Purpose and object of anti-consumption

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Abstract

A counter movement of anti-consumption runs from the very beginning of mass-consumption societies. Four distinct types of anti-consumers, simplifiers, global impact consumers, market activists, and anti-loyal consumers, have emerged in recent years. The primary focus of anti-consumption research has been on market activists and anti-loyal consumers. This article focuses on the other two groups (i.e., the simplifiers and global impact consumers). The authors address the need for scale development to measure the general anti-consumption attitudes of these two groups. The goal is to improve the ability to identify anti-consumption attitudes and to gain a better understanding of how anti-consumption relates to other key constructs such as self-consciousness, self-actualization, and assertiveness.

Keywords: Anti-consumption; Self-actualization; Assertiveness; Self-consciousness; Global impact consumers; Simplifiers

1. Introduction

A counter movement of anti-consumption exists in a mass-consumption society. For example, Corrigan (1997) argues that the society of mass-consumption did not develop until the twentieth century and yet Craig-Lees (2006) traces the anti-consumption movement back to the eighteenth century. Craig-Lees is careful to point out that anti-consumers have never formed a monolithic anti-consumption movement. Rather, many different approaches to anti-consumption and alternate-consumption and the motivations for anti-consumption vary among political, personal, and environmental concerns.

2. Four types of anti-consumers

Four distinct areas of anti-consumption research have emerged in recent years. Fig. 1 presents a two-by-two matrix depicting these four forms of anti-consumption research. The vertical dimension of this matrix is the difference between those who want to generally reduce their overall level of consumption versus those who are interested in reducing the consumption of specific brands or products. Though anti-consumption is often associated with the former, as Craig-Lees (2006) suggests, anti-consumption need not only reflect a general reduction in consumer activities but instead can be targeted towards specific products or brands. The horizontal dimension of Fig. 1 is the difference between those who are focused on societal issues such as environmentalism versus those who are focused on personal issues such as life-simplification. The two dimensions create a two-by-two matrix that illustrates four types of anti-consumers. It is important to note that these are not mutually exclusive categories in that a person could reduce consumption for more than one (or even all) of the reasons associated with each category. However, for the greater clarity that is needed to adequately study anti-consumption, it is important to distinguish between these four forms of anti-consumption.

2.1. General–societal: global impact consumers

Global impact consumers are interested in reducing the general level of consumption for the benefit of society or the planet. They do not believe that the current level of consumption...
is good for society as a whole. The two most common reasons
global impact consumers give for this form of anti-consumption
are environmental concerns and material inequity. They hold
the belief that the modern consumption of current times is causing
irreparable damage to the earth’s ecosystem or that over-con-
sumption by the wealthier nations or classes is contributing to
poverty problems in lesser developed nations or the poorer
classes of society. Dobscha (1998) performed a two-year study
of anti-consumers who felt consumption promoted “waste and
environmental degradation” (1998, p. 91). She found that anti-
consumers did not adopt the prevalent view that consumption
was a major indicator of a nation’s prosperity (Borgmann, 2000).
Instead, they argued that it was over-consumption that created
many of society’s problems. Many of the participants even
refused to be called consumers because of the negative con-
notations the term held for the term. Goldman (2002, p. 16)
refers to these anti-consumers that so passionately oppose
marketing as “enemies of global capitalism.” One special event
that many socially concerned consumers look forward to each
year is the “Buy Nothing Day” which coincides with one of the
largest shopping days of the year in the United States, the day
after Thanksgiving. The focus of “Buy Nothing Day” is to
encourage consumers to consider why they buy and how it
affects society and the environment (Carty, 2002).

2.2. General–personal: simplifiers

The second group of anti-consumers is best characterized as
simplifiers. This group wishes to drop out of the fast-paced,
high-consumption society and move to a simpler, less consumer-
oriented lifestyle. They are not the frugal materialists identified
by Lastovica (2006), who are reducing consumption in one area
to increase consumption in other areas. Neither are they forced
by changing economic circumstances to reduce consumption.
Rather, they believe that maximizing their consumption, as is
commonly done, has undesirable consequences, such as stress
and distraction from higher pursuits (Etzioni, 1998; Fischer,
2001; Schor, 1998; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Zavestoski;
2002a). There may also be a spiritual or ethical component to
the simplifiers’ anti-consumption beliefs; they believe that it is
morally abhorrent to focus so much energy on self-serving
consumption activities (Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Wilk, 2006).
According to Shaw and Newholm (2002), ethical consumers are
surrounded by important decisions of whether to consume with
sensitivity through the selection of more ethical alternatives or
whether to reduce levels of consumption to a more sustainable
level through voluntary simplicity.

