

The Ideology Underlying Consumer Boycott Studies: Are We Boycotting a Deeper Understanding of the Theme? An Abstract

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Abstract Social media has enhanced the potential for consumers' mobilization through social movements, such as boycott. Researches about how consumers negotiate their own pleasures of consumption with morality and thought for others and how this creates value for society as a whole are growing. More recently, some authors have pointed out the importance of a deeper understanding of the ideological agenda adjacent to each part of the social movements puzzle: activist consumers, companies, government, academic researchers, and so on (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Carrington et al., 2016; Kozinets, 2014). This research aims to analyze the body of studies about consumer's boycott that has been built over the past 20 years. The main objective was to critically analyze the ideologies underlying the researches and to discuss what could be the consequences of that. After refining the search for articles in the major Marketing and Consumer Behavior journals, a total of 25 articles were analyzed. Synthesizing, our analysis indicates that the predominant ideology underlying the researches about consumer boycott seems to be aligned with the maintenance of the idea of consumer sovereignty and, therefore, the consumption market-based system. That comes with a touch of hope that consumers have the power to change the world and build a better and fair society. The consequence of replicating in studies the mainstream ideology is that the system itself is not challenged. What we propose here is not about ranking ideologies and systems – e.g., capitalism vs. socialism or neoliberalism vs. protectionism – but about critically thinking of the greater contexts. Undoubtedly, the body of studies analyzed brought relevant contributions to build the knowledge about consumer boycotting. However, not going deep in identifying and analyzing what institutional ideologies may be influencing consumer individual reasons to boycotting, researches refrain from reflecting about those forces and also about how those forces might drive the study itself. The consequences for consumer behavior studies can be to state as “natural” attitudes and behaviors that actually emerge from a broader context of structured forces. When ideologies are hidden, i.e., not experienced as ideologies, they can prevent a deeper understanding of all the forces involved in the phenomena.

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We propose to reframe our questions when it comes to consumer boycott studies and therefore look for some more disruptive answers. That evolves questioning some “naturalized” results, going deeper into thinking about structured determinisms and institutionalized forces that drive not only consumers but also academic researchers.

References Available Upon Request