WHAT DOES POLITICAL CONSUMERISM MEAN FOR MARKETERS?

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Abstract

Studies of political consumerism originating especially from political science have demonstrated that the market mechanism can be regarded as another channel for political participation, and that the consumers are both able to and willing to use this channel to achieve political goals. However, marketers still need studies that are able to show to what extent consumer behaviour in fact can be regarded as political consumerism. It therefore seems as if political consumers seen from a marketing management point of view primarily should be regarded as potential political actors that may be mobilized under certain conditions based on personal experience and mediated storylines of corporate social performance seen in relation to the ongoing international debate on companies’ social responsible. In the article different marketing management implications of this stance are outlined and explained in further detail.

Introduction

In many Western societies consumer behaviour increasingly reflects motives, attitudes, and buying intentions that are based on cognitive and affective responses to politics in general and/or to political aspects of what companies supply and the way this is done. Consequently, the marketplace is changing into being another channel for political participation.

There is therefore nothing extraordinary about that researchers especially from political science have been interested in studying political consumerism as a particular variant of political participation. The wonder is that only few researchers from consumer behaviour and marketing have tried to expand our knowledge of this rather new market phenomenon, because understanding the consumer is crucial for the preparation of successful strategies at least in consumer markets.

It has therefore been considered worthwhile in this paper to outline some implications of political consumerism for marketing management. Because most published studies of the above-mentioned social phenomenon originate from political science, the following epitome of our empirical knowledge is based primarily on contributions from this particular discipline. The outlined managerial implications will be delimited to unorganised political consumerism.

The paper ends in some suggestions for future research followed by a conclusion.

Political Consumerism

The development of many western societies has resulted in increasing privatization of the political and politicization of the private. The political is privatized to a larger extent when decisions, which were previously made in the institutionalized political system, are
widely left to the market forces. The private is politicized to a larger extent, when decisions in the private sphere become more political, that is when purchase decisions reflect a greater wish to influence resource allocation in society at large. When consumers show political considerations, and citizens show consumer considerations, two formerly different kinds of rationality are mixed up. Consequently, political rationality is also used in markets, and consumer rationality is also used in politics. No matter how one is looking at this development it should be recognized that the study of citizens can no longer be left alone to political scientists and sociologist, and the study of consumers alone to market researchers.

Political consumerism is a social phenomenon the understanding of which should be based on knowledge of fundamental changes in political participation. In many countries political research has shown that citizens are more inclined to regard the market as a channel for political participation (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:10; Micheletti, 2001). Thus, today consumers may be regarded as actual or potential political actors (Micheletti, 2001).

Individuals with a well-developed consumer identity and representatives of consumer organizations have for a long time been acting on the political stage (Jensen, 1986). Now ordinary consumers have apparently also realized that their decisions can be used for more than satisfying private needs and wants. This is mainly due to the fact that consumers are increasingly being involved in solving political problems. They have been invited to do this not only by interest groups, companies, public authorities, and the mass media, but also by representatives of the institutionalized political system who have all contributed to increasing the politicization of markets (Jensen, 2003).

However, political consumerism should not be regarded as one - and only one – form of political participation through the market mechanism. Danish, Swedish, and American studies suggest a distinction between the following four forms (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:13; Micheletti, 2001):

1. Collective, organized, positive political consumerism like, e.g., requests from the Max Havelaar Foundation to buy coffee in order to support poor farm workers in the developing countries.
2. Collective, organized, negative political consumerism like, e.g., the 1995 boycott against Shell, organized by Greenpeace.
3. Individual, unorganized, positive political consumerism like, e.g., the choice of organic products in order to promote sustainable farm production.
4. Individual, unorganized, negative political consumerism like, e.g., avoidance of eggs from battery hens in order to promote animal welfare.

Considering the first two forms of political consumerism as political participation is hardly controversial, and history can, indeed, show many examples of these forms especially as far as boycotts are concerned (Friedman, 1999). It is, however, not self-
evident to regard individual consumer behaviour in the same way. When the citizens use their power as consumers to put pressure on the French government to make it stop the nuclear tests in the Pacific, as was the case in 1995, it is no doubt a political action. When people boycott companies that base their production on child labour, it is also a political action. But what about consumers who buy organic food? What about vegetarians? Or people who do not eat pork for religious reasons?

