

Advocacy and Consumerism: TOMS Case Study

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Abstract

This preliminary research seeks to better understand the connection between making a purchase from a social enterprise (SE) and participating in human rights activism. TOMS is highlighted as a case study because of its proven track record in social entrepreneurship. This link may help social entrepreneurs and human rights activists better utilize their market and audience, as well as collaborate to increase awareness of social issues. In order to improve understanding of consumer behavior, this study relies on a systematic literature review and initial interview data. Ultimately, this study is aimed at understanding how university students see consumerism and activism, and whether they see their SE purchases as a means for changing the world for the better. Continued research on this topic will hopefully provide opportunities for improving the connection between social enterprise and positive change.

“Conscious capitalism is about more than simply making money – although it’s about that too. It’s about creating a successful business that also connects supporters to something that matters to them and that has great impact in the world” (Mycoskie, 2009, p. x).

After a trip to Argentina in 2006, American entrepreneur Blake Mycoskie founded TOMS, a social enterprise business “for a better tomorrow.” His company manufactures and sells shoes, sunglasses, and coffee. The TOMS “One for One” business model operates so that when a consumer buys a pair of shoes, TOMS gives a new pair to a child in need; when a consumer buys a pair of

sunglasses, TOMS will help restore sight to an individual in need. Since June 2013, TOMS has given more than 10 million pairs of new shoes and has helped more than 150 thousand people regain their sight. TOMS partners with charitable, not-for-profit organizations that donate goods in over forty countries in need around the world (TOMS, n.d.). TOMS has proven itself as a sustainable solution to solving many human rights issues in the areas of education, health, and labor.

Recently, social enterprises (SE) like TOMS have emerged in the market that differs from most other businesses. They not only calculate success by profit and return, but they center their brand's mission on a positive return to society. SEs are for-profit businesses that are meeting consumer demand for material goods while also innovating new, sustainable solutions to social problems. In the past, international human rights were only protected and promoted through political spheres of influence. Presently, SEs offer consumers the opportunity to impact the lives of others who are less fortunate and who need their human rights to quality education, adequate healthcare, or dignified work to be respected and fulfilled. By buying goods from SEs, consumers are empowered to make global change at the local level.

This research focuses on how consumers identify themselves when they support SEs. Does their action toward solving international human rights issues stop at the cash register, or do they participate in other forms of advocacy? Do they identify themselves as activists in the first place? This research seeks to discover the underlying mechanisms of consumer behavior and the individual's perception of human rights advocacy as it relates to their consumption. It is important to understand the impacts that SEs have on society in order to improve and grow their capacity to support human rights on the global scale. Many researchers have specifically focused on political consumption or international human rights advocacy, but until recently few have investigated the intersection of these two fields.

TOMS will be used as a case study for this research because it uses an innovative SE model as a tool for its human rights advocacy to fight poverty, promote education, and improve health. There has

been little-to-no research conducted on how TOMS consumers identify themselves in a human rights context. The inherent relationship between consumerism and human rights activism impacts the overall potential for using consumer goods to solve social issues. Overall, the paper seeks to understand whether there is a relationship between individuals who consume goods from SEs and those who engage in other forms of human rights activism.

SE Consumerism

Scholars in the fields of business and international human rights question whether shopping as a form of activism is an effective method to combat human rights violations. Lawson and Potts (2013) believe that shopping ethically still “oils the wheel of the consumer industrial complex,” which could be defined as consumerist mentalities spreading to touch every aspect of an individual, a group, and society. “Shopping is the prime way that we’re socialized, and that is exactly why it is not enough to withdraw selectively our consent” (Lawson & Potts, 2013, p. 32). Anti-consumerists struggle to accept the idea that “materialism,” conceptually meaning a consumer’s relationship to goods, could be a tool for supporting and promoting international human rights. Despite the advancements in SE, it is questionable if consumption is the most beneficial tool for solving human rights issues such as poverty, lack of education, and health. Materialism has been largely associated with a relationship to stuff that has been “passive, debt-fueled, wasteful, and ultimately unsatisfying,” but some contend that SE gives consumerism a new relationship that is “active, pleasurable, and more respectful” (Lawson & Potts, 2013, p. 32).

Perhaps materialism can be redefined through consumption from SEs because their goods create healthy relationships to goods (Lawson & Potts, 2013). Buying goods from a SE that provides education, health services, or jobs to an impoverished country’s citizens forms a positive relationship between consumers, producers, and goods. Products from SEs create better relationships because they

purposefully seek to have a positive impact on the world. SEs manufacture and sell goods that are produced in a way that does not exploit the producers or their environments from which they are created. Producers are paid fair living wages, and their land and property are respected. TOMS “One for One” model, for instance, gives portions of the profits from their goods to different charities or humanitarian organizations that provide aid to groups that are suffering human rights abuses. This SE essentially matches consumption in a socially responsible way (TOMS, n.d.). The idea that consumers and their relationships to goods can be used in the human rights toolkit is not widely accepted, but it is becoming a popular means to addressing issues around education, health, and labor in much of the developing world.

The overall effectiveness of consumer activism rests upon the underlying assumption that politicians and governments can solve social issues by implementing policies. From this perspective, political consumers make an impact by protesting, writing letters, voting, and engaging in other forms of political participation. A “political consumer” is defined as undertaking “a ‘new’ kind of political participation that is replacing conventional forms” (Stømnès, 2009, p. 304). Two theories focus on understanding political participation. The first is called *mobilization theory*, and it holds that citizens who feel helpless through traditional political participation use new forms by mobilizing “new social groups into politics” (Stømnès, 2009, p. 304). The second theory is called *supplement theory*, and it contends that political participants who use traditional forms are also the adopters of new forms of participation (Stømnès, 2009, p. 304). There is much debate on whether consumer activism mobilizes these new social groups to participate in the political sphere, or if traditional political participants adopt it as a supplemented tool. Still, many political advocates believe the system needs to place more pressure and reliance upon traditional forms of political participation, which are believed to be more effective and reliable at creating lasting change (Lawson & Potts, 2013). Part of understanding how TOMS consumers

identify themselves will require us to consider this difference when calculating if the individual is part of some “new social group” or if he/she is a traditional human rights activist.

