The intellectual structure of the anti-consumption and consumer resistance field

An author co-citation analysis

Marco Galvagno
University of Catania, Catania, Italy

Abstract

Purpose – Given the variety of approaches characterising the research area of anti-consumption and consumer resistance, the purpose of this paper is to conduct a literature review to explore the structure of this interesting research domain and to better understand its origins, current state of development, and future trends.

Design/methodology/approach – An author co-citation analysis was performed using the SSCI of the Thomson-ISI database. A sample of 48 authors was identified, and the co-citation frequencies were analysed.

Findings – The study reveals the former and present structure of the anti-consumption and consumer resistance field of inquiry. Two levels of analysis, five areas of interest, and nine theoretical approaches were acknowledged. These results are useful in providing future direction, particularly in terms of the research gaps and the expected topical areas of interest.

Research limitations/implications – Although quite rigorous, co-citation analysis is subject to some limitations that can bias the results of the research: primarily, the inability to distinguish between good citations and bad citations.

Originality/value – The study contributes to a clear-cut representation of the field of anti-consumption and consumer resistance. From an academic perspective, it provides clear tools for researchers to identify potential new directions as well as to locate their work within the field. It also provides a useful approach for new researchers, as they can identify the main approaches and areas of interest. From a practical point-of-view, it can serve as an introduction to the field for students and managers.

Keywords Anti-consumption, Consumer resistance, Co-citation analysis, Consumers, Consumption

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, studies about anti-consumption and consumer resistance have gained increasing attention in academic literature. Although most of the contributors to this field of inquiry share the broad underlying idea that today’s consumers are more capable of resisting corporate marketing actions and have greater expertise in terms of their consumption, there is still much confusion about the differences and similarities between anti-consumption and consumer resistance. In addition, a great degree of heterogeneity still exists with regard to the approaches followed and the theories used as conceptual building blocks. The present study
attempts to overcome the aforementioned limitations by mapping out the intellectual structure of the field as well as its boundaries and the core subject matters treated within it. The study attempts to capture, through the formal quantitative technique of author co-citation analysis (ACA), the nature and kinds of intellectual discourses and communities that comprise the field of anti-consumption and consumer resistance scholarship. Moreover, it attempts to understand the past and present state of the field in order to identify influential academics, observe research gaps, and discover understudied topics.

Thus, the first basic research question is as follows:

\[ RQ1. \] Is there evidence – from the citers’ perspective – of groups of authors who have been influential in shaping the anti-consumption and consumer resistance field of enquiry?

More specifically, the study seeks to identify groups of authors whose work and research themes have influenced the field (RQ 1.1) and to explore the specialised area or approaches that characterise and define the literature in terms of the formal publication record (RQ 1.2).

The second research question focuses on studying the diversity between the two concepts and the related literature.

\[ RQ2. \] Is there any difference between anti-consumption and consumer resistance literatures and their use in the minds of the citers?

2. Methodology: author co-citation analysis

The research methodology draws on McCain’s technical overview of mapping authors in intellectual space (McCain, 1990). In author co-citation analysis, a set of authors is selected to represent a research area. Relationships between these authors are then analysed using co-citation counts[1] (such as similarity measures) and multivariate analysis techniques (such as analysing tools) to study the intellectual structure of the research field and to infer some of the characteristics of the corresponding scientific community. The technique has been applied to many fields of research, such as organisational behaviour (Culnan et al., 1990), strategic management (Nerur et al., 2008), and consumer behaviour (Hoffman and Holbrook, 1993) and has many advantages over other approaches. First, it is empirical. In this light, the results it offers are fully replicable and are not influenced by the researchers’ cognitive barriers and biases that, in turn, reflect their education, their experiences, and the social groups to which they belong. Second, co-citation analysis has the advantage of focusing on objective indicators. In particular, the technique is based on co-citation frequencies and on the premise that the references of any scientific work are indicative of the theoretical and empirical bases on which the new scientific contribution rests (White and Griffith, 1981). This assumption implies that the more an author is cited within a corpus of research, the more likely it is that he participates in the intellectual structure of the field. Obviously, these indicators are not perfect: not all citations are equal, and some references may have been more influential for the authors of an article than those listed at the end of their work (MacRoberts and MacRoberts, 1989). Third, author co-citation analysis has the advantage of focusing not on the most cited authors taken in isolation from one another, but on the relationships between these most cited authors.
In the work that follows, the co-citation technique allows us to identify connections among influential authors in the anti-consumption and consumer resistance research domain and to represent them systematically within groups of similar researched topics and approaches.

