An Exploratory Investigation of Aberrant Consumer Behavior in Libya: a Socio-Cultural Approach

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Biographies

Amal Abdelhadi is currently employed as a marketing lecturer in Benghazi University and obtained her PhD in Marketing at Nottingham Business School. Her PhD project focused on Aberrant Consumer Behaviour in Libya and the Factors Affecting its Adoption. Her primary research interests concern consumer ethics across cultures. Recently, she has focused on building a model of Aberrant Consumer Behaviour across cultures by researching this behaviour in Muslim countries (Libya and Saudi Arabia) and Western/ non Islamic countries (UK and USA). Amal has contributed by presenting research papers at several marketing conferences in different countries: UK, USA, Malaysia, Libya.

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Abstract

Studies concerning aberrant consumer behaviour (ACB) are dominated by research conducted in the West. By examining the impact social and cultural factors have on the management and understanding of ACB in Libya, a Muslim country, this paper extends knowledge by exploring this issue in a different setting. Materials were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 26 sellers in Libya and ACB was explored in three different contexts: grocery stores, computer stores and hotels. The study finds that the sellers use alternative marketplace behaviours to manage ACB to that described in the literature, namely informal, community based approaches which reflect accepted societal and cultural norms. Furthermore, the study finds that not all activities reported to be ACB in the literature are perceived to be misbehaviour by the Libyan sellers.

Summary statement of contribution

This study aims to develop theory relating to the impact social and cultural factors have on ACB in alternative settings to that reported in the literature. By exploring the actual experiences of Libyan customer-facing marketers, the paper finds that the social and cultural setting, derived from the Muslim context, influences their approach to managing and understanding ACB and that informal solutions at a local, community level are more acceptable than relying on formal, official means like those described in the literature. ACB is therefore only understood in its societal context.

Keywords: Muslim, Libya, Consumer Misbehaviour, qualitative

Introduction

Aberrant consumer behaviour (ACB) can be defined as "*behavior in exchange settings which violates the generally accepted norms of conduct in such situations and which is therefore held in disrepute by marketers and by most consumers*" (Fullerton and Punj, 1993, p.570). Although most aberrant consumer behaviour concerns sporadic pilfering by individuals, the aggregate impact this behaviour has on society is significant (Centre for Retail Research, 2011). For sellers such behaviour not only leads to monetary loss associated with stolen merchandise but also impacts in terms of resources spent on personnel and equipment designed to detect and prevent pilfering (Tonglet and Bamfield, 1997). Global costs of crime-plus-loss-prevention in retail have been estimated at US$128 billion in 2011 (Centre for Retail Research, 2011). A considerable practitioner literature provides pragmatic guidance for retailers on various aspects concerning the management of ACB (British Retail Consortium, 2013), yet there has been little conceptual development in this area, and only limited exploration of ACB from a socio-cultural perspective particularly beyond Western societies. This paper seeks to address some of those shortcomings by exploring in depth Libyan marketers' responses to ACB and the extent to which these responses are influenced by the social and cultural context.

Literature Review

The most widely studied form of ACB is consumer theft, when the consumer seeks to avoid paying for goods at all, or attempts to pay a reduced amount (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). Although shoplifting, when theft takes place from the selling floor while a store is open for business (Francis, 1979), is one of the most prevalent, costly and consequently most widely studied form of ACB, more recently consumer theft has encompassed new forms of deviant behaviour such as software piracy or 'softlifting' (Thong and Yap, 1998). This refers to unauthorised copying of software, purchasing unauthorised copies and loading several machines with software licensed for use with one machine only (Prasad and Mahajan, 2003). Consumer theft can also occur in non-retail settings such as hotels

where towels and other items might be stolen by guests (Fukukawa, 2002). Other examples of aberrant consumer behaviour include fraud, altering price labels in-store, time-wasting and purchasing counterfeit products (Fukukawa, 2002; Daunt and Harris, 2012). Studying ACB across such different manifestations will contribute to a more rounded understanding of this broad and complex phenomenon.

