

ABSTRACT

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AN INQUIRY INTO SUBALTERN CONSUMPTION

Illegality is a ubiquitous phenomenon in subaltern markets. Despite acknowledging the role of illegality in subaltern markets and consumption, marketing scholarship has not engaged with this aspect. In this research, I critically investigate the nature and roots of illegal practices in subaltern consumption and markets. I conducted ethnography over a period of twenty months in a village in north-central India. I employed observations and ethnographic interviews as primary data collection methods. I follow the three-essay format in my dissertation.

The first essay examines a state welfare housing scheme for the poor. I offer insights into why subaltern consumers are unable to speak against the injustices meted out to them. I explain the discursive mechanism through which subaltern consumers' ability to resist and speak against the widespread irregularities is quelled within the State's welfare discourse. This essay contributes to consumer welfare and public policy debates within marketing. The essay also offers insights into the area of consumer resistance by highlighting the limits of subaltern consumers' resistance in a capitalist third world political economy.

In the second essay, I investigate an illegal market of illicit distilled liquor (IDL). I argue that the IDL market operates as a state of exception where violence and law overlap with each other. I highlight the significant role of a marketized and illegal state in sustaining market operations in the IDL market. This essay provides a corrective to Agamben's thesis on state of exception and sovereignty. I also highlight a key limitation in Chatterjee's theory of political society. I show that the political society becomes a hegemonic entity for the groups living at the

margins of political society. Moreover, this essay contributes to the under-researched area of illegal markets by conceptualizing market as a state of exception. I also draw attention to the role of violence that remains an under-researched aspect of markets.

In the third essay, I investigate the relationship between illegality and institutional context. My findings reveal that my institutional context exhibits Kafkaesque properties such as indecipherable and inaccessible law, and centrality and abuse of power. I highlight alienation of subaltern consumers in such a Kafkaesque context. The findings enable us to attend to power relations, abuse of power, and the subjectivity of alienated subaltern subjects. These elements are at the root of illegal practices in subaltern settings.

In summary, I uncover important facets of discursive silencing of subalterns, marketized sovereignty, Kafkaesque institutional context, and violence that have not been understood in extant marketing theory. This dissertation offers some valuable insights on illegality in subaltern consumption and markets.