3. Analysis

The analysis, following the prescribed method (McCain, 1990), comprises six steps:

1. identifying influential authors;
2. retrieving co-citation frequencies for each pair of authors;
3. compiling the raw co-citation matrix;
4. compiling the matrix of Pearson’s correlations;
5. performing the multivariate analysis; and
6. interpreting the findings.

To ensure that only the authors who had a significant impact on the field were included in the study, two different subsets were created. For the first subset, the reference section of every article published in the two special issues on anti-consumption and consumer resistance of *Psychology & Marketing* (2002) and *Journal of Business Research* (2009) was analysed, and a list of those authors who were cited at least three times was created. For the second subset, another list was created that included authors who have written articles that have titles, abstracts, or keywords containing the terms “anti-consumption” and/or “consumer resistance”. The initial sample of 124 authors was created by selecting those authors present in at least one of the two subsets (the complete list of authors is available upon request). The *Social Science Citation Index* (SSCI) of the Thomson-ISI database, which covers over 1,700 of the world’s leading scholarly social sciences journals in more than 50 disciplines, was used for this purpose[2]. Because some of the authors found did not generate substantial co-citation frequencies – despite their having made important contributions to scholarly work in the target field – it was decided to filter them using a lower threshold of 30 citations (Culnan, 1986). The initial list of 124 authors was thus reduced to the 48 authors most cited. The following is an alphabetical list of the 48 authors with more than 30 citations:

1. Ajzen, I.
2. Aquino, K.
3. Aty, S.
4. Bagozzi, R.P.
5. Belk, R.W.
6. Bhattacharya, C.B.
7. Bourdieu, P.
8. Dobscha, S.
9. Eagly, A.H.
10. Elgin, D.
11. Elsbach, K.D.
Structure of anti-consumption
It should be recognised that some significant authors may have entered the field relatively recently, and although they may be well known within the research community, they may not yet have had the opportunity to build up a substantial citation history. The final list is therefore biased toward established figures with significant contributions over the years. It does not include all influential authors, but does include most of the well-known names.

A cross-citation frequency matrix of 48 by 48 was created by pairing each author with every other author, where the cells represent the number of times each pair of authors has been cited. For subsequent analysis, in order to standardise the data, avoid possible scale effects, and reduce the number of zeros in the matrix, the raw co-citation matrix was converted into a matrix of Pearson’s correlation coefficients. Three different multivariate statistical techniques were used to extract information from the data (Culnan, 1986):

(1) non-metric multidimensional scaling was employed to map relationships among authors;
(2) cluster analysis was used to group the authors in terms of similarities; and
(3) factor analysis was used to associate single authors with a given factor.

4. Results and discussions

To deal with the first purpose of this study (RQ 1.1), which is the identification of groups of authors whose work has influenced the anti-consumption and consumer resistance field, the correlation matrix was subjected to multidimensional scaling (MDS) and hierarchical cluster analysis. MDS consisted in projecting the authors on a two-dimensional map using the ALSCAL routine of the SPSS statistical program. Next to MDS, a clustering algorithm (using Ward’s hierarchical method) was applied to the data to group significantly related authors. Results of the analysis are depicted in Figure 1, in which the five groups of authors obtained by performing the clustering procedure were superimposed on the MDS graph. The mapping shows the following:

(1) positions of authors with respect to the map’s axes;
(2) identifiable groups that represent research topics or lines of research; and
(3) location of these groups with respect to each other.

