

Jakopánecz, Eszter

PhD Student

University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics

+36 72 511-699

jakopaneczeszti@gmail.com

Nemeth, Péter

PhD Student

University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics

+36 72 511-699

nemeth.peter.pte@gmail.com

Szűcs, Krisztián

Senior Lecturer

University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics

+36 72 511-699

szucsk@ktk.pte.hu

Törőcsik, Mária

Professor

University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics

+36 72 511-699

torocsik@ktk.pte.hu

The forms of consumer resistance¹.

The border between acceptance and rejection

Abstract

It is even more regular for consumers to experience fear, insecurity, negative emotions concerning certain products or companies. These negative attitudes result in different levels of consumer resistance, even ending in active responses of consumers. Marketing literature has already recognized the relevance of consumer resistance, discussed the characteristics and mechanisms of the phenomena, and its possible marketing solutions. In existing knowledge we see a notable hiatus in systematisation and harmonisation. In this paper we aim to explore the border between the acceptance and rejection to base the concept of consumer resistance. For empirical investigation we selected a market area that is not part of the classic themes of consumer resistance, but the adoption process is still faces significant obstacles: the renewable energy (in a representative sample of the Hungarian adult population).

Keywords: consumer behaviour, consumer resistance, acceptance, rejection, renewable energy

¹ This paper was supported by the project SROP-4.2.2.A-11/1/KONV-2012-0058, Modeling the effects of the energy- production, utilization and waste management technologies to the competitiveness of the cities and regions.

Introduction and objectives

It is even more regular for consumers to experience fear, insecurity, negative emotions concerning certain products or companies – not only against innovations, but sometimes even in regard to products that are traditionally present in the market. These negative attitudes result in different levels of consumer resistance, even ending in active responses of consumers. The rejective attitude of consumers causes difficulties in corporate aspirations: a number of market example shows that resistant behaviour of markets can cause significant damages to companies and its endeavours. This is despite the fact that postmodern marketing mainstream approach starts from consumer needs and aspirations.

Marketing literature has already recognized the relevance of consumer resistance, discussed the characteristics and mechanisms of the phenomena, and its possible marketing solutions. In existing knowledge we see a notable hiatus for structuring and harmonisation.

This phenomenon is further complicated by the fact that a considerable conflict of interest lies between the various players in the market. The weight of debates draws attention to the social involvement of the raised issues. Therefore such factors have also impact on assessment of particular products, companies or technologies, for which they have little or no effect.

The importance of the topic consumer resistance supported by the aforesaid marketing consequences but also by the expected future appreciation: because of expected involvement of further markets, the role of web 2.0 in consumer behaviour, the increasing need for transparency, and the more complex technological environment.

Our objectives in this study to provide an overview of the relevant literature, detail the characteristics of the phenomena, and the different forms of consumer resistance. Our aim is also to *explore the border between acceptance and rejection* to base the concept of consumer resistance. Its empirical investigation we selected a market area that is not part of the classic themes of consumer resistance, but the adoption process is still faces significant obstacles: the *renewable energy*. To measure the attitude and usage patterns of these products we performed a personal inquiry (PAPI). The research was conducted with participation of 2000 adults in summer of 2013, which sample is representative of the Hungarian population.

Conceptual Framework

The literature of unsuccessful products is not new among thinkers in marketing: it is topic in discourses and (theoretical and empirical) studies a long time why some products fail in the market. The theoretical marketing literature examined in the 70s the causes of market failures (Tauber, 1973). The contradiction of market failures and consumer resistance are given by the prevailing view of the economic thinking, the marketing concept: namely companies based their operations on consumer needs (Levitt, 1960). According to Tauber we know that trial is not equal with adoption, because “consumer interest is not the same as consumer needs” (1973 p. 64.) so it has increasing significance to find important consumer needs with product development. Kotler (1973) point out that we can meet rarely optimal market conditions: he identified 8 different levels of demand which required special marketing tasks to achieve the desirable level of demand: to negative demand has been offered disabusing.

Until now several studies carried out in which consumer resistance and the lack of acceptance is investigated. Some example, without being exhaustive: Szmigin and Foxal (1998) examined the different forms of consumer resistance to the retail payment methods. Hansen et al. (2008) examined the food marketplace: many consumers feel mistrust and they are uncertain in the decision making process between existing products because the marketplace is more complex. As a result of their pilot studies confirmed that post-purchase stress is existing among food buyers, and they can be segmented by the level of its.

