Shifting conceptualizations of ethical consumption: Cause-related marketing in India and the USA

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Abstract

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is a popular ethical consumption model where a for-profit company makes a donation to a non-profit organization each time a consumer purchases a certain product in the name of a particular cause (e.g., education). As a form of ethical consumption CRM has been documented and debated by academics in the Global North, but this is not the only place in which the CRM model is employed. This paper investigates the growing popularity of CRM in India, where it is used to target middle-class consumers. It explores how a shift in the place where CRM occurs necessitates a shift in the way that researchers conceptualize it. Drawing on economic, feminist and postcolonial geographies, this paper puts forward a framework for conceptualizing ethical consumption in emerging economies as both place/context specific and embedded in broader power dynamics and global processes. The paper details four CRM campaigns underway in the USA and India and investigates the contexts in which each is situated. The analysis moves beyond a straight comparison of the Indian and American cases to examine CRM as constituted through various places and practices.

1. Ethical consumption and the cause-related marketing model: Histories and geographies

Geographers have contributed significantly to the study of ethical consumption, in terms of the spatial distribution of commodity chains (e.g., Goss, 2004; Hughes and Reimer, 2004), the environmental impacts of material desires/needs (e.g., Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Hartwick, 2000) and the identity politics that often play out through worker and consumer practices (e.g., Barnett et al., 2005; Goss, 2006; Mansvelt, 2008). While not always the case, these studies tend toward examining the practices of consumers living in the Global North, and producers in the Global South. This framing is quickly becoming outdated with the growth of middle-class populations in emerging economies in the Global South. The consumption potential of these populations has garnered some attention (see the articles in this special issue), but studies of this phenomenon remain rare. In this paper I ask whether this shift in the place where ethical consumption occurs, also necessitates a shift in how ethical consumption is conceptualized by researchers? Through an examination of cause-related marketing (one form of ethical consumption) in the USA and India I put forward a framework for conceptualizing ethical consumption campaigns in emerging economies as both situated in specific places/contexts and embedded in the relations and power dynamics of a globalizing world.

Cause-related marketing (CRM) is growing in popularity around the world as a model through which for-profit entities (e.g., corporations), non-profit entities (e.g., non-governmental organizations, NGOs), and consumers can address social issues. Under the CRM model a corporation makes a donation to a NGO each time a consumer purchases a certain branded product. For example, each time a consumer in the USA buys a package of Pampers diapers (nappies), Procter and Gamble (the parent company to Pampers) donates seven cents[^1] to UNICEF’s vaccination program. Because of the need for consumer purchases to trigger these donations CRM can be understood as a form of ethical consumption.

CRM is a contentious model that is hotly debated in the academic literature. Proponents emphasize the benefits to: (i) for-profit actors – in that they can engage in strategic corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices that simultaneously involve philanthropy and selling products, (ii) non-profit actors – in that they benefit from the resources and expertise of corporations to increase their funding and awareness raising, and (iii) consumers – in that they can engage in everyday ethical actions through simple consumption choices. Despite these positive attributes, CRM is

[^1]: All monetary amounts in this paper are in US Dollars (USD) unless otherwise stated.

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also highly criticized in academic literature. Critics highlight the small donation amounts often connected to CRM campaigns and the risk that corporate engagement in CRM may seem superficial to consumers thereby tarnishing corporate brand image (for more on the pros and cons of CRM see: Berglind and Nakata, 2005; Eikenberry, 2009; Gupta and Pirsch, 2006).

Literature and debates about CRM are not limited to marketing and business studies. Critical geographers and other social scientists have also weighed in on CRM, understanding it as a lens through which to analyze broader societal trends. For example, Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) note the business-like methods (such as the use of corporate language and practices, increased reliance on audit-culture, and a focus on NGO-brand promotion) through which NGOs engage with corporate CRM partners, which they see as illustrative of the increased marketization of the philanthropy sector (see McGcoey, 2014). Similarly, Richey and Ponte (2014) include CRM as one type of ‘new alliance in development’ where private sector actors become responsible for funding and often also implementing International Development projects. Concerns over the neoliberal agendas that underpin CRM are widespread and particular attention is given to the problematic ways in which CRM campaigns frame individual acts of consumption as legitimate solutions to global social and environmental problems (Hawkins and Emel, 2014; King, 2006; Richey and Ponte, 2011).

Finally, critical analysis of CRM advertising images and slogans has found that CRM campaigns often use harmful gendered, sexualized and racialized tropes to constitute consumers as ‘saviours’ and ‘heroes’ and beneficiaries as ‘helpless victims’ (Hawkins, 2011; Johnston and Taylor, 2008; Ponte and Richey, 2014; Richey, 2009). While this critical literature has provided many insights applicable well beyond the example of the CRM model, the cases examined are mostly limited to those targeting consumers in the Global North (particularly the USA). As CRM gains traction internationally more critical research is needed.

In the USA, CRM is so ubiquitous that its proponents fear that the market is nearing a point of saturation (Cone Inc., 2008, 2010). As a method of fund- and awareness-raising CRM follows on from older philanthropic models that sell products in the name of charitable causes (e.g., girl scout/guide cookie sales). What is relatively recent is the strategic partnership aspect of CRM (where a corporation aims to improve its bottom line through products sales in partnership with an NGO), which is said by many to have been ‘born’ in the USA (La Ferle et al., 2013; Strand, 2013). The commonly repeated history of CRM begins in 1983 with an American Express initiative that donated one cent to a Statue of Liberty restoration project for each use of its credit card. The company spent six million dollars promoting the initiative, raised over one million dollars for the fund, and saw their card usage grow by 28% (Berglind and Nakata, 2005; Smith and Higgins, 2000). American Express trademarked the term ‘cause-related marketing’ after “sensing it had something valuable on its hands” (Berglind and Nakata, 2005: 445). According to Berglind and Nakata (2005: 445) this initiative was a departure from the corporate philanthropy of the past because of the “overt and much publicized connection between a company’s primary activity (making money) and a not-for-profit organization’s aim (improving welfare).” In the past, corporate philanthropy had focused on distributing profits whose earning was not related to the cause in question. This distinctive model of CRM has grown dramatically in popularity in the USA since 1983, largely due to the success of the Statue of Liberty campaign.

