



# Travelling like locals: Market resistance in long-term travel

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## H I G H L I G H T S

- The study examines lifestyle-based market resistance through 'global nomads'.
- Global nomads engage in voluntary simplicity and non-monetary exchange.
- While these alternative practices challenge the market, they also reinforce it.
- Resistance can still be empowering; it teaches global nomads the logic of the market.

## A R T I C L E I N F O

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## A B S T R A C T

Market resistance has been studied in relation to ecological and ethical tourism, while lifestyle-based resistance has received less attention. This study examines a group of long-term travellers, the 'global nomads', who avoid the tourism industry by making long-term lifestyle changes, engaging in voluntary simplicity and non-monetary exchange. They seek authenticity by interacting with locals, representing an increasing trend. More conventional tourists also seek similar experiences, posing challenges to the tourism industry. Analysed with Foucauldian theories, global nomads' market resistance is shown to be contradictory as it also reinforces the market. However, even if partial, global nomads' resistance reminds us that tourism is not just an industry. It is also negotiated between private individuals, with or without intermediaries, which calls for rethinking of the concept of 'tourism'.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a major industry affected by the pressures of making profit, accumulating capital, and encouraging consumer practices that promote increased consumption (Hall, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). During recent years, however, consumers have begun to question this inevitable link between travel and consumption, and its possibly harmful environmental, ethical, and societal impacts. A myriad of alternative travel styles have emerged to address consumer concerns including responsible tourism, community tourism, and pro-poor tourism.

Market resistance has inspired a fast growing body of literature around the opposition to marketplace practices. Tourism researchers have examined degrowing tourism, ethical tourism, and anti-shopping tourism that resist the expansive growth of

international travel and its side effects (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Wooliscroft, 2016; Hall, 2009; Régi, Rátz, & Michalkó, 2016). Not all market resistance, however, is motivated by grand-scale ideologies and concerns or includes an attempt to change society. Consumers may also avoid the market for personal reasons or as a part of their lifestyle, but this has been a scholarly blind spot until recently (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones, 2012).

This study contributes to the literature by examining lifestyle-based resistance through a group of long-term travellers, the so-called 'global nomads'. They practise extreme mobility seeking detachment from particular geographical locations and conventional practices including market-based consumption. Although global nomads challenge the link between tourism and commercial consumption, they do not fit into the usual anti-consumption categories of the green or ethical consumer (Shaw & Newholm, 2002; Soper, 2007). Instead, they make long-term lifestyle changes altering their consumption practices. These practices and their effects on travel and tourism are investigated through the lenses of

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'lifestyle' and 'authenticity'.

### 1.1. *Lifestyles and global nomads*

'Lifestyle' is often thought of superficially in terms of brands, products and marketing only (Giddens, 1991), but the concept draws from more nuanced sources. Lifestyle figured in Max Weber's *Economy and Society* (1978), where Weber spoke of status groups that are based on honour and a distinctive "style of life" (pp. 305–307). Social status and therefore lifestyle, Weber suggested, are not reducible to economic and material resources only, as Marxist theories had assumed, but depend also on education and occupation. They involve agency and will rather than represent simple derivatives of class.

Lifestyles comprise a set of practices from travelling to religious rituals, which do not necessarily include consumption in the sense of buying of goods and services at all. Instead, they touch many important aspects of subjectivities. Lifestyles help individuals to make sense of themselves and the world, offering a feeling of ontological security by creating continuity and order to otherwise chaotic everyday life (Giddens, 1991). This is an ongoing process that can be highlighted with the concept of 'subjectivity'. Contrary to 'identity', 'subjectivity' can be formed differently in different contexts, even in contradictory terms (Bauman, 2001; Hall, 1996, pp. 1–17).

In contemporary society, the rise of lifestyles is interwoven with late modernism and the erosion of traditions. As individuals' lives are no longer decidedly structured in advance by social hierarchies and traditional authorities, they are relatively free to make up whom they wish to be by means of lifestyles (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009). For global nomads, travelling and market resistance are choices that shape and direct many other aspects in their lives. The two are entwined: global nomads are immersed in travel but they avoid the tourism industry. Their self-defined criteria for the success of their journey is travelling cheaply and socialising with locals, which they associate with authenticity.