Although the concept of consumer resistance is recognised in marketing literature, does not appear in a consistent way by the different authors. According to our researches we see 4 different possible interpretations for the phenomenon consumer resistance:

- *innovation resistance*. Sheth (University of Southern California) and Ram studied the phenomenon from the 80's, primarily under the aegis of overseas academics. The starting point of their thinking is the barriers of the adoption of innovations, their rejection, and the resistance against them (Sheth, 1981; Ram, 1987). This knowledge is taken over by other authors, so typically they also discussed the phenomenon of resistance along this thinking.
- *resistance markets*. This second concept shows temporal, spatial and interpretational differences. Willers from the University of Köln examined the resistance markets and its marketing tasks a bit later and based on European experiences. His knowledge is more practical because it focuses on gene- and biotechnology which was resulting a huge social debate in Germany also.
- *ethical consumption*. These consumers form communities or civil organizations, whose members intend to actively influence the wider consumer community along their declared values. They actively turn away from brands, products or companies and consciously choose other products or market players – their behaviour is fairly demonstrative. The consciousness of these consumers is very complex: they are simultaneously highly sensitive for social, environmental, or health issues. There is also an expression of the consumer's critical thinking which criticized and questioned fundamentally the companies market and marketing activity: anti-marketing or anti-consumption (Szmigin – Carrigan 2003).
- *stakeholder resistance*. This notion gives a new dimension in the interpretation of consumer resistance. However it was not spreading in the mainstream literature, it can be regarded as a new direction of the phenomenon's interpretation. The title refers to the complexity of markets concerned with consumer resistance: for example the issue of nanotechnology represents a complex market in which the resistance can come from different groups of stakeholders (Gauthier, 2010).

We believe that the issue of consumer resistance is not limited to innovations, because this attitude can rises during the whole product lifecycle: the case of fatted goose liver in Hungary is an example for this phenomenon which counts a traditional products (Töröcsik et al. 2011).

We know from Kleijnen et al. (2009) that existing literature discussed separately the adoption and rejection – because of the other factors can lead to their development. Furthermore resistance is not correspond to *non-adoption* and it is not the *observe of adoption*. Rogers (1983) defines the diffusion of innovation which realizes in a 5 stages process: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. The feature of Roger's theory is also to distinguish between diffusion and adoption. Adoption is a respond from individuals which manifests as an individual

evaluation process. Compared to adoption diffusion includes several phenomena with social connection points, it aggregates actually the responses of individuals. Rogers (1983) determine several characteristics that influence the individual's decision *to adopt or reject* the innovation. They are: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity or simplicity, trialability, observability.

Treating collectively the notion of acceptance and rejection is not characterized the literature thinking: they are definitely firmly separated (Kleijnen et al. 2009). We can split factors that drive consumer resistance into more main types. The factors result different type of resistance according to the literature. Factors are:

- the required *changes* in consumer's established behavioural patterns, daily routines and habits – some authors call it compatibility;
- by the innovation caused psychological *conflicts* – with social-relevant context, as core values, social norms, traditions, consumer lifestyles;
- *perceived product image* is related to the consumer experience, the characteristics of the existing market with the already known products,
- *environmental complexity*: because of information overload.

The spectrum of manifestation of consumer resistance is wide, from the cognitive style to the active forms. The literature distinguishes the following forms: see the *1st table*.

Empirical method

In this study our main aim is to *explore the border between acceptance and rejection* to base the concept of consumer resistance. Its empirical investigation we selected a market area that is not part of the classic themes of consumer resistance, but the adoption process is still faces significant obstacles: the *renewable energy*. To measure the attitude and usage patterns of these products we performed a personal inquiry (PAPI). The research was conducted with participation of 2000 adults in summer of 2013, which sample is representative of the Hungarian population concerning gender proportion, age, the highest school degree, settlement type and regional distribution. Distribution of major demographic variables is summoned in the *2nd table*: gender, age groups, highest school degree, settlement type, family status, type of estate, income status.

During the inquiry we measured the attitude and behaviour of Hungarian adults to the following energy sources (including renewable and non-renewable energy sources for comparison):

- renewable energy: wind energy, solar energy, biomass, biogas, hydropower, nuclear energy, geothermal energy, heat pumps, biofuels;
- non-renewable energy: piped gas, bottled gas, electricity, tree.

These energy sources were examined according to the following aspects (type of question):

- awareness (1-0),
- sympathy (five-point Likert scale),
- usage (1-0),
- environmental friendly nature of energy source (five-point Likert scale).

