

The Other Side of Civic Engagement – Consumer Activism

2012 Dalton Institute for College Student Values

Virginia Byrne, virginia.l.byrne@gmail.com

Consumer Activism

- Hollenbeck & Zinkhan (University of Georgia) define consumer activism as a social movement made up of people who feel a moral responsibility to improve society, reject some aspect of consumerism, and voluntarily participate in a more pure lifestyle.
- Values justice, purity, and self-control
- Movement and a practice
 - Michael Pollen in Omnivore's Dilemma stresses that he votes for a more sustainable and health food system three times a day by not buying traditional meat, produce and other food products, to instead choose the organic options which are more expensive, yet more align with his values.

For Millennial Students (briefly)

[Special Report: The 2002 Civic and Political Health of the Nation](#)

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE),
Tufts University

“Some highlights of the study: Young people are much more likely to support government action and are just as engaged in apolitical civic activities as are older generations, but are less likely to trust others and participate in electoral politics. “Generation DotNet” (15-25 year-olds) has a strong and distinct generational identity, while joining older citizens in using consumer activism as a vehicle for expressing their political and policy views. Younger Americans don’t share older generations’ views about the responsibilities of citizenship, but they do say that civic education makes a big difference in fueling their interest in public affairs.”

“Consumer Activists: More than a third (38%) of the Dot Nets have reported not buying something from a company they do not like in order to punish them, and a similar number (35%) say they have purchased a product from a particular company to reward them for some corporate behavior. The DotNets’ rate is surprisingly almost equal to that of the Baby Boomers (41%, 37% respectively) and the GenXers (43%, 42%).”

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What are some recent examples of consumer activism on your campus?

National examples of boycotting:

- Boycott of BP after the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster
- Boycott of Chik-fil-A after anti-LGBT comments (and Target somewhat)

National examples of buy-cotting:

- Toms Shoes
- Health food groceries/Co-Ops – organic trends
- Shop Local Saturday – in response to Black Friday shopping
- Bank Transfer Day to Credit Unions (November, 5, 2011)

How do you believe consumer politics and lifestyle activism fits into the concepts of social entrepreneurship discussed throughout the Dalton Institute?

Recommendations for future research:

- Student development theory in regards to consumerism
- How do civic engagement programs teach effective and constructive ways to engage in consumer activism?
 - Civic engagement programming that addresses voting with your wallet