SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONSUMERS AND GLOBALIZATION

Syed Tariq Anwar, West Texas A&M University
WT Box 60809, College of Business, Canyon, Texas 79016
Email: sanwar@mail.wtamu.edu, Tel: (806) 651-2491

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the literature of social movements (SMs), the work analyzes and discusses the role SMs play in consumption, marketing and globalization. Since the literature on SMs in marketing is sparse and limited, we look at the research avenues of this debate in marketing and its related areas. We also discuss "the Occupy Movement" that in a short time has become a major movement in the U.S. Within SMs' multidisciplinary literature and multifaceted contributions, the paper systematically evaluates and analyzes SMs and their conceptual issues and frameworks that relate to consumers and globalization. Findings of the paper reveal that SMs play an important role in marketing regarding consumption and global markets. The work also provides SM-specific research agenda and research settings that deal with marketing. We believe that this paper carries meaningful implications and managerial applications.

Keywords: Consumers; Globalization; Marketing; Social Movements.

INTRODUCTION

In marketing, business ethics and globalization, SMs are important regarding their formal and informal activities, networks, consumer protests, and agendas. History reveals that SMs carry distinct organizational cultures and operational platforms that bring major structural changes in the business world. History also reveals that SMs can be exemplary organizations as well as self-serving nefarious entities. In the last few years, there is a renewed interest in SMs because of their tangible impact on consumption and marketing (*Wikipedia*, 2011). There are a multitude of active SMs in global markets that one way or another impact consumers, company-specific activities, and globalization areas. Selected SMs that impact consumers and marketing are Anti-Consumerism, Anti-Globalization Movement, Conservation Movement, Ecology Movement, Fair Trade Movement, Labor Movement, Open Access Publishing, Reform Movements in the US, Renewable Energy Movement, the Occupy Movement, etc. Currently the Occupy Movement is in the limelight because of its massive publicity and involvement regarding consumer grievances and social issues. The movement has spread to over 20 countries in various agendas, formats, and identities. In the U.S. alone, the Occupy Movement has established a powerful structure and operational platforms in 32 cities. Some of the most active and organized offshoots of the Occupy Movement include Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Los Angeles, Occupy San Francisco, Occupy Washington D.C., Occupy San Jose, Occupy San Diego, Occupy Boston, etc. The Occupy Movement has attracted the attention of national and global media, governments, consumers, politicians, celebrities and NGOs.

The literature reveals that SMs take the forms of "*group action*" and are made up of "*large informal groupings*" that aim at seeking "*specific political or social issues*". This often results in tangible socio-political changes and new institutional structures (*Wikipedia*, 2011, p. 1). Social movements and their formal and informal entities in the process of collective actions play an important role in today's society (see: Andrews & Caren, 2010; Beck, 2008; Davis & Thompson, 1994; Diani, 2000; King, 2008; Powell, 2011; Tilly, 2011; Waddock, 2009; Watanabe, 2007).

Published research on SMs mostly originated from sociology and its related areas. At the same time, in marketing and its corporate, societal and consumer-specific areas, literature on SMs is distinctly sparse and limited. Studies that investigated SMs and their consumption-related issues, product standards, grassroots coalition movements, consumer rights, and boycotts are diverse and multifaceted (see: Arjaliès, 2010; Holzer, 2006; Wilkinson, 2007). There are a few studies available on SMs that deal with consumers and globalization. No wonder a meaningful value added and marketing-related contributions are needed in these areas. Social movements and their literatures specifically fall apart when dealing with consumers and globalization because of the absence of strong research agendas and useful investigations.

To discuss further, the paper is divided as follows. Section one provides introduction and significance of the topic. Section two discusses SMs and their multidisciplinary literature and conceptual issues. Data and methodology are presented in section three. Section four discusses research agendas and presents managerial implications. The last section provides concluding comments and closing arguments. We believe that within today's changing consumers and globalization, the topic of SMs is particularly relevant because of heightened consumption and marketing in global markets.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, MULTIDISCIPLINARY LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Historical and extant literature on SMs is immensely rich, multidisciplinary and multifaceted and mostly originated from sociology and its related fields (see: Minkoff, 1997; Rao, 1998; Walder, 2009). Other literature belongs to the management field and have made timely contributions (see: Arbuthnott, Eriksson & Wincert, 2010; Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Hambrick & Chen, 2008; King & Haveman, 2008; O'Mahony & Bechky, 2008; Weber et al., 2008). As stated earlier, there are a few studies published in marketing and consumer research that explore and debate SMs and social activism (see: Holzer, 2006; Jaffe, 2010; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Other areas related to marketing and SMs include anti-branding movements (Holt, 2002), and negative feelings and consumption (Andrade & Cohen, 2007). At the same time, studies conducted in the areas of consumer boycotts, consumer animosity, product recall, and product-harm crises and negative publicity are equally important.