Globalization implies that understanding consumers' ethical values across different cultures is important for international businesses, not least for managing ACB (Saeed et al., 2001; Ford et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2009). Cross-cultural studies have shown that consumers' predispositions towards, and engagement in, ACB differ across societies (Rawwas, 2001; Al-Khatib et al., 2005); moreover those differences reflect cultural, economic, religious, legal and social contexts (Al-Khatib et al., 1997; Rawwas et al., 1998; Rawwas, 2001; Fisher et al., 2003). Yet most studies exploring ACB have been conducted in the UK (Tonglet and Bamfield, 1997; Gill et al., 2002; Harris and Reynolds, 2004) and USA (Krasnovsky and Lane, 1998; Al-Rafee and Cronan, 2006; Goles et al., 2008) and therefore reflect the fact that "*A long tradition in consumption studies has developed in Western, economically developed, societies by scholars whose backgrounds are rooted in the Western tradition of thought*" (Jafari et al., 2012, p. 3). Few studies have considered ACB from a socio-cultural perspective, particularly in non-Western contexts. Muslim societies in particular represent an under-researched context, despite Muslims comprising a majority in 49 countries and 23% of the world's population in 2010 (DeSilver, 2013).

Studies which consider ACB in Muslim societies have found attitudes towards consumer misbehaviour differ across countries. Al-Khatib et al. (2005), for example, found that despite common social, cultural, religious and economic environments in Arabian Gulf countries, differences existed in relation to ethical beliefs and orientations. This supports the work of Alajmi et al. (2011), who found that, contrary to Hofstede's (2005) claim of homogeneity in Arab cultures (Itim International, 2009), more differences than

4

similarities exist between, for example, Kuwait and Egypt, in terms of power distance and uncertainty avoidance which could influence attitudes towards societal norms and ethical behaviour. Unsurprisingly, most of the few studies to explore ACB in Muslim countries call for further research (e.g. Rawwas, 2001; Al-Khatib et al., 2005; Dabil, 2009). This, combined with the negative impacts ACB has on business and society and a lack of conceptual development concerning managing and preventing ACB, prompted the research reported here. The focus is on marketers' perceptions, for while definitions such as that of Fullerton and Punj (1993), cited in the introduction, assume the existence of accepted ethical norms across a society, in reality it is the perceptions of customer-facing marketers that define which behaviours are tolerated or not.

The setting for this study is Libya, a Muslim country. That religious context provides a framework that shapes the morals and behaviour of both individuals and society. For example, all types of theft are forbidden according to Islamic law (Saeed et al., 2001). Approximately 97% of Libyans are Sunni Muslim (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2013) and Islam plays a vital role in Libyan community life and inter-personal relationships (Ahmed, 2004). Religious teachings and laws are not only applied to economic and political life but increasingly to social life (Marinov, 2007). Libya is a particularly interesting research setting. Firstly, the Libyan market is developing yet relatively unknown to multi-nationals due to limited contact with global markets under international sanctions which were only recently lifted (Jodie and Gorrill, 2007). Secondly, partly because of those sanctions, there are no retailing or hotel chains and little competition within Libya. This reflects the view that under the Gaddafi regime the aim was to *"…create a centrally-planned economy, making business a 'dirty word' "* (Tantoush, 2013: presentation). Small, independent hotels and retailers offering similar products and services and tending to sell primarily to localised markets dominate the economy. Owner-managers are therefore autonomously responsible for determining how their businesses operate, including how ACB is managed. Thirdly, shortages of items can compel consumers to use counterfeited products, particularly software programs. The

Libyan software piracy rate was reported to be 88% in 2010, one of the highest rates in the world, despite Libya having copyright laws since 1968 (Business Software Alliance, 2011)

To summarise, the overall purpose of this study is to develop theoretical knowledge concerning the impact social and cultural factors can have on aberrant consumer behaviour. More specifically the research aims are:

1. To understand how social and cultural factors influence the management of ACB in a Muslim society, given the lack of knowledge concerning how this occurs.

2. To capture and interpret the actual experiences of owner-managers confronted with ACB in Libya and their managerial responses to it.

3. To demonstrate the impacts of social and cultural factors on marketplace (mis)behaviours in Libya.

The next section of the paper explains the research design employed and that is followed by findings before the final section of discussion and conclusions.

Research Design

Since there is a lack of conceptual development which considers how social and cultural factors influence the management of ACB in alternative contexts, the study adopted an exploratory approach to data collection and analysis. A qualitative approach to data collection was deemed the most appropriate because it typically involves an "*…interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world*" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.3) with an emphasis on respondents' interpretations and a consideration of the real-life context (Bryman, 1989). Materials were collected through 26 face-to-face semi-structured interviews as this meant that the research issue could be investigated in detail, allowing the researchers to explore themes in an area which has received limited theoretical development up until this point. All interviews were conducted in Arabic and the open-

ended questions explored the following themes: the forms of aberrant consumer behaviour participants had experienced; the characteristics of the offenders; participants' attitudes towards aberrant consumer behaviour; how interviewees managed aberrant consumer behaviour; and their reasons for managing it in a particular way. The interviews were not recorded as this is unacceptable practice in Libya but instead detailed hand-written notes were made in Arabic during and after each interview. These notes were translated into English and then 'back-translated' into Arabic to check the accuracy. Each interview was conducted by the Libyan member of the research team in Arabic, lasted for approximately 60 minutes and was conducted *in situ*, that is where the seller worked.

Interviews were conducted with sellers in Benghazi, the second largest city in Libya and a major economic centre which the research team were familiar with. Sellers were selected from three different sectors: grocery stores, computer stores and hotels. These sectors were selected because they serve a wide demographic range of people and they are likely to be the source of the main forms of ACB reported in the literature (shoplifting, software piracy and pilfering from hotels). In-depth interviews also enabled the researchers to capture the *actual* experiences of those managing aberrant consumers in their own words since existing knowledge has a tendency to focus upon people's opinions towards hypothetical consumer misbehaviour (see, for example, Callen and Ownbey, 2003).

'Sellers' in this study were identified as the person in each grocery store, computer store or hotel that was the most qualified to provide the required information and were normally in a position of authority. Purposive and snowball sampling were therefore used to identify participants (Burns and Burns, 2008). Whilst it is recognised that these sampling methods have limitations, it was important given the study's cultural context that trust between the participant and the Libyan researcher was established prior to the interview taking place. In Libya it is unusual for data to be collected from the general

7

public and these activities are often associated with the government and viewed with suspicion. Therefore establishing a relationship with the participants and reassuring them about the purposes of the study prior to interview was essential. After 26 interviews (ten in grocery stores, ten in computer stores, and six in hotels) no new themes were generated and with the data saturated, no more interviews were conducted (Bloor and Wood, 2006). All data collection took place in 2010, prior to the conflict in Libya experienced in 2011.

Table 1 outlines the participants' demographic and employer/business characteristics. It should be noted that whilst Arab countries have witnessed a substantial increase in women's share of economic activity (UNDP, 2005), the occupation of some jobs such as seller/hotel employee is still dominated by males in Libya. The sample of interviewees therefore only included one female. The mean of the sample's length of experience in their jobs was approximately 9.4 years, which suggested that they should have a sound level of knowledge and experience of ACB.

Table 1: Demographic and Employer/Business Participants' Information

No	Gender	Line of business	Job title	period of experience in this job
1	Male	small grocery shop	sales person	6 years
2	Male	small grocery shop	shop owner	18 years
3	Male	small grocery shop	shop owner	20 years
4	Male	medium grocery store	shop owner	22 years
5	Male	medium grocery store	shop owner	20 years
6	Male	medium grocery store	shop owner	10 years
7	Male	medium grocery store	store manager	8 years
8	Male	supermarket	supermarket manager	9 years
9	Male	supermarket	floor manager	4 years
10	Male	supermarket	management team member	8 years
11	Male	small computer store	technician and sales person	5 years
12	Male	small computer store	sales person	3 years
13	Male	small computer store	technician and sales person	3 years
14	Male	small computer store	store owner	1½year
15	male	small computer store	technician and sales	7 years

			person	
16	Male	small computer store	store owner	4 years
17	Male	medium computer store	sales manager	4 years
18	Male	medium computer store	store owner	6 years
19	Male	medium computer store	technician and sales person	10 years
20	Male	medium computer store	accountant	10 years
21	Male	public- 3 stars hotel	rooms division manager	25 years
22	Male	public- 4 stars hotel	hospitality unit manager	17 years
23	Male	private - 4 stars hotel	reception manager	10 years
24	female	private - 4 stars hotel	reception manager	6 years
25	Male	private - 4 stars hotel	Floor manager	2 years
26	Male	public- 5 stars hotel	rooms manager	7 years