Research indicates that a substantial portion of the population
believes that over-consumption can create feelings of stress,
fatigue, unhappiness, or disillusionment (Zavestoski 2002b).
Zavestoski concludes that consumers may no longer be asso-
ciating consumption with the creation of a healthy self. The
Harwood Group (1995) found that 72% of participants agreed or
strongly agreed with the statement that “many of us buy and
consume things as a substitute for what’s missing in our lives.”
Rather than improving society, simplifiers are attempting to
obtain a happier lifestyle through buying only what is needed.
Jenkins (2006) conducted a study of simplifiers in which he
observed that those who reduce their consumption habits seemed
happier after doing so than they did prior to the change.

2.3. Brand–societal: market activists

The third group in Fig. 1 is the market activists who try to use
the power of consumer dollars to impact societal issues (Fried-
man, 1985; Mintel Special Report, 1994; Smith, 1990; Strong,
1997). Notable instances of this in recent years have been the
production of the Wal-Mart film due to concerns over labor and
anti-competitive practices (www.walmartmovie.com; Frazier,
2005) and the Southern Baptist Convention’s call on its mem-
bership to boycott Disney due to their “family-values” concerns
(Orwall, 1999; Brandt, 1997; Gergen, 1997). Market Activists
might avoid using a product or brand because they feel that a
specific brand or product causes a specific societal problem (e.g.,
a product that causes environmental degradation or a brand that
encourages negative social behavior).

Market activists are sometimes aided by publications that
keep them informed of the brands and companies to avoid. The
Media Foundation, a very visible anti-consumption organiza-
tion, circulates a number of anti-consumption advertisements
in its Adbusters magazine (Penaloza and Price, 1993). Some
publications urge consumers not to buy products from certain
conglomerates, such as Phillip Morris, and others urge con-
sumers to refrain from potentially harmful activities, such as
consuming alcohol or smoking cigarettes.

2.4. Brand–personal: anti-loyal consumers

Anti-loyalists are consumers who exhibit the opposite of
brand loyalty. Whereas brand loyalty reflects a commitment to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object of Anti-Consumption</th>
<th>Purpose of Anti-Consumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General (All Consumption)</td>
<td>Societal Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific (Individual Brands or Products)</td>
<td>Personal Concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Impact Consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simplifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-Loyal Consumers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1. Four types of anti-consumers.
repurchase a brand because of its real or imagined superiority (Jacoby et al., 1978), anti-loyalty reflects a personal commitment to avoid purchasing a product because of perceived inferiority or because of a negative experience associated with it (Lee et al., in press). According to Englis and Solomon (1997), products that consumers avoid are often as personally and socially important to them as products that they actively seek to purchase. Consumption preferences of the self and of other consumers are important factors in determining an individual consumer’s decision to avoid a particular product. Englis and Solomon found that the avoidance of undesirable products is equally important to individual consumers’ shaping of their ideal selves.

3. Research objectives and hypotheses

Because brand-level anti-consumption has the potential to impact negatively on companies’ bottom-lines, several studies have already investigated this specific form of anti-consumption (Carty, 2002; Ethical Consumer 2005; Lee et al., in press; Klein et al., 2004; Mikkelson and Mikkelson, 2005; Sen et al., 2001; Penaloza and Price, 1993). In contrast, development of tools for studying general anti-consumption attitudes and behavior has been inadequate. One of the main barriers to further developing these areas of anti-consumption is the absence of appropriate scales. Specifically, there are no existing scales that differentiate between the various types of anti-consumers. To help in the development of such scales, the authors conducted an exploratory study that was specifically targeted to identify the differences between the two types of general anti-consumers (i.e., global impact consumers versus simplifiers). The authors explored these two types of anti-consumers in the context of certain key variables hypothesized to be related to anti-consumption. The authors were also interested in exploring whether the variables related to anti-consumption in general and, if so, whether they related differently to simplifiers and global impact consumers. The variables studied in the current research were as follows.