Commentary on each point follows:

(1) Although the construction of the axes is arbitrary, the information retrieved on authors and their positioning on the map seems to suggest that the horizontal axis refers to “authors’ background” and the vertical axis to the “level of analysis”. In particular, authors located in the top-right quadrant are almost all psychologists; those located in the bottom-right quadrant are sociologists or philosophers. Authors located in the left quadrants are mainly marketing and consumer behaviour scholars. With respect to the vertical axis, authors located above the horizontal axis concentrate their attention on an individual level of analysis and study anti-consumption or consumer resistance from a single person point-of-view. Those authors appearing below the horizontal axis focus on the collective level of analysis related to the study of groups, communities, and movements opposing or resisting the consumer system. Another dimension becomes apparent as well: the research approach. In the top-right corner appear
Figure 1. Multidimensional scaling structure of anti-consumption.
authors with a largely post-positivist approach, whereas the bottom-left corner shows authors with an interpretive approach. With respect to the position of the individual authors, Ajzen and Petty or Hogg and Wilk, for example, have a high correlation profile, are placed close to one another, and are often cited together. On the contrary, Gramsci and Fournier, or Klein and Bourdieu, are never cited together and, having a low correlation coefficient, are placed far from one another.

(2) Using cluster analysis, authors are grouped together on the basis of correlation relationships. Figure 1 depicts the five author groups found. In particular, authors within group boundaries share similar co-citation profiles, which means that they are seen – from scholars within the field – as addressing similar, broad questions without necessarily agreeing with each other on their findings. Starting from the bottom right area and proceeding clockwise, the groups identified are the following:

- **Group A** comprises the precursors and inspirers of the consumer resistance research tradition, such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Gramsci, Veblen, Friedman, and Gregg. They all have theorised on resistance to different kinds of power and hegemonies (political, cultural, and social) and have written on topics such as cultural and symbolic capital, taste and distaste, social movements, and ethical consumption. In particular, Friedman has written on consumer boycotts, Veblen has written on conspicuous consumption, and Gregg has written on voluntary simplicity and sustainable consumption. The most extreme authors in the group are Zavestoski and Fiske. They can be considered the link to the left side of the map, as the former is a sociologist who writes about consumer behaviour and the latter is interested in popular and mass culture and television studies.

- **Group B** is the most peopled and comprises all authors who write on collective forms of consumer resistance, such as consumer movements, anti-choice constellations, global impact consumers, and market activists (Iyer and Muncy, 2009).

- Those authors focusing on symbolic consumption and on materialism and possession consequences for self-definition dominate Group C. Authors in this group write on individual forms of resistance to specific products or brands as typical of the anti-loyal consumers (Iyer and Muncy, 2009).

- **Groups D** is more related to social and group identity and represents a link to the left-hand side of the map. In fact, social identity and culture and their effects on (anti-)consumption can be seen as a synthesis of the psychological approach typical of authors on the right and the consumer behaviour approach typical of the authors on the left.

- **Group E** collects almost all the psychologists and is characterised by studies on persuasion, individual identity, self-concept, and consumer choices related to prejudices, gender, religion, and stereotypes.

(3) With respect to the position of the groups, a not surprising finding is the centrality of Group B and Group D. Research themes of authors within those two groups are perceived to be of interest to many surrounding scholars.
Almost all of the authors of those two groups have written on some typical issues of the field, such as voluntary simplicity (Elgin), environmental activism (Herrmann), de-marketing or feminist activism (Dobsha), consumption constellation and advertising effects (Englis), and organisational disidentification (Bhattacharya and Elsbach).