Whilst there is little consensus as to how qualitative materials should be analysed, the interview data were analysed using a commonly accepted three stage interlinked process of data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/ verification (Huberman and Miles, 1998). The data were reduced using a process of coding, clustering and thematic analysis which enabled the researchers to then draw meaning from the data. The codes were initially derived from the general themes highlighted in the practitioner literature and the research aim. It is recognised that the 'literature' was practitioner commentary and not theory based. However, by using the themes in the practitioner literature as a way of organising the interview materials, the researchers were able to start the initial stages of analysis. The codes were then refined and developed according to the themes which emerged from the interview materials. This method of coding has been described as "*…partway between a priori and inductive approaches…*" in that it creates "*…a general accounting scheme for codes that is not content specific, but points to the general domains in which codes can be developed inductively*" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.61). The findings were triangulated as a result of the three members of the research team working on the data analysis both individually and as a group (Jack and Raturi, 2006).

Findings

9

Two key themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative materials and concern, firstly, how ACB was perceived, including references to instances of misbehaviour, and secondly how this was managed by the Libyan sellers. It is important to note that these themes are interrelated since the sellers' perceptions of ACB had a direct impact on how that behaviour was managed. For each of these two broad themes, a number of sub-themes were also identified and are explored in this section.

Perceptions and Instances of Aberrant Consumer Behaviour

The sellers reported a number of activities which they considered to be consumer misbehaviour, already highlighted in the literature (Huefner and Hunt, 2000; Fukukawa, 2002). These included fraud, vandalism, aggressive behaviour towards staff or other guests/ customers and queue jumping. However, as anticipated, the most prevalent form of ACB as defined by the literature was consumer theft. This was in the form of shoplifting from the grocery retailers, pilfering from hotels and software piracy.

Shoplifting

There was a consensus amongst grocery owners/managers that shoplifting represented consumer misbehaviour and this normally occurred at peak times when the grocery retailers were busy. Whilst the most common form concerned adult customers stealing items directly from the store, other tactics were employed. Children, for example, were used to steal items as one participant reported:

> "*Some parents use their children. They give them items and put them in a bag and let the child go out of the shop. If I notice and tell the parents, the parents excuse the children by saying 'they are just children'. I'm sure it doesn't happen by mistake.*"

Other sellers reported that consumers changed the product packaging so as to reduce the cost of an item. Since products were priced using individual stickers and not scanned

10

at the cash till, this was an opportunity for customers to shoplift. One seller explained how a customer had tried to swap the packaging of an electrical item:

> *"My customers have tried to take the Philips lamp* (worth US$ 1.20) *out of its packaging and put it in a Chinese lamp box* (worth US$ 0.20) *so that they can pay the lowest price."*

The lack of barcoding and scanning in stores meant that customers could also take advantage of the fact that receipts were either not provided or did not itemise the purchased goods. Customers could therefore claim that they had paid for goods when they had not, as one grocery owner explained:

> *"One of my regular customers used to add their items up and tell me the amount. When I checked it, it was always right. After doing this several times they gained my trust. But then I noticed that the customer started to deliberately reduce the amount by LYD 5-10* (equivalent to US$ 4-8)*."*

Hotel Pilfering

In comparison to shoplifting, participants from hotels did not always perceive stealing from their premises as aberrant consumer behaviour. Instead the misbehaviour was tolerated and in many cases regarded as excusable behaviour. Until recently Libyans did not use hotels and instead stayed with relatives and other families when travelling. The economic downturn in the 1980s, however, forced many Libyans to downsize and move to smaller houses, meaning that guests could no longer be accommodated. Staying in hotels was therefore a new experience for many Libyans. Consequently, the hoteliers reported that guests could not be penalised for stealing as they did not understand the 'rules' of staying in their hotel, assuming, for example, that as they had paid for a room they were entitled to some of the contents of that room. Indeed, some hoteliers reported

that guests stole items with the hotel's logo so that they could be put on display as a souvenir to commemorate their stay. One seller explained why guests could not be blamed for this behaviour:

"The guests like to keep souvenirs from the hotel, so they might take a towel as a souvenir especially as our hotel does not sell any souvenirs."

