

## **Consumer Alienation and Attitudes toward Consumer Free Riding**

By DAVID J. BURNS\*

*Given that consumer free riding involves a relatively high level of interaction with the marketplace, it is likely that individuals' attitudes toward consumer free riding are related to degree to which they feel alienated from the marketplace. Such a relationship was observed to exist. Through further examination, attitudes toward consumer free riding appear to originate from two of the three alienation factors, suggesting that individuals' attitudes toward consumer free-riding arise from perceptions of external marketplace issues, not from internal issues. The findings suggest that consumers' attitudes toward free riding may arise from their experiences in the marketplace.*

**Keywords:** Consumer Alienation, Retailing, Consumer Free Riding

JEL Classification: M39

### **I. Introduction**

When consumers view the retail marketplace, one of the key qualities they observe is change. New retail concepts are continually forming as existing concepts go through a seemingly endless cycle of renewal. As a consequence of the change occurring in the marketplace, consumers possess an ever-increasing number of shopping alternatives from which to choose, often finding that they can choose to patronize retailers offering products bundled with a vast array of different service offerings (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2009). Within this setting, when customers are considering purchasing from a specific product category, they often have the ability to patronize retailers offering the array of accompanying services desired (while paying only for the services desired).

Many of the services offered by full-service retailers, however, are pre-purchase services. Services such as providing product information, selection assistance, and product trials are offered pre-purchase, before a consumer chooses to purchase the product (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2009; Sewell & Bodkin, 2009). Pre-purchase services are offered to consumers with no upfront charges—the expenses of providing the services are included in the price of the product (Carlton & Chevalier, 2001). The possibility exists, therefore, for consumers to partake in the pre-purchase services offered by full-service retailers without expense and subsequently make actual purchases from low-price, limited-service competitors (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2009). This is the essence of consumer free riding (Singley & Williams, 1995). Consumer free riding occurs when consumers partake in and receive the benefits of prepurchase services offered by full-service retailers without personally bearing the costs of providing the services (Singley & Howell, 1989; Gerstner & Holthausen, 1986). In this scenario, full-service retailers unintentionally support their low-price, limited-service competition at their own expense. Full-service retailers find that, in

---

\*Department of Marketing, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45207. (Email: burnsd@xavier.edu), Phone: (513) 745-3956, Fax: (513) 745-3692.

their implicit support for their competition, their long-term survival may be at stake (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2009). Increased understanding of consumer free riding, therefore, may provide full-service retailers with a better understanding of how to compete against their limited-service competition.

Consumer free riding involves significant involvement in the marketplace. Consumers engaging in consumer free riding must become aware of the prices and services offered by multiple retailers. Consumers, therefore, must interact with a minimum of two, but more likely, several retailers before a purchase is actually made to be able to engage in consumer free riding. Individuals who participate in consumer free riding, therefore, must interact with a larger number of retailers than individuals who do not. To be involved in consumer free riding, individuals must not only interact with retailers offering a specific desired set of service offerings but also interact with retailers offering differing sets of service offerings.

Some individuals, however, feel alienated from the marketplace (Allison, 1978). Such alienation from the marketplace, or consumer alienation, involves feelings that fulfillment cannot be found in the marketplace (Allison, 1978). Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace, therefore, can be expected to limit their interaction with the marketplace (Lambert 1980). Since consumer free riding requires increased interaction with the marketplace, individuals who feel more alienated from the marketplace can be expected to hold less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding. On the other hand, individuals who feel relatively little alienation from the marketplace are more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding. The relationship between consumer alienation and attitudes toward consumer free riding, however, has received minimal research attention and is the focus of this study. Specifically, the relationship between individuals' perceptions of consumer free riding and the extent of their alienation from the marketplace is examined. Previous research seems to suggest that a negative relationship may exist between attitudes toward consumer free riding and consumer alienation. This study, therefore, will test the hypothesis that individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace will have less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding than those who feel less alienated from the marketplace. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: consumer free riding is explored in Part II, consumer alienation is examined in Part III, the hypothesis is developed in Part IV, the methodology is presented in Part V, and the results are reported and discussed in Part VI and Part VII.

## II. Consumer Free Riding

The activity of free riding has received a significant amount of attention in the discipline of economics. In this sense, free riding involves receiving the benefits of goods or services, primarily collective or public goods, without making a payment or enduring a sacrifice (Devlin-Foltz & Lim, 2008). Collective or public goods are different from private goods—they are goods which exist only in joint supply, meaning that in making these goods available to one, they become available to all (Barney & Zhang, 2008). Hence, when they are made available, collective or public goods are available to all—to those who have paid for their production and to those who have not (Devlin-Foltz & Lim, 2008; Sell, 1988). This situation is also referred to as “nonexclusivity of consumption” (Hampton, 1987). Since whether one chooses to pay does not affect whether one has access to these goods, there is an obvious incentive for individuals not to

pay for the production of these goods (Hampton, 1987; Kim & Walker, 1984). Indeed, it has been argued that nonpayment is the only rational course of action (Sell, 1988).

Some (e. g., Singley & Williams, 1995; van Baal & Dach, 2005) argue that the pre-purchase services offered by retailers, particularly those offered by full-service retailers, are similar in kind to collective or public goods. Pre-purchase services, such as the sharing of information by informed salespeople and product demonstrations, are offered by full-service retailers to consumers to aid them in coming to purchase resolution and to help them make an informed product choice. Pre-purchase services, however, are typically offered without charge and before any purchase commitment is made (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2009). The receiving of prepurchase services by consumers then, generally does not obligate them to make a purchase (van Baal & Dach, 2005). Consumers, therefore, often have the ability to partake in the pre-purchase services offered by full-service retailers, but subsequently choose to make the ultimate purchase elsewhere, typically at a lower-price, limited-service retailer (Carlton & Chevalier, 2001; Huang, Lurie & Mitra 2009). Specifically, consumer free riding can be defined as “customers using information and services from a full-service retail store to allow for later purchase from limited-service stores” (Singley & Williams, 1995, p. 64). Consequently, because of the effects of consumer free riding, full-service retailers find that they are offering costly pre-purchase services but also find that sometimes they are providing those services with no direct benefit. In fact, full-service retailers can find that they are actually adding to the sales of their lower-price, limited-service competitors (Boyd, 1997; van Baal & Dach, 2005). Huang, Lurie, and Mitra (2009) suggest that the incidence of consumer free riding is increasing.

Although consumer free riding appears to negatively affect full-service retailers, they often possess little ability to exclude non-buyers from partaking in pre-purchase services (Carlton & Chevalier, 2001; Wu, Ray, Geng & Whinston, 2004). Retail salespersons at full-service retailers, for instance, are usually unable to correctly predict a customer’s potential to engage in consumer free riding (Singley & Williams, 1995). The risk of a retailer making a potential incorrect prediction can have devastating effects. In making a “false positive” prediction (incorrectly assuming that a consumer is engaging in consumer free riding activity resulting in the withholding of pre-purchase services), for instance, a retailer runs the risk of alienating prospective consumers who may subsequently choose never to consider purchasing from the retailer again.

Consumer free riding is an overt choice of individuals—it involves the choice to interact with numerous retailers (at least one, but possibly several full-service retailers and at least one lower-price, limited-service retailer). Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace, however, can be expected to attempt to withdraw or minimize their contact with the marketplace. These individuals, therefore, can logically be expected not to possess favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding.

### III. Consumer Alienation

Feelings of alienation appear to be a growing societal phenomenon. Alienation involves individuals’ feelings of separation or estrangement from a social structure or social institution (Johnson, 1996; Seeman, 1959)—it involves the feelings that interactions with the social structure or social institution in question will be unpleasant and unfavorable (Krishnan, Bhatnagar & Manchanda, 2009). Since it consists of feelings toward particular social structures or institutions, alienation is not a universal construct; instead, alienation is situation-specific (Allison, 1978). In response, Clark (1959) suggests that alienation can only be examined within the domain of a

specific social system. Consequently, alienation has been examined from a number of contexts. Hirschfield, Feild, and Bedeian (2000) and Akkirman and Harris (2005), for instance, examined alienation within the workplace. Gaski and Ray (2004) examined alienation within the distribution channel. Southwell (2003) and Saito (2008) examined alienation from the political process. Kennedy and Drebing (2002) and Exline, Yali and Lobel (1999) examined alienation within the context of religion. Çeçen (2006) and Boyle (2007) examined alienation from the education system. Finally, Johnson (1996) and Lambert (1980) among others have examined alienation in the context of consumption and the marketplace. Although consumer alienation seems to be timely subject, surprisingly little recent attention has been given to consumer alienation (Krishnan, Bhatnagar & Manchanda, 2009).

Johnson (1973) believes that consumer alienation consists of individuals' failure to find fulfillment in the offerings of the marketplace. Krishnan, Bhatnagar, and Manchanda (2009) observed that consumer alienation appears to be related to the amount of power individuals perceive they possess in the marketplace. After observing that alienation explains a sizable proportion of the variance observed in consumer dissatisfaction, Lambert concludes "alienation is a potentially fruitful area for further explorations aimed at attempting to gain better insights into and understanding of the factors that feed discontentment and consumerism" (1981, p. 82).

Individuals can be expected to desire to avoid social structures or institutions from which they feel alienated. The marketplace is no exception. Although most cannot completely remove themselves from interacting in the marketplace, it is logical to expect that individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace will desire to minimize their interactions with it. Lambert (1980), for instance, suggests that greater consumer alienation may lead to marketplace disengagement behavior. Similarly, Bearden and Mason (1983) observed that highly alienated individuals possess less confidence in their ability to evaluate products, likely lessening the utility that such individuals believe they can obtain from additional involvement in the marketplace resulting from search activities.

