Empowerment in Marketing: Synthesis, Critical Review, and Agenda for Future Research

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Abstract

We comprehensively review consumer empowerment, which has received increasing attention from academics and has given rise to inconsistent theoretical frameworks. Building on a multidisciplinary approach and a review of power models, we begin with a conceptualization of empowerment, identifying the concept’s contours and origins. Then, we show how multidisciplinary advancements influence the marketing discipline through an assessment of the empowerment literature. We reveal important knowledge gaps on the topic related to different theoretical orientations and various levels of analysis and contexts. We then propose an organizing framework to help understand the underlying mechanisms induced in psychological empowerment by changes in the market structure and technological shifts, consumer-to-firm, state-to-consumer, and firm-to-consumer deliberate actions. Our critical review of the marketing literature reveals the limits of prior research, and we suggest directions for future theoretical and empirical research on the consumer empowerment theme.

Keywords
Consumer empowerment, empowerment, multidisciplinary approach, power, critical review.
Introduction

Empowerment refers to a wide range of practices, from the activities of minority groups attempting to gain power to policies implemented to move the powerless into equitable positions (Lincoln, Ackers, Travers and Wilkinson 2002). The concept of empowerment is a cornerstone ideology profoundly embedded in the political and philosophical foundations of the American nation. Empowerment was a fundamental principle in the American civil rights movement and was recognized as a key part of the War on Poverty of the 1960s (Swift and Levin 1987). More recently, international institutions, including the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations (UN) and UNICEF, have adopted empowerment as a central theme and goal for their development programs, as these institutions’ websites document.

The original meaning of empowerment, rooted in left-wing revolutionary discourse, was appropriated and applied to liberal managerial practices (Lincoln, Ackers, Travers and Wilkinson 2002). In fact, this concept has traveled across diverse disciplines, contexts, and countries with dissimilar approaches and meanings. Since the 2000s, the term “consumer empowerment” has been used intensively in marketing. An explosion of academic interest in identifying the contours of consumer empowerment has been witnessed, as evidenced by the European Journal of Marketing special issue (2006) and, more recently, a published collective work on the topic (Meyer-Waarden and Geyer-Schulz 2014). In 2000–2002, only four articles explicitly referenced consumer empowerment, but by mid-2017, that number had increased to more than 120. Different approaches to the concept have emerged in the marketing literature, as summarized by Cova and Cova (2009). The authors defined empowerment as a set of practices ranging from daily resistance to marketing abuse (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006) to participation in collaborative practices with companies to develop new products (Fuchs and Schreier 2011) and design services (Cova 2004).

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1 Data obtained from the Business Source Premier database through a search of article titles with explicit reference to the concept of consumer empowerment or customer empowerment.
Although the literature on consumer empowerment has grown exponentially, it is still in its early days and remains fragmented. Scholars and practitioners both report a lack of understanding and poor linkages between empirical findings on the topic (Meyer-Waarden and Geyer-Schulz 2014). Despite the contribution the marketing literature has made to this burgeoning research field, marketing research on empowerment has two significant limitations. First, multidisciplinary works on empowerment have been neglected, limiting the understanding of the different aspects of the concept. Second, marketing scholars have addressed a wide variety of research questions based on various theories in a diverse range of contexts and settings. This diversity, however, makes it difficult to grasp the core findings and difficult to envision what remains to be done for future research.

Against this backdrop, our objective in this article is to develop an organizing framework on consumer empowerment to provide new insights for scholars pursuing research on consumer empowerment. By building a framework that is designed to increase our understanding of consumer empowerment, we make three main contributions.

First, taking an interdisciplinary approach, we identify the way the concept of empowerment has developed in the social sciences, shedding light on (1) different levels of analysis (individual and collective) and (2) historical contexts (relying on research conducted on Google Books Ngram Viewer). We identify three approaches within the social sciences scope that provide a comprehensive understanding of empowerment: the delegation of power to others, the gain of power over others, and empowerment as a subjective state.

Second, we analyze the theoretical foundations of consumer empowerment, highlighting how these three approaches have been contextualized and appropriated in the marketing discipline. An integrative definition of empowerment is developed. Based on this integrative definition, we specify the conceptual differences between empowerment and related concepts (e.g., resistance and agency) and discuss the different theories of power (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006) behind the eclectic marketing literature on empowerment. We then consolidate actual developments through an organizing framework that focuses on empowerment as a subjective state and its drivers.
Finally, for each driver of consumer empowerment identified, we present a promising research agenda for scholarly inquiry.

To address these issues, we conducted a review of more than 600 articles and books in various disciplines using the EBSCO database, in which the literature on consumer empowerment is traditionally published. We conducted a search for articles with titles, keywords, or abstracts containing the terms “empowerment” and “consumer.” From this research and the identified references, we selected 142 articles. We subsequently widened our study to other search engines (including Elsevier, ScienceDirect, Cairn.info, and Google Scholar) for further multidisciplinary references to empowerment. The conceptual section in Lincoln et al. (2002) dedicated to the etymological origins of empowerment coupled with research on Google Books Ngram Viewer (selected period of study: 1985-2008) enabled us to identify additional key references in political science, sociology and psychology.

Origins, meaning and evolution of the concept of empowerment

Theoretical assessment of empowerment. Since its first appearance in the 19th century, empowerment has been defined in numerous ways (Rappaport, Swift and Hess 1984). The literature on empowerment has been concerned with two main issues: 1. the nature of the concept of empowerment and 2. its level of analysis.

First, scholars in various disciplines emphasize the dual nature of empowerment as both a process and an outcome (Anderson 1996; Gibson 1991; Rappaport 1987). As a process, Lincoln et al. (2002, p. 273) describe empowerment as two distinct processes that we rename “delegation of power” and “gain of power”, respectively: 1. the way in which power is granted by an agent to one agent to make it more powerful (“to bestow power upon”) (i.e., delegation of power) or 2. the way by which an agent takes power over a second agent (“to gain or assume power over”) (i.e., gain of

\[2\] Google Ngram Viewer does not cover sources beyond 2008.
power). Depending on the literature streams and contexts, the authority can be a government, local communities, or firms, while an entity can designate citizens, consumers, or communities and groups of people. As an outcome, empowerment is defined as the subjective state of being empowered (Lincoln et al. 2002). Empowerment is then characterized by a state of having more power than before; individuals feel that they have the power to control, understand, and manage their environment (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Spreitzer 1995). The subjective state of empowerment might come from the two distinct empowerment processes described by Lincoln et al. (2002), although we must specify conditions under which this subjective state arises. When the power is bestowed by an authority, the entity must accept or take the additional power to be empowered. In addition, for both the delegation and the gain of power, empowerment occurs if the process leads to perceived outcomes such as a gain in control, the acquisition of necessary resources and the development of skills (Zimmerman 2000).

