

# CYNICAL CONSUMERS: DANGEROUS ENEMIES, LOYAL FRIENDS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation introduces and develops the construct of consumer cynicism, characterized by a perception of a pervasive, systemic lack of integrity in the marketplace, and investigates how cynical consumers behave in the marketplace. This dissertation developed a scale, laying groundwork for future research, and investigated cynicism antecedents, associated marketplace behaviors, and the cynicism-brand loyalty relationship. Cynical consumers perceive a marketplace full of opportunism.

The nine studies reported here formed a rigorous scale development procedure. A large-scale national survey provided the final scale validation sample and primary research instrument for testing hypotheses. Consumer cynicism is shown to impact marketplace behaviors and perceptions, leading to marketplace shaping or consumer activism and criticism behaviors, marketplace withdrawal, perceptions of purchase risk, and category-specific cynicism. At the level of a particular purchase, category-specific cynicism is shown to be associated with brand support behaviors and with increased importance of trust issues, rather than satisfaction or value, in brand loyalty.