Hilger (1973) observed that the degree of consumer alienation experienced by individuals appears to affect their opinions of activities related to consumption, such as degree of belief in government intervention into the marketplace. Individuals experiencing consumer alienation were observed to believe that the government needs to be more involved in the marketplace. If the government is involved to greater extent in the marketplace, consumers may not need to spend as much time in the marketplace comparing market offerings and prices. Some likely outcomes of increased involvement by the government in the marketplace include a decreased level of choice in the marketplace and an increased feeling of assurance in the products available. Both of these outcomes likely lead to a decreased need for involvement in the marketplace.

Lambert (1981) examined the relationship between consumer alienation and feelings of being disgruntled with the marketplace. He observed the existence of a strong positive relationship; individuals with stronger feelings of alienation are more likely to be disgruntled with the marketplace. Similarly, Vitell and Paolillo (2003) observed that individuals with stronger feelings of consumer alienation possess poorer opinions of the ethics held by businesses. Logically, individuals will avoid situations with which they associate increased disgruntlement and will similarly hold less favorable attitudes toward activities which require increased interaction with situations with which they associate increased disgruntlement (Lambert, 1980).

The research suggests, therefore, that feelings of consumer alienation may be negatively related to consumer free riding. A desire to minimize the interaction in the marketplace can logically be expected to be associated with less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding.

Since consumer free riding involves increased contact with the marketplace, individuals who are more alienated from the marketplace can be expected to hold relatively unfavorable attitudes toward consumer free riding. Similarly, individuals who are less alienated from the marketplace can be expected to possess more favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding.

#### *A. Contrary Explanation*

Although theory suggests the existence of a negative relationship between attitude toward consumer free riding and consumer alienation (the relationship which will be examined in this study), the findings of Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) raise some questions. Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) observed a negative relationship between attitude toward business in general (which they view as being synonymous with consumer alienation) and the resulting amount of search activity of individuals in a recent automobile purchase. This finding would seem to indicate that increased consumer alienation may lead to increased consumer search activity and likewise increased involvement in the marketplace. The rationale for this seemingly contrary assertion is that alienation from the marketplace will breed mistrust with the marketplace, leading individuals to desire to seek for more information before making purchase decisions (Lambert & Kniffen, 1975). This explanation suggests that the relationship between attitudes toward consumer free riding and consumer alienation may be opposite of that which theory suggests.

This apparent confusion over the relationship between attitudes toward consumer free riding and consumer alienation arises from confusion over the nature of consumer alienation. As mentioned above, Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) equate consumer alienation with one's attitude toward business, assuming that poor attitudes toward business lead to greater consumer alienation. Bearden and Mason (1983) observed such a relationship between consumer alienation and attitude toward business, but the strength of the relationship was insufficient to conclude that the constructs are synonymous. Furthermore, the scale used by Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) to measure attitude toward business was comprised of only two disparate items (one addressing ethics and one addressing "providing good products"). Since Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) did not directly examine consumer alienation, the interpretation of their findings as actually pertaining to consumer alienation must be viewed as suspect.

### **IV. The Study**

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between individuals' alienation from the marketplace (consumer alienation) and their attitudes toward consumer free riding. Theory suggests that individuals will desire to avoid social structures or institutions from which they feel alienated. Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace, therefore, can be expected to avoid the marketplace where possible. Since engaging in consumer free riding necessitates increased interaction with the marketplace, individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace can be expected to hold less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding than individuals who feel less alienation from the marketplace. Hence, the following hypothesis seems appropriate.

**H:** Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace will have less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding than those who feel less alienated from the marketplace. In other words, a negative relationship is hypothesized to exist between individuals' alienation from the marketplace (consumer alienation) and their attitudes toward consumer free riding.

Beardon, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1983) suggest that consumer alienation is comprised of three components or factors: 1) business ethics, or beliefs about the ethical behavior of business, 2) informed choice, or opinions about the usefulness of more information, and 3) personal norm, or attitudes about one's personal norms about consumption. The hypothesized relationship between consumer alienation and consumer free riding extends to each of the consumer alienation factors—each of the factors of consumer alienation is hypothesized to be negatively related to attitudes toward consumer free riding. (The model tested is placed in Figure 1).

## V. Methodology

### *A. Sample*

The sample was a convenience sample consisting of undergraduate business students attending a medium-sized state university located in the Midwest. As a commuter campus, nearly all of the students were employed with a majority of them employed full-time. The sample was chronologically and educationally homogeneous. Although Shuptrine, Pruden, and Longman (1977) suggest that consumer alienation is affected little by age or income, Allison (1978), Johnson (1995), and Lambert (1981) reported observing age effects in samples comprised of individuals from multiple generations. Furthermore, Neal and Groat (1974) observed that alienation decreases with education. The sample controls for any age or education effects which may exist.

The questionnaire was administered anonymously during class settings in marketing courses. In no instance were the issues of consumer free riding or consumer alienation discussed in class before or after the administration of the instrument. The resulting sample consisted of 1,008 usable responses. No non-response was noted.

### *B. Questionnaire*

The questionnaire included scales to measure consumer alienation and attitudes toward consumer free riding.

Little empirical research was conducted on consumer alienation until the 1970s. In one of the initial studies, Pruden, and Longman (1972) examined consumer alienation based on a generic measure of alienation. In addition to a lack of a context-dependent measure of alienation (the need of which was discussed earlier), methodological problems limit the applicability of the findings (Landon & Lundstrom, 1973). Similarly, Hilger (1973) attempted to examine consumer alienation using items acquired from existing generic alienation measures. Very limited efforts were made to examine the validity of the measure.

More recently, Allison (1978) developed a scale to explicitly measure consumer alienation (see Table 1). The scale was developed through a multi-stage process to ensure the development of a valid, reliable instrument. Allison (1978) began by conceptualizing consumer alienation on

the basis of four constructs—powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. Marketplace powerlessness consists of feelings that one possesses little control in the market and is unable to influence the behavior of businesses. Normlessness is the belief that businesses act consistent with only their needs and, as a result, cannot be trusted. Isolation involves feelings of separation from the institutions and practices of a market economy. Finally, self-estrangement is characterized by an inability to identify with the practices and behavior expected from one fulfilling the role of a consumer.

An initial pool of 115 items was generated with each item developed to reflect a specific variant of consumer alienation. A panel of 35 judges reviewed each item on whether it would likely differentiate between an alienated and non-alienated consumer and assigned each item to the appropriate subscale (powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, or self-estrangement). As a result, the pool was reduced to 50 items.

The 50 items were then factor analyzed based on a quota sample of 368 individuals. The expected four-factor structure did not hold, so consumer alienation was re-conceptualized as an unidimensional construct and redefined as “feelings of separation from the norms and values of the marketplace. Such a state includes a lack of acceptance of or identification with market institutions, practices, and outputs as well as feelings of separation from self when one is involved in the consumption role” (Allison, 1978, p. 570). The final 35-item scale was observed to possess high reliability (.8802) and high test-retest reliability attesting to its temporal stability (.75 with a three-week time interval). Allison (1978) also provides evidence of construct validity.

Further analysis of the scale by Beardon, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1983) suggests that the scale is actually comprised of three factors, representing 1) business ethics, or beliefs about the ethical behavior of business, 2) informed choice, or opinions about the usefulness of more information, and 3) personal norm, or attitudes about one’s personal norms about consumption. The length of the scale was also reduced to 22 items. Further validity testing of the shortened measure by Beardon, Lichtenstein, and Teel (1983) lends additional support to the validity of the scale.

The questionnaire used in the study also included a six-item scale developed to measure attitudes toward consumer free riding (Burns 2007) (see Table 2). It is the only known scale that has been developed to measure attitudes toward consumer free riding. Although the scale has not received the same degree of validation as the consumer alienation scale, the attitude toward consumer free riding scale possesses considerable face validity. Students were asked to respond to each question using a five-point scale, with the points representing (1) “Strongly Disagree,” (2) “Disagree,” (3) “Neutral,” (4) “Agree,” and (5) “Strongly Agree.” After accounting for reversed-scored items, scores were added and divided by six for a final score.

Attitudes toward consumer free riding were examined instead of actual consumer free riding because measuring attitudes will provide a more valid and reliable measure. Individuals’ actual consumer free riding can be expected to be guided by their attitudes toward consumer free riding. However, situational factors (e.g., product need, available resources, etc.) will also affect consumer riding. For instance, an individual may have favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding and may frequently engage in consumer free riding, but may find that he or she does not engage in free riding for long periods of time. This may be a frequent phenomenon since an individual may be making only routine replenishment purchases for a period of time due to a lack of a need for other purchases or due to a lack of financial resources.

## VI. Results

Correlational results (using SPSS) are presented in Table 3. A significant (at the .05 level) negative relationship was observed between consumer alienation and attitudes toward consumer free riding consistent with the Hypothesis. Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace were observed to hold less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding than those who feel less alienated from the marketplace. The Hypothesis, therefore, appears to be supported.

When the factors of consumer alienation are examined, similar significant (at the .05 level) relationships were observed for two of the three factors—business ethics and informed choice. A significant relationship, however, was not observed for the third factor—personal norm. Examination of the factors of consumer alienation, therefore, suggests that actually only partial support is observed for the Hypothesis.

## VII. Discussion

The existence of a negative relationship between consumer alienation and attitudes toward consumer free riding was partially supported. A significant supporting relationship was observed between the overall measure of consumer alienation and consumer free riding. The findings support the hypothesis that individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace will have less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding than those who feel less alienated from the marketplace. Consistent with the literature review, the results are consistent with the contention that individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace will tend to hold less favorable opinions of activities, such as consumer free riding, which require increased participation in the marketplace.