We analysed also how important are certain factors during the decision about using alternative energy source like economic aspects, existing information, testing opportunity, perceived utility, social utility.

Findings – empirical results

We compared the result of the examined dimension: awareness, sympathy (mean, standard deviation), usage rates based on awareness, and environmental friendliness (mean, standard deviation, based on awareness). In the *3rd table* data are in order to decrease usage proportion.

Among renewable energies well-know are: solar energy, wind energy, hydropower, which have also a highest sympathy (over 4.0). The environmental classification of these resources is very different: the evaluation is above 4.0 in case of biogas, heat pumps, biofuels, wind energy and geothermal energy; in contrary solar energy and biomass are not considered as environmental friendly. Although some renewable energy show high acceptance positive attitudes do not manifest in usage patterns: above 5.0% used only the water energy among the respondents.

From the above results we can conclude that the sympathy and the environmental assessment of certain energy sources do not follow each other, namely probably beyond that criteria several other aspects also play an important role in evaluation process, like economic issues, availability, etc. By solar energy other aspects play significantly greater role. Other hand in case of heat pumps and biogas preference is rather neutral - despite the positive environmental assessment.

Our other question is the phenomena of rejection: examing the sympathy responses we can see that three energy sources value are significantly below the average: nuclear energy, biomass, heat pumps. The evaluation of biomass is the most extreme: his environmental assessment is also low, that means that biomass is the least accepted energy source.

We also asked among the respondents how important are certain aspects in the decision of renewable energy sources, which are recognized in the literature, as financial barriers, knowledge about the product, trial opportunities, expected performance, social utility. The responses given high values by each factors among which saving money and the expected performance were especially important (*4th table*).

Discussion

Behind these phenomena we have identified products, which aim not only to satisfy the real needs of consumers, but also own questionable product characteristics which make the stakeholder groups worry about health, environmental or ethical issues. The topic as an even increasing importance, while the even more frequent technical, technological innovations (e.g.: GM seeds, food, nuclear energy) also provide reasons for consumer resistance. The knowledge of the consumer is limited, for even larger consumer groups it is harder to understand the logic behind innovations.

We aimed to study the different forms of consumer resistance especially the border between acceptance and rejection. We agree with the literature that these two concepts require a different measurement method, although there are similarities between the root causes. To examine the acceptance and/or rejection we selected a market area that is not part of the classic themes of consumer resistance, but the adoption process is still faces significant obstacles: the *renewable energy* in the Hungarian market. Our results show that environmental assessment and sympathy of alternative energy sources are not directly connected to each other, other factors represent at least this degree of weight in their evaluation. For Hungarians the financial and performance criteria are the most important aspects in the process of acceptance.

Limitations and Further Research

Limitation of our study is that the used quantitative method does not provide exploratory findings. Understanding the differences between acceptance and rejection qualitative research is also required. Our results did not show the drives of the different attitude levels in case of renewable energy: environmental classification, sympathy and usage patterns. In the future we plan to explore the underlying causes using complex, qualitative and quantitative methods.

Bibliography

- Gauthier, C (2010): From Consumer Resistance to Stakeholder Resistance. The Case of Nanotechnology. 28 September 2010. Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, hal-00521610, version 1. 17.p.
- Hansen, T. – Boye, H. – Thomsen, T. U. (2008): Post-purchase Stress in the Consumer Food Marketplace. Marketing. In: Jean-Claude Andreani and Umberto Collesei (ed.) (2008): 8th International Conference Marketing Trends. Paris-Venice: Marketing Trends Association. ISBN 978-2-9532811-2-5
- Kleijnen, M. - Lee, N. - Wetzels, M. (2009): An exploration of consumer resistance to innovation and its antecedents. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 30. pp. 344-357.
- Levitt, T. (1960): Marketing Myopia. *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 38, July-August, pp. 55-68.
- Ram, S. (1987): A Model of Innovation Resistance. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 14 1 pp. 208-212.
- Ram, S. - Sheth, J. N. (1989): Consumer resistance to innovations: the marketing problem and its solutions. *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*. Vol. 6. Nr. 2. pp.5-14.
- Rogers, Everett M. (1983): *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press. ISBN 978-0-02-926650-2
- Sheth, J. N. (1981): Psychology of Innovation Resistance: The Less Developed Concept (LDC) in Diffusion Research. *Research in Marketing*. 4 pp. 273-282.
- Szmigin, I. - Carrigan, M. (2003): New Consumption Communities: Resisting the Hegemony of the Marketing Process. 3rd International Critical Management Studies Conference, July 7-9, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK.
- Tauber, E. M. (1973): Marketing Notes and Communications. Reduce New Product Failures: Measure Needs as Well as Purchase Interest. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 37. Issue 3 pp. 61-64.
- Törőcsik, M. – Jakopánecz, E. – Soós, J. (2011): „The category of products generating consumer resistance” In: 10th International Marketing Trends Conference, Paris, January of 2011, CD, 9. p.