Andersen and Tobiasen (2001:12) define political consumerism as the actions a person performs when he/she shows substantial value considerations in connection with deliberately choosing or avoiding goods in order to promote a political goal. According to this definition green or ethical consumption is not necessarily political consumerism. What motivates consumer behaviour is crucial.

Danish studies have shown that positive and negative political consumerism are not independent social phenomena (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:30). 19% of the 21% of the Danes who have boycotted certain goods for political reasons during the last 12 months, have also been involved in positive political consumerism.19% of the 45% of the Danes who have made a positive politically motivated individual choice of products, have also been involved in negative political consumerism. 2% of the Danes have only avoided products for political reasons, while 26% have only chosen products for political reasons alone. According to these figures, negative political consumerism normally involves positive political consumerism while the opposite not necessarily is the case. However, we still need studies that can explain why this is so. The figures seem to suggest that not all kinds of individual, unorganized political consumerism are political to the same extent.

According to Andersen and Tobiasen (2001:64) political consumerism is a result of strong political interest and trust which means that the market mechanism is considered as a supplement to and not a downright replacement of the institutionalized political system. If this is true, it does not support Beck’s (1997:98) implicit hypothesis that political consumerism is a kind of sub- and counter-politics based on a critical attitude towards modernity, the consequences of industrialization, man-made risks, and the role of the State. Apparently, political consumers are very interested in politics, and they want to support and not to counteract the institutionalized political system. Political consumerism may therefore reflect the endeavours of post-modern citizens to recapture the “ecclesia” by rebuilding the “agora” which is the third and intermediate sphere between the public and private spheres where communication between the two takes place (Bauman, 1999:107).

Andersen and Tobiasen (2001: 65) have demonstrated that political consumerism is coherent with values such as global orientation and international solidarity probably reflecting the fact that globalization has created an international political vacuum. As political consumerism seems to be coherent with critical consciousness, individual reflection, individualism, and global orientation in a world where institutionalized political systems cannot solve all problems that are highlighted by the international mass
media, political consumerism probably is an essential manifestation of life politics which is a politics of life decisions (Giddens, 1991:214-217). These decisions are flowing from freedom of choice and a generative power which enables the transformation of the self. They aim at creating morally justifiable forms of life that will promote self-actualization in a context of global interdependence, and they involve ethics concerning how to live in a post-traditional order and against the backdrop of existential questions. Consequently, the political consumer probably is an “everyday-maker”, a citizen characterized by governance and the values of postmodernization, a street-level political entrepreneur who seeks solutions for very concrete or local problems that may have global ramifications (Kristensen, 1999:18).

IFF (1996) has demonstrated that 44% of the Danish population in 1996 often chose products because of their connection with environmental problems, animal welfare, and human rights. 9% always did so, 26% rarely did it, while 16% never attached importance to such questions in connection with consumer choice. Consumers who always or often choose products because of perceived connections between these products or the supplying firm and the mentioned political issues made up 53% of the Danish population both at the beginning of 1996 and in 2000 (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:29).

IFF (1996) has also shown that 43% of the Danish population in February 1996 found that consumer boycotts are a good idea as a means to express political attitudes, while 33% did not agree with this point of view. 40% of the Danish population had furthermore boycotted one or more products because of political reasons within the last year which is a doubling since 1990 (Andersen et al., 1993: 41). This percentage was reduced to 21 in 2000 (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:29). Furthermore, Thulstrup (1997:31) has shown that 29% of the Danish population in June 1996 was able to confirm that they had avoided buying products during the last three months because they were politically against a country or a company. When the same question was asked three months later this share had decreased to about 17% of those interviewed, and in June 1997 it had further decreased to 12%. In September 1997 it was only 11% (Thulstrup, 1998:58).

It therefore seems as if negative political consumerism is a fluctuating social phenomenon, but we still need studies that are able to explain why this is so. However, a politically motivated avoidance of products is relatively free of costs, because the consumer usually can easily find substitutes that are politically correct and fit nicely into already established patterns of consumption. This is hardly the case when it is about positive political consumerism, because involvement in a specific political issue here probably is combined with more perceived risk concerning the continuous suitability and political correctness of the chosen products. It may also play a role that citizens today apparently can change their political identity rather quickly depending among other things on what is highlighted by the mass media, and that they may have more, divergent perceptions of themselves as political actors at the same time (Micheletti, 2001).