Since individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace seem to hold less favorable opinions of consumer free riding, it suggests that such individuals may be less likely to participate in the marketplace. Although the relationship observed was relatively weak, the results have important ramifications for retailers. Since most consumer purchases are of a discretionary nature, the extent of one's participation in the marketplace can be expected to directly relate to the number of purchases made—individuals who participate less in the marketplace can be expected to be exposed to fewer products and, consequently, make fewer purchases. On the other hand, the less favorable attitudes toward consumer free riding by individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace may be good news for full-service retailers since these consumers may be less likely to participate in that activity. Consequently, they are less likely to visit or interact with lower-priced, limited-service retailers.

Significant supporting relationships, however, were observed for only the first two factors of consumer alienation (business ethics and informed choice), not for the third factor (personal norm). Each will be discussed.

The business ethics factor relates to individuals' assessment of the ethics employed by businesses. Individuals who perceive that the ethics employed by businesses are relatively poor, were found to hold less favorable attitudes of consumer free riding than individuals who perceive that the ethics employed by businesses are relatively high. This finding implies that individuals who perceive that lower ethics are employed by businesses may desire to minimize their contact with those businesses. It should be noted that these findings do not support the contentions of Anderson, Engledow, and Becker (1979) who suggested that individuals who hold less favorable attitudes toward business are more involved in search activity such as that which would be a part of consumer free riding.



The informed-choice factor relates to whether individuals perceive that they possess adequate information to make an informed choice. Individuals who perceive that they do not possess adequate information to make informed choices in the marketplace were found to hold less favorable attitudes of consumer free riding than individuals who perceive that they possess adequate information. It appears that the perception of a lack of adequate information is not due to a lack of search activity, but may instead arise from a perception that the information is not readily available, consistent with feelings of alienation from the marketplace. If individuals perceive that the information is not readily available, there is no need for them to attempt to obtain it through such means as consumer free riding.

A significant relationship was not observed for the last factor, personal norm, or the attitudes about one's personal norms about consumption. Individuals' attitudes toward consumption do not appear to affect attitudes toward consumer free riding. This finding is surprising. As discussed earlier, consumer alienation consists of individuals' failure to find fulfillment in the offerings of the marketplace. Of the consumer alienation factors, the personal norm factor seems most to represent the essence of consumer alienation. Consequently, this finding is difficult to interpret.

One's attitudes toward consumer free riding, therefore, appear to be affected by one's perceptual attitudes of external issues (assessment of the ethics employed by business) and perceptions of the adequacy of information of external issues (adequate information to make an informed choice), but not with perceptions of internal issues (individuals' attitudes toward consumption). Attitudes toward consumer free riding may originate, therefore, in individuals' perceptions of external issues, not from internal issues.

#### *A. Implications for Future Research*

The results raise interesting questions for future research. As just mentioned, the lack of a significant relationship with the internally focused personal norm factor, but the existence of significant relationships with the externally focused business ethics and informed-choice factors, would seem to be consistent with the idea that attitudes toward consumer free riding may be the result of past negative experiences in the marketplace, as opposed to internal factors. If this is true, consumers' attitudes toward consumer free riding may be affected or determined in part by their past experience with retailers, implying that retailers may play a role in the development of consumers' attitudes toward free riding. Similarly, it would appear that individuals' personal attitudes toward consumption may not be determined by their past experience with retailers. Future research is necessary to explore these issues.

An alternative explanation for the findings observed may be that individuals' attitudes toward consumer free riding may have their origins in the ways which individuals respond or react to negative marketplace occurrences as opposed to the negative occurrences themselves. Since all individuals likely experience negative situations in the marketplace, how consumers react to these occurrences may be the critical issue. Specifically, some individuals may attribute negative situations in the marketplace internally, leading to alienation and a desire to withdraw from the marketplace. Others, however, may attribute negative situations in the marketplace externally, leading to minimal effects on future marketplace activities resulting in continued marketplace engagement, increasing the likelihood of consumer free riding activity. Research into the attributions by consumers about negative situations in the marketplace and their relationship with consumer alienation seems to be another appropriate area for future research.

### *B. Implications for Practitioners*

The results suggest that consumers' attitudes toward free riding activity may be affected directly or indirectly by retailers and the nature of their interactions with consumers. For many retailers, especially those who offer extensive arrays of pre-purchase services, consumer free riding is generally viewed negatively since it can be expected to directly add additional costs and lead to decreased sales. However, it would appear that for some full-service retailers, consumer alienation may not be all that bad. If these retailers possess a loyal clientele, for instance, they may not be easily enticed away by other retailers, including those offering lower prices.

Having as a consumer base, those who feel alienated from the marketplace, however, does not seem optimal either. Individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace can be expected to attempt to minimize their interaction with the marketplace. These customers, then, can be expected to shop only when necessary and for only those purchases deemed necessary. It is unlikely, therefore, that these customers will reach their spending potential.