With respect to the themes identified within the groups, it is possible to assume two things. First, we can assume that researched topics about anti-consumption and consumer resistance fields are moving from the resistance to power of the bottom right-hand corner to the role of self identity and self-definition of the upper right-hand corner. Second, the four distinct areas of research proposed by Iyer and Muncy (2009) find empirical support.

To address the second goal of the study (RQ 1.2), which is to reveal the specialised area or approaches that characterise and define anti-consumption and consumer resistance in terms of the formal publication record, factor analysis of the co-citation matrix was used. If the cluster analysis showed five unconnected groups representing the researched themes, factor analysis was of use to interpret the intellectual connections among authors and their schools of thought. Table I shows the results of this analysis. All of the information is summarised in nine factors, and 44 authors (out of 48) loaded on at least one factor. The five authors that loaded heavily (greater than 0.57) on more than one factor (Thompson, Holt, Belk, Markus, and Etzioni) are the bridge authors who influence multiple research approaches.

After analysing the loadings on each factor, nine factors were named according to the following labels:

1. consumer culture theory;
2. social psychology;
3. post-modern consumer research;
4. advertising theory;
5. cultural studies;
6. social economics;
7. organisational psychology;
8. personality psychology; and
9. voluntary simplicity.

The first four factors are the most relevant within the field, together explaining almost 50 per cent of the total variance.

Factor 1 includes ten authors whose perspective is based on Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and who are split up in Group B and Group C. Authors loading on this factor have written heavily on consumer resistance. In particular, Dobsha has written on consumer rebellion; Fournier, Belk and Penaloza have written on consumer resistance; Kozinets has written on consumer activism and anti-market events; Holt has written on consumer emancipation; Muniz has written on oppositional brand loyalty; and Thompson has written on anti-corporate experiences.

The broad theoretical framework characterising all of the authors in factor 2 pertains to social psychology. The authors within this approach concentrate their
Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Social psychology factor loadings at 0.55 or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muniz</td>
<td>Ajzen 0.94 Venkatesh 0.82, Soloman 0.83, Foucalt 0.88, Friedmann 0.93, Bhattacharya 0.71, Ogilvie 0.80, Gregg 0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fournier</td>
<td>Petty 0.90 Firat 0.82, Englis 0.81, Gramsci 0.85, Veblen 0.89, Elsbach 0.59, Gecas 0.79, Elgin 0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schouten</td>
<td>Eagly 0.89 Penaloza 0.74, Sirgy 0.69, Fiske 0.84, Etzioni 0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozinets</td>
<td>Bagozzi 0.82, Herrmann 0.72, Aty 0.65, Bourdieu 0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson1</td>
<td>Aquino 0.74, Lasm 0.63, Richins 0.63, Jhally 0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacoby</td>
<td>Markus1 0.71, Witkowski 0.62, Kleine 0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holt1</td>
<td>Shaw 0.69, Holt2 0.61, Belk2 0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escalas</td>
<td>Klein 0.66, Thompson2 0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobsha</td>
<td>Etzioni1 0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belk1</td>
<td>Kotler 0.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Total variance explained: 77.28 per cent; Subscripts: 1 = First appearance; 2 = Second appearance
attention on the attitudes and their effects on behaviour. When a psychological perspective is adopted, the analysis on anti-consumption becomes primarily related to identity and self-concept incongruity.

The authors loading on factor 3 study consumers from a post-modern point-of-view and are all placed in Group B. This factor is also suggestive of the centrality of certain issues in anti-consumption research that are of particular importance. These issues include symbolic consumption (Holt, Thompson, Venkatesh), consumer behaviour and sub-cultures (Penaloza, Witkowski), and market activism (Lasn, Witkowski, Herrmann). Two authors loaded on factor 3 also loaded on factor 1 (i.e. Holt and Thompson), suggesting that they bridge the post-modernist view inside the Consumer Culture Theory.

Factor 4 seems best characterised in terms of effects of advertising and media on individual behaviour and issues related to persuasion. In particular, Solomon and Englis are interested in communication strategies, lifestyle issues, and the symbolic aspects of products; Auty is interested in advertising effects on children and social identity; and Richins is interested in consumer complaints and negative word-of-mouth.

Both factor 5 and factor 6 represent the origins of some important themes and interpretative approaches within the anti-consumption and consumer resistance research field, namely socioeconomics and the criticism of social and capitalistic institutions (Veblen and Etzioni) and the cultural studies tradition represented by two poststructuralists, in Foucault and Fiske, and two critical theorists, in Bourdieu and Gramsci.

Factor 7 includes two authors (Bhattacharya and Elsbach) who adopt the approach of organisational psychology. They theorise on the concept of organisational disidentification, by suggesting that people distance themselves from organisations that they perceive to be incongruent with their own values. Factor 8 is related to three authors who deal with psychological perspective and, in particular, with self-concept. Markus, with her work on possible selves, inspired Ogilvie and his undesired-self, which represents the foundation of the symbolic consumption. Last, factor 9, which includes authors such as Gregg and Elgin, connects consumer resistance with the voluntary simplicity concept.

Having identified the main themes and the different approaches, the final part of the analysis focusses on the question (RQ 2) concerning the differences between the literatures of anti-consumption and consumer resistance. To do so, all articles with titles, abstracts, or keywords containing the terms “anti-consumption” and “consumer resistance” were retrieved from the SSCI of the Thomson-ISI database. This search yielded two different sets of works: one set of 18 articles on “anti-consumption” and another set of 28 articles on “consumer resistance”. Afterwards, the total number of citations received from each of the 48 authors was counted and recorded. To clarify the origins and the ideas that the two literatures built on, two lists were prepared, one referring to the authors who were cited by the 18 anti-consumption articles and the other referring to the authors who were cited by the 28 consumer resistance articles (see Table II).

The analysis of the citations throughout the different articles gives an idea of the prevalent approaches followed within the two literatures (see Figure 2).
The considerations are two-fold. On the one hand, and not surprisingly, Consumer Culture Theory and Post-modern Consumer Research approaches are quite relevant to both anti-consumption and consumer resistance literatures. On the other hand, anti-consumption studies are more multi-disciplinary and are founded on Voluntary Simplicity, Social Economics, and Organisational Psychology approaches, whereas consumer resistance studies have a strong background in Cultural Studies.

The analysis also allows us to infer some conclusions on the differences between the two constructs of anti-consumption and consumer resistance.

Anti-consumption is more of an attitude (individual) and seems to be related to self-identity. It results from, and is related to, an act of consumption. The prefix anti-does not indicate lack of; instead, it means opposition to something of the same kind (anti-consumption is still consumption). For example, the unorthodox uses of standardised objects in antagonism to manufacturers, advertisers, or other consumers require a previous act of consumption. Thus, the consumption object becomes a means to act against consumption itself from within the system. It is possible to anti-consume by consuming objects, not by rejecting them, and by transforming or using them in different ways (Penaloza and Price, 1993; Gabriel and Lang, 1995). From this point-of-view, alternative consumption, file sharing or illegal downloading over the internet, and consumers’ co-production activities could be seen as practices of anti-consumption and interesting topics for future research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Anti-consumption Citations</th>
<th>Consumer resistance Author</th>
<th>Consumer resistance Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Thompson</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozinets</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Firat</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zavestoski</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Penaloza</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belk</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Belk</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holt</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Focault</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kozinets</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penaloza</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Holt</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Herrmann</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friedman</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bourdieu</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Authors most cited in the “anti-consumption” and “consumer resistance” literatures

Figure 2. Distribution of citations by research approaches and literatures (%)

■ Anti-Consumption Literature
■ Consumer Resistance Literature
On the contrary, resistance occurs, as Weber and Marx claim (Cherrier, 2009), in opposition to a constraining system and outside of the system. Consumer resistance is a behaviour, an act of opposition made by a force or a power, and could be seen as a sort of “response to structures of domination” (Poster, 1992, p. 94). It is usually related to some general motivation (e.g. environmental, political, or economic) and collective action. In order for consumer resistance to succeed, consumers must have power similar to the agents that they are resisting (See Table III).