Second, the literature on empowerment has further understood the nature of empowerment by separating it into two different levels of analysis: personal and collective. Personal empowerment refers to the way individuals perceive their critical consciousness and the skills they possess (Freire 1970; Zimmerman 1995). Collective empowerment entails mechanisms by which individuals participate in actions to achieve shared goals and objectives by both drawing on internal resources within the community and influencing external institutions and organizations (Zimmerman 2000).

**A multidisciplinary overview of the empowerment concept across disciplines.** Empowerment is an ambiguous theoretical concept (Lincoln et al. 2002) used in several disciplines, including political science (Redley and Weinberg 2007), sociology (Simon 1994), human and social psychology (Batifoulier, Domin and Gadreau 2008), and management (Nord and Doherty 1996; Wathieu, Brenner, Carmon, Chattopahyay and Wettenbroch 2002).

Despite a considerable level of conceptual breadth across the reviewed disciplines and context, three different approaches to empowerment structure the literature: empowerment as a
delegation of power, as a gain of power and as a subjective state. An overview of selected conceptualizations of empowerment identified within specific academic disciplines is provided in Table 1. These works originated from different histories and contexts that we summarize (i.e. Table 1), highlighting major references, the meaning of empowerment in each discipline and the main findings. In this table, we argue that in political literature, three approaches to empowerment are found: the delegation of power, the gain of power and the subjective state. In sociological writings, both the delegation of power from governments and the gain of power from minority groups are documented, while the subjective state of empowerment is not advanced by scholars. In the sciences of education, community psychology and management disciplines, the focus is on both the delegation of power from institutions and the resulting subjective state felt by individuals, while the approach of gaining power does not emerge from these sciences.

< Please insert Table 1 here >

Presenting a multidisciplinary analysis of empowerment across the social sciences enables us to show how the definitions and contextualization of the concept have evolved around the three approaches. The following paragraph describes how the three approaches to the concept of empowerment presented above have developed within competing power theories.

**A necessary assessment of how different power models influence the field**

The definition of empowerment through its etymology gives a central role to the concept of power. The theoretical approach to power inevitably directs the nature of the research that results. Social scientists have drawn on the genealogical origins of power for power mapping (Clegg 1989; Clegg, Courpasson, and Philips 2006). It appears that conceptions of power are based on two opposing traditions (Clegg 1989): one inherited from Hobbes (1909) and the second one introduced by Machiavelli (1958). In the Hobbesian view, power refers to the ability of one actor to alter the behavior of another by direct action (Dahl 1968). Machiavelli has proposed a different approach: power is not held by an all-powerful ruler, it is omnipresent and operates according to local strategies.
Based on these two opposite views of power, the major contribution of Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder (2006) is based on a mapping related to theories of power that structure the literature on empowerment. These authors identify three competing models that each deliver a different and complementary vision of empowerment and refer implicitly to the three approaches of empowerment (delegation of power, gaining power, and power as a subjective state) discussed earlier in this paper. These models are consumer sovereignty, cultural power, and discursive power.

**The consumer sovereignty model.** This model has its roots in classical and neoclassical economics. Power is presented as a rational ability to exercise choice. Dahl (1957/1968) defines power as follows: A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do. Research on empowerment as a collaborative management practice is based on the assumption of consumer sovereignty (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuchs and Schreier 2011). These authors highlight the transfer of power from company to consumer that enables consumers to have more control over marketing policies. This theoretical approach also sees empowerment as a process of collective action that can be achieved by boycotts or consumer strategies designed to counterbalance the power of the producer (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006; Friedman 1991; Smith 1990).

**The cultural power model.** This model is based on a critique of consumerism that theorizes the market as a source of political and cultural oppression that can transform active citizens into passive consumers (Murray and Ozanne 1995). Scholars who adopt the cultural power model explore consumers’ acts of resistance against the disciplinary power of the market (Denegri-Knott 2004; Dulsrud and Jacobsen 2009; Fiske and Eberhardt 1994; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). De Certeau (1984/1986) shows how the ideologies developed within macro-societal structures are negotiated in the micro-social practices of everyday life (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Consumers become creative agents who invent tactics and tricks to counteract companies’ maneuvers (Abercrombie 1994; Fiske 1989; Hebdige 2000; Peñaloza and Price 1993).
The discursive power model. This model questions the dualism that opposes the all-powerful marketer and the resistant consumer. It also challenges the assumption (consumer sovereignty) that consumers have power and control over the choices they make (Holt 2002). The discursive model emphasizes the disciplinary role of discourse and managerial practices, and Foucault’s (1978) theory of governmentality has been widely cited (Cova and Cova 2009; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006; Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008). According to Foucault, subjects are socially constructed through economic, political, and managerial discourse and language structure. With the exception of some studies (e.g., Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Thompson and Troester 2002), empirical studies of empowerment that take a discursive power approach (Denegri-Knott 2004; Hodgson 2002) have developed a fragmented and compartmentalized vision of Foucault’s theory (1978). That is, they ignore the second part of his theory, which attests that norms and standards provide a framework and structure within which the exercise of power and individual freedom are permitted. However, this Foucauldian theoretical framework opens the way to a more critical view of empowerment and puts into perspective its negative and ethical implications for individuals, which are largely neglected by the literature. This overview of power approaches presented here helps to better organize empirical findings on empowerment in marketing and provides a foundation for future developments.

Our review of key multidisciplinary works on empowerment provided the three approaches to the concept as well as frameworks of power useful to study the concept. We next present an organizing framework for empirical developments in marketing and elaborate related research gaps.

Consumer empowerment: An organizing framework.

Conceptualization of consumer empowerment. Wathieu et al. (2002) were the first to explicitly refer to consumer empowerment in a marketing context. They introduced the subjective state of empowerment and the changes in the choice environment that lead to this state. They defined the
subjective state of empowerment as the perception on the part of consumers that they have more power than they previously had. In line with Lincoln et al. (2002), the state of being empowered is intrinsically linked to the action that triggers this state. However, the type of action that leads to the state of being empowered is missing or inadequately articulated in the literature. Those actions must be deliberately conducted by free agents (1) to give more power to consumers (firms, or the state through public policies) or (2) to gain more power (consumers) and a voice in companies’ offerings in the marketplace, or (3) they might be linked to changes in the marketplace environment that are unintentionally carried out to improve consumers’ subjective state of empowerment. To illustrate the latter, the arrival of a new player leading to an enlargement of consumers’ choice set or the development of the Internet may increase control over the choices consumers make without having as a main goal the increase of consumers’ subjective state of empowerment (Wathieu et al. 2002).

Building on this discussion, we advance an integrated conceptualization of consumer empowerment, which we define as the “perceptions on the part of consumers that they have more power than before following the implementation of consumers deliberate or unintentional actions and changes in the choice environment of free agents”. By doing so, we enlarge and enrich the definition of consumer empowerment by Cova and Cova (2009) (i.e., a set of practices ranging from daily resistance to marketing abuse to participation to collaborative practices with companies to develop new products and design services) described in the introduction section by introducing the subjective state approach to empowerment as well as the unintentional actions that may lead to this state.

The next section discusses the conceptual differences between empowerment and similar concepts.