One possible strategy for high-service retailers, however, may be to work on developing an aura of trust with individuals who feel alienated from the marketplace. If a high level of trust can be built, this group of consumers may prove to be highly store loyal—they may not possess the faith or trust to shop anywhere else. Developing a high level of trust can also be expected to possibly overcome some of the customers' hesitations of engaging in the marketplace and also lead to a possible loyal and lucrative customer base. Building such a level of trust, however, is not an easy undertaking. The expense of building trust with alienated consumers, though, may ultimately prove to be a wise investment.

### *C. Conclusion*

If corroborated by additional research, the findings suggest that consumer alienation does play a role in the attitudes that individuals have toward consumer free riding. The findings suggest, however, that consumers' attitudes toward consumer free riding may arise at least in part from their experiences in the marketplace. If true, the findings suggest a potential market for high-service retailers among alienated individuals. The findings also suggest that retailers may play a role in the development of consumer alienation, at least that part of consumer alienation that is related to consumer free riding.

### *D. Limitations*

The study possesses a number of shortcomings which limit the generalizability of its findings and may also negatively affect the validity of the findings. First, given the relatively youthful age of the sample, the experience of the sample in the marketplace is limited. Second, in order to control for demographic factors, the sample is relatively homogeneous. Third, attitudes toward consumer free riding activity were examined instead of actual consumer free riding activity. Fourth, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study, cause and effect, especially regarding the origin of consumer alienation, cannot unequivocally be established. Finally, the consumer free riding scale has not been subject to validity testing to the extent that the consumer alienation scale has.

**Table 1: Consumer Alienation Scale**

1. Most companies are responsive to the demands of the consumer.\* (BE)
2. Unethical practices are widespread throughout business. (BE)
3. Stores do not care why people buy their products just as long as they make a profit. (BE)
4. Harmful characteristics of a product are often kept from the consumer. (BE)
5. I tend to spend more than I should just to impress my friends with how much I have.\* (PN)
6. Even with so much advertising, it is difficult to know what brand is best. (IC)
7. It is difficult to identify with current trends and fads in fashion. (IC)
8. I often feel guilty for buying so many unnecessary products. (PN)
9. A product will usually break down as soon as the warranty is up. (BE)
10. Business is responsible for unnecessarily depleting our natural resources. (BE)
11. It is difficult to identify with business practices today. (BE)
12. One must be willing to tolerate poor service from most stores. (PN)
13. It is difficult to know what store has the best buy. (BE)
14. Business' prime objective is to make money rather than satisfy the customer. (BE)
15. After making a purchase, I often find myself wondering "why." (PN)
16. It is hard to understand why some brands are twice as expensive as others. (IC)
17. It is not unusual to find out that business has lied to the public. (BE)
18. Buying beyond one's means is justifiable through the use of credit. (PN)
19. Products are designed to wear out long before they should. (BE)
20. Most claims of product quality are true.\* (BE)
21. The wide variety of competing products makes intelligent buying decisions more difficult. (IC)
22. Advertisements usually present a true picture of the product.\* (BE)

Consumer Alienation Factors: BE – Business ethics  
 IC – Informed choice  
 PN – Personal norm

\* Reverse-scored

(from Allison 1978, pp. 573-574)

**Table 2: Attitude toward Consumer Free-Riding Scale**

1. Sales assistance should be available to all potential customers, regardless of whether they actually buy or not.
2. Customers should only visit the retailers from which they plan to purchase.\*
3. A salesperson's time should not be wasted on non-buying customers.\*
4. It is unethical to receive sales assistance and not buy from that salesperson.\*
5. Wise customers will attempt to gather information from numerous stores and salespeople before making a purchase.
6. After spending time with a potential customer, a salesperson has the right to expect that customer will purchase the product.\*

\* Reverse-scored

(from Burns 2007, p. 48)

