the campaign periods.

The formation of short-term alliances generated needed resources for the enactment of novel consumer initiatives. Potential market allies were targeted by community members as those market entities whose sentiments and sympathies aligned with the product or community, or those who would benefit from participating in the campaign. Alliances were explored both with previously affiliated market players and third-party companies. Zoey, in conceptualizing the “Finale and a Footlong” initiative of having consumers purchase Subway sandwiches on the day of the “Chuck” season finale, described: “it turned out to be a very easy way that…shows this advertiser, ‘We noticed. We noticed your product, and we’re going to buy it, because you were on the show.’ I was hoping that Subway would see it and they might want to be further involved.” As a result, Greg related that “we heard that the VP of marketing at Subway had called Ben Silverman, who was the head of NBC at the time, and talked to him about Chuck. And that’s all the info we got at that point. And then we heard more and more from our sources that NBC was talking with Subway and that actually, Subway had initiated the conversation because of the fan campaign.” Based on the spike in sales and immensely positive public relations, Subway entered the conflict as an ally to the consumers. By so doing, Subway was able to provide the communities with vicarious bargaining power in negotiations with the network, offering themselves as a more visible and involved sponsor in the show, and providing an added monetary incentive for NBC to renew “Chuck.”

Alliances were also formed with third-party companies that provided capabilities and resources unavailable to the individual consumer or community. During the “Nuts for Jericho” campaign, campaign leaders suggested using an online nut company as a way to revolutionize the campaign: “Most campaigns, people send their individual purchase in. This vendor agreed to pull funds. So you
could put in however much you could afford, and at the end of the
day, he would tally it and he shipped every couple of days.” (Gina) Congregating the orders served to motivate fans to continue their
efforts, as the daily and weekly tallies of nuts delivered were pub-
lished on the nut distributor’s website, through his personal videos of
delivering the nuts to the network, and on the community’s discus-
sion boards. The formation and utilization of an external, third-party
ally in this case therefore served a strategic purpose in providing
additional pools of resources previously unneeded by the commu-
nity. However, once the need was fulfilled, the momentary alliance
between the third-party producer and the community dissolved, leav-
ing good memories and a ton of nuts at CBS’ studios. Thus, in this
case, forming alliances represented a fluid resource that was rooted
in the transitory nature of the campaign and the goals needing to be
achieved at that point in time.

Relationship fluidity not only contributed needed resources to
the campaigns for strategic purposes, but also allowed for the com-

dities to adjust to the changing external environment by char-

erizing new players as potential allies or foes, as seeming fit by
the circumstances. For example, for the Polaroid community, as it
became evident that Polaroid was no longer going to be producing
instant film, community members sought alternative avenues for
production so that they could achieve their goal of saving instant
film. Fuji film was targeted by leaders for community appeals, as a
producer of instant film, though the products would not work directly
with Polaroid cameras. Although petitions and letters were sent to
the company, the members were disappointed in the non-realization
of their potential ally. “We never really got any response from any-
one at Fuji. And it’s only through like third hand that [we learned]
they were not interested… we were sad that they kind of ignored us
and our request that they make something the looked like Polaroids
and could work with Polaroid cameras.” (Dean) The possibility of
forming an alliance with Fuji, diffused by the lack of cooperation and
interest on the part of the company, resulted in dissolving the hopes
and abandoning the ally characterization of the company. The Pola-
roid community moved on to identifying other possible allies in the
market and extending their efforts to encourage an alliance.

Therefore, it appears that the communities exhibited movement
in their characterization of and allegiance with market players. Re-
lationship fluidity provided communities with the ability to identify
and engage in short-term alliances with external companies that in-
creased pool of needed resources for specific campaign initiatives.
The characterization and supplication for involvement seems to be
influenced by the goal orientation, external conditions, and novelty
of desired initiatives.