In India, CRM has a more recent history. While it has been in use for over a decade it remains a relatively newer trend in India where public awareness of it is lacking (according to Interview respondents; Interview, 2014a,b; see also Sundar, 2007). Additionally, the history of CRM in India is not as definitively told in a single story. Often, the success of the Statue of Liberty campaign and the popularity of CRM in the USA are cited as influential in the growth of the CRM modal in India (e.g., Sundar, 2007). CRM is also said to have grown out of Indian traditions of philanthropy such as local shops having a box available for customers to make charitable donations toward community cow sheds, orphanages or other causes (Interview, 2014a; Sundar, 2007; Sundhar, 2013). Recent rapid economic growth, industrialization and an increase in the middle-class population in India have acted as a catalyst for ethical consumption models like CRM to proliferate, as will be detailed below. Because of the relative newness of CRM in India and its potential for dramatic growth, CRM in India is lacking in academic study while in great need of it. The question is how the academic literature on CRM based on studies in the USA can be useful to understand more about the Indian context.

In order to explore how a shift in the place where CRM occurs necessitates a shift in the way that researchers conceptualize and investigate ethical consumption, I begin this paper by proposing an analytical framework that draws on approaches used in economic, feminist and postcolonial geographies (Section 2). I suggest that this framework can be used to conceptualize CRM as a process that is both mobile (interconnected globally) and embedded in specific places. Next, I introduce two CRM campaigns from India and two from the USA in order to ground the following discussion in particular examples. Using information gathered from organizational documents, academic and industry research reports, media coverage and telephone interviews with key informants, I describe the context within which each campaign is situated (Sections 3 and 4). I then employ this framework to highlight potential questions, conclusions and future avenues of research, putting forward a research agenda for ethical consumption (Sections 5 and 6).

2. A framework for conceptualizing ethical consumption

2.1. Moving away from comparative studies

When I first began examining CRM in the Indian context I was already very familiar with the context in the USA and so I turned to studies that had compared the implementation of, and reaction to, CRM campaigns in India to those in the USA. This type of comparison is quite common in consumer behavior literatures. For example La Ferle et al. (2013) compared student perceptions of CRM campaigns in India and the USA and concluded that Indian students perceived the campaigns and corporations involved more positively than American students did. The authors attribute this to the relative novelty of the CRM model in India, calling it a “honey-moon stage” (La Ferle et al., 2013: 369). Similarly, in a comparison of national consumer ethics, Eckhardt et al. (2010) found that consumers in emerging economies (e.g., India and China) more readily brushed aside certain ethical issues (such as poor labor conditions) compared to consumers in more developed economies (e.g., Sweden and USA). The authors of this study suggest that this may be due to a stronger concern for job creation and economic development by Indian and Chinese compared to American and Swedish respondents.

These large-scale comparative studies provide useful information about consumption and CRM trends at a national scale, but comparative studies as outlined above also have several well-documented drawbacks. These drawbacks include the dangers of comparing predetermined groups (e.g., Indian or...
American consumers), where there is commonly more variance within such groups than between them (Auger et al., 2010; Belk et al., 2005). Furthermore, comparisons often understand the context or culture of a place as stable and occurring only at large scales (e.g., ‘Indian culture’) rather than as malleable over time and constituted through everyday processes (Mitra, 2012). Perhaps most importantly, there is a problematic tendency to hold the Global North in a prioritized position in comparative work as a kind of base line to which the Global South can be compared (Pollard et al., 2009). Often this plays out in research that treats the Global South as a kind of laboratory through which to test theories developed in the Global North (Pollard et al., 2009; Raghuram and Madge, 2006: 280). This observation may be particularly important because ethical consumption research is skewed toward studying consumers (but not producers) in the Global North and producers (but not consumers) in the Global South. For this reason, it is crucial to understand CRM in India through the lens of the Indian context and avoid interpreting it through US context/trends, a strategy I develop throughout the paper.

That said, understanding CRM campaigns within their Indian and US-contexts alone is not sufficient because these campaigns are necessarily interconnected in several direct and indirect ways, as will become evident below. There is therefore still a need to examine the similarities and differences between CRM in the Indian and US contexts in order to draw broader conclusions about both their unique attributes and their interconnectedness. The framework I outline here aims to provide a route through which ethical consumption researchers can consider a particular phenomenon (such as CRM) as both place/context-based and embedded in broader power dynamics and global processes.

2.2. Considering the mobility of policies and practices

One common form of investigation in ethical consumption research that highlights the interconnectedness of places is the follow-the-thing/commodity chain approach. It works by following a commodity through the sites of production, distribution and consumption, allowing connections to be traced between the actors, organizations, cultural processes, places and governance structures involved (Hughes and Reimer, 2004). However, when applied to the study of CRM, the commodity-chain approach does not fully encompass the fluidity of the CRM model. For example, in following only the product involved in the CRM campaign (e.g., Pampers) a researcher might miss tracing the funds directed to ‘beneficiary’ NGOs or regions (e.g., vaccines). Additionally, the fleeting nature of many CRM campaigns (e.g., the NGO partner changing from year to year) would be difficult to capture. One way to navigate these challenges may be to focus on the process of CRM by thinking of CRM as a model or policy, such as a strategic CSR model engaged with by NGOs and corporations, rather than thinking of CRM campaigns or products as discreet things.

Moving from an analysis of things to an analysis of processes necessitates a more fluid understanding of the flow of information and ideas within and between CRM campaigns. The work of Peck and Theodore (2010, 2012) on mobile policies is useful here. They propose that geographers pay greater attention to the movement of policies from one place to another and understand policy mobility and mutation as a process affected by social structure, context and the decisions of embedded, complex actors (Peck and Theodore, 2012: 23). According to Peck and Theodore, most researchers do this by “follow[ing] processes, practices, discourses, technologies or networks thereby connecting sites, scales and subjects” (2010: 171, italics in original). Focusing on processes of water and telecommunication privatization, Larner and Laurie (2010: 218) suggest emphasizing the embodied practices of actors in this research, rather than just the movement of abstract policy.

