Deviance, Resistance and Consumption

Yohan Gicquel, PhD student, IRG, University Paris-Est
Abdelmajid Amine, Professor, IRG, University Paris-Est

ICAR/ NACRE SYMPOSIUM 2010
Friday 25th and Saturday 26th June 2010
Euromed Management, Marseilles
Research agenda

- Research interests
- Research questions
- Framework (deviance, norm and resistance)
- Research results
- Remaining questions and research avenue
Consumption behaviors should not be viewed simply as a brake on the economy, but that it also opens up opportunities and should be understood as a new variable that explains the system’s functioning.

Oppositional behaviors in regard to firms or the consumption system have grown.

Studies on consumers’ resistance behavior remain marginal.

Deviance in which marketing researchers still have only an embryonic or limited interest.
Research questions

What are the respective scopes of deviant behaviors and resistant behaviors?

What are the interactions and/or links between resistance and deviance?
Etymologically, the term means “straying from the right path” or “making a detour”.

The concept of deviance can be linked with the work of philosophy on the «utopian societies» (Plato).

In sociology it is a process resulting in the subject acting or thinking in a way that lies outside the norms laid down by a society.

Deviant behaviors are not necessarily criminal or harmful. There are around the norm of extreme variations (rejection vs. addiction).

The work of Merton, which is embedded in this perspective, is a major contribution in studying deviant behaviour within consumption. (Morchis and Cox, 1989).
Framework: deviant

Fowler (2007) identified three main types of consumers’ deviant behaviors:

- Inappropriate behavior in the point-of-sale (Mills and Bonoma, 1979);
- Compulsive behavior, impulse buying, theft, fraud and many others (Mochis and Cox, 1989);
- Subculture of consumption (Schouten and Mc Alexander, 1995).

Limit: These different types reflect only behaviors located in the upper bound of the norm or harmful/criminal behaviors.
Framework: norm

The norm can be understood from various standpoints:

- for the social psychologist: It concerns the rules structuring of adherence to or belonging to the group (Ladwein, 2003).

- for the sociologist: It is defined in relation to a frequency, a state conforming to the majority of cases (Durkheim, 1894).

- in science and technology: the norm is a set of characteristics defining an object reference and used to solve recurring problems (cnrs dictionary)

However, it is difficult to establish a boundary between what is normal and what is not, between what is pathological and what is not, considering the elasticity of norm in the time.
Framework: resistance

- They are “hostile” behaviors increasingly emerging in opposition to market actors or to the system (Roux, 2007).

- The opposition behaviors are opposed:
  - to firms (boycotts, theft, vandalism, etc.) ;
  - to market ideology (adbusting, second-hand shopping, etc.) ;
  - to the materialist ideology (downshifting, voluntary simplicity, etc.).
# Framework of consumer behaviors toward norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal behaviors</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expected</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accepted</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Exchange,      | - Brand communities, ...
| - Payment,       | |
| - Respect others,| |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideological / Tolerated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Voluntary simplicity,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Downshifting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Second-hand shopping,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Green behavior,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Boycott,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deviant behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accepted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Subcultures of consumption, ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathological / Tolerated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Compulsive behavior,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Impulse buying (chronical),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Addiction, ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criminal / Rejected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Shoplifting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vandalism,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Adbusting, ...

The margin of the consumption norm
Finally:

- There are many points of convergence between deviance and resistance, either in the nature of their resulting behaviors or in their relationship to the norm.

- Anti-consumption and resistance behaviors are marginal in consumer society.

- This marginal character makes them deviations from normality as much from a statistical as a sociological standpoint.

- When some anti-consumption and resistance behaviors are deviant cease to be marginal in a social group, they became normal.
Research Implications

For researchers:

- It opens up lines of research on notions that can differentiate and articulate deviant and resistant behavior in relation to (non)consumption.

- It opens up new research perspectives on the possible hierarchization of consumers’ opposition and dependence behaviors.

- It shows the opportunity to study the process of consumer shift from the consumption norms to over/under consumption (deviance).
For practitioners and public authorities:

- Deviance as over-consumption gives rise to serious social problems (dependence, indebtedness, obesity ...) which send back to the concern of corporate social responsibility of the firms and the society as a whole;

- Deviance as abnormal reduction of consumption (downsizing, voluntary simplicity) can create new development opportunities of alternative markets (emergence of new “local” actors, replacement/evolution of norms, etc.).
Remaining questions and research avenue

- Over consumption as a form of deviance questions the concept of resistance (in the sense of rejection of consumption norms)?

- How can we operationalize consumption norms to capture the shift from the norm to deviance (i.e. under/overconsumption behaviors)?
Thank you for your attention