Community Transformation

Community relationship transformations. During and after the
campaigns, internal community relationships also underwent signifi-
cant transformations. Consumer-community, consumer-consumer,
consumer-brand, and consumer-market relationships were affected
as consumers engaged in their activist efforts. First, community lead-
ers sought to revolutionize member overall focused on “rallying the
troops,” (Marcus) sending out calls to arms to transform lurkers into
active members, recruit new members, and motivate members into
action. “The activities we designed were really to get people out of
their seats, away from their computers, and into the real world to take
action.” (Dean) Current members worked to recruit new members to
the community, as Sam noted in the “Save Polaroid” plan: “Phase 1
was create a lot of noise. Get people interested in what’s going on.
The choir kind of already knew, but it brought new members into the
choir.” New recruits cited exposure to the campaigns through the
media and active networking by members as primary causes for their
participation. In addition to the stream of new members, community
leadership structures emerged and transformed during the campaign
periods. In order to coordinate and direct widespread action, leader-
ship groups were formed within the larger community in order to act
as gatekeepers, motivators, and strategists for the campaigns:

“But we had a very tight-knit group of maybe 20 people. These
are all people we had all communicated with each other on the
boards. We knew each other at least in cyberspace. And Sarah
[main leader] basically pulled everybody together, and, you
know, we held meetings on Skype. Kind of strategy meetings,
saying, okay, what are we going to do this next week, and how
are we going to do it, and what’s the most effective thing to do.”
(Christian)

New leaders also rose up in the ranks of the community by their
active campaigning, innovative ideas for campaign initiatives, vis-
ibility through frequent communications, or by the expertise offered
from prior campaign activities. Thus, the combination of the influx
of new participants and the restructurization of the community leader-
ship contributed to the redistribution of contributors from a small
nucleus of contributors to a more diverse set of active participants,
with distinctive leadership groups propelling the campaign forward.
The overall orientation of the communities therefore shifted in re-
response to the active mobilization of the communities through the
campaign process.

Market player transformation. The campaigning communities
shifted their focus from primarily enjoying the products as consum-
ers to seeking and incorporation of market logics within the com-
munity, thus evolving the consumer-market relationship. Campaign
leaders educated themselves to the behind-the-scene business struc-
ture that contributed to the production of the products, key decisions
makers, and ways of “speaking” to the companies in ways that would
be impactful. When organizing the “Finale and a Footlong” initiative
for the “Save Chuck” campaign, Greg discussed the importance of
communicating to the network in a way that would garner legitimate
attention:

“This was a very similar idea, except that I wanted it to be a lit-
tle more cohesive with the marketing strategy, and for the show
itself, because they care if we send them a bunch of nerd candy?
I’m like, yeah. It’s cute and it’s funny. But what are they go-
going to do with it? So instead of sending them candy and nuts,
which sounds like Valentine’s Day, but instead of sending them a
product, if we can coordinate and show an actual purchase to
a key sponsor or advertiser, I think a happy advertiser is always
going to be welcome at a network.”

Moving beyond buzz-worthy gimmicks, such as sending large
quantities of products that represent the show, Chuck’s leaders lev-
eraged experiences from previous consumer campaigns and knowl-
edge of the television advertising system to elevate their campaign to
fight using the logic that would appeal to the network as a business.
“It’s based upon ratings and whether or not it’s going to be profit
able. Because at the end of the day, NBC, Warner Brothers, and other
advertisers like Subway are businesses. They need to sell a produc
and make a profit. And you know, by doing this, we were playing the
game.” (Mindy) The leaders used their understanding of the market
system for their particular as a way to strategically tailor their initia-
tives to have the greatest impact on a business level.

“Save Polaroid” members considered the competitive landscape
and product line alignment of potential producers in a bid to find
an appropriate producer-product fit for instant film, “that a company like Fuji and a company like Ilford who had a strong focus on analog film might be interested in buying some of the film from Polaroid and really moving forward, adding one more product to their list of products and sort of shoring up their analog base.” (Dean) Campaigning consumers did not campaigning simply based on the platform of passionate fan support, as had been touted in prior campaigns. Rather, the informants entered into the market dialogue by employing research, market analyses, and business knowledge as tools for strategy development and campaign initiatives. Thus, the act of campaigning appears to create a catalyst for members to adopt a more market-oriented sensibility that incorporated business knowledge within the community. Individual members led the way for the community, strengthening and leveraging market-oriented relationships based on the adoption and application of market logics.