As towels could be used as a souvenir, these items were reported to be stolen the most, a finding which reflects other studies of consumer theft, particularly in the West (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). Nevertheless, the participants also reported that larger items were pilfered, as illustrated in the following quote:

"When one guest came to our hotel we noticed that he had a medium-sized rollercase which seemed empty. When he checked out the rollercase was full. We stopped him and checked the rollercase and the room TV was found in it."

Software Piracy

Whilst shoplifting was regarded as unacceptable consumer behaviour and in most cases, stealing from hotels as excusable behaviour by the sellers, software piracy was seen as acceptable behaviour by the participants. In particular, copying software for customers and encouraging customers to copy software for their friends or relatives was commonplace, with the latter in many cases being actively encouraged by the computer store owner/manager, as illustrated in the following quote:

"Two customers came in together. They looked like friends and they ordered two copies of the same software. I told them to buy two different types of software

instead. They can then exchange them after they've installed them on their computer."

Copying software was not perceived as breaking the law by the participants and many sellers were unaware that legislation existed which made software piracy illegal. This meant that nearly all the software available in the stores was copied. In fact, retailers were against the enforcement of anti-software legislation because they believed this would have a negative impact on consumers and retailers, pushing up prices and reducing demand for computers and software. As one participant explained,

"Computers are imported without the software so we download copied software on to them before selling them on. If we do this it can reduce the price. If we don't do this only a few customers will buy the computer."

The computer store sellers believed that once a customer had purchased software, they were entitled to do whatever they wanted to do with it. The behaviour was also justified by the sellers because of the lack of original software in Libya. The following quote illustrates how the blame for this behaviour was placed with the software companies,

"The software companies are responsible for the widespread nature of this behaviour in Libya. They don't have branches here. They should know that we need software in Libya but they don't think about us. So what can we do? Even if our business causes a loss for these companies, it's not our fault. They force us to do it because they ignore us!"

Managing Aberrant Consumer Behaviour

Respected Societal Groups

Sellers were reluctant to reprimand certain groups found to be engaging in aberrant consumer behaviour for fear of negative repercussions towards their businesses. Women, older people and those with prestigious jobs who engaged in misbehaviour were rarely challenged by the sellers since these people are respected in Libyan society and to accuse them of, for example, theft could lead to the business being boycotted by the local community. One seller commented on the difficulties of accusing individuals with well-respected jobs,

> *"It is difficult for us to stop someone from the University when they behave unacceptably."*

Furthermore, because of their position in society, these various groups of individuals were not monitored by the sellers thus providing an opportunity for them to engage in aberrant behaviour as one store owner explained,

> *"A lady of around 45-50 always comes into the store. She has good relations with the staff. The staff respect her and trust her and so they don't watch her but by chance one of the staff saw her and she was shoplifting."*

Approaching female perpetrators was particularly problematic for male sellers as Islamic teachings state that it is forbidden for men to look at women. If the man was to challenge a female there was also the danger that they could be falsely accused of molesting the woman thus damaging the local reputation of the business and seller. A store owner explained the difficulties associated with dealing with female shoplifters, even when escorted by a male companion,

> *"I noticed a couple whose manner in the shop made me suspicious. I asked one of the assistants to watch them. When the male shopper noticed this he complained*

angrily and said 'Your employee is being very rude and that's unacceptable because he's looking at my wife'".

Another participant also explained the hazards of approaching female perpetrators,

"A young woman had hidden a bottle of shampoo in her handbag which was noted by one of the staff. He asked her to open her bag to check but she hit him with the bag. She was doing this to try and create the impression of being molested."

Religious Teachings

Islamic teachings were also used by the sellers to deter shoplifters. Muslims are encouraged to remind one another about the importance of the 'allowed' behaviours (Halal) and 'forbidden' behaviours. Since theft is a forbidden behaviour in a Muslim society, some sellers had placed framed verses of the Qur'an on the wall in the store entrance to act as a deterrent to potential shoplifters.

