Chapter 9

The Impact of Social Media on Social Movements: The Case of Anti-Consumption

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this chapter is to analyze the support of social media for social movements within the context of the anti-consumption movement. Social media have proved to be strategic for initiating, organizing and communicating social movements. The anti-consumption movement is a trend of the postmodernism era that has not yet reached a large following. A secondary aim of this chapter is to analyze the similarities and differences in the support of social media for the anti-consumption movement between one developed and one emerging market. To achieve this goal, a content analysis was employed to analyze Facebook accounts of anti-consumption online communities in the USA and Turkey. The findings show that social media can be the right medium to increase coverage of social movements in society. Additionally, the online institutionalization and decentralized organization of the online community as well as stable social media sharing help support non-radical social movements like anti-consumption.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media, defined as “activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media” (Safko & Brake, 2009, p.6), is a new platform through which extensive consumer interaction occurs. Its ease of use, speed and anonymity make social media a tool where people can express themselves freely and influence each other comprehensively (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). This enabled interactivity among individuals on social media has changed online communication dramatically and drawn interest in academia to study its effects from business and sociological perspectives. For example, the Arab Spring fueled interest on how social media triggers protests and social movements. However, the extant literature and studies are not yet sufficient to understand the relationship between social media and social movements, so more studies on the subject are needed (Boulianne, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to add to the extant literature on how social media and online communities support social movements using the context of the anti-consumption social movement. Anti-consumption is the rejection of consumerism. Consumerism is a byproduct of modernism and modern way of living, in which standardization of culture, media, products, ideas and way of living are praised (Hakansson, 2014). Consumerism is based on acquisition and consumption of goods and services, and achieving satisfaction and happiness in return. Postmodernism was a reaction to modernism, and appeared as a revolutionary alternative (Rosenau, 1995). The post-modern world is based on impression management, accepting alternate and innovative ways of personal identification (Podesta & Addis, 2005). Thus, anti-consumption appears as a trend among some post-modern individuals to define their personal images (Yüksel & Mirza, 2010). The contributions of this paper are to help identify anti-consumption as a social movement and to illustrate how social media have lent support to the movement by uniting individual anti-consumption attempters under one platform as a community. A related contribution of the study is to illuminate the similarities and differences between the anti-consumption movement on social media in a developed and an emerging market.

To achieve the aim of the study, this paper is organized as follows. First, a background on social movements, the intersection of social movements and social media are presented, followed by a discussion of development of anti-consumption as a social movement and social media’s influence on the movement. Then a content analysis of selected Facebook accounts of online communities on anti-consumption in developed and emerging markets were done to snapshot the current situation of the movement on social media. Findings of the research are discussed,
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