

Consumer Misbehavior

Student's Name

Institution of Learning

Abstract

This research proposal is based on the general view and observation that in the current marketing situation, consumers have developed certain forms of misbehaviors in the process of acquisition, utilization, and disposal of goods and services. In this proposal, categories of such misbehaviors, their causes, socio-economic consequences, as well as possible remedies, are the main issues to be researched. The introduction provides a detailed definition of the concept of consumer misbehavior. Other sections of this proposal focus on the proposed methodology of the study, the target respondents, methods of sampling, as well as data collection methods. The final section of the proposal discusses possible causes of biases and how the research intends to control them for the attainment of valid and reliable findings.

Consumer Misbehavior

Introduction

Consumer misbehavior can be defined as a behavioral act or a set of acts by customers which tend to breach norms of conduct in consumption situations (Vitell, 2003). These acts include verbal and physical abuse, theft, vandalism, and trashing among others that are intentionally conducted by consumers in order to cause losses to producers and suppliers. Other acts such as purchase of fake goods, piracy, irresponsible utilization of goods, as well as improper disposal of wastes from such goods and services, can also be treated as forms of consumer misbehaviors (Vitell, 2003). However, these acts exclude legal behaviors such as making a legitimate complaint with an intention of improving the quality of services offered to consumers. Such may be treated as ethical acts that reflect positive initiatives of consumers to partner with producers and suppliers to enhance quality of products and efficiency of service provision.

Consistent evidence has been reported revealing that the provision of services exposes producers to a number of challenges that are associated with consumer misbehavior (Crane & Matten, 2007). However, little research has been done to investigate the extent to which consumers misbehave, reasons for their misbehavior, and corporate strategies devised to manage the consumer misbehavior (Crane & Matten, 2007). Based on this understanding, the concept of consumer misbehavior has been acknowledged as real yet ignored in current research (Vitell, 2003). This research, therefore, seeks to explore various categories of the misbehaviors, their causes, how they are revealed, and their socio-economic impact on society. The research will also make recommendations on a possible remedy for this problem.

Previous studies on this problem, whether qualitative or quantitative, have been hindered by their traditional research techniques (Vitell, 2003). Traditional research on consumer misbehaviors has been based on written role-playing scenarios. These have been questioned based on the low respondent involvement, which in turn discredits the validity of the findings. Therefore, this leaves a vacuum of knowledge that this research is meant to fill by employing modern techniques of market research and incorporating both consumers and suppliers in the research process. Adopting a mixed approach in the study design will, therefore, be helpful in the realization of the study objectives.

Research Methodology

The choice of the methodological approach to this concept is very essential to the advancement of clarity in this field of study (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2008). Any research problem that is driven by the need to have an objective analysis and recommended proper and effective solutions must be founded on clear methodological techniques or designs so as to achieve the set objectives. Such a research must identify and advance methods and techniques that are most suitable for the investigation of the phenomenon under consideration, which in this case is misbehavior in the context of the services being offered and the products on offer.

In this research, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be utilized. In this case, qualitative research will focus on issues relating to opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions (Marschan & Welch, 2004). This method will, therefore, help the researcher to identify reasons for consumer misbehaviors and the attitudes that people have towards such behaviors. This approach will also help to investigate the role of ethical, cultural, and religious beliefs in promoting or preventing consumer misbehaviors. This will help in

understanding why consumers behave in ways that can be classified in the category of consumer misbehavior and find out how they might respond to a change of products and other variables.

Since the opinions will be obtained from a small number of respondents through interviews, the findings may not be statistically valid. They will only give certain behavioral highlights that will be verified through quantitative methods (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2008). The use of qualitative approaches would, thus, promote the collection of data that would have otherwise been challenging for the researcher if purely quantitative methods had been adopted for this study. The qualitative design in this case would help the researcher to develop hypotheses that could be further analyzed in future studies to establish theoretical frameworks relevant in understanding and explaining consumer misbehavior. In order to gain understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations behind consumer misbehavior, the researcher will use qualitative design (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2008). This will also help in uncovering prevalent trends in consumer opinion, thought, and behavior over time.

The study will also apply quantitative research design to deliver on its objectives. This design entails the determination of the relationship between two or more variables. In this case, the research will apply quantitative research design by using consumer misbehavior as the dependent variable and finding its relationship with other dependent variables, such as price of products, packaging, quality of the products, distribution, and perceived values of the product to consumers. In this study, the researcher will use a descriptive quantitative design that purely measures the relationship between variables. A quantitative approach, therefore, will not be ignored in this research, since it will help address the questions of how many and how often certain forms of misbehaviors have been witnessed and possible determinants of such behaviors. This will help in calculating percentages of misbehaviors in response to particular products over

time. This will also bring onto the scene other market factors that affect the consumer, such as demand, supply, and inflations that have quantitative values.

