



Consumerism:too Much Too Soon Syndrome

KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT *In a developing country like India where the incidence of poverty and unemployment is very high and the level of literacy is very low, the people face a volume of problems, particularly in the context of consumer related issues. Unlike in the developed world, consumers in these countries have not been able to play a greater role in the development process. The process of development coupled with increasing liberalisation and globalisation across the country has enabled consumers to realise their increasingly important role in society and governance. However, concentration of the market power in the hands of a select few has affected consumers' behaviour over time. Through this paper an emphasis has been to explore consumerism as too much too soon syndrome in India.*

Introduction:

Consumerism is a social and economic order and ideology that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. This speaks about the active buying and selling by the consumer. The development in the consumer oriented tendencies, marked by the availability of a variety of manufactured consumer goods and active advertising of the products in various media .A large part of consumerism depends on advertising.

Consumerism discourse relates to the everyday patterns of behavior one expects to find in consumerism or commercialism .This also means that a large percentage of Indian population lives in rural sector as opposed to urban centers. Currently, the division between rural and urban population distribution is 70% to 30%. While this reveals a large rural bias, it however points to a dramatic shift to greater urbanism because in 1960 the distribution was 85% and 15%. Urban industry, which was barely existent thirty years ago, generates 40% of the national output. While the rural labor force still exists based on historically constructed caste lines as non-competing groups, the structure of the urban labor force is becoming more cosmopolitan.

Consumerism also refers to economic policies placing emphasis on consumption. In an abstract sense, it is the consideration that the free choice of consumers should strongly orient the choice of what is produced and how, and therefore orient the economic organization of a society. Consumerism essentially means the growing wants and needs of an individual for goods and services. India is one of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world. The consumer's standard of life is going higher and hence his needs are escalating as well. Consumerism in India, is in a new high, and refuses to show signs of budging anymore. The Indian consumer, due to his exposure, of the global market, strives to get the best of the goods in his home land. Consumer tastes and preferences are definitely changing. Even children have their own preferences. The retail sector-both organized and unorganized, strive hard to cater to the vast range of the Indian consumers. Eg : The retail sector in India, with its present pace, is expected to grow at a rate of 25%- 30%annually

By definition, consumerism is in total contrast to mindfulness:

The preoccupation of society with the acquisition of consumer goods, or, put another way; the theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable.

Consumerism encourages us to be on the lookout for the next best thing, when more often what we have is still in good condition, fully functional and wholly adequate.

Fashion, trends and marketing initiatives lure the mind into believing that we need more than we have and better than what we currently own. The ramifications of this are a materially conscious society judging each other by what one does and doesn't own.

Grasping after the latest car, phone or item of clothing is an addiction that takes over the mind.

For many people life revolves entirely around accumulating more money to buy more things, with the mind residing in a constant quest to acquire more luxurious, society-approved goods than their peers. Such a state of mind makes for a tormented soul, particularly for those without the funds to maintain their material aspirations.

The consumer society we live in completely unaligned with mindfulness philosophy because it causes mental suffering through constant desire. There is no reality in a world of consumerism. All awareness of true reality is lost. The awareness of self and the intricate human connection with Mother Nature is lost in the deluded notion that "just one more handbag will make me happier".

Literature review

Academic researches focused their attention to address how an individual consumer thinks of his rights. But these rights are to be addressed by the formal movements that play a function of a facilitator in providing and protecting rights of consumers. The basic right of a consumer is right of safety, right of information and right to be heard and these rights were further extended to rights of education, rights to be redressed, rights for healthy environment and last but not the least rights to basic needs (Stern, 1967; Morgan & Avrunin, 1982). The concept of consumerism was elaborated by (Abplanalp, 2009) as a new socio economic and cultural trend which celebrates consumer individuality and unique personality, and consequently, companies have no option but to respond and recognize

positively to this emerging consumer concerns. Companies have had to invest heavily in advertising their products to meet and stimulate consumer demands with various products categories because consumers are no longer passive actors; rather they have become independent and active force in shaping events in market place and influencing corporations' market and non market decisions.(Ali A. , 2007; Barrutia & Charterins, 2006). This has been made possible by rapid developments in informational technology, ease of communications across the globe, education, wide exposure to media and entertainment, and wide spread influence (Ali & Wisniesk, 2010). As early as 1876, John Wanamaker, the founder of world first departmental stores, stated, "When a customer enter my store, I forget myself. He is the king" (Economist, 2005). In 1960s, customers did not exert that much influence in the marketplace as they do in current years. No doubt changes have taken place in 1990s and catapulted customers on the center stage of market power. This development is associated with consumerism and the quest of customers across the globe to take advantage of enfolding market opportunities and changes. The cores of consumerism debate are the issues of power of consumer choice, the propensity to consume, and the willingness to voice concerns (A.J, 2007; D, M, & Micheletti, 2005). (Henry, 2010) Identified two dominant factor contributing consumer movements are consumer's own beliefs about their rights and political acts towards consumer movements. (Jensen, ISSN: 2044-5261 | www.britishjournals.com | © London Research Syndicate 2011 Journal of Marketing Philosophy & Practice, Vol 1, No 1 Page 3 Mazze, & Stern, 1973) Argued that consumer protection acts has to be established for the sake of consumer prevention as well as revolutionized the industries to follow certain rules for consumer safety.

Objective

To explore the consumer protection and consumerism in India.

Methodology

This research paper is based on secondary data and qualitative analysis. The paper is constructed on basis on literature review and conclusions are drawn from it. The review of literature includes the published articles of various researchers and books on consumerism. Finally, limitation of the study and future directions for research is provided by the author

Advantages

I guess we have a tremendous amount of choice in the marketplace. Don't like that purple shirt on the mannequin? There's one in every colour of the rainbow on the rack. There's a specialized store for every possible activity or interest. For big businesses, consumerism allows for brand differentiation... Where we have the same product sold under many different names. This makes big businesses tons of money and allows for competition in the marketplace. Consumerism works very well for capitalists, economists and corporations.

Disadvantages

Consumerism encourages highly wasteful behaviour. We waste our money on goods that we often do not need--big businesses and advertisers work tirelessly to create an environment conducive to impulse buys. Think about all the little goodies they pack around the check-out in stores. We waste our time search for new things to buy rather than thinking up ways to (re)use the things we already have. Consumerism leads to overproduction of

times (there are many structures at work that contribute to this problem however). Overproduction leads to the waste of valuable resources and energy. It also contributes to increasing amounts of plastics in our oceans and landfills. That's just to name a few.

We clutter up our lives with "things", many of which we seldom use or make good use of. We clutter our living environment with more than we need yet still live with the constant desire for more bigger and better "things".

This isn't conducive to finding contentment and harmony with one's self. The grasping is a vicious circle, one that never ends, no matter how much one acquires.

But we aren't all doomed; quite the contrary. By simply becoming aware that we are being drawn in by the incessant marketing that traps the mind in this convincing vice, we can break free and subjectively see that the grasping mind is misleading our awareness and leading us astray.

If you find yourself trapped in the "next best thing" cycle, instead of rushing out to buy that new phone, bag or pair of shoes, reverse the process by simply minimizing what you own.

By this I mean getting rid of stuff you don't need.

Spend a deserved day going through all those things cluttering your life that represent your relentless quest to buy the feel good factor.

Identify stuff you just don't use or don't need but that has the potential to better the life of somebody less fortunate. Give those things to charity or someone you know who could really make use of it.

For example, I deliberately haven't been replacing old t-shirts and jeans this year. I used to have six or more pairs of jeans for varying occasions; now I just have three. And it feels great. I have less to consider when I get ready to go out, less cluttering up my wardrobe and less to wash, and I got a soul-satisfying feeling giving three pairs of jeans to my local Oxfam shop.

I now buy less clothes and completely ignore fashion trends. I wear what I like to wear.

I have applied this philosophy to technology like old computers, phones charges, etc. So what if I might be able to sell it; the likelihood is I'd never get around to it and it's just cluttering up my home, and in turn, my mind.

Right now, aside from the furniture, TV, my computer and other essential bits of technology, I probably have around 40kg of belongings, and it feels amazing. I just have what I need.

And every time I feel tempted to buy something just because it's a good deal, I ask myself, "Do I really need it?"

