

Empowering your customers? Think twice about social media campaigns

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Companies that empower consumers by involving them in important processes such as product development shouldn't also try to influence them through social media, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Peer-to-peer marketing and consumer empowerment may not be compatible. Empowered consumers resist social influence by either discounting the opinions of others or deliberately expressing opinions that diverge from those of other consumers," write authors Mehdi Mourali (University of Calgary) and Zhiyong Yang (University of Texas, Arlington).

Empowering the consumer has become a popular business practice. For example, M&M's, Mountain Dew, and other brands seek to empower consumers by giving them some control over product development (customers are allowed to vote on new colors, flavors, or products). At the same time, companies are increasing their attempts to influence consumers through social media.

Previous research has assumed that empowered consumers either pay no attention to the opinions of other consumers or dismiss them entirely when judging a product. However, the authors found that consumers who were made to feel empowered didn't always just ignore the opinions of others. In fact, some empowered consumers deliberately expressed opposing views and rebelled against attempts to influence them.

Companies that succeed in empowering their customers may find it difficult to implement a successful social media campaign. Empowered consumers will either ignore or rebel against any perceived attempt to influence them.

"Many companies have embraced the concept of consumer empowerment. However, they should consider whether attempts to integrate [social influence](#) (word-of-mouth marketing, social network marketing, buzz marketing) might backfire with empowered consumers," the authors conclude.

More information: Mehdi Murali and Zhiyong Yang. "The Dual Role of Power in Resisting *Social Influence*." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2013

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