**Table 3: Correlational Results**

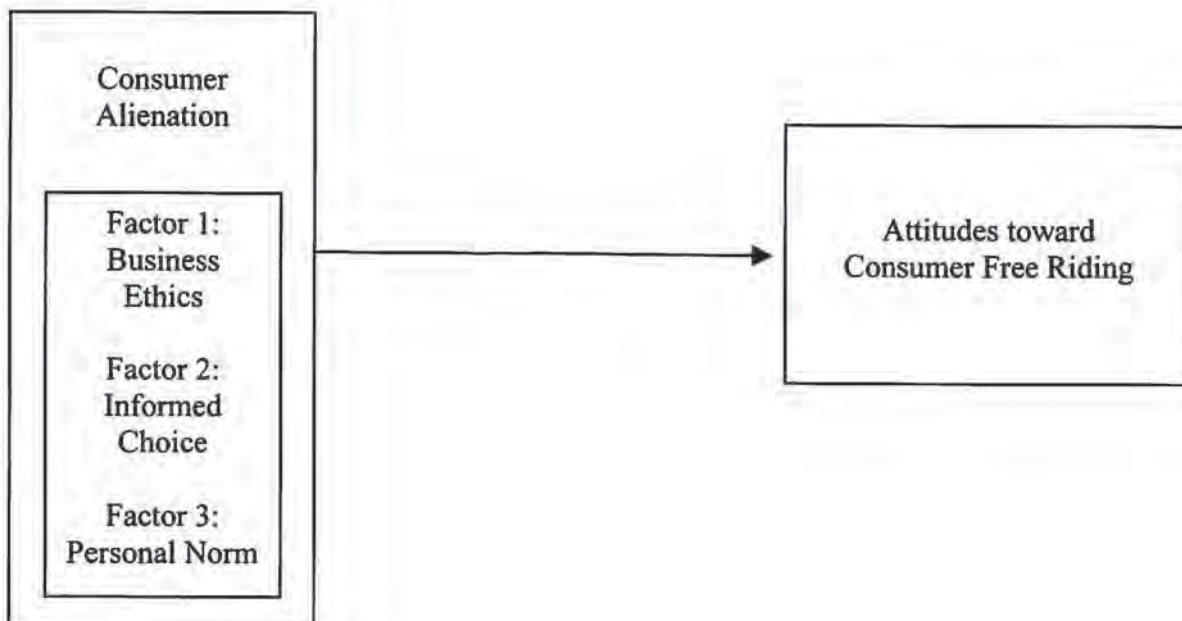
<u>Consumer Alienation</u>	<u>Consumer Free Riding</u>	
	Correlation	Significance
	-.116	.000*

\* p < .01

<u>Consumer Alienation Factors</u>		<u>Consumer Free Riding</u>	
		Correlation	Significance
	Business Ethics	-.200	.000*
	Informed Choice	-.119	.000*
	Personal Norm	-.044	.163

\* p < .01

**Figure 1: Model Tested**



## References

- Akkirman, A. D., and D. L. Harris.** 2005. "Organizational Communication Satisfaction in the Virtual Workplace." *Journal of Management Development*, 24: 397-409.
- Allison, N. K.** 1978. "A Psychometric Development of a Test for Consumer Alienation from the Marketplace." *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15: 565-575.
- Anderson, R. D., J. L. Engledow, and H. Becker.** 1979. "Evaluating the Relationships Among Attitudes Toward Business, Product Satisfaction, Experience, and Search Effort." *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16: 394-400.
- Barney, J. B., and S. Zhang.** 2008. "Collective Goods, Free Riding and Country Brands: The Chinese Experience." *Management & Organization Review*, 4: 211-223.
- Beardon, W. O., D. R. Lichtenstein, and J. E. Teel.** 1983. "Reassessment of the Dimensionality, Internal Consistency, and Validity of the Consumer Alienation Scale." In *1985 American Marketing Association Summer Educators' Conference Proceeding*, eds. P. E. Murphy, et al., 35-40. Chicago IL: American Marketing Association.
- Bearden, W. O., and J. B. Mason.** 1983. "Empirical Evidence on Marketplace Alienation." *Journal of Macromarketing*, 3: 6-20.
- Boyd, D. W.** 1997. "From 'mom' and 'pop' to Walmart: The Impact of the Consumer Goods Pricing Act of 1975 on the Retail Sector in the United States." *Journal of Economic Issues*, 31: 223-232.
- Boyle, C.** 2007. "Review of Breaking the Cycle of Educational Alienation: A Multi-professional Approach." *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23: 196-197.
- Burns, D. J.** 2007. "Marketplace Interaction Styles and Consumer Free-riding: The Relationship between Assertiveness and Aggressiveness and Attitudes toward Consumer Free Riding." *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 48: 35-48.
- Carlton, D. W., and J. A. Chevalier.** 2001. "Free Riding and Sales Strategies for the Internet." *Journal of Industrial Economics*, 49: 441-461.
- Çeçen, A. R.** 2006. "School Alienation: Gender, Socio-economic Status and Anger in High School Adolescents." *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 6: 721-726.
- Clark, J. P.** 1959. "Measuring Alienation within a Social System." *American Sociological Review*, 24: 849-852.
- Devlin-Foltz, Z., and K. Lim.** 2008. "Responsibility to Punish: Discouraging Free-riders in Public Goods Games." *Atlantic Economic Journal*, 36: 505-518.
- Dulleck, U., and R. Kerschbamer.** 2009. "Experts vs. Discounters: Consumer Free-riding and Experts Withholding Advice in Markets for Credence Goods." *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 27: 15-23.
- Exline, J. J., A. M. Yali, and M. Lobel.** 1999. "When God Disappoints: Difficulty Forgiving God and its Role in Negative Emotion." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 4: 365-379.
- Gaski, J. F., and N. M. Ray.** 2004. "Alienation in the Distribution Channel: Conceptualization, Measurement, and Initial Theory Testing." *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 34: 158-200.
- Gerstner, E., and D. Holthausen.** 1986. "Profitable Pricing when Market Segments Overlap." *Marketing Science*, 5: 55-69.
- Hampton, J.** 1987. "Free-rider Problems in the Production of Collective Goods." *Economics and Philosophy*, 3: 245-273.