For example, they follow the career trajectories of engineers involved in the shift to privatization and find that they “actively created new opportunities for themselves through and against privatization and in doing so also helped shape these processes in distinctive ways” (Larner and Laurie, 2010: 224). They suggest that this approach might complicate the commonly reiterated idea that policies flow from the North to the South by recognizing the hap hazard and complex ways that policies move and are implemented by individual actors and groups (Larner and Laurie, 2010, see also Pollard et al., 2009: 139).

2.3. Thinking with counter-topographies

Using a ‘follow-the-policy’ approach to understand the movement of the CRM model between places would be a good starting point for understanding the introduction and particular manifestations of CRM in India and the USA. It is also necessary to analyze how these local manifestations are influenced by global processes and structures (such as the neoliberal trend of NGOs needing to act more like businesses to secure CRM funding). This requires a conceptualization of local–global processes that maintains the uniqueness of the local context while seeing it as interconnected to other places. Inspiration for this task can be found in the work of feminist economic geographers and their theorization of globalization (e.g., Nagar et al., 2002). In particular the concept of counter-topographies is useful here.

Counter-topographies rise from feminist geographer Katz’s ethnographic work in two locations: a village she calls "Howa" in Sudan and East Harlem in New York, USA. In order to make connections between these sites Katz employs the word ‘topography’ because it is used in a description of a place and also it is used to explain the relationship of that place to others (through differences of distance and elevation) (2001: 1229). Using this metaphor Katz examines the sites of Howa and East Harlem considering how these places experience global and systematic processes such as economic transformation and deskilling (Katz, 2001: 1228). The approach allows her to see the similarities between places and situations but also to keep them separate, avoiding a straight comparison that might hide power differentials. According to Mountz (2011: 394) “Katz’s global topography...brings together politics of location and differentiation by connecting the particularities of marginalization and political struggle in vastly distant and distinct locales.” Her work is mirrored in the ideas of other feminist geographers who argue for an approach to globalization that is simultaneously global and intimate (rather than either global or intimate). They call for an examination of how global processes play out on and are practiced by individual bodies in particular places (e.g., Mullings, 2009; Nagar et al., 2002; Pratt and Rosner, 2006).

2.4. De-centering the North

A final important component of this framework is a postcolonial approach, which could help to circumvent tendencies in comparative work to centre the Global North as a place of theory or policy creation and the Global South as a place of application (Pollard et al., 2009; Raghuram and Madge, 2006: 280). Pollard et al. (2009) call for a postcolonial economic geography. For them this is “not a geography of the South, but an economic geography more conscious of its own perspectives and more open to embracing different perspectives through which to view economic practices” (2009: 139). Similarly, Raghuram and Madge (2006: 271) argue that development studies needs a postcolonial method that: (i) examines the politics behind the production of research questions; (ii) explores how academic theories are deployed in exclusionary ways; and (iii) considers how researcher identities are linked to geopolitical power structures. These calls clearly stress a need to...
employ a postcolonial perspective in ethical consumption research, particularly in studies focused on emerging economies.

Pollard et al. (2009: 138) specifically call for an interrogation of the geographies of knowledge production when it comes to ‘the economy’. They worry about economic geographers parachuting into new terrain (e.g., CRM in emerging economies like India) with their old theoretical tool-kits and perspectives which would continue to perpetuate Western understandings of the world (Pollard et al., 2009: 138). In order to avoid the (often concealed) dominance of western conceptualizations Raghuram and Madge (2006) insist that researchers make their theorization processes clear to their audience and draw on concrete cases to avoid abstractions and universalizing claims. This difficult task of de-centering the North is already underway in some fields related to CRM. For example, in examining corporate social responsibility (CSR) in India, Mitra (2012) employs a postcolonial approach that shifts the focus of CSR studies from corporate actors to “center the subaltern communities most affected by CSR” (2012: 136). Through this lens Mitra (2012: 140) demonstrates that CSR in India takes on specific cultural aspects (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on philanthropy) that are more conducive to neoliberal logics while ignoring others (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis on long-term commitment to communities). He suggests that an engagement with grassroots, community-based perspectives could be useful to re-define CSR in a way that does not marginalize subaltern subjects (Mitra, 2012: 141).

2.5. Analytical framework

In sum, I am proposing an analytical framework for conceptualizing CRM in India and the USA that includes: (i) moving away from comparative studies to consider CRM as situated in a particular place/context and interconnected globally, (ii) considering the mobility of policy and practice (and not just things), (iii) thinking with the counter-topography concept to examine local/global processes, and (iv) decentering the North through postcolonial approaches. Before returning to this framework below, I first examine CRM campaigns and contexts in both India and the USA.

3. Cause-related marketing in India

I begin here by summarizing two well-known Indian CRM campaigns (Tables 1 and 2) in order to ground the following discussion in particular cases. I elaborate on these campaigns below while also outlining the Indian context for CRM, as it relates the perspectives of for-profit, non-profit and consumer actors. As will be illustrated, the Indian context is currently particularly ripe for CRM campaigns to develop because of a confluence of regulations around corporate social responsibility, NGO popularity and an increasingly brand-attentive consumer culture.