3.1. Self-consciousness and anti-consumption

Self-consciousness refers to the habit, tendency, or disposition to focus on oneself. The concept is derived from Buss’ (1980) theory of self-consciousness, according to which a subject’s attention can be seen as dichotomous, either directed toward the environment or focused internally on the self. Self-consciousness is defined as a person’s view of himself or herself as a social object, with an acute awareness of other people’s perspectives about him or her (Mead, 1934). Buss (1980) categorized the self in two components: the private self and the public self. The private self-consciousness disposition is concerned with attending to or thinking about the covert and hidden aspects of the self not easily known by the others, such as inner feelings, fantasies and thoughts (e.g., daydreams), focal stimuli (e.g., sore muscles), diffuse internal states (e.g., anger) and motives (e.g., desire to achieve) (Buss, 1980; Marquis and Filiatrault, 2002b). Kernis and Granneman (1988) have shown that private self-consciousness also refers to self-reflection, heightened self-knowledge, and awareness of one’s own conceptions, beliefs, emotions and drives.

By contrast, public self-consciousness is concerned with a disposition toward the self as perceived by others. It reflects a concern for the publicly displayed aspects of the self that can easily be examined by others and is linked with overt displays and impression management (Cheek and Briggs, 1982). The public self-consciousness is more sensitive to personal rejection (Bushman, 1993). People who exhibit a trait tendency towards public self-consciousness will likely engage in the behavior of self-monitoring, since it has been shown that individuals who are high self-monitors will monitor the self-presentation of others in order to find cues for their own self-presentation (Gould, 1993; Snyder, 1974). In fact, one way to identify people who have the trait of public self-consciousness is to identify those who have the tendency to engage in substantial self-monitoring.

Applied to consumer behavior, the theory of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) suggests that when consumers’ behavioral freedom is reduced or threatened, they will become motivationally aroused (Marquis and Filiatrault, 2002a). Their arousal will be directed against any further attempts to curtail their freedom. Therefore, consumers who are more self-conscious would have a higher tendency to react negatively to the pressures of the marketplace and to be more aware of their ability to react against them through anti-consumption activity. The first hypothesis tests this possibility.

H1a: Self-consciousness has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of simplifiers.

H1b: Self-consciousness has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of global impact consumers.

3.2. Self-actualization and anti-consumption

Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs offers further insights into anti-consumption. According to Zavestoski (2002b), the lower-level needs (psychological, safety, and belongingness/love needs) can be met through consumption, but it is much more difficult to buy products directly meeting the higher level needs. Even when all four needs are satisfied, individuals still experience deficiencies in their human fulfillment: feelings of alienation, notions that life has no meaning and boredom (Lea et al., 1987). For Schiffsman and Kanuk (2000, p.81), “this need refers to an individual’s desire to fulfill his or her potential to become everything he or she is capable of becoming.” This potential may be creative, artistic, or extremely altruistic, contributing to public service. Zavestoski surveyed 179 participants enrolled in a voluntary simplicity course and found that, “People are drawn to voluntary simplicity because they experience a general dissatisfaction with their lives, a spiritual emptiness, and they don’t know where to go with it” (2002b, pp. 158-9). Therefore: H2a: Self-actualization has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of simplifiers. H2b: Self-actualization has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of global impact consumers.
3.3. Consumer assertiveness and anti-consumption

Alberti and Emmons (1974, p. 2) define consumer assertiveness as behavior which enables a person to act in his or her own best interests, to stand up for himself or herself without undue anxiety, to express his or her honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise his or her rights without denying the rights of others. Galassi and Galassi (1978), in their extensive review of the assertiveness literature, delineated seven behavioral dimensions of assertiveness: (i) standing up for one’s rights; (ii) initiating and refusing requests; (iii) giving and receiving compliments; (iv) initiating, maintaining and terminating conversations; (v) expressing love and affection; (vi) expressing personal opinions, including disagreement; and (vii) expressing justified anger and annoyance.

Fornell and Westbrook (1979) found only weak correlations between a general assertiveness measure and consumer complaining behavior. According to Richins (1983), the nonassertive individual has difficulty standing up for his rights in the consumer environment and may experience moderate to high levels of anxiety when it is necessary to do so. Assertive individuals are more able to stand up for their rights as consumers. They have positive perceptions of business and business responsiveness, but complain more frequently and are more resistant to compliance-gaining attempts than nonassertive individuals. Thus, an assertive consumer would be more likely to use general anti-consumption as a way to influence society or their own life satisfaction.

H3a: Assertiveness has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of simplifiers.

H3b: Assertiveness has a positive impact on the anti-consumption patterns of global impact consumers.