Implications for Marketing Management
When markets react politically to a larger extent, then firms serving such markets have to adjust themselves to this matter of fact. How this should be done has been explained to some extent in the marketing management literature, where especially company reaction to collective, organized political consumerism has been highlighted. It has therefore been considered worthwhile to explore in further detail some marketing management implications of unorganized political consumerism. This will be done in the following sections.

**Companies as Political Actors**

One of the main conditions for company adjustment to unorganized political consumerism is that firms get more inclined to perceive themselves as political actors. Many Danish companies still strongly resist using concepts like politics and political when characterizing their actions and decisions in relation to their surroundings (Rasmussen, 1996:21-25). This fear of contact reflects a narrow and traditional view of what politics is all about. Politics is no longer reserved for the institutionalized political system. Companies are political actors because their decisions and actions considerably influence economical, social, cultural, political, and environmental affairs in society. They are also political actors because the institutionalized political system increasingly involves them in solving political problems. Finally, they are political actors because they are expected to have a substantial share in social responsibility both today and in the future. Politically acting companies therefore have to deal with fields that have previously been regulated by the institutionalized system or perhaps not regulated at all. Furthermore, they have to relate themselves proactively and strategically to opportunities and threats emerging in environments characterized by increasing privatization of the political and politicization of the private. To do this depends not so much on the existence of a public relations department, but more on the political competences of the company at large, and how the development and maintenance of these competences are supported by top management (Drumwright, 1994; Menon and Menon, 1997). It therefore seems as if the political economy paradigm still offers a relevant framework for analyzing how economic structures and processes in firms can be integrated with sociopolitical phenomena (Stern and Reve, 1980; Achrol, Reve and Stern, 1983; Arndt, 1983; Hutt, Mokwa and Shapiro, 1986). It encompasses the marketing-as-exchange notion by placing it in a broader social and political context.

**Corporate Social Performance**

The social performance literature generally recognizes three alternate perspectives or viewpoints guiding companies’ social involvement: Social obligation, social responsiveness, and social responsibility (Sethy, 1979; Wartick and Cochran, 1985; Wood, 1991). Social obligation norms guide corporate behaviour to do the minimum to satisfy market forces and legal constraints. Social responsiveness related market objectives are driven by a need to bring corporate behaviour into congruence with prevailing norms and expectations of crucial stakeholders. The critical social performance objective driving this mode is the amelioration of any negative impact on business
practice. In contrast, social responsibility adopts a more ethically based and moral agency perspective about long-term obligations and responsibilities of the firm to all current and future stakeholders (Sethy, 1979; Wartick and Cochran, 1985; Swanson, 1995). Social responsibility is driven by an objective to promote positive change outside traditionally defined business environmental boundaries.

Wood (1991) has defined corporate social performance as a business organization’s configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programmes, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm’s social relationships. Principles of social responsibility include principles of legitimacy, public responsibility, and managerial discretion. According to the principle of legitimacy, society has the right to establish and reinforce a balance of power among institutions and to define their legitimate functions. According to the principle of public responsibility it is the organization’s duty to act affirmatively for social well-being. According to the principle of managerial discretion, the individual's right and responsibility to decide and to act are affirmed within the bounds of economic, legal, and ethical considerations.

Wood’s (1991) reformulation of the corporate social performance model as outlined by Wartick and Cochran (1985) offers several conceptual advances. First, the articulation of three principles of social responsibility at the institutional, organizational, and individual levels clarifies a long-standing debate over social responsibility and emphasizes that principles motivate human and organizational behaviour. Second, the identification of specific responsive processes shows the channels through which companies can act out their involvement in the external environment. Third, by incorporating social impacts, policies, and programmes as the collective outputs of a company’s environmental interactions she removes corporate social performance from wishful thinking and allows more pragmatic assessments to be made. Fourth, links among the three facets of the corporate performance model are made explicit, thus generating new understandings of business-society relationships as well as important new research questions.

