Exploring Social Change through Social Media: The case of the Facebook group

Indignant Citizens

Abstract

This study examines the role of social media in facilitating the network of a social movement, the novel forms of exchange networks that are fashioned by participants of this movement and the drivers and effects of individuals' engagement therein. Specifically, using the lens of political consumerism, we look at the movement of self-described *Indignant Citizens* in Greece to reveal the underlying motivations for participants to engage in this social movement, the dynamics of their engagement and the ways in which *Indignant Citizens'* online presence enables identity expression, community-building and social change. We draw on interpretive analysis of findings from eight focus groups with members of *Indignant Citizens*. The findings reveal how this movement and the shared identity developed amongst its members empower our participants by giving them a voice and engage them in role mobilization, drive specific actions towards the conceptualization of a shared utopia and provide them with a platform to organize action and employ desired practices for the co-creation of useful and gratifying exchanges.

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Introduction

The roles of citizens and consumers are merging (Scullion, 2010). Individuals are becoming increasingly aware of the political and moral implications of their choices and many add a citizen dimension to their consumption aspirations and decisions (Uusitalo, 2005; Lillqvist *et al*., 2018). Thus, market demands are often expressed within society's public sphere through demonstrations, occupations of buildings or other forms of protest, and society's demands are put across within the marketplace through anti-consumption, green and ethical marketing activities, among others.

Political consumerism incorporates consumer/citizen synthesis, recognizing that modern individuals are often a part of two worlds, the economic (as consumers) and the political (as voters or as more active agents for change) (Holzer, 2006). Enacting change often requires individuals to take the initiative in coming together and organizing themselves, in order for collective action to take place. However, traditional points of reference are weakened by the combination of rapid change in most aspects of everyday life, overlapping group memberships, and a plethora of information and symbolic messages communicated through diverse media sources (e.g., Melucci, 1981; Buechler, 1995). Thus, attention is turned towards the creation of self-referential movement networks with multiple meanings and orientations (Melucci, 1985). With recent technological advancements, social movements have proliferated and strengthened their ability to respond to market pressures, reach people and share

relevant information. In this respect, social media are of critical importance as a consumer-empowering tool that enables and facilitates unfiltered peer-to-peer communication (Bennett, 2009), and the production and sharing of relevant content (Anderson *et al*., 2016).

In this paper we apply the lens of political consumerism to study a politically motivated movement, namely the *Indignant Citizens* (translated from the Greek: Αγανακτισμένων Πολιτών, also known as "Indignant Citizens Movement" or the "Greek *indignados*") in early-2010s Greece. *Indignant Citizens* (*IC*) consist of people dissatisfied with existing political parties, which they perceive to be disconnected from their core values and concerns. *IC* was created online but also operated offline, following marketing practices, to campaign for social change. Existing research on political consumerism focuses largely on personal factors, especially around identity formation (e.g., Smith and French, 2009), and tends to overlook how communicative, societal and ideological factors around communities may contribute to individual expression and social change (Lee *et al*., 2009; Neilson and Paxton, 2010). This manuscript advances the field by examining how *Indignant Citizens* engage in social communication and use their online community to create and share relevant resources, fashion new types of exchange networks and affect change. In particular, we shall offer insights into participants' underlying motivations to engage in this social movement, the dynamics of their engagement and the ways in which the movement (and participants' engagement therein) facilitate identity expression, community-building and social change. In so doing we will uncover consumption practices amongst those affiliated to the movement, often based on unconventional relationships of exchange that are enabled by social

media and which play an important role in reinforcing the movement's collective identity and the commitment of its members towards the movement.

In the following section, we discuss political consumerism and its contribution to changes to institutions' and markets' practices, and examine the importance and role of context in social media. We then describe the chosen research context and explain our methodology (a case study using focus groups). Next, we present our findings based on the interpretive themes that emerged during the data analysis. We then discuss our results before drawing conclusions.