**Conceptual differences between empowerment and related concepts**

**Empowerment and resistance.** According to the cultural model of power, consumer resistance and consumer empowerment are distinct. Consumer resistance is linked to the consumer’s creative practices of subverting the laws imposed by the market. Consumer empowerment is more connected
to consumers’ capacities and resources and their efficiency in manipulating and producing market spaces (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). We also contend that any act of resistance is not necessarily a source of empowerment, but this is the case if the consumer can influence firms’ offers and change the balance of power.

**Empowerment and agency.** Building upon previous works (Drydyk 2010; Lindridge, Peñaloza, and Worlu 2016; Narayan 2002), we present differences between agency and empowerment, especially because there is conceptual ambiguity between the two in the literature. Agency can be comprehended as an ability to make choices, while empowerment refers to the effectiveness of this ability when the right conditions are met in the external social, political, and institutional environment. According to Drydyk (2010), agency refers to autonomous personal involvement in activities, while empowerment refers to a process of change and its results on the agent. For Drydyk (2010, p. 13), empowerment is a process “of engaging with power, and it is empowering to the degree that people’s agency is thereby engaged to expand their wellbeing freedom in a durable way.”

After presenting differences between empowerment, agency and resistance, we focus on conceptual distinctions between psychological empowerment, perceived control, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived competence.

**Differences between psychological empowerment and related concepts.** The subjective state of empowerment has also been called “psychological empowerment” in the management literature. The subjective state of empowerment, or psychological empowerment, must be distinguished from other variables that are conceptually close: perceived control, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived competence (Zimmerman 1995). Perceived control is linked to beliefs about individuals’ ability to exert influence on the different spheres in which they operate (family, work, social, and political contexts). Perceived self-efficacy is related to beliefs that people can successfully reach the goals they set for themselves. Finally, perceived competence involves the belief that people will develop tools and knowledge to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Zimmerman (1995) developed a nomological model of psychological empowerment based on a characterization of each of these three
constructs (i.e., perceived control, perceived self-efficacy, and perceived competence). The author shows that these are second-order concepts that contribute to psychological empowerment. In other words, people perceive themselves as empowered if they feel they are controlling and affecting their environment.

A proposed organizing framework. Building on this proposed definition of consumer empowerment, we propose an organizing framework that is described below.

The subjective state of empowerment is centrally positioned in the framework to emphasize its fundamental role because there is no consumer empowerment if consumers do not perceive that they are empowered. The organizing framework (Figure 1) identifies five research foci that correspond to the main drivers of the subjective state of empowerment, or psychological empowerment. For each driver, we distinguish the transmitter of the action and the agent to which it is directed. The five research foci are as follows:

1. Subjective state of empowerment. Research focusing on psychological empowerment and its measure; a research agenda dedicated to this concept is also advanced.

2. Changes caused by technology and market competitive structure. Research focusing on the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) in terms of the consumer-companies power balance and on external changes in the market competitive structure that lead unintentionally to greater perceived empowerment for consumers.

3. State-to-consumer deliberate action. Research focusing on public policies to educate, protect, and enhance consumers’ discernment when confronted with multiple offers in the marketplace. The consumerism literature is presented here with a focus on regulatory and legal approaches undertaken to enhance consumer welfare and to remove detrimental marketing practices committed in the marketplace.

4. Firm-to-consumer deliberate action. Research focusing on collaborative management practices implemented by firms to give customers a sense of control over a company’s product selection process and empowerment as applied to other marketing mix variables.

For the subjective state of empowerment and its four drivers (Figure 1), we present the main findings advanced by marketing articles (Appendix A). In Appendix A, we classify key marketing contributions according to the subjective state of empowerment and the levers to which they relate as well as references providing an analysis of power models.

**Research focus 1: Consumers’ subjective state of empowerment**

**Current research.** Scholars in psychology and management have shown that there are three components to the subjective state of empowerment: renamed psychological empowerment (Zimmerman 1990): intrapersonal (i.e., how individuals perceive themselves), interactional (i.e., how a person perceives and interacts with the environment), and behavioral (i.e., actions and commitments undertaken). In the same vein, Spreitzer (1995) proposed a multidimensional measure of psychological empowerment with the identification of the five dimensions of this concept’s measure (competence, choice, impact, control, and meaning). Competence and choice dimensions are closely linked to customers’ perception of their expertise in relation to a product or a brand and refer to ego reinforcement. Marketing studies (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Hair, Bart, and Neubert 2016) on firm-to-consumer deliberate actions have also mobilized and adapted the perceived impact dimension from Spreitzer’s (1995) measure and have shown that consumer participation in empowerment strategies generates a higher consumer perception of perceived impact on business decisions. For example, Morrongiello, N’Goala, and Kreziak (2017) have demonstrated that psychological empowerment through ego reinforcement positively impacts customers’ online engagement because they have the capacity to impact a company’s e-reputation.

**Research gaps and opportunities.**

**Methodological research opportunities.** Despite rich reflections on psychological empowerment in the management literature and efforts to develop a multidimensional measurement scale (Arneson
and Ekberg 2006; Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, and Drasgow 2000; Chiles and Zorn 1995; Frans 1993; Spreitzer 1995), marketing research has used one-dimensional and short measurement scales (i.e., Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuller, Mühlbacher, Matzler and Jawecki 2009; Hunter and Garnefeld 2008) and has failed to discuss the dimensionality and validity of the construct. Examples of items used by marketing authors are mainly linked to perceived impact (“I feel good because of my ability to influence the choice set offered to me by this company”; “My influence over this company has increased relative to the past” (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008)) and to control (“In my dealings with this company, I feel I am in control” (Hunter and Garnefeld 2008)). The management literature has highlighted dimensions of employee psychological empowerment. A similar approach needs to be taken to identify and measure components of consumer psychological empowerment in a marketing context.

**Impact of consumer profile characteristics on the subjective state of empowerment.** Management scholars working on employee empowerment have shown that personal variables such as age, status (full-time or temporary), and hierarchical position are positively related to psychological empowerment (Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu 2012; Seibert, Wang, and Courtright 2011). However, except for contributions that present social class as an antecedent of psychological empowerment (Henry 2005; Hess 1970; Kessler 1982), marketing studies generally fail to identify consumer characteristics that may favor psychological empowerment. In the collaborative management practices field, Vernette and Hamdi-Kidar (2013) and Vernette, Beji-Becheur, Gollety, and Hamdi-Kidar (2013) have identified the profiles of creative consumers who have a strong ability to advance innovative concepts that will appeal to the public, that is, “lead users” and “emergent-nature consumers.” Nevertheless, studies on “ordinary” consumer profiles, the popular target of empowerment practices (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuchs and Schreier 2011), have been neglected by the literature, and it is worthwhile to develop more empirical studies on the issue. Several individual characteristics can be identified that may influence psychological empowerment. For example, the level of education and related skills appear to play a leading role in psychological
empowerment (Spreitzer 1995). Building on the personality dimensions literature (Avey, Hughes, Norman, & Luthans 2008; Seibert, Wang, and Courtright 2011), we suggest that positive self-evaluation, individual psychological capital (a positive psychological state characterized by individuals’ belief in their skills, success, and ability to cope with difficulties), and the need for achievement (individuals’ belief in their competence and abilities) can be positively associated with psychological empowerment. Finally, it would be interesting to study consumer resistance (Banikema and Roux 2014) in terms of ambivalent roles in the subjective state of empowerment. There are two facets of consumer resistance: self-affirmation, which refers to individuals’ perception that they are self-confident and able to resist influence, and self-protection, which translates to escape and avoidance responses to market influences. We may assume that while self-affirmation is positively associated with the subjective state of empowerment, this is not systematically the case for self-protection.