4. Methodology

4.1. Scale development, data collection, and sample

The anti-consumption scale was developed by first generating a set of items which was then tested on an independent sample of consumers (Churchill, 1979). The anti-consumption scale was validated using several psychometric tests, and content validity was established for the scale. In the first phase of the research, the ideas and opinions that consumers hold about anti-consumption practices were explored. Based on the literature on anti-consumption in trade and academic journals, the authors then generated fourteen statements which reflected general anti-consumption attitudes. These statements were pre-tested in an undergraduate marketing research class. Based on the responses from the pretest, some changes were made to the statements to reflect better readability.

These statements were then administered to 504 respondents. The study was conducted in a southeastern U.S. city. Therefore, the sample is a regional convenience sample. The respondents consisted of people who had been contacted by trained survey interviewers to complete the questionnaire. To ensure accurate responses, the respondents were promised complete confidentiality and were asked to return the questionnaire where the study was being conducted. Sixty percent of the sample were female. The median age of the respondents was between 31 and 39 years. The median household income of the respondents was between $30,000 and $50,000. Approximately 77% of the sample was White (Caucasian) (18% were African-American). At least 76% of the sample had completed an undergraduate degree and 52% of the respondents either worked for a company or business. Each respondent then rated these items on a 7 point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), which were factor analyzed using principal components analysis and a varimax rotation.

The reliability of the variables used in the study was calculated as follows:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Given the choice, I would rather buy organic food.</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make specific efforts to buy products made out of recycled material.</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Waste not, Want not&quot; is a philosophy I follow.</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to recycle as much as I can.</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the world continues to use up its resources, it will not survive.</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We must all do our part to conserve.</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If we all consume less, the world would be a better place.</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people buy way too many things that they really don't need.</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of variance</td>
<td>27.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

r=reverse scored.

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rotation. The principal component analysis led to a three factor solution. These three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were extracted, but the last factor consisted of a few items which cross-loaded on other factors that were poorly defined, therefore those items were dropped. Spector (1992) advised that a minimum value of around 0.30 to 0.35 indicates that an item loads onto a factor. Items that exhibited low loadings (below 0.40) onto the factors were scrutinized and those that appeared redundant or relatively unimportant were dropped. The remaining ten items were again factor analyzed. This time the program extracted two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were extracted.

The rotated component matrix showing the items and their loadings appears in Table 1. The two items were defined by the item with the biggest factor loading or based on some meaningful definition based on the items that loaded on that factor. As can be seen, one of these components corresponds to the “global impact consumers” and the other to the “simplifiers.” Internal consistency was evaluated by computing coefficient alpha. These values were 0.70 and 0.61 for the two factors, respectively. These are consistent with recommended values proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) when developing new scales.

4.2. Construct operationalization

The authors used three scales to measure the three additional constructs of interest. All three scales have been used in earlier research. Self-consciousness was measured by using a three-item scale developed by Bearden and Rose (1990) and also used by Dabholkar and Bagozzi (2002). Self-actualization was measured using a three-item scale that had been used by Jones and Crandall (1986) and later by Mick (1996). Finally, the shortened version of the assertiveness scale proposed by Rathus (1973) was used for the study. All the above items were measured on a seven point Likert scale from “1=strongly disagree” to “7=strongly agree,” where the rating 4 was for customers who “feel neutral.” Table 2 presents the items used in the current research.

4.3. Measures and purification

The authors followed a process recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to evaluate the measurement quality of the indicators. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) recommend that

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Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Construct reliability</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>t-values of factor loadings</th>
<th>Coefficient alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simplifiers</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.44 9.03</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM1</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>16.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM2</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>11.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIM3</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>15.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global impact consumers</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.46 8.61</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI1</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>11.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI2</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>11.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI3</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>8.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-consciousness</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.67 15.21</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC1</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>19.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC2</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>17.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-actualization</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.66 12.86</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA1</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>13.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA2</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.62 12.36</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASS1</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>12.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASS2</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>13.47</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Fig. 2. Proposed model of relationships.

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researchers first refine the measurement model before testing the structural component of the model. This two-step procedure by Anderson and Gerbing has been widely adopted in marketing. The goal was to identify a final set of items with acceptable discriminant and convergent validity, internal consistency, reliability and parsimony.