- Hilger, M. T.** 1973. "An Evaluation of Various Aspects of Alienation from the Marketplace." Master's thesis. University of Texas.
- Hirschfeld, R. R., H. S. Feild, and A. G. Bedeian.** 2000. "Work Alienation as an Individual-difference Construct for Predicting Workplace Adjustment: A Test in Two Samples." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 30: 1880-1902.
- Johnson, E. B.** 1995. "Cognitive Age: A Key to Understanding Consumer Alienation in the Mature Market." *Mid-Atlantic Journal of Business*, 31: 259-271.
- Johnson, E. B.** 1996. "Cognitive Age: Understanding Consumer Alienation in the Mature Market." *Review of Business*, 17: 35-40.
- Johnson, F.** 1973. "Alienation: Concept, Term and Word." In *Alienation*, ed. F. Johnson, 27-53. New York: Seminar Press.
- Kennedy, P., and C. E. Drebing.** 2002. "Abuse and Religious Experience: A Study of Religiously Committed Evangelical Adults." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 5: 225-237.
- Kim, O., and M. Walker.** 1984. "The Free Rider Problem: Experimental Evidence." *Public Choice*, 43: 3-24.
- Krishnan, P., N. Bhatnagar, and R. Manchanda.** 2009. "Consumer Alienation by Brands: Examining the Roles of Powerlessness and Relationship." *Advances in Consumer Research*, 36: 955-956.
- Lambert, Z. V.** 1981. "Profiling Demographic Characteristics of Alienated Consumers." *Journal of Business Research*, 9: 65-86.
- Lambert, Z. V.** 1980. "Consumer Alienation, General Dissatisfaction, and Consumerism Issues: Conceptual and Managerial Perspectives." *Journal of Retailing*, 56: 3-24.
- Lambert, Z. V., and F. W. Kniffen.** 1975. "Consumer Discontent: A Social Perspective." *California Management Review*, 18: 36-44.
- Landon, E. L., and W. Lundstrom.** 1973. "Comments on 'Race, Alienation and Consumerism.'" *Journal of Marketing*, 37: 67-69.
- Neal, A. G., and H. T. Groat.** 1974. "Social Class Correlates of Stability and Change in Levels of Alienation: A Longitudinal Study." *Sociological Quarterly*, 15: 548-558.
- Huang, P., N. H. Lurie, and S. Mitra.** 2009. "Searching for Experience on the Web: An Empirical Examination of Consumer Behavior for Search and Experience Goods." *Journal of Marketing*, 73: 55-69.
- Pruden, H. O., and D. S. Longman.** 1972. "Race, Alienation and Consumerism." *Journal of Marketing*, 36: 58-63.
- Saito, S.** 2008. "Television and Political Alienation: Does Television News Induce Political Cynicism and Inefficacy in Japan?" *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, 17: 101-113.
- Seeman, M.** 1959. "On the Meaning of Alienation." *American Sociological Review*, 24, 783-791.
- Sell, J.** 1988. "Types of Public Goods and Free-riding." *Advances in Group Processes*, 5: 119-140.
- Sewell, E., and C. Bodkin.** 2009. "The Internet's Impact on Competition, Free riding and the Future of Sales Service in Retail Automobile Markets." *Eastern Economic Journal*, 35: 96-114.
- Shuptrine, F. K., H. O. Pruden, and D. S. Longman.** 1977. "Alienation from the Marketplace." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 5: 233-248.

- Singley, R. B., and R. D. Howell.** 1989. "Information as a Public Good: The Case of Consumer Free Riding." In *The Cutting Edge*, ed. W. R. Darden, 85-96. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University.
- Singley, R. B., and M. R. Williams.** 1995. "Free Riding in Retail Stores: An Investigation of its Perceived Prevalence and Costs." *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 3: 64-74.
- Southwell, P. L.** 2003. "The Politics of Alienation: Nonvoting and Support for Third-party Candidates Among 18-30-year-olds." *Social Science Journal*, 40: 99-107.
- Van Baal, S., and C. Dach.** 2005. "Free Riding and Customer Retention across Retailers' Channels." *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19: 75-85.
- Vitell, S. J., and J. G. P. Paolillo.** 2003. "Consumer Ethics: The role of Religiosity." *Journal of Business Ethics*, 46: 151-162.
- Wu, D., G. Ray, X. Geng, and A. Whinston.** 2004. "Implications of Reduced Search Cost and Free Riding in E-commerce." *Marketing Science*, 23: 255-262.