Wood (1991) emphasizes that terms like legitimate functions, obligations, social well-being, and managerial discretion are neither universal nor absolute in their meaning. They are time and culture bound, and even within a specific time and culture such concepts are defined variously by relevant stakeholders. This also applies to the principles of social responsibility. Increasing privatization of the political and politicization of the private probably implies that the institutionalized political system will be less inclined to use its right to establish and enforce a balance of power among, e.g., companies and consumers to the benefit of the latter (Ronit, 2003:192). If so, this will affect the meaning of the principle of legitimacy. It probably also implies that the institutionalized political system will be less involved in defining what social well-being is all about as a challenge for private companies, which will affect the meaning of public responsibility. Finally, it probably implies that managers will identify the bounds of ethical and political considerations by paying more attention to political processes outside the institutionalized political system, which will affect the meaning of managerial discretion. Concepts such as options, opportunities, constraints, and choices are therefore bound by different social
and political conditions and perceptions among organizations and people.

Firms serving politicized markets should therefore continuously monitor and assess external political conditions, attend to the many stakeholder demands placed on them, and design plans and policies to respond to changing political conditions. These requirements correspond to the three main areas of research in social issues in management, namely environmental assessment, stakeholder management, and issues management. These areas are theoretically and pragmatically interlocked. Stakeholders are involved in issues. Issues involve stakeholders and their interests. And information about the environment is necessary for responses to be made.

**The Political Competences of the Company**

The ongoing political debate on companies’ social responsibility plays an important role for if and how markets will be politicized. Developing and maintaining competitive advantages in such a context therefore depends on whether companies possess the analytical skills for pinpointing what this responsibility means and how to relate to it.

This task is not easy. The prevailing attitude to company action towards its surroundings is changing, because various actors and coalition partners through their discursive and social practices exert varying influence on the interpretation of this attitude. During the Brent Spar conflict in 1995 social responsibility initially was related to the question, if Shell should be allowed to dump a worn-out oil-drilling platform into the North Atlantic (Jensen, 2003). Later on it was related to the question, if Shell should be allowed to create a precedent for further pollution of the marine environment. Finally, social responsibility was made to a question, if Shell should be allowed to release an environmental disaster. This conflict shows that social responsibility goes further than to legal affairs, that it is coherent with ethics and morality, and that it may have changing focus dependent on who is dominating the public debate. The conflict also shows that social responsibility can discursively be placed where it perhaps does not belong at all. At any rate the institutionalized political system in Denmark and other European countries managed to avoid that social responsibility was related to this system’s indecision and hesitation, and instead was related to the question, what a company should be allowed to do in relation to the marine environment.

**Marketing Strategy in Companies Serving Politicized Markets**

When a company considers itself a political actor, it does not only have special skills to pinpoint analytically what may trigger politically motivated consumer decisions and actions. It will also know how it should act proactively and strategically in relation to actual and potential political consumers as well as to competitors who may have built up similar skills or maybe a superior talent for politicizing markets to own advantage (Rasmussen, 1996:25).

Product attributes have long been recognized as being neither essential nor valuable per
see seen from the consumers’ point of view. As consumers are primarily interested in the consequences of using products, the attributes of such products are only important to the extent that they are perceived as means to achieving essential consequences and goals (Jensen, 2001). Consequently, the value of product attributes depends on the resulting consequences, and the value of these consequences depends on the instrumental or terminal values with which they are cognitively connected by the consumers (Peter, Olsen and Grunert, 2001:71). It has also been recognized for a long time that products should be marketed with special focus on preferred consequences and values, and that new product attributes should be developed based on knowledge of such consequences and values (Woodruff and Gardial, 1996:135). However, if the demand for products is substantiated in aggregated political consequences and preferred political goals, companies should change their view on what to offer, how to approach marketing, and how to build and maintain competitive advantages.

Markets with a large, built-in potential for politically motivated buying decisions require companies to reinterpret the concept of superior customer value which by many authors is considered as the main purpose of all value chain activities (Jensen, 2001). Lower relative costs will always be advantageous, but in heterogeneous markets, as most market probably are, all costs should be used to differentiate supply.

Customers very seldom attach importance to either what they get, or what they have to sacrifice. Seen from a buyer’s point of view customer value is based on a satisfactory trade-off between these two important product dimensions (Zeithaml, 1988), and they both represent a means-end chain which will be cognitively integrated before a purchase will be considered (Jensen, 2001). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that also political consumers will connect these means-end chains in order to find out if a purchase is advantageous or not. Consequently, a politically motivated purchase will always be connected with perceived costs representing a larger or smaller drain an available economic resources, more or less pleasant/unpleasant feelings, and more or less desirable/undesirable goal achievements. The more important the politically motivated buying decision seems to be, the higher costs and derived unpleasant consequences the decision maker is probable to accept. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that involved political consumers, who, e.g., want to influence the development towards more sustainable farm production, are willing to accept higher perceived costs than consumers who are not quite as involved. However, consumer markets are probably in most cases supplied with substitutes that are politically correct or perhaps not so politically incorrect as the product the consumer wants to avoid. If so, it will affect the consumer’s willingness to sacrifice.

