

Chapter 14

Causal Recipes Sufficient for Identifying Market Gurus versus Mavens

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ABSTRACT

Prior research focusing on the market maven (MM) neglects to consider the possible existence of people who may represent an important source of marketplace information for MMs—the market guru (MG). A “market guru” is a consumer others frequently seek out for advice but who does not seek advice from others. In contrast to MG, a MM is a consumer who other consumers frequently ask for advice and who frequently seeks advice from others. This study raises the proposition that a greater share of MGs versus MMs are innovators, that is, individuals who rely on technical reports to become the first to adopt new products in her or his community. This study applies fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA) to distinguish between MMs and MGs using multi-year data from a national U.S. omnibus survey. The findings support several propositions distinguishing MGs from MMs. MMs evaluate themselves as great influencers of consumers, highly sensitive to normative susceptibility, and possessing superior taste. However, MGs evaluate themselves exactly the opposite from MMs on these conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer discussions with friends, family members, and acquaintances about what to buy, not to buy, and where to buy influence consumers' purchasing behavior (Chelminski & Coulter,

2006; Robertson & Kennedy, 1968; Feick & Price, 1987; Rogers, 1995). Therefore, understanding who diffuses market information and how market information flows are important for building and testing theories in consumer psychology.

Consumer behavior word-of-mouth research focuses mostly upon identifying a market in-

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formation diffuser, that is, the “market maven”. Market mavens (MMs) are “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (Feick and Price 1987).

Because of MMs’ expected influence occurs for many product and service categories, the empirical studies of market mavens traits are available in several disciplines—including consumer psychology, sociology, and marketing (Abratt, Nel, & Nezer, 1995; Belch, Krentler, & Willis-Flurry, 2005; Chelminski & Coulter, 2006; Ruvio & Shoham, 2007). The findings from these studies indicate that as important disseminators of general market knowledge, MMs are heavy information-seekers and want to possess market information to diffuse and generate social conversation (Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson 2004). They tend to feel obligations with others involving marketplace issues and also to represent themselves to be important sources of general market information to other consumers (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Feick & Price, 1987).

Prior research focuses on maven’s characteristics, however, neglects another potentially important segment of information diffusers, who may represent an important source of marketplace information to other consumers but do not seek out advice from other consumers and not involved in the marketplace socially. The study here identifies these consumers as “market gurus” (MGs).

In this study a “marketing guru” is a consumer others frequently seek out for advice but who does not seek advice from others. This definition appears to be the first to introduce “market guru” into the marketing and consumer research literatures. Developing theory about the antecedents associating with being a MG and confirming the existence of MGs among consumers were objectives for the present study. MMs’ characteristics include possession of high amounts of market information; perform extensive search activities, and are female more often than male (Abratt, et

al. 1995; Cal, 2004). These characteristics may apply only to MMs and not to MGs. MGs may be more likely to possess high amounts of technical versus market information; perform limited search activity, and may be males more than females.

Goldsmith, Flynn, and Goldsmith (2003) argue that MMs are likely to be distinct from other influencers, that is, innovators. Boone (1970) defines consumer innovators as persons who make innovative purchases without having to rely upon the experience of others. Although consumer innovators are likely to contribute to other consumers’ needs about market information and likely to take new product risk (Robertson and Kennedy, 1968), they do not seek-out the advice of people regarding their purchasing. This characteristic represents MGs not seeking whereas MMs frequently seek other consumer to get and give advice.

However, the distinguishable causal recipes for MMs and MGs are ill-defined and heretofore are untested. Therefore this study examines the “distinguishability” of antecedent conditions for MGs versus MMs.

To identify distinguishable antecedent conditions of MGs versus MGs, this study uses a configurational method, fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA) (Ragin, 2000). The main reason to applying fs/QCA is that the method permits analyses of complex configurations of causal conditions as explanations of an outcome condition—and does so without assuming symmetric relationships among antecedents and outcomes. Unlike statistical methods that rely on matrix algebra, relying on Boolean algebra QCA methods explicitly consider alternative complex antecedent statements that are likely to associate with an outcome condition, that is, QCA calls attention to the frequent reality that more than one route (i.e., path) is sufficient and no one path is necessary to cause an outcome (see Ragin 1997).

Heretofore, the majority of studies examining maven’s characteristic used regression based models (Engelland, Hopkins, & Larson 2001; Goldsmith, Clark, & Goldsmith 2006). Whereas

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