Appendix: Tables and figures

1. table: Forms of consumer resistance.

authors	issues	forms of resistance	attributes
Koppelman and Willers (2008)	according to the nature of the manifestation	cognitive	e.g. cognitive dissonance
		behavioural	e.g. active consumer boycott
Ram (1989)	forms of resistance to innovations	rejection	strong aversion develops during the consumer's own value judgment
		postponement	adaption shifting over time until circumstances will be suitable
		opposition	consumer is convinced of unsuitability of innovation and takes steps against its spread
own classification	according to the level of manifestation	individual	the discretion of consumer
		organizational	civil organizations function as a link between the other two levels
		governmental	regulation and prohibition with statutory tools

2. table: Demographic data of respondents (n=2000). Source: own diagram

demographic variables	number of respondents	proportion of respondents (n=2000)
gender		
male	956	47.8%
female	1044	52.2%
age groups		
up to 29 years	496	24.8%
30-39 years old	372	18.6%
40-49 years old	433	21.7%
50-59 years old	338	16.9%
over 60 years	361	18.1%
highest school degree		
primary school	191	9.6%

secondary vocational school	550	27.5%
GCSE	828	41.4%
university/collage	373	18.7%
n.a.	58	2.9%
settlement type		
Budapest	360	18.0%
city of county rank	457	22.9%
10.000+ settlement	445	22.3%
2.000-10.000 settlement	439	22.0%
-2.000 settlement	299	15.0%
family status		
single	441	22.1%
lives in partnership	330	16.5%
married	832	41.6%
divorced	172	8.6%
widow	138	6.9%
lives in cohabitation	87	4.4%
type of estate		
family house	1147	57.4%
row house	104	5.2%
story house (brick)	273	13.7%
panel house	467	23.4%
other	9	0.5%
income status		
can not buy basic things	128	6.4%
only basic things	832	41.6%
any needed thing but do not save	845	42.3%
any needed thing and can also save	112	5.6%
n.a.	83	4.2%

3. table: Rating of energy sources: awareness, sympathy (1 – not at all, 5 – very), usage, environmental friendliness (1 – not at all, 5 – very). Data in order to decreasing usage proportion. Source: own diagram

energy sources	awareness (n=2000)	sympathy: mean, st. dev.		usage (n= know them)	environmental friendliness: mean, st. dev. (n=know them)		diff. between sympathy and env. friendly
electricity	100.0%	4.18	0,95	100.0%	4.81	0.52	0.39
piped gas	99.9%	3.72	1.17	81.9%	3.32	1.17	0.40

tree	99.8%	3.68	1.22	44.3%	3.16	1.31	0.52
bottled gas	99.2%	3.09	1.29	30.9%	3.04	1.18	0.05
hydropower	93.3%	4.38	0.89	6.2%	4.55	0.76	-0.17
biofuels	78.6%	3.82	1.16	3.4%	4.06	0.93	-0.23
solar energy	98.2%	4.64	0.72	2.3%	4.85	0.45	-0.21
biogas	65.0%	3.69	1.14	1.5%	4.16	0.88	-0.48
biomass	54.8%	3.48	1.20	1.5%	4.15	0.90	-0.67
heat pumps	53.4%	3.54	1.22	1.2%	4.08	0.94	-0.54
wind energy	96.9%	4.48	0.87	0.8%	4.81	0.52	-0.33
geothermal energy	63.6%	3.82	1.22	0.7%	4.31	0.94	-0.49
nuclear energy	93.6%	2.89	1.33	0.0%	2.74	1.36	0.14
<i>average</i>	<i>84.3%</i>	<i>3.80</i>	<i>1.10</i>	<i>21.1%</i>	<i>3.92</i>	<i>0.95</i>	<i>-0.12</i>

4. table: How important are these aspects in the decision of the application of renewable energy sources? N=2000. Source: own diagram

aspects	average	standard deviation
to save money	4.78	0.54
to be not unknown	4.29	0.95
possibilities for trial	4.36	0.92
be sure to get better performance	4.72	0.59
to have social usefulness	4.13	1.01
<i>average</i>	<i>4.46</i>	<i>0.80</i>