Currently, SE consumerism is seen as a new form of political participation that allows consumers to “vote with a dollar”. The idea is that buying more ethically produced goods will have a positive impact, yet critics argue that consumers need to engage in forms of advocacy that do not promote unhealthy relationships to goods – even if they are ethically produced (Lawson & Potts, 2013). The United States was built, in part, on the “vote with a dollar” mentality and it continues to shape American consumption habits. The Boston Tea Party was an early political revolution fueled by the rejected consumption of the East India Company’s tea. It was the first form of ethical consumption within the U.S., in the form of a boycott to express political beliefs. Until recently, consumers could impact the world around them by choosing to buy or not to buy certain brands or goods. Unlike boycotts, which have persisted throughout history, “buycotts” involve consumers consciously buying goods and services for their socially responsible reputation and are steadily increasing in popularity (Sandovici, 2010).

Consumerism and political involvement need not be exclusive means of political expression. Many consumers are finding consumption to be an effective way to address human rights issues in a way that was not previously offered to them. For instance, researchers have considered consumer advocacy in Norway, where the majority of political consumers are established individuals with a high level of education, an interest in politics, and a leftist political affiliation (Youde, 2009). The various forms of political participation measured by Strømnes (2009) included:

Activity within parties and organizations (worked in a political party, worked in an organization or association, or attended a political meeting or rally), contact activity (contacted a politician, contacted an association or organization, contacted a civil servant, contacted or appeared in the media, or contacted a solicitor or judicial body), direct actions (worked in a political action group, worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker, signed a petition, taken part in a demonstration, taken part in a strike, or participated in illegal protest activities), and charity (donated money or raised funds) (p. 308).

In Norway, political consumers were more active in all forms of political participation and advocacy. Therefore, political consumption as a supplement to traditional forms of political participation can affect change in the field of international human rights – but it's important to note that not all SE consumers are activists, and not all political activists see consumption as a legitimate solution to human rights issues. Norwegian “political consumers,” or consumers who shop to impact political institutions, were surprisingly found as engaged citizens within the political sphere. They saw consumption as an additional means of expressing their beliefs and preferences on political issues (Youde, 2009). With existing theories in mind, this data suggest that political consumers are not mobilized as a new social group, but they are presently politically active citizens who view consumption as an additional channel to express their political ideologies.

Socially responsible brands may not have the full impact that the international political and economic systems do on global issues, but they offer a starting place. In some cases, they alleviate problems in the short run until government policies and action plans are set into motion. Youde (2009) defends ethical consumerism on a few grounds, and he explains the common misconceptions and arguments against it. In his case study on (RED), a non-profit that partners with for-profit companies to market (RED) products and donate a portion of the proceeds to fight AIDS, he explains that “social consumption” (consumption of socially responsible goods from socially responsible enterprises) does not solve the “problems inherent to neoliberalism that exacerbated the AIDS crisis in Africa” (p. 209). Rather, it made Africans far too dependent on private aid and the unpredictable global market, and (RED) validated the consumers’ “shallow level of participation.” Despite the company’s failure to completely eradicate AIDS in Africa, it has raised global awareness about HIV/AIDS and contributed more than \$240 million to the cause. This demonstrates that the private and public sources do complement one another in the long run even if consumption is not the sole means to the end (Youde,

2009). Consumption of ethical goods is a stepping-stone toward dealing with the pressing issues, and the success of these consumer campaigns gives the issues a greater importance level for politicians.

They also give consumers a communal voice to express their interest in issues they find most pressing. By purchasing (RED) products, consumers show their support for the fight against the AIDS epidemic while fulfilling their needs for a new cell phone or T-shirt. Shopping becomes a form of social capital, where individuals can buy into a social circle. Through social networks, causes are promoted and individuals become socialized to buy products that their peers are purchasing (Neilson & Paxton, 2010). This may be the reason that consumption as a form of human rights advocacy is gaining so much attention and why more brands are emerging to provide consumers with what they want while giving back to the global community. SEs make human rights an attractive consumer experience in a way that was never before considered or imaginable.

Consumer Motivations and Identity

The consumption of goods from SEs may help form an ethical consumer identity. "Citizen-consumers," like political and social consumers can be conceptualized as consumers who participate in political affairs through established market systems. A consumer identity is the image or set of values that an individual adopts through the products and services that they consume. Wheeler (2012) asks some interesting questions about citizen-consumers, such as: "How is the citizen-consumer constructed and mobilized through an evolving and complex set of interactions?" (p. 493). Her frame shifts the focus from the consumer who consciously chose their lifestyle to the consumer who is guided to socially responsible consumption decisions by influences from "socio-technical devices and knowledge systems" (p. 493). Either an individual finds products that represent their core set of values or beliefs, or companies market a core set of values or beliefs in the form of an identity to consumers.