Within marketing and consumer research, the literature on SMs remained limited although consumer movements play a critical role regarding consumption patterns and

firms' marketing behavior. In SMs, politics, resource mobilization, institutional structures, activism, watchdog organizations, and market institutions are important. Other areas are firm-level participation, mass movements and coalitions, collective identity and action, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are applicable regarding SMs development and growth (see: Amenta et al., 2010; Andrews & Caren, 2010; Arjaliès, 2010; Beck, 2008; Davis & Thompson, 1994; Diani, 2000; Jaffe, 2010; Leontidou, 2010; Minkoff, 1997; Rao, 1998). We believe that these areas are equally important in marketing since SMs can impact firms' marketing activities as well as consumption patterns.

Social movements are like "*episodic*" entities in society (Davis et al., 2008, p. 389) and often come into force to help "*underprivileged*" and "*underrepresented*" groups; "*boundaries of collaborations*" are necessary in stable SMs (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2008, pp. 422&424). Social movements are typically made up of activists that target firms and other organizations to seek social change (King, 2008). To bring credibility and tangible influence, SMs associate themselves with "*extant social institutions*" that may include professional entities and educational and profit and non-profit organizations (King & Haveman, 2008, p. 493). Within established markets and institutions, SMs can also take the form of "*loosely organized coalitions*" that help actors and participants to seek professional exchanges and cooperative actions (Weber et al., 2008, p. 531). Within the mainstream institutional frameworks and organizational structures, SMs often deal with two distinct parties: "*incumbents*" and "*challengers*" (Kim et al., 2008, p. 286]. Social movements and consumer movements deal with grievances, protests, demonstrations, consumer activism and boycotts, legitimacy building, consumer rights, organizational justice, and purpose-driven activities (Tilly, 2008; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; King & Soule, 2007). Bringing legitimacy and mobilizing members (Hambrick & Chen, 2008, pp. 36-37) can be a difficult task in the formation of credible SMs. In this process, "*activism*" and "*institutional change*" (Hond & Bakker, 2007, p. 905) can take many forms and structures because of SMs' diverse agendas and identities.

There are five main attributes that play an important role in SMs and their growth and include '*emotional engagement*' (*EE*; ideology-based involvement, activities, and passionate contributions of members), '*socio-political agendas*'(*SPA*; movements' affiliations with social groups and political parties based on expected outcome), '*resource mobilization*'(*RM*; mobilization of a large group toward common goals and objectives), '*legitimacy building*' (*LB*; point where movements bring authenticity and create credibility about their agendas, existence, and operational platforms), and '*collective identity*' (*CI*; social actions undertaken by a large group of consumers and affected people regarding their demands and agendas). In a mainstream SM, the five attributes may appear in the following sequence:

$$EE \longrightarrow RM \longrightarrow LB \longrightarrow CI \longrightarrow SPA$$

Other issue-specific attributes and variables that impact SMs are their development, social and consumer activism, consumer resistance, social and cause marketing, regulatory issues, sustainability, collective action, and purpose driven activities.

Additional areas are social change, stakeholders, institutional change, organizational and procedural justice, societal pressure, and consumer rights. Behind the growth and interactions of SMs and marketing are timing and intensity of these attributes and situational variables.

DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

The study used online secondary data from various Websites and news organizations. In marketing, online data collection and newspapers are useful sources of information and are extensively used in research investigations (Humphreys, 2010; Johnson, 2000). For literature review, we employed interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary approach because of the diversity of the topic and its multifaceted character. Multidisciplinary research and its theories are important vehicles in marketing and other disciplines and have been employed in other studies (Cheng et al., 2009; Newman, 2006).

DISCUSSING RESEARCH AGENDA AND IMPLICATIONS

As stated earlier, the present study in its current form is exploratory in nature and is a part of an ongoing project on SMs, marketing ethics and globalization. Because of the shortage of studies on SMs in marketing, we provide seven research agenda items and their SM-specific which are discussed as follows:

1. Advocacy for Change, Social Activism and Politics: Social movements' advocacy for change, social activism, and politics are important in consumption and marketing. These areas play a critical role regarding the growth and impact of SMs in consumption and globalization. These topics fit well with today's fast growing Occupy Movement in the U.S. and other markets. The areas of consumer marketing and globalization play a critical role because of the complexity of socio-political activities and consumption. There is ample literature in sociology and other areas of social sciences that can be tapped for future studies in marketing (see: Abramovay et al., 2008; Amenta et al., 2010; Baily, 2009; Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Hond & Bakker, 2007; Walder, 2009).
2. Consumption-Related Movements, Product Standards and Grassroots Coalitions: Consumer movements and grassroots coalitions normally originate because of questionable product standards, product recalls, and product-harm crises. In marketing there are virtually no studies that investigate these coalitions and consumer movements. These are major topics that require investigations and new value added in marketing. Studies that can be benchmarked are Arjaliès (2010), Jaffe (2010), Kozinets & Handelman (2004), Schneiberg et al. (2008), and Weber et al., (2008).
3. Community-Related Movements, Internet and Social Media: As investigated by Holzer (2006), Wilkinson (2007), Almeida (2009), Sudulich (2008), Van Laer and Aelst (2010), and others, the Internet and social media plays an important role in the development and growth of SMs. These topics need fresh investigations in marketing and consumer research because of heightened consumption in global markets consumer convergence. In addition applying the issues of the Internet and social media to the Occupy Movement can shed light on the changing behavior of this and other movements which draw diverse audiences and supporters worldwide.

4. 'Doing Good Activities', Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Movements: As discussed by Freeman (2010) and Thomas et al. (2009), 'doing good activities' and corporate social responsibility remain important agenda items in SMs. In consumer marketing and globalization, there is no literature that addresses these issues. Future studies can help if investigated in multiple countries because of the diversity of SMs and their audiences.

5. Memberships/Networks and NGO-Related Activities: In the growth of SMs, memberships, social networks, and NGO-related activities are critical regarding making coalitions and collective identities. These issues have been further corroborated by Arbuthnott et al. (2010), Bond (2008), King and Haveman (2008), O'Mahony and Bechky (2008), and others. More marketing studies are needed that can investigate these issues and their growth patterns. Since SMs are created on the basis of 'cause-related marketing' and 'social issues', it will be prudent to investigate these timely topics. The Occupy Movement fits well in this domain because of its massive growth and visibility in the media.

6. Consumer Rights, Boycotts and Media Attention: Social movements mostly operate on the basis of consumer rights, boycotts and media attention. In consumer marketing and globalization literature, there are no studies that authenticate these activities. It will be useful to approach these topics since consumer rights, boycotts and media attention are the backbone of SMs. Studies that can be benchmarked are Andrews & Caren (2008), Holzer (2006), and King & Haveman (2008).

7. Change and Institutionalizing Social Movements: In SMs, change and institutionalizing movements is a major topic. This is attributed to institutional and structural changes that contribute to the growth of SMs. These topics have been selectively investigated by Dodman (2009), King and Pearce (2010), King and Soul (2007), and Suh (2001). We suggest that these new research avenues be pursued to investigate unexplored areas in marketing.

Within today changing markets and globalization patterns, this paper provides the following managerial implications:

A. In marketing, SMs' growth and their peculiar nuances and distinct environments in global markets should be understood. The pace of change is particularly important when dealing with consumers and globalization patterns. Understanding advocacy for change and social activism is particularly important when dealing with diverse consumers and consumption patterns in global markets.

B. Consumer movements can bring opportunities as well as create havoc for companies. Marketers need to understand the development process of SMs from the beginning. Last year, nobody could predict the behavior of the Occupy Movement which developed into an established movement with multiple identities and agendas in global markets. This is a reflection of globalization and its consumer convergence taking distinct shapes and forms in global business (Anwar, 2007).

C. Topics such as 'doing good' social activism, and corporate social responsibility are relevant in marketing because of the diversity of societal needs. Marketers need to understand these areas because of the changing forces of globalization and consumption trends.

D. As investigated and analyzed by Dodman (2009), Kim et al. (2008), King and Soul (2007), and Suh (2001), institutional changes and societal and corporate frameworks often appear during the development of SMs. Marketers need to understand these patterns because of consumption and needs. Understanding institutional changes and SMs become even more important when dealing with global markets and diverse cultures.

E. Consumer rights, boycotts, and product recalls often originate from active SMs. Marketers need to devise a system to understand the behavior of SMs when dealing with consumers and diverse markets.

F. History reveals that grassroots coalitions often turn into large-scale SMs. Marketers need to understand SM-related evolutionary growth and development. These areas can help deal with SMs and their agendas. Many companies were taken by surprise because of the emergence of the Occupy Movement, its diverse audiences and heightened interest on the part of public.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Social movements are important in marketing, consumption and globalization and will continue to attract researchers because of societal needs and marketing ethics. There is much to be learned from this exploratory research in marketing ethics. The paper's main contribution is in three areas. First the work looked at SMs and their characteristics and operational issues. Second, the work reviewed multidisciplinary literature of SMs that has not been put together in marketing. Third, within today changing consumers and globalization, the paper pursued a logical discussion of SMs and their research agendas in marketing. The review and findings of this paper authenticate that SMs carry major ramifications for marketers. Although there are a few studies available on consumer movements and SMs in marketing, major works have yet to be published. This is needed because of the importance of SMs in consumption and globalization. In today's changing markets, SMs are major players regarding mobilizing masses, initiating consumer activism, and showing collective identities and consumer rights. A perfect example is the growth of the Occupy Movement and its grassroots coalitions. The limitation of this paper falls within the domain of its exploratory nature. At the same time, the multidisciplinary literature and discussion presented in the work truly corroborates the ongoing investigations regarding SMs and consumer protests. Marketers need to pay attention to the SM-related developments that engulf corporate operations and consumption. Social movements provide important research vehicles to study socio-political trends and consumption platforms. In conclusion, SMs and their nuances are distinct in consumption, marketing ethics and globalization. Their forms, structures, and operational patterns should be understood and scientifically investigated in marketing.

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NOTE: Additional references available upon request.