
When does Consumer Empowerment Lead to Satisfied Customers? Some Mediating and Moderating Effects of the Empowerment-Satisfaction Link

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances increasingly provide marketers with the opportunity to empower consumers. Consumer empowerment is a positive subjective state evoked by consumer perceptions of increasing control. As a positive state, increasing consumer empowerment should be associated with increasing consumer satisfaction. If such a relationship exists, it may be influenced by a number of contextual variables. Knowing in what contexts empowerment has a greater impact on satisfaction would help marketers decide when they could more effectively use such a strategy. This study has two purposes: 1) to investigate the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction and 2) to investigate a set of potential influences on that relationship. Marketers will be in a better position to decide when to empower consumers if they have guidance on the relationships between these variables.

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While there is some evidence as to when consumer empowerment is beneficial for the consumer (e.g., Goldsmith 2005; Henry 2005; Pitt et al. 2002), less well known is when giving control to consumers offers potential benefits to marketers. This is surprising given that marketers often hold the key to giving consumers a greater amount of control. For example, in the U.S. marketers decide how much access cell phone customers can have to product information. Cell phone service providers generally keep the codes allowing use of the phone with competing carriers secret from consumers. Access to those codes would give consumers the ability to switch carriers when it was cost effective. While intuitively it seems necessary for marketers to keep those codes secret, perhaps empowering consumers would enhance consumer satisfaction with the marketer. An important piece of the consumer empowerment puzzle is the rationale for when empowering consumers is a beneficial strategy to marketers.

This study focuses on the positive state produced by increasing control. It assumes that the marketer's empowerment strategy has been successful and that the consumer is experiencing empowerment. Consumer empowerment is defined as a positive subjective state evoked by increasing control (Wathieu et al. 2002). It should be noted that empowerment is defined as the positive state which results from increasing control; it is not defined as control. This study does not examine whether the state of consumer empowerment will or will not be experienced, but examines the relationship of this state to consumer satisfaction with the empowering firm. Moreover, while consumers can be empowered through different sources, including governmental regulations and consumer education, the focus of this paper is consumer empowerment by a firm as part of its business strategy.

Investigating consumer empowerment's impact on satisfaction is important. Given that satisfaction has been linked to important outcomes for marketers such as positive word of mouth (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Wangenheim and Bayón 2007), loyalty (Fornell et al. 1996; Olsen 2002), willingness to pay more (e.g., Fornell et al. 1996; Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2005), and a firm's financial performance (Anderson, Fornell, and Rust 1997), any antecedent to satisfaction would seem an important investigation. Empowerment is particularly important because marketers can choose how much control to offer to customers, thus making empowerment a potential source of competitive advantage. Some practitioners and academic authors argue that providing more control to consumers is increasingly important for competitive reasons (e.g., Rust and Oliver 1994; Smith 2004). If marketers are required to empower consumers to stay competitive, knowing the circumstances under which the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction is strengthened should make the marketer better at using this tool. Empowerment has been identified as a growing force in marketing (e.g., Rust and Oliver 1994; Smith 2004). As its prevalence increases, the need to understand its antecedents and consequences also increases.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between consumer empowerment and consumer satisfaction. Specifically we seek to determine if such a relationship exists and, if so, how is it influenced by consumer involvement, responsiveness to customers, and face to face contact between the employee and customer.

The Empowerment Construct

In the marketing literature, consumer empowerment is defined primarily in two ways. First, consumer empowerment can be defined as giving consumers power through resources such as greater information or greater understanding (e.g., Brennan and Ritters 2004; Cutler and Nye 2000; Rust and Oliver 1994). Second, consumer empowerment is defined as a subjective state, caused by perceptions of increasing control (Wathieu et al. 2002). We define consumer empowerment using the definition of Wathieu et al. (2002) as well as a definition of personal control reported by Skinner (1996). Empowerment is a consumer's subjective experience that they have greater ability than before to intentionally produce desired outcomes and prevent undesired ones and that they are benefiting from the increased ability. Thus consumer empowerment is a positive subjective state which results from a mental comparison of a consumer's abilities relative to existing or previous abilities. As such it is only the perception of increasing control which evokes empowerment and empowerment may be experienced whether control actually increases or not.