3.1. For-profit actors and CRM in India

When it comes to for-profit actors, large trans-national or national corporations, such as Procter and Gamble (P&G) or Tata Group, dominate the CRM field in India (Interview, 2014a). This is not surprising since large for-profit actors working in India are currently under substantial political pressure to engage in CSR activities, like CRM. Recently, the Indian Government passed the ‘The Companies Act, 2013’ a bill that (among other things) mandates CSR for companies over a certain size that are registered in India. Beginning in fiscal year 2014/2015, the Act requires corporate entities that meet the criteria to spend at least 2% of their average net profit in the previous three years on CSR activities. It is estimated that the Act will cover more than 6000 companies, many of them engaging in CSR for the first time, and that the money committed to CSR through The Act could total approximately 340 million USD (CII, 2013). The Act stresses that CSR activities should give preference to the location where the company works and lists activities that qualify as CSR including: eradicating extreme hunger and poverty; promotion of education; reducing child mortality; and improving maternal health (Companies Act, 2013). The corporation can undertake these activities directly or with the help of a NGO partner (CII, 2013).

The Act has had mixed reviews so far. It is applauded for mandating that companies be responsible to Indian society-at-large (Economic Times, 2013). However, there is also concern that mandating CSR, rather than keeping it voluntary, will taint the outcomes of CSR projects, making them superficial. For example, it is unclear how the Act could differentiate between building a ‘good’ school versus building a school (CII, 2013; Karnani, 2013). This is consistent with the ways in which CRM outcomes are often reported quantitatively, lacking qualitative detail. For example, Project Shiksha reports its impact through the number of schools built (140), number of children educated (420,000) and number of dollars donated (4.5 million) (Agarwal, 2013; P&G, 2014c). The potential for the Act to encourage quantity over quality CSR endeavors may be exacerbated by the activities listed as possible CSR practices in the Act which largely focus on types of causes (e.g., reduce child mortality) rather than CSR practices themselves (e.g., improving labor conditions along the supply chain).

Currently the Act lacks clarity on how models such as CRM fit into its plan. Some advocates in the CRM field in India suggest that CRM fits neatly into this new Act since CRM campaigns in India are already taking on issues suggested by the Act (such as education and children’s issues). It is possible then that CRM will receive increased corporate attention in the coming years as one means of complying with the Act, to the benefit of NGOs seeking funding (Agarwal, 2013). However, others seem less sure of CRM’s place within the Act because of the potential profit raised directly through the model, which may disqualify CRM as a legitimate CSR practice (Interview, 2014b). Despite this confusion, the introduction of this Act will likely result in more strategic CSR decisions by for-profit actors that aim to both address issues of social responsibility and improve the corporations’ bottom-line and brand image. It is possible that the long-standing campaigns of Project Shiksha (Table 1) and Desh ko arpan programme (DKAP) (Table 2) will be looked to as successful models for this purpose.

Along with the potential to contribute to CSR requirements, CRM is relevant in India for its focus on linking brand-name products to causes. It is no accident that the most well known CRM campaigns in India are tightly tied to branded products. For example, P&G brand name products such as Tide Detergent are the cornerstones of Project Shiksha. Additionally, the DKAP campaign specifically focuses on promoting Tata’s brand of salt, which was marketed as the purest tasting salt. As a result of the CRM campaign Tata salt sales rose 16% and “consumers have begun to recognize the benefits of branded salt” (Mehan in Shatrujeet, 2002). The power of brands in India is, according to many, ripe for development with a growing number of consumers interested in brand-name products (Auger et al., 2010; Maxwell, 2001).

This growing competition to sell brand-name household products to Indian consumers often targets emerging middle-class or lower income consumers following the promise of realizing corporate profits at the ’bottom of the pyramid’ (Prahalad, 2009). Prahalad (2009) argues that lower income consumers (found at the ‘bottom of the economic pyramid’) are brand conscious and willing to purchase branded goods; as such corporations should turn their attention to this market. According to P&G, reaching

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1 These criteria include companies with a minimum net profit of fifty million Indian Rupees (INR), an annual turnover of ten billion INR, or a net worth of five billion INR. One million INR is approximately 16,900 USD (as of June 8, 2014).
consumers in India and China could increase their sales by 40 billion USD (Gupta, 2010). P&G has already invested 1 billion dollars over 5 years in capital and marketing investments to reach Indian consumers (Gupta, 2010). Because of the growing importance of brand-name products in India, and because the CRM model requires a branded product upon which to attach a cause, attention needs to be focused on how CRM and the race to the bottom of the pyramid intersect.

3.2. Non-profit actors and CRM in India

The NGO sector in India is well situated to take advantage of CRM, if desired, because of a confluence of favorable factors. First, NGOs are well placed to work with corporations to address causes of interest to the Indian public. The majority of Indian NGOs work on issues of education and children’s health (Sheth, 2012). Importantly, these are the same causes that are listed in the potential CSR activities within the Companies Act and the same causes that are found to be most palatable in studies of CRM audiences in India (Companies Act, 2013; Interview, 2014a).

Second, the Companies Act provides an interesting opportunity for NGOs in India because through the Act NGOs are presented as the ideal partners for implementing CSR programs (CII, 2013). The NGO sector in India includes an enormous number of organizations, estimated at around 2 million, which is the equivalent of 1 NGO for every 600 people (Mahapatra, 2014). In fact, the introduction of the Companies Act is credited by some for encouraging the emergence of more NGOs aiming to take advantage of corporate partnerships (Johari, 2014). While the Companies Act could yield significant corporate investment for several NGOs, the current climate is one of confusion. On top of the lax NGO reporting standards, for-profit actors are concerned that there are not enough well-organized NGOs available to partner with, especially for executing CSR projects in rural areas (Mahapatra, 2014). The sheer number of NGOs alone has led to increased competition for funding between NGOs and raised concerns that NGOs will be more susceptible to conditions that corporate donors may place on their work (for example not being permitted to speak out about public issues) (Rathod, 2015). Evidence of an imbalance in power can be seen in the cases above where one for-profit entity (e.g., Tata Salt, P&G) engages with a number of different NGOs switching NGO alliances over time. That said, concerns over NGO competition specifically for CRM partners in India might be overblown. An interview respondent from a well-known Indian NGO claimed that there is plenty of CRM money to go around and estimated that, because of the relative novelty of CRM, NGOs are only tapping into about 15–20% of the possible monies available (Interview, 2014b).

Finally, NGO popularity grows from a strong history of philanthropy in India that remains prominent today with large numbers of people donating to charities (Cantegreil et al., 2013; Charities Aid Foundation, 2013). This interest in philanthropy is emphasized in Indian CRM campaigns. For example, the DKAP campaign draws heavily on this image of the philanthropic Indian in its advertising. The idea of purity used to market the taste of Tata Salt was extended with the CRM campaign to a “purity of thought and action” (Raja in Shatrujeet, 2002), which is tied to the everyday nature of patriotism (with the DKAP slogan referring to eating the salt of the earth as a representation of loyalty). This has the effect of “highlighting small deeds of selflessness that reflect a respect for the Greater Good. In the process, the campaign rises from being solely about Indianness to being about good citizens” (Shatrujeet, 2002). The potential exists therefore for NGOs to play a key role in bridging the cultural and National desire for voluntary philanthropy with the mandatory CSR requirements in the Companies Act. This potential must be further explored however, because the benefits to NGOs engaging in CRM (financial and otherwise) have not yet been evaluated in the India context.

3.3. Consumers and CRM in India

Perhaps the most influential factor affecting CRM in India is the growing role of consumers in the Indian economy. Particular attention has been paid to the growth of a middle-class in India and its changing consumption patterns. Estimates of the number of...
middle-class consumers in India vary widely (from 100 to 350 million by one count; Van Wessel, 2004). Additionally, the definition of ‘middle-class’ as a category is highly contested. For example, definitions are often based on factors such as: earning an annual income over 70,000 rupees (Guha, 2007 in Eckhardt and Mahi, 2012); speaking English and having private education (Murphy, 2011); appetite for global culture and western lifestyles (Chaudhuri and Majumdar, 2006; Mawsley, 2004:85); and/or being constituted in opposition to imagined categories of the slum-dwelling or rural poor (Nandy, 1998). However it is defined, the consumption practices of the middle-class and whether these practices may result in increased ethical/responsible consumption are of great interest. Whether middle-class consumers in India will prioritize ethical consumption or focus more heavily on the conspicuous consumption of branded products remains to be seen.

According to Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) and others, Indian consumer culture before liberalization in 1991 was dominated by the Gandhian philosophy of simple living and self-sacrifice as well as by the anti-materialistic religious messages of Buddhism and Hinduism and the community-oriented messages of socialism (see also Eckhardt and Mahi, 2012; Khare, 2011). After liberalization conspicuous consumption by individuals of branded products (particularly western ones, such as P&G brands) began to dominate. This conspicuous consumption is often framed as ‘western consumer values’ that exist in stark contrast to India’s national values of social responsibility and community development (Van Wessel, 2004). Studies that examine how middle-class consumers navigate these tensions found that decision-making processes are complex and often involve justifying consumption decisions through emphasizing family values and gaining status in class, caste or community groups through the acquisition of brand name products (Eckhardt and Mahi, 2012; Van Wessel, 2004).

Conclusions drawn from research like this often recommend that companies market global brands in India through a combined focus on lifestyle, status improvement, and family/national values in order to attract middle-class consumers (Khare, 2011). For example, one consumer behavior report identifies ‘aspirationals’ as a category of potential ethical consumers in India who want to purchase brand-name products that improve their own lives (through function and status) and improve society more broadly (BBMG, 2012). According to this study, aspirational consumers make up 42% of consumers in India and are more than twice as likely than consumers in developed countries to buy products because of social or environmental benefits (BBMG, 2012: 39).

It is precisely here that the CRM model has the potential to resolve this tension around whether middle-class consumer culture in India is about conspicuous or moral consumption decisions. CRM falls directly in the middle of this debate by allowing aspirational/middle-class consumers to differentiate themselves by conspicuously consuming brand-name products in the name of helping (and conveniently differentiating themselves from) the slum-dwelling or rural poor. Project Shiksha bridges this gap well by promoting itself as a “national consumer movement that empowers consumers across the country to participate and support education of marginalised children in India” (India PR Wire, 2008), while at the same time increasing the sale of its branded household products (Agarwal, 2013). Similarly, the resolution of these contradictory notions (conspicuous versus moral consumption) is evident in the DKAP campaign where the double meaning of purity (as a brand qualifier and a description of philanthropic action) attracts consumers from the ‘aspirational’ category who wish to purchase brand-name products and simultaneously improve society. The ability of CRM to bridge this apparent divide in consumer culture makes what it is appealing to both-for-profit, non-profit and consumer actors in the Indian context.

4. Cause-related marketing in the USA

As explained above, in this article I intend to examine CRM campaigns as they play out in both Indian and US-contexts. This will highlight the similarities and differences between the contexts but also how these campaigns are necessarily interconnected in several direct and indirect ways. Therefore I turn now to the USA. This section summarizes two CRM campaigns (Tables 3 and 4) and then situates them in terms of current trends from the perspectives of for-profit, non-profit and consumer actors in the USA. Overall, the

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Campaign details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For-profit actor(s)</td>
<td>Proctor and Gamble (P&amp;G) – Pampers brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit actor(s)</td>
<td>US Fund for UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product(s) triggering donation</td>
<td>Pampers diapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation amount per purchase</td>
<td>5–7 cents (the cost of one vaccine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause(s) receiving donation</td>
<td>Vaccines for Maternal Neo-natal Tetanus (MNT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries receiving donation</td>
<td>Several African countries where MNT is prevalent 2008*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of inception</td>
<td>2 months each year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The campaign was launched in the USA in 2008 and became very popular in the USA 2009 because of a television commercial. The same CRM campaign was launched in 2006 in the UK and in 2009 was going on in more than 100 countries (P&G, 2009).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Ethos Water; Starbucks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For-profit actor(s)</td>
<td>Several water-related NGOs (e.g., CARE, UNICEF, Water Aid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit actor(s)</td>
<td>Bottled water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of inception</td>
<td>2003 (as social enterprise); 2005 (as part of Starbucks’ CRM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation amount per purchase</td>
<td>5 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause(s) receiving donation</td>
<td>Water provision (e.g., well building)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries receiving donation</td>
<td>Countries in Africa, Asia and South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Campaign</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
popularity of the CRM model in the USA is not surprising given that it supports strategic CSR and corporate branding, that it encourages social entrepreneurship, that it provides much needed funding for overburdened NGOs and that it reinforces consumption as the main avenue for change-making in society.

### 4.1. For-profit actors and CRM in the United States

From the perspective of for-profit actors in the USA CRM is a very attractive model through which to demonstrate socially responsible corporate practices. While CSR is not mandated in the USA by any government legislation, it is well established that American consumers expect corporations to act responsibly and to communicate their CSR practices clearly and effectively (Cone Communications, 2013). CRM works extremely well as a visible form of CSR because of the way that causes are tied to product marketing, advertising and sales under the model. This visibility follows corporate trends of engaging with strategic and business-oriented CSR models where CSR is seen as an investment that can push forward a certain corporate brand image, such as caring about health (Gupta and Pirsch, 2006). For example, in the One Pack = One Vaccine campaign (Table 3) the product and cause both focus on the needs and health of mothers and babies, promoting a cohesive message for the Pampers brand. The fit between the brand and the cause was emphasized in the narration for a popular television commercial for the campaign stating: “When you buy specially marked Pampers, you can help the world’s babies in need, because one pack of Pampers equals one lifesaving vaccine...Together we can help give babies a brighter tomorrow” (Pampers, 2008; also see Hawkins, 2011 for more details).

In the USA, two for-profit forms dominate the CRM model. First, there are large transnational corporations, such as P&G, that engage in CRM campaigns as part of their broader strategic CSR mandates which might also include practices such as employee giving/volunteerism, supply-chain sustainability and waste reduction measures (e.g., P&G, 2013). Second, CRM in the USA manifests in the form of small-scale social enterprises. Here, entrepreneurs start businesses with the explicit purpose of selling products to support a cause. This is how the Ethos Water campaign (Table 4) was begun 2003 by two social entrepreneurs who were inspired to “develop a fashionable bottled-water brand that generates funds to finance water programs in developing countries,” after seeing to develop a fashionable bottled-water brand that generates funds (Ponte and Richey, 2014).

In order to meet these goals, specific marketing practices (e.g., the content of a commercial) are negotiated between NGO and corporate staff (and sometimes external consultants such as public relations firms) (Hawkins, 2012). The goal to simultaneously market the cause/NGO and the product/corporation in a way that does justice to both is often an area of contestation in terms of which aspects of each are highlighted (Hawkins, 2012). Additionally, critics worry about the harm that may arise from the blurring of products and causes effectively ‘commodifies’ the places, issues and beneficiaries involved in order to sell more products (e.g., Richey, 2009).

### 4.2. Non-profit actors and CRM in the United States

CRM appears to be playing a significant role in the ways in which NGOs in the USA raise funds and awareness for their causes. CRM is commonly used to raise funds and diversify funding streams by NGOs as they lose access to other funding sources, including those both publicly available from the state and privately available from individuals (Eichenberry and Kluver, 2004; Nickel and Eichenberry, 2009). NGOs in the USA often competitively specify corporations as potential CRM partners and must effectively negotiate the terms of the partnership (e.g., the amount of money to be donated per purchase). Many established NGOs (such as the US Fund for UNICEF) have large teams dedicated to these tasks, while smaller NGOs often lack the resources to negotiate effectively (Hawkins, 2012). This lack of resources makes it challenging for some NGOs to vet potential corporate partners; for example to ensure they are not connected to practices such as weapons manufacturing or the use of child labor (Hawkins, 2012).

Along with facing funding and vetting challenges, NGOs in the USA are often expected to act more like businesses, focusing on efficiency, branding and marketing to get ahead in an increasingly competitive environment (Nickel and Eichenberry, 2009). In fact, many development NGOs based in the USA report engaging in CRM for the primary purpose of raising awareness about their organizational brand, rather than raising money (Hawkins, 2012). In order to meet these goals, specific marketing practices (e.g., the content of a commercial) are negotiated between NGO and corporate staff (and sometimes external consultants such as public relations firms) (Hawkins, 2012). The goal to simultaneously market the cause/NGO and the product/corporation in a way that does justice to both is often an area of contestation in terms of which aspects of each are highlighted (Hawkins, 2012). Additionally, critics worry about the harm that may arise from the blurring of products and causes effectively ‘commodifies’ the places, issues and beneficiaries involved in order to sell more products (e.g., Richey, 2009).

### 4.3. Consumers and CRM in the USA

Currently CRM is extremely popular with consumers in the USA with 91% stating in 2013 that they would switch brands to support a CRM campaign and 47% reportedly buying a CRM product at least once a month (Cone Communications, 2013; CMF, no date). The CRM market in the USA is therefore considered somewhat saturated, but with room for brands to differentiate among knowledge- and ethically-focused consumers (Cone Inc., 2010). The popularity of CRM is connected to its representation as a form of ethical consumption. Studies show that most Americans see their consumption habits as one route through which they can make change, act on their politics and construct their own identities as caring and ethical global citizens (Cone Communications, 2013; Wilk, 2001).

The popularity of ethical consumption in the USA has led to a large amount of resources spent (mostly by for-profit actors) to identify ethical consumers. According to some reports, ethical consumers can be divided into categories based on demographics and then targeted appropriately in marketing strategies. When it comes to CRM, the categories ‘moms’ and ‘millennials’ (people who were young adults around the year 2000) are two of the most sought-after demographics because of the large amount of consumption they undertake and their attention to cause-related issues (Cone Inc., 2010).

