

Market-resistance and Valentine's Day events [☆]

Angeline G. Close ^{a,*}, George M. Zinkhan ^b

^a University of Nevada, Las Vegas 4505 Maryland Parkway Las Vegas, NV 89154-6010, United States

^b Coca-Cola Company Professor of Marketing at The University of Georgia, Terry College of Business, 138 Brooks Hall, Athens, GA 30602-6258, United States

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Abstract

Extending resistance theories, this article examines multi-method data spanning over seven years of events related to a holiday market. In the context of Valentine's Day, the authors present findings and develop knowledge on anti-consumption and alternative consumption. Specifically, this article introduces the recurring events of gift-resistance, retail-resistance, and market-resistance. Such consumer resistance often coexists with movements towards individualism and creation of more unique alternative consumption traditions.

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1. Introduction

Alternative consumption and anti-consumption have a long tradition in American society. For instance, strains of anti-consumption can be traced back to seventeenth century Puritan immigrants. Anti-consumption sentiments are strongly espoused in Thoreau's *On Walden Pond*. In the twenty-first century, ritualized holidays (e.g., Christmas, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day) are annual events associated with excess and heightened consumption. As a consequence, consumers may sometimes avoid, minimize, or adapt consumption traditions during such events.

To understand consumption in a holistic fashion, it is necessary to examine resistance as a type of anti-consumption and alternative consumption. Anti-consumption research tradition-

ally focuses on why individuals fail to consume or why they actively choose not to consume. Related, research on alternative consumption (a form of anti-consumption) traditionally focuses on why a person fails to consume traditional goods from traditional channels (Gould et al., 1997).

Here, the authors examine alternative and anti-consumption during Valentine's Day. This holiday provides an advantageous context for developing knowledge in these areas for several reasons. Within the U.S., there is a cultural understanding of Valentine's Day traditions and goods that are traditionally exchanged (Close and Zinkhan, 2006, 2007; Otnes et al., 1994). In the U.S., the holiday has become an annual event that consumers associate with certain symbolic items (e.g., roses, cards, chocolate) and marketplace activities (e.g., dating, gift exchange) that are reflective of the holiday events (Close and Zinkhan, 2006). In a country that especially values individualism, latent tension surrounding socio-cultural universals and a mass-marketed holiday culture may exist. The apparent materialism associated with holidays (Belk, 1989) is a further reason to study alternative and anti-consumption in the context of Valentine's Day. This holiday especially potentially presents issues surrounding commercialization of romance and love. On the one hand, this holiday is associated with meanings of affection, love, and romance. On the other hand, a commercial focus is on material gifts and luxuries that have both market-prescribed meaning and personal meaning.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: angeline.close@unlv.edu (A.G. Close), ginkhan@terry.uga.edu (G.M. Zinkhan).

Empirical research on anti-consumption and alternative consumption, exemplified in the context of holidays or other special events, is valuable for consumer research. Given the relevance of such recurring special events, comparatively little research exists on holiday anti-consumption in contexts other than Christmas. Specifically, the context of Valentine's Day remains relatively under-explored in marketing journals. While an emergent amount of studies are attentive of anti-consumption and alternative consumption issues, the present research differs in two key respects. First, this article addresses the paradox that a holiday or other special event (e.g., an anniversary, birthday) can be both a time to embrace some rituals and traditions as well as a time for alternative consumption traditions. Second, former research in the context of holidays and related events emphasizes obligation, altruism, and relational exchange. In contrast, this article focuses on advancing theory in the domains of anti-consumption and alternative consumption (via the context of a commercial holiday).

Specifically, the objectives of this study are twofold: (1) to uncover the anti-consumption and alternative consumption attitudes and behaviors during a commercial holiday, and (2) to advance resistance theories in these areas. This article addresses these objectives via four complementary methods stemming from seven years of primary research (i.e., retailer interviews, consumer diaries, e-diaries, surveys). Each method provides insight from a different angle for a more holistic understanding.

This paper is structured as follows. First, the authors develop the conceptual framework, with an emphasis on theoretical development. Then, the authors present the contextual background—followed by a description of the multiple methods and the findings. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for consumer theory and retail practice.

2. Conceptual framework and theoretical development

Consumption cannot adequately be understood without attention to its counterpart—anti-consumption (Lee et al., 2009-[this issue](#)). Anti-consumption entails active and passive resistance from consumers. Resistance theory (McGuire, 1964; Newman, 2002) states that individuals are not likely to comply with specific or prescribed behaviors. Extending resistance theory, Table 1 displays definitions of gift-resistance, market-resistance, and retail-resistance.

In a holiday context, some consumers may resist pre-packaged solutions that retailers have developed. Some resistance may be associated with the gift component of a holiday or special occasion. Where such occasions are meant to bring people together (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), Otnes et al. (1994) find that gift-giving brings some males feelings of obligation despite any altruistic motivations. In turn, it is foreseeable that gift exchange traditions may spark anti-consumption or alternative consumption behaviors. Resistance may entail a procrastination to purchase, if at all. In the case of gift-resistance, consumers are hesitant to participate in traditional gift exchanges, do not give at all, and/or encourage others not to engage in gift exchange. In other cases, the gift element may prevent someone from attending events associated with a holiday—an example of anti-consumption.

Table 1
Conceptual framework and theory advancement

Concept	Proposed definition	Example
Gift-resistance	Consumers set limits for gift exchanges, do not give at all, and/or encourage others not to engage in gift exchange.	Limiting Valentine's gift expenditures to ten dollars
Retail-resistance	Shoppers do not patronize specific stores that are associated with a certain event or holiday.	Avoiding Hallmark
Market-resistance	Shoppers do not engage in the culturally-established ritualized marketplace behaviors associated with a particular market.	Opting-out of Valentine's Day

A second extension of resistance theory, and a potential issue for retailers, is retail-resistance. Defined, consumers may avoid or intentionally boycott retailers associated with a non-desirable event. For instance, those who opt not to partake in Valentine's Day traditions may exhibit retail-resistance to the Hallmark retail franchises in the U.S. due to their association with the holiday. Anti-materialism may arise in response to over-commercialization (Santino, 1996). On a broader scope, consumers may resist an entire related set of traditions and marketplace activities. This article introduces the concept of market-resistance. Market-resistance is apparent when a consumer does not engage in the culturally-established behaviors associated with a particular market (e.g., a holiday market). For example, a consumer may elect not to partake in any card or gift exchange—contrary to tradition. This article explores these concepts of gift, retail, and market-resistance as they relate to anti-consumption and alternative consumption.

3. Contextual background

3.1. Characteristics

Although this is not a study on Valentine's Day, characteristics of the holiday are important to establish for a thorough study on anti-consumption and alternative consumption examined in the context of Valentine's Day. Broad characteristics of this context are generalizable to many gift-oriented holidays or special events. Like other holidays, Valentine's Day has become an event that entails an abundance of distinctive goods, foods, leisure, gift exchange, and festivities (Close and Zinkhan, 2006). Other holidays such as Thanksgiving involve gatherings of family (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991) or community (e.g., Fourth of July). However, for Valentine's Day, consumers traditionally recognize intimate and/or romantic relationships (Otnes et al., 1994).

This day is unique in other regards. Compared to some other holidays, Valentine's Day does not have strong religious associations—despite bearing a saint's name. As the history of St. Valentine and Valentine's Day is disputed and somewhat controversial, the story of St. Valentine is only one explanation for this holiday's origin (Schmidt, 1993). With rituals tracing back to the Roman Republic, circa 300 B.C., pagans enacted lottery dating on the Ides of February. At the time, for warrior males, the state banned marriages. St. Valentine is said to have defied this ban

and was beheaded on February fourteenth. He inspired a consumer ritual by signing a love note, “from your Valentine”. This story has evolved into a retail holiday and a day of exchange traditions that may spark anti-consumption.