Take a moment today to meditate on consumerism; what it represents and how it affects the way you act, think and feel. Is it time you stopped buying stuff you don't need and freed your life of the material grasping and subsequent mental clutter that traps you in the "keeping up with the Jones'" mindset

Consumerism In India

In India, consumerism is relatively more established as

compare to other developing countries. India has witnessed dramatic transformation over the past two decades as structural adjustments out of which consumer movements were dominant. The country is conscious about customer satisfaction and their safety rights. There are six rights given to consumers in order to protect a consumer from misleading and cheating. To secure the consumer from being exploited, Indian Government has passed many acts time to time to serve the consumers such as drugs and cosmetics act 1940, prevention of food adulteration act 1954, essential commodity supply act 1955, monopolies and restrictive trade practices act 1969, standards of weight and measure act 1976 and consumer protection act 1986 which is currently working in India uptil now for the protection of consumer rights and transformed in consumer act 1995 with some amendments and positive alterations (Consumer Act 1995). Additions to this, there are two more rights given to consumers by United Nations that are rights to basic needs, rights to healthy environment. Moreover, there are around 600 non government organizations that are working to protect consumer interests and their function is to educate the consumers about consumerism, special education about consumerism to women, arrangements of seminars, publishing brochures, encouraging following desirable consumption standards. These movements are established in order to create strong motivation and urge to business to conduct high commercial standards of behavior (Klein & John, 2004). The first consumer protection council was built in Madras in 1950. Later in 1966, Consumer guidance society of India was formed in Bombay. Consumer protection grew into a movement as per record of International organization of Consumer union. In 1970s, consumer unions were formed in Dehli, Ahmadabad and Calcutta. There are 36 legislations protecting consumer rights in India which are currently working under Consumer protection Act 1986 (Lizzy, 1993). Moreover government of Gujrat has established a Consumer affair and Protection agency to protect the rights of consumers. (Vermann & Belk, 2009) Identified the history of few big companies that had to stop their operations as a result of consumer movements on consumer's concerns violations. Author discussed the problematic existence of Coca cola Company in India because it was suspected that it illegally transfers revenues to Atlanta. The company decided to withdraw its operations from India when it is asked to provide the disclosures of formula in 1975. The anti consumption movement started with the name of Lok Samati which protest against water shortages and pollution caused by Coca cola company. The pamphlets were used to protest and these pamphlets were distributed among consumers and workers. Apart from pollution hazards, other reasons for protest were that activists protested that coca cola came up with an advertising message of pride and that is against the cultural values of India. (Vermann & Belk, 2009) discussed in their study that to protest further a rally was organized in India, Mehdiganj and the Ashfaq one of the activist of Lok Samiti claimed that it is harmful to consumer health as well because it contains acid and if you wash your toilet with it, the floor starts shining. Therefore he claimed it to be more harmful to stomach. This also shows that consumer movement leads a big giant company like Coca cola to spend huge amounts to conduct consumer market research and re-launch later with better quality and keeping environmental concerns in mind. Same is the case with McDonald's in India, it has come up with completely altered menu due to protest of foreign fast food culture there. It has to come up with all vegetables deals as dominant Hindu culture is to worship cows therefore they have to exclude

beefs offerings there (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2004). (Vermann & Belk, 2009; Brown, 2002) described the interpretation of consumer movement with political ideology and use of consumption and globalization. This study elaborated that existence of consumer movements in India since 1970 but it was more refined in 1980 and 1990s with the increase in consumer awareness and media exposures and Judicial activities for consumer's rights protection are to keep a balance between the liabilities of consumers and sellers prior to this consumer's movement were used to be held at federal levels (Pitofsky, 1997).

Discussion And Findings

_"Consumers as varied as societies and future of consumer societies vary with the extent of consumerism that is concerned with individual choice" (Hilton, 2003)

Findings revealed that resistance to consumption requires a deep sense of knowledge and interpretation of production and marketing systems as they are reflected within the national spaces in globalization. Moreover, consumers are now becoming more aware of their rights and power therefore they raise concerns for their protection. For this purpose, consumer movements established in various countries to serve the consumer complaints and to redress their concerns. Consumerism is global but the extent of consumerism across the globe varies with the cultural aspects, lifestyles, socio-economic statuses and values of the people in a particular society.

Limitations and future research direction

One of the limitations of this research is that this study conducted on secondary data only. But this limitation of this study can become a good direction for future research. Empirical research can also be conducted to support the conclusions and findings of this study in the future. The growth potential of consumer movements in other developing countries can also be a direction for further research to be carried out. Reasons for lack in consumerism in Asian countries can also be studied. Lastly, number of researcher has carried out research on historic movements of consumerism globally but the future of consumerist societies are yet to be explored. As consumption patterns in different societies varies therefore the future of consumerism in Asia or any other country can also be prospected and predicted by conducting further research. Time series analysis can also be done for the purpose of comparison between past and present trends of consumerism in different societies.

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