

Can “Buy Local” Campaigns in Times of COVID Backfire? A Reactance Theory Perspective

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Abstract

We apply reactance theory to investigate consumer responses to “buy local” campaigns by government to counteract the negative economic effects of the COVID pandemic. Specifically, we develop a conceptual model aimed at revealing the extent to which “buy local” campaigns – explicitly justified by the need to fight the economic consequences of COVID – are likely to lead to (a) compliance (i.e. support for local product/retailers) or (b) freedom restoration (i.e. support for foreign products/retailers). We subsequently test our model on a sample of German consumers (N=265) and find that such campaigns are likely to generate reactance and that such reactance leads to both non-compliance and “related boomerang” outcomes. Our findings have implications for both domestic and foreign firms and are also of relevance to public policy makers seeking to encourage consumers to support the local economy during the COVID crisis.

Keywords: *COVID; “Buy Local” Campaigns; Reactance*

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