**Research focus 2. Changes caused by technology and market competitive structure**

**Current research.** The macro environment (i.e., political, legal, regulatory, economic, social, cultural, and technological factors) constitutes a well-established setting in which firms operate. It directly and indirectly drives power distribution and relations between consumers and corporations. One of the most central drivers of power shifts is information technology. This tool empowers both consumers and companies. Through the Internet, consumers have rapid access to numerous sources of information, can compare offers, and can generate content on social networks (Amichai-Hamburger, McKenna and Tal 2008; Cova and Pace 2006; Harrison, Waite, and Hunter 2006; Pires, Stanton, & Rita 2006). However, as a source of consumer empowerment, the Internet is dependent on individuals’ ability to master it as a tool and the specific resources needed to use it (e.g., available time, ease of access; see Hough and Kobyłanski 2009; Labrecque, Vor Dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofäcker 2013). Kucuk and Krishnamurthy (2007) have shown how the balance of power between consumers and companies has been altered by the advent of the World Wide Web in favor
of consumers along four dimensions: technological, economic, social, and legal. The technological power aspect refers to the connected and informed consumer who can track and control her or his order status, forcing corporations to be more transparent and clearer with their clients. Economic power involves the increase in bargaining power (Porter 2008) that is measured by (1) consumers’ ability to access more options in the market and (2) a reduction in costs due to disintermediation in the supply chain. Additionally, economists and econometricians (Nevo 2001) have studied and measured the market power that can be exerted by firms and that depends on the extent to which firms can preserve across time a wide range of differentiated products and influence perceived product quality through advertising.

Social power manifests as consumers exert power by shaping companies’ future strategies and imagining new meaning and values for offerings. They can coordinate themselves to pressure a company regarding, for example, its unethical actions in the market. Finally, the legal source of power as hosted by Internet facilities is linked to the possibility offered to consumers to gather reports and data about companies’ legal abuse or infringements and to engage in legal prosecution when facing damages (i.e., class actions). Previous research (Kucuk 2016; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2009; Porter 2008) has also documented how such power dynamics reflect upon the consumer decision-making process.

We propose below a research agenda linked to shifts generated in consumer empowerment by market environment changes and Internet development.

**Research gaps and opportunities.** Actual developments have focused on new online sources of consumer power. However, the conditions and processes under which market power shifts occur should be studied in greater depth. In addition to focusing on technology-enabled power interactions between corporations and consumers, potential research could deepen our understanding of power shifts induced by macro-environmental factors (Porter, 2008). These include politico-legal forces (e.g., privacy and other legislation, taxation policy, and civil action groups), economic forces (e.g., trading alliance barriers, interest rates, inflation), social forces (e.g., demographic changes, income
distribution), and technological forces (e.g., innovation, substitute technologies). There are numerous opportunities for new and exciting research to determine the roots of an industry power in the marketplace and their impact on the resulting feeling of empowerment achieved by consumers. These approaches can constitute avenues of investigation for a better understanding of the power shifts that affect consumer/company dyads that have external sources. These approaches can be contrasted with those spontaneously undertaken by consumers in the marketplace (consumer-to-firm deliberate actions) to compare the levels of consumer power in both models.

We now focus on additional changes in the power balance that can occur due to governmental programs.

**Research focus 3. State-to-consumer deliberate action**

**Current research.** Major changes in consumer power were introduced by legal measures adopted to protect consumers and develop their welfare. These are covered by the consumerism literature. Consumerism propounds to inform, educate, and protect consumers against misleading or anti-competitive activities, dangerous products, and any type of abusive marketing through legislative support (Aaker and Day 1982). Public institutions take regulatory approaches to protect the consumer against defective or unsafe products (right to safety) and to enhance the amount of information presented about brands (the right to be informed) and about consumers’ right to choose and to be heard (Kucuk 2016; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2009). These laws and procedures can also act as catalysts to eliminate harmful business and marketing practices from the marketplace. A careful consideration of the previous literature on consumerism addresses shifts in consumer empowerment and consumer vulnerabilities, questioning the need for protection from public policymakers (Kucuk, 2015). Scholars (Kucuk 2016; Kucuk and Krishnamurthy 2007) have concluded that the right to choose and the right to be heard could be jeopardized in the future because legislative developments are lacking in both the United States and the European Union, and companies are ruling and controlling market relationships. More research needs to be conducted on state-to-consumer deliberate action
and its effects on psychological empowerment. In the next paragraphs, we propose avenues for future development.

**Research gaps and opportunities.** Moving from traditional consumerism toward today’s “digital consumerism” implies new aspects of consumerism in digital markets that have the potential to enhance or harm consumer well-being and empowerment. However, empirical testing linked to this line of research (laws and regulation effects on consumer empowerment) on the Internet is still needed.

Moreover, the right to information safety needs to be addressed because cybercriminalization continues to grow, exponentially threatening consumers’ personal identities and means of payment. One promising approach will be to test whether governmental response to improve the respect for and safety of consumer privacy is an efficient means to enhance consumers’ perceived empowerment in an online context. A longitudinal and comparative cross-country study could be particularly interesting.

It is sometimes naively stated that the power balance between manufacturers and consumers has changed in the latter’s favor (Moynagh and Worsley 2002; Nelson 2002) due to the will of public policy to give more power to consumers. Research on consumer empowerment published in the *Journal of Consumer Policy* and the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* documents and analyzes public policies implemented in different countries and geographical areas (e.g., England, Russia, Costa Rica, the European Union) to educate, protect, and enhance consumer discernment when confronted with multiple offers in the marketplace (Brennan and Coppack 2008; Delgadillo 2013; Scammell 2000; Wahlen and Huttunen 2012). While the research cited here has the advantage of providing descriptive analyses of public policies implemented in different countries, empirical and longitudinal approaches are still needed to measure the actual influence of these policies on consumers’ perceived empowerment.

We focus on works about firm-to-consumer deliberate actions, drawing upon literature on collaborative managerial strategies involving consumers.
Research focus 4. Firm-to-consumer deliberate action

Current research. The research area of firm-to-consumer deliberate action includes all practices that integrate consumers in collaborative systems (Cova and Cova 2009). These practices have been defined as “a strategy that firms use to give customers a sense of control over a company’s product selection process, allowing them to collectively select final products the company will later sell to the broader market” (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010, p. 65). Research efforts have been directed toward identifying a typology of empowerment managerial strategies (§1) that are (1) distinct from other upstream cocreation concepts (§2) and (2) based on different elements of the marketing mix (§3) and that (3) measure the benefits of such a strategy (§4) from both the consumer and firm perspectives.