The two definitions of consumer empowerment have caused some confusion in the literature. While consumer empowerment has represented the firm activities that evoke the subjective state (e.g., Wathieu and Bertini 2007) and the subjective state itself (e.g., Wathieu et al. 2002), our focus is on the latter definition. We assume that firm activities have already evoked a state of empowerment. For a discussion of which activities will lead to a state of empowerment, see Wathieu et al. (2002). Our investigation begins at a later point in the chain of events, once a state of empowerment has been evoked, and focuses on the relationship with satisfaction as well as the impact of other variables on that relationship.

Conceptual Model

Consumer Empowerment and Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction has gained considerable attention in marketing research and practice. The great amount of literature has led to different definitions of the construct. Consumer satisfaction is often interpreted as a cognitive construct based on the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm. Here the pre-purchase expectations regarding the product or service are compared to the actual purchase experience (Churchill and Surprenant 1982; Oliver 1997), leading to satisfaction, dissatisfaction or indifference. In contrast to this cognitive interpretation of satisfaction, other studies see satisfaction as an emotional response to a consumption experience (e.g., Oliver and Westbrook 1993). Some recent literature, however, defines consumer satisfaction based on affective and cognitive processes (Oliver 1997). In this study, we follow the cognitive-affective approach and define satisfaction according to Oliver (1997, p. 13) as follows: “satisfaction is the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over fulfillment”

Consumer empowerment is a positive subjective experience evoked by noting an increase in control. Empowerment includes the belief that one has benefited from this increased control. Such a positive belief should influence other judgments. Research on the affect as information model (e.g., Pham 1998) suggests that affect will be used as an additional input into judgments, which should include those of satisfaction. Schwarz and Clore (1983) show that mood can impact unrelated evaluations including those concerning satisfaction. Pham (1998) demonstrates that such effects are even more pronounced when the evaluation is affective and some researchers (e.g., Oliver 1997) suggest that satisfaction has an affective dimension. This argument is in line with the service management literature on empowerment which often assumes and confirms a positive impact of empowerment on job satisfaction (Bowen and Lawler 1992; Chebat and Kollias 2000; Yagil 2006). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1: Consumer empowerment will be positively related to consumer satisfaction.

The Mediating Role of Consumer Involvement

Consumer involvement will partially mediate the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction. Past studies differentiate between two forms of involvement: enduring and situational involvement. While situational involvement is a person’s temporary interest in an object, enduring involvement is a consumer’s general interest in that object (Zaichkowsky 1985). In our study we refer to the latter, defining consumer involvement as the degree to which a product is more relevant to a consumer (e.g., Bloemer and de Ruyter 1998). Involvement often is associated with a greater motivation to process information (Celsi and Olson 1988; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983).

Empowerment is a positive state evoked by increasing control. As consumers feel pleasure from increasing control, the product or firm that is associated with this pleasure should become more relevant to them. This is potentially because the product or firm is a source of pleasure and because it is a source of increasing control, making consumers feel good about their selves. As the product or firm becomes a source of pleasure, it will become more important to the consumer and the consumer will be more motivated to process information. Therefore, we postulate:

H2: Consumer empowerment will be positively related to involvement.

Some evidence suggests that high levels of involvement strengthen the experience of emotions (Bloemer and de Ruyter 1999). This view is based on conceptualizing emotions as a combination of valence (positive versus negative) and level of arousal (Mano and Oliver 1993). Research suggests that involvement leads to higher levels of arousal (Pham 1992). According to this view, positive feelings should be more amplified in an area which is of greater relevance to the consumer. This is in line with past studies also showing an effect of involvement on satisfaction (Oliver and Bearden 1983; Richins and Bloch 1991). Against this background, it is hypothesized:

H3: Involvement will be positively related to consumer satisfaction.

Empowerment should be related to involvement and involvement should be positively related to satisfaction because it also includes a dimension of affect (Oliver 1997). As hypothesized, a direct relationship should exist between empowerment and satisfaction, while an indirect relationship should exist through involvement. As such, involvement should partially mediate the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction.

