

Consumer Response to Big Innovations

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher who lived 100 years before Plato, famously said “change is the only constant in life.” Perhaps, then, it is no surprise that humans have developed many and complex means of responding to change—both in strategies to leverage novel benefits and to cope with the costs of flux.

Nowhere are these means more apparent than in today’s marketplace where consumers face a multitude of major innovations. Technology, cultural shifts, and social systems have created rapid changes in new products, new services, new channels, and even new economies. The diffusion of innovation is accelerated by greater information accessibility and social visibility. On the horizon, consumers can see sea-changes in innovative domains such as the Internet of Things (IoT), sharing economies, tele-health and digital healthcare, smart/connected products (wearables, smart fabrics, etc.), self-driving cars, and user-generated content/influence (blogs, Twitter, etc.).

What, then, drives how consumers respond to these big innovations? When do consumers respond with enthusiasm or resignation? With careful learning or careless assumptions? When do they change quietly and when do they evangelize to everyone they know? When do they play a waiting game and when are they first in line? When are consumers the recipients of innovation and when are they its creators? What are the psychological costs and benefits of trying new things? How does society manage (or reflect) the interdisciplinary forces that converge in major marketplace shifts? And, critically, how can innovative firms facilitate consumers’ successful innovation—both as adopters of innovation and innovators themselves? What makes us better at change?

To better understand how consumers respond to big innovations, we must necessarily take a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodological approach. In this special issue, we want to highlight the importance of diverse thinking in consumer innovation. Some examples of areas of interest include (but are certainly not limited to):

- Cognitive processes that shape how individuals learn, are persuaded, and change prior habits
- Social influences on innovation adoption (changing roles of WOM, social media, and impression management)
- Cultural trends and meaning production in innovation
- Emerging consumer theory from substantive domains like IoT, healthcare, artificial intelligence, social entrepreneurship, etc.
- Consumer strategies to manage risk and uncertainty
- Consumer strategies to optimize adoption timing decisions
- Consumer needs for novelty-seeking or status
- Methodological approaches to understand consumer preferences in fast-evolving markets
- Conceptual and managerial differences between new and established brands
- Consumer creativity, co-creation, and user-generated content