

Consumerism - Review of Literature

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Abstract:

The modern era of business has prompted an increased focus on the consumer and the responsibility of corporations to consider their ethical and social obligations to their customers. The rise of the consumerist movement has encouraged further research and development on the topic of consumerism, enabling business to succeed in a consumer-driven market.

Consumerism has been the subject of considerable discussion over the last four decades. This social movement- which has sought to help consumers attain safer products, more information, adequate selection, and better access to redress mechanisms--has been examined by researchers from numerous disciplines using a wide variety of research approaches. These researchers have sought to describe, explain, predict, and control the overall consumer movement and the organizations, individuals, and issues that have made up the movement. Put differently, one could say that these researchers have studied consumerism extensively on both a macro and micro level.

Consumerism in the global market place, focuses on the ways in which businesses can improve their relationships with customers as well as analyze and influence purchasing behavior. As a comprehensive reference source on topics like consumerism and the related ones, this paper is intended for use by marketing professionals, business managers, students, and academicians.

Keywords: Consumerism, Consumer, CLC (Consumerism life cycle), Producerism, Socio-cultural

1.0 Introduction:

The last four decades have witnessed an over expanding interest in Consumerism and which is in a very critical condition. The word Consumerism has to be fully understood in its historical retrospect with reference to the consumer's position in common law, main areas of regulations, controls on advertising, labelling standards, etc. The word consumer means a person who uses goods and services.

In comparison to 1957, today, only in the U.S, people own twice as many cars per person, eat out twice as often and enjoy endless other commodities that weren't around then--big-screen TVs, microwave ovens, SUVs and handheld wireless devices, to name a few. Are they really happier than before? Certainly, happiness is difficult to pin down, let alone measure. Many recent studies and the related literature review suggest we are no more contented than we were then--in fact, maybe less than before. "Compared with their grandparents, today's young adults have grown up with much more affluence, slightly less happiness and much greater risk of depression and assorted social pathology," notes Hope College psychologist David G. Myers, PhD, author of the article, which appeared in the American Psychologist (Vol. 55, No. 1). "Our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being." These findings emerge at a time when the consumer culture has reached a fever pitch, comments Myers, also the author of "The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty" (Yale University Press, 2000). Let's see, what does psychologists' research say about possible effects of this consumer culture on people's mental well-being?

Based on the literature to date, it would be too simplistic to say that desire for material wealth unequivocally means discontent. In fact, the least materialistic people report the most life satisfaction. Further, some more studies indicate that materialists can be almost as contented if they have the money and their acquisitive lifestyle doesn't conflict with more soul-satisfying pursuits.

"There's a narrowing of the gap between materialists and non-materialists in life satisfaction as materialists' income rises," notes Edward Diener, PhD, a well-known researcher of subjective well-being and materialism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "So if you're poor, it's very bad to be a materialist; and if you're rich, it doesn't make you happier than non-materialists, but you almost catch up."

1.1 Initiating Points of Materialism:

Across the world, we all experience the same consumeristic culture, why do some of us develop strongly materialistic values and others don't? A line of research suggests that insecurity--both financial and emotional--lies at the heart of consumeristic cravings. Indeed, it is not money per se, but the striving for it, that's linked to unhappiness, find Diener and others. Further research suggests that when people grow up in unfortunate social situations--where they're not treated very nicely by their parents or when they experience poverty or even the threat of death," says Kasser, "they become more materialistic as a way to adapt."

This was first being demonstrated in 1995 paper, *Developmental Psychology* (Vol. 31, No. 6) by Kasser and colleagues. Teens who reported having higher materialistic attitudes tended to be poorer and to have less nurturing mothers than those with lower materialism scores, the team found. On the same lines, a 1997 study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (Vol. 23, No. 4) headed up by Aric Rindfleisch, PhD, then a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and now an associate professor of marketing there, found that young people whose parents were undergoing or had undergone divorce or separation were more prone to developing materialistic values later in life than those from intact homes.

And in the first direct experimental test of the point, Kasser and University of Missouri social psychologist Kenneth Sheldon, PhD, reported in a 2000 article in *Psychological Science* (Vol. 11, No. 4), that individuals provoked with thoughts of the most extreme uncertainty of them all--death--people reported more materialistic leanings. The ill effects of materialism appear subject to modification, other research finds. Like in a longitudinal study reported in the November 2003 issue of *Psychological Science* (Vol. 14, No. 6), psychologists Carol Nickerson, PhD, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Norbert Schwarz, PhD, of the University of Michigan, Diener, and Daniel Kahnemann, PhD, of Princeton University, examined two linked data sets collected 19 years apart on 12,000 people who had attended elite colleges and universities in the 1970s--one drawn in 1976 when they were freshmen, the other in 1995.

On an average, those who had initially expressed stronger financial aspirations reported lower life satisfaction two decades later than those expressing lower monetary desires. But as the income of the higher-aspiration participants rose, so did their reported life satisfaction, the team found.

James E. Burroughs, PhD, assistant professor of commerce at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce, and the University of Wisconsin's Rindfleisch conclude that the unhappiest materialists are those whose materialistic and higher-order values are most conflicted. In a 2002 paper in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (Vol. 29, No. 3), the team first gauged people's levels of stress, materialistic values and pro-social values in the domains of family, religion and community--in keeping with the theory of psychologist Shalom Schwartz, PhD, that some values unavoidably conflict with one another.

Then in an experimental study, they ascertained the degree of conflict people felt when making a decision between the two value domains.

The unhappiest people were those with the most conflict--those who reported high pro-social and high materialistic values, says Burroughs. The other three groups--those low in materialism and high in pro-social values, those low in pro-social values and high in materialism, and those lukewarm in both arenas--reported similar, but lower levels of life stress.

His findings completed with those of others: that the differences in life satisfaction between more and less materialistic people are relatively small, says Burroughs. "Material things are neither bad nor good," Burroughs comments. "It is the role and status they are accorded in one's life that can be problematic. The key is to find a balance: to appreciate what you have, but not at the expense of the things that really matter--your family, community and spirituality."

1.2 Point of View:

Mostly materialists swim through life with little distress, however, consumerism carries larger costs that are worth worrying about, others say. "There are consequences of materialism that can affect the quality of other people's and other species' lives," says Kasser. In fact, he and others are beginning to study links between materialistic values and attitudes toward the environment, and to write about the way consumerism has come to affect our collective psyche. Psychotherapist Kanner, who co-edited "Psychology and Consumer Culture" with Kasser, cites examples as minor as parents who "outsource" parental activities like driving their children to school and those as big as international corporations leading people in poor countries to crave products they can ill afford.

Indeed, consumerism is an example of an area where psychology needs to stretch from its focus on the individual and examine the wider impact of the phenomenon, Kanner believes.

1.3 Perspectives: Consumerism Meaning

The influence of the public, as end users of products and services, on the way companies manufacture and sell their goods. Consumers exert considerable power over companies as organizations become more customer-focused. Demand is rising for products that are of high quality, ethically produced, well priced, and safe, and consumerism pressurizes companies to operate and produce goods and services in accordance with the public's wishes. A particular form of consumer pressure, motivated by environmental concerns, is green consumerism, which campaigns for environmentally friendly goods, services, and means of production.

Consumerism should be termed as an organized movement of citizens and government to strengthen the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers. It is the ideology and a concept, which has come to stay in business literature. The consumer is exposed to many hazardous-physical, environmental and exploitation due to unfair trade practices. He needs protection, for instance, against products, which are unsafe for consumption products, which may cause badly injury such as defective electrical appliances. He needs protection against mal-practices and deceit by sellers. He should have adequate rights and right of recourse to redressal measures against defaulting businessmen. He needs protected against environmental pollution of air; water and noise and effective measures should be devised to keep the surroundings neat and clean. Further, a policy of protecting and informing consumers through honesty in advertising and packaging, improved safety standards etc.

Much has been written on the subject of consumerism, but only a relatively small portion of this writing has contained reports on empirical research.

The focus of the empirical work in this area has thus far been on understanding the nature and determinants of consumer discontent. A broader understanding of consumerism could be obtained through more research on consumer organizations, their supporters and clients, and the performance of their programs and initiatives.

In the coming times the term consumerism will always be on move with see-saw movement hence it is a primary responsibility of marketer to assess and access to the changing pattern of consumerism. Further the psychological factor needs to be emphasised, since it inspires consumer to believe that they can't brush their own teeth without a help of an electronic gadget? Companies and marketers should educate the consumers about products and its use and utility. It is being nicely put by CEO of Sony Akio Morita that 'Our plan is to lead the public with new products rather than ask them what kind of products they want. Generally successful marketers try to create a market for a product by educating, the public about, what the product can do for them.

2.0 Discussion:

2.1 Are materialists really unhappy?

As with all things psychological, the relationship between mental state and materialism is complex: Indeed, researchers are still trying to ascertain whether materialism stokes unhappiness, unhappiness fuels materialism, or both. Diener suggests that several factors may help explain the apparent toll of pursuit of wealth. In simple terms, a strong consumerist bent--what William Wordsworth in 1807 called "getting and spending"--can promote unhappiness because it takes time away from the things that can nurture happiness, including relationships with family and friends, research shows.

"It's not absolutely necessary that chasing after material wealth will interfere with your social life," Diener says. "But it can, and if it does, it probably has a net negative payoff in terms of life satisfaction and well-being."

People with strong materialistic values appear to have goal orientations that may lead to poorer well-being, adds Knox College psychologist Tim Kasser, PhD, who with Berkeley, Calif., psychotherapist Allen Kanner, PhD, co-edited a new APA book, "Psychology and Consumer Culture" (APA, 2004), featuring experts' research and views on the links between consumerism, well-being and environmental and social factors.

In Kasser's own book, "The High Price of Materialism" (MIT Press, 2002), Kasser describes his and others' research showing that when people organize their lives around extrinsic goals such as product acquisition, they report greater unhappiness in relationships, poorer moods and more psychological problems. Kasser distinguishes extrinsic goals--which tend to focus on possessions, image, status and receiving rewards and praise--from intrinsic ones, which aim at outcomes like personal growth and community connection and are satisfying in and of themselves.

Relatedly, a not-yet-published study by University of Missouri social psychologist Marsha Richins, PhD, finds that materialists place unrealistically high expectations on what consumer goods can do for them in terms of relationships, autonomy and happiness.

"They think that having these things is going to change their lives in every possible way you can think of," she says. One man in Richins's study, for example, said he desperately wanted a swimming pool so he could improve his relationship with his moody 13-year-old daughter.

Neither money nor materialism can buy happiness, in fact research shows that people who place a high value on wealth, status, and stuff are more depressed and anxious and less sociable than those who do not. Now new research shows that materialism is not just a personal problem. It's also environmental.

Consumerism has strong links with the Western world, but is in fact an international phenomenon. People purchasing goods and consuming materials in excess of their basic needs is as old as the first civilizations (e.g. Ancient Egypt, Babylon and Ancient Rome).

A great turn in consumerism arrived just before the Industrial Revolution. In the nineteenth century, capitalist development and the industrial revolution were primarily focused on the capital goods sector and industrial infrastructure (i.e., mining, steel, oil, transportation networks, communications networks, industrial cities, financial centers, etc.).

3.0 Review of Literature:

The consumer movement can be traced back for nearly a century (Herrmann 1974; Mayer 1989), but the word consumerism is of relatively recent origin. What is believed to be the first documented use of the word appeared in *The New Republic* in 1944. Some of the oldest and most successful consumer enterprises grew independently of the rural impulse that in recent years has been most active in spreading the idea of consumerism. A business of over one million dollars a year in Waukegan, Illinois grew out a housewives' milk strike 34 years ago (Greer).

In the initial stage of the development of consumerism consumers vented their grievances individually on the individual seller. The impetus for an organised consumer movement is believed to have come from the vigorous activities of consumer activists such as Ralph Nader (Quazi, 1998; Kaynak, 1985), the passage of President Kennedy's four-point Charter of Consumer Rights (right to safety, right to choose, right to know, and right to be heard) by the US Congress in 1962 (Ede and Calcich, 1999; Day and Aaker, 1997; Turner, 1995; Carlson and Kangun, 1988; Aaker and Day, 1978), the formation of the International Organization of Consumer Unions in the Hague in 1960 and publication of some works such as Vance Pacard's *The Hidden Persuader* and Ralph Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed* (Day and Aaker, 1997; Craig-Lees, 1991).

The term consumerism was apparently first used in a manner, which is only tangentially related to contemporary usage. That original usage reflects the important role of cooperatives in the consumer movement through the 1930s. Moreover, the link to that earlier, reformist tradition may help explain reactions to consumerism when the word re-emerged in conjunction with the consumer movement of the mid-1960s. The immediate impact of the term, however, was nil. It went unnoticed and no evidence that it was used in reference to the consumer movement could be found for nearly a quarter century. The movement revived with President Kennedy's 1962 call for a "Bill of Consumer Rights" (Lampman 1988) and Esther Peterson's appointment to the new position of Special Assistant to the President for Consumer Affairs two years later. Still, there were no references to consumerism.

It is impossible to say precisely when consumerism was first used in reference to the consumer movement, but it seems the term was in use conversationally by 1965 or 1966. Stanley Cohen (1993), long-time Washington editor for *Advertising Age*, links the emergence of the term with *Printer's Ink* (PI), another advertising publication of the period. Indeed, PI's editorial position was vociferously opposed to the growing consumer movement in general and Esther Peterson in particular.

3.1 Describing and Explaining Consumerism:

Much effort has been devoted toward describing what consumerism is and toward explaining why the movement emerged and developed the way it did. Numerous writers have offered descriptions of the legislative debates, the legal battles, the boycotts and demonstrations, and the fund-raising techniques that have characterized the consumer movement. Most of the empirical work directed at describing and explaining consumerism has tended to be very limited in its focus.

Most of the empirical research has sought to either (1) describe the characteristics of consumers who hold "consumerist" attitudes or who report being "dissatisfied" or (2) explain what has caused consumers to develop "consumerist" attitudes or to become "dissatisfied." One could say that this research has tended to look at consumerism on a more micro level, being concerned with understanding more about the individual attitudes and opinions that provide some basic underlying support for the consumer movement. More macro-level empirical studies, examining how the strength and vitality of the overall movement has been affected by consumer attitudes and opinions versus factors such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph, have not been done. Furthermore, only limited effort has been devoted toward other types of micro-level studies, such as investigations of individual consumer groups, their supporters and clients, and the reasons why people choose to become supporters or clients.

Thus, what is available is a large assortment of studies on "consumerist" attitudes and opinions, and the three studies reported upon prior to the delivery of this paper all contribute nicely to this body of literature. Through the guidance of all this literature, much is now known about who favors consumer protection legislation (Sentry, 1977), who likes Ralph Nader (Barksdale and Perreault, 1980), who thinks business cares about consumers and charges reasonable prices (Darden, Stanley, and Howell, 1982), who feels dissatisfied (Warland, Herrmann, and Willits, 1972), and why dissatisfaction develops (Deshpande and Krishnan, 1982; Richins, 1982). In addition, it is now known that much of what consumers think and feel about consumerism has remained reasonably stable over the last decade or so (for a review of relevant studies see Bloom and Greyser, 1981). What past empirical research cannot reveal, however, is why--in spite of relatively stable and favorable thoughts and feelings about consumerism across many different types of consumers--the consumer movement as a whole has had relatively dramatic ups and downs? Clearly, some new and different forms of empirical research will be required to address this question.

While the previous research on attitudes and opinions has been helpful--by showing that an important element for the vitality of a social movement, mass public discontent, has been present--it has not been enough. Sociologists who have analyzed social movements have come to recognize that to understand a social movement, it is necessary to look beyond data on discontent toward information about the resource mobilization abilities of the organizations making up the movement. In fact, a "resource mobilization" approach has essentially replaced a "discontent" approach as the dominant paradigm in the sociology literature for analyzing social movements (Zald and McCarthy, 1979; Jenkins and Perrow, 1977).

Thus empirical research on a more micro-level that would be consistent with the "resource mobilization" approach might examine things such as: (1) the changes over time of funding and memberships for various consumer organizations, (2) the reasons why individuals contribute to and join consumer organizations--something which Richins (1982) has, to a degree, addressed in her work, and (3) the amount of assistance and political support given to consumer organizations by certain labor unions, legislators, celebrities, and others. Such research is needed to begin to understand how individual consumerist attitudes get converted into group consumerist behaviours and a national consumer movement.

3.2 Future of Consumerism:

Nothing helps one make a good prediction like a good explanation. However, as has just been lamented, good, empirically tested explanations of consumerism have not appeared. In spite of this lack of guidance for making predictions | or perhaps, because of it--writers have not been shy about forecasting the future of the movement. Marketing scholars (including this writer see Bloom and Stern, 1978; Bloom and Greyser, 1981), economists

(Herrmann and Warland, 1980), futurists (Molitor, 1981), and consumer advocates themselves have spoken out freely and frequently about consumerism's future. The predictions that have been made have generally been based on personal observations, discussions with consumer advocates, and intuition, without much rigorous theoretical thinking or empirical analysis to back them up. About as rigorous as the predictions have gotten is the work of Graham Molitor (1981), who uses futurist curve-plotting techniques to forecast the strength of the movement and its most prominent issues. Unfortunately, (and understandably) Molitor--who is now a private consultant--has not laid out the details of his forecasting methodology for review by others.

3.3 Control of Consumerism:

There are certainly individuals who would like to be able to exert some control over the evolution of the overall consumer movement. Some members of the business community would probably like to steer consumerism toward a quick death, while certain consumer advocates would like to steer consumerism toward a position of much greater importance in American politics. On a more micro-level, a desire to be able to exert control over the fortunes of individual consumer organizations clearly exists among many consumer advocates.

Research that could help these various people in their control efforts has been very limited. Of course, research seeking to explain consumerism could indirectly help them and, perhaps, has helped them by suggesting causes of discontent and activism that they might try to eliminate or exacerbate (depending on what they were trying to accomplish). But more direct assistance to control efforts can probably be attained by various forms of evaluation re- search. Studies that could tell something about how well certain control efforts have actually "worked" would be most useful. Thus, much could be learned from evaluations of lobbying efforts--such as Schwartz's (1979) study of the business lobbying effort against the proposed consumer protection agency--or of programs initiated by various organizations to attract members, educate consumers, or handle redress problems. An example of this last type of evaluation can be found in the TARP, Inc. (1979) study of complaint-handling procedures in various public and private organizations. It should be recognized, however, that evaluation research of consumer programs can be extremely difficult and frustrating (see Bloom and Ford, 1979).

This was to change quickly, however, and one can infer something more about early, informal usage by those initial responses in the trade press. Advertising Age began an eight-part series entitled "Consumerism and Marketing" in May 1967 (Weiss 1967a-h). The tone of the series was broadly conciliatory, urging businesses to develop a positive response to consumer initiatives and avoid a "rigid posture of opposition" (Weiss, 1967b). "If," he argued, business "fights consumerism as 'socialism'...the end result will be increased regulation" (Weiss, 1967b).

A similar article appeared soon thereafter in the insurance industry's trade weekly. Readers were warned that if they did not support reforms in response to "the growing forces of consumerism...their comforting assumption that nothing much is going to be done about weak state regulation" might prove false ("Editorial Comment:..." 1967. Another trade publication featured Rev. Robert McEwen in an article on consumerism early the next year. Rev. McEwen responded negatively to the term: "I don't like this word consumerism. It has a built-in sneer..." ("Consumerism's New Messiahs" 1968, emphasis in original).

Ralph Nader commented on these developments later in 1968. In an article on November 21 in *The New York Review of Books*, he indicated that:

"Consumerism" is a term given vogue recently by business spokesmen to describe what they believe is a concerted, disruptive ideology concocted by self-appointed bleeding hearts

and politicians who find it pays off to attack the corporations. "Consumerism," they say, undermines public confidence in the business system [and] deprives the consumer of freedom of choice (1968). Consumerism first appeared in *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* in 1970 (Gaedeke) and was used without comment. The use of the word without special explanation represented something of a departure. The tendency at the time was to qualify the term in some way. Readers may already have noted that in many of the early references "consumerism" is in quotation marks. Aaker and Day did the same thing, beginning their 1971 book of readings, entitled *Consumerism*, with "The term 'consumerism' identifies the modern consumer movement launched in the mid-1960."

Generally, quotation marks are used around nonquoted material to qualify the term or suggest that it is being used in an unusual manner. In the foreword to Aaker and Day's book, Holton avoided the quotation marks, but spoke of a "force, which is vaguely referred to as consumerism" (1971). The qualifiers associated with the term underscore its transitional nature.

3.4 Refinements and Extensions in Consumerism:

Freed from the constraints of quotation marks, use of the term consumerism spread quickly. Aaker and Day's book, which went through several editions, was followed by a similar collection of readings by Gaedeke and Etcheson (1972). As the decade progressed, numerous readers and other treatments of consumerism were published in rapid succession (Greyser and Diamond 1976; Harris 1976; Jones and Gardner 1976; Kelley 1973; Murray 1973).

As consumerism came to be used more widely, definitions proliferated. Some of the earlier ones tended toward the global. Magnuson argued that consumerism is "...the phenomenon whereby purchasers of goods and services are trying to attain a marketing system which makes the consumer sovereign..." (1973). Bishop maintained that consumerism "...seeks nothing less for every American than a secure physical environment and a just economic one" (1973), which takes the issue well beyond fairness in the marketplace. That same year Cravens and Hills offered a more operational definition. To them, consumerism "encompasses a multitude of group actions concerned with such issues as consumer protection laws, the availability of product and price information, fraudulent and deceptive business practices, and product safety" (1973).

Variations in both precision and level of specificity continued to characterize definitions of consumerism. Maynes (1975) identified consumerism as the source of criticisms of consumer sovereignty. I used the word without comment in a discussion of consumer organizations, implicitly equating consumerism with the consumer movement (Swagler 1975). However, I did question the word consumerism several years later: "Consumerism," I contended, "is something that all consumers practice and is therefore hardly very useful" (Swagler 1979).

Garman provided an operational definition of consumerism in the context of the evolution of the consumer movement in the 1960s: "...consumerism was a label put on the efforts of a growing number of consumer advocates who questioned the inadequacies of the marketplace and the unwillingness of business and government to deal with important consumer needs and demands" (1991, emphasis in original). Consumers, he maintained, were demanding "more of a balance between them and sellers in the marketplace."

Brobeck made a distinction between consumerism and the consumer movement. In the former, he included all those working on behalf of the consumer interest. He limited his definition of the consumer movement to "non-profit advocacy groups and individual advocates who seek to advance the consumer interest by 'reforming' governmental and/or corporate policies and practices" (1990).

His is a distinct perspective, but Maynes (1992) noted that activists tend to identify consumerism with promoting governmental intervention on consumers' behalf.

Two conclusions may be drawn from viewing these various perspectives as a group. First, there is an obvious central tendency among them. When different individuals from the consumer movement refer to consumerism, they have the same general idea in mind. The most striking common element is consumer sovereignty (or the lack of it). Most definitions either mention consumer sovereignty or are offered in a broader discussion of that topic. Consumer sovereignty has to do with power; oddly, however, few of the definitions of consumerism make specific mention of power. The second conclusion qualifies the first: despite the commonalities, there are important differences among the various definitions. The arrangement is much like a Venn diagram, featuring areas of overlap along with areas, which are distinct to each element. The major differences seem to be between approaches targeted to specific goals and those concerned more with reform of the economic system. This is not surprising. Any movement seeks to include like-minded individuals, even though disagreements exist about particulars. Because there is strength in numbers, it is to the advantage of those who share at least some common interests to coexist when possible.

It has been suggested that the definition of consumerism has broadened over the years, although it is difficult to imagine a broader definition than Bishop's (1973) with its goal of a just economic environment. The biggest change has likely been with operationalizing the definitions. Various individuals may agree on the need to protect the consumer's interests, but disagree on how best to do so. Is deregulation in the consumer's interest? Privatization of public goods? Ceilings on interest rates? Disagreements now are likely to be found not in the "what?" or consumerism but in the "how?" of it.

3.5 Consumerism, Is It an Excessive Materialism?

The discussion thus far has dealt with consumerism as it relates to the consumer movement. Recently, however, a quite different and possibly disconcerting meaning has surfaced: consumerism is being used to mean excessive materialism. The usage is technically correct, based on the definition of -ism as a "state or condition resulting from an excess of something specified" (definition 3.b.). In this sense, consumer is to consumerism what alcohol is to alcoholism.

The Oxford English Dictionary provides what many would consider a less threatening definition. The Dictionary's second definition of consumerism is given as: "Name given to a doctrine advocating a continual increase in the consumption of goods as the basis of a sound economy" (1989, 802). This places the meaning of the term close to the idea of the consumer society.

However, this is not a new development. Indeed, consumerism was being used in this way before the term was used with reference to protecting the consumer's interests. In his 1960 best seller, *The Waste Makers*, Vance Packard wrote about excited businesspersons who had "caught a glimpse of the potentialities inherent in endlessly expanding the wants of people under consumerism."

Soon thereafter, Godfrey maintained that "Consumerism has become the guiding force of our economy" (1962). In 1963, Julian Huxley concluded in the *New Scientist* that "The western economic system...is turning into what has been called 'consumerism'. All these references antedate the association of consumerism with the consumer movement. They are consistent with the second Oxford definition, and while not necessarily flattering the meaning is not changed if the more neutral sounding "high levels of consumption" is substituted for "consumerism."

A number of empirical studies confirmed Australia's position in the "popular movement stage" (Barker, 1987; Barksdale et al, 1982).

Organised consumer movement leading to government intervention at local and central levels marks the popular movement stage. Emphasis is placed on consumer education, competition and trademark policy, copyright and intellectual property. Kaynak (1985) proposed a similar consumerism life cycle curve with four distinct phases in the evolution of consumerism. Hypothetical country examples were set in each of the four stages of the cycle. Bangladesh has been located in the lowest (crystallization) stage of the cycle. Kaynak (1985) described this stage as the antitrust phase of market regulation, which is characterized by lack of organised consumer movement at the national level.

The growth of consumerism has resulted in consumers being critical of many questionable business practices and has supported the imposition of increasing regulation on the corporate sector. In the western countries, for example, most consumer issues were eventually translated into regulation through a process of institutionalization of consumerism in the socio political systems (Craig-Lees, 1991). Business has also institutionalized consumerism in their decision-making processes (Steiner and Steiner, 1997). Hence, responding to consumerism has now become a routine exercise for most businesses in the West. However, in the developing countries, the level of corporate attitude and action has been relatively low, as the pressure, arising from the movement is generally low. This is because in least developed countries (LDCs) consumers place greater emphasis on the satisfaction of the physiological needs of the public. The prevalence of seller's market conditions in most LDCs has also contributed to the low response of business. Consumers in such market conditions accept whatever is offered to them, because they have very little voice in the marketplace (Reddy and Campbell, 1994; Kaynak, 1985; Kaynak et al., 1992). Besides, most LDCs lack a supportive macro-economic environment, which is an essential condition for consumerism activity and, as such, consumerism is concerned with micro issues including product safety, packaging and unit pricing, misleading advertising or labelling and product quality. In the developed countries macro issues are the prime focus of consumerism and, as such, pollution, poverty, welfare system, health care, tax system and anti-nuclear issues are given priorities in consumer movement (Kaynak, 1985). This is reflected in the attitudes and action of corporations in the developed world towards the solution of problems in the socio-economic, cultural and technological areas.

The findings as per a comparative research of consumerism between Bangladeshi and Australian managers, it was found that the nature of Bangladeshi managers is linked with the growing nature of consumerism in a developing country. Consumerism is likely to play a constructive role in maintaining a congenial business environment by creating consumer awareness, maintaining a reasonable code of conduct for businesses and eliminating questionable business practices from the marketplace. Furthermore, as consumerism progresses through successive stages, the likelihood of consumer worries translating into regulation will increase and a favorable commitment of business translated into responsive action is likely to reduce the proliferation of legislation, thus reducing extra cost of compliance and bureaucratic hassle. This is a fundamental reason why consumerism is so paramount in the minds of Bangladeshi businesspeople.

This finding can be linked to the stage of development of the consumerism life cycle, as suggested by Kaynak (1985). While a number of prior studies have found either limited (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990; Varadarajan et al., 1991, 1994) or no empirical evidence (Barker, 1987; Barksdale et al., 1982) to support CLC (consumerism life cycle), the results of the present study provided some empirical support in favor of the basic assumption underlying Kaynak's model, which positioned various countries at the different stages of consumerism life cycle (CLC) on a hypothetical basis. As is supported by the data, the slightly more advanced position of Bangladesh than Kaynak assumed in 1985 seems to be justified in the context of the evolutionary process of the growth of consumerism.

This points to an indication as to the possible extension of the consumerism life cycle suggested by Kaynak (1985) in order to incorporate a take-off stage" in between the crystallization and organization stages to accommodate a country such as Bangladesh. It's "take off stage" is likely to be characterized by a rising trend in the consumer movement triggered by consumer organization, increasing trend in the government intervention in business and increasing acceptance of consumerism by the business community in appreciating the positive role of consumerism. This change has stemmed from some recent change in the macro-economic factor following the tremendous growth of the export-oriented garment industry during the last decade, leading to substantial increase in the foreign currency reserve of the country. This has resulted in the improvement of the socio-economic infrastructure of the country, which led to an increasing trend in the consumption level of the people and obviously consumerism received an impetus for further growth.

A similar use of consumerism appeared in conjunction with Pope John Paul II's 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (The Hundredth Year). The encyclical represented a papal accommodation with market capitalism, but warned against wanting more "not in order to be more, but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself." (10) Newsweek's report on the encyclical applied the term consumerism to the Pope's warning and, paraphrasing John Paul, concluded that "Consumerism...can be as soulless as communism" (Woodward 1991, 56). The article later made reference to the "exploitation" of "unchecked consumerism."

The Pope was not the only one to link consumerism with the problems of modern life. In a recent critique of the American family, Coontz asserted "Certainly, modern consumerism seems to violate traditional American values about the work ethic, self-restraint and participation in voluntary associations" (1992). She later identified consumerism as a force "eating away at family time, neighborhood cohesion and public solidarities" (Coontz, 1992). Using the same language, a report by the Colorado Trust on the state's future asserted "Consumerism crowds out our participation in family, learning, neighborhood, community and democratic government" (Choices for Colorado's Future:...1992).

Although the evidence is not conclusive, it appears that using consumerism to mean excess materialism has become more common in recent years. If so, one would expect to see increasing numbers of references to consumerism as a highly destructive force. That does not augur well for those associated with the consumer movement.

4.0 Summary and Conclusions:

There is no shortage of ironies along the twisting path, which traces the changes in the meaning of consumerism. Coined with reference to the early years of the consumer movement, consumerism became an epithet used to suppress the movement's re-emergence. In what appears to have been a seamless transition, however, the term was appropriated to describe the various reforms associated with the consumer movement. Although this usage became well established, an unrelated and somewhat older meaning persisted. It is this latter consumerism that is used to mean self-indulgence.

At the very least, the twists and turns in the meaning of consumerism show that language has a dynamic of its own, which is seemingly beyond manipulation. Apologists for business failed in their effort to turn consumerism into a term of contempt. Whether those concerned with the consumer interest have more success in deflecting the negative association of the term with excessive materialism remains to be seen.

It is possible that some key source could have been missed. However, usage almost certainly emerged during the period identified.

The term consumerism itself (as opposed to consumerist) could have appeared in print in a 1966 source. If so, it would most likely be found within the records of congressional hearings.

Even skimming the thousands of pages of hearings was so time consuming that it did not seem worthwhile to continue. The author is confident, however, that should a somewhat earlier source be found, the pattern of usage would be the same. The subsequent evolution of the meanings of consumerism was traced through a conventional review of the literature.

Moreover, developments in both the economy and the broader everyday culture seem to conspire to foster consumerism in continental Europe. Global competition, it might seem, demands that European countries eliminate the sort of inefficient producer protections associated with the producerist orientation. Indeed, both the system of global trade agreements and the policies of the European Union are dedicated to breaking down the sorts of producer protections that create obstacles to trade. Meanwhile the ever-rising flood of consumer goods must inevitably tempt ordinary Europeans to think of themselves primarily as consumers. Indeed, so have European cultural critics complained for decades. So hasn't consumerism triumphed in Europe? Is there really still any point in talking about consumerism versus producerism? There is indeed!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Consumerism versus producerism remains a vital analytic opposition-indispensable in particular for understanding continental Europe. Political scientists continue to see continental Europe as a world of "neo-corporatism," a world in which policies are made through negotiation between the state and producer associations; and its law has not lost its producerist coloration. Despite all of the pressure for change, continental Europe is managing to remain significantly more producerist than the United States, as I aim to show. But even to the extent the Continent is changing, we cannot understand what is at stake unless we bear the consumerism-producerism opposition in mind. The politics of consumerism are only fully intelligible if we understand the converse politics of producerism.

To understand the lasting vitality of the consumerism/producerism opposition, though, we must use both terms with extreme care, beginning with some preliminary work of comparative law definition and analysis.

Let us start by defining "consumer" and "producer." "Consumer" is a straightforward term: a "consumer" is any member of society who is engaged in consumption of goods or services. "Producer," by contrast, is a more complex category. Figures like Weyl lumped together all economic actors who were not consumers under the general rubric "producer." They defined a "producer" as any actor who provided some factor in the production and distribution of goods and services.⁸⁴ By this definition, the rubric is very broad indeed: "producer" includes both workers and capitalists, both management and labor, both industry and retail. It includes all actors on the supply side of the market.

These two forms of consumer-oriented law are also most naturally at home in different institutional settings. Consumer protection legislation is the natural province of bureaucracy, and indeed tends to be produced through paternalistic bureaucratic regulation everywhere. By contrast, the consumer economic interest has an obvious affinity with relatively free, unregulated markets. To state it in the simplest terms: the core value behind the protection of consumer economic interest is consumer sovereignty, maximally immune from bureaucratic interference. The two also have natural affinities with different kinds of economic policy. Law favoring the consumer economic interest will seem appealing to policymakers who aim to stimulate consumer spending, while law oriented toward consumer protection will not.

Conversely, the spread of economic consumerism tends to threaten traditions of class conflict politics. Such indeed was exactly the program of figures like Lippman and Weyl,

who believed that focusing on the interests of the consumer would put an end to the politics of the interests of labor and capital. Anybody who is committed to the politics of class conflict can thus be expected to regard economic consumerism as a menace.

There is definitely a clear and recurring conflict between the producer orientation and the consumer economic interest. To the extent that the consumer economic interest dominates the thinking of policymakers, the law of producer interests, and more broadly the politics of class conflict, are in danger. The same, however, is not true of the consumer protection interest. On the contrary, producer-oriented law and consumer protection legislation may often go hand in glove. Legislation intended to guarantee the quality and safety of consumer goods can easily have the effect, intended or unintended, of protecting existing producer interests. This has to do largely with the dynamic of competition. High quality and safety standards may tend to protect the position of existing competitors in a given industry. If there are such consumer protection standards in place, new entrants cannot break in by offering relatively low-quality goods. Moreover, as we shall see, high quality standards are often associated with entrenched artisanal traditions that may benefit from producer-protectionist policies.

Finally, we should be very careful in describing the conflicts over consumerism and producerism in today's world. The truly bitter current world conflicts over consumerism and producerism revolve around the consumer economic interest, the consumer interest in competitive prices and shopping convenience. What troubles critics of consumerism worldwide is first and foremost the danger that a politics of low prices will endanger historic producer protections.

5.0 Future Research Implications:

Hanging over all this is one additional fundamental difficulty that deserves constant reiteration: "consumers" and "producers" are not two different classes of persons, but two kinds of constructed legal-economic identities. Political leaders like Ralph Nader often speak as though "consumers" and "producers" were two different classes of real existing persons, with two different, conflicting, sets of interests. So do European advocates of a pro-consumer revolution. Yet of course, that is nonsense. Everyone has both identities. The choice between consumerism and producerism is not a choice about whether "the" consumers or "the" producers will ultimately win out, but a value choice about which of these two possible economic identities deserves priority in a modern market order.

What is the consumer economic interest when it comes to shopping? We can define it, straightforwardly enough, as an interest in low prices, wide selection of goods, and shopping convenience. This interest is typically best served by stores offering a wide range of goods and open for maximally long hours. Consumers prefer large diversified retail establishments that open early and close late. Retail law that is unfavourable to consumer economic interests comes, correspondingly, in several forms. It may be law limiting store hours. It may be law limiting the range of merchandise that retailers may offer; for example, if the law permits retailers to offer only shoes or socks, but not both, the consumer who wishes to clothe his feet must make two shopping stops and not one. It may be law very simply limiting the size of shops by limiting their square footage. It may, of course, also be law-limiting competition within a certain district, permitting only a limited number of shops to open.

The success of these products reflects a kind of human capital resource in Europe. Because artisanal traditions are strong, they allow forms of production that are more difficult elsewhere. The result is that there can be "A Renaissance in Germany," as the business section of the New York Times recently proclaimed, because "A Tradition of Quality and Strong Brands Leads Export Growth."²⁰⁷ Precision and high quality in production, the Times notes, are allowing Germany to specialize in "global niche products."²⁰⁸ Similar things can be said of other continental economies.

Europe's artisanal traditions give it a global niche. This sort of specialization is not necessarily directly threatened by globalization at all. On the contrary, the more integrated the world economy becomes, the more likely it is that Western Europe will become, perforce, a specialized producer of high-end and luxury goods, much as parts of Europe have become specialized in high-end tourism.

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