

Research Title: Consumer Empowerment through Contemplative Consumer Activism: A Drive for Social Change

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Research Problem and Vision

Consumer empowerment intersects consumer activism in that it is deeply embedded in those collective attempts aimed at transforming an existing power of authority causing unrest, and instituting social change (Hajdas and Kłeczek, 2021, Shankar et al., 2006). The consumer activism literature with a consumer empowerment agenda is often informed by two research approaches. The first approach sees the consumer as being an important social actor who is empowered through an entitlement to the right to freely choose among different market options (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2014, Den Hond and De Barker, 2007). In this agency-oriented view, the consumer is often viewed as individually responsible for forging social change through their consumption choices. The second approach on the other hand sees the consumer as being shaped by the intricate nets of social fabric formed collectively. In this view, consumer empowerment acts as an important mediator in forming new forms of social organization which are manifested through shared spaces, practices and discourses in creating macrostructures (Papaoikonomou and Alarcón, 2017).

My contribution to both strands of literature would be informed by my PhD research in which I plan to introduce the notion of *contemplative consumer activism*, and theorize its role in instituting social change. Contemplative consumer activism is conceptualized as an alternative form of consumer activism, which relies on a resource base of a more endogenous, secluded and subtle nature, rather than a rational, explicit or tangible one. The research context for my study is mindfulness, which refers to paying attention to what is going on in the here and the now. As it stands, the research relates to the Transformative Consumer Research and Social Marketing agendas in that it investigates how the unprecedented rise of mindfulness impacts and transforms the contemporary consumer society while witnessing changes in consumer perception and behavior at a time of significant social change induced by the global pandemic.

The view adopted in this research associates consumer empowerment, in its relation to contemplative consumer activism, with the consumer's ability to elicit effective responses to themselves, their own experiences as well as any external stimuli that may cause unrest in their social arrangements. In this view, consumer empowerment enacted by a change created at the consumer's perceptive level is seen as the primary condition of creating a change at the societal level, as it will translate into developing more competent behavioral patterns and relationships with their surroundings, rather than being driven by automatic thought patterns and reactive responses (Williams, 2010, Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Such a shift of control from unpredictable external conditions

to the very consumer would allow them to decide for the kind and intensity of the experience they want to have with external stimuli.

From a social marketing standpoint, the suggested consumer empowerment through a contemplative resource base that prioritizes looking inside and realizing all the possibilities of one's abilities in mobilizing social change would lead to more perpetual and impactful results that would contribute to the welfare of the larger aspects of the consumer society. Such a contemplative resource base that relies on commonness, abundance and imitability, rather than efficiency economies based on uniqueness, rareness and invaluableness as often emphasized in the resource-based view, would further promote the idea of democratization in resource allocation among different consumer groups in the way to creating social change.

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