3.2. Market

During an otherwise slow month for retailing, Valentine’s Day brings heightened commercialism and spending; U.S. consumers spent 13.7 billion dollars on retail goods in 2006 (Krugman and Grannis, 2006). Cards, flowers, jewelry, plush, and candy are universally the traditional retail gifts exchanged in the U.S. (Krugman and Grannis, 2006). Services add synergies—especially spa experiences, romantic travel, and other sensual indulgences. Further, restaurants, grocers, and even pharmaceutical marketers are involved. For example (despite FDA sanctions), Pfizer’s Viagra claimed to be the official sponsor of Valentine’s Day (Young, 2004). By these actions, the pharmaceutical industry acknowledges and commercializes the sexiest day of the year. Such holiday hype may arouse sentiments of anti-consumption.

3.3. Culture

Anti-consumption attitudes are based not just on psychological factors; they are largely influenced by societal and cultural factors (Zavestoski, 2002). Valentine’s Day is celebrated in many nations, with variations across cultures. For example, in Korea, females reciprocate the male gift-giving role approximately one month later on White Day. The holiday’s cultural exchange is sometimes associated with resistance and backlash, where recognition of the holiday is banned or resisted due to the Western ideals it represents. For instance, retailers in some Indian regions are prohibited from selling Valentine’s Day cards and goods—resulting in an underground market. Because cultural universals transcend borders and such societal factors differ, the focus here is on anti-consumption as experienced in the U.S.

4. Methods

The authors employ multiple methods from both a consumer and a retail perspective. Four methods cover a span of seven years (2000–2006). Phases include: (1) interviews with retail executives and managers, (2) a survey of consumers in a romantic relationship, (3) analysis of diaries from consumers, and (4) analysis of online diaries and postings. While most informants discussed heterosexual romantic relationships, various kinds of human relationships (e.g., familial, homosexual, friendly) were open for inclusion. Table 2 summarizes the methods, sample sizes, informants, period, and focus for each phase.

4.1. Survey [S]

The purpose of the survey is to gather consumption and anti-consumption habits for the Valentine’s Day holiday from young adults in a romantic relationship. A twelve-item survey on Valentine’s Day (2003) was administered to 100 college students and to 98 consumers (2004). The authors performed tests for

Table 2
Multiple methods of data collection

Method	Sample	Time	Focus
Survey [S] (<i>n</i> =198)	– College students – Males and Females – Age 18–28 – Currently in a dating relationship	2003–2005	Individual and couple resistance Materialism, purchase motivations, timing, purchase behavior, comfort level, meaning
Diaries [D] (<i>n</i> =149)	– Males and females – Age 18–47	2002–2005	Individual and couple resistance Cultural rituals, gender roles, enjoyment, materialism and comparison to other holidays
E-diaries ^a [E] (<i>n</i> =47)	– Posters to online diaries and boards – Males and females	2000–2005	Individual and couple resistance Naturalistic consumer thought of holiday meaning and materialism
Retailer interviews [R] ^b (<i>n</i> =19)	– Corporate marketing and retail executives – Managers of retail/e-tail establishments – Individual and chain stores – National sample	2004–2005	Retail-resistance Materialism Anti-materialism

^aWeb-posting date documented, sources include www.diaryland.com, www.ependiary.com, www.my-diary.org, www.diarist.net, www.mydeardiary.com.

^bFindings from the retailer interviews are denoted in the text by [R], observations by [O], and so forth.

pooling and combined the samples (*n*=198). The sample comprises a relatively even representation from each gender and relationship length. Informants reported whether or not they are in a romantic relationship. If so, researchers instructed informants to continue. If not, researchers directed informants to skip part one of the survey (about purchasing for their romantic partner) and go to the section with open-ended questions. As suggested by Huang and Yu (2000), informants were classified as either in a new (less than six months) or in a more established dating relationship.

4.2. Diaries [D]

One hundred-forty-nine consumers kept diaries related to their thoughts and behaviors concerning the holiday. The age of diary authors ranged from 18–67. A relatively even distribution of males and females in various relationship statuses (e.g., single, dating, married, divorced, widowed), professions, and geographic backgrounds completed entries. Informants wrote about their experiences with the holiday’s: cultural rituals, gender roles, marketing and retail associations, likeability, and comparison to other holidays. Consumer diaries lend to a personal feel, and some informants feel more comfortable writing their story rather than in person, due to the intimate nature of this holiday.