However, political motives are apparently mingled thoroughly with non-political motives when consumers make their final buying decision, and politically motivated attitudes and buying intentions do not necessarily result in unambiguous and consistent buying behaviour. These conditions can probably explain why the market share of organic products stagnates around 5% and constitutes a decreasing part of the total Danish food consumption. Even if environmental considerations seem apparent here, a number of non-
political motives like family health, taste experience, perceived risk, or a wish for a certain lifestyle can be much more important purchase determinants (Beckmann et al., 2001). It is also a fact that the 45% of the Danes who claimed to have made a politically motivated choice of products within the last 12 months (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001:29) have not wanted to support poor farm workers in the developing countries to a large extent, since the sale of Max Havelaar coffee is only 2.5% of the Danish coffee market. Finally, it has been demonstrated that convenience and financial circumstances often come before consideration for the environment and animal welfare when the final purchase decision is made (Grunert-Beckmann and Thøgersen, 1997). Superior customer value therefore implies that marketing managers consider both the “get” and the “give” components of their supply, that both components are interpreted in relation to the political importance of the supply in the specific situation, and that customer importance rating, performance rating, and relative product performance rating are all based on such an interpretation (Woodruff and Gardial, 1996:264).

However, superior customer value is not dependent only on the way individual companies manage the value chain compared with the way it is managed in competing companies. Porter’s (1980) assumption that competition within an industry depends on the individual company’s own interest and relative power alone is therefore not appropriate. If we accept this, we fail to see the strategic opportunities involved in establishing and maintaining co-operation between companies based on an understanding of present and future mutual interests (Woodruff and Gardial, 1996:281). Consequently, superior customer value is also dependent on the way companies co-operate in supply chains and how such chains compete with alternative supply chains trying to gain the favour of the consumers. Such a perspective will enlarge the understanding of the strategic field and make it possible to encircle how supply chain management can be used as a marketing tool vis-à-vis politicized markets.

Shell’s plans to dump Brent Spar into the North Atlantic had indeed unpleasant consequences for the company’s oil refineries, petrol and oil deliveries to industrial and institutional markets, and the sales to private households (Jensen, 2003). Child labour in a subsupplier company in the Far East may have serious consequences for the sale of textiles in Europe. A planned establishment of a brewery in Burma may affect the sale of Heineken or Tuborg in our part of the world. Animal welfare in Danish farms may determine if Danish bacon can be sold in England, and the working environment in Indonesian factories may determine if Nike running shoes can be sold in the USA. It is the therefore not only important that supply chains are managed in such a way that all links allow for potential political consumer reactions, that the risk of such reactions is minimized through backwards turned agreements, and that reward and penalty systems are established to make sure that agreements are held in respect. It is also important that supply chains try to build and maintain comparative advantages on the output side seen in relation to the ongoing international debate on companies’ social responsibility, and that these efforts are visible and reliable for the consumers as well as the public in general.

Implications for Future Research
However, we still do not know how political and non-political goals and values are balanced by the consumers, and which aspects of the consumers’ social, political, and cultural environment are decisive for the outcome of this process. We also do not know how citizens find out which political problems should be solved by means of political consumerism, and what in fact motivates such a decision. Finally, we do not know to what extent positive and negative political consumerism is political. Why does negative political consumerism typically imply positive political consumerism while the opposite not necessarily is the case? Why is negative political consumerism a more fluctuating social phenomenon than positive political consumerism?

Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour and its predecessor, Fischbein’s theory of reasoned action, recognizes that people’s attitude towards an object may not be strongly or systematically related to their specific behaviours (Ajzen and Madden, 1986). Rather, the immediate determinant of whether consumers will engage in a specific behaviour is their intention to do so, and the theory of planned behaviour identifies the factors that influence this relationship. However, consumer behaviour may be quite inconsistent with measured behavioural intentions. It is therefore important to get more knowledge about which factors may be decisive for this outcome. However, even if we would be able to get more knowledge about the effect of these factors, it still seems to be relevant to ask, if it, after all, will be possible to predict political consumerism. Behaviours always occur in a situational context, in a particular environment, and at a particular time (Peter, Olsen and Grunert, 1999: 130). Does this matter of fact not imply a challenge which is too big for positivist consumer research? Should we perhaps not instead be more inclined to appreciate a thick understanding of political consumerism in its specific context?