There are generally two types of citizen consumers: reflexive and unreflexive. The term “reflexive consumer” refers to those individuals who seek out socially responsible options on their own accord, whereas the term “unreflexive consumer” refers to those individuals who must be engaged and mobilized by an external catalyst. Campaigns like “Fair Trade Fortnight” (FTF) have an opportunity to create “systems of provision, institutional frameworks and social and cultural norms” (Wheeler, 2012, p. 510). Overall, ethical consumption campaigns will engage and mobilize some already interested consumers to further their social activism within the market and the political sphere. This approach “offers pathways for some into deeper engagement with trade justice issues” (Wheeler, 2012, p. 502). Consumer-activists, at the very least, are socially constructed symbols that spark debates within the market and the SE movement. By developing a community of ethical consumers, individuals are engaged with the ideas and have opportunities to connect with others who are also engaged and active in the movement to mainstream SEs.

Consumers are mobilized as ethical consumers and are empowered by information sharing on corporate behaviors. “Ethical consumerism” is defined as an alternative to traditional consumerism and consumer behavior. When corporations lacked transparency and responsibility to the market society, unconscious consumerism was generally seen as uninformed. Ethical consumer guides in the United Kingdom are targeted at reflexive consumers to empower them to act on their ethical and political ideologies. Publications “function as a means of maintaining and extending the mobilization of people already geared to taking certain dimensions of their everyday consumption as an object of explicit reflection, as well as providing them with informational and narrative resources to help them recruit new supporters from within their own social networks” (Clarke et al., 2007, p. 237). Mobilization happens at this individual level and ripples through social groups that want to promote human rights. SEs can tap this crowd by providing it with a better understanding of their brand’s story and mission to impact society for the better. Narratives can be used to connect consumers to causes that they support.

One strategy used by SEs is to authentically connect the consumer and producer through different campaigning strategies. There are several ways in which “consumers feel good by changing their choices and changing people’s lives” (Wheeler, 2012, p. 506). SEs can organize producers from the global South to share their personal before-and-after narratives with citizen-consumers in the West. This marketing strategy turns consumers into “empowered actors who are able to alleviate the suffering and hardship of the hard-working ‘other’” (Wheeler, 2012, p. 506). Images of producers next to consumers of their product were incorporated in many points of sales across different consumer markets. TOMS’ social media channels utilize this strategy by sharing pictures of producers or recipients of goods with consumers. This strategy was found to have a significant impact on the citizen-consumer and producer’s individual senses of pride. While producers took pride in their work, consumers took pride in their socially responsible consumer decisions. Altruistic behaviors are those behaviors that show a deep concern for the well-being of others and less concern for the self. Raising awareness of global issues and giving citizen-consumers a way to improve the lives of “the other” proves to be an emotionally charged process that generally increases overall consumption and creates a healthy relationship to goods (Wheeler, 2012).

SEs can also legitimize their brand by producing quantifiable statistics on their consumers and commitment. A low cost way to share their numbers with the public is by conducting polls and surveys that demonstrate their growth in sales and impact. “It is acts, not identities or beliefs, which matter in mobilizing the presence of ‘ethical consumers’ in the public realm – acts which can be measured, reported, calculated and represented in the public realm” (Clarke et al., 2007, p. 241). Mobilization occurs through open transparency between business and the public. TOMS publishes a Giving Report that provides consumers with a snapshot of the company’s impact and reach around the world. Because SEs are a new innovation between business and society, it is important for this communication to open up dialogue and understanding between both sides. Surprisingly, the identity and beliefs of the

organization matter less than its actual actions. Thus, if a SE does not show the public that it is aligning its actions with its mission to “do good”, it will not recruit supporters and consumers to its cause.

Individuals are socialized to identify with SEs, so they may see ethical consumption as a social investment. “Although consumption decisions can be viewed as largely private, political consumerism brings larger, more public concerns to bear in making purchasing decisions” (Neilson & Paxton, 2010, p. 5) or “private choices have political consequences” (Neilson & Paxton, 2010, p. 7). Social capital affects political consumerism; it was found that individuals who are networked to other ethical consumers also participate in this new form of social advocacy. Similar to social movement mobilization, “formal associations, informal network ties, and trusting relationships” attract more people to politically consume (Neilson & Paxton, 2010, p. 8). The power of social networks is increasingly influential on consumers, and socially responsible consumers have been shown to have a thorough social connection to others who do the same. This does not insinuate that ethical consumers are any more social than others, but they utilize their network to recruit and influence others to participate in ethical consumption as a form of political activism.

According to Soat (2012), consumers’ behaviors are driven by both a desire to fulfill their own needs while making a positive social impact. TOMS’ model really embodies the value of altruism because TOMS donates shoes, eyesight, and clean water to an individual or group in need. This model is unprecedented in SEs, and it actually increases a consumer’s likelihood of engaging in brand activism or “cause marketing”. Soat (2012) defines “cause consumers” as those who buy into a “style to care” (p. 16). Ethical consumers socially construct their identities by identifying themselves with socially conscious brands like TOMS. The term “cause marketing” involves the consumer’s positive word-of-mouth of their products, which has a direct impact on sales and success for a SE. Better understanding how TOMS’ consumers identify themselves (and whether they do see themselves as human rights

activists in the first place) could greatly enhance the company's means for adopting and/or mobilizing new social groups to consume their goods and participate in a new form of political participation.

Furthermore, consumers may find pride in their ethical decisions at the register and share this positive feeling within their social networks. When a consumer can help someone in need while meeting their own needs, it creates an "easily communicated story, one that customers want to share with others" (Soat, 2012, p. 19). TOMS' website uses stories from producers, recipients, and employees to share inspiring messages related to buying their products. Connecting the ethical consumer to the producer or the child in need develops a personal relationship between the groups. This concept is in line with the marketing relationship described in Du et al.'s (2007) conceptual study on brand positioning and activism. Not only is TOMS tasked with forming lasting relationships with their consumers, but they need to foster the relationship between the two ends of their business. Many of these consumers are simply making purchasing decisions that support the causes about which they care about and then advocate for others.

