

## Chapter 4

# Using Consumerism to Maintain Mobile Customer Engagement

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### ABSTRACT

*Consumerism is a social phenomenon that refers to the way in which consumer spending habits extend beyond the mere purchase of items for purposes of necessity. Consumerism is inevitable, and the technology sector leads companies to create better products for their consumers. In the early 2000s, a new concept emerged, “new consumerism.” The new consumers are concerned about time, sustainability, authenticity, technology, and simplicity. Their wellbeing plays a vital role in their thinking; they expect the freedom to choose, to see, and to listen. In such a world, companies need to use this new consumer behavior characteristic in order to create customer engagement. This chapter explains what the consumerism is and its transformation to new consumerism in the context of customer engagement. In order to explain this, the author clarifies the relationship between conspicuous consumption and consumerism and also how it affects mobile technology companies. Finally, this chapter argues how to use consumerism to maintain customer engagement.*

### INTRODUCTION

In early history, people had nothing beyond their needs. They acquired the things they really needed like pots, pans or utensils. Nations and people were generally poor. However, starting in the early 18th century, in the countries of northwestern Europe, a remarkable phenomenon occurred. Wages started to rise, and people started to earn much more than before. People started to shop for small luxuries like combs or mirrors. Their expenditure created a virtuous economic cycle. The more they spent, the more businesses grew, and the more wages rose. Especially in Britain by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, people were faced with an epochal change; the first consumer revolution. The industry started to grow and the demand for goods that could only be bought by riches had increased. The Church wanted to stop this vanity but in 1723, Bernard Mandeville published a book and his view defended the idea that wealth

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can only be maintained by shopping for pleasure. The only way to generate wealth was to ensure a high demand for unnecessary things. By creating this demand new workshops could be built, apprentices trained and new employees hired (Stearns, Stearns, & Corporation, 2001, p. 17).

With the industrial revolution, mass production rose. With production beyond consumer demand, marketers developed strategies for creating even more demand, and this demand was focused not only on needs but also on encouraging people to buy things hedonistically (Czarnecka & Schivinski, 2019). The real challenge started for companies to create products that fulfilled the needs of customers but also wanting the product out of a sense hedonism. Right here, conspicuous consumption gives a complete explanation of the situation. Veblen suggests that people buy expensive things to show their wealth rather than to cover their real needs (Diggins, 1999; Veblen, 2015). They make such purchases purely for vanity.

Consumerism is not always a bad concept. Consumerism creates competition and this leads companies to be creative. In today's technological world, new inventions are welcomed by consumers and they constantly want more. Technology never satisfies consumers. However, companies need to create customer engagement and include them in the process, a form of co-creation. So, consumers become "prosumers" (Vere, 2014). From now on, consumers are not just consuming; but they also produce. At the very least, they participate in the production process somehow. With the emergence of this phenomenon, the new consumerism era has begun. New consumerism is about a sharing economy, space for life, buying time, circular economy, frugal innovation and the gig economy. All these concepts are about creating customer engagement in the technological environment.

People still want to buy more. Conspicuous consumption still exists but green and ethical consumerism and being a prosumer are emerging concepts. So, how can companies use this current trend to their own advantage? This chapter will examine these questions by looking at applied examples.

## **WHAT IS CONSUMERISM**

Several researchers have attempted to describe the term consumerism. Since this term emerged, it has undergone several changes in meaning. The meaning of Consumerism is multilayered. It can be defined as giving consumers choice, bringing freedom to customers' choices, and ensuring happiness and consumer power. It can also be defined as a conspicuous consumption ideology, which means a status achieved through material possessions. However, it can also be seen as a social movement of consumers, including consumer activism for ethical consumers (Mansvelt, 2011).

Essentially, consumerism is a social phenomenon that is expressed in two ways. First, we can refer to it as protecting consumers' rights and the environment. Secondly, we can refer to it as enticing consumers into over consumption. Kotler gave a definition for the first argument that states, "*consumerism is a social movement seeking to augment the rights and power of buyers in relation to sellers*" (Kotler, 1972, p. 49); and for the second argument we can say that consumers want to buy items for a purpose beyond just what is needed (Kucuk, 2002, p. 42). Consumerism is actually not about the fundamental needs that individuals have in order to survive, but more precisely, it refers to wants rather than necessities. It describes consumption behavior in itself. It means consuming not for survival but for hedonistic, less rational wants (Benett & O'Reilly, 2010; Lodziak, 2002).

In 1962, President Kennedy's declaration of the bill of rights for consumers accelerated the consumerist movement. These rights included the right to choose, to be heard, to safety and to be informed (Ede & Calcich, 1999, p. 113). This most common definition of consumerism broadens the activities of busi-

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