4.3. E-diaries and postings [E]

To complement the offline diaries, the authors collected online diary entries and postings on and about this holiday. This online

sample is particularly appropriate for studying the e-tailing aspects of the study. Online informants often share their screen-name, gender, and location; however, many choose not to reveal their on-ground identity. The anonymity and facelessness here provides for rich, less censored sentiments and experiences about the materialism/anti-materialism component of the holiday events. Importantly, those who discuss their experiences online do so from their inner desire.

4.4. Retailer interviews [R]

An author conducted depth-interviews with retail managers in industries that emphasize this holiday. The sample includes florists, jewelers, chocolatiers, cosmetics/fragrance shops, gift stores, mass-discounters, grocers and department stores. Retailers range from small, independent shops to large multinational companies and many have an e-tail counterpart. Most interviews took place in the retail store offices, while five were conducted via telephone in order to reach managers whose retail headquarters were across the country. The structured interviews lasted forty-five to ninety min, and were recorded and transcribed.

4.5. Data analysis and theme development

Qualitative data were iteratively analyzed the data based on the objectives, theories, and themes identified in the extant literature and resistance theory. Via axial, open, and selective coding, similar findings and observations were grouped into categories of meaning as they relate to resistance. Such grouping contributed towards revealing emergent patterns of each category (Wolcott, 1990). In the process, many new themes became apparent. The authors reviewed each other's data interpretations until key findings reached a point of saturation. Although many themes beyond resistance theory emerged, this study only focuses on findings relevant to anti-consumption and alternative consumption. Data from the retail interviews were separately coded for a separate analysis with respect to retailer implications.

To improve validity and reliability, the authors used approaches suggested by Spiggle (1994). Multiple methods depict an overall, holistic understanding of the research questions. The data are triangulated in many ways. For instance, an author collected data in electronic environments in addition to offline methods. The authors consider multiple theoretical perspectives of resistance (e.g., psychology, sociology) along with the findings. Further, an author followed up with some informants and presented the study to retail executives for face validity.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Gift-resistance

To extend resistance theory, this article focuses the results around three themes mentioned during the introduction (i.e., gift-resistance, retail-resistance, and market-resistance). Informants show a strong element of gift-resistance, a form of anti-consumption. Gift-resistance often occurs via non-gift exchange

(i.e., informants do not exchange gifts with their partner) or by modifying traditional gift exchanges associated with the event. Various degrees of gift-resistance, range, for example, from setting a five-dollar limit (despite having expendable funds) to encouraging others not to exchange gift. To classify as gift-resistance, non-giving or self or couple-imposed restrictions represent the principle of resisting traditional, generic, or market-suggested gifts. It is not a case of gift-resistance when the primary motivation to limit or resist expenditures is a financial barrier. In the case where a consumer desires to give certain gift (e.g., a romantic vacation) that is unaffordable at the time, it is more of a rational financial burden than a case of gift-resistance.

Perceived obligation further influences gift-resistance (Otnes et al., 1994). Most (63%) males and some (31%) females feel obligated to give a gift to their partner for this holiday [S]. Some couples discuss their frustrations; yet they still buy:

Valentine's Day is a way for retailers to get you to spend money in their stores. People get caught up in the B.S. and I should not have to spend extra to show I care, and my girlfriend agrees. But we both still spent plenty! [M, D]

Like the male informant quoted above, the majority of survey respondents in a new relationship feel obliged. Notably, males in a new relationship feel most obligated (81%) [S]. The second most obligated group is females in a new relationship (50%) [S]. Explanations may be that consumers in a new relationship buy to solidify or invest in the relationship (Belk and Coon, 1993) or that it is hard to admit feelings of obligation to a new partner. Comparatively, less than half (44%) of males in a more established relationship feel obligated [S]. A low 13% of females in more established relationships feel this obligation [S]. One explanation for such anti-consumption is that gifts are unnecessary to continue the relationship:

For those in a committed relationship, Valentine's Day gifts seem shallow and wholly unnecessary. For those not tied down, it is just a big pain in the ***! [M, S]

Gifts include an element of pursuit in the beginning stages of dating. Informants claim to exchange fewer and less expensive gifts as their relationship matures. Other cases document an obligation to reciprocate expenditures from prior years:

Although we are not in good terms currently, I know that she will get me something so I had to buy her something... I have spent enough money on my girlfriend on past Valentine's Days, so she should be happy that I am getting her anything! [M, D]

As the set of quotes show, obligatory spending and the generic nature of traditional holiday gifts may rob gifts of meaning. Despite anti-consumption attitudes, consumers still purchase. Eighty-eight percent of men and 75% of women in a romantic relationship bought their significant other a Valentine's gift [S]. However, this purchase was not necessarily a traditional gift (e.g., roses, chocolate, Valentine card, plush, jewelry, lingerie). Many informants consider handmade items and dinners—or any financial expenditure as gifts. Many men and women, in relationships of various lengths, report setting a price limit on gifts (i.e., gift-resistance).

Two plausible explanations remain for why consumers in new relationships may be anti-gift exchange. The first reason for gift-resistance is due to the fear of gift misinterpretation. Specifically, those in newer relationships discuss the fear of their partner misinterpreting the gift. A second reason has to do with commitment. Gifts (especially expensive gifts) signal more commitment than a dater wishes to convey (Belk and Coon, 1993); the current study finds a similar explanation. Gift-giving may signal heightened commitment to the recipient or to the relationship (Otnes et al., 1994)—influencing anti-consumption.

Insight into obligatory spending provides retailers with a unique challenge. On the one hand, some shoppers want buying opportunities. On the other hand, some consumers interpret retailing promotions in a negative light and resist the socio-cultural pressure associated with this holiday. The following findings of retail and market-resistance develop this trend further.

5.2. Retail-resistance

Retail-resistance is a form of anti-consumption where a consumer elects not to patronize a particular retailer associated with the traditional marketplace. As one woman represents, informants often associate negative attitudes with specific retailers on this holiday:

Well, it has been almost two months since Christmas, and us single folks are finally recovering from the psychological damage making it through the holiday season does to us. So as I am almost fully recuperated myself, I would like to extend a warm thanks to Hallmark, the official sponsor of Valentine's Day, for reminding me that without a significant other, how truly worthless my life is. In my defense, who wants to celebrate a holiday whose initials are VD anyway? However it is upon us and in light of the holiday...it is imperative to wallow in our mutual misery together. [F, E, 2-14-04]

In the case above, retail-resistance coexists with brand avoidance (i.e., Hallmark). Brand avoidance is the study of why consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand (Lee et al., 2009-this issue). Retail-related hype provides an outlet for some consumers to channel their feelings. For instance, those in an unhappy relationship or who are physically apart from their loved one are prone to anti-consumption:

Of all the wonderful (silent sarcasm intended) years of my ever-joyous life, I have come to some quite obvious realization that Valentine's Day is nothing more than a commercial holiday they exploit to drastically nauseating proportions. If someone is looking for a single day out of the year to share with that special someone, do it on their friggin' birthday. You should be more worried about the fact that you are alive, rather than if you are going to get a ton of chocolates or flowers from your significant other. To all those who have found their special someone in their life, I bid you congrats. However, for those of us who are still looking, like myself, I bid this past day a big...! [F, E, 2-15-01]

Some informants do not buy holiday hype and have negative affect about those who do. For instance, this man uses holidays to note his friend's conversion from macho to lovey-dovey:

Another Valentine's Day has gone by only to leave me wondering why? Why do people get hyped up over a senseless holiday of commercialism? I made the effort of going to town and managed to see my friend, in Wal-mart of all places, getting something for his better half. I was semi-frustrated about this. This guy is the same one I spend every Superbowl Sunday with, belching and doing the male bonding thing with. To see him buying something lovey-dovey definitely makes me **! [M, E, 2-15-01]

While this situation may imply some jealousy and hurt over losing time spent with a friend who has a new girlfriend, it also exemplifies retail-resistance (against Wal-Mart). More broadly, his resistance transcends to the commercialized holiday market and its feminine traditions.