Loyalty to brands is an important mobilizing tool that SEs rely upon to promote their brand and products. Brands that promote human rights attract consumers who are generally more likely to "identify with, be loyal to, and be advocates for their respective brands" (Du et al., 2007, p. 234). There is an important and practical behavior that will contribute to a deep, long-term relationship between consumers and brands. Strategizing "brand positioning" strengthens relation behaviors of brand loyalty and advocacy. Brands like TOMS focus on building relationships with their customers and between the consumers and producers of their goods. Positioning their brand as this agent of trust bridges the groups emotionally and attracts customers to buy their goods. Ethical consumers therein manifest into long-term brand champions who seek the greatest marketing relationship, which could be described as meaningful, relaxed, and fulfilling (Du et al., 2007). By participating in brand advocacy for a SE, consumers become cause marketers and social advocates for the causes that the business supports.

Advocacy may also be connected to leadership and entrepreneurialism. Although many students may not go on to start their own SE, it is interesting to see the correlation between consumer activism and social entrepreneurialism. In the present market, there is a wide gap between the producer and the consumer. As evidenced in Wheeler's 2012 study, individuals from both sides feel disconnected. An example of this relationship can be seen between the African coffee bean farmer and the British FFT event goer who buys a cup of Fair trade coffee. By improving relationships, consumers are more likely to become activists. Their relationship could again shift if that ethical consumer decides that he/she wants to start a "do good" business that would sell the farmer's coffee in her hometown. The mainstreaming of human rights issues in a market-driven economy has seen an explosion in the number of SEs. Entrepreneurialism in and of itself can be considered as a viable form of advocacy, where the consumer identifies himself or herself as a producer.

In the globalized marketplace, there is a widening gap between the producer and the consumer, but new SEs help bridge that gap to encourage ethical consumption. In the past, human rights abuses were less noticeable in the West. Businesses had little transparency and were able to hide their irresponsible practices when they started outsourcing production to foreign countries. In the past, individuals from both sides of the supply chain felt overwhelmingly disconnected and their human rights were not protected. Consumption came to be seen as a burden that was fueling global discontentedness and destruction. SEs like TOMS have taken to acting as relationship builders, and consumers are more likely to become advocates for the brands that identify with their core set of beliefs. Consumers see their impact on the world, and that encourages them to spread the word and contribute more to the brand's cause. SE is a venue for producers and consumers to engage with one another, develop trust and ethically support one another. According to London (2008), some conditions for SEs that improve social advocacy integration into ethical consumption include: contact with the beneficiary, time frame for action, clarity of goals and action, goal and action difficulty, cost and value, relationship between

effort and effect, support, social encouragement, and “adversaries, nay-sayers, and doubters” (p. 321). In addition, “social activism” is defined as taking public action to produce fair treatment or to help those individuals in need that cannot attain their basic human rights. Goals may be as general as promoting common welfare or as specific as supporting an individual or group. Since the United States has such a strong capitalistic culture, it would be beneficial to look more in-depth at the relationship between being a political consumer and being a human rights activist.

SE leaders are motivated by their beliefs, self-confidence, and extroversion. Their beliefs about people will ultimately shape their strategies on how to best mobilize others to their cause (Du et al., 2007). Such leaders usually succeed if they are resilient and possess abilities including communications and political skills, knowledge of change management, and learning orientation. It is important to note that communications and political skills are listed because they reaffirm the fact that SE leaders work in a similar framework as social movement leaders. They speak in the political rhetoric to legitimize their campaigns that ultimately generate a profit and a positive social impact. They must be able to work alongside and even sometimes within the political sphere, as it is the traditional driving force for social and political change. Because social entrepreneurialism is such a recent development, success requires strong leadership by individuals possessing these specific characteristics (Du et al., 2007).

Reflexive and unreflexive brand consumers can fulfill their self-interests while acting altruistically towards others in need. By participating in various forms of activism, consumers become empowered to impact the lives of marginalized groups otherwise without help. Their social networks influence them to shop consciously, thus mobilizing them to participate as political consumers. Through these vast social networks, individuals engage in political activities that consumption plays an important part in fortifying and reinforcing the importance of. Consumers can boycott and buycott products that support their moral and ethical beliefs and values. The overall push in business is shaping the next generation of brands that have begun to emerge from this evolving system. Brands like TOMS are taking

the opportunity to start a global movement to make business truly social in a changing and ever more connected world. Social enterprises are prized for the ability to not only take responsibility for their impacts but also to reach out and mobilize consumers to join as activists. More and more businesses are actually looking for ways in which they can improve the international human rights situation.

Despite this promise, there is an information gap between political consumption and the human rights activist identity. This study seeks to improve understanding of social activism at the organizational and community level through a case study on TOMS. The influence that social entrepreneurs have on the community to participate in social activism can be better understood by looking at the current literature on social entrepreneurship, social activism, and the TOMS business model. Understanding how TOMS' consumers identify themselves through a human rights lens will begin to uncover the true purpose of SEs and how they can better connect with their markets.

Case Study: TOMS

TOMS describes itself as a movement, and its socially responsible initiatives offer the community additional ways to advocate for social issues. Currently, initiatives include "One Day Without Shoes," "World Sight Day," "Ticket to Give," and various campus programs. These initiatives form the TOMS community, which is the social, public arm of the organization. "One Day Without Shoes," for instance, is an "annual day when we take off our shoes to raise global awareness for children's health and education." On "World Sight Day," consumers can wear "shades inside to raise awareness for visual impairment and global blindness." "Tickets to Give" is an opportunity for TOMS fans to join SE organizers on a Giving Trip "to distribute shoes, to place them on the feet of kids and to see firsthand the self-confidence and smiles that new pairs of shoes can create" (TOMS, n.d.). All of these activities are promoted through the company's website and social media, making activism another form of human rights awareness rising beyond simply consuming.

