CONSUMERISM IN ASIA

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ABSTRACT
A Study of consumerism focuses on development of movements for the safety and protection of consumer rights. There can be a positive shift in consumer standards in consumer societies with the help of consumer movements which actively operates to protect and define the rules for consumer safety. Historic researches in recent years on consumerism have surprisingly given the importance of consumer behavior and consumerism in modern life. Despite a fact that for a long time, historic work was constrained by strong belief that it is unworthy topic for scholars attention in comparison with wars or kings but historians have made successful cases for the importance of examining consumerism through the lens of their discipline. Therefore consumerism can now be studied in terms of its origin, initial causes, subsequent changes and its growth in different societies. A lot of books and journals have contribution in the publications of consumerism in Western countries but less attention and focus has been directed towards this trend in Asian societies. This research paper focuses on consumerism in Asian perspective. The major countries that are discussed in this paper in context of consumerism is India, Japan and Turkey and Pakistan as in these societies of Asia, consumerism exists with varying level of existence. The objective of this paper is to identify the different consumerist societies in Asia and understands the history and dynamics of consumer culture, consumer ideologies and consumer movements within these societies.

Keywords: consumerism, consumerist society, consumer culture, consumer ideology, consumer movement.

INTRODUCTION
A lot of work has been done on consumerism in Western perspective but so far researches have failed to describe the extent of consumerism in Asian countries. The motive of this study is to
identify the extent of public opinion, consumer advocacy groups, activists, government agencies and legislation on consumer rights working for the protection of consumers particularly in Asia. Academic researches focused their attention to address how an individual consumer thinks of his rights. But these rights are to be addressed by the formal movements that play a function of a facilitator in providing and protecting rights of consumers. The basic right of a consumer is right of safety, right of information and right to be heard and these rights were further extended to rights of education, rights to be redressed, rights for healthy environment and last but not the least rights to basic needs (Stern, 1967; Morgan & Avrunin, 1982).

The concept of consumerism was elaborated by (Abplanalp, 2009) as a new socio economic and cultural trend which celebrates consumer individuality and unique personality, and consequently, companies have no option but to respond and recognize positively to this emerging consumer concerns. Companies have had to invest heavily in advertising their products to meet and stimulate consumer demands with various products categories because consumers are no longer passive actors; rather they have become independent and active force in shaping events in market place and influencing corporations’ market and non market decisions (Ali A., 2007; Barrutia & Charterins, 2006). This has been made possible by rapid developments in informational technology, ease of communications across the globe, education, wide exposure to media and entertainment, and wide spread influence (Ali & Wisniesk, 2010). As early as 1876, John Wanamaker, the founder of world first departmental stores, stated, “When a customer enter my store, I forget myself. He is the king” (Economist, 2005). In 1960s, customers did not exert that much influence in the marketplace as they do in current years. No doubt changes have taken place in 1990s and catapulted customers on the center stage of market power. This development is associated with consumerism and the quest of customers across the globe to take advantage of enfolding market opportunities and changes. The cores of consumerism debate are the issues of power of consumer choice, the propensity to consume, and the willingness to voice concerns (A.J, 2007; D, M, & Michaelletti, 2005). However, (Kozinets & Handelman, December 2004; Gabriel, Yiannis, & Lang, 1995; Sklair & Leslie, 1995) Described that consumption plays a role in contemporary societies but consumer movements in different societies has transformed the consumption ideologies of consumers. The influential effect of these consumer movements can be seen in consumption culture of different societies (Thompson, J, & Troester, 2002)

Consumerism is referred to as consumer movements or activism which finds ways to inform and protect the consumers by performing honest practices such as product safety, guarantees and advertising and sales promotions (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). This term first used in 1915 to define the advocacy of rights for consumers. Consumerism had a great turn after industrial revolution.

Consumerism is an organized movement for consumers and role of government is to establish and maintain consumer rights against the sellers. The ideology and motive of consumerism is to prevent consumer from being exposed to hazardous products and environment due to unfair practices in trade. Consumer should have therefore adequate rights to claim against the defaulting business person. Consumerism defines the concept of consumer is king. Consumerism and anti consumer movements are the set of ideologies that widen up the movement base against corporate adversaries. (Henry, 2010) Identified two dominant factor contributing consumer movements are consumer’s own beliefs about their rights and political acts towards consumer movements. (Jensen,
Mazze, & Stern, 1973) Argued that consumer protection acts has to be established for the sake of consumer prevention as well as revolutionized the industries to follow certain rules for consumer safety.