The Moderating Role of a Firm's Responsiveness to Consumers

Although it is often assumed that firms empowering their consumers are also responsive to their customers, this is not always the case. Some firms are fortunate in that an activity intended to provide some benefit to the firm also empowers its customers. For example, banks initially installed automatic teller machines as a cost cutting measure. Only later did banks realize the greater convenience of the machines empowered customers. In this example, banks were not being responsive to customers but merely trying to reduce payroll costs. Such activities can lead to empowerment without being responsive to consumers.

While we believe that responsiveness to consumers is not a necessary condition for empowering consumers, we assume that firms that are more responsive to consumers should produce greater satisfaction from strategies of consumer empowerment. Responsiveness to consumers is defined as "willingness to help consumers and provide prompt service" (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988, p. 23). Greater willingness to help and promptness should amplify the relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction. Activities which firms use to empower consumers often provide greater opportunity for those consumers to band together and thereby increase their power in the market (Pitt et al. 2002). For example, firms such as Dell use access to other consumers through their website to solve common service problems. This also provides consumers greater opportunity to band together as a group and increase their power. As power increases, presumably consumers will raise their expectations because of increased ability to demand more and because of increased communications about experiences.

Firms empowering their customers therefore need to be ready to cope with these risen consumer expectations. Firms that are quicker to realize changed consumer expectations should be more responsive firms. Expectancy disconfirmation models suggest that those firms that are better at matching consumer expectations should reach higher levels of customer satisfaction. Increased satisfaction should come from those firms knowing the expectations of their customers and being able to match those expectations. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis:

H4: The relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction will be positively moderated by a firm's responsiveness to consumers.

The Moderating Role of Face to Face Contact

Firms having a high level of face to face contact with customers should be more suited to a strategy of consumer empowerment. Wathieu et al. (2002) propose actions such as making choices reversible and providing information about the decisions made by others as more likely to lead to the experience of empowerment than simply providing greater choices. These activities are assumed to make consumers feel safer in their decisions in that both reduce the risk associated with the decision. Face to face contact with employees provides the opportunity to ask questions and should enhance feelings of security and comfort for empowered consumers, amplifying the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction. Therefore, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H5: The relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction will be positively moderated by a firm's use of face to face contact.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of our model. In the model, consumer involvement is proposed to partially mediate the relationship between consumer empowerment and customer satisfaction. We also hypothesize that the direct relationship between empowerment and satisfaction will be moderated by responsiveness to consumers and face to face contact with consumers.