TOMS products are sold on the SE's website and through certain retailers including, but not limited to: Nordstrom, Whole Foods, and Journey's Shoes. The shoes cost between \$54 and \$185, the sunglasses cost between \$98 and \$160, and coffee is sold at around \$13 a bag. Many of these items are priced higher compared to their competitors, but portions of the proceeds are used to help those in need. When consumers visit the TOMS website to shop, they can sort the products by causes, which include children, education, job creation, health, and women (TOMS, n.d.). The shoes are sold in a variety of styles, fabrics, and designs, and are targeted for specific genders and age groups. TOMS produces special shoes that features original artwork by producers, which connects the consumer to the distant "other" producer. The "One for One" model justifies the higher price for their products. In general, ethical consumers can interact with TOMS through their community programs, and they can find their products easily in the U.S. market.

Consumers develop relationships to the brand and other ethical consumers through TOMS' campus programs, social media, and awareness raising community events. SEs like TOMS center their brand on social responsibility as the key to sustaining and growing their profits and impact. TOMS' most recent product launch was coffee, which provides clean water to those in need for every bag purchased. According to Carroll (2012), Mycoskie is the "standard-bearer" of the "One for One" movement, and he embodies the brand's "do good" image through the TOMS website and social media. The consumer advocates are part of a community that helps champion the causes that TOMS supports. Mycoskie is fulfilling a market demand for individuals to be altruistic and socially conscious, which are values that many consumers and activists identify themselves with. At the same time, consumers are growing their networks and working as part of a whole unit with a mission to "do good" through consumption.

Mycoskie is a social entrepreneur who leads a business movement around the altruistic, giving mission that followed his realization that business can address human rights issues. He mobilizes consumers by incorporating advocacy campaigns that include brand advocacy, social advocacy, and

entrepreneurial advocacy. He continues to expand his business model, and “he envisions a TOMS empire that encompasses all sorts of everyday products” (Chu & Weiss, 2013, p. 100). His staff outlines the activism role that TOMS plays in “empowering people, inspiring people, helping them to see the life they could live differently” (Chu & Weiss, 2013, p. 103). Consumers engaging in “do good” behavior become part of TOMS’ word-of-mouth marketing campaign. Ethical consumers are rewarded for their efforts to help others, as well as to look fashionable.

A major issue that some ethical consumers and human rights activists have with TOMS is its lack of financial transparency. This is one impediment to the TOMS brand’s ability to generate sufficient legitimacy in the human rights and social advocacy fields. A “portion of profits” is not telling enough to consumers to get an honest idea of what they are really contributing to those in need. TOMS is estimated to have an annual revenue around \$300 million, and that number continues to grow (Chu & Weiss, 2013). Since TOMS is a privately held company, it is unknown to consumers what the exact cost of goods or retained earnings are for the company. Reliance upon donors is not ideal because the organization becomes crippled when funds dry up. Mycoskie’s innovative thinking led TOMS to adopt a hybrid model of both earning profit and donating for social good (TOMS, n.d.). Many, however, still find the company’s lack of transparency unsettling, and they have less trust in the brand’s efficacy to impact human rights in the long term.

There are many inherent issues in TOMS’ model of giving to those in need of human rights. The “One for One” model incorporates an aspect of charity by donating products in developing countries. Charity has been an ethical and moral aspect of social life throughout human history, but it has evolved over the years to its current image. Dependency upon American businesses makes countries facing human rights violations vulnerable to even graver violations if donations stop abruptly (Dees, 2012). Presently, aid and donations to charity are promoted in diverse ways in society, and citizen-consumers can consciously make a donation with a text or by rounding their drug store purchase up to the nearest

dollar. TOMS inconspicuously sells charity to consumers, so many consumers may not even realize that they are supporting TOMS' mission to give when they buy their products. Perhaps understanding their identities in a human rights context may awaken a deeper conscious consumerism movement within society.

Although TOMS prides itself on empowering their consumers, some scholars believe that SEs like TOMS are disempowering Africans. The fact that TOMS uses the black African mother and child as their "poster child" for their giving missions may mean that they set up an unbalanced relationship between the consumer and the producer. Similar to the quote, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," simply giving goods and services to the poor may not be a sustainable solution for human rights issues. "It has inherently perverse incentives of keeping the problems it addresses alive so that future generations can continue to exercise this virtue" (Dees 2012, p. 327). Additionally, when Africans develop their own identities in the context of SE marketing and campaigning, they unconsciously stifle their ability to be free agents of progress in their communities. In a way the "unreciprocated gifts" that TOMS, the "rich almsgiver," gives to those in need actually creates an inferiority complex unto the recipient. TOMS has been criticized for its backhanded approach to addressing human rights abuses in the developing world (Dees, 2012).

Despite criticisms against their hybrid SE model, Mycoskie and TOMS may have a positive influence in lowering the barriers to entry into human rights advocacy. Studies show that leaders are more likely to take on an activist role if the need is local and personal, and participation can be promoted if the initiative creates direct, visible impact (London, 2010). By consuming or supporting TOMS, consumers transform into social advocates or leaders in their local and global community. Many of TOMS' initiatives help solve social issues in the United States and their impacts are measurable, so consumers are willing to participate in the transaction. Early adopters of socially responsible brands are leaders for political consumption in their social networks. Mycoskie's role shows that there is a strong

match in qualities shared between leaders and activists. Through their non-profit giving partners, TOMS and the individuals who purchase their products are responsible for giving shoes, eyesight, and now clean drinking water to individuals in need. They produce an annual "Giving Report" that demonstrates their impressive achievements in alleviating serious human rights issues in South America, Africa, and the Middle East (TOMS, n.d.). These experiences further strengthen the connection that consumers have to those receiving TOMS' goods and services. Individual and social efforts may be as general as promoting common welfare or as specific as supporting an individual or group (London, 2010). Social activism is defined as taking public action to produce fair treatment or to help those individuals in need, and activists are able to enact change in a unique and rewarding fashion by purchasing a new pair of shoes, sunglasses, or coffee.

