

Extended Abstract | The 1st Research Innovations in Sustainable Marketing: A Global Virtual Symposium

From Corporate Hypocrisy to Consumer Protest: The Role of Moral Outrage and Mobilization Networks

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Extended Abstract: How do consumers respond when they perceive that a company is not what it claims to be? It is evident that customers are becoming increasingly aware of the ethical aspects of products and services. One of the pressing contemporary ethical concerns is corporate hypocrisy, which refers to the inconsistency between a company's claim and its actual behavior. Previous research indicates that perceived corporate hypocrisy can result in consumer reactions such as boycotts and negative word-of-mouth. However, today's consumers are increasingly displaying protest intentions and mobilizing against companies rather than just self-boycotting products or expressing dissatisfaction to friends and acquaintances. The underlying mechanism behind this elevated level of consumer resistance remains unclear.

The perception of corporate hypocrisy can elicit diverse reactions and negative emotions among consumers. However, there has been limited exploration of negative emotional states (e.g., anger, disgust) in consumer resistance. Negative emotions can easily lead to retaliatory behavior, underscoring the severe detrimental impact of different forms of consumer resistance on businesses. Therefore, it is essential to understand the factors that motivate such behavior.

Drawing on the corporate hypocrisy literature, this study employs a survey-based methodology to investigate the interplay between corporate hypocrisy, moral outrage, and consumer resistance. Using data collected from online social media users, the findings demonstrate that specific forms of consumer moral outrage mediate the relationship between perceived corporate hypocrisy and protest intentions. The study also highlights the pivotal role played by mobilization networks in influencing the resistance inclination of consumers.

Mobilization has always been crucial in shaping movements. In this digital age, mobilization has become comparatively more accessible as different social media platforms can facilitate the process. The study's results indicate that mobilization networks amplify protest intentions and are essential in the emergence of protest movements when consumers detect a gap between a company's words and actions. Without such networks, consumers' moral outrage triggered by perceived corporate hypocrisy is primarily manifested through boycotts and negative word-of-mouth.

The study contributes theoretically by offering a more in-depth analysis of how perception of corporate hypocrisy can lead to consumer protest behavior.

ior. It extends the existing understanding of consumer resistance by highlighting the dynamics of moral outrage and mobilization networks in facilitating protest events. Based on the empirical findings, the paper also provides practical implications and suggests avenues for further research.

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