Political consumerism

Political consumerism refers to consumption practices governed by ethical and political considerations. In the form in which it was originally popularized by Micheletti, the term was used to mean "actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices" (Micheletti, 2003, p. 2). The institutions targeted are typically assumed companies or governments (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015). Bossy (2014) criticizes Micheletti's (2003) definition of political consumerism for being too narrowly focused on a fixed array of actions (boycotts, buycotts and ethical investment), excluding others (e.g., cultural jamming, eco-villages), and for equating actions with social movements when these two phenomena should be, in her opinion, differentiated. Consequently, Bossy (2014) re-defines political consumerism as "a social movement in which a network of individual and collective actors criticize and try to differentiate themselves from

traditional consumerism by politicizing the act of buying in order to search and promote other types of consumption" (p. 182).

Political consumerism, understood largely as a form of collective action based on individual consumption, is enabled by social movements that "'collectivize' individual choice and use this social capital as a signalling device in the market" (Holzer, 2006, p. 406). Thus, political consumerism transforms individual purchase decisions into collective action (Bossy, 2014; Melucci, 1996) to deliver a coherent message.

Within political consumerism, individuals' consumption practices are guided by concerns of justice or fairness, or an evaluation of business and government actions (Micheletti, 2003; Stolle *et al*., 2005; Follesdal *et al*., 2009). In particular, as with the Gree*k Indignant Citizens,* many of these movements are driven by discontentment with dominant neoliberal economic, political and cultural regimes and, often, with their associated unsustainable practices (see Bennett, 2012). As Gotlieb (2015) discusses, political consumerism can, thus, be linked to a wider participation in lifestyle movements (see also Haenfler et al, 2012). They become particularly noticeable when formal organizations appear incapable of responding to citizens' or consumers' growing concerns or environmental challenges and, as a result, have lost people's trust in them.

The identification of free spaces between the levels of political power, market power and everyday life emphasizes the importance of individuals consolidating collective identities through both representation and participation (Melucci, 1996; Buechler, 1995). This process relies heavily on consumers' active participation through role

mobilisation; that is, organizing the social and physical capital that they hold due to their various social roles, to further the movement's objectives (Holzer, 2006). Consumers guided by personal and social motives attempt to influence other consumers and change institutional or corporate practices (Follesdal, 2004) towards the construction of an imagined or utopian marketplace and community. Such utopian discourse, which rejects the current state of affairs and envisions the possibility of a better society, needs to be reified through practices that help the movement to spread in society (see Bossy, 2014).

Social movements are increasingly gaining power and recognition with the proliferation of social media and development of communication technologies, which, as Bennett (2012) describes, allows individuals to become catalysts of processes of collective actions.

The context of social media

Social media are defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). Social media comprise a variety of online information-sharing platforms including social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), content-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), collaborative websites (e.g., Wikipedia) and microblogging sites (e.g., Twitter) (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Ellison, *et al.,* 2007; Thelwall, 2009; Valenzuela *et al.*, 2009). These platforms facilitate the creation of shared identities and relationships amongst users (Parigi and Gong, 2014) whilst also being a site for personal expression where individuals appropriate,

shape and share themes (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Social media (Zúñiga *et al.*, 2014) are also commonly used to promote political consumerism because they are considered to be consumer-empowering technologies with no gatekeepers restricting communication (Bennett, 2009, 2012), which makes them particularly relevant for contemporary forms of mobilization (see Parigi and Gong, 2014; Earl *et al.*, 2017). They allow grievances and other information to be quickly shared amongst many, facilitating coordination and collective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). The continuously renewed "digital ties" become an organizing agent of individuals' actions (see also Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) and reinforce the political consumers' commitment to engaging in market-based actions to affect change (Parigi and Gong, 2014).

Given their collaborative and social characteristics, social media are sites for consumer-to-consumer conversations, which have revolutionized the ways in which messages are created, shared and maintained, both in the political and other consumption realms. This fundamental change is believed to significantly affect communications in general and especially social communication (Peltier et al., 2003; Taylor, 2009). Firstly, the extent and scale of message-reach exceeds conventional physical, cultural or other barriers. Secondly, messages are now being immediately produced, reproduced and shared, with meanings within communities being created and negotiated via continuous interaction (Mulhern, 2009). This adds value to social media through its ability to engage users and create additional reach. Thirdly, social media have changed the way individuals interact with the original message producer, such as organizations and initiators. As individual consumers also generate the content of messages and are responsible for their distribution (Berthon et al., 2008), the line between media consumer and information

provider becomes increasingly blurred and "producers and consumers coalesce into "prosumers"" (Pitt et al., 2006, p. 118).