TOMS relies upon their consumers and their networks to act as the company's premier marketing tool, and they use social movement language to mobilize new social groups of consumers. Their social activism campaigns incorporate a marketing element, and it is a key to understanding consumer behavior as it relates to consumer, social, political, and brand activism. Their campaigning tools utilize the opportunity to direct individuals to buy a product. Competitive positioning plays a role in the creation of consumer's CSR beliefs about these brands in addition to the impact these beliefs carry to brand choice and brand advocacy behaviors. Advocacy behaviors can be measured by collecting data on consumers' intention to try new products of the brand, satisfactory word-of-mouth, and resilience to negative information (Du et al., 2007). Political consumers engage in self-marketing as a powerful tool to spread the word on socially responsible brands. This positions brands similarly to social movements. By relying upon the social networks of their supporters, they draw in new business.

TOMS not only offers its customers ethical products, but they also provide opportunities and encourage activities that encompass a wide array of participation in human rights activism. They are mobilizing consumers to join their movement, which encourages ethical consumption that actually

impacts international human right issues such as poverty, education, and health. While human rights advocacy may be transformed by SEs, more quantitative research data on TOMS' consumers' identities and their participation in other forms of human rights activism will reveal new insight into improving SEs' impact on these pressing issues.

Consumers as Activists

TOMS is in the business of bridging the gap between consumers who buy the products, producers, and individuals who receive the donated product. Their "One for One" model encourages consumers to support someone in need whom they have never met. This sense of camaraderie between consumers and those living in poverty makes TOMS unique in the SE world. Similar to charities that tell the story of the young boy or girl in a developing country that needs help, TOMS tells stories of how our consumption is improving the lives of these strangers in distant lands. Many researchers have not considered the impacts that consumer activism has on other an individual's propensity to get involved in other forms of human rights activism.

TOMS continues to grow at an unprecedented level. They are broadening their global giving efforts to mobilize more customers to join their consumer movement. Governments around the world support this growing sector of the market, and educational institutions encourage students to consider finding work in the field. By better understanding how TOMS impacts student consumers to engage in activism, this research project will begin to place the pieces of the puzzle together. Companies, governments, and educational institutions will benefit from the findings of this research because it will uncover the hidden dimension of how consumers are shaping the global human rights scene. By triangulating data from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and literature reviews, the study will thoroughly examine the impact that CSR has on activism. This research may help improve the impacts of

consumerism on human rights awareness and activism through company, government, media, and academic avenues for change.

TOMS was chosen to be the subject of this case study for several important reasons. The company is easily accessible to Americans in nearly every major city because they distribute their products to shopping mall retailers including Nordstrom and Journey's, as well as other boutiques and their online store. In 2009, TOMS and founder Blake Mycoskie won the Award for Corporate Excellence (ACE) from U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. ACE recognizes companies that are devoted to corporate social responsibility, innovation, and exemplary practices and democratic values worldwide (Carroll, 2012). For these reasons, TOMS was a perfect case to study to better understand how consumers are impacted by SE practices in terms of activism.

Preliminary research on this subject shows that some consumers are not politically active, or at least do not self-identify as activists. In an early interview, the interviewee replied to a question by asking, "Um, what do you want me to say?" At one point she said, "I don't know if that's like activism," which points out the confusion and disconnectedness between the generally accepted conceptualization of consumerism and activism. The subjects that were discussed included consumer behavior, social media activism, and self and brand image. Image and self-branding seemed to lead to the most interesting information from the interviewee. She expressed her desire to buy TOMS for the style and trendiness, and the human rights impact was an afterthought. Overall, this interview provided insight into the individual's view of herself as a consumer, as well as an activist in certain aspects – but not a human rights activist. This shows that TOMS attracts consumers who are conscious of their image as a "do gooder," but their buy in to TOMS did not have a direct impact on their interest in other forms of human rights activism. Clearly, more data is sorely needed.

Further, this preliminary interview drew a useful parallel between human rights, animal rights, and environmental rights promotion and protection through consumerism. The interviewee was a

vegetarian, animal rescuer, and hospice volunteer. She had a vested interest in animal rights, which is why she chose to eliminate meat from her diet. This shows a cause and effect relationship between her personal image as a consumer and as an activist. She could more easily understand this connection because it is communicated often in the community, but she could not as easily draw the connection between her interest in buying TOMS and working as a hospice volunteer with individuals in need. Future research will need to delve deeper into participants' political consumption habits and consider their unidentified activism related to human rights. Many individuals may also not be aware of human rights issues that they impact beyond purchasing TOMS, but this indicates a clear lack of communication and connection between SEs brands and the issues they are addressing.

During a second preliminary interview, additional new ideas were born from the discussion of TOMS' consumers and advocacy. The first pertained to how the individual engages with their social networks to market TOMS products by word of mouth and to promote their personal image and identity as an ethical consumer. One question that arose was: "How often do you or in what circumstances do people ask you about the shoes in the sense of the one-for-one model?" Another question (which arose after the participant expressed dislike for the shoe brand Sketcher's): "What makes TOMS stand out above Sketcher's?" and "Why is Sketcher's harder to trust than TOMS?" Some major subjects that were discussed include political activism, social media activism, consumer behavior, corporate social responsibility, and marketing.