Each factor was submitted to a confirmatory factor analysis. All factor loadings were significant at the 0.01 level and all individual reliabilities were far above the required value of 0.4 (Bagozzi and Baumgartner, 1994). According to the recommendations of Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Bagozzi and Baumgartner, (1994), a composite reliability of at least 0.7 is desirable. This requirement was met. After the authors assessed the individual factors, they conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using the reduced set of items, all together using the maximum likelihood estimation. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3, together with additional information on reliability and validity.

Although the chi-square value was significant (255.50 with 109 d.f., \( p < 0.001 \)), other goodness of fit measures indicate a good overall fit of the five factor model to the data: GFI=0.94, AGFI=0.92, RMSEA=0.05 (see Baumgartner and Homburg, 1996), and NNFI=0.92, CFI=0.94 (see Bentler, 1990).

### 4.4. Construct validity assessment

In addition to the analysis presented above the authors conducted additional analyses to provide more confidence concerning the measurement properties of the scale by assessing its convergent and discriminant validity. As seen in Table 3, all factor loadings are significantly different from zero (consistently large t-values), indicating satisfactory convergent validity. The authors followed the procedure outlined by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) to assess discriminant validity. All two factor pairs were assessed by comparing (1) the chi-square in a model constraining the correlation parameter between two latent variables to unity, with (2) the chi-square in a model freeing this parameter (Joreskog, 1971). For all possible pair-wise cases, the chi-square values were significantly lower for the unconstrained models, and the change in chi-square between the two models exceeded the critical value (\( \Delta \chi^2 > 3.84 \)) for statistical significance. This suggested that the variables exhibited discriminant validity. Finally, the authors calculated composite reliability scores to assess the reliability of the scales. These composite reliability scores ranged from 0.66 to 0.80, which are all above the cutoff of 0.6 suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Based on the results of the preceding analysis, which are presented in Table 3, the current scale has sufficient validity and reliability as to allow the testing of the hypotheses presented earlier.

### 4.5. Structural model estimation

The authors tested the hypotheses within the framework presented in Fig. 2 using structural equation modeling through LISREL 8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993) on the measures as indicated in Table 3.

Table 4 presents the construct correlations, means, and standard deviations. Table 5 presents the results of the hypotheses tests. The fit of the data to the proposed model (see Fig. 2) was quite good (\( \chi^2(110) = 314.20, p < 0.01; \) RMSEA=0.06; GFI=0.93; AGFI=0.90; CFI=0.91; NNFI=0.90).

### 5. Results

Hypothesis 1A was not supported. Self-consciousness did not have a significant impact on anti-consumption patterns of simplifiers \((t = 1.17)\). Hypothesis 1B was supported. Self-consciousness had a significant impact on anti-consumption patterns of global impact consumers \((t = 3.81)\). Hypothesis 2A and 2B were significant but in the opposite direction. Self-actualization has a significant negative impact on anti-consumption patterns of simplifiers \((t = -2.86)\) and global impact consumers \((t = -3.63)\). Hypothesis 3A was supported. Assertiveness had a significant impact on anti-consumption patterns.
of simplifiers ($t=3.02$). Hypothesis 3B was not supported. Assertiveness did not have a significant impact on anti-consumption patterns of global impact consumers ($t=1.21$).

6. Discussion

One possible explanation for self-consciousness having a significant effect on global impact is that these self-conscious consumers are concerned about how society views them and hence they make conscious decisions to do the right things by engaging in behavior that is very visible to the outside world. They engage in behaviors which show the world that they are supporting causes that protect the environment. Doing this perhaps makes them feel good about themselves and gives them a sense of achievement. However, on the individual (simplifier) level, anti-consumers may not be as concerned with doing what society dictates; perhaps because there is less of a need to strive for congruence between their beliefs and those of others. Simplifiers, in general, become less dependent on the opinions of others and more and more on their own knowledge and values; hence the divergent self-consciousness relationships between simplifiers and global impact consumers.

Individuals prioritize (basic) physiological needs, moving with increasing incomes to satisfy safety and social needs, through to higher needs associated with self-actualization. This progression is the basic premise of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory. It uses a lexicographic approach where once the consumers move up the hierarchy, the importance of lexicographic ordering is downplayed, as suggested by Lavoie (1992). Trigg (2004) argues that this approach is flawed in that the relationship between hierarchy of needs and hierarchy of consumption is unexplained, especially concerning how social needs operate in the hierarchy of needs. A further critique of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory is that consumers watch and copy other consumers because in doing so they learn how to spend their increased purchasing power. Consistent with this view, Christopher and Schlenker (2004) have shown that the fear of negative evaluation is positively correlated with materialism. According to Rose and DeJesus (2007), the desire to avoid rejection and gain approval motivates people in relatively materialistic cultures to perceive buying as a means of belonging, thereby engaging in increased valuation of wealth and luxury and adopting a materialistic lifestyle. Hence, self-actualization does not mean that the consumer becomes a recluse and gives up his/her way of living by giving up the materialistic preferences. Consumption remains a part of his/her life. Therefore, this may help explain the negative relationship between self-actualization and anti-consumption.