5.3. Market-resistance

At the broadest level, market-resistance applies to the culturally-established Valentine's market. Market-resistance is a form of anti-consumption where various individuals or groups do not engage in the marketplace behaviors or rituals associated with a particular market. Other informants resist to the extent of choosing not to participate in the holiday events at all. Some persuade others not to participate in the holiday (e.g., a woman convinces her husband to skip Valentine's Day gift exchange and put the money towards their vacation).

Some informants direct market-resistance at certain industries related to the Valentine's Day market. Informants repeatedly mention three industries—greeting card, confectionary, and floral.

Valentine's Day is a.k.a. candy companies' Maximized Profit Day. [F, S]

Valentine's Day is a marketing strategy by the flower and candy companies. It's a cheesy, overblown, stupid "holiday" to force you to spend money on each other. [F, S]

Valentine's Day is a GREAT marketing scam by the greeting card people. Everybody should recognize love and this day makes you pay attention to what matters (sarcasm). [M, S]

These quotes show how industry resistance contributes to anti-consumption of traditional or more generic gifts that are suggested by retailers or mass advertised. While some informants attribute industries with resistance, the entire holiday market also is a source of resistance. Consumers resist Valentine's Day for a number of reasons. Motivations to oppose retailer suggestions often drive behavioral resistance to the rituals and traditions associated with the holiday. Attitudes countering the social norms associated with this market are also associated with market-resistance. For example, romantic gestures, cards, gifts, and dates are standard behaviors on February

fourteenth. Nonetheless, such expectations are restrictive to some informants:

I think it is a day that forces feelings we should exhibit everyday. In theory, it is fine but we should act like this on a random Tuesday in November or any other month instead of just one day. I hate the whole marketing of gifts and guilt thrown on this one day! [M, S]

I hate this day, because there are so many people who interpret this day in a wrong way. In fact, if we love someone we will always love forever and ever. It does not matter what day it is. [M, E, 2-06-00]

Others opt-out because of their perception that the holiday is tainted by greedy corporations or disapproval of the buying and selling of American holidays (Schmidt, 1995), as the following informants explain:

I love the concept of the day, but HATE how it is one of those corporate holidays. [M, E, 5-20-04]

Valentine's Day has become a day that corporations in the U.S. exploit just to sell candy and novelty items. [F, S]

Valentine's Day is a marketing technique designed to take advantage of people who are in love. [M, S]

It is a corporate holiday. Why designate a day to show you care except for monetary gain? [M, S]

As illustrated here, many informants resist the commercialized aspects of exchanging traditional gifts. The cultural standard for gifts include: a Valentine card, roses, chocolate, jewelry, plush and sensual items such as lingerie, perfume and beautification products and services. Despite resisting commercialism, some informants feel positive affect surrounding the unique or personalized aspects of certain cards or gifts that they own. Just as consumers can characterize a possession as "me" or "not me" (e.g., love letters), certain possessions are artifacts of the self (Kleine et al., 1993). In this sense, consumers define themselves via self-signifying possessions, and they also define themselves via the goods they dissociate themselves with (Kleine et al., 1993). Sometimes, as a consequence of owning an object, a person may develop material possession attachment—a property of the relationship between an individual and a specific possession (Kleine et al., 1995). Possessions, such as a Valentine or other symbolic gift from a loved one, exemplify items that may be associated with positive experiences or spark feelings or memories of soured relationships and the resistance surrounding a failed relationship. Other times, consumers engage in alternative consumption to express resistance to specific gifts, retailers, industries, or markets. Such resistance leads to trends of alternative consumption.