Between the two interviews, there were some similar findings. Both interviewees admitted to not consciously thinking about human rights advocacy when buying or wearing their TOMS shoes. The first interviewee stated, "I don't often think about contribution...I don't really actively think about that." The second stated, "I don't really think about it [contribution]. It was just like special bonus I guess." Additionally, they discussed their consumer behaviors relative to TOMS shoes, which both mentioned the style, trendiness, and visual appeal of the shoes while discussing their reasoning to pay the steeper

price. The first stated, “They make me feel like I’m trendy...Usually when I think about buying TOMS, I think that they’re worth the price because you give a pair.” The second stated, “I noticed that it was kind of a trend...I’d pay that for a pair of shoes normally, so what’s the difference if I am buying two pairs.” I also noticed that the interview questions left both women feeling insecure about their overall contributions to human rights issues, which will need to be lessened for future research so as not to guilt interviewees into pleasing the researcher. Both women considered participating in a TOMS’ activity, “A Day Without Shoes,” but neither actually followed through with their intentions. They did not provide any reasons for not participating.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Little research has been conducted to determine how a SE, specifically TOMS, impacts a consumer’s identity as human rights activist. “The roots of individual consumption decisions are under-explored in the human rights literature” (Scruggs et al., 2011, p. 1092-1093). Additionally, “more-comprehensive public opinion data on human rights and on ethical consumption is important” (Hertel et al., 2009, p. 446). A future study will lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how TOMS’ consumers see consumerism and activism as means of changing the world for the better and alleviating human rights issues – if at all. This understanding can be used to expand the field and continue providing opportunities for individuals to be activists in a consumer society. TOMS is finding great success, but its effect on consumers’ willingness and action to be social and political participants in international human rights is unknown. The aim of this research is to improve the understanding of how SEs can influence the public sphere and mobilize support.

The next steps in this research project will focus on collecting data by combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to include surveys and interviews. It will provide a unique perspective on how TOMS “One for One” model and the concept of altruistic behavior in consumer behavior can

possibly be used as a human rights tool. Polls and surveys are the most effective methods for collecting numerical information on a SEs growth, which ultimately mobilize more consumers in this new form of political participation. TOMS can use information on their consumers' identity to improve their external communications and their brand's narrative and positioning. It is recommended that TOMS incorporate the findings from this study in their reports so that the public has access to information regarding their impact and effectiveness at raising awareness on human rights issues. The research will construct guidelines that will greatly improve insights on how and why, how, and if consumers engage in activism.

Participants will include TOMS' consumers and community members, which include participants in their social networks and awareness raising activities, as well as individuals who simply purchase their goods. The research will focus in particular on TOMS' consumers because they have not been studied at great length, and they are unique within the political consumer realm. Not only do they receive a product, but their purchase directly gives a product to someone in need. Additionally, TOMS' community activities engage consumers in advocacy behaviors that other SEs rarely undertake. As next steps in the research on SEs and advocacy, a case study on TOMS consumers will help shift the focus of research on to the consumers themselves and how they identify themselves as human rights activists.

The survey design will include a section that covers the overlap between human rights and consumer behavior by asking questions that pertain to advocacy, consumerism, and political consumerism. Examples include:

- Have you participated in any of TOMS movement activities (e.g. World Sight Day, A Day Without Shoes, etc.)?
- How does buying and wearing TOMS shoes make you identify yourself?
- Can you define what political activism means to you?
- Do you view TOMS as a socially responsible company?

- Have you taken a class, watched documentaries, or other educational activity about international subjects related to human rights, poverty reduction, education, and/or health? If so, how did that impact you?
- What forms of political advocacy have you participated in previously?
- How do you see TOMS in comparison to other shoes brands on the market (such as Sketcher's BOBS), and why?

Past research uncovers general information on consumers and political activists, but does not detail how SEs play a role in shaping or reflecting the political consumer identity. Recommendations are to assess both sides of the market, which not only helps consumers form their personal identity, but also compliments their established identity as an ethical consumer. There has not been a lot of research on this differentiating factor, and it raises some very interesting questions. Do SEs shape and mobilize a new consumer as a political consumer, or does the politically minded consumer find SEs to buy from? It is still unclear on the cause and effect or correlated relationship between political consumers and the SEs. Consumers buy from SEs, but it is unknown as to the impact that this action has on their interests in advocacy or international human rights. Furthermore, there has been little research to demonstrate how SEs influence consumers to participate in human rights advocacy beyond the community activities or campaigns constructed by the company.

It is difficult to determine if specifically buying TOMS had an impact on the individual's consumer or advocacy behaviors. Expanding the research to also include specific questions related to the "One for One" business model will help form more specific conclusions on whether consuming TOMS goods and participating in human rights activism are interrelated. The research will include ethical consumers and contain a specific question determining what kind of SE the individual actually supports. That will allow for a comparison between different models of giving businesses. Ethical shopping does

seem to correlate with participation in other activist activities; however, it is still unclear as to how the levels of participation differ.

The concepts of business leadership and advocacy are both crucial in this case study because they can be used to explain how TOMS had generated such a loyal following through Mycoskie's social mission. "Social advocacy" can be defined as the initial starting point that analyzes consumer behaviors in transition toward expressing entrepreneurial and leadership behaviors. In understanding how these ideas are related, this research will ask: "What qualities must an activist possess to become a leader, what qualities must a leader possess to become an activist, and does an activist need additional skills that a leader in general would not?" Also, "Is it necessary for leaders who turn into activists to act differently than other activists?" It is interesting to see how the political consumers are leaders and advocates themselves for TOMS in addition to SE as an alternative mode of consumption. Prior research hypothesized that the role of being a leader and being an activist are complimentary. Leaders are more likely to take on an activist role if the need is local and personal, and participation can be promoted if the initiative creates direct, visible impact (London, 2008). Overall, looking at how the consumer is shaped by the SE to act as a leader and advocate for a brand and social cause will help advance this field.

