

# The anti-consumption movement: Researchers examine resistance to global brands

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What motivates people to rebel against global brands—or consumption in general? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* examines the connection between nationalism and the anti-consumption movement in India.

Authors Rohit Varman (Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta) and Russell W. Belk (York University, Toronto) examined a movement against Coca-Cola based in the village of Mehdiganj in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. They found that the movement employs a version of the nationalist ideology of swadeshi, an ideology that has been associated with Gandhi and the overthrow of British colonialism.

"According to swadeshi, indigenous goods should be preferred by consumers even if they are more expensive and inferior in quality," write the authors. "The contemporary processes of globalization have again unleashed a resurgence of opposition, this time involving neo-nationalism. As a result, the ideology of swadeshi continues to shape the ongoing debate about the concept of nationhood in India."

The researchers examined the practices of organizations involved in the struggle against Coca Cola. They conducted interviews with activists, villagers, and Coca Cola workers and managers. They observed protest activities and analyzed written material on the movement.

In the course of their research, the authors found that the concept of swadeshi has morphed from its origins. "Whereas Gandhi's villain was colonialist Britain symbolized by its machine production, postcolonial India faces the invasion of Western branded goods," the authors write. "The anti-consumption movement against Coca Cola in Mehdiganj is shaped by this discourse against globalization." The authors found that the anti-consumption movement invokes imagery of foreign invaders, poisoned farmland, and exploited workers.

"We offer an understanding of how prominent global brands run the risk of becoming anti-national icons of oppression," write the authors. "These results have implications for multinational corporations, policy makers, and civil society groups."

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