6. Discussion

6.1. Alternative consumption

The consumer sentiments explained above indicate trends that relate to alternative consumption. This article provides evi-

dence that consumers often create new trends, rituals, and traditions in addition to or in lieu of classic exchanges during the holiday. For example, some couples choose to stay in, cook and exchange appreciation for one another in lieu of celebrating at an upscale restaurant or exchanging store-bought Valentine cards [S, D]. These informants exhibit elements of voluntary simplicity during this holiday, where they choose to celebrate in alternative, low-key ways or celebrate the holiday outside the formal marketplace. In this process, consumers resist the traditional gift exchanges, retailers, or holiday market while they create new traditions to meet their unique needs and tastes. In some way, gift-resistance relates with voluntary simplicity. While acts of voluntary simplicity may be less expensive, financial reasoning is not the primary motivator of voluntary simplicity (Gregg, 1936). Similarly, gift-resistance is less expensive, and for some (especially college students or newlyweds), reflects rational budget or bank account realities. Acts of voluntary simplicity pose a threat to some traditional retailers (e.g., gift shops), but provide opportunity for others (e.g., grocers).

As explained by this extension of resistance theory, some consumers opt-out of traditional behaviors, events and activities and sometimes reject promotional activities associated with specific retailers. In these findings of retail-resistance and market-resistance, small-scale consumer revolts against stereotypes and commercialism exist. This resistance is related to a number of factors (e.g., relationship status, obligatory feelings, media and retail hype, heightened commercialism holiday events, distaste for generic gifts). For some, Valentine's Day is a joyous, romantic event. For others, it time to be reminded of loneliness or a time of self-reflection and evaluation. Consumers enact distinct rituals (e.g., guys' night out, self-gifts) for their situations.

6.2. Non-choice and anti-choice

The findings of this study may be interpreted to mean that some individuals and couples practice Valentine's Day rituals that vastly differ from the assumed normative rituals. These consumers may not overtly resist the market traditions; however, they construct consumption constellations that are more unique and personalized than the more standard consumption constellation associated with Valentine's Day (e.g., a date, roses, chocolates, cards, jewelry). A consumption constellation is a concept that describes symbolic interdependencies; it is a group of complementary consumption activities, products, and brands, and activities that consumers associate with a social role (Solomon and Buchanan, 1991). Consumption constellations are typically complementary in a symbolic (e.g., red roses and chocolate to symbolize love) more so than a functional (e.g., hammer and nail) fashion (Solomon and Buchanan, 1991). They enable consumers to communicate a desired social role (Hogg, 1998); in a similar way, anti-consumption may also enable consumers to detach themselves from a traditional role.

Implications for anti-consumption constellations emerge from the findings of this study. Anti-constellations represent non-consumption in the form of non-choice or anti-choice

(Hogg, 1998). Non-choice is influenced by affordability, accessibility, and availability (Hogg, 1998). Non-choice includes goods that are not purchased (e.g., because the person does not have the means to purchase). For example, a teenager without an income does not have the means to send roses to his girlfriend—hence, a non-choice. Reviewing the findings, informants do not blame their anti-consumption on non-choice. First, traditional Valentine's Day exchanges are relatively affordable (e.g., a card, chocolate, plush animal). Second, traditional Valentines' Day gifts are accessible to most consumers. In fact, informants note how Valentine's Day events, goods and promotions are difficult to avoid in the marketplace. Third, most traditional Valentine's Day items are available to the mass market—often via intensive distribution strategies.

So, deeper and less rational reasons occur as to why consumers exhibit acts of anti- and alternative consumption. These reasons are related to anti-choice (i.e., abandonment, avoidance, aversion). Anti-choice occurs when a person actively does not choose a good, perhaps due to refusal of taste (Hogg, 1998). For instance, a husband does not choose to go to an upscale restaurant and give a store-bought Valentine as he finds such to be too common and not in good taste.

The authors emphasize that anti-consumption is not always non-consumption. In the previous examples of non-choice or anti-choice, the individual may engage in alternative consumption. For example, a son chooses not to buy a Valentine's card for his mother—yet writes one himself. Or, a teenager creates a mix of meaningful songs for his girlfriend. Hence, anti-consumption of traditional items purchased via traditional channels coexists with creation of alternative exchanges that informants perceive as less generic and embedded with more meaning.