More longitudinal studies must be done in order to determine how political consumers transition to and from other forms of political participation. Additionally, more studies must be done on the various forms of activism as they relate to consumer behavior. Further research must also be conducted to connect these theories to university students who have opportunities to take courses, join or start extracurricular activities, and express themselves freely in their dress code. More focus should be given to mobilizing, educating, and empowering events that encourage fair trade, ethical, and responsible shopping. A survey study will be more focused on gathering statistical and measurable data on consumer behaviors. Overall, these improvements will help future studies clarify the breadth of movement and advocacy information as it correlates to new, ethical consumerism.

Next, comparing brands like TOMS and Sketchers has not been done in any past study. Loyalty and trust play important roles in brand positioning, so its reputation and success as a SE depends on these factors. One preliminary interview sparked conversation around the topic of competitive positioning of other brands and the impact it has on the ethical consumer identity. BOBS, the Sketcher's knockoff of TOMS, interestingly enough was seen as a repulsive option to the participant. BOBS also claims to donate a pair of their shoes to a child in need for every pair purchased. Both brands make nearly identical shoes, but the brand name has a lot of influence in shaping the consumer perspective on ethical behaviors by SEs. Better understanding why TOMS is favored over similar shoe companies has not been previously considered, and it may yield more insight into how TOMS has set itself apart from its competitors. It may also help established brands learn how to enter the market of "doing good." The barriers to entry may prevent new industries from changing their models of business because they fear it will not succeed up against new SEs. TOMS has the trust and loyalty of its consumers, but what differentiates it in comparison to other brands that have existed for a much longer time? Some consumers might attest that Sketcher's is only out to make a profit, but TOMS is also a profit seeking business. An interesting study would frame the research question to uncover the perceptions and assumptions that currently direct consumer behaviors toward SE brands.

Additionally, social media and social networks reveal information in the context of ethical consumption and advocacy. These subjects open up a plethora of questions to explore in this research project pertaining to activism through social media and networks as it relates to consumption of TOMS. In the preliminary interviews, the participants made reference to their social media networks on Facebook in relation to their political and social participation. This demonstrated the importance of understanding how social media networks are legitimate platforms for human rights advocacy and influence. Considering the impact of social media on SE marketing and relationship building could be done in the form of a social media analysis on TOMS. TOMS has a strong digital presence, and many

consumers interact with the brand through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and blogs. In the future, social media may become the main means for buying goods, so understanding how to optimize reach and impact through these mediums can grow the market for SEs. Social network platforms are evolving quickly, and it would be practical to assess TOMS' strengths and weaknesses in staying involved with their community through computer mediated communication systems.

Further, word of mouth marketing is another important way that brands are communicated between ethical consumers, and surveys and interviews need to incorporate questions that address consumers' role in spreading SE brand awareness. Future studies should see what the relationship is between authenticity and trust in marketing for SE versus traditional businesses. Consumers with more social capital are more likely to shop ethically, but understanding how and why these behaviors take place will generate insight into how the public sphere is shaped by SEs. TOMS mobilizes their supporters through their community events like World Sight Day, which employ word of mouth actions, but little research has tracked the impact of these marketing strategies. Consumers are the channels for positive and negative views of brands, so it will be helpful to understand their motivation and interest in participating in "cause marketing" efforts. Understanding the social capital theory that drives TOMS' success would provide discernment for other SEs. The big questions lie in TOMS consumers' social networks. Perhaps within these knowledge webs lies the secret formula for TOMS continued growth and success. Looking at websites and social media sites of various SEs that address human rights issues such as TOMS may also be imperative to understanding how their consumers interact. More interactions are taking place through computer mediated communication systems, and research will need to focus on those areas to really determine what the drivers are for social change through business.

Knowing about consumer advocacy does not reveal the true impacts on consumer and activist decision-making. A comparison between this study's preliminary interviews to the completed study on political consumers in Norway shows that there are some major differences in the United States market.

The preliminary interviews suggested that TOMS consumers were not politically active through other forms of participation, but they found the brand to be attractive for stylishness and trendiness. Therefore, completing a similarly fashioned research project in the United States using political and social consumers will yield even greater insight into the mechanisms that promulgate advancements in the field of SE and human rights advocacy. Since these interviews indicated that the consumers were less concerned about the human rights issues their purchase impacted and more on their personal image in society as TOMS consumers, these findings were quite different from what the study in Norway found. TOMS is a unique brand because they have positioned themselves as not only ethical and socially responsible, but they are also trendsetters. Future studies need to consider this additional layer to the work done by TOMS to grow their movement. They do not settle on being like other SEs, but they set themselves apart through their product and how they market it to their customers. Furthermore, future survey and interview data will expand the breadth of knowledge that is currently available on TOMS brand and its consumers' identities as their supporters and advocates.

Overall, this research will seek to better understand the connection between supporting SEs and participating in human rights activism. The case study will be conducted using TOMS because of its proven track record and its innovative business model. The findings of this research will benefit SEs and human rights advocates looking for additional forms of participation in the global movement. Survey and interview results will provide insight into SE consumer behavior and activism in regards to TOMS that supports global human rights causes in the areas of poverty, health, and education. This information will allow the researcher to better understand TOMS consumers so their efforts can improve and be more effective in making positive changes worldwide through the public sphere. Since activism is a broad subject that affects many sectors of society, it is important to understand how consumers see the impacts of such innovative SE initiatives in the market, their lives, and the lives of the "other."

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