In recent years, Asian countries have faced growing trends in activities by consumerists. These activities include different consumerists’ societies and protection of consumer rights through legislation and consumer laws. Numerous researches have shown that consumerism movements in Asian countries have different levels of consumer issues. Consumerism has slow growth in Asian countries or in other words it is still in a growing phase. Different consumer movements have now been working on consumer concerns and issues in countries like Pakistan, India, China and Turkey (Samiee, et al., 1982). (Stearns) Argued that well before 18th century, various societies around the world had established pervasive value system, none of which provided fertile ground for consumerism. Almost a decade ago, consumer society was assumed to be followed by industrial revolution, thus it emerged at the end of nineteenth century.

(Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, & Odabasi, 1992) Well described the consumerism lifecycle stages as crystallization stage (birth), organization stage (growth), institutionalization stage (maturity) and conceptualization (decline). The author conducted an exploratory studies to identify the extent of consumerism in developing and developed countries across the globe and founded that Japan and Turkey are on the institutionalization stage of consumerism whereas India is at its organizational stage of consumerism.

INDIA

In India, consumerism is relatively more established as compare to other developing countries such as Pakistan. India has witnessed dramatic transformation over the past two decades as structural adjustments out of which consumer movements were dominant. The country is conscious about customer satisfaction and their safety rights. There are six rights given to consumers in order to protect a consumer from misleading and cheating. To secure the consumer from being exploited, Indian Government has passed many acts time to time to serve the consumers such as drugs and cosmetics act 1940, prevention of food adulteration act 1954, essential commodity supply act 1955, monopolies and restrictive trade practices act 1969, standards of weight and measure act 1976 and consumer protection act 1986 which is currently working in India until now for the protection of consumer rights and transformed in consumer act 1995 with some amendments and positive alterations (Consumer Act 1995). Additions to this, there are two more rights given to consumers by United Nations that are rights to basic needs, rights to healthy environment. Moreover, there are around 600 non government organizations that are working to protect consumer interests and their function is to educate the consumers about consumerism, special education about consumerism to women, arrangements of seminars, publishing brochures, encouraging following desirable consumption standards. These movements are established in order to create strong motivation and urge to business to conduct high commercial standards of behavior (Klein & John, 2004). The first consumer protection council was built in Madras in 1950. Later in 1966, Consumer guidance society of India was formed in Bombay. Consumer protection grew into a movement as per record of International organization of Consumer union. In 1970s, consumer unions were formed in Dehli, Ahmadabad and Culcutta. There are 36 legislations protecting consumer rights in India which are
currently working under Consumer protection Act 1986 (Lizzy, 1993). Moreover government of Gujrat has established a Consumer affair and Protection agency to protect the rights of consumers. (Vermann & Belk, 2009) identified the history of few big companies that had to stop their operations as a result of consumer movements on consumer’s concerns violations. Author discussed the problematic existence of Coca cola Company in India because it was suspected that it illegally transfers revenues to Atlanta. The company decided to withdraw its operations from India when it is asked to provide the disclosures of formula in 1975. The anti consumption movement started with the name of Lok Samati which protest against water shortages and pollution caused by Coca cola company. The pamphlets were used to protest and these pamphlets were distributed among consumers and workers. Apart from pollution hazards, other reasons for protest were that activists protested that coca cola came up with an advertising message of pride and that is against the cultural values of India. (Vermann & Belk, 2009) discussed in their study that to protest further a rally was organized in India, Mehdiganj and the Ashfaq one of the activist of Lok Samiti claimed that it is harmful to consumer health as well because it contains acid and if you wash your toilet with it, the floor starts shining. Therefore he claimed it to be more harmful to stomach. This also shows that consumer movement leads a big giant company like Coca cola to spend huge amounts to conduct consumer market research and re-launch later with better quality and keeping environmental concerns in mind. Same is the case with McDonald’s in India, it has come up with completely altered menu due to protest of foreign fast food culture there. It has to come up with all vegetables deals as dominant Hindus culture is to worship cows therefore they have to exclude beefs offerings there (Eckhardt & Mahi, 2004). (Vermann & Belk, 2009; Brown, 2002) described the interpretation of consumer movement with political ideology and use of consumption and globalization. This study elaborated that existence of consumer movements in India since 1970 but it was more refined in 1980 and 1990s with the increase in consumer awareness and media exposures and Judicial activities for consumer’s rights protection are to keep a balance between the liabilities of consumers and sellers prior to this consumer’s movement were used to be held at federal levels (Pitofsky, 1997).