### 5. Conclusions

Although various authors have offered reviews of the anti-consumption and consumer resistance literatures (for example, Zavestoski, 2002; Hogg et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2009), these often illuminating illustrations are nonetheless subjective and suffer from biases that pertain to the actor performing the analysis. The study proposed in this paper aims to overcome these limitations by elaborating an objective review of the main contributions to the field, clarifying its latent structure and calling attention to the different streams of research originating in the anti-consumption and consumer resistance studies. From an academic perspective, this study provides clear tools for researchers to identify potential new directions as well as to locate their work within the field. It provides a useful approach for new researchers as well, as they can identify the main approaches and areas of interest. From a practical point-of-view, this study can serve as an introduction to the field for students and managers.

Moreover, a number of distinct traits have emerged:

1. the two levels of analysis;
2. the shift from a collective resistance to an individual and identity-based anti-consumption attitude; and
3. the implicit theme of culture.

The first contribution of this study is related to the systematisation of the bulk of the contributions to anti-consumption and consumer resistance. By highlighting clusters of influential authors in the field, the second contribution concerns the identification of five groups of authors representing relevant investigation issues connected to anti-consumption and consumer resistance:

1. resistance to power;
2. collective anti-consumption and consumer resistance;
3. individual anti-consumption;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-consumption (as attitude)</th>
<th>Consumer resistance (as behaviour)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is more private (self-identity) and has no great consequence for others</td>
<td>Is made from someone in a power position (i.e. activists, workers, associations, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is related to an act of consumption (postponed, unorthodox use, etc.)</td>
<td>Is more conscious and directed to change or to subvert the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can cause (consumer) resistance behaviours</td>
<td>Can exist also without an anti-consumption attitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III. Anti-consumption and consumer resistance as distinct concepts
The third contribution is connected to the outcome of factor analysis, which identifies nine research approaches that indicate the emergence of the so-called “invisible colleges”, or the intellectual connections among authors and schools of thought. In particular, four of these are quite relevant:

1. consumer culture theory;
2. social psychology
3. post-modern consumer research; and
4. advertising theory.

The analysis proposed is an initial study, and the findings are limited by certain caveats that deserve to be mentioned. First, the citations analysed represent only articles published in scholarly journals (not books) indexed into the SSCI of the Thompson-ISI database and all references from those journals (whether to journal articles or books). Second, it is not possible to distinguish between good citations and bad citations[3]. Third, the technique delivers a static representation of the field as it includes articles only up to a specific date. Finally, this article provides at least one interesting suggestion for future research. It would be of interest to combine the co-citation analysis with a contents analysis to allow for better tracing of future research trends.

Notes
1. In general, two authors are considered as being co-cited when they appear together in the same reference list of a subsequent article. If authors co-occur in the reference lists, being co-cited, it means that they are intellectually related in some way. Because scholars are cited together for many reasons, co-citation data can be noisy, but in the aggregate they are a robust measure of how citers view the intellectual linkages in a research domain.
2. A well-recognised limitation of using the SSCI database is that co-citation data can only be collated for first authors; researchers who collaborate with others, but who do not obtain first authorship, are not represented.
3. Bad citations are those citations that do not provide any contribution to an article.

References


About the author
Marco Galvagno is Assistant Professor of Management at the University of Catania, Italy. He holds a PhD in Management and a Licentiate Degree in Business Economics from the same university. He is visiting research scholar at the Mays Business School at Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA. He teaches management and marketing to undergraduates and doctoral students. His research interests refer to industry evolution and technological convergence, coopetition strategies and competitive dynamics, relationship marketing, trust and loyalty among firms and consumer behaviour. Marco Galvagno can be contacted at: magalvagno@unict.it

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints