

Adversaries of Consumption: Consumer Movements, Activism, and Ideology

ROBERT V. KOZINETS
JAY M. HANDELMAN*

This article focuses on consumer movements that seek ideological and cultural change. Building from a basis in New Social Movement (NSM) theory, we study these movements among anti-advertising, anti-Nike, and anti-GE food activists. We find activists' collective identity linked to an evangelical identity related to U.S. activism's religious roots. Our findings elucidate the value of spiritual and religious identities to gaining commitment, warn of the perils of preaching to the unconverted, and highlight movements that seek to transform the ideology and culture of consumerism. Conceiving mainstream consumers as ideological opponents inverts conventional NSM theories that view them as activists' clients.

Social movements are intentional collective efforts by activists to transform the social order (Buechler 2000). This article focuses on consumer movements, which are particular kinds of social movements that attempt to transform various elements of the social order surrounding consumption and marketing. As consumption has come to play an increasingly central role in contemporary society, consumer movements have arisen to challenge and transform aspects of it by propagating ideologies of consumption that radicalize mainstream views.

As we seek to increase our understanding of the dynamics and complexities of consumer culture, we need theory that conceptualizes consumer movements and their ideological role. As we follow the historical trajectory of a culture of consumerism that seems in many accounts to be globally ascendant and apparently unstoppable, conceptualizing consumer movements that stand in opposition to it may be viewed as increasingly important. Sklair (1995, p. 507) terms the mutually reinforcing integration of consumer culture and consumerist ideology the "culture-ideology of consumerism" and concludes that it is a "fundamental institutional support of global capitalism." The purpose of this article is to arrive at a theory-based understanding of con-

temporary consumer movements that seek to change this elemental institutional foundation.

We can conceptualize any social movement's ideology as consisting of three core representational elements, in which the movement's activists publicly portray (1) their goal, (2) themselves, and (3) their adversary (Melucci 1989; Touraine 1981). Considerable theory development has taken the goal of consumer movements to be changes in the principles, practices, and policies of organizations, businesses, industries, and governments. This orientation is present in the historical conceptualization of management sociologist Rao (1998), who asserts that there have been three eras of consumer movement in the United States: an antiadulteration movement, the rise of nonprofit consumer watchdog organizations, and an era of legal activism.

Activism in Rao's (1998) account and related other theoretical accounts of consumer movement history (e.g., Gabriel and Lang 1995; Tiemstra 1992) accept consumption as central to modern society and present businesses as the targets and consumers as the clients of activist's efforts. Consumer movements are portrayed as organized around goals that resist particular industrial or marketing practices, such as selling unsafe vehicles or publishing deceptive advertising. A similar assumption of principles, practices, and policy changes as key goals for activists is apparent within consumer research focused on the study of boycotts and socially responsible consumers (e.g., Friedman 1999; Garrett 1987; Miller and Sturdivant 1977). According to this research, the social order that these various consumers and activists seek to protect is one "of healthy and employed consumers protected by the state against profiteers, market fluctuations and scarcities, unemployment and disease" (Trentmann 2001, p. 130).

However, a more radical variety of consumer movement

*Robert V. Kozinets is assistant professor of marketing at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, School of Business, 975 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53706; e-mail: rkozinets@bus.wisc.edu; Web page: <http://www.research.bus.wisc.edu/rkozinets/>. Jay M. Handelman is associate professor of marketing at Queen's University, School of Business, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, K7L 3N6; e-mail: jhandelman@business.queensu.ca. The authors thank Marc Ventresca, John Meyer, Richard Scott, Eileen Fischer, and John Sherry for their many insightful comments and suggestions. The authors thank the editor, associate editor, and three reviewers for their comments and helpful suggestions. They are also grateful for the contributions of the consumer activists and consumers who were observed and interviewed for this article.

has appeared in which the goal is not only the changing of principles, practices, and policies but also a fundamental change to the ideology and culture of consumerism (Gabriel and Lang 1995; Rumbo 2002; Sklair 1995). The influence of this latest consumer movement can be located in some of the activist identities and radicalized consumption meanings present among a range of individuals, groups, and cultures studied in recent consumer research (e.g., Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002a; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Troester 2002). Yet, as Sklair (1995) notes, ordinary countercultures are regularly incorporated into the consumer culture and actually pose little threat to the capitalist system (see also Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002a). Nevertheless, Sklair (1995, p. 505) holds that it is important to theorize about the "considerable difficulty of mobilizing social movements against global capitalism on the basis of anti-consumerist ideology."

Seeking to further our understanding of this form of consumer movement, we are led to examine its ideology, constituted of its three key components: a goal, a self-representation, and an adversary. Because the consumer movement's goal has altered to include radical change in the broader consumer culture, has the activists' description of themselves also changed? Has their altered goal led to an alteration in activists' portrayal and conception of their adversary? If they are no longer oriented only to change the practices of businesses, organizations, and industries, are those same businesses, organizations, and industries still seen as their key adversaries? This article contributes to current knowledge about activist ideology by exploring the theoretical implications that the change in consumer movement goal orientation has upon our understanding of activists' representations of themselves and their adversaries.

Building from a basis in the theoretical understanding of New Social Movement theory, particularly the work of Alain Touraine (1977, 1981), we contribute to theory about activist ideology by exploring how its elements change in the context of contemporary consumer activism. This helps us to understand and also to constructively critique activist ideology in the latest era of consumer movement. The next section places our study of consumer activist discourse in relation to extant studies of social movements and ideology. After discussing our method and our sites, we present and analyze our findings and then discuss their implications.

THEORY

Social movements have only begun to receive systematic attention within sociology in the past 25 yr. Over that period, studies of social dynamics have displaced prior structural-functional Parsonian and Durkeimian paradigms that assumed social stability and harmony as the steady state. Social scientists have increasingly moved away from viewing social movements as threatening or irrational actions by extremists to seeing them as the normal and rational political challenges of aggrieved groups (Buechler 2000).

Although their study is fairly recent, social scientists have traced the origins of social movements to European societal modernization and Enlightenment philosophy. As Eder

(1993) notes, social movements are genuinely modern phenomena, linked to an age of ideology in which society came to be understood as a social creation that is also malleable. Touraine (1977) asserts that the premodern era constrained collective action through metasocial principles like divine rules or natural laws that dictated the social order. Modernity, however, ushered in a new historical era where meta-social guarantees largely passed into obscurity. In exchange came nearly boundless capacities for self-transformation and social change.

These interrelated new capacities for self-transformation and social change have received a central place in the sociological theorizing of New Social Movement (or NSM) theorists. Especially within European studies, a wide variety of different NSM theorists have deployed concepts relating politics and culture to the contexts of contemporary social movements. In an overview article, Buechler (1995) places the theories of Manuel Castells, Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, and Jurgen Habermans as central to the large body of NSM theorizing. Positioning their approach in relation to the economic reductionism of classical Marxism, these NSM theorists look to logics of action based not within the sphere of production but in the spheres of politics, ideology, and culture. In addition, they look for sources of collective identity such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality to complement the Marxist predilection for class-based identity (Buechler 1995, 2000).

Different from sociological approaches to social movements like the resource mobilization and social constructionist paradigms, NSM theorists theorize about social movements in relation to some societal totality. In many NSM theoretical formulations, such as those of Castells, Touraine, and Habermas, new social movements are cast as historically specific responses to the totalizing and hegemonic cultural forms defined by capitalist markets. Because of their focus on the cultural sphere and their frequent incorporation of consumerist elements, NSM theories are appropriate theoretical frames to employ to study consumer movements that seek, among other goals, to transform consumerist culture and ideology.

The literature that forms the body of NSM theory is vast and diverse. To maintain our theoretical focus, we rely mainly upon the work of Alain Touraine, one of the most influential and important NSM theorists. In one of Touraine's central contentions, he saw in postindustrial or programmed society a characteristic struggle for what he termed "historicity." Historicity is a complex concept defined as the symbolic capacity of social actors to construct the cultural and technical system required to produce a functioning society (Touraine 1981). Touraine contends that conflicts over historicity are central to life in the postindustrial era. Because of this, he asserts that the study of social movements should be central to sociology.

Touraine (1977) also contends that, in postindustrial society, the ruling class is capital holders and the oppressed popular class is consumers, not, as the Marxists would have it, the labor class. Touraine therefore saw the principal field

of social conflict to be consumer culture, not industrial production. The central cultural issue is management of the self or identity. One of Touraine's central questions was, Who would program the programmed society: managers and technocrats or consumers? As with the many historians of consumer movements mentioned above, Touraine viewed activists as siding with consumers to help them overcome the oppressive programming of managers and other technocrats.

For Touraine (1977, 1981), the postindustrial struggle of consumer versus managers takes place through ideology. Touraine (1981) conceptualizes the ideology of a social movement as always including the following three elements: (1) identity, the self-definition and collective identity of the activists or member of the social movement; (2) opposition, the social movement members' identification and description of their adversary; and (3) totality, the indication of the objectives that are to be attained through the struggle.

As Melucci (1996, p. 350) developed it, Touraine's theory represents the interdependence of these three elements in a social movement's ideology. Ideology stabilizes the relationships between actor, adversary, and objectives in a way that legitimizes the actor and also negates any positive social identity of the opponent. The members of a movement identify themselves in a mobilizing fashion, as affirming a beneficial social goal that transcends their immediate interests. Correspondingly, their opponent is ideologically linked to illegitimate amoral or immoral pursuits and usually identified in antisocial terms. The adversary is also represented as an obstacle to the general good, preventing the moral goals for which the activist strives. Based on the polarity of this representation in social movement ideology, there is an "irreconcilable opposition between the actor and the adversary" (Melucci 1996, p. 350).

Several empirical studies have asserted the utility and applicability of Touraine's framework of social movement ideology. For example, Bernstein (1997) finds Touraine's theory of social movement ideology appropriate to the study of the lesbian and gay movement and also suggests its applicability to the civil rights and feminist movements. Hourigan (2001) similarly finds that the theory usefully accounts for the struggle of indigenous European linguistic minorities for their own-language television services.

Across these conceptions of social movements, consumers are cast as popular classes or common people, and social movement actors are those who lead them in struggles against powerful business elites. The portrayal of movements as common people versus elites has almost become definitional (see, e.g., Melucci 1996, pp. 357–60; Meyer and Tarrow 1998, p. 4). In the social movement theory of other NSM theorists such as Touraine, Castells, or Habermas, as in critical theory scholarship and some liberatory postmodern scholarship, consumers are conceptualized as the oppressed underclass pitted against elite business adversaries.

However, contemporary consumer movements also resist and seek to transform consumer culture itself. By studying these movements and their activists, we can expand extant conceptualizations of consumer movement ideology. When

the goal of a movement includes changes in consumer culture, does this affect the other ideological elements of the movement? Does it affect activists' self-representation? Does it affect their portrayal of their adversary? As we develop our findings and their theoretical implications, we explore the effects of activists' approach upon their relations with mainstream consumers and also suggest some of the likely historical and cultural origins of their approach. Before proceeding to these findings, our next section describes the methodology we employ to conduct this investigation.

METHOD

Our study encompasses activists and consumers in three different empirical sites of consumer activism (see table 1). The first activist site is an organization of anti-advertising activists that focuses on the role of advertising in affecting contemporary consumer culture and also on consumerism's deleterious effect on ecosystems. This group produces and sponsors material that specifically attacks consumer culture and promotes methods to encourage public skepticism toward advertising. To provide confidentiality, we changed the name of the specific organization to the Front for the Liberation from Advertising (herein abbreviated as the FLA). The second activist site is the affiliation of anti-Nike activists, which gained momentum through the 1990s to become one of the most recognized consumer activist movements in recent history (see, e.g., Holt 2002, p. 87; Klein 1999; Shaw 1999). The third site is the anti-genetically engineered food and crop (abbreviated as anti-GE food and crop) activist coalition, which brings together grassroots food rights activists, small farmers, ecologists, and anti-globalization forces who have framed GE as a part of a broader, U.S. multinational-based assault on global ecosystems and developing economies.

Our research sites had initially been selected because they were of interest to research we were conducting on boycotts and on critical theoretic approaches to consumption change. Only after extensive analysis, reanalysis, negative case analysis, and successive rounds of revision did our theoretical focus resolve. Activist informants in each of our sites insisted that they were not only trying to alter some specific corporate or industry behavior, for example, providing a living wage to workers in developing countries or gaining labeling legislation for genetically modified foods. They repeatedly emphasized that they were also trying to elevate consumers' collective awareness and, through it, to change consumer culture and ideology. Our themes of consumer culture change and consciousness raising as goal were therefore emergent.

Over a period of 2 yr., we contacted and gained access to 13 leaders and organizers in each activist organization. Where possible and practical, we interviewed these activists in person, either in their places of work, at home, or in public settings. Several interviews were also conducted over the telephone. We conducted depth interviews of approximately 90-min. duration. We also took advantage of a few opportunities to observe activists in meetings and discussions and recorded field notes on those observations that

TABLE 1
CONSUMER ACTIVIST INFORMANT CHARACTERISTICS

Consumer activism site/ consumer activist informant	Informant characteristics
Anti-Nike:	
Malcolm	Age 25, male, Canadian, local organizer
Ernest	Age 45, male, Canadian, local organizer, union affiliations
Martin	Age 31, male, American, union affiliations
Thornton	Age 46, male, American, union affiliation, journalist
Wallace	Age 48, male, American
Harper	Age 45, male, local organizer, union affiliations
Anti-advertising (the Front for the Liberation from Advertising):	
Ricardo	Male ^a
Annie	Female ^a
Alex	Male ^a
Thomas	Male ^a
Anti-genetically engineered food and crops:	
Rudy	Age 29, male, American, full-time activist,
George	Age 49, male, American, journalist and radio show host
Edith	Age 57, female, American, journalist, American

NOTE.—Pseudonyms are used for consumer informant activists for purposes of confidentiality.

^aOther informant characteristics are disguised for anonymity.

informed our growing understanding of activist culture and discourse.

We then turned to the Internet, using an observational methodology similar to but less participative than “netnography” (Kozinets 2002b). Online, we gathered two distinct types of textual discourse. We collected discourse data from activist related newsgroups such as alt.activism and misc.activism.progressive. Data collection was based on approximately bimonthly observation and search, with subsequent classification and downloading. This transpired over a 7-yr. period (1996–2002). To collect ordinary (i.e., non-activist) consumers’ responses to activist discourse, we entered key words in search engines that led us to activist threads in newsgroups whose central topics were unrelated to activism, such as rec.running.

We iteratively analyzed our data for anticipated and emergent themes, then tacked back and forth repeatedly between our findings and extant literature. Negative case analysis was used extensively to direct and narrow our analysis and to place boundary conditions on our findings. Data collection ended when new data were easily classified as a repetition of existing findings.

FINDINGS

Our study focuses not on social movements but on consumer movements. The distinction is an important one because consumer activists’ ideological discourse necessarily views consumers and consumption as the pivotal points for enacting a change in the social order. Although activist informants in each of our sites described how they were trying to change principles, practices, and policies, they repeatedly emphasized that they were also trying to elevate consumers’ awareness and, through it, to change the consumerist ideology. In this way, we became aware of the theme of culture

change as an additional and distinct orientation of contemporary consumer movements.

Activist Identity: More than Caring Connections

People Who Care. In Touraine’s (1981) theory, social movement actors portray themselves as positive change agents, forces for good who protect and stand up for oppressed people and causes. Consider first the descriptions of Edith,¹ a 57-yr.-old journalist and anti-GE food and crop activist. Edith describes her involvement in different social movements and communities as follows:

I was active in the [1960s political party] Peace and Freedom party. The anti-Vietnam War movement. Most of the people that I knew from college were people of conscience. Some of them were Quakers, you know? Some of them had an antiwar stance. Others just had humanitarian and civil rights orientations. But they were all people who cared, and I guess, social justice issues were important to them.

What is noticeable about Edith’s short description of her activism is the way in which she links positive terms of social concern to the politics of activism. Edith’s “you know?” seems to emphasize the metonymic significance of the Quaker sect. Ever since their founding in England in 1647, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have a long historical tradition of asserting social and religious reforms that include pacifism, simple living, and various forms of human rights activism. Edith also describes a variety of high-profile political issues, most dating from the 1960s, indicating the ties of activism to a more recent history of

¹Pseudonyms are used throughout in order to protect informant confidentiality.

mass culture critique in the United States. Suggesting a certain selflessness running throughout all of these affiliations, Edith asserts that the activists she knows are “all people who cared.”

Harper, a 45-yr.-old American union organizer and anti-Nike organizer explains:

The campaign on Nike is about dignity and respect. And giving people enough money to live on. Whether it's here, in the U.S. or Canada, or in Indonesia, Haiti.

Harper's ideas relate his identity as an activist to elevated Western social values of liberation and emancipation. His discourse of empowerment indicates that he cares about downtrodden people residing in distant places, about issues from which he may never benefit.

Edith and Harper demonstrate that activist discourse connects the identity of consumer activist to a wider social good. This socially positive self-representation is certainly congruent with the mobilizing role of collective identity in Touraine's (1981) theory. However, as the goal of culture change becomes prominent, there is more to activists' portrayals than the mere sponsorship of social good. Consider our field notes on an anti-Nike activist meeting. In them, we note how much of the activists' *mise en scène* is directed to reinforcing self-representation.

From the sticker that Ernest posted on the door that read “Educate Agitate Organize,” to Malcolm's baseball cap that read “Read Chomsky,” to Dillon's T-shirt that said “Don't Be Naïve,” practically everything at the meeting was encouraging reflexivity, thinking about the way we think about consumerism, consumer culture, capitalism, and simultaneously broadcasting that activists were different from most people because they did exactly that. Code words. In-group stuff. Almost all of the conversations and presentations centered on these ideas. Ernest and a small group of others talked and joked about being bad capitalists. They spoke almost constantly about the dangers of consumption. Malcolm in particular asserted several times how much consumption was definitely not a part of his life. One of my outstanding impressions was that this group was the opposite of people who are obsessed with their work: this group is consumed by nonconsumption. In all, there was actually very little business or organizing done. Although the meeting was supposed to be about organizing leafleting activities at various sporting stores that sell Nike products, the entire meeting seemed to be much more about talking, spreading catchphrases, spurring reflective thinking about consumption, transferring ideology, and reinforcing how different they were from the mass of consumers “out there.”

The perspective in action provided by observation of this meeting was very informative. The Web pages, leaflets, and other communiqués of activists involved in this anti-Nike movement focused on attacking Nike and forcing them to change their policies. However, at the meeting, much of the

activists' discourse and behavior fixated on ascribing positive meanings of education and awakening to their own collective identity as activists. They actively worked to convince one another that they are not only more socially conscious but also more aware than ordinary consumers.

Revelations. Activists often link social awareness to a type of spiritual awareness. According to many consumer activists, their selfless concern originates from a startling moment of clarity. Activist Kalle Lasn (1999, p. xiv) writes of his “moment of truth” when, bombarded by newscasts, he realized that humanity is headed for “ecocide—planetary death.” Naomi Klein (1999, pp. xiv–xvii) begins her antibrand book *No Logo* with a description of a coincidence that spurred her growing realization of an antibrand movement rising in the world. Her warehouse home in Toronto was once the site of a London Fog factory, relating her to oppressed London Fog workers she coincidentally, or perhaps synchronistically, visited in Indonesia. “Sitting cross-legged on the concrete floor of the tiny dorm room, I thought of my neighbors back home [in Toronto]. . . . It seems the young women in the [Indonesian] export processing zone are our roommates of sorts, connected, as is so often the case, by a web of fabrics, shoelaces, franchises, teddy bears, and brand names wrapped around the planet” (Klein 1999, p. xvi).

By their own accounts, activists seem in these moments to leave their own small selves behind, to transcend time and space, and to attain a sense of connection with people across the globe or with the planet itself. The inescapably religious metaphors of transcendence and connection and the metonymic evocations of Quakers point to new developments in the manifestation of activist ideology that take it beyond the pragmatic considerations of changing business principles and practices. The ensuing radical differentiation between activist consciousness and regular consumer consciousness is beautifully illustrated by a story told to us by FLA activist Ricardo.

Ricardo: It was only about 3 years ago I sort of started to wake up to consumer culture, amongst many other things. I was in Yosemite backpacking 3 years ago, and I had spent about 5 weeks in the valley and also hiking in the high country and so on. One weekend I was in the valley, I was sitting by the river watching the world go by, as well as reading a book. And I was right next to one of the drive-in campgrounds, and I usually used the toilets there. So I found the toilet block, and on my way back to my spot by the river, I passed a campsite where there were these two families, four adults, and three or four or five kids, something like that maybe. And between them they had two really huge RVs and two pickup trucks with two rather big trailers. They had it arranged in a semi-circle, and two of them had satellite dishes, they had about three motorbikes strapped to the back, and they had cut off the other side of the semi-circle with a picket fence and they had put Astroturf down in the middle of the circle. And they're sitting there, cooking their lunch over the barbecue, watching satellite TV in the Yosemite

National Park! And I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and I was kicking myself for not having my camera with me.

Interviewer: Astro turf is great.

Ricardo: Yeah, that was the finishing touch! No one actually believes me when I tell them this, and it's absolutely true, no need for exaggeration. That's when I woke up to the whole consuming thing as well. The way we're all sort of very gently and through many subtle ways indoctrinated to this sort of belief that you must have more to be more. Whereas previous to that my interests were more specifically environmental and sort of saving the world. And I guess, yeah, that was the moment when I sort of certainly thought "Hang on, this is the root cause of so many of our troubles." And I guess that eventually one way or another led to [the FLA].

Ricardo's narrative is saturated with images of detachment and distance that he associates with other consumers: the socially divisive fence, the artificial Astro turf overlain on natural ground, the massive and overpowering RVs, pickup trucks and trailers, the distracting and technologically sophisticated satellite television. It also captures a stereotypical orgy of unnecessary consumption that is linked to Ricardo's conceptualization of mainstream consumer culture, a totalizing vision conditioned by his own apparently middle-class, urban, industrialized world upbringing. He views the ideology of that culture as a subtle but powerful indoctrinating force that encourages people to buy and use more than they truly need, and he sees mainstream consumers as unaware of this force influencing their lives. Representing all that is wrong with consumer society in his story, these metonymic consumers are distracted from life, obsessed with their sophisticated possessions, and distanced from one another and from the natural world.

In contrast, Ricardo differentiates himself with an awakening metaphor. His metaphor suggests an immanent wisdom, a knowledge of things hidden, that is concealed from the overconsuming campers—and by extension, from all consumers who do not go through a similar activist realization. Later in his interview, Ricardo analogizes this revelation to a breakthrough in terms that strongly evoke conversion experiences:

I think the only way you [the consumer activist] can break through is if they [the consumer] want you to break through. I think someone [i.e., the unawakened consumer] has to be ready for that change. I don't think anything we do is actually going to make people suddenly see the light, I think they've got to be ready for that change themselves.

Ricardo's metaphors are rich with religious and spiritual significance, from Plato's cave, to conversion epiphanies, to near death experiences. They suggest the existence of a hidden world to which the Enlightened Master—the activist, in this case—has mystically attained access, and from which common people are excluded.

The elevated vantage point from which Ricardo makes his realization is also informative. His statement that he was

"sitting by the river, watching the world go by" seems to imply a Buddha-like position from which he could view ordinary experiences. Resulting from a kind of pilgrimage to an ostensibly natural site, his realization draws upon a long spiritual legacy stretching from biblical figures to gentlemen scholars like Henry David Thoreau. The impression of Ricardo's own elevation is underscored by his exclamation that he did not know whether to laugh or cry at his moment of realization. Should he laugh at these pitiful beings engaging in such ridiculous acts of overconsumption? Or should he weep for them, their misguided ways, and for the earth they have despoiled? Ricardo rhetorically places himself far above ordinary consumers.

Evangelical Roots Run Deep. Filled with overtones of supremacy, the epiphanies and spiritual linkages of these activists could be interpreted as strategies of social distinction intended to enhance their personal status (Bourdieu 1984). Inspired by deep convictions, premonitions of doom, heartfelt human connections, and sudden realizations of sinful consumption, these consumer activists have, in their own eyes, become elevated above the multitude of duped consumers. Like religious converts, they represent themselves as suddenly able to see beyond the veil of a consumerist ideology that says that "consumption is good and more consumption is better" (Mick 2003, p. 457) to see the terrible consequences it brings and will continue to bring.

The epiphanies, the transcendence, the deeply emotional conversions, the various senses of social and ecological sin, and the crusading overtones in our activists' self-perceptions reveal not cultural capital-based aspiration so much as the strong links between the ideological form of consumer activism, its roots in national social movements, and their roots in evangelical religion. As Young (2002) points out, the first national social movements in the United States emerged in interaction with religious institutions. As with recent consumer movements seeking changes in consumer culture and its ideology of consumerism, these early social movements pursued goals that mixed personal and social transformation (Young 2002).

In the United States of the 1830s, a particular style of Protestant evangelism became the dominant form of spiritual expression. The quintessential characteristic of this form of evangelism was its dynamism and activism (Scott 2000). Most nineteenth-century evangelicals preached a kind of practical Arminianism that emphasized the duty and ability of sinners to repent and desist from sin, lest they be condemned to hellfire and damnation (Scott 2000). The Second Evangelical Awakening that thus began in the U.S. American Frontier took on an activist role that sought to change society through converting and changing individuals, one damned sinner at a time. Evangelical schemas of confession and sin were used in highly effective ways in order to launch and sustain national protests on temperance and antislavery in the 1830s, calling on individual and nation to repent and reform (Young 2002). Through this combination of religious and social reform was begun the women's suffrage movement, the temperance movement, advances in public education, and proper care for

the mentally ill. Eventually, these reformatory imperatives led to the abolition of slavery (Scott 2000).

As the religious historian Donald Mathews (1977) has pointed out, the Second Great Awakening was an innovative and highly effective grassroots organizing process. Conversion brought communicants into a new and powerful institutional fabric that provided them with personal discipline, a strong sense of community, and activist channels for their benevolent obligations. Like Kalle Lasn, Naomi Klein, and other consumer activist journalists included in our study, evangelicals in the Second Great Awakening period were very active in the media process, launching their own newspapers and periodicals and distributing millions of reform tracts. In those early days of social movements, it was the powerful supernatural force of Satan that offered temptation and exercised terrible control. Today's consumer activists have new adversaries.

The Obvious Opponent: A Corporate Elite

Social struggles and social movements must have an adversary against which to fight if they are to be effective (Touraine 1981). Ideologically, the existence of a clear and despicable adversary performs an invaluable function, unifying and motivating activist mobilization. Unsurprisingly, corporate adversaries were immediately and readily apparent in the discourse of our activist informants, and oppositions were frequently cast in religious terms. Many compared their anticorporate struggle to the biblical tale of David and Goliath. The largest, most visible companies in any category were frequently classified by our informants as labor rights abusers, monopolistic threats to competition, and/or cultural imperialists.

Large Corporate Puppeteers Indicating a systematically entrenched adversary, our consumer activist informants often named not merely one but several large corporations as their adversaries. The ostensible like-mindedness of those who run large corporations is evident in the narrative that George, an anti-GE food and crop activist, uses to describe the insidious strategies of the eight largest chemical companies.

[I discovered that the eight largest chemical companies] were toxifying people with pesticides. They were toxifying them with drugs. They were toxifying the planet with waste pollutants. And they were about to launch a genetically engineered food program. One of whose aims, covertly, was to enable food crops to absorb more of the pesticides that they manufactured, without dying. So that would poison people more. . . . I think what these people are seeing, and I'm doing everything I can to make them see it, is that the power behind the throne is the economic power. And so it's fine to go after the government, and I've done that God knows enough in the last 15 years. But the point here is to not let that be a smoke screen for the big boys, you know, the real elite that want to carve up the planet and use it as their own country club. These are the people to go after. And they

manage to stay behind the scenes, and they need to be exposed and brought out into the open. And the best way to do that, at least initially, is through their corporations and their products.

There is no moral gray zone in this account, no accidental exposures or unintended consequences. George's discourse wants to convince us of a conspiracy of rich corporate puppeteers who form a shadow government while deliberately and secretly jeopardizing human and ecological health. He describes big business bullies on the ultimate power trip while masculinizing and infantilizing the ruling class as "the big boys." Rich with overtones of class warfare, George's discourse decries the hierarchical dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

The stark opposition between consumer activist and corporate adversary is fully exposed in the discourse of 29-yr.-old anti-GE food and crop activist Rudy:

You know, I look at these large corporations. I look at the element that created them, the bottom line mentality. The believing what you want to believe about your products, what they're doing to people, or not wanting to know, and all. That element is the manifestation of evil in the physical world.

Further in our interview, Rudy reveals that he views his work as an activist as being "involved in the battle between good and evil," where working on the side of good means struggling to see that people are "happy, healthy, and empowered" and those who are evil oppose these beneficial social goals. Like George, Rudy's anticorporate ideology pits those who care about profits and products against those who care about people, a textbook example of the "irreconcilable opposition" described by Melucci (1996, p. 350). The relation between consumer activist and large corporate adversary is drawn in starkly religious terms as a literal battle between good against evil.

Temptations and Weakness. The existence of large corporate adversaries in consumer activists' ideological discourse is hardly a surprising finding. As we have stated, the presence of a corporate elite as consumer activists' adversary has been de rigeur in extant theories. Similar corporate adversaries have been identified as the targets of corporate boycotts, which are important manifestations of consumer activism (Friedman 1999, pp. 50–53; Garrett 1987). However, when we look beyond consumer movements concerned with changing various principles, practices, and policies to those that include consumer culture change as their goal, we find that the blame placing does not simply stop at the door of corporate headquarters. From the early history of culture-oriented consumer movements, these activists have linked the temptations of corporate adversaries with the weaknesses of the consuming public.

In the 1890s, early consumer activists argued that consumers should be revolted by the crass materialism and conspicuous consumption they saw as consumerist traits (Tiem-

stra 1992). Muckrakers in that time dug into the social evils that were seen as side effects of consumerism, and the Consumer's League emphasized that consumers bore the responsibility for the way their goods were produced (Silber 1982). Although this was not actually a reactionary critique of consumer culture that aimed at its overthrow or reformation, it urged members of the consuming public to take control of their consumption from the ruling elites who controlled the productive mechanisms. Over a century ago, the basic formula for consumer movements had been set.

Similar critiques are found in the late 1950s and early 1960s works by best-selling sociologist Vance Packard. Packard's (1957, 1960) pop sociology books were outspoken critiques of consumer culture that condemned its hedonism. They argue that it is not just the corporation but also the consumer who is responsible for the current culture of consumption. A number of other scholars have attempted to explain why this century of activist efforts to curb consumption's influence on daily life failed. One of the most interesting is the notion that, aided by advertising and other institutional supports, by the early twentieth century consumers had largely accepted the "therapeutic economy" ideology in which a consumption-driven lifestyle became central to social identity (Fox and Lears 1983). The centrality of consumption to identity and to social life, combined with the diversity of consumers and types of consumption, present a difficult challenge to consumer activists seeking culture change. Combined with activists' evangelical identity, this centrality opens the door to an oppositional approach to consumers.

The Activists' View of Consumers

Although interview data inform us about how these consumer activists want to represent themselves thinking about consumers, netnographic observation provides us with data that allow us to see activists actually interacting with consumers and to overhear consumers discussing their responses to activists' culture change efforts. We have already seen how activists differentiate themselves from consumers with metaphors of conversion and epiphany. This differentiation takes place through a dialectic suggesting that most consumers are unaware that they are being manipulated. In the following sections, we use interview and netnographic data to elaborate and build on these findings.

Robotic Sleepers. We asked George, an anti-GE food and crop activist, if consumer activists are different from average consumers. His answer?

Well, sure they're different. And obviously the way they're different is they don't feel [pause], they have not been able to place themselves outside the system. By the system I mean just the, kind of, robotic buy-sell, buy-sell, buy-sell. And they have not been able to think about what it is that they want to use.

The discourse of anti-Nike activist Martin also portrays con-

sumers as unaware, automatic, and unthinking. In his account of his own objectives, Martin states:

What I want is for people to get a wake up call. And for people to understand what's going on. Not just go to a Wal-Mart or whatever and just pick something off the shelf. But I want people to understand, just like they do everywhere else, that their purchases make a difference to the world around them.

These activist accounts describes the generic consumer as an unreflective being, unable or unwilling to "understand" (Martin's interview) or "think about" (George's interview) their own consumption. To them, consumers seem incapable or disinclined to reflect on their own consumer behaviors from a systemic point of view and to insert social and moral criteria into their purchase decisions. Similar portrayals of consumers as unreflective, unaware, and amoral or immoral are present in other activists' discourse, all of it seeking consumer consciousness raising as a critical intermediate step to the attainment of wider social betterment.

Entranced Couch Potatoes. The Vancouver-based anti-consumption activist organization The Media Foundation describes itself as one of the most significant social movements of the next 20 yr. (Rumbo 2002). In one of their 30 sec. "subvertisements," the portrayal of unaware consumers reaches stereotypical proportions (see Handelman 1999). In this anti-advertising uncommercial, which was aired on Canadian television, television viewers and apparently, by extension, all consumers, are audiovisually portrayed in a frightening, dystopian manner. The uncommercial begins with a man sitting alone, in a trancelike state, slumped on a couch in a dark room. With a bag of snacks perched on the coffee table in front of him, he stares lifelessly into the glow of a television screen. The screen emanates meaningless sounds like game show buzzers and cheering and inducements like "There's never been a better time to buy." As the camera angle swivels from the man's face to the back of his head, a narrator states "Your living room is the factory." As the camera focuses on the back of the man's head, we see a UPC symbol tattooed onto the back of his neck. "The product being manufactured is you," the narrator intones. Viewers are then admonished to "Cast off the chains of market structured consciousness." The uncommercial ends suddenly as if the television had been turned off (see Handelman 1999).

The Media Foundation's strong imagery points to the totalized and dehumanized view that some activists hold of contemporary consumers. The uncommercial builds on recurrent urban myths linking UPC symbols and the Mark of the Beast prophesied in the Book of Revelations. Like zombies, or sinners possessed by Satan, the mass of consumers is possessed by television, markets, and brands. The Media Foundation's subvertisement also provides keys for decoding the activist injunction for consumers to raise their consciousness or awareness. The raising to which this discourse refers is based on the assumption that all consumers are ignorant or unaware of the hidden or invisible connections between

their consumption and its effects upon themselves, society, and the planet. How unlike the identity of the activist: founded on personal conversion, charged with moral rectitude, altruistically directed to beneficent works. The activist is busy organizing and agitating for the common good. In the uncommercial, consumers sit alone, outside society. They are kept in the dark. Consumers seem selfish, lazy, self-absorbed. The activist is portrayed as both more knowledgeable than the stereotyped consumer and as morally superior to him or her.

Sometimes Wicked and Selfish. The impact that this standpoint has in interplay with consumers further reveals activists' ideological orientation toward them. We can see this viewpoint in recent news, where environmental activists vandalize SUVs, especially Hummers, and spray paint slogans such as "Fat Lazy Americans" on them (*Wall Street Journal* 2003). The effects of this oppositional standpoint are evident in a lengthy set of communications that centered on the consumer activism of the Vancouver-based antiadvertising magazine *Adbusters* (published by The Media Foundation, the same organization that produced the aforementioned uncommercial).

Norton: The goal of *Adbusters* is not necessarily to criticize human desire; the goal is to criticize human desire as it is created and channeled for a corporate end.

Nicholas: No matter what spin you put on it, *Adbusters* denigrates the consumer, sometimes as easily led and incapable of making competent decisions for himself, sometimes as wicked and selfish in making greedy decisions, sometimes as undeserving. . . . *Adbusters* ridicules not ads but the common people's consumption, which they depict as vulgar, inferior, greedy, and unwise. . . . The first image that greets me when I hit *Adbusters* shows a desperately poor third-world peasant holding a bottle of dishwashing liquid. That is not a criticism of the advertising industry. It is a condemnation of the consumer for having more than he ought. Even when *Adbusters* does address advertisers, the message is not the *Mad Magazine* message, that the words and images of advertisers are deceptive and not to be trusted. Instead the message is that the consumer is helplessly and passively obedient to whoever commands him. (Collected and abridged from one thread of postings to the alt.society.anarchy and alt.politics.radical-left newsgroups, July 12, 1999 to July 17, 1999)

In its entirety of 120 postings, this online debate is an extensive critique of the consumer movement goal of cultural and ideological change. Norton voices support for *Adbusters'* brand of activism. It is, however, not Norton's but Nicholas's virulent response to *Adbusters'* activist discourse that is most relevant to our analysis. Nicholas's comments reveal that he feels consumers are being portrayed as inferior, evil, and subservient to large corporations. Although Norton interprets *Adbusters'* antiadvertising discourse more charitably as focused against corporations and their allegedly negative ends, Nich-

olas deciphers their activist appeals as pointing to common people's consumption as their true ideological enemy.

Given that they are portraying him as an opponent, Nicholas responds in kind by portraying these activists as a disdainful elite.

Substituting the wise and good decisions of those terribly intelligent people at *Adbusters* for the stupid decisions of those illiterates [i.e., their belittling portrayal of mainstream consumers as TV-addicts] could in theory make those illiterates a lot better off, but in practice it is more likely to result in those illiterates performing slave labor under whip and baton. (alt.politics.radical-left newsgroup, July 12, 1999)

Ironically, Nicholas describes consumer activists using imagery of domination and oppression identical to the imagery our activist informants use to portray corporate abuses. Instead of emancipating and liberating consumers, Nicholas sees consumer activism as ultimately resulting in consumers' enslavement, which Nicholas repeatedly casts in Marxist and socialist terms (in other sections not cited here). He responds to *Adbusters'* activist ideology as an attempt to discredit and demoralize consumers in order to exercise control over their decisions and lives.

Slavish Adherents. Nicholas's intuition that consumer activists seek to exercise control over consumers' decisions would be confirmed by anti-Nike activist Wallace. In an interview with us, Wallace divides activists from consumers in a way that indicates his belief that the activists' perspective grants them a special ability to make good choices that he is unwilling to accord to typical consumers:

At this point in history, like I say the system is so rancid that we're asking you [the consumer] not even get in the mindset of what are good products, but instead, and not to keep track of all the unclean products. Because they are virtually everything, almost.

The ambiguity-crushing clean/unclean metaphors that Wallace uses throughout his interview have an old history in religious thought, for example, in unclean spirits, contamination, purification. They tap into the same cultural polarities of legitimacy versus illegitimacy and order versus chaos as many of the ideological distinctions between right versus wrong and good versus evil (Douglas 1966). Suggesting that virtually the entire life of consumers is tainted and rancid is a way of using the notion of disgust to arouse moral and political concerns, a connotative use of disgusting imagery that has, according to Miller (1997), a long history.

After seeking to arouse visceral reactions, Wallace proposes to consumers, almost as if he were speaking to small children, a simple and straightforward solution.

Instead we want you [the consumer] to think of it in a different way. We want you to think about campaigns. At any given time there are going to be certain companies and their brand names, either brand names or store chains, that we [the

activists] are targeting. And we ask you to observe those campaigns and support those campaigns. And then we'll list them off.

Although apparently he is trying to increase the effectiveness of campaigns such as the Nike boycott, the implication of his statement is harsh: "Leave the thinking to the activists," his narrative implies. "Buy what we tell you to buy." To combat consumers' slavish adherence to advertising and consumerist ideology, Wallace proposes that consumers substitute a slavish adherence to activists and their ideology.

Idiots and Foolish Consumers. Through these interactions, we continue to see how activists' double coding of consumption as a state of unawareness and a state of moral corruption works for them as a double-edged sword. Activist discourse represents activists as aware, converted beings seeking a wider social good while surrounded by a world of unseeing wrong-doers. This evangelical orientation is also evident in interactions between runners and Sebastian, an anti-Nike activist, that we observed online. Sebastian is a runner, and he is also a vocal critic of iconic running shoe brand Nike. He actively tries to educate others on the group, and persuade them to boycott Nike (he also encourages a Disney boycott). Although the great majority of posters on the popular rec.running newsgroup were interested in trading ideas, reviews, and stories about recreational running, in spring of 1998, Sebastian used the forum for provocative activist discourse. The following set of verbatims, collected and abridged from one thread of postings on the rec.running newsgroup on March 20, 1998, is representative of these exchanges:

Arnold: I think you also offend a lot of runners who wear Nikes by implying that they are less intelligent because they buy Nikes.

Sebastian: [Arnold], the facts are out there for everyone and yes for people who are aware of them: (1) They are idiots for disregarding these facts. Or (2) They are idiots for supporting Nike and their labor practices. That's the way it is. Again you can spin all you want. You can deny all you want. You can argue all you want. But that's the facts, and that's the way it is. I call em as I see em. The truth will set you free, my friend. And I give you the truth whether you'ns like it or not. Sorry but I tell it like it is. :)

Maurice: Your calling people idiots does not make it so. Present your case rationally, and maybe people who like to draw their own conclusions would start to pay attention to you. Heck, you might even "persuade" them that the Nike boycott is a Good Thing. Meantime, remember that barking will only work with sheep.

Sebastian: [Maurice], the facts are getting out there and the people are informed and enlightened and educated to what's going on here, and many are taking action and joining the boycott. I may not be the best/sweetest spokesperson for the

cause but I have given facts to back up everything. The other side has not nor cannot present facts. I don't sugar[coat] anything, I've always said what I think and feel. This may anger some but they still cannot deny the truth.

For our purposes, one of the most revealing aspects of Sebastian's interactions with these consumers is his disparaging form of address. Like an adult dealing with naughty children or a preacher dealing with unrepentant sinners, he scolds his fellow runners on the newsgroup. Arnold, Maurice, and many other rec.running consumers repeatedly requested proof and facts about Nike from Sebastian, in essence demanding to be treated like thinking adults rather than subservient children. Maurice seems more interested in discussing Sebastian's confrontational discursive mode than the message he seeks to convey.

But Sebastian does not see it this way. He is offering people the "truth." He is speaking for the "enlightened," and for those who wish to learn. He offers a variety of news sources to back up his points. At one point, frustrated with a particularly intransigent message poster, Sebastian accuses him of being a representative of Nike: "It's very evident that you can't or don't want to comprehend or understand all this information. You make a fine Nike rep, deny, spin, deny, spin, deny, spin" (posted on the rec.running newsgroup, March 20, 1998). Given that these activists see Nike as a great source of evil in the world, this is akin to a Puritan accusation of witchcraft or Satanic possession. Just as idle hands make the devil's work, ignorance of consumption leads to the support of evil. At one point, seemingly exasperated yet also energized by his ongoing online struggle, Sebastian begins posting a biblical tagline below his signature (where before there had been a quote from legendary long-distance running prodigy Steve "Pre" Prefontaine): "I Peter 2-15: For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (posted on the rec.running newsgroup, March 22, 1998).

Consumers as Opponents

Unreflective and Unrepentant With their current ideology, our consumer activists must act from a very challenging social situation. They must change consumer culture and the ideology of consumerism by changing consumers' minds. But, as they see it, large corporations have already infiltrated them. Consumers are the linchpin in the social change activists seek and thus ineluctably also the things that stand in the way of this change. Mainstream consumers are rich with potential—they are an activist army in waiting. But activists see them as couch potatoes, selfish, lazy, SUV-driving hedonists.

Are consumers portrayed as consumer activists' opponents? Touraine (1981, p. 85) stressed that the activists' "conflict with the adversary should not be specific; it should be a social problem concerning the whole of society." The activist discourse presented here and the orientation of these consumer movements to culture change leave little doubt that activists view mainstream consumers as responsible at

least in part for many of the social ills that beset the world. Consumers' lack of reflexivity is portrayed as leading to dangerous and immoral situations ranging from unfair working conditions to environmental devastation. To the extent that consumers are characterized as complicit carriers of the culture of consumerism, perpetrators of marketized evil, unwitting pawns of corporate overlords, those consumers are adversaries who stand in the way of the social betterment sought by the activist.

In the online observational component of this study, we found consumers reacting to consumer activist discourse as elitist and overzealous. Consumers responded to this activist intransigence with recalcitrance. Reacting, or perhaps overreacting, to the vehemence of these activists, some consumers interpret these mobilization efforts as an attempt to undermine their free choices. On the other side of this ideological divide, to the extent that consumers resist consumer movements, the collective identity offered by the activist, and the consciousness raising it implies, those consumers were treated and portrayed as the consumer movements' opponents.

A Dualist Legacy. Consumer activists conceptualize consumers using some of the most passive metaphors possible. They portray them as unaware, asleep, unenlightened. As it is in the ideology of Marxists and other academic critics of capitalism, the consumer's reality is disparaged here as one of false consciousness, based on ignorance, manipulation, and fantasy. From truth versus falsity to good versus evil, clean versus unclean to enlightened versus unenlightened, a religiously colored legacy of dualism pervades this discourse.

In dualism, the differences between two categories are simplified to form a starkly contrasting pair (see Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Plumwood 1993). The differences are portrayed hierarchically as one member of the pair becomes valorized over the other. The differences between the two categories can become so exaggerated that no commonality is seen between them. For example, the activist becomes equated entirely with the notion of wakefulness or enlightenment, while the consumer becomes equated fully with the idea of being asleep or unenlightened. This occurs to the point where no overlap is seen between them.

Deploying dualism is a powerful and pervasive rhetorical technique that is often associated with the ideological systems of oppressive or dominating forces, such as patriarchies or repressive political systems (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Plumwood 1993). It is thus ironic that our consumer activist informants, who seek to overthrow similarly unjust and detrimental social practices, employ the same master narrative. This dualism legitimizes the activist while delegitimizing the consumer that resists joining their movement. Our informant interviews and online observations reveal an approach that has objectified both consumers and corporations into one-dimensional entities, an approach that stifles discourse. These objectifications do not invite consumers or businesses to participate but instead relegate them to the role of passive listener.

Although the central dualism behind the large corporate adversary is the good activist opposed to the evil corporate power, the central dualism behind the consumer adversary is that of the unaware unenlightened consumer ignorantly opposing the aware and enlightened activist (although there is a moral element to the latter contrast as well). This notion that consumers are treated as consumer movement opponents has not been previously theorized. We now turn to the concluding section of this article to further develop and elaborate the significance of these findings.

DISCUSSION

The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're inside, you look around and what do you see? Businessmen. Teachers. Lawyers. Carpenters. The very minds of the people we're trying to save. But until we do, these people are still a part of that system, and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand that most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it. (Activist leader Morpheus speaking to initiate Neo in *The Matrix*.)

Like the virtual reality world depicted in the *Matrix* movies, the institutional system of consumption has gained cultural and social centrality. It is widely praised as the engine of economic growth and national prosperity and the indicator par excellence of global quality of life. Before it had assumed this centrality, however, consumption in excess of what was seen as a person's basic needs was roundly condemned in the United States. The earliest consumer movements, although not directly anticonsumer culture (there was not one yet) contain many of the anticonspicuous consumption elements of the nineteenth-century's Puritans (Campbell 1999; Tiemstra 1992). We have asked in this article whether a similar culture change goal in contemporary consumer movements has led to changes in the activists' description of themselves and also to alterations in their portrayal and conception of their adversary. We must answer in the affirmative on both counts. Parallel to Morpheus's speech to Neo in our epigraph, activists see the consumption system as the enemy and the blind and embedded consumers as an inextricable and essential part of that system. They are trying to save them, but they are also fighting against them. In the following three short sections, we use the three central categories of Touraine's (1981) original formulation to further elaborate our study's contributions to our understanding.

Identity

We conceptualize our consumer activists as a type of modern day Puritan who seeks changes in consumption culture through seeking to reform the wrongs of the unenlight-

ened consumer. While admonishing mainstream consumers as driven by weak-minded and unconscious urges, activists see themselves very much as Puritans did, as high-minded and noble citizens of society who knew right from wrong and who were morally and spiritually obligated to enlighten and convert others (see Campbell 1999).

Although Touraine (1981) and other NSM theorists posit the ideological identity of the social movement actor as affiliated with a beneficial social cause, the profoundly evangelical overtones of our (American) consumer activists are not captured by his (European social movement–based) theory of ideology nor are they captured in other NSM theories. Touraine's and most other NSM theories are informed by neo-Marxian thought and reflect Europe's long history of class and labor oppression and revolution as well as the modern period's increasing secularization. Although they also clearly involved class, American movements remained more religious and evangelical in their basis. Current religious and social movements have much in common historically, structurally, and ideologically (Hannigan 1991; Young 2002). However, social movement scholars have not yet linked religious identities with the identities and ideology of social movement actors, including contemporary consumer activists, as we do here.

The insight that contemporary consumer activists draw their collective identities from historical evangelical religious identities has theoretical and practical implications. With their tales of conversion, epiphany, righteousness, abstinence, damnation, prophesy, and empowerment, consumer activists set themselves apart from consumers to such an extent that the two groups almost seem to be living in different worlds. One world is luxurious, solipsistic, evil, and unreal. The other world is spartan, self-sacrificing, good, and real. Yet the powerful, globally recognized, and often status-rich identities that brands and the consumerist lifestyle generally offer are ideological competition to this latter world. Unlike the often homogenizing, stereotyping, and emotionless portrayals of consumer identity in our activist ideology, as well as in many NSM theorists' Marxian-colored conceptions, consumers' identities are actually heterogeneous and dynamic. This heterogeneity is served by a vast and ever-increasing variety of brands and consuming positions (tough Harley riders, smart *Star Trek* fans, or creative Apple users), each of which partakes in the wider consumer culture and ideology of consumerism. Thus, the instabilities of identity that Firat and Venkatesh (1995) celebrate as potentially emancipatory are seen by Melucci (1989) as serious challenges to the success of contemporary social movements.