The Social Network and Shaming

In terms of managing those who engaged in misbehaviour, a number of approaches were adopted by the sellers. These approaches, however, were not written down or formalised in any way. Instead the management of each instance of consumer misbehaviour was judged on a case-by-case basis by the seller and was heavily influenced by the social and cultural norms of Libyan society. Unlike many Western sellers, Libyan sellers were reluctant to use official means to reprimand and monitor the perpetrators. Indeed awareness of software piracy laws, for example, was almost negligible amongst the participants and enforcement of the law in Libyan society rare. This was evident in one participant's response to an interview question asking about copying software. They were unsure of the relevance of the question as they did not regard software piracy as illegal or unethical and so asked the researcher,

"Why do you ask about this behaviour? Do you think it is forbidden?"

In stores, other formal measures such as electronic devices like CCTV were not favoured since they could lead to customers boycotting the business and the seller's social network being damaged. One participant's comments highlighted how the maintenance of his personal relationships took priority even to the detriment of his business when considering store security,

> *"I installed cameras in my store. However, I was shocked to see some of my friends and relatives stealing from the shop. I couldn't confront them and risk my relationships with them. I don't want to damage my relationships so I stopped using CCTV. I prefer to lose some money than lose a relationship."*

The police were rarely called upon by the sellers for help because the police's approach typically was to encourage the seller to resolve the issue through their social network and the family and friends of the perpetrator who would then be responsible for punishing the individual. This was evident in comments made by one participant,

> *"We do not ask for help from the police. We've tried that before and they always refuse to come. They always say, 'you know if we arrest the offender his family will take him out of the gaol. You should go to his family directly and solve the problem with them'."*

Indeed, sellers preferred to use their social network to punish those engaging in misbehaviour rather than reprimanding the individual themselves because this was more effective and presented less of a risk to the reputation of the owner/manager. Family and friends of the perpetrator were likely to resolve the issue successfully and quickly, normally through a process of 'shaming' because in Libyan society, notions of shame and honour are highly important and the disreputable actions of an individual not only

dishonour that person but also their entire family unit. Further evidence of sellers using family and friends to punish the perpetrator was present in the hotels. Rather than confront the individual directly, hoteliers would check the telephone numbers called by the guest after they had left and call these people directly to resolve instances of misbehaviour. In most cases the friends or relatives of the guest would be willing to help settle the issue so as preserve the honour of the family.

In only a few instances did the sellers directly punish the perpetrator as one participant explained,

> "*We find the best deterrent is to shame the shoplifter in front of other customers. The shoplifter won't come back and we frighten off any other likely shoplifter.*"

Physical Punishment

In addition to shaming, other sellers occasionally used physical force to punish perpetrators notably when they were young males. Compared to other groups in Libyan society such as women and the elderly, punishing young men in this way was acceptable practice. It should be noted though that whilst direct punishment could be effective in some instances, it was only used on rare occasions.

Discussion & Conclusion

This study sought to explore how aberrant consumer behaviour is managed and understood from a socio-cultural perspective, particularly from a different context to the Western studies which currently dominate the literature. It has not been the intention however, to present the Libyan context as non-Western and therefore as a polar opposite to the West but instead to present the West and non-West as terms which "*…acknowledge a diversity of historical, sociocultural, economic, ideological and political factors*" (Jafari et al, 2012, p.5) and to explore how these factors have led to differences and similarities in the management of ACB in Libya to that reported in the literature. The

very fact that the literature is dominated by studies from developed, Western economies suggests that work is needed to broaden this viewpoint.

The study has explored the experiences of Libyan sellers and the extent to which the social and cultural setting influences their understanding of ACB and their approach to managing it. The study finds that ACB is not always perceived or managed in the same way as it is reported in the literature and that the socio-cultural context is an important factor influencing this. The research therefore reinforces the view that ethical behaviour is culturally bound (Rawwas, 2001) and that the consumer misbehaviour literature, dominated by studies from the US and UK, only has limited application in alternative settings. As Mitchell et al. (2009, p.408) report,

> *"...marketing transactions....require a common understanding about what is, and what is not, appropriate in the exchange context. In international environments, such understanding can often be limited and even when some understanding is present, it can differ markedly between cultures."*

Whilst this study indicates that consumer theft is one of the main forms of aberrant consumer behaviour and thus shares similarities to existing studies (Harris and Reynolds, 2004), in contrast to the literature, not all of these activities were treated as misbehaviour by the Libyan sellers, reinforcing the influence of the socio-cultural context on interpretations of ACB. Instead a 'continuum' of ACB emerged which had a direct impact on how this behaviour was managed. At one end of the continuum, shoplifting was regarded as consumer theft by the sellers and occurred in a number of different forms, from stealing products directly from the shop floor through to altering the price of items. These activities were seen as something that should be prevented and in most instances behaviour which should be punished. This view would appear to support the beliefs of sellers in the West (British Retail Consortium, 2013).

Next, stealing property from hotels such as towels and 'souvenir' items, whilst recognised as consumer misbehaviour, was perceived by the Libyan sellers as an excusable activity and perpetrators were only punished in a limited number of cases, normally when larger more expensive items were stolen. On the whole, proprietors tolerated small scale pilfering because they felt that guests were unaware of the 'rules' of staying, particularly that payment for the room did not entitle the guest to the hotel's property even though staff did encourage customers to treat the hotel like their home. In terms of the continuum, whilst the hoteliers recognised that all theft was misbehaviour, the findings suggest that there were two aspects to pilfering from hotels: tolerated stealing of less valuable items and the unacceptable practice of stealing valuable hotel property. This distinction of hotel theft contrasts with views of other hoteliers in the literature, typically Western, who while encouraging guests to feel comfortable in their hotels, generally regard theft of hotel assets as consumer misbehaviour which should be prevented and punished through a number of policies and formal practices (Gill et al., 2002).

At the other end of the continuum was software piracy which was not perceived as unethical or illegal behaviour by the Libyan sellers and was in fact carried out by the sellers themselves and encouraged amongst their customers. The perception amongst sellers was that once consumers purchased the software, the software became his or hers, so he or she then had the right to copy it. By actively encouraging customers to engage in this behaviour, sellers also saw this as a way of helping their customers by saving them money – an activity that could be regarded as value co-creation (Gronroos, 2011). This approach to software piracy is in stark contrast to the views of those selling and distributing software in the West where the protection of intellectual property rights is of paramount importance hence the existence of numerous laws, policies and practices to help achieve this (Husted, 2000). The very fact that the software is produced by large, foreign and almost anonymous software companies, who, as the sellers pointed out had neglected their interests, perhaps made it easier for the sellers to justify or 'neutralise' their actions (Harris and Daunt, 2011). This finding reflects other studies which have

found that in some circumstances the victim, in this case the software company, becomes the 'deviant' rather than the consumer (Piquero et al., 2005). It can be argued then that in the case of software piracy there seems to be a more community-oriented, socially responsible motivation by the Libyan sellers than might be expected in other societies, although it may have elements of enlightened self-interest if, as sometimes was suggested, it also helps to grow the market for Libyan computer stores. Indeed, although much of the literature reports the negative aspects of software piracy, it is argued that this practice may have some positive impacts, such as the piracy acting as an initial distribution point which encourages future software purchase particularly in areas like Libya where original software may not be available (Givon et al., 1995; Wooley and Eining, 2006).

Where the sellers believed that consumers were engaging in aberrant behaviour, the decision to punish the perpetrator was made on a case-by-case basis by the seller. The personal ethics of the seller were therefore a key aspect to this decision making process and this finding is in line with wider research concerning ethical decision making in small businesses (Quinn, 1997). However in contrast to the literature, typically highlighting the approach taken by Western marketers and sellers, the participants did not rely on formal policies or procedures to manage consumer misbehaviour. Instead it can be argued that informal 'institutions', particularly the local community, played a significant role in how the sellers and aberrant consumers operated in the market (Penaloza and Venkatesh, 2006). This was due to a number of reasons. Firstly, there was rarely a need to demonstrate procedural fairness, particularly in terms of consistency and collecting accurate evidence (Leventhal, 1980) when dealing with those stealing items, for sellers were unlikely to use the police or rely on the law to punish customers. As a result costly security measures frequently used in the West such as CCTV and itemised receipts showing proof of purchase were rarely used. Secondly, the study suggests that in contrast to other studies which predominately explore ACB in the West, religious teachings were more influential than the criminal laws in terms of determining whether a