**Long-term community relationship transformations.** The respective battles fought during the campaigns continued to affect consumer-brand and consumer-consumer relationships within the communities. Some informants were unable to go back to the “good ‘ole days,” continuing to act in a mobilized state as a result of feeling an increased and vested interest in the community-brand relationship. These stalwart campaigns continued to discuss new ways to promote the product, garner new community members, and so on, long after the immediate threats had been resolved. “I knew from what Jericho had done, you know, their failure really. I mean, they got the show back, but then it failed. And I knew from their failure that our work had just begun. That we had to do something bigger. We had to motivate the fan base even more.” (Mark) Ardent members acknowledged that they felt an increased burden of responsibility for the success of their products in later incarnations, and that they would be held accountable for both failures and successes by both other members and producers. The relationship between some community members and the product was strengthened through this increased responsibility and residual sense that the consumers were partly responsible for their successful campaigns in bringing back the desired products.

The relationships within the communities between individual consumers after the campaigns were tested and in some cases, dissolved. Some members, exhausted from the intense campaigning period or disillusioned with other community members, effectively “resigned” their status within the communities. It appears that without the guiding and unifying goal to save the product, conversations descended into bickering and argumentation as individuals fought over the direction of the community, leading some consumers exiting the main community and forming exclusive segments. Gina, who assumed a new role in the overall “Jericho” community as an emissary and middleman, mentioned that “there’s some people that still won’t talk to each other. And there’s probably some people in my other group that I don’t talk to. There’s not too many people in the Jericho group I don’t talk to, because it just seems so silly.” Acting as a go-between, Gina had to forge new connections between the divergent groups in order to continue sharing information in the overall group. The vacuum of post-campaign directive goals and attitudes appears to have contributed to the destabilization of previously strengthened relationships, and altered the structure of community networks. Campaigning thus appears to have exerted more than a momentary transformative power on internal relationships. Organizing and fighting to save a product seems to have shifted communities in ways that led to new relationships forming or changing over time within the community.

**DISCUSSION**

Beyond the front lines of consumer hero and market foe lies a complex system of relationships that arise and shift in relation to the response of rising to resist market decisions. Based on the transformations of communities to new orientations and the liminal space in which consumers function as both consumers and activists aiming to achieve particular goals, fluid alliances provided access to needed skills and capabilities of useful market players, represented a method for dealing with the ever-changing external environment, and transformed a community both during and after the campaign period.

Consumer campaigns, like other forms of consumer resistance (e.g., Thompson et al 2006; Giesler 2008), are of strategic importance for companies. Not only can unaffiliated companies develop alternative streams of revenue when collaborating with consumer communities during campaign periods, but also targeted companies can improve consumer relations by actively working with communities to facilitate the mobilization and reorientation of consumer groups into viable promotion and production collaborators. Activists, as part of their goals, work to recruit members through word-of-mouth marketing, testimonials, product trial offers, and so on. As emissaries and ambassadors of the products, companies can benefit from the mobilization and involvement of activists in the marketplace. Further, because consumers utilize the campaigns as opportunities to learn more about and engage with the market on a business level, companies have the chance to cultivate co-creative relationships with market savvy individuals after campaign periods. Thus, we recommend that companies expand their perspective of consumer campaigners: though some may seem to be fanatic extremists, they have the potential to greatly contribute to the future of the product.

Our contributions to consumer literature are five fold. First, contrary to Giesler’s (2008) linear, dramatic model of consumer resistance, we find that activism is more fluid and multidimensional in terms of the social structures and actors involved in consumer-generated campaigns. Relationship fluidity appears to be a necessary and useful construct when discussing consumer activism, and by extension, the strategic use of and characterizations of external partnerships. Second, we also note the strategic importance of emergent campaign goals in enabling and guiding relationship formations in activism. New goals fostered the transformation from community orientations, provided a standard under which consumers could gather, and acted as a key criterion for engaging in external alliances. Third, we extend beyond Muniz and Schau’s (2005; 2007) findings to suggest that through activism, consumer communities are motivated to engage with market discourses and practices to become strategically minded consumer organizations who are further integrated into the market system. Fourth, we contribute a conceptualization of consumer resistance behaviors that identifies the nuanced differences of consumer resistance as exhibited in the marketplace. Finally, we address longitudinal community transformations, a hitherto neglected area of consumer research, and suggest that the transformations resulting from consumer activism create both short-term adjustments, and long-term shifts in community activities, foci, and networks.

We suggest that corporations take a broader perspective when confronting consumer campaigns. Not only can unaffiliated companies develop alternative streams of revenue when collaborating with consumer communities during campaign periods, but also targeted companies can improve consumer relations by actively working with communities to facilitate the mobilization and reorientation of consumer groups into viable promotion and production collaborators.
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