Hall (1981) suggests that successful ideologies work through a process of interpellation whereby the listener, attracted by identification, adopts the activists' viewpoint. But what viewpoints are consumer activists offering as an alternative to consumers' entrenched and often very satisfying identities? Can the serious, aloof, even risky puritanical activist identity described in this study seriously compete with status, celebrity, and easy access to community and cool?

Why would a particular consumer want to permanently adopt an activist identity, with all of its sacrifices, when she or he can simply adopt the stylistic elements of a resistant consumer and enjoy almost all of the same benefits to identity?

The answers lie in the depth of lasting commitment, legitimacy, and authenticity that can be found mainly in the realms of traditional community and religion. One of the most powerful threats to global consumerist ideology today is, in fact, religious, particularly Islamic, fundamentalism (Ray 1993). Spiritual and religious connections constitute individual identity into the lasting communal and institutional forms necessary for sustained and successful consumer movements. Through them, community, authenticity, and self-realization are often cast in opposition to consumerism (see Kozinets 2001, 2002a; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Rumbo 2002). Through identity, there is a meaningful, legitimate, and historically grounded connection between religion, morality, and social movements. Yet, as our netnographic data from news-groups attest, affecting a similar rhetorical style to evangelical Christians without making a clear link to the power of religious and spiritual identities of historical evangelicals seems far less influential.

Opposition

Our research also suggests that consumer movements have added a new opponent to their ideological bestiary. Our findings illustrate how an activist ideology can easily slip from opposing the evil of greedy corporations to also opposing what these corporations are seen to create: a selfish, greedy consumer consciousness. Viewed as hegemonically complicit in wrongdoing, yet manipulated and deceived by evil forces, the mainstream consumer and his or her view of the world are the main target of our consumer activists' ideology. This conception of mainstream consumers as opponents inverts Touraine's (1977, 1981) and other NSM theories that view consumers as activists' clients and the beneficiaries of their benevolent works. That a contemporary movement of consumer activists with consumer culture change among its goals places itself in opposition to a construction of mainstream consumers is this article's central finding.

Our netnographic findings demonstrate that this ideological conception is not well received by consumers. To be more effective, consumer activists might consider rebuilding the activist-consumer relationship in terms of "a non-hierarchical concept of difference" (Plumwood 1993, p. 60). We find activist dialogue saturated with stereotyping constructions that differentiate and separate them from, and also deprivilege, consumers. Activists interviewed for this article portray mainstream consumers as unaware, hypnotized, selfish, and lazy, although they represent themselves as aware, free, altruistic, and mobilized. A more effective consumer activist ideology would not radically exclude dissenting consumers. It also would not claim an essential difference from, and superiority to, them. It would acknowledge the many areas of overlap and common concern between activists and mainstream consumers (and even some business people and

members of government) and also acknowledge the validity of their different needs. The dichotomy between contented consumer and questioning activist can remain, but the dualism that favors the latter over the former can be reformulated in order to reflect the enacting of activism as a meeting of equals, a dialog, a co-construction. Activism that too fervently constructs consumers as unenlightened adversaries will fail to attract many new activists from the mainstream. The challenge, of course, is to resist complete co-optation and dissolution of the movement's central message. Voluntarism is a critical stepping stone to activism. Overly radical and marginalizing activist conceptions, such as the ones to which our newsgroup posters responded, can quickly squelch any form of consumer participation and thus be counterproductive to these movements.

Totality

Researchers have long been confounded by the lack of clear goals in many forms of consumer movement. For example, boycott studies luminary Friedman (1999, pp. 12–13) classified the 1-day Don't Buy Anything Day event, which is currently known as Buy Nothing Day, as an "expressive boycott." He opined that the event, which its Media Foundation organizers say is about consciousness raising, is "more concerned with venting the frustrations of the protesting group" than with "practical ends" (Friedman 1999, pp. 12–13). Friedman disparaged as an impractical emotional outburst a form of activism that seeks to change consumer culture and consumerist ideology.

Although activism with more specific goals, such as particular boycotts, may be easier to locate, to study, and to model, more research needs to be done on movements seeking the much broader goal of consumer culture change. If our field sites are good indicators, this goal is often intertwined with more concrete goals, although this fact is often not superficially obvious. After this research, we believe that future studies of consumer protests and boycotts will be incomplete if they do not acknowledge and explore the role that this wider ideological and cultural movement plays in motivating these particular struggles.

Theory about consumer culture, its institutional supports, the ways it changes, and the social forces affecting it will benefit from greater attention to the culture change goals of contemporary consumer movements. Similarly, conceptualizations of consumption ideology, its elements, its history, its social role, its global and local facets, its diffusion, and its malleability will benefit from the further investigation of local and global consumer movements. Such studies would also lend a new impact and appeal to NSM theories that are only beginning to move beyond Marxian thought to theorize the relation between consumer culture and social movements.

Our consumer activists openly acknowledge the changes they seek in consumerist ideology. They want consumers to question the morals and ethics of a product or service's origins and its social and environmental implications. They talk about the self-discipline and restraint in purchase and usage that are needed. Clearly, this is not the "consumer

resistance" that "is actually a form of market-sanctioned cultural experimentation through which the market rejuvenates itself" (Holt 2002, p. 89). It is something else: a consumer movement directed against one of the pillars of global capitalism. Differentiating between style-based countercultures on the one hand and movements that seek to undermine consumerist ideology on the other will reveal how ecofeminist communities and others assuming voluntary simplistic lifestyles (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001) are actually different from resistant communities like Burning Man, who seek temporary community and authenticity through acts of consumption (Kozinets 2002a).

As market-based consumption decisions are the preeminent means of determining resource allocations and collective decision making, these movements seek to moralize, sacralize, or "ensoul" individual and collective consumption decisions (Kozinets and Handelman 1998). The movement's objective is to subvert and shift the prevalent ideology by making these collective criteria prominent, rather than the individualist criteria of self-expression, freedom, therapy, or hedonism. Individual self-discipline and restraint in the service of the collective good, which are values usually associated with more collective societies, would instead come to the fore.

With its religious, moral, and self-disciplinary orientation, this consumer movement assumes a neoconservative orientation and not the more sexy revolutionary position that Gabriel and Lang (1995) use to portray it. Combining environmental and social concerns with injunctions to moral restraint, our consumer activists are actually rejecting many conventional Western notions of individualism and progress and encouraging the embrace of a more spiritual, communal, and holistic ethos. Yet, in doing so, these activists face some of the same peculiar ironies that fundamentalist religions do. They must walk a tightrope between conviction and conversion and avoid the pitfalls that come from turning mainstream consumers into their adversaries. Contemporary consumer research has a history of interest in critical theoretic and emancipatory approaches, consumer research for consumers, and consumerist ideology, topics that also, to varying degrees, interest NSM theorists. With renewed attention in our future work we may help bring into clearer focus the history, tactics, and paths of consumer culture movements.

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