PAKISTAN

In a country like Pakistan where basic needs rights of citizens are contested on frequent basis before the courts, consumer protection is rather more neglected category. As a present view of consumer legislation in Pakistan, consumer has an exclusion or partial accommodation such as in most cases, consumers have no rights to express and represent their point of views as in case of price settings. The consumer is therefore placed at a disadvantaged position against seller. This seeks to highlight consumer’s aspect of legislations to be established so that consumer rights can be treated and consumer point of view can be heard. Therefore, in Pakistan, considerable work has been done on consumerism. Many organizations and legislations has been established in this regard such as Pakistan Penal code 1860, West Pakistan pure food ordinance 1960, Wafaqi Mohtasib order 1983, Pakistan standard quality control act 1996, drug act 1940, drug act 1976, Islamabad consumer protection act 1995, NWFP and consumer protection act 1997, consumer protection act Punjab 2005, West Pakistan pure food ordinance 1960, cantonment pure food act 1966. Moreover, Consumer right commission was established in 1999 in Pakistan and its function is to create awareness among consumers and protect their rights. The active role of consumer courts in Pakistan
has facilitated the consumers in terms of providing rights to claim their rights being a consumer against seller. These consumer protection acts have liabilities for defective products and obligations of manufacturer and sellers mentioned in manual so that consumer can claim against those defects in consumer courts **Punjab consumer act 2005.** As a result of these consumerism activities, these consumer courts led to the positive responses of businesses and raised a concern about quality management issues, industry code of conduct establishment, establishment of consumer affairs and encouragement of product recalls (Silbey, 1981). Pakistan is now relatively conscious about consumer satisfaction and consumer safety issues as compared to 1980s. To ensure the consumer movements in Pakistan with proper legislation and statutes for consumer protection for all consumer concerns ranging from food and health to redressal mechanism is a function of consumer rights commission of Pakistan. Recently, this commission has passed a new law for lobbying activities as well as educating consumers about consumerism (Nader, 1976).

In previous consumer acts since 1980s, there is no evidence of consumer welfare thinking in majorities of developing countries (Silbey, 1981). For example consumer laws arguably deals with consumer related concerns and in fact there was no provision for consumer participation. This was largely due to the fact of lack of consumer awareness as well. The consumer laws were revised in Pakistan in mid 1990s for the purpose of consumer awareness and protection.

**JAPAN**

In **Japan**, consumer movements were established in 1942 in which consumer groups pressurize individual firms to make safer products and provide more customers friendly business practices. In 1960s these groups get involved into nationwide political campaigns to ensure food safety policies and develop laws governing product liability legislation (Schwartz & Pharr, 2003). Consumerism in Japan engages two significant strains within Japanese social movement environment. The first is the citizens group which includes consumer movements towards quality of life products that is why this consumer movement was termed as social movement. The second is advocacy group which consists of government advisory commission or participation in lobbying activities to protect consumer rights. Shimin movement, which means the spirit of freedom, was developed in Japan in 1970s however it is important to know that Japenese consumer movements learned a great deal of experience form foreign movements (Schwartz & Pharr, 2003). Today a handful consumer groups at national level of Japan working for consumer rights and are a part of International Organization of Consumer Movements which is an international network of consumer groups that coordinates movements policies on global consumer trends, consumer rights, impact of national economic policies on foreign consumer population and other related concerns. Japenese consumerism remains largely nationalist (Maclachlan, 2002). In 1968, Consumer protection basic law was established called as Constitution of Japanese consumer protection that strives to secure lifestyles of consumers by defining rules for business practices. Representatives for consumers also formed a Ministry advisory council. (Kirkpatrick, 1975) Described that interest in consumerism clearly represents an entirely new dimension in consumer interest activity in Japan, and holds prospects for the development of consumerism as a new form of grass roots citizen activism. Consumer interest groups are not a new phenomenon in Japan. A few such groups have existed since early post war years. Over the years some of these groups evolved into advocates of consumer interests in broader sense with respect to various government consumer related policies. Tokyo area where 30 new
consumer groups were formed between 1969 and 1972 was largely due to the result of consumer participation plans developed by Government. The current popularity of consumer activism in Japan reflects a growing alienation from the collection of party and interest group relationships which have formed the fabric of Japanese politics to protect emerging consumer concerns of Japan’s increasingly mass consumption oriented society. Role of consumerism in Japan is likely to change with the changing concerns of public and its need for expression (Stearns). Further Product liability law was developed in 1994 in Japan (Maclachlan, 2002) but this law failed to specify the product safety and consumer redress nevertheless it provides legal incentives for producers to make safer products. The reason for failure of this law was low cost alternative dispute resolution (ADR) which was developed by government is late 1990’s but this resolution also came to an end because of long standing dependence on government, market intentions for consumers protection became intact. Therefore Tokyo Consumer Ordinance initially specified five consumer rights afterwards added sixth consumer rights when it make amendments 1994 consumer act. These rights include consumer rights to be heard, to be informed, to get safer product, to get healthier environment, to claim or protest and redress.