Different types of empowering collaborative practices. Two types of strategies are distinguished (Fuchs and Schreier 2011): empowerment to create and empowerment to select. Customers may be empowered to submit ideas for new products based on their creative abilities and innovativeness (empowerment to create; see Ogawa and Piller 2006; Pitt, Berthon, Watson, and Zinkhan 2002; Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli 2005) or to vote on products that will ultimately be marketed (empowerment to select; see Fuchs and Schreier 2011). This typology of empowerment strategies is interesting; nevertheless, discussions about conceptual and operational differences between empowerment strategies and other forms of collaborative practices are limited (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000), with the exception of the conceptual distinction established between the empowerment-to-select strategy and mass customization (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010). Consequently, the scope of this work and its integration in the field of collaborative practices are restricted.

Distinguishing empowerment as a managerial practice and other collaborative strategies. We address differences between the two empowerment strategies and upstream cocreation forms identified and defined in Table 2. These include open innovation (Chesbrough 2003), co-innovation
Building on the works of Hamdi-Kidar (2013), Reniou (2009), and Schenk and Guittard (2011), we identify three necessary and sufficient criteria to distinguish operational differences between empowerment strategies and other forms of co-creation: the predominant objective assigned to the co-creation strategy, the issuer of the co-creation strategy, and the recipient of the co-creation strategy. In view of the definitions of upstream cocreation practices identified (e.g., Table 2), four distinct objectives are assigned to these practices: (1) the generation of ideas and design proposals for new products without a prior problem being identified in the existing offer, (2) the evaluation and design choice for a new product to be marketed, (3) a hybrid objective consisting of idea generation and design choices for the marketed product, and (4) solution detection related to a problem identified with an existing product offer. These co-creation practices can be initiated by companies or by consumers themselves. Finally, these practices can target three different audiences: businesses, expert consumers, and ordinary consumers. Expert consumers include both lead users and creative consumers, as distinguished by Cova (2008): the first innovate to adapt the product to their expectations, while the second innovate out of love and passion for the product. A comparison of the three criteria makes it possible to segment upstream co-creation strategies and isolate the specificity of empowerment strategies, as shown in Table 3.

**Empowering collaborative practices can be used for different marketing mix elements.**

Empowerment has been studied extensively in relation to new product development (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuchs and Schreier 2011; Fuller, Mühlbacher, Matzler and Jawecki 2009). Recent studies document managerial practices that have focused on empowerment in relation to other marketing mix variables, namely, price and communication. Some firms lead consumers to select the
price for a product, with or without specifying a minimum threshold. Two managerial practices are identified in the literature, “Name Your Own Price” and “Pay What You Want” (Dekhili and Guesquière 2014; Kim, Natter and Spann 2009). Empowerment is also mobilized to promote firms’ offerings, where consumers are involved in the creation and/or selection of theme and/or advertising media for a communication campaign (Lawrence, Fournier, and Brunel 2013; Robinson, Irmak, and Jayachandran 2012).

The benefits of empowerment strategies. The benefits of empowerment strategies for companies are well documented in the literature, although those enjoyed by consumers remain unexplored. Scholars contend that empowerment strategies are used to develop better products at a lower cost and risk of failure (Dahan and Hauser 2002; Fuchs and Schreier 2011; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000), to enhance consumer satisfaction (Pranic and Roehl 2012) and to develop a more positive brand attitude (Fuchs and Schreier 2011) with a brand perceived as more innovative (Poetz and Schreier 2012). The development of a positive image is due to a better assessment of a company’s customer orientation. In addition, customers who actively participate in empowerment campaigns by offering innovative solutions to problems raised by the company and/or participating in final product choice express greater demand for the product and are ready to engage in positive word-of-mouth promotion (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010). These beneficial effects are due, in part, to the sense of psychological ownership developed by the consumer toward the new product created or selected (Cova and Dalli 2009; Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Pierce, Kostova and Dirks 2001; Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli 2005). These benefits, however, seem to depend on industry type and context. While they are effective for consumer goods (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010) or in a service recovery context (Pranic and Roehl 2012), they are counterproductive in the luxury fashion sector. Here, user contribution backfires due to lower perceived quality compared to designer-labeled products (Fuchs, Prandelli, Schreier, and Dahl 2013). Additionally, the preference for user-driven over designer-driven firms is stronger when consumers identify with participating users in terms of gender and social group
and when user-driven firms are open to participation from all users (Dahl, Fuchs, and Schreier 2015). A conceptual framework can be developed to account for the main empirical results linked to empowerment as a managerial strategy (Figure 2).

Although academic contributions studying the effects of consumer empowerment strategies have been included in the literature, several answers remain to be explored by future research.

**Research gaps and opportunities.**

**Effectiveness of managerial empowerment practices: further developments.** Studies on empowerment as a management practice concentrate on line extension. Within an existing product line, consumers are asked to decide on new T-shirts or developments in bicycle design specifications (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuchs and Schreier 2011). This practice is not explored as part of a brand extension study in which consumers are asked to decide on the development of a market for a new product whose nature and function are different from existing brand products (Cegarra and Merunka 1993). Moreover, it is clear that studies are concerned with the effectiveness of one or more empowerment practices in isolation; they do not include relative performance analyses. In other words, the effectiveness of empowerment to select and the effectiveness of empowerment to create are assessed without comparing their performance in terms of impact on the brand, product demand, or consumer satisfaction. At a time when companies are facing pressure regarding the return on investment of marketing actions (Casenave 2013), identifying the most effective empowerment practice, depending on the efficiency measure chosen, remains an important topic. Finally, the consequences of many managerial empowerment practices have been studied (Figure 2), including product demand, attitude toward the brand, and satisfaction. A dependent variable, however, seems to have been overlooked: brand equity, defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer responses to brand marketing (Keller 1993). Brand equity is measured through brand
loyalty, brand associations, brand awareness, and perceived quality. These dimensions are mobilized to better understand the effectiveness of empowerment strategies and their return on investment.

**Methodological research opportunities.** Empirical research on empowerment as a management practice based on experimental approaches suffers from some limitations. Scholars have mainly worked on fictional empowerment situations with convenience samples (students), which often leads to artificial experiments (Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier 2010; Fuchs and Schreier 2011). In this context, another desirable avenue for research involves studying real empowerment practices developed by companies for their target consumers. This approach could also study empowerment effects on actual sales recorded by these companies rather than declarative variables such as product demand estimated by intention to purchase.