Empirical Study

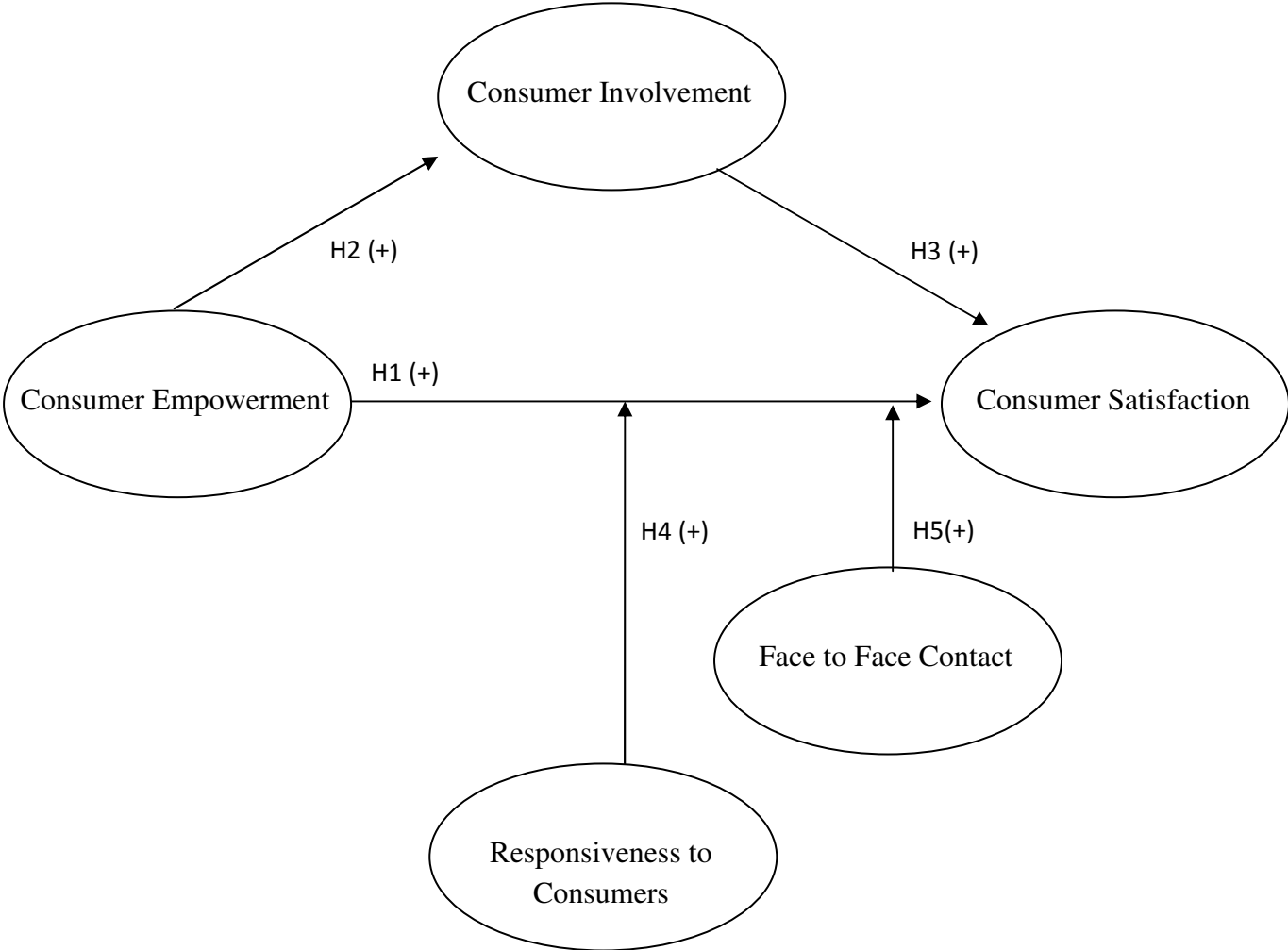
Design

The study is based on surveys among consumers in a medium sized city in Germany. The surveys were conducted in German by trained interviewers. Consumers were approached in two shopping areas and asked if they were willing to take part in a consumer survey. In total, 869 consumers took part in the interviews. Due to incomplete data, 31 questionnaires had to be excluded. This led to a net sample of 838 questionnaires. Respondent ages ranged from 14 to 83, with an average age of 35. Slightly less than 54 percent of respondents were female.

To generate more general results of the satisfaction-empowerment link and to create variance in the contextual constructs, seven versions of the questionnaire were created, each covering a different industry. Each respondent was queried regarding only one industry and responses were aggregated for this study. Consumers were asked to state their level of satisfaction and empowerment with their service provider in one of the following industries: railway, travel package provider, airline, health insurance, banking, supermarket, and mobile service. The questionnaire for the industries with contractual settings (e.g., mobile service) concretely started with the question "What is your current ... provider?", while in industries with non-contractual settings, consumers were asked which service provider they last used (e.g., airline). Consumers were next asked to state their level of satisfaction and empowerment regarding this service provider. The satisfaction construct was measured based on the scale used by Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos (2005). As we could not locate a scale measuring consumer empowerment, we developed a four item scale following established scale development procedures (DeVellis 2003; Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma 2003). Next,

respondents were queried regarding their involvement with the product category and their perception of levels of firm responsiveness and face to face contact. Involvement was measured with four items that were taken from Mittal (1995) and adapted to the context of our study. Three items from a scale to measure responsiveness to consumers were taken from Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) and adapted to the characteristics of each industry. To measure the degree of face to face contact the consumer experiences, we developed a two item scale. Appendix A provides a listing of translated items used in the study.

Figure 1 - The Mediating and Moderating Role of Contextual Factors on the Relationship between Consumer Empowerment and Consumer Satisfaction



Measure Validation

Coefficient alpha (Cronbach 1951) and composite reliability (Fornell and Larcker 1981) were used to offer evidence of the reliability of the scales. Coefficient alpha for the consumer empowerment, consumer satisfaction, face to face contact, responsiveness to consumers, and consumer involvement scales were .92, .79, .84, .89, and .73 respectively, exceeding the .70 suggested for basic research (Nunnally 1978). Likewise, composite reliability scores were

computed for each of the variables (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Composite reliability scores were .93, .79, .89, .84, and .76 respectively.

Structural equation modeling using the EQS 6.1 software package was used to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis of the scales. Due to concerns about the normality of the data as evidenced by a mardia's coefficient of 97.40, the Satorra Bentler correction for non-normality was used (Satorra and Bentler 1988). A confirmatory factor analysis offered evidence of the unidimensionality of the variables in the study.

A measurement model composed of 5 latent factors and 19 manifest indicators was estimated. The fit indices for the measurement model were $\chi^2 = 334.76$ ($df = 142$), $CFI_{S-B} = .98$, and $RMSEA_{S-B} = .04$. Values of .90 and above have been recommended for CFI (Browne and Cudeck 1993) while Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest a cutoff of .08 or less for RMSEA. All indicator t values were significant and all standardized factor loadings were greater than .40.

Discriminant Validity of Scales

Discriminant validity of the scales used in the study was explored using the procedures of Fornell and Larcker (1981). All of the scales evidenced discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) stringent test of average variance extracted exceeding the squared correlation coefficients for each possible pair of variables. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics, correlations, and the average variance extracted for each of the variables.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Average Variance Extracted

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Consumer Satisfaction	28.90	8.31	0.676				
2. Consumer Empowerment	14.81	5.70	0.549	0.499			
3. Consumer Involvement	19.23	5.81	0.282	0.237	0.449		
4. Responsiveness to Consumers	13.89	5.08	0.573	0.499	0.246	0.725	
5. Face to Face Contact	06.57	3.68	0.325	0.387	0.170	0.551	0.731

All correlations are significant at $p < .05$ or less.

Average variance extracted is reported along the diagonal.

Tests of Hypotheses

Regression was used to test the five hypotheses. To control for differences between industries, dummy variables representing the seven industries were included in all analyses. Results are consistent with H1, predicting a positive relationship between consumer empowerment and consumer satisfaction. Regression results offer evidence that consumer empowerment is positively related to consumer satisfaction ($t = 16.933$, $p < .05$). See Table 2 for a summary of regression results.

Hypotheses two and three collectively posit that consumer involvement will partially mediate the relationship between consumer empowerment and consumer satisfaction. This partially mediated relationship is supported by the data. Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest using a series of regressions to determine whether a relationship demonstrates mediation. In determining whether a relationship is mediated by a third variable, the first step is to determine if the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable exists. As discussed previously, consumer satisfaction was regressed on consumer empowerment and was found to have a statistically significant positive relationship ($t = 16.933$, $p < .05$). The second step in determining whether a relationship involves mediation is to regress the mediator on the independent variable, so consumer involvement was regressed on consumer empowerment. A statistically significant positive relationship was found to exist between

consumer empowerment and consumer involvement ($t = 5.838, p < .05$) confirming H2. As postulated in H3, consumer involvement had a statistically significant positive relationship with consumer satisfaction ($t = 6.332, p < .05$). The third step in determining a mediated relationship is to regress the dependent variable on the mediator while controlling for the independent variable. Consumer satisfaction was regressed on consumer involvement and consumer empowerment. Consistent with partial mediation, the influence of consumer empowerment remained significant but dropped ($t = 15.960, p < .05$). A variance inflation factor of 1.233 suggests that multi-collinearity did not overly influence the results.

Table 2 - The Relationship between Consumer Empowerment and Consumer Satisfaction

Related hypothesis	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5
Independent variable(s)	Consumer empowerment	Consumer empowerment	Consumer involvement	Interaction of Consumer Empowerment and Responsiveness to Consumers	Interaction of Consumer Empowerment and Face to Face Contact
Dependent variable	Consumer satisfaction	Consumer involvement	Consumer satisfaction	Consumer satisfaction	Consumer satisfaction
Adjusted R ²	.369	.182	.190	.457	.382
F-statistic	70.781	27.619	28.963	79.364	58.462
p-value	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001	.0001
Beta coefficients ^a	.496	.195	.214	.116	.047
t-statistic	16.933*	5.838*	6.332*	.960	.440

^a Standardized coefficients are used throughout.

* $p < .0001$

Neither H4 nor H5 were supported by the data. Interaction with consumer empowerment was not significant for both firm responsiveness to consumers ($t = .960, p > .05$) and face to face contact ($t = .440, p > .05$).