The use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches will help in reducing the errors that are associated with the use of one particular research design. Although some alternative approaches are recommended, none of them may be effective without complementation of the others (Marschan & Welch, 2004). This, therefore, implies that the incorporation of multiple methods should be the most effective design if the goals of the study are to be attained objectively. The limitations that are associated with qualitative research designs will, thus, be covered through the use of quantitative techniques of data collection.

This will also employ the use of the simulation game to explore consumer misbehaviors with regard to their flow and engagement, as well as their ethical responsibility. This method provides a control environment and at the same time explores the environment that is ethically responsible for consumer behaviors and misbehaviors. This will support a diversified range of qualitative investigation that enhances the fairness of the research process and limits possible biases.

Although the simulation game was traditionally used for entertainment, its applicability has expanded to include constructive military games, government games, religious, and academic games (Marschan & Welch, 2004). In the recent past, this method was very instrumental in marketing research while evaluating the behavior of consumers. A simulation game in this case refers to the method and process of copying various activities in real life and using such imitations to analyze and predict people's behavior (Marschan & Welch, 2004).

In this process, the research will employ both experiential and computerized simulation games. The experiential simulation will remain quite distinct in that it will focus on how the participant consumers interact with the simulated environment, as well as how they provide behaviors and decisions within the environment. The computerized simulation will also be useful in exploring the implications of theoretical modes and model-building of this research. Although a combination of the two approaches will remain useful, more emphasis will be laid on the experiential model.

Target Audience

The proposed research is meant to investigate a convenient sample of 1200 consumer respondents in the transitional economy of Slovenia. The country is selected for this study because this kind of research investigating ethical behaviors in a transitional economy has been very rare (Watson & Kirby, 2003). Furthermore, cases of purchasing counterfeit and pirate goods continue to dominate and present a great challenge, particularly, in the field of software marketing in this environment (Watson & Kirby, 2003).

Considering the geographical and population size of the country, it remains a justifiable selection even for the external validity of the study. Furthermore, the availability of a number of both undergraduate and postgraduate business students in the country makes it easy to get a variety of samples as they will be used to administer the survey in their local communities for a fair representation.

Methods of Sampling

The sample frame of this research is designed to cover a quarter of twelve regions of Slovenia. This will be relevant to the most recent division of the Slovenian territory that created

twelve regions, namely Primorska, Notranjska, Griska, Gorenjska, Central Slovenia, Dolenjska, Dolenjska, Zasavje Posavje, Savinjsko, Koroska, Podravje, and Pomurje. Out of these, only Central Slovenia, Primorska, and Gorenjska will be selected to represent the country.

Both probability and non-probability sampling designs will be used in the selection of the respondents in this study. The probability sampling techniques in this case will involve the use of stratified random sampling. This procedure will allow the researcher to select respondents from all the regions randomly and to ensure that the percentage that is selected in each region is representative of the population in that region. Besides, it will ensure that no one region has more respondents than the other. In adopting the stratified random sampling design, the research findings will be valid and can be generalized in the regions since the principle of representativeness will be achievable (Tew, 2012). The justification for the use of this approach is to be found in the need to apply the principle of representativeness with the aim of enhancing the realization of external validity in the study.

The research will also use a probability sampling design such as purposive sampling. Purposive sampling will be used by the researcher to identify the region from where the respondents will be selected. A purposive sampling design will specifically enable the researcher to locate dealers and consumers in each region. From this, the respondents may be randomly selected from the sampling frame using the stratified random sampling technique. The use of consumer and producer unions will be appropriate in identifying the purposive samples.

Data Collection Methods

Both primary and secondary sources of data will be used in this research process. The secondary sources of data will involve a critical review of the existing literature based on

previous researches on the concept of consumer behavior and misbehavior. This will not only focus on published books, but also on other academic sources such as journals, relevant theses, as well as online articles. The review of empirical literature and the theoretical frameworks explaining the concept of consumer behavior and misbehavior will add value to the research, as the researcher will be able to gain insight into the previous studies, findings, limitations, and gaps that the present study will fill (Tew, 2012). Besides, secondary data will enable the researcher to analyze consumer attitudes, patterns, and motivations. These data can be used by the researcher to develop explanations for any observed patterns and attitudes in the current study.

The use of questionnaires will, however, remain the most useful tool for gathering primary data. The questionnaires will be divided into four parts which will be based on the information gathered from the secondary data. These sections will be basically meant to test behaviors and misbehaviors in consumers based on the existing knowledge of counterfeiting, established measures, self-constructed measures, as well as socio-psychological constructs of consumers. For instance, the respondents' willingness to purchase fake goods at various prices will be ranked numerically from 1 – 5, meaning strong disagreement to strong agreement in the ascending order.

