

Youth, consumption and political culture: the Brazilian case

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Abstract

In the last few years, research carried out according to different theoretical traditions has noticed a process of politicization of consumption taking place trans-nationally. Civic values have been related to terms such as consumption and consumers, pointing to a possible breaking down of the borders between these two worlds. There are several theories to interpret the phenomenon of political consumption, from the thