

Consumer Activism for Social Change

Abstract

Consumer activism, or activism through participating in the market such as through boycotts or ethical shopping, is the most common form of political action in the United States aside from voting. While consumer activism was a popular macro practice social work intervention by social work pioneers and has been an important part of many social change movements, it is rarely discussed formally in the field of social work today. This article provides an overview of consumer activism as a social work intervention, describes historical and twenty-first century examples of consumer activism, discusses the effectiveness of consumer activism, and discusses the strengths and challenges of consumer activism for social workers who engage in it either professionally or personally.

Consumer activism is activism taken by consumers through participating in the market. This can involve activities such as choosing to shop for only fair-trade products or boycotting a company because of its labor practices. Consumer activism has a long history in the United States (US), and more than half of US citizens have participated in a form of consumer activism in their lives, with more than a third participating in the past year (Keeter, Zukin, Zndolina & Jenkins, 2002). Aside from voting, consumer activism is the most common way that citizens engage in political participation and is far more common than other types of political engagement, such as contacting legislators, fundraising for charity, taking part in a protest or volunteering for a candidate. Consumer activism was considered a key part of social work by social work pioneers, and is currently practiced by many individual social workers on a personal level. However, consumer activism is almost never studied by social work researchers, included in an in depth manner in social work textbooks, nor taught as a unique advocacy method to social work students. While consumer activism fits within the realm of the discipline of social work, scholars in other fields, including management, history, sociology, political studies, and economics, provide the intellectual leadership on this topic. This article introduces social workers to the concept of consumer activism, describes the historical and present uses of this type of activism, and discusses its effectiveness, strengths and limitations as a twenty-first century social work intervention.

Overview of Consumer Activism in the United States

Consumer activism has been prominent in the US since the Boston Tea Party, which was essentially a boycott of British goods (Lang & Gabriel, 2005). Lawrence Glickman, the leading historian of consumer activism, defines consumer activism as “organized consumption or, more often, nonconsumption that is collective, oriented toward the public sphere, grassroots, and conscious of the political impact of print and commerce (Glickman, 2009, 26).” Consumer activism typically involves consumers involved in boycotts of particular products or companies, or buycotts, which are consumers intentionally purchasing particular products or from particular companies. There are many variations of consumer activism (Glickman, 2009), but in general, the purpose of consumer activism is to either hurt or harm the revenue of an organization directly, such as through stopping or starting to spending money on a particular product or organization, or using media or other third parties to damage or improve a company’s image, thus ultimately effecting its revenue (Freidman, 1999; King, 2011). It also can involve action that intends to change the behavior of an entire industry. In general, the emphasis of consumer activism focuses on the demand-side of the market, and involves consumers changing or threatening to change their consumption as a way to effect change (Wight, 2017).

As an activism method, consumer activism is notable for its low barriers to participation. Anyone can be a consumer activist just by choosing where to spend or not spend whatever money or resources they have. Thus, it has historically been attractive to those who are political outsiders, such as African Americans and women before they had the right to vote (Glickman, 2009), and is currently popular among many who feel unable to affect legislative change because of the large amounts of special interest money spent in the political process (Hamilton, 2013). Consumer activism is also unique as it creates a form of long-distance solidarity among people who might not know or be located near each other (Glickman, 2009). In the nineteenth century, this solidarity was forged through word of mouth or print ads to encourage others to join in on a boycott or buycott, while in the twenty-first century this solidarity is often forged through social media. While consumer activism is often linked with liberal causes, it is a method that has been used by social movements of many political orientations. Consumer activism is used by activists worldwide (Hilton, 2009), but this articles limits its focus to consumer activism in the US.

While historically social workers led consumer activism campaigns, and individual social workers and social work organizations engage in consumer activism, a search of Social Work Abstracts found that there hasn't been an article published on social work and consumer activism since Orlin's (1973) article in *Social Work* which advocated for social workers to get involved in the consumer movement, particularly in regards to consumer education, consumer advocacy and boycotts, as well as broader involvement in consumer protection, and Powers' (1977) discussion of the importance of including consumer activism into BSW classes in the *Journal of Social Work Education*. When consumer activism is discussed in the field of social work, it is usually addressed in two ways. First, consumer activism techniques, particularly boycotts, are often included as a type of either social action or social reform in which social workers can engage (Rothman, 2007; Lough, 2008).

However, the discussions of boycotts usually doesn't address consumer action's unique demand-side focus, which differs greatly from both the protests or marches typical of social action, and the research and legislative action activities carried out by social reformers. Consumer activism is also discussed in the field of social work as activism by consumers of social service, such as people with disabilities or health care users (Tower, 1994). While this type of consumer activism by users of social work services is related to the broader field of consumer activism and has been very important for improving social work practice, social work usually does not place service user activism in this broader context of consumer activism.

History of Consumer Activism in the United States

Consumer activism has been one of the most consistently used types of social action since the founding of the US, though it is often thought of as a more episodic activity that didn't gain force until the twentieth century. In his overview of consumer activism in the US, Glickman asserts that "the relative absence of memory and myth that usually characterizes social movements" (Glickman, 2009, 2-3) is absent among consumer activists of today. While social movements usually revere their forefathers and mothers, much of the early history of consumer activism is forgotten, including the hundreds of boycotts throughout the 1800s, before the terms "consumer activism" and "boycott" had even been coined (Glickman, 2009). This is certainly the case in the field of social work, where consumer activism, which is so integral to our social work pioneers, is not given much attention. However, while activists today might not reference their activities as being a new iteration of long American tradition, the earlier activities did lay the groundwork for later movements (Glickman, 2009). The following highlights past and present consumer activism campaigns in the US.

Nineteenth Century Consumer Activism

Two of the most prominent nineteenth century consumer activism movements were the "free produce" movement and the National Consumers League. The free produce movement was begun by northern abolitionists, primarily free African Americans and Quakers, and its prime tactic was boycotting products produced by slaves, such as cotton or sugar (McDonald, 2017). In addition, the free produce movement established a number of stores that sold only products made using what was called free labor, which is the opposite of slave labor, so consumers could engage in buycotts at "free produce" stores. The free produce movement, which became popular in the late 1820s and remained strong through the 1850s, spread across the country and to England, and at one point had more than fifty stores in nine states that sold only products made by free labor. Some notable proponents of the free produce movement were Frederick Douglas and Harriett Beecher Stowe (McDonald, 2017). There was a strong moral undercurrent to the free produce movement, which proposed that consumption was a political or moral act. While the free produce

movement didn't achieve its immediate objective of ending slavery, it did provide a means for political participation for free African Americans, and also established a framework for consumer activism that has been used, consciously or not, by subsequent consumer activism campaigns (Glickman, 2009).

Social workers were the leaders of the most prominent Progressive Era consumer activism campaign, and it one could argue that consumer activism was a key activity of early social workers. The National Consumers League (NCL) was founded in 1890 by social work pioneers Jane Addams and Josephine Lowell, and among its leaders were other social work pioneers, such as Florence Kelley, who served as the long-term Executive Director, and Frances Perkins, who was and the Executive Director of the New York City Consumers League. The social workers at NCL used consumer activism as one of its key tools for social change. Its stated purpose, which Vose (1957) quoted from the back cover of one of its early pamphlets, was "to have consumers use their buying power, their economic and political power, to compel the payment of decent wages (p. 267)". The NCL engaged in a famous boycott in which it developed for shoppers a white list of merchants who treated their female staff fairly, and a white label that was placed in underwear to signify that the product was made in a safe work environment (Murphy, 2017). The NCL coupled its white list and white label consumer activism tactics with legislative activism and social research, and its efforts were instrumental in establishing occupational safety laws, child labor restrictions, and work hour restrictions. While these progressive era social worker-led consumer activism campaigns were successful and fit well within the values of the field as they were a low-risk way for those without a political voice to be active, this proved to be the height of social work involvement in consumer activism.

Twentieth Century Consumer Activism

The twentieth century saw a number of successful consumer activism campaigns, as well as the growth of new forms of consumer action. While the field of social work and individual social workers were actively involved in many of these campaigns, the discipline as a whole did not play a leadership role in these consumer activism activities.

Several prominent social movements involved consumer activism as an integral part of its strategy, including the civil rights and farmworkers movements. The civil rights movement is one of the most well-known social movements that employed consumer activism. While its most famous consumer activism campaign is the yearlong Montgomery bus boycott of Rosa Parks in the 1950s, which emphasized the purchasing power of the African American passengers and their ability to bring financial ruin to the streetcar company (Glickman, 2009), it was actually the culmination of nearly fifty years of consumer activism protests. Civil rights consumer activism dates back to 1910s, when African Americans engaged in "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns, where they boycotted companies that refused to hire African Americans or advertise in African American newspapers (Carreiro, 2017). There were many consumer activism actions in the following decades, including boycotts of movie theaters, newspapers and vacation destinations (Glickman, 2009), accompanied by "buy black" boycotts, encouraging African American consumers to shop from African American owned companies and the establishment of co-ops (Carreiro, 2017). College students, primarily from the Atlanta University Center (e.g. Spelman, Clark College), also engaged in very successful consumer activism campaigns against the A&P grocery store, where they used slogans such as, "our money isn't different, why are our jobs?" (Grady-Willis, 2006, p. 11). Consumer activism partially served to remind companies that African Americans as a group, along with their allies, had significant buying power. A number of companies made requested changes to end the consumer actions. The civil rights movement's use

of consumer activism involved similar tactics to eighteenth century free produce movement, and can almost be seen as a continuation of this type of activism.

Another twentieth century consumer activism campaign that was enormously successful was the United Farmworker (UFW) led Delano Grape boycott from 1965-1970. This campaign involved a nationwide boycott of table grapes to persuade grape farmers to enter into a collective bargaining agreement. As the farmworkers were not well-organized before the strike and had extremely little political power, a consumer activism campaign was one of the few ways for the farmworkers to gain political power. As the first president of the UFW Cesar Chavez said,

The consumer boycott is the only open door in the dark corridor of nothingness down which farm workers have had to walk for many years. It is a gate of hope through which they expect to find the sunlight of a better life for themselves and their families (Cesar Chavez, as quoted by the United Farmworkers, 1997, para 41).

Unlike the civil rights consumer activism campaigns, this campaign did not involve the farmworkers acting as consumers, but rather involved the general public making consumption decisions on behalf of the farmworkers (Glickman, 2009). This long-distance solidarity between grape consumers and farmworkers ultimately resulted in concessions from the farm owners. The UFW is an example of an individual social worker's involvement in consumer activism. The second president of the UFW, Arturo Rodriquez, was a social worker who started engaging in consumer activism as an MSW student, and went on to organize some of the massive UFW boycotts in the 1970s and 1980s (Anderson, 2015).

Other consumer activism campaigns of the twentieth century that involved long-distance solidarity included the decades long worldwide boycott of South African products, sports and academics because of apartheid (Glickman, 2009), the 1960s boycott of Dow Chemical's Saran Wrap because of Dow's manufacture of napalm used in the Vietnam War (Vogel, 1978), the 1970s and 1980s boycott of Nestle for promoting and selling infant formula in countries that did not have safe water to make the formula (Post, 1985), and the 1990s global boycott of Nike for its use of sweatshops and child labor in developing countries. All of these prominent twentieth century consumer activism campaigns were ultimately successful, though many others were not.

The twentieth century also saw the rise of the consumer movement, with groups such as the Consumer's Union playing an important role in influencing businesses about safety, value and quality of its products, and its influence can be seen in the still popular *Consumer Reports* (Lang & Gabriel, 2005). The consumer movement differed from earlier consumer activism movements, such as the free produce movement or the grape boycott, in that the emphasis was not on consumer activism on behalf of society, but rather consumer activism specifically for the sake of the consumers themselves (Glickman, 2017). Ralph Nader's activities typify this movement, such when he documented the lack of safety features in the Chevy Corvair, which led to widespread changes in the automobile industry. The consumer movement, centered on the well-being of the consumers themselves, focused heavily on some of what Orlin (1973) was urging social workers to get more involved in forty-five years ago: consumer education, social research and lobbying businesses on behalf of consumers. This activism which focuses on the well-being of the consumer, whether it be related to unsafe products or unfair global trade practices, has involved many activists globally and is an important activity (Hilton, 2009), though has a slightly different orientation and uses different techniques than other types of consumer activism.

Another strand of twentieth century consumer activism that grew popular in the twentieth century was green consumerism, which is a type of "ethical shopping" popular today in which everyday consumption is considered a form of political action. Green consumerism focused on the

role of consumers in effecting the environment. Its focus was not on specific organizations, but rather on individuals making consumption choices that change entire industries (Wight, 2017). It gained popularity with the publication of the *Whole Earth Catalogue* (1968), which provided consumers with information on how to buy environmentally friendly items. Consumer activists of all political stripes have engaged in ethical shopping like green consumerism since the earlier free produce stores and white labels of the social worker-led NCL. Ethical consumption, where everyday consumption can be considered a political action, is similar to the second-wave feminist idea of “the personal is political” (McCann & Kim, 2013), though the underlying concept of expanding the form of political action to everyday personal decisions had much earlier origins.

Twenty-First Century Consumer Activism

The rises of the internet and social media has greatly influenced consumer activism in the twenty-first century (Hollenbeck & Zinhan, 2006). It is easier to begin campaigns, and new boycotts and buycotts are introduced seemingly nonstop. Buycotts or ethical shopping campaigns have grown in popularity. Consumers can choose to buy green, local, American, union, free trade, shade grown or black, among others, or to buy products that give to charities or to otherwise shop for social change (Einstein, 2017; Glickman, 2009). The buycotts of the twenty-first century harken back to social work pioneer Florence Kelley’s “white label” and “white list” campaigns. However, now the particular lists of companies to support are usually found online, the buycotts are usually popularized via social media, and companies themselves may even join-in or co-opt such campaigns by advertising that they fit certain ethical consumer shopping preferences, such as non-GMO or pesticide-free (Joy et al, 2012). A completely social media driven form of buycott now is the ‘carrotmob’, which is essentially a flash mob of ethical shoppers who descend upon a particular store to reward it for acting favorably (Hoffmann & Hutter, 2012).

Boycotting is also an extremely common form of activism in the twenty-first century. Its nature has also shifted with the growth of the internet. While twenty-first century boycotts do retain some of the more traditional structures of earlier boycotts, they are not necessarily backed by a formal leadership structure and are often conducted entire online. For example, there a number of amorphous anti-brand communities who boycott large companies such as McDonalds or Wal-Mart for being immoral in general, with forum participation providing the incentive for consumers to engage in long-term boycotts (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006). However, most do have some sort of leader, even if the leader is a single person unaffiliated with an organization. In addition, some successful consumer activism campaigns have been conducted almost entirely over social media, which also allows for greater participation by using media to spread messages. However, it also results in far more campaigns that can get noticed by the public.

Several recent successful consumer activism campaigns typify this new type of consumer activism. One example is the Grab Your Wallet campaign, which was started online by a private unaffiliated citizen who was upset by a comment by then US presidential candidate Donald Trump glorifying sexual abuse. The Grab Your Wallet campaign urged consumers to boycott companies either owned by the Trump or that did business with his family, such as his daughter’s clothing line. This campaign consisted primarily of a website that listed companies to boycott, and the campaign was spread through social media with hashtags and tweets. The founder echoed the sentiments of earlier consumer activists when she said the campaign’s purpose was “to be able to shop with a clear conscience (NBC Bay Area, 2016, para 3).” This campaign also forged long-distance solidarity through the internet, but differed in that it was unaffiliated with any standing organization. Most major retailers had pulled Ivanka Trump’s clothing line within a year of this campaign’s inception, and the brand folded completely in 2018 (Segran, 2018). In the same time

period there have been many targeted boycotts fueled by social media, both on the left and the right, often in response to breaking news, such as #DeleteUber after Uber engaged in strike breaking or #boycottNFL in response to football players kneeling during the national anthem to protest police brutality. Social media and the 24 hour news cycle makes it easier to start these targeted campaigns, but also makes it difficult for them to get noticed and to receive sustained attention.

A more unique twenty-first consumer activism campaign is the Sleeping Giants campaign (@slpng_giants), which primarily uses twitter. Sleeping Giants encourages consumers to notify advertisers whose ads were being retargeted onto the controversial Breitbart website, usually without their knowledge. This campaign is conducted completely over social media, as consumers find the advertisements online, and post a screenshot of the advertisement on twitter urging the company to block Breitbart from their ad buys. While there is no threat of a boycott, the intent is to warn companies that this advertisement is poor for the brand's image, and thus is an example of consumer activism that focuses on the media image of a company. Sleeping Giants, like Grab Your Wallet, was also established by an unaffiliated person, but unlike Grab Your Wallet, this campaign was completely anonymous until the founders were doxed (i.e. their identities were revealed) by opponents. As of September of 2018, over 4,000 companies had dropped Breitbart from their ad buys as a direct result of the Sleeping Giants campaign, including large companies such as Nordstrom, 3M, Regal Cinema, and AllState (Sleeping Giants, 2018).

Consumer Activism as a Social Work Advocacy Method

As consumer activism has been a nearly constant activity in the political landscape for several hundred years and is core to many campaigns today, social workers need an understanding of its effectiveness and ethical considerations. Certainly, as consumer activism has been so widely used in the US, there have been many successful and unsuccessful campaigns. Most of our knowledge of effectiveness comes from the many studies of boycotts (Davidson, Worrell & El-Jelly, 1995). Studies by Friedman (2002) and King (2008) have estimated that more than one quarter of boycotts result in a direct concession, which is an extremely high success rate. And boycotts that don't get a direct concession often result in the company making some other action, even if it's just a marketing campaign to protect their image (King, 2011). The prominence of social media has actually improved the effectiveness of boycotts (King, 2011). Recent studies have found that some characteristics of boycotts are associated with more success (King, 2011; Friedman, 2002). To summarize, boycotts tend to be more successful if they have the following components: 1) *Carrot*. A reward for a company for making a change before a boycott occurs, such as positive publicity, and a promise to immediately stop a boycott if the company makes a desired change. 2) *Stick*. A clear action, such as consumers not buying a product or buying products from a particular company. 3) *Specific Request*. A specific clear request that is feasible for the particular company. 4) *Sustained Attention*. Effectively use of media for announcing a campaign and for gaining sustained attention to an issue. Using celebrities, demonstrations and social media can be helpful in gaining and sustaining attention. 5) *Simplicity*. A very easy to understand message, including a very straightforward grievance. In addition, the action should be a simple for consumers to do, with readily available alternative products for consumers if appropriate. 6) *Target*: Choice of an appropriate target that consumers can easily identify. Some characteristics that used to be considered vital for a successful boycott, such as being coordinated by an established organization (Friedman (2002), seem to not hold true in the digital age.

Campaigns that are deemed not successful when using a discrete measurable objective, such as loss of revenue by a business, might still ultimately be successful in raising awareness of

issues. In addition, sometimes campaigns have very large or lofty goals, such as ending unfair global trade practices or changing the nature of the national or international economy. For example, the Free Produce movement's goal was to end slavery, and slavery did not end before the free Produce movement had died out. However, in the long-term, some have considered that the free produce movement had an important role in ending slavery, as it publicized abolitionist ideas and served as way for African Americans to begin to engage in political organizing when they had few other avenues (McDonald, 2017).

Unfortunately, there has been limited research on the effectiveness of "buycotts" (Friedman, 2002), though some studies have shown that some types of buycotts have been at least moderately successful, such as buying "fair trade" (Schmelzer, 2010). However, there appears to be large gaps between intention and action, as while many people intend to buy products that match with their values, when they are actually shopping, they may end up buying the cheaper product than the socially conscious product (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). In the end, regardless of whether consumer activism is effective or not, people in the US routinely engage in consumer activism, and it is important for social workers to understand its strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths of Consumer Activism as a Social Work Intervention

Consumer activism has a number of clear strengths as a means of social action that social workers can engage in themselves, or mobilize others. First, as mentioned earlier, nearly everyone can participate in consumer activism (Glickman, 2009). As consumer activism makes everyday consumption a political act, anytime anyone is making a purchasing decision, even with an electronic benefit transfer card, the decisions can be seen as a political act. Thus, consumer activism fits squarely within the National Association of Social Worker's (2017b) *Code of Ethics*, particular the principle relating to social justice that requires social workers to ensure that all people can participate in decision-making. Consumer activism can be extremely powerful to people who feel disempowered or have a real risk for being otherwise politically active, as it is a way to participate that doesn't involve anything more than deciding where to spend their money. Social workers working with disenfranchised groups can introduce consumer activism as a low-risk tactic for those just starting to get involved in activism. By thinking of consumer activism as a political act, people can broaden their scope of political involvement as well as think differently about the consequences of their consumption. In addition, as it is already widely used by many Americans and has had some enormous, well-known successes, it should be a relatively straightforward method for encouraging action.

Another benefit of consumer activism is that it allows people to join in solidarity with others, even from a long-distance. As typified in the South African boycott, hundreds of thousands of people across the world acted in solidarity with South Africans in their daily choices not to buy South African products until apartheid was abolished. This feeling of solidarity can also be used by social work community organizers when working with groups that may empathise with social justice violations of folks in distant locations, but not know how to assist them, or serve as a first step for encouraging people to get involved in a social action group.

With the rise of mobile technology in the twenty-first century, consumer activism has become even easier to engage in by social workers and people with whom they work, as demonstrated by the #GrabYourWallet and @Slpng_Giants campaigns. The new *NASW, ASWB, CSWE and CSWA Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice* (National Association for Social Workers, 2017a) describes how social workers can use technology for social change or mobilizing others to participate in social change efforts. While the Standards define social change narrowly as legislative action or other public policy related change efforts, certainly the same

principles in the Standards that apply to legislative advocacy apply to other forms of online activism, such as consumer activism. In particular, the Standards assert that social workers using technology for activism should be sure to share information that is honest and accurate, and be respectful online (Standard 2.15).

Critiques of Consumer Activism

There are also number of ethical and pragmatic concerns related to consumer activism that are important for social workers to consider. First, the whole notion of focusing on consumer activism has been critiqued as buying into the moral foundations of the capitalist order without critiquing its structures that cause injustices. Conceiving of consumption as a political activity can be seen as inherently too neoliberal at its core (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). In addition, while all people can participate in consumer activism, consumers with more resources are by definition able to have more impact, which gives people with more money more options for political involvement. Social work scholars have criticized this especially in regards to green consumption (Pfeifer, 2016), as many luxury brands are now focusing on their products as ethical or sustainable, but these products are out of reach for many consumers (Joy et al, 2012). While this critique is certainly accurate, the inequality exists whether people are conscious or not of how they spend their money. However, social work advocacy campaigns that want to center on consumption as political action do need to think about these issues critically, and be sure that they aren't limiting opportunities for action by focusing on consumption alone or too much, and not forgo other types of social work activism, such as activism targeting legislative change. They also should acknowledge that some types of activism are easier for those with more resources, and tailor the consumer activism campaigns to those that they are organizing, such as ensuring that there are inexpensive and accessible alternatives.

Another concern about consumer activism is the potential for corporate cooptation of consumerist goals. An example of this is "pinkwashing", which is when companies use the color pink to symbolize that their products support breast cancer research as a marketing tool toward ethical shoppers, when the companies might do little to support breast cancer research, and may actually have products that include pesticides that lead to breast cancer (Lubitow & Davis, 2011). Whatever the cause, social workers can play a role in educating consumers about pinkwashing and other forms of cooptation, persuading companies to stop using deceptive advertising, and providing accurate information to consumers interested in becoming more socially conscious consumers, which is in line with the social work technology standards (NASW, 2017a).

Consumer activism has also been critiqued for often missing the appropriate target. For example, campaigns that have advocating boycotting particular stores because they sell clothes made in sweatshops, have suggested consumers purchase products at alternative stores that sell the exact same products (Stewart, 2017). Again, social workers can play a role in helping consumer activism campaigns do appropriate research to assure that they are choosing the right targets for their campaigns.

There is also a real concern that consumer activism campaigns can take away from other types of social action, and it might become even more difficult to encourage social workers and those with whom they work to be involved in other forms of action that might require more effort, such as legislative advocacy, door knocking or fundraising. If people become aware that their consumption decisions are political action, they might feel that they do not need to engage in other sorts of action aside from choosing what to buy (Mukherjee & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Further, the focus on the demand-side of consumption could detract from an equally important emphasis on supply-side activism, such as union organizing or legislative activity related to regulating

businesses. Overall, social workers need to be aware that there are opportunity costs and potential risks involved in engaging in or promoting consumer activism campaigns, and should think carefully about the implications of such campaigns.

Finally, as a practical matter, while consumer activism has fairly easy entry, it also involves a diffuse and diverse group of consumers (Glickman, 2009). There is no one ideology associated with consumer activism, with groups as varied as civil rights and anti-immigrant groups participating in this activity, and in twenty-four hour news cycles, it might actually result in even greater divides among ideological lines.

Conclusion

As consumer activism is now ubiquitous in the US and social workers are often personally or professionally involved in such campaigns, social workers need to be aware of its strengths, limitations and unintended consequences of this demand-side method of social action. Social work educators should teach social work students the history of consumer activism, including its use by social work pioneers, as well as its main concepts and current uses, alongside other types of macro practice interventions. In addition, social workers who are working with communities or organizations thinking of appropriate social actions or increasing political engagement of community members should thoughtfully consider consumer activism as potential tool. While there are certainly ethical and practical limitations that social workers should consider, consumer activism can be a useful social action strategy that is in line with the principles of the profession, particularly as it allows such easy entrance for people of all social and economic backgrounds to become involved in efforts related to social change.

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