7. Implications and new directions

7.1. Implications for retail

To facilitate implications for retail, the authors presented the findings to retailing executives. Several recommendations emerge from the consumer findings and the interviews with retail managers. Retailers may help shoppers foster and maintain relationships. These relationships are often more meaningful to many consumers than material gifts. We consider consumer theory and practice in tandem in Table 3, which summarizes key consumer findings as they related to retailing strategy.

7.2. Implications for theory

This article expands on concepts and theory in the areas of alternative and anti-consumption (see Table 1). For example, the extension of resistance theories now distinguishes among gift, retail, and market-resistance. As a broader implication for consumer theory, the authors show areas where consumer resistance links with trends towards voluntary simplicity—where consumers revert to the private sphere, buy less pre-made goods, and actively resist complex rituals common during Valentine's Day and its associated events.

Table 3

Linking theory with practice: insights based on consumer findings and retailer interviews

Resistance theory findings	Retail strategy
Females feel obligated to a lesser extent	Reinstate importance of giving gifts to males; Recognize that not all females welcome this day
High obligation to give in new relationships	Feature gifts appropriate for new romantic relationships
Some feel obligated to give in order to invest in the relationship	Embed long-term meaning (e.g., the 3-stoned ring)
Gift(s) are unnecessary to continue an established relationship	Promote adding passion and excitement to established Relationships
Gift misinterpretation fear exists	Encourage cards to express what they want to communicate; Use satirical or humorous approach to the holiday and inventory
Spending is often procrastinated	Provide gift wrapping options for last-minute buyers; Expand the retailing season and store h 3 days prior
Resistance surrounds the feeling that love should not be reserved for just this day	Incorporate themes of love during other times of the year
Society interprets the holiday incorrectly	Incorporate the human component of familial love and romantic love more than the materialism
Industries and companies own the holiday	Promote the idea that consumers own this holiday
Consumers show voluntary simplicity	Feature products and ingredients suited for a more subtle time

7.3. Limitations and directions for future research

This article shows what Valentine's Day consumption/non-consumption means to informants. These meanings, in turn, imply specific recommendations for retailing practice and strategy. Some of the insights generated here provide a platform for cross-cultural studies and may generalize to other gift-oriented holidays or special events such as birthdays or anniversaries. Nonetheless, limitations that lead to suggestions for further research. This study focuses on the holiday as practiced and understood in the U.S. Holidays are an aspect of a country's culture and because this holiday is practiced internationally, ample room for cross-cultural research presents itself. Future research could examine this market internationally and address questions such as: (a) what are the common Valentine's gift rituals and how do retailers participate in these rituals? (b) what are the various gender roles associated with the holiday?, and (c) what are the best retail practices? Within a culture, those who assimilate follow their stereotype of that culture's majority (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1987). Future research may document the extent to which those who are well-assimilated to their national cultures partake in Americanized holiday events in attempt to assimilate international or cosmopolitan consumption trends (Reilly and Wallendorf, 1987).

A second limitation is that the study does not incorporate children directly into this study. Children are an important group concerning Valentine's Day. Children have pester-power and

are drawn into branded cards and candy. Interestingly, in elementary school, Valentine's Day is an egalitarian holiday. For instance, children's exchange of cards/candy is for everyone in the class. How is it, then, that exchange traditions change along with romantic discourse in the adolescent and adult years? How can marketers overcome resistance and revive the meanings behind romantic or other symbolic ritualized exchanges? Further, the role of the self during symbolic exchange at various life stages is important to explore, and the symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund and Gollwitzer, 1982) may serve as a foundation for future studies in this area.

This study may stimulate further research on alternative consumption and anti-consumption during other holidays or recurring events. Specifically, holidays are times for both religious and secular celebrations. Holidays are also a time for heightened retailing activities and consumption. Because seasonality and holidays are vital aspects of marketing and retailing, the authors encourage researchers to extend theories to further scholarly understanding of consumer meanings and practices during such recurring special events.

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