Many (anti)-consumption experiences are stressful. Consumers are constantly dealing with product/service failures. Assertive consumers have been shown to engage in more problem-focused coping behavior than nonassertive consumers (Carver et al., 1993; Duhacheck and Iacobucci, 2005). Assertive consumers are more likely to engage in active coping strategies that are important to them. However, at the macro level (global impact) they feel that it takes more than one assertive individual to change the world or the way of thinking. These assertive consumers are comfortable with just doing their part which may help to explain the relationship between assertiveness and anti-consumption.

These results clearly indicate the existence of two distinct groups among those consumers whose anti-consumption is not focused on specific products or brands. Although some overlap between groups is likely, this article shows evidence of distinct reasons for anti-consumption. Some individuals avoid consumption to combat a perceived global problem of over-consumption and others do so because of the stress and strain that living in a consumer society places on their lives. Purely from looking at the items and their loadings, one set of items reflects a “We” perspective on anti-consumption whereas the other reflects an “I” perspective. The fact that these “I” versus “We” statements loaded on different factors supports the idea that global impact consumers seem to engage in anti-consumption for different reasons than do simplifiers. An area for future study is to see if this split between global impact consumers and simplifiers would still emerge if scale items were developed which were not worded so strongly in the “I” versus “We” dichotomy.

Zavestoski (2002a) stated that, “Perhaps one reason anti-consumption attitudes have not been well studied is that acknowledging their existence requires acknowledging that there is a flaw in the way we currently go about marketing consumer goods.” Traditional marketing tools may work well to change the behaviors of specific anti-consumers. Despite the existence of literature dealing with anti-loyalists and market activists (Bitner et al., 1990; Blodgett et al., 1997; Hoffman and Kelley, 2000; Johnston and Hewa, 1997; Lee et al., in press; Miller et al., 2000; Tax et al., 1998), what is less clear is how marketers can deal with consumers who want to reduce their overall level of consumption. Are there ways to develop products that will appeal to such consumers, or can existing products be redesigned to meet these consumers’ needs? Are there ways that the markets, driven by the profit motivation of corporations, can respond to the societal concerns of the global impact consumers or the personal concerns of the simplifiers? As of now, those engaging in anti-consumption seem to be choosing to opt out as much as possible of the existing system. That is the very nature of anti-consumption. However, it would be an interesting twist if the very marketing systems that they have chosen to opt out of developed solutions to the problems that concern them.

7. Limitations and future research

Some of the limitations of this study need to be addressed. First, the sample was a regional sample. Hence, the results are not generalizable across populations. Second, the scales used to measure assertiveness and self-actualization were scales that had been widely used in past research. However, these scales had poor reliability in past studies. This study also revealed poor reliability for these constructs. Future studies need to be careful in the adoption of these scales, or the researcher must be prepared to deal with poor reliability.

Another limitation of this article was the fact that a disproportionate number of the anti-consumption scale items seemed to focus on green marketing or environmental issues. This is possibly reflective of the very large impact the environmental
movement has on people’s anti-consumption disposition. However, the authors recommend that future scale development studies should aim to capture a wider breadth of the anti-consumption movement. As the results of the current research show, a substantial environmental component to the anti-consumption movement exists but other factors which encourage anti-consumption also need to be explored.

8. Conclusion

The article describes four types of anti-consumption. This research presents an initial attempt to develop scales that differentiate between people who engage in general anti-consumption for societal concerns and those who do so for more personal reasons. The results were promising, as a set of “We” anti-consumption statements and a set of “I” anti-consumption statements emerged from the factor analysis. If further studies are able to take and expand the scales initially explored in this article, eventually a fuller understanding of anti-consumption may emerge—one that differentiates anti-consumers based on the purpose of their anti-consumption (social versus personal concerns) as well as the object of their anti-consumption (all consumption versus specific brands or products).

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