CRM messaging in the USA is often developed to emotionally connect with these groups, for example by emphasizing the role of caring mothers in the One Pack = One Vaccine campaign (Hawkins, 2011). Often the ‘feel good’ quotient of CRM campaigns in the USA is dominated by discourses of consumer empowerment and action. For example the Ethos Water website emphasizes the ability of consumption to make a difference by stating: “Without question, the world water crisis condemns billions of people to a perpetual struggle to survive at the subsistence level, thus inspiring millions to engage and alleviate this problem. Every time you purchase a bottle of Ethos you make a difference” (Ethos Water, 2011). The background story to Ethos Water as a successful entrepreneurial venture also plays into tropes of success through hard work and capitalist endeavors common in American culture (e.g., Hawkins and Emel, 2014; Prudham, 2009). The fact that consumers do not have to make any uncomfortable changes to their daily routines (e.g., consume less) also helps legitimize CRM as an everyday ‘feel good’ practice since it does not contradict any of the consumerist or individualist ideals often associated with American society.
5. Re-conceptualizing CRM as globally interconnected and embedded in place

In this section I examine the details from the CRM campaigns and contexts above through the analytical framework presented in Section 2 of this paper in order to better understand the trends found in India and the USA as embedded in global processes. My aim is to put forward suggestions for a future research agenda on ethical consumption in emerging economies.

5.1. Moving away from comparative studies

Looking at the details of the four CRM campaigns and their contexts described above it is evident that they are not disparate and independent from one another but are directly and indirectly linked. Directly, many of the entities involved take part in more than one campaign and are transnational actors with offices/heads in both India and the USA as well as elsewhere (such as Starbucks and UNICEF). It is very likely that individual actors, training documents and CRM strategies circulate between these locations shaping the individual campaigns in particular ways. For example both the One Pack = One Vaccine and Project Shiksha campaigns are listed under P&G's corporate cause program 'Live, Learn and Thrive' which combines more than 100 CSR initiatives (including CRM campaigns) in 60 countries around the world. All of the initiatives are designed to address an overarching cause (improving the lives of children and youth) and to strategically highlight the uses of P&G products to consumers (P&G, 2012, 2014b).

The four campaigns examined here are also all connected indirectly through similarities in the contexts in which they operate and the practices they engage in. For example, for-profit actors in both the USA and India face increasing pressure to report on CSR activities and ensure that these CSR practices strategically address corporate reputation and sales. Additionally, CRM appears to be an attractive model from the perspectives of non-profit actors in both India and the USA to garner more funding in the face of increasing competition. Finally, consumer cultures in both contexts emphasize the ethical nature of some consumption decisions, but do this in relation to a variety of other identity factors (as discussed below).

Since the actors and practices in these campaigns are already interconnected, a comparison of the campaigns as seemingly separate entities would do them a disservice. Instead, the particular ways in which these direct and indirect connections manifest themselves in each context must be examined.

5.2. Considering the mobility of policy and practice

The ‘follow-the-policy’ approach is useful in parsing out the direct connections between the campaigns and contexts under study by unveiling networks of influence and interconnection between the various actors and entities involved in CRM campaigns (Peck and Theodore, 2010, 2012). This approach focuses on the processes by which CRM campaigns are negotiated by actors within NGOs and corporations in the USA and India and everywhere in between. There are many ways that CRM researchers can enact this ‘following’ approach. For example, researchers might choose one CRM campaign that is underway in several countries (e.g., One Pack = One Vaccine) and trace how it is rolled-out in different national contexts to highlight aspects of the campaign that are replicated or challenged as it is affected by various people, institutions and places. Additionally, the processes by which CRM campaigns are promoted in markets thought to have reached CRM saturation (e.g., the USA) or thought to be in a CRM ‘honeymoon stage’ (e.g., India) could be examined. Similarly, researchers might trace the influence that highly successful campaigns (e.g., DKAP) have had on other for-profit or non-profit CRM strategies, or on consumer perceptions of issues such as ethical actions, national identity or brand desirability. Finally, the circulation of stories (e.g., best practices) through CRM networks within reports, websites and conferences may also be a point of investigation in terms of examining which ideas pick up traction, by whom and for what reasons. These efforts would help to map the circulation and shifts in ideas about ‘successful’ CRM campaigns or ‘ethical consumption’ more broadly.

For a more embodied approach inspired by Larner and Laurie (2010), researchers could trace the movement and embodied practices of specific actors within the CRM field. For example, experts in the CRM field often move between campaigns and for-profit and non-profit employers. Following these individuals, rather than campaigns as a whole, might provide insight into how decisions around CRM campaigns are negotiated and how certain practices (e.g., an emphasis on causes related to children's wellbeing) are replicated time and again. One interesting entry point for investigation might be following the marketing and public relations professionals that deal with communicating the key points of CRM campaigns to consumers while negotiating what these key communication points will be between-for-profit and non-profit interests. In examining how certain actors participate in constituting CRM as strategic CSR, effective fundraising and/or ethical consumption, researchers could learn more about how the CRM model comes into being in specific contexts. Tracing the educational background of the actors involved in the CRM campaigns under study may also be useful. For example, most CRM professionals (in both for-profit and non-profit sectors) are trained through MBA programs and so investigating the ways that these programs constitute concepts like ‘ethics’ or ‘corporate responsibility’ may be of interest (e.g., Hall, 2008). Overall, an approach that considers CRM as a mobile, embodied and process-based practice could contribute to better understandings of the (re)production of neoliberal philosophies that underpin much of the CRM field.

5.3. Thinking with counter-topographies

In order to highlight the broader trends that indirectly connect CRM campaigns or contexts a counter-topographic approach inspired by Katz (2001) can be used. When it comes to researching CRM, counter-topographies are helpful for deciphering how neoliberal trends in the for-profit, non-profit and consumer sectors are constituted in India and the USA differently and similarly. While neoliberal processes encompass a variety of aspects, here neoliberal influences can be observed in the increased role of the for-profit sector in addressing social issues (e.g., education), in the increased competition between NGOs and their turn to more business-oriented practices and in the continued emphasis on individual consumption choices as a valid route to systemic change.

While a counter-topography approach would highlight the pressure that for-profit actors are under in both the Indian and US contexts to engage with CSR and publicly report on their efforts, it would also note the differences between how these pressures play out on the ground. For example, in the Indian context, the mandate for large companies to engage with and publicly report on CSR activities may lead to certain types of CRM being conducted (e.g., campaigns addressing the causes listed in the Act itself) and increased partnerships with NGOs (as suggested by the Act). Conversely, the public (not government) pressure to report on CSR in the USA may lead to for-profit entities engaging with CRM in a different manner. It is possible that the rise in social enterprises in the USA is a reflection of this public desire for CSR. Future research could be undertaken to determine how exactly
these different CSR reporting cultures affect the structure of particu-
lar CRM campaigns (in terms of actors involved, funds donated, 
transparency, etc.).

A counter-topographic approach could also be useful for exam-
ing the similar messages in both the USA and Indian CRM cam-
paigns around consumption practices being viable actions to 
effect social change. However, the constitution of consumers as 
ethical takes different forms in the USA and India. In the USA, 
CRM campaigns rely on emotional pulls based on categorical con-
sumer identities (e.g., the desire of mothers to help children 
around the world). In these discourses brand name products take 
a backseat to the positive messaging around consumer empower-
ment. In India, ethical consumption through CRM is constituted 
as a means of status improvement and conspicuous consumption 
of branded products at the same time that it is constituted as an 
action of national pride, good citizenship and honor, following reli-
gious and cultural traditions. A counter-topographic approach 
allows for these similarities and differences to be parsed out, add-
ing nuance to the contextual descriptions of the CRM campaigns 
but also allowing for conclusions to be made more generally, about 
the constitution of consumer identities and ethics through CRM 
practices.

5.4. De-centering the North

One final approach that can be used to better understand CRM 
emerging economies like India is a postcolonial one. An impor-
tant aspect of this is the act of decentering Northern dominance 
in theoretical application and the construction of research ques-
tions (e.g., Pollard et al., 2009). One example of the dominance of 
western conceptualizations of CRM is the constant reference to 
the ‘birth’ of CRM (from both American and Indian sources) as 
the 1983 Statue of Liberty campaign. This history re-issues the 
North as dominant in the development of CRM, erasing complex 
histories of charity and community philanthropy that may have 
contributed to the ways in which CRM is implemented and under-
stood in the Indian context. This history reinforces a unidirectional 
flow of ethical consumption models from the North to the South 
even though in reality this flow is far more complex. A postcolonial 
approach to understanding CRM would re-examine this commonly 
reiterated history and make note of its multi-directional history 
and present. As just one example: the CEO of Starbucks (Howard 
Schultz) was recently reported as being moved to tears by the 
grace and wisdom of Ratan Tata (of Tata group) during a speech 
which then resulted in Starbuck s sourcing and roasting coffee 
beans locally in India, a process not undertaken in any other coun-
try (Business Today, 2013). A re-working of the North–South 
dynamics in CRM networks and campaigns would likely yield 
many more examples of this type and help to re-theorize concepts 
such as ethical consumption, marketized philanthropy and ‘new 
alliances in development’ (Richey and Ponte, 2014) beyond a 
Northern lens.

Finally, a postcolonial approach highlights the need for 
researchers to reflect on how their own positionality might affect 
the research process. While researchers are clearly not bound 
entirely by their personal history or societal position, it is the case 
that many researchers working in academic institutions (in the 
North and the South) are targeted as consumers of CRM campaigns 
because of their middle-class status. It is imperative therefore for 
researchers to consider how this dynamic may influence their 
choice of research questions and approaches. Examining how 
researchers are constituted as ethical consumers, donors, experts 
and/or professionals within their work on CRM could be useful in 
identifying which perspectives and questions are likely to be 
missing from the current approach to investigating CRM and ethi-
cal consumption, particularly in emerging economies.

6. Conclusions: Shifting conceptualizations of ethical consumption

One goal of this paper was to investigate cause-related marketing 
as it is underway in four campaigns in India and the USA. In order 
examining these cases I outlined the national contexts within which 
for-profit, non-profit and consumer actors operate in each country 
in relation to CRM. By situating the campaigns in context, I illus-
trated that CRM continues to be popular in the USA because it allows 
corporations to engage in CSR in a strategic and visible manner, it 
allows NGOs to make-up for lagging funds with awareness-raising 
campaigns and it further entrenches ethical issues into everyday 
consumption practices. In the Indian context CRM is poised for sig-
nificant growth because it allows corporations to meet the man-
dated CSR requirements from the Indian Government while selling 
branded products, it allows NGOs to join forces with corporations 
to promote popular causes and encourage philanthropy, and it 
allows middle-class consumers to conspicuously consume branded 
products in the name of moral and community-focused ideals. CRM 
in India and other emerging economies requires further attention 
from ethical consumption researchers, both because of its potential 
for growth and also because of the lack of existing critical research 
conducted in these contexts.

A second goal of this paper was to put forward an analytical 
framework that allows these ethical consumption campaigns to 
be understood both as unique and in relation to one another, with 
the aim of avoiding the common trap of centering research and 
processes from the Global North. Drawing on economic, feminist 
and postcolonial geographies I suggest that future research in this 
area should: (i) move away from comparative studies and toward 
considering CRM as both situated in a particular place/context 
and interconnected globally, (ii) consider the mobility of policy 
and practice (and not just things), and in particular the embodied 
ways in which the CRM model is negotiated and practiced by par-
cular actors, (iii) engage the counter-topography concept to 
examine local/global processes, especially the differential effects 
that neoliberal trends have on CRM in particular places, and (iv) 
decenter the North through postcolonial approaches that examine 
the politics of knowledge production.

As ethical consumption practices, such as the CRM model, 
migrate from place to place and proliferate, it is necessary to develop 
new ways of capturing the complexity of these practices. Researchers 
must avoid applying conceptualizations of ethical con-
sumption that emerge from research in the Global North to the 
Global South and aim to move past these dualisms by seeing the 
CRM model as simultaneously global and situated in particular 
contexts. It is my hope that these suggestions will be taken up by 
researchers interested in ethical consumption in emerging 
economies.

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