perpetrator should be punished or not and whether the behaviour was 'forbidden' or not. Whilst religion is not the only factor influencing an individual's morality and moreover Muslims may interpret and reinterpret religious guidelines in different ways (Jafari and Suerdem, 2012), this presupposes then that there is a widespread acceptance and understanding of these religious based norms and societal expectations in Libya; something which is less likely to occur in multi-cultural societies like the UK and USA. Thirdly, the fact that the Libyan stores and hotels were relatively small and independently run meant that there was no requirement to have written policies in place to ensure similar treatment of customers across a number of different outlets, as there is for most retailers and hoteliers in the West. Finally, as Penaloza and Venkatesh (2006, p.310) argue this paper has gone some way to *"…recalibrate and reconfigure our understanding and research actions to resituate the market with social life…"* by showing that the maintenance of the seller's social network and business reputation within the community are of key importance, largely because of the collectivist nature of Libyan society and the importance placed on the role of the extended family (Hammad et al, 1999; Itim International, 2009). This meant that distributing direct punishment to the perpetrator was rare and individuals that were well-known to the seller or respected in society, such as women and the elderly, were not punished at all, in contrast to young men, even at the cost of losing profits. This reflects the tendency for Libya, like many other Middle Eastern nations, to score highly on power distance, in other words that the hierarchical order of society is accepted and people have distinct roles within this (The Hofstede Centre, 2013).

In conclusion this study has in some way addressed the gap in knowledge that exists in relation to how ACB is managed in alternative contexts and, by using Libya as a setting, this paper has attempted at a more general level to add to the limited literature which explores Muslim consumers. By capturing the *actual* experiences of sellers, the study contrasts with existing literature which has a tendency to only explore responses to hypothetical situations of consumer misbehaviour in isolation and ignore the decision-

making processes of those managing aberrant consumers. By engaging with the marketers and sellers themselves, this research has learnt "*…from marketing managers how they perceive their role in society*" and introduces "*…a plurality to our understanding of what constitutes marketing management*" (Tadajewski, 2010, p.87). Furthermore this approach addresses Penaloza and Venkatesh's (2006, p312) call for a re-conceptualisation of the market as a social construction, that is "*…work that takes as its focus of study consumers, marketers and firms in social groups, and as social groups in communities, neighbourhoods, cities, industries and nations*". Most importantly though, this study shows that unethical behaviour is understood and managed differently across cultures and this clearly has managerial implications for organisations wishing to expand globally.

It is recognised that this study is not without its limitations. The study has adopted an exploratory approach, largely because there has been no conceptual development in this area. Future studies should therefore aim to enhance theoretical development surrounding the management of ACB in alternative contexts and to consider more widely the impact the socio-cultural context may have. This could be achieved in a number of ways. In this study, materials have only been collected from sellers and whilst this highlights the need for more research exploring their attitudes and experiences of consumer misbehaviour, it only shows findings from one side of the marketing transaction and has not considered consumer attitudes. Although this study offers useful insights into an under-researched area, it is noted that adopting a qualitative approach means that the findings have only limited generalisability to other countries, particularly those that have different economic and legal environments. So for example, whilst Egypt and the UAE share cultural similarities to Libya, Egypt and the UAE have enforced copyright laws to prevent software piracy. Studies of ACB in similar cultural contexts to Libya would also address the call by Jafari et al (2012, p. 6) to "*…analyse and interpret cultural practices of that society from within that culture*". Future studies should therefore explore aberrant consumer behaviour in other contrasting environments from

the point of view of consumers as well as sellers. This could include, for example, other countries such as China and India which are increasingly receiving attention from global retailers and hoteliers. Such research could also consider other forms of theft reported in the literature such as music piracy, not paying for public transport and fraud (Fukukawa, 2002). Of most interest though would be to conduct the study reported here again in the future when the recent turmoil in Libya has settled. If the Libyan economy opens up to Western retail and hotel chains and software businesses, it is likely that the perceptions, instances and management of consumer misbehaviour may change, creating further challenges for the sellers managing ACB. However, as suggested by Tantoush (2013) at a recent Global Business Ethics Symposium, the future of Libya and the impact the Arab Spring has had on the country and Libyan business remains unclear.

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