Discussion

Results offer evidence that consumer empowerment leads directly to consumer satisfaction and indirectly influences satisfaction by increasing consumer involvement. The findings also suggest that the direct relationship is not influenced by two potential moderators, responsiveness to consumers and face to face contact with consumers. Below we discuss some reasons for the non-significance of these moderating relationships.

We argued that a firm's responsiveness to consumers would have a moderating effect on the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction, as only responsive firms can cope with the risen expectations of empowered consumers. However, the results do not support this

hypothesis. Our reasoning for this hypothesis was that activities firms use to empower make it easier for consumers to band together and increase their power in the market. Such banding together will increase consumer power and communication about their experiences. However, this assumes all firm empowering activities will have this effect. One explanation for our results might be that increasing expectations is not a general result across activities. That is, some empowering activities may not be associated with increased expectations. Future research could examine the effects of different empowering activities.

Regarding the moderating effect of face to face contact, we argued that firms empowering their consumers will increase consumers' satisfaction more when there is human backup as this enhances a consumer's feeling of security. Obviously, firms do not need to have personal contact with their customers when using an empowerment strategy successfully. One explanation might be advances in new technologies, e.g. web 2.0. Using these new technologies firms might not necessarily be in direct contact with their clients to make them happy and a human backup becomes dispensable.

Implications

These findings are important for theory and for marketing practitioners. From a theoretical perspective, these findings advance understanding of the process by which consumer empowerment impacts satisfaction. The findings also suggest that consumer empowerment serves as an antecedent to consumer involvement, shedding greater light on methods of increasing involvement.

Our findings support the partial mediation of the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction, indicating that consumer empowerment leads to satisfaction in two different ways. Consumer empowerment does not only directly lead to consumer satisfaction, but also indirectly (through consumer involvement). This enhances the understanding of the role of involvement in the empowerment process.

From a practitioner perspective, these findings suggest that empowerment can be a source of competitive advantage because of a direct positive link to satisfaction. Activities which empower customers can lead to increased satisfaction. Satisfaction has been linked to important outcomes such as positive word of mouth (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Wangenheim and Bayón 2007), loyalty (Fornell et al. 1996; Olsen 2002), willingness to pay more (e.g., Fornell et al. 1996; Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2005), and a firm's financial performance (Anderson et al. 1997). Successful empowering activities increase satisfaction and lead to positive firm outcomes.

Our results suggest that empowerment can be used to increase consumer involvement. Empowering consumers during the process of purchasing may be used as a means to make a firm and its products more relevant to consumers. Thus empowerment can be added to the toolbox of methods for increasing consumer involvement.

A finding of partial mediation suggests that firms choosing an empowerment strategy should also increase involvement. Increases in consumer involvement should enhance the effect of consumer empowerment. Marketers who fail to increase involvement and empowerment will have a less effective empowerment strategy.

Moreover, the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction seems to hold in a variety of contexts; at least firm responsiveness to consumers and face to face contact do not seem

to alter the relationship. Such findings suggest that firms could use a strategy of consumer empowerment in a variety of contexts involving these two variables.

Establishing a relationship between consumer empowerment and satisfaction should help expand firm efforts to empower consumers. This study offers evidence of the benefits of consumer empowerment to marketers. As such, it should serve as a call for increased empowerment. However, consumers should be wary as some researchers suggest that the positive state of empowerment can overshadow other important issues in the buying process (e.g., Wathieu et al. 2002).

The study builds upon previous consumer empowerment research by distinguishing between firm activities directed toward empowering consumers and the subjective state of consumer empowerment. There is some confusion in the literature regarding the definition of consumer empowerment. The term is often used to describe the activities which lead to empowerment as well as the state resulting from those activities. This paper adds to this discussion by identifying these two uses of the term. In so doing we hope to help alleviate some of this confusion.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it stops at satisfaction without exploring the effects of increasing consumer satisfaction on the firm. While research indicates increasing satisfaction leads to positive outcomes such as a willingness to pay more (Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2005), the study would be more valuable if empowerment were linked to improved performance. Future research should examine the impact of empowerment on firm performance.

