



Passive innovation resistance: The curse of innovation? Investigating consequences for innovative consumer behavior



Sven Heidenreich ^{a,*}, Tobias Kraemer ^b

^a Faculty of Law and Economics, Saarland University, P.O. 15 11 50, 66041 Saarbruecken, Germany

^b Institute for Management, University of Koblenz-Landau, Universitätsstraße 1, 56070 Koblenz, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Empirical research reveals that many new products fail as a result of consumers' passive resistance to innovation. Moreover, extant research suggests that high levels of stimulation induced by radical innovations even enhance negative effects of passive innovation resistance. However, empirical evidence for these propositions is still rare. Consequently, this study strives to enhance the current understanding (1) by investigating the inhibitory role of passive innovation resistance for different kinds of innovative consumer behaviors and (2) by examining the moderating role of perceived stimulation for effects of passive innovation resistance. Based on a large-scale empirical study ($n = 681$), we provide first empirical evidence that passive innovation resistance inhibits both consumers' tendencies to engage in innovative behavior and actual new product adoption. Furthermore, the results confirm that perceived stimulation increases the negative effects of passive innovation resistance. Our findings contribute to the ongoing discussion on a possible pro-change bias in adoption literature and to the current understanding on how to develop and market innovations to reach market success.

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1. Introduction

The continuous development and launch of new products are two major factors of companies' long-term success (Prins & Verhoef, 2007). Consequently, companies must develop a constant stream of new products and successfully introduce these products to the market (Hess, 2009). However, the rate of innovations that are successfully introduced to the market is strikingly low and shows no sign of improvement (Andrew & Sirkin, 2003; Gourville, 2006). Recent studies propose that failure rates of innovations are approximately 40–55% (Castellion & Markham, 2013). Failed innovations lead to a negative return on investment and as a consequence might even expose a threat to the competitiveness of firms in the long run (Bayus, Erickson, & Jacobson, 2003). Thus, consumers' adoption behavior is a serious concern for firms because many new products fail due to consumers' resistance to innovation (Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013; Hess, 2009).

The relevance of innovation resistance has been acknowledged by both scientific research (Ellen, Bearden, & Sharma, 1991; Heidenreich & Handrich, 2014; Laukkanen, Sinkkonen, & Laukkanen, 2008; Ram, 1989; Reinders, 2010; Sheth, 1981) and management practice (Garcia, Bardhi, & Friedrich, 2007; Gourville, 2006). Thereby, past research principally differentiates between (1) active innovation resistance which represents a negative attitude toward a new product that is

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 (0) 681/302 71480.

E-mail address: sven.heidenreich@uni-saarland.de (S. Heidenreich).

caused by psychological and functional barriers during the evaluation of new products and (2) passive innovation resistance which refers to a predisposition to resist innovations due to an individual's inclination to resist change and status quo satisfaction that already forms rather unconsciously prior to new product evaluation (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2014). Yet, scant research has investigated the root causes and consequences of innovation resistance (Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013; Kleijnen, Lee, & Wetzels, 2009; Laukkanen et al., 2008). Instead, past research on adoption behavior has focused on factors that foster the adoption and diffusion of innovations (e.g., Im, Bayus, & Mason, 2003; Rogers, 2003) and largely neglected to examine factors that inhibit new product adoption and diffusion (e.g., Ellen et al., 1991; Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013; Nabih, Bloem, & Poiesz, 1997). As a consequence, only few studies have examined innovation-specific barriers to the adoption of new products and thus explicitly focused on active innovation resistance as negative attitude formation that is driven by product-specific factors (e.g., Ellen et al., 1991; Kleijnen et al., 2009; Kuisma, Laukkanen, & Hiltunen, 2007; Laukkanen et al., 2008). However, research that investigates consumers' generic predisposition to resist innovations and thus passive innovation resistance remains largely neglected (e.g., Nabih et al., 1997; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). Although past research on adoption behavior has at least implicitly recognized the role of passive innovation resistance as an important inhibitor of innovative consumer behavior, it still lacks empirical evidence for this proposition (Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013). Only two studies, one by Heidenreich and Spieth (2013) and another by Heidenreich and Handrich (2014) provide first empirical evidence that passive innovation resistance negatively affects new product evaluation and adoption. Yet, a better understanding of whether and how passive innovation resistance inhibits innovative consumer behavior might contribute to the ongoing discussion on a possible pro-change bias in adoption literature (Laukkanen & Kiviniemi, 2010; Rogers, 2003; Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). An empirical validation of passive innovation resistance as important inhibitor would imply that consumers with a high resistance to change disposition and/or a high satisfaction with the status quo might not always be open to innovations. If this is the case, some of the earlier empirical studies on consumer adoption behavior would have been indeed subject to pro-change bias, as these studies made the (biased) assumption that consumers are principally open to new products and willing to evaluate and adopt innovations. However, a thorough empirical validation of the inhibitory role of passive innovation resistance, accounting for possible effects on different types of innovative consumer behavior and across different research settings, is still lacking (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2014). Thus, debate remains about whether passive innovation resistance represents a neglected but important predisposition in innovation adoption research and whether previous adoption research was prone to pro-change bias.

Furthermore, past research has shown that a behavioral response is not only influenced by a consumer's optimal level of stimulation, which results from the degree of passive innovation resistance (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014), but also by the level of stimulation experienced by a consumer when exposed to the stimulus object itself (Wahlers & Etzel, 1985). Consequently, past research suggests that the high amount of stimulation induced by a radical innovation might evoke high levels of passive innovation resistance, whereas low levels of stimulation induced by incremental innovations provoke much less passive innovation resistance (Heidenreich & Handrich, 2014; Heidenreich & Kraemer, 2015). Hence, the negative effect of passive innovation resistance on innovative consumer behavior might be responsive to the amount of perceived stimulation experienced at the time of the exposure. In order to examine the inhibitory role of passive innovation resistance, it thus seems necessary to assess both the direct effect of passive innovation resistance and the moderating effect of perceived stimulation. Insights into this interaction would contribute to the current understanding on how to design optimal innovations that maximize market success. An empirical validation of the moderating role of perceived stimulation would suggest that maximizing product innovativeness might not be the most effective way to reach market success, as some consumers with high passive innovation resistance might react negatively to the amount of perceived stimulation induced by high product innovativeness. Yet, empirical proof on whether and how passive innovation resistance and perceived stimulation interact is also lacking.

Consequently, we aim to enhance the understanding of the inhibitory role of passive innovation resistance for different types of innovative consumer behavior and its interaction with perceived stimulation. First, we develop the conceptual framework of this research and present relating hypotheses. Second, we empirically examine the effects of passive innovation resistance and perceived stimulation on innovative consumer behavior. Thereby, we analyze both effects on innovative consumer behavior across several technological products as well as within specific new product evaluations. Finally, we outline theoretical and managerial implications of our results and present some avenues for further research.

2. Conceptual development and research model

2.1. *Passive innovation resistance*

According to a systematic literature review of Heidenreich and Handrich (2014), previous literature differentiates two types of consumers' resistance to innovation: active and passive innovation resistance. Active innovation resistance represents a negative attitude formation driven by innovation-specific factors that evolves during new product evaluation (e.g., Kuisma et al., 2007; Laukkanen, Sinkkonen, & Laukkanen, 2009; Nabih et al., 1997). When evaluating new products, consumers form their attitude toward an innovation based on its attributes (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). In case some of the perceived innovation attributes are not in line with their expectations, functional and psychological barriers arise (Heidenreich & Spieth, 2013; Ram & Sheth, 1989). As soon as these barriers exceed an adopter-specific tolerance level,

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