### 1.2. *Beyond money*

'Authenticity' is another keyword for understanding global nomads' market resistance. It has been a bone of contention among tourism scholars since MacCannell, in his seminal work *The Tourist* (1999), argued that tourists search for authenticity in order to escape the feeling of alienation brought about by their home environment. MacCannell was sceptical, however, as to whether tourism can offer such experiences as all events are "staged" with the primary purpose of making money (see also Cohen, 1988, 2007).

MacCannell's statement implies that experiences beyond consumptive encounters and monetary transactions were more 'authentic'. However, this market viewpoint has mostly been bypassed in the wide-ranging literature that followed MacCannell's publication. Studies have focussed on the authenticity of toured objects ('authentic' in the sense of 'original') and on subjective and transformative experiences (Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Cohen & Cohen, 2012b; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2016; Lau, 2010; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999).

This study aims to broaden the discussion with Foucauldian approaches by examining whether market resistance can offer global nomads an experience of 'authenticity'. Authenticity, in this context, is a socially constructed conception that involves negotiations about what it is to travel and be a tourist (Cohen, 1988). It is continuously contested, (re)defined, and (re)created by market actors. While mass tourists reinforce the commercial notion of

tourism, global nomads oppose it. For them, tourism is not about "consuming goods and services which are in some sense unnecessary" and which "supposedly generate pleasurable experiences which are different from those typically encountered in everyday life" (Urry, 2005, p. 1).

Through global nomads, the study is able to shed an alternative light on tourism. How authenticity is sought through market resistance and whether it can be successful, remains to be seen. Three questions are addressed to this effect:

- (1) What kind of consumption practices have global nomads adopted?
- (2) Why have they chosen these particular practices?
- (3) How do global nomads negotiate possible tensions between their consumption practices?

While it could be argued that global nomads' travel and consumption styles are extreme and they are too marginal in terms of numbers to be significant for the tourism industry, they represent an increasing trend: more conventional tourists also seek authenticity in everyday experiences and fulfilling relationships with locals (Kirillova et al., 2016; Richards, 2011; Xue, Manuel-Navarrete, & Buzinde, 2014). These new trends invite tourism researchers to re-examine consumer needs, wants and concerns in order to better understand emerging forms of tourism (Close & Zinkham, 2007).

## 2. Literature review

Market resistance is a relatively novel subject area in tourism, marketing and consumer research. Most studies have examined pro-consumption attitudes including the role of consumption in identity formation (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). This is also the case in tourism research. Tourism is viewed to organise individuals' knowledge and understanding of themselves and other societies and it has been examined as an important element in the projects of the self (Lash & Urry, 1994).

These consumerist discourses have come under attack during recent decades from diverse sources including environmental, ethical and anti-globalisation movements (Shankar, Whittaker, & Fitchett, 2006). A similar but more discreet protest has been raised by individual consumers – the global nomads of this study included – who make long-term lifestyle changes by searching for work-life balance and more satisfying ways of living out of the traditional marketplace (Albrecht, Campbell, Heinrich, & Lammel, 2013; Shankar & Fitchett, 2002; Shankar et al., 2006; Wahlen & Laamanen, 2015). These alternatives have been reflected in academia under the rubrics of 'market resistance' and 'anti-consumption' (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Cherrier, 2009; Hogg et al., 2009; Iyer & Muncy, 2009; Kozinets, Handelman, & Lee, 2010; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009). For the purposes of this study, this wide-ranging literature is divided into two main subject areas: 1) overt resistance (including boycotting and brand avoidance) and 2) covert resistance (including anti-loyalism, voluntary simplicity, and the creation of alternative consumption practices and communities).

### 2.1. *Overt resistance through boycotting and brand avoidance*

Overt resistance includes boycotting or otherwise rejecting a product or a brand. It has drawn attention among marketing scholars for obvious reasons: it can result in substantial losses in sales as well as harm to brand image and customer relations (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004; Thompson & Arsel, 2004). Boycotts against tourism firms usually

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