The use of both open and closed ended questionnaires will be employed. This will be necessary in creating a framework of analysis that is structured and also at certain points creating room for diversified experience of respondents (Tew, 2012). The use of interviews will also be necessary. In case certain respondents are deemed to be holding more information that cannot be fully exploited through questionnaires, personal interviews will be useful. This will mostly target various leaders of consumer, producer, and supplier unions that often deal with cases and

complaints that are related to consumer misbehaviors. They may also be required to provide lists of other stakeholders that may be holding relevant information for the study. Thus, the researcher will use interviewing techniques to collect data from key informants. This will help in enriching the data collected through the use of other instruments, such as questionnaires.

The help of research assistants to administer the questionnaires will be necessary. A total number of 30 assistants drawn from both undergraduate and postgraduate university students based on their availability and willingness to participate in this study will be regionally distributed across the three selected areas. The criterion for the distribution will entirely rely on a person's regional origin so as to enhance a clear understanding of the assistants of the area of study. Ten assistants will be expected to work in each region and administer thirty questionnaires. The researcher can also make use of focus group discussions under the qualitative design to collect data that can in turn be applied to corroborate the information collected through the use of other study instruments.

Controlling Bias

Just like any other academic research, this research is exposed to a number of limitations that if not properly checked, may dilute the accuracy and validity of the findings. For instance, the common understanding of consumer misbehavior may be hindered by the traditional research methods which are limited to written scenarios and self-report surveys (Marschan & Welch, 2004). Furthermore, cases of social desirability biases may make consumers reluctant to admit misbehaviors, even in an anonymous, confidential survey (Tew, 2012). The study, thus, seeks to apply attitude measurement and perception scales in the data collection so that the biases associated with falsified responses that the respondents may give to avoid certain questions on

their misconducts are limited. The questionnaires will also be constructed in such a way that leading and embarrassing questions are eliminated.

Consumer misbehavior is a low base rate phenomenon which may make general observation techniques inefficient and impractical (Marschan & Welch, 2004). Due to the sensitivity of the area of study, it is unethical to fabricate situations that may prompt misbehavior from consumers. There is, therefore, a need for instruments that will accurately engage the research in both efficient and ethical manner, hence controlling against any possibility of biasness and reliability questions on the research tools (Tew, 2012).

The researcher will deliberately engage neutral research assistants who are not interested in achieving one result or the other. Since the research will not put any pressure on them for any designed positive result, the researchers are expected to eliminate any possible internal and personal influences in the process of data collection (Tew, 2012). Besides this, the researchers will undergo thorough training as far as the methodology is concerned. This will be done with a clear focus on the need to be real and much demand on unbiased results.

In addition to this, the sampling methods proposed for the research are meant to enhance equal representation with no room for biases. Apart from the purposive sampling that targets a particular group, the final selection of the respondents is based on random sampling that is expected to be demographically representative of different qualities and opinions that are typical of the entire population of the study. The use of the principle of random sampling will in particular help in the achievement of external validity, since the respondents selected in this study will be proportionate to the population from which they are selected (Tew, 2012).

The research tools such as the interview schedule and questionnaires will be tested for reliability before they are finally used in the study. The researcher will present the study tools for peer review and expert review by senior researchers in the field of consumer behavior to ensure that the study tools are reliable and can collect accurate information for the purposes of the study. This implies that the researcher will conduct a pilot study aimed at testing the study tools with a section of respondents selected from regions that will not be included in the study. The reliability of the study instruments will then be tested to ascertain whether the tools are collecting the information that they are meant to collect. Any anomalies will then be corrected before the research tools are finally administered to the target respondents. Piloting has been found to help researchers achieve validity and reliability, especially in instances when the reliability of the study is of critical concern for a researcher.

In case of interviews, the research will ensure the maximum neutrality by avoiding unnecessary leading questions. In case of a series of questions, general questions will precede specific questions so as to avoid giving too much information to the respondent early in the interview. In the process of analysis, several strategies are put in place to guard the findings against unnecessary biases. The data collected will be cleaned before they are coded and analyzed. This process will ensure that all the questions are answered by the respondents and that all missing cases are noted so as to avoid chances of manipulation, which is a vice that causes validity concerns in many studies. In cases that require computation and estimation of figures, relevant computer programs will be employed to eradicate the possibility of human error in calculation.

Conclusion

This research proposal is developed as a tool that will help in a scientific research on the critical topic of consumer misbehavior. This would be achieved by effectively employing the use of the simulation game in predicting the behavior of consumers in particular market areas. The target respondents in this research are 1200 consumers from three regions of Slovenia that will be identified through purposive sampling based on the available data of consumer associations. After which, random sampling will be used for fair representation of the population. Both primary and secondary sources of data will be applied in this process. The primary data collection processes such as questionnaires and personal interviews will remain paramount. Although there may be several sources of bias as foreseen in this process, proper scientific research measures are put in place to guard the research against such biases that may hinder the accuracy of the findings.

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