As to company reaction to political consumerism it is important to get more knowledge about the characteristics of those firms that are intensely concerned about political consumerism including their motives for being so. Andersen and Tobiasen (2001: 44) have suggested that it is the fear of a consumer boycott which is a strong, potential power instrument that may have substantial indirect effects under certain conditions (Beckmann and Langer, 2003). This is also the basic conclusion of the abundant empirical literature on boycotts in the USA (Friedman, 1999). However, to be concerned about political consumerism may also be based on desires to be social responsible and to develop, maintain, and enhance sustainable competitive advantage.

The resource-based view of market competition posits that strategies that are difficult to imitate, rare, and organizationally based create competitive advantages that produce long-term performance results. Because tactical strategies are highly visible, imitable, and require low levels of skills and organizational capabilities to copy, they are susceptible to competitive imitation, and hence performance results are less enduring. In contrast, because strategic and quasi-strategic strategies require significantly greater levels of organizational resource commitment and culture shift, they are rare and thus less susceptible to competitive imitation. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the higher the levels of marketing strategies pursued in order to achieve competitive advantage in
politicized markets, the greater the potential for developing, maintaining, and enhancing sustainable competitive advantage. It is also reasonable to expect that the higher the levels of marketing strategies pursued in order to achieve competitive advantage in such markets, the greater the firm’s ability to project a consistent message about its concerns for political consumerism, to express its civic nature, and to show seriousness.

Another interesting avenue for further research is to determine if there are moderating or mediating factors of danger and risk of pursuing specific marketing strategies vis-à-vis politicized markets. Are larger corporations more likely to be accused of cause-exploitative marketing when they adapt such strategies than smaller and more anonymous firms? Similarly, are interest groups, purely for notoriety and wider exposure, more likely to target companies using proactive marketing strategies vis-à-vis politicized markets, than companies that are not pursuing such strategies? Research by Garrett (1987) suggests that a small number of firms within an industry is more likely to be targeted for boycotts by certain groups, because they are more visible and can provide for a greater exposure of the issue.

Conclusion

Studies of political consumerism originating especially from political science have demonstrated that the market mechanism can be regarded as another channel for political participation, and that the consumers are both able and willing to use this channel to achieve political goals. However, marketers still need studies that are able to show, how the consumers in fact are using this channel under which specific conditions, in order to know to what extent consumer behaviour in fact can be regarded as political consumerism. Studies of green consumption have demonstrated that consumer behaviour can be quite different from what might be expected based on knowledge of the consumers’ overall attitude to positive and negative political consumerism, their recalled behaviours, and ideal type characteristics of the so-called political consumer.

It therefore seems as if political consumerism seen from a marketing management point of view primarily should be regarded as a kind of predisposition for market responses. Political market responses are based on stimuli that mobilize these predispositions, and we know from the past that information about working conditions, human rights, the environment, child labour, and bad marketing practices is able to do this. We also know that information about such matters is mediated, and that news producers both circulate and create meaning that is able to influence manifestations of positive and negative political consumerism. We finally know that consumers negotiate the behavioural consequences of mediated knowledge and personal experiences taking into account both the get and the give components of market offerings, and that the outcome of such negotiations may be, or may not be, manifestations of political consumerism.

Companies serving politicised markets therefore have to monitor and to assess continuously external political processes both inside and outside the institutionalised political system, attend to the many stakeholder demands placed on them, and develop
plans and strategies in order to respond to changing political conditions in a profitable way. These requirements correspond to the three main areas of research in social issues in management, namely environmental assessment, stakeholder management, and issues management.

However, what seems to be especially important for companies serving such markets is the ability to pinpoint analytically what may trigger politically motivated buying decisions and to act proactively based on valid knowledge about such matters. Political consumers should not be regarded as a specific segment with specific characteristics concerning the expected response to marketer-dominated stimuli. Instead, they should be regarded as potential political actors that may be mobilized under certain conditions based on personal experience and mediated storylines of corporate performance seen in relation to the ongoing international debate on companies’ social responsibility.

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