**Empowerment managerial practices and ethical issues.** The Foucauldian theoretical framework of governmentality highlights a contrast between the liberating and disciplining power inherent in marketing discourse (Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006). On the one hand, marketing practices and discourse give consumers more freedom of action and space in which they can exercise their creativity while making their skills available to companies. On the other hand, according to Foucault, marketing practices are producing a disciplining language that is conveying to consumers an illusion of power and forcing them to assume the image of the collaborative consumer who uses the skills he or she has developed to exert control over his or her choices (Cova and Cova 2009; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006; Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008). This Foucauldian theoretical framework opens the way to a more critical analysis of empowerment and to an ethical examination of these practices by emphasizing their negative and perverse consequences for the consumer. For instance, consumers’ creativity is exploited (Cova and Dalli 2009; Dujarier 2006; Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody 2008), in most cases without remuneration, and consumers who do not have skills to participate can be excluded and stigmatized (Canel-Depitre 2012).

Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford (2006) argue that the opportunity to give more choices to consumers can have a chilling effect; the consumer may ultimately be unable to choose the desired offer. Canel-
Depitre (2012) supports the thesis that empowerment is a new form of consumer liability because consumers are forced to voluntarily perform tasks on behalf of the company, inevitably generating new types of exclusion for consumers who do not have the requisite skills or energy to perform the tasks. While many conceptual articles note the negative externalities of empowerment (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006; Shankar, Cherrier, and Canniford 2006), their findings must be tested empirically. Interpretative qualitative approaches could also be considered to understand the disciplining power of the market.

**Research focus 5. Consumer-to-firm deliberate action**

**Current research.** Distinguishing and determining what types of consumer actions can be considered levers of the subjective state of empowerment is an important task in an account of consumer-to-firm deliberate actions.

**New forms of consumer empowerment on the Internet.** First, based on Hirschman’s (1970) seminal work “Exit, Voice, and Loyalty”, Kucuk (2008) identifies two new forms of consumer empowerment on the Internet: exit-based and voice-based consumer power. Tactics of consumer empowerment can occur through exit (which occurs with the refusal to consume, thus leaving the market) and voice (complaining about companies and products, thus raising the consumer’s voice in the market). Similar to this approach, we contend that consumer empowerment based on exit options occurs through economic, technological, and social sources, such as (1) consumers’ ability to switch to better offerings, enabled by Internet technology that provides price transparency, and (2) consumers’ collective anti-consumption movements and exit behavior in the market. However, in the exit option, consumers exert their power through companies only if they all leave together at the macro level. They are empowered by their ability to change modes of consumption to select the best alternatives in the market. To illustrate the above points, Kahr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer and Hoyer (2016) highlight that consumer brand sabotage can lead to empowerment if the consumer (the aggressor), who is less powerful than the brand, reverses the power gap by acting with other consumers disaffected by the
brand, making it possible to defeat it. In a similar vein, Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009) declare that technological, economic, social, and legal consumer empowerment enabled by Internet shifts lead to the creation of anti-brand sites, which is one of the most developed forms of boycott. Consumers are launching meaningful anti-consumption campaigns that have a visible market impact.

Along with Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009), Denegri-Knott (2006) has demonstrated that in an offline environment, the power balance is more favorable to producers than to consumers. However, in an online environment, consumers have strategies to gain power at the expense of producers. These strategies are (1) control over a relationship, (2) information, (3) aggregation, and (4) participation (Denegri-Knott 2006, p. 85). The first empowerment strategy relates to whether consumers will engage with producers online; for example, they can choose to block a communication from a company if it is offensive or not visit a particular website. The second strategy refers to consumers’ use of information as a means of improving decision-making skills and criticizing companies’ practices. Aggregation occurs when like-minded individuals join in online environments to initiate anti-producer activities. These kinds of practice relate to collective empowerment. Consumer participation in the creation of content about firms appears as the fourth level of empowerment, as identified by Denegri-Knott (2006). These types of practices relate to collective empowerment (Kerr, Mortimer, Dickinson, and Waller 2012).

**Consumer empowerment through agency.** From the perspective of consumer-to-firm deliberate actions, scholars of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) have closely studied the relation between consumer agency and consumer empowerment (Peñaloza and Price 1993; Poster 1992). Consumer agency describes consumers as independent actors who are conscious of their choices and who devise creative and subversive methods (Scott 1994) to resist and oppose the dominant ideological representations imposed by the market (Kozinets, Sherry, Storm, Duhachek, Nuttavuthisit, & DeBerry-Spence, 2004; Murray and Ozanne 1991; Murray, Ozanne, and Shapiro 1994; Thompson and Haytko 1997). Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) examine the strategies developed by marginalized overweight consumers to influence businesses to produce fashion products in larger sizes for them.
Through agency, consumers are empowered to challenge many inequalities and injustices (Henry 2005). These include illiteracy (Ross Adkins and Ozanne 2005) and low skill levels in the do-it-yourself sector (Moisio, Arnould, and Gentry 2013) as well as symbolic capital, defined by Bourdieu (1990) as the sum of economic, social, and cultural forms that are recognized as a legitimate basis for claiming a level of prestige, respect, and authority in a given social field (Üstüner and Thompson 2012).

Further refinement of the empirical studies discussed above and a conceptual framework proposition about consumer-to-firm levers are needed, which opens the way for research gaps and opportunities.

Research gaps and opportunities.

Collective empowerment as a consumer-side force. Developments in CCT suggest many points of connection with the political and sociology literature on empowerment (Arendt 1965; Freire 1970; Solomon 1976) and outline strategies used by consumers to unite and put pressure on the marketplace (Scarabotto and Fischer 2013). A significant body of research has focused on individual consumer empowerment strategies (Ross Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Moisio, Arnould, and Gentry 2013) without acknowledging the importance of the connection between persons. Specifically, research has begun to address ways through which collective empowerment can emerge (Kerr et al. 2012) over the Internet and its associated power sources and mechanisms. However, future studies should also develop knowledge on collective or community empowerment that allows “people to work together to improve collective well-being and links between organizations and community groups that contribute to a better quality of life” (Zimmermann 1995, p. 582). Online communities (Petrič and Petrovic 2014) have been the subject of interesting case studies on the collective identification process (Baka and Garyfallou 2011), which contributes to the development and construction of collective empowerment. In fact, better knowledge about the connection between individual and collective empowerment and how it is likely to occur—including the roles played by technological, sociocultural, and market-related development—can be particularly promising in comprehending how an individual versus a group of consumers can harm brands through anti-brand movements.
Avenues of research on empowerment linked to agency and resistance developments. There are four major limitations to consumer empowerment in agency-related works.

First, the CCT theory works presented previously did not make a sufficient contribution to the links between resistance, agency and empowerment. These eclectic works illustrate a wide variety of consumer agency situations leading to consumer empowerment. However, no integrative framework has been developed to identify marketing practices that encourage consumer agency and empowerment and the factors that constrain them (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013). Longitudinal studies are particularly well suited to document the changing nature of power exerted by consumers across time and how markets can respond to these consumers’ actions.

Second, while agency is often defined in terms of the presence or absence of choice, the examination of difference between the ways individuals express empowerment and agency in a marketing context through consumption is still in its infancy (Lindridge, Peñaloza and Worlu 2016).