In this paper, we concentrate on two potential moderator variables, namely a firm's responsiveness to consumers and face to face contact. As neither was confirmed in our empirical study, we assume that the effect of consumer empowerment on satisfaction holds in different contexts. However, our study only includes two moderating variables and other contextual differences might play a role. Future research therefore should include other moderating variables. For example, in a service employee context Yagil (2006) found that the link between empowerment and job satisfaction depends on the employee and the degree to which he or she wants to be empowered. A consumer's willingness to be empowered might therefore also moderate the relationship between empowerment and satisfaction. Consumers with great expertise might benefit more from an empowering strategy as they might be able to handle the greater control better than consumers with less expertise.

A second limitation results from our assumption that marketers can decide on the amount of control they give to their consumers without restraint. In some industries this is not the case. Depending on the level of regulatory control in the industry, firms may not have much choice regarding the level of control offered to their consumers. Another factor limiting the possibility of implementing an empowerment strategy is the competitive environment. When there already is a high level of empowerment within an industry, there is less possibility for one firm to differentiate by empowering consumers.

Future Research

The effect of firm activities designed to evoke empowerment on the level of empowerment would be an interesting avenue of research. This study begins at the point at which a consumer is experiencing empowerment. However, the activities that firms use to evoke empowerment are varied and, among others, can include allowing the consumer to specify product features (Wathieu et al. 2002), educating consumers (Brennan and Ritters 2004), increasing the quantity and the quality of information available to consumers (Rust and Oliver 1994), increasing access to information (Keh and Park 1998), and enhancing communication with important others (e.g., other consumers, experts; Pitt et al. 2002). The differences between these activities suggest that the way in which empowerment is evoked may interact with the environment to influence levels of empowerment. Future research should examine the sources of empowerment and their impact on the level of empowerment.

This study demonstrates empirically how consumer empowerment impacts consumer satisfaction. Other research demonstrates a link between consumer satisfaction and firm performance (e.g., Anderson, Fornell, and Rust 1997), suggesting the importance of satisfaction. However, satisfaction is not the only indicator of firm performance. Research could examine when a strategy of empowerment best “fits” with the external and internal environment of a firm. Essentially, when does it pay a firm to offer a strategy of consumer empowerment? This study investigates one combination of factors, but others will also impact the relationship between empowerment and firm performance. It is hoped that by identifying the factors which drive successful empowerment, firms will see more reasons to empower consumers.

Conclusion

This paper presents an empirical model which offers evidence for two relationships. First, that the experience of consumer empowerment is positively related to satisfaction. Second, that consumer involvement mediates the relationship between consumer empowerment and consumer satisfaction. These findings are important because they suggest that consumer empowerment will have a stronger impact on consumers’ satisfaction with the empowering firm depending on the context. At a specific level, one of the contextual factors that are proposed to affect this relationship is identified.

We hope that the paper will serve two immediate purposes - helping guide firms as they consider the benefits of empowering consumers and spurring research into the consumer empowerment construct. Empowerment has been shown to offer some benefits to consumers (Henry 2005), and more constructs which benefit both consumers and firms would seem to be fruitful avenues for exploration.

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Appendix A

English Translations of the Scales Used in the Study
(All items were in German in this study.)

Consumer Satisfaction

1. Altogether, I'm satisfied with the goods and services of this company.
2. I'm totally convinced of this company.
3. This company totally meets my expectations.
4. I've made especially good experiences with this company.
5. I'm dissatisfied with this company.
6. This company offers me exactly what I need.

Consumer Empowerment

1. In my dealings with this company, I feel I am in control.
2. The ability to influence the goods and services of this company is beneficial to me.
3. I feel good because of my ability to influence the choice set offered to me by this company.
4. My influence over this company has increased relative to the past.

Responsiveness to Consumers

1. When I have a problem, the personnel of this company are always available.
2. When I have a problem, the employees solve it quickly.
3. The personnel of this company are helpful.

Face to Face Contact

1. At this company I often have personal contact with the employees.
2. At this company I often speak with employees in person.

Consumer Involvement

1. ... (e.g., package tours) mean a lot to me.
2. ... (e.g., package tours) are useful for me.
3. I think ... (e.g., package tours) are interesting.
4. I can get along without ... (e.g., package tours). (R)

(R) = Reverse scored item