The *Indignant Citizens* Movement

The Spring and Summer of 2011 saw mass mobilization throughout Greece, against the Greek government's policies of fiscal austerity (Rüdig and Karyotis, 2014). This took place in the context of a wave of similar movements around the world and especially elsewhere in Southern Europe (Shihade *et al.*, 2012), such as those of "los Indignados" in Spain (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). As with other contemporaneous mobilizations, social media was an important tool for organizing and community-building (Uncles *et al.*, 2015).

The Greek Facebook group *Indignant Citizens* was started by a young student and gained over 100,000 followers in the first day. The initial aim of the group was to bring people together who opposed the government's handling of the economic crisis, regardless of their political convictions or social position. The Facebook group provided people with similar ideas, who might not otherwise interact, with an accessible space to organize themselves and decide on courses of action towards a fundamental change of political decisions.

Indignant Citizens could be considered a self-referential movement network, which connects a plurality of meanings and orientations (Melucci, 1985), attempting to influence social change through collective action based on individual consumption. *IC* offers, therefore, a particularly fertile setting in which to explore how social media can

facilitate political and social change, as well as to investigate participants' engagement therein. This selected case uses the lens of political consumerism to appreciate how change can be enacted through organizational and exchange practices facilitated by this movement.

Method

This study aims to explore the role of social media in enabling *Indignant Citizens*, the types of exchange that are fashioned by participants of this movement and the drivers and effects of individuals' engagement therein. In so doing we will observe participants' underlying motivations for engaging in *IC*, the dynamics of their engagement and the outcomes of their participation.

Given the study's exploratory and subjective nature, we use a qualitative approach, oriented towards discovery, aiming at a contextual understanding of social behaviour from the consumers' point of view (Flick, 2007). We conducted a case study through eight focus groups. Case studies are the recommended method when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin et al., 1991), as they bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants. They further give us the opportunity to investigate a real-life situation and, thus, strengthen the emerged findings with real-world anchoring (Yin, 1994).

Also important in our study is the creation of settings in which diverse perceptions, judgments and experiences on social media and social change can be heard. Focus groups achieve this because when participants hear about experiences of other members

of the group, they are motivated to expand and refine their own ideas and perceptions on the topic and, as a result, meanings and practices surface that might not have been articulated elsewhere (Bloor *et al*., 2001; Lindlof, 1995). In other words, focus groups provide us with evidence from a range of different voices on the same subject.

Our sampling plan was purposive (Bahl and Milne, 2006), including participants that will best help us in understanding the research question. In this exploratory study we are not attempting to achieve a representative sample that would enable us to make generalized inferences about a whole population, rather we are interested in capturing the users' points of view with rich descriptions of their social world (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In more detail, the sample composition of the groups was made of active online participants in the *Indignant Citizens* online community, as this is the intended audience of the produced message. We used participants of both genders (47% women, 53% men), different social classes, various professions (i.e., doctors, artists, employees in both the public and private sector, housewives) and aged between 18 and 60 (average age 41 years old). This profile is consistent with the demographic profile of participants of *IC*. Each focus group consisted of seven participants in order to reach a variety of perspectives whilst avoiding becoming disorderly or fragmented (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). To recruit participants, we sent emails through the *Indignant Citizens'* Facebook page asking for interviewees for a research project on social change. The focus groups took place in Athens, Greece. At first, participants were asked general questions about their personal backgrounds, interests and life goals; focus was then turned upon their experience with *IC*. Participants were encouraged to talk about their motivations for engaging in *Indignant Citizens*, participation and role in this movement, attitude towards existing political brands, and the significance of social media.

Examples of questions posed include: How did you find out about *Indignant Citizens*? What was your understanding of *Indignant Citizens*? Why did you decide to engage with *Indignant Citizens*? How did you start engaging with *Indignant Citizens*? Could you describe an incident where you felt good/did not feel good about participating in *Indignant Citizens*? The transcripts of the eight focus groups, of an average duration of two hours, were later transcribed and translated from Greek to English. Our coding process followed the main sections of the questions posed to participants on motivations for engaging with *IC*, their participation and activities, role of social media, and importance of political brands. This led to a further analysis of the collected data using the interpretive, thematic analysis technique where, through pattern recognition, we attempted to "construct a representation of meanings as recurring themes producing an interpretation of interpretations" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 496). A larger group of themes was derived independently by the different authors and, subsequently, narrowed down and negotiated until agreement was reached (see Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000; Belk *et al.*, 2003) for the four overarching themes presented hereafter.

Findings

Data analysis yielded four main themes: *Indignant Citizens* - a site for personal and collective expression; towards the creation of an imagined community: empowering togetherness; enabling utopia; and, co-creating new forms of consumption. Together these themes elucidate how *Indignant Citizens*, enabled by social media, offers its participants a site for expression and action, far beyond politics. Participants' accounts within each of these themes are rich with references to individual and collective

projects, which reinforce participants' commitment to the movement and their shared identity, as well as drive social change.

Indignant Citizens: A site for personal and collective expression

All participants expressed a strong distrust towards established institutions, such as political parties, trade unions and mainstream media, which they believe to be purposively hiding information from citizens and largely driven by self-interest. As participants alternate between the use of the pronouns "I" and "we", we can appreciate how their personal grievances combine into a collective rejection of the current authorities ("they"), which they firmly oppose:

> *"I, as so many others, have lost faith in the government and the other political parties. They all lie to us, they do not inform us about what is going on, they take decisions based on information that they keep to themselves, and then ask us to pay the bill"* (Christina).

> *"I and my whole family have been voting for the governing political party our whole lives. I do not trust them anymore, none of them. They only care for their personal wealth, how to remain in power and make more and more money, even now, during the crisis. They don't care about us. All these years they keep lying to us. Enough is enough"* (Anastasios).

Feeling wary of, and alienated from, mainstream institutions participants of *Indignant Citizens* largely turn to one another to discover and exchange information. *IC* offers a

platform for resistance built around values of sharing and trust amongst its members. This is very important for our participants, as illustrated in the following accounts where both Elli and Maria classify their participation in the movement as "sincere", "authentic" or "true". This is in stark contrast to their suspicion of, and anger with, existing political institutions. Significantly, this gives participants an opportunity for self-expression, which, as discussed by Klanderman (2017), constitutes, in itself, an important motivator for engagement in social movements:

"I am able to express myself in a very sincere way when I post my views on our Facebook page and feel that I am having authentic conversations with other members regardless if they agree or not with what I am saying. These kinds of conversations do not happen elsewhere these days" (Elli).

"When given the chance each week to stand up in front of my fellow citizens and share my personal opinions, views, aspirations as well as concerns and fears about anything and everything, I feel being true to myself. I cannot think of any other occasion where this has been possible to date. Most importantly, having a sincere dialogue with the gathered audience both offline and online, even debating issues of common interest with people that have no hidden agendas offers a spiritual challenge" (Maria).

As Maria articulates, an authentic exchange of thoughts gives her an elevated mental experience (a "spiritual challenge"), which may represent an important enough reason to engage. Moreover, and based on the information gathered, *IC* gives its members a

site on which *to act upon* the information shared, which our participants are very eager to do:

> *"We had enough. [...] we decided that it is about time we do something about it. We all felt like that, but since we are not trusting political parties or trade unions any more, we had no way of organizing ourselves. Indignant Citizens' Facebook page solved that"* (Nora).

This is especially relevant because these individuals felt invisible for so long and are keen to show that they can make a difference:

> *"I guess we were feeling so unimportant and being on the margin, as officials never really cared about what ordinary citizens thought and wanted, and as a result wanted to contribute with all our skills and expertise in this effort. We had enough by not being taken seriously. It is an opportunity for us to do something that matters, in a constructive and truly representative way of who we are"* (Sofia).

> *"We had enough [...] The only thing left now is to take responsibility and make things happen ourselves. We have to identify what really matters, how we discover the relevant information and how we use it to make our lives and our society better"* (Lefteris).

Thus, IC furnishes these participants with more than a site for resistance; it is a place for individuals to connect with others with similar grievances, to express themselves

(individually and collectively) and to shape protest. This helps them to be visible, assert their significance, and, importantly for the present study, has the potential to initiate political and social change, as demonstrated by participants' determination in "mak[ing] things better".

Towards the creation of an imagined community: empowering togetherness

Our participants' narratives contain frequent allusions to better ways to envision society. *Indignant Citizens*' online community utilizes a horizontal, decentralized structure of interaction (Bennett, 2009) that is compatible with their vision, and contrasts with the hierarchical centralization of the traditional institutions in which participants have lost faith. Participants take part in political street theatre (Goffman, 1959), as they attempt to organize themselves following the democratic structures and practices as they were envisioned and applied in the *agora* of Ancient Greece. In the *agora* citizens would gather to exchange views and democratically vote when deciding on a course of action, as Konstantinos articulates:

> *"It is so refreshing and liberating the fact that everyone can be heard. There are no leaders or followers. Decisions are taken collectively. Every Friday afternoon, we come together in Constitution Square and have open discussions. Anyone who wants to can come up to the podium and talk to the gathered public for three minutes on whatever issue he/she wants, and at the end we all vote on our next steps of action"* (Konstantinos).

A "collective identity of being leaderless" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 741), reinforces the stance that *IC* is made of "ordinary citizens" who seek to escape elites. This consciousness of collective effects helps to build an arguably naïve, shared sense of imagined community (Halkier, 1994), where everyone works for the greater good of society and of the people around them. Participants' discourses of an alternative and better form of organization speak directly to Bossy's (2014) "utopian discourses" of political consumerism, by both rejecting existing society ("real life") and envisioning the possibility of another, more desirable ("ideal"), one:

> *"The way things are happening and decisions are made throughout our Indignant Citizens' Facebook page is so different from real life. It is how things should have been happening. We managed to organize ourselves in a kind of ideal way, kind of how we would have hoped that society was running. The most impressive thing is that all this happened spontaneously and so very easily"* (Geogia).

Reinforcing the utopian nature of *IC*, our participants are keen to represent it as different from, and better than other, organizations or movements that have dealt with the economic crisis:

> *"We all have a strong desire to protest and express our views in a peaceful and decent way. What is really amazing, and in a way very unique and special, is that we want to actively contribute in this initiative with the most positive possible input. It is an opportunity for us to become active citizens again, by*

showing them that we are capable people who can often do things better than them" (Giannis).

"We have seen how protests were organized by political parties and trade unions for so many years now. We are different from them and want to make this very clear. As a result, every participant uses his expertise and skills, in order to make ours better. We do not want, for example, to damage anything or leave rubbish at the end of our protests. We also want to be able to care for people who might exhibit breathing problems from potential tear gas and chemicals" (Athina).

In particular, by distancing themselves from less peaceful movements, which are often attacked in the media for causing havoc, these participants assert their moral superiority; they are "decent", "mindful" people, who respect others and are serious about working towards better alternatives. Some of these accounts suggest a moral overtone that surpasses the political realms of the movement, and helps to strengthen its "virtuous", collective identity as well as that of its members:

"For so long, we have been viewed as only voters. This is all they cared about, our vote once every four years. Well, we are more than that, much, much more than that. We are educated people, family members, productive in our jobs and try to lead our lives based on certain values" (Stathis).

Enabling utopia

IC empowers its members to imagine and to create the reality that they imagine. Like other digitally-enabled networks, it brings people together who mostly did not know each other previously and allows them to share and reproduce trustful and relevant content in a far-reaching, timely and accessible way (see also Bennett and Segerberg, 2012):

> *"Whenever a protest or relevant event is taking place anywhere within the country, I visit our Facebook page in order to find out how is it going and if many people are attending. Usually such events are not covered by mainstream media, while even when they are covered, they might intentionally report false information for the reasons of the event or its attendance rate. In contrast, on the Facebook page of Indignant Citizens, participants upload pictures and videos on real time and from different points of where the event is taking place. This gives us a clear and true picture of the situation"* (Panos).

> *"Because it is online, I have access to it anytime, anywhere. Every time I log in, there are always new posts, new comments, new inspiring ideas, new food for thought and action. It never stops! Given that we are talking about things that speak to all of us, having the conversation going nonstop makes it a part of my life rather than a pass time that you might engage for a specific and limited time"* (Elli).

This speaks directly to Peretti's (2009) argument that social media are of great importance within political consumerism, since broad, deep information can be controlled by consumers themselves and communicated in real time. As Elli explains

this continuous presence of updated and inspired content that "speaks to [her and others]" turns *IC* into a part of her life. Participants trust the content shared, which is supported by the videos and pictures attached. This trust is vital for community members as it motivates them to exchange information (Jarvenpaa *et al*., 1998; Ridings *et al*, 2002) amongst peers who share their views. Thus, while this social movement is facilitated by technology, participants' engagement is deeply embedded in the collective identity of sharing and confidence developed amongst its individual members.

Within this digitally-enabled social movement, participants are able to use their particular knowledge and expertise to organize themselves effectively, extending Holzer's (2006) view of role mobilization:

> *"I am an economist and having the chance to analyse political decisions and economic policies, while proposing new ways of action with citizens of other backgrounds from for example political science, law, agriculture, engineering who have shared interest in the topics and provide different lenses of thought, is quite unique. I guess if this initiative was not rooted online, this would not have been possible, as time and place is of no issue to us"* (Panos).

For other examples, a student who was familiar with social media created their Facebook page, cameramen recorded material from their protests from different angles and then posted it on Facebook, journalists contacted media providers abroad, academics organized public debates once a week, where anyone was welcome to speak to the audience, musicians performed, doctors created an on-site clinic for emergencies,

cyclists blocked the traffic, students were responsible for cleaning up the streets once the protests were over, priests organized transport for people who could not afford to travel around the country for protests, and so forth. We can, thus, appreciate how the *IC* online presence facilitates the availability and sharing of a vast array of resources (e.g., ideas, knowledge, expertise, infrastructure), which are needed to enact political and social action. As a result, novel forms of exchange and consumption can be developed, as we shall further explore below.

Co-creating new forms of consumption

Indignant Citizens is not only a site for political expression and role mobilization. Anchored in a shared political agenda and in keeping with the community spirit of *IC*, participants invest in their own projects, as illustrated by Anna's account, below. This intersection of private action and social movement participation (Haenfler et al., 2012) can be inherently gratifying, whilst contributing both to participants' personal affirmation, and to the collective identity of *IC*.

> *"I am a housewife and mother of three who tends to spend my days following a strict routine. Lately, I operate an open kitchen whenever there are protests or open discussions, so people can have a home meal to eat with no charge. Through this initiative, I enjoy immensely being able to directly take care of others by doing something both personal and political. What is truly amazing is the fact that I started having repeated customers with whom we often chat. This way, I get to know things about them and their lives. I have to admit that I also feel very proud when they compliment me on my food or even ask for the*

recipes. Based on this interest, I started posting the menu and recipes on the website and receive a lot of positive feedback. My husband sometimes asks me how I manage with the extra weight on my shoulders, and if I am sure I can handle it. The truth is that instead of feeling more tired, I feel I have more energy than before. It fills me with pleasure being part of something bigger than myself, in which I can have an active role and being recognized for it" (Anna).

Thus, Anna's engagement in *IC* provides her with more than political action, it offers her recognition, valued social links and the satisfaction of belonging to "something bigger". Like Anna, many other participants feel empowered by the movement's collective spirit and use this platform to find shared solutions to their consumption needs:

"… We will create the alternative ourselves. We will turn to one another for solutions. This way we will be able to find things that we need and want, as we need them, without having to depend on any of them. I am an unemployed hairdresser. This is what I know and can offer. I therefore go online to Time Exchange and try to find an offered service with which I could exchange an hour of my service. Last week for example, I was able to exchange an hour of hairdressing with a teacher in mathematics who taught my younger son for an hour. Last month I exchanged an hour with a banker who consulted me into how to better deal with my outstanding loans. And that is only one site, there are other online sites that were created by ordinary people and do all sorts of things. You can, for example exchange used clothes, food, medicine, housing if you have to relocate…" (Eleftheria).

As Eleftheria articulates, participants understand that they can use the logic of the market towards their ends (Kozinets 2002, Penaloza & Price 1993) by building effective market exchanges, in order to express resistance and present themselves with much needed products and services. Participants take a variety of roles, including that of producer, distributor, marketer and user of products (Pitt et al., 2006). This affords the creation of novel and unorthodox consumption experiences, which are truly valued and heartening:

"Not only I can find very useful things to exchange for, I really enjoy the interaction. Knowing that someone else is offering something that they care for inspires a different attitude. It makes me more appreciative towards the offering" (George).

"*Yes, you are so right. It is a very different consumption experience. It makes you value things more. You also value the providers more because they are people like you who care about what they are doing, have a purpose and this way the transaction becomes more of an interaction*" (Lefteris).

"*I also value the fact that this helps you distinguish between things that you need versus those that just add clutter to your life. Enough with useless purchases, clutter and vain consumption. It gives you the space to concentrate on things that matter and strengthen community relationships, it is very liberating*" (Dimitris).

Such forms of exchange do not, however, obey the dictates of the market, rather they are rooted in a communal spirit of sharing. Significantly, they inspire participants into meaningful beliefs and lifestyles, where relationships are valued over consumerism and material possessions:

> *"If offers you a new perspective on life, too. It is not all about money and commercialisation. Products or services can be very easily and successfully initiated by people who come together and put forward what they can offer, rather than sell, and what could be of use to them in return, rather than just profit them. This way, the offerings are things or services that someone truly needs. Enough with consuming just for the pure pleasure of consumption. Secondly, you know it is not about taking advantage of others, but about being useful and contributing in improving someone's life. There is no money exchange, no profit made. Then people have the chance of also improving themselves through the experience they gain by repeatedly offering something, and the sincere feedback they are most likely to receive. All is about exchanging value. Most importantly, it has a very warm and comforting feeling as well, and that cannot be found in a traditional commercial exchange"* (Eleni).

This further strengthens and extends the shared identity of *IC* as resistant to conventional institutions and dominant agendas, and interested in simpler lifestyles.

Discussion

Indignant Citizens' core commitment evolves from its members' dissatisfaction with existing political organizations, and the ways in which they address the current economic crisis. Wary of conventional institutions and organizational powers, which they see as incapable of challenging austerity (and indeed perceive to be a part of the problem), our participants vividly express their will to enact change ("we need to do something about it", "enough is enough", "time for action"). However, as we have seen, participants' explicit motivation to influence the political environment they are in is accompanied by a, perhaps less apparent, will to have their voices heard or, as Klandermans (2017, p. 222) would say, to engage in "expressive action". Thus, their feelings of anger, disbelief and frustration are important in that they represent powerful drivers for engagement in the movement; our participants had "had enough" of austerity, but also of being ignored and lied to. In this sense, their participation in *IC* can be viewed as an effort for political change as much as an "attempt to gain dignity in their lives through struggle and moral expression" (Klandermans, 2017, p. 223).

To participate in the movement, participants turn to each other, the ensuing communal spirit becoming the cornerstone of *IC*. Participants find in *IC* a site for co-creating resistance to political and economic power structures, as well as for conceiving solutions to their consumption needs. In so doing, they can adopt simpler lifestyles that also express resistance to the market (Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Kozinets, 2002). Thus, through sharing of information, ideals, values, goods and services, *IC* expands its boundaries from being a social movement with a fundamental (anti)political drive to further embrace a lifestyle dimension in perfect harmony with the nature of the

movement. This illuminates the important, yet neglected, area of intersection of social and lifestyle movements (Haenfler et al., 2012), shedding light upon the interplay between the public and private dimensions of this movement. Apart from any effect upon the political environment in which they live, participants obtain material and spiritual gratification from their engagement. This further strengths their commitment towards the movement in a virtuous cycle that both reinforces the shared identity of *IC* and that of its members. Our participants' accounts about *IC* are, in themselves, a phenomenon of interest in that they are a manifestation of their personal and shared identity. They are proud of *IC*, which embodies the values of its individual members; they see themselves as decent, able, peaceful, authentic, ordinary people disaffected with political and powerful structures who hope to, together, construct a new society.

This study also advances theoretical understanding of the roles that the consumption of social media services plays in social movements and of the unconventional exchange relations that emerge within the network of such movements. It is well known that social media enables personal engagement and offers individuals a platform to come together (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) and run a social movement, away from conventional organizations (Earl et al., 2017). Furthermore, as we have seen, because it is always accessible with new and relevant content, it helps to build a collective spirit amongst its members, becoming a part of their lives. As such, it constitutes a fundamental part of the organizational structure of these self-referential movements (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012), around which individuals develop trust.

Importantly, as we have seen in our case, social media, and associated communication technologies, make it possible for participants to build upon their different professional

and personal roles and, thus, utilize participants' knowledge and skills in the most efficient way. We, therefore, encounter the notion of prosumers (Pitt et al., 2006), initiated by social media, but also applied in an offline context. Through social media, individuals can not only participate in this online community, but also encourage each other to initiate and participate in further, related activities. They are able to empower themselves by co-creating new choices that provide them with "genuine" value, while excluding formal organization and commercial agendas. This, in turn, effects change in social behaviour and, as a result, new indicators of success such as value creation, personal feedback, transparency and authenticity are brought forward to substitute for the existing one of profit.

Final Considerations

Our study advances knowledge into how individuals' use of social media changes marketing communication and alters consumer behaviour by reassigning roles, initiating specific actions towards the creation of a utopia and employing desired practices for the co-creation of useful offerings. Importantly, this manuscript offers fresh insights into the underexplored intersections of private action and moment participation (Haenfler et al, 2012) where the strength of *Indignant Citizens* rests. Indeed, while social media and digital technologies enable *Indignant Citizens*, this study shows that it is the shared identity developed amongst its members, built around myriad personal and common ideals and projects that drives engagement. In *IC*, participants find a site in which to voice and enact their emotions and resistance, which makes them feel that they can make a difference. However, they also find a place for cohesion; inspired and empowered by others with similar concerns, and based on shared

ideals and trust, participants find multiple ways to express disaffection, pool resources together and promote social change that surpass the political aims of the movement. *Indignant Citizens* affords them an opportunity to act based not only on their political roles, but also on their professional, consumer and personal roles, crossing boundaries between political, economic, cultural and private life (Micheletti, 2003). Hence, consumers dissatisfied with current political brands, become the producers of much needed offerings through self-organization and exchange networks. These can be extremely gratifying, while both legitimizing the shared identity of the movement and the commitment of its participants.

Our findings must be understood in the context of our studies' methodological trade-offs and limitations. The focus of this study was on conceptualization and on achieving understanding rather than generalization, as existing knowledge in this area remains limited. In particular, our study investigated cognitive processes and motivational drivers of *IC* participants and, thus, a case study via focus group was deemed an appropriate approach. Future studies, analysing social media content, would further illuminate participants' social media strategies and the nature and characteristics of communication messages. Additional research that seeks to determine the relationship between social media and the success or failure of political consumerism would be particularly useful in better understanding the constructive dialogue that is taking place between consumers and producers and how co-created solutions could be best developed and applied in different settings.

This study demonstrates the power of social media as a platform not only for spreading messages and organizing protest but also for enabling new, potentially transformative

modes of exchange and sharing. As participants grow in strength and voice, they are drawn to much more active roles than they would have been in the mass media era (Bennett and Segerberg, 2017). Significantly, our participants are capable of fashioning creative solutions to many of their grievances that challenge organizational and market structures, and affect society much beyond politics.

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