Third, CCT literature (building upon the cultural power model) documents subtle forms of resistance in the market that may be quiet and discreet (Peñaloza and Price 1993). For instance, subtle forms of resistance can arise when consumers choose to consume less and set up self-control expenditures (voluntary simplicity, downshifting). Literature on consumer power and resistance that draws upon the consumer sovereignty model is mainly focused on aggressive and collective forms of resistance (e.g., boycotting and sabotage) or the consumer as a rational and dispassionate decision maker (Denegri-Knott, Zwick, and Schroeder 2006). Further research could broaden our understanding of situations that lead to higher levels of consumer empowerment by comparing overt and aggressive means of resistance with quieter ones. We could thus obtain a continuum of strategies of resistance and agency that generates different levels of empowerment.

Fourth, interpretative works have mainly studied marginalized and highly stigmatized populations (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Ross Adkins and Ozanne 2005; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). We know very little about the efficacy
of resistance on the part of less stigmatized consumers (Barnhart and Peñaloza 2013). This avenue of research appears worthwhile for upcoming investigation.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to clarify advances in the concept of consumer empowerment and to propose an integrative definition. Drawing on a multidisciplinary literature, we have highlighted the three approaches to empowerment that have been used in the different sciences reviewed, shedding light on the specificities of each context studied. Connections between power models and empowerment contributions have been clarified, providing a conceptual basis for future developments with different axiological orientations. This combination of several branches of knowledge helped us in the process of assembling and structuring the marketing literature, offering an outline of consumer empowerment approaches and levers as well as a critical reading of key contributions, as summarized in Figure 1. This framework provides an organizing view of voluntary actions and unintentional factors that can act on consumers’ subjective state of empowerment. We have suggested several desirable avenues for future research to better understand the effectiveness of managerial empowerment practices and have discussed their ethical scope, the consumer characteristics that are likely to respond positively to empowerment practices, and consumer strategies undertaken to negotiate market impositions. Perspectives relevant to further research are related to these topics in terms of both subject analysis and methodological approach. Future research is needed to further understand how macro-environmental components and technology impact perceived empowerment. In a complementary approach, longitudinal studies to document the effects of measures undertaken by public institutions to protect consumers from abusive practices related to psychological empowerment will be particularly promising. This paper also provides a synthesis of the conceptual differences that distinguish empowerment from related concepts such as resistance and agency and helps to distinguish strategies of empowerment deployed by companies from other
forms of co-creation for new product development. Given the number of potential investigations to be conducted, consumer empowerment represents a particularly promising field of research.

References


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<th>Research focus and references</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
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<td><strong>Research focus 1. Subjective state of empowerment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research focus 2. Changes in the market competitive structure and technology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cova and Pace (2006)</td>
<td>Netnography case study: <em>my Nutella The Community</em></td>
<td>Exploration of the power that a virtual brand community exerts over a brand of a mass-marketed convenience product (Nutella).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Füller, Jawecki, and Mühlbacher (2009)</td>
<td>Article based on an empirical study; N = 727 consumers who participated in a co-creation activity on the Internet</td>
<td>Computer interaction tools are an antecedent of consumers’ perceived empowerment in new product development tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison, Waite, and Hunter (2006)</td>
<td>Focus group and observation; N = 24 participants; sample of 20 websites relating to pensions</td>
<td>Internet can empower consumers only if the information provided meets consumers’ expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labrecque et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Literature review; publications in academic and managerial journals</td>
<td>Identification of four distinct consumer power sources (demand-, information-, network-, and crowd-based power) in a digital context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pires, Stanton, and Rita (2006)</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Empowerment level depends on the connectivity of electronic networks and the formation of collective purchasing groups over the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitt, Berthon, Watson, and Zinkhan (2006)</td>
<td>Exploratory approach based on case studies proposing an analysis of changes induced by the Internet</td>
<td>Exploration of changes in power relations between consumers and companies induced by the Internet: access to recent and unbiased information, consumer discussions, and group formation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Newman, and Dennis (2006)</td>
<td>Literature review; example of Tesco store</td>
<td>Consumer empowerment is triggered by stimulating marketing environments and adequate information made available by marketers in shopping places and on the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research focus 3. State-to-consumer deliberate action</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brennan and Coppack (2008)</td>
<td>Exploratory article; reports from international organizations</td>
<td>Analysis of government involvement in consumer empowerment through education, access to resources, and a UK protection policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wahlen and Huttunen (2012) Comparative historical approach of public policies in Finland and Germany Analysis of the consequences of consumer empowerment policies adopted at the European level and comparison with local policies in Germany and Finland.

**Research focus 4. Firm-to-consumer deliberate action**

- **Fuchs, Prandelli, and Schreier (2010)** Experiment N = 264 students T-Shirts Empowered consumers develop a sense of psychological ownership for products with which they are involved, leading to higher product demand.

- **Fuchs and Schreier (2011)** Two experiments; N = 190 students (study 1) and N = 92 students (study 2), three categories of products (T-shirts, furniture, bicycles) Brands that empower consumers to select or create the products to be marketed are associated with (1) increased levels of perceived customer orientation, (2) more favorable corporate attitudes, (3) and stronger behavioral intentions.

- **Fuchs et al. (2013)** Four experiments; N = 73 then N = 29 students (study 1), N = 222 (study 2), N = 705 (study 3), and N = 94 (study 4); luxury fashion products Products made by consumers in the luxury sector are perceived as being of lower quality and give users less statutory value.

- **Dahl, Fuchs, and Schreier (2015)** Three experiments; N = 244 (study 1), N = 483 (study 2), N = 216 (study 3); consumers recruited from a European market research agency and Amazon’s Mechanical Turk website; breakfast cereals, T-shirt designs Non-participating consumers prefer user-driven firms to designer firms due to their social identification with participating users.

**Research focus 5. Consumer-to-firm deliberate action**

- **Barnhart and Peñaloza (2013)** In-depth interviews conducted in 8 ECE with elderly consumers, their families, and caregivers Elderly consumers’ consumption process, as part of an interaction between elderly consumption ensemble (ECE) members, allows identity and age negotiation for the older person.