TURKEY
Turkish constitution for consumer act guarantees the consumer protection and rights for consumers by the government and also encourages consumers to take step to protect them. The first law of consumer protection was adopted in 1995 (Day & Icduygu, 1999). Consumer Policy Framework 2003 was developed as a result of amendments in law of 1995. Product safety issues were covered in this law with implementation of technical legislation on products. Moreover Turkish strategy on consumer protection for 2007-2013 is included in ninth development plan which was published in 2006. Turkey expects to reach all consumer rights and develop a strengthen system for consumers to protect themselves (A.Rawwas, Swaidan, & Oyman, 2005). Turkey is working on consumer rights with the help of number of NGO’s and consumer courts. In regard to safety of products, there are twelve public bodies’ legislations. A consumer council was also developed in 1995 that governs the rules for consumer safety for consumer organizations. Moreover, 40 smaller NGOs are active as consumer organizations. There are also Conformity Checks on safety of products imported from the foreign countries. It was also estimated that in 2007, 80% of the 68,900 complaints handled by arbitration committees were in the favour of consumers and this percentage is forecasted to be around 92% in next few years. There are currently 24 consumer courts in operation in turkey (Consumer and Health protection in Turkey, May 2007). However, consumerism in Turkey has almost reached the maturity stage argued (Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, & Odabasi, 1992).

METHODOLOGY
This research paper is based on secondary data and qualitative analysis. The paper is constructed on basis on literature review and conclusions are drawn from it. The review of literature includes the published articles of various researchers and books on consumerism. Finally, limitation of the study and future directions for research is provided by the author.
DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

“Consumers as varied as societies and future of consumer societies vary with the extent of consumerism that is concerned with individual choice” (Hilton, 2003)

Findings revealed that resistance to consumption requires a deep sense of knowledge and interpretation of production and marketing systems as they are reflected within the national spaces in globalization. Moreover, consumers are now becoming more aware of their rights and power therefore they raise concerns for their protection. For this purpose, consumer movements established in various countries to serve the consumer complaints and to redress their concerns. Consumerism is global but the extent of consumerism across the globe varies with the cultural aspects, lifestyles, socio-economic statuses and values of the people in a particular society. Based on literature, this study proposes that different societies develop different consumerism styles and react to consumerism in terms of prior traditions and this led to variable outcomes. But value judgment must be applied to decide whether Western, Asian or African responses to consumerism are preferable. The research also concluded that consumerism exists in various societies and countries of Asia such as India and Turkey are the key examples Moreover, the trend of consumerism in Asian society is an emerging perspective and is in a growing phase particularly in country like Pakistan. The consumerism success or failure in any society largely depends upon the government interventions, consumer’s rights to be informed and values and cultural shifts in those societies and consumer rights to raise concerns and voice. The study of literature revealed that consumerism started from Western countries and then spread out across the globe. In context of Asia that is one of the developing economies, consumerism is at its growing stage. Author identifies the consumerist societies in Asia where signs of consumerism prevailed. The consumerist societies in Asia include Japan, Turkey, and India. In context of Pakistan, consumerism is not widespread but can be predicted to exist in future. Consumerism has now been dominated at all levels of societies like U.K and U.S but the extent of consumerism is lagged in developing economies like Asian countries such as Pakistan. The countries where economy is comparatively stable, consumerism is growing there as discussed in literature about countries like Japan, India and Turkey.

The influence of consumerism and consumer culture expressions were not as dominated as it prevailed in the consumer societies today. The international visions of consumerism advocates that the consumer societies to set merits to bring more valuable goods to people and protect their rights. For this purpose, several consumer movements have been established in different societies. Consumer societies progressed towards global remit spreading beyond industrial and developed countries of the world, towards the Asian and African countries as well but rights for consumers and extent of consumerism is not the same in developed and developing countries.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

One of the limitations of this research is that this study conducted on secondary data only. But this limitation of this study can become a good direction for future research. Empirical research can also be conducted to support the conclusions and findings of this study in the future. Moreover, this study does not take into account those societies of Asia in which consumerism is growing and emerging concept. The growth potential of consumer movements in those societies can also be a direction for further research to be carried out. Reasons for lack in consumerism in Asian countries can also be studied. Lastly, number of researcher has carried out research on historic movements of
consumerism globally but the future of consumerist societies are yet to be explored. As consumption patterns in different societies varies therefore the future of consumerism in Asia or any other country can also be prospected and predicted by conducting further research. Time series analysis can also be done for the purpose of comparison between past and present trends of consumerism in different societies.

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