- **Moisio, Arnould, and Gentry (2013)** N = 100 informants (Tucson and Lincoln, USA) but more specific focus on 23 informants through in-depth Exploration of male identity construction through productive consumption within household do-it-yourself (DIY) activities
Appendix A. Summary of main findings on empowerment in marketing according to the five research foci

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1: N = 8</td>
<td>Ross, Adkins, and Ozanne (2005)</td>
<td>Interviews and pictures of domestic improvement projects</td>
<td>Analysis of personal, social, and situational coping strategies used by uneducated consumers to consume and satisfy their needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2: N = 22 in-depth interviews with adults with varied degrees of literacy, coupled with participant observation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 years’ netnography</td>
<td>Scaraboto and Fischer (2013)</td>
<td>Face-to-face interviews with activists</td>
<td>Investigation of consumers’ motivations to engage in activities aimed at making plus-size fashion companies extend their product lines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years’ netnography</td>
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Empowerment examined through different power theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shaw, Newholm, and Dickinson (2006)</td>
<td>N = 10 semi-structured interviews; fair-trade products in Scotland</td>
<td>Based on a Foucauldian approach to power, an inquiry into the effects of widening choices on perceived empowerment is attempted with a criticism of the sovereignty power model. Consumers who consume fair trade products view consumption as an ethical/political domain and characterize their consumption as empowering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Meaning of empowerment</td>
<td>Context, objects of study and key references</td>
<td>Key insights</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| **Political literature**            | • Greater recognition of, respect for, and involvement of satellite institutions (local empowerment)  
• Emancipation, freedom, and extended rights for individuals and groups that have greater control over their lives. | • Representation of minority groups in elections increases political participation in the United States and New Zealand (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004)  
• Example of the Communist revolution in China (Woetzel 1989)  
• Black political empowerment: access to politics for Afro-Americans (Hanks 1987)  
• Marxist theory: dehumanization, alienation and disempowerment of working class by its integration into capitalist society (Marx, 1976). | **Delegation of power:**  
• Focus is on the delegation of power of public entities to provide better-quality services to consumers and communities (Lincoln et al. 2002).  
• Incorporation by countries of electoral structures involving minorities.  
**Gain of power:**  
• At the national level, studies have documented minorities’ empowerment through revolts and revolutions.  
• Agency of historical change occurs with the class struggle (Marx 1976)  
**Subjective state:**  
• Reduction of the feeling of powerlessness for minorities and individuals. |
| **Sociological literature**         | • Better integration of individuals and reduction of inequalities for vulnerable and minority groups  
• Better integration of women and reduction of inequalities between women and men. | • The Women Centered Model (Collins 1990; Stall and Stoecker 1998): African American Women (XIX/XXth century) and British women. Central concerns: physical violence, sexuality, the workplace and family (Bookman and Morgen 1988). | **Delegation of power:**  
• Inequality development toward minorities and government initiatives to promote their social integration.  
• Affirmative action policies allow equitable access to employment for historically underrepresented groups (women and ethnic minorities) (Fiske and Eberhardt 1994).  
**Gain of power:**  
• Because the power balance between men and women is unbalanced, the focus is on women's strategies undertaken to restore power symmetry: commitment to lead institutional transformations for equal rights (volunteering, commitment to... |
| Sciences of Education | • Autonomy (i.e., one's capacity to make informed decisions) rather than increasing the learner's conformity (i.e., one's willingness to follow the instructions of those in authority).  
• Education can be used to facilitate the integration of generations into the system and bring about conformity to it, or it can lead to freedom and influence how men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire 1982).  
• Teachers and students (Griffin 1992), Illiterate (Courts 1991).  
• Example of Australia and its immigration policy before and after 1973 (Bullivant 1995).  
• Education in Brazil (Freire 1982).  

**Delegation of power:**  
• Moving from an education system meant to reproduce the ruling class culture to an educational program that is a source of empowerment for minorities.  

**Gain of power:** Not addressed  

**Subjective state:** Not addressed |

| Community psychology and mental health | • Self-help, self-control of one’s disease, autonomy.  
• Economic and social inequalities affecting vulnerable social groups have an impact on their health (i.e., immigrant women in Canada with chronic illnesses; Anderson 1996).  

**Delegation of power:**  
• Description of health organizations forced to develop collaborative practices between the patient and the caregiver.  
• Authorities’ measures to promote an empowerment model for the prevention of mental illness, the promotion of individual achievement, and a community experience (Rappaport, Swift, and Hess 1984).  

**Gain of power:** not addressed  

**Subjective state:**  
• Empowerment appears to be a process according to which individuals have more control over their lives through resource mobilization (concept of self-care) (Anderson 1996; Gibson 1991). |
Management literature

- Empowerment refers to “a process whereby an individual’s belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced” (Conger and Kanungo 1988, p. 474).
- Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu (2012) analyze employee empowerment in different cultural contexts (Turkey, Australia, etc.).

Delegation of power:

- Structural empowerment is developed to underline the benefits of horizontal and collaborative organizational systems vs. the limits of vertical and centralized management.
- Programs devised to increase employee influence in the organizational decision-making process are documented.

Gain of power: not addressed

Subjective state:

- Psychological empowerment is developed and measured. The measurement of psychological empowerment enables the study of its impact on individual productivity and organizational effectiveness.

Table 1. Overview: contributions to empowerment in selected academic disciplines and the three empowerment approaches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of strategy</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment to select</td>
<td>Fuchs and Schreier (2011)</td>
<td>Strategy by which the company asks consumers to “vote” on which products should ultimately be marketed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment to create</td>
<td>Fuchs and Schreier (2011)</td>
<td>Strategy by which the company asks consumers to submit ideas for new products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full empowerment</td>
<td>Fuchs and Schreier (2011)</td>
<td>Hybrid strategy that combines empowerment to create and empowerment to select.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open innovation</td>
<td>Chesbrough (2003)</td>
<td>Strategy initiated by a company to rely not only on its own internal knowledge and resources (such as its R&amp;D department) for innovation but also on multiple external sources (such as customer feedback, competitors, and external agencies) to drive innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Innovation</td>
<td>Von Hippel (1998)</td>
<td>Strategy initiated by the expert consumer (lead user) who proposes new product and service development without the assistance or involvement of producers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-innovation</td>
<td>Cova (2008); Le Nagard and Reniou (2013)</td>
<td>Strategy initiated by the company that involves consumers in new product design development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdsourcing</td>
<td>Schenk and Guittard (2011)</td>
<td>As part of new product development and innovation processes, the company appeals to consumers to find solutions to problems related to its offer (problem-solving orientation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open source</td>
<td>Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004); Von Hippel (2005)</td>
<td>Sharing skills and knowledge between expert consumers in an online community to develop software for which the owner grants users the right to copy, distribute, and modify.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Definitions of major upstream co-creation strategies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the co-creation strategy</th>
<th>Initiator of the co-creation strategy</th>
<th>Intended recipient of the co-creation strategy</th>
<th>Companies</th>
<th>Expert consumer</th>
<th>Ordinary consumer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation of ideas and design proposals for new products without the existence of a problem identified on the offer</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ordinary Consumer</td>
<td>Open-innovation</td>
<td>Empowerment to create Crowdsourcing as ideation (Fedorenko and Berthon 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and design choices for the new product to be marketed</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>User innovation</td>
<td>Empowerment to select</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid objective: idea generation and choice of product designs to be marketed</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Co-innovation (according to Cova 2008)</td>
<td>Co-innovation (according to Le Nagard and Reniou 2013) Total empowerment (according to Fuchs and Schreier 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detection of solutions to a given problem</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Open source</td>
<td>Crowdsourcing as problem-solving (Schenk and Guittard 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Segmentation of upstream co-creation strategies.
Figure 1. Research on consumer empowerment: an organizing framework
Figure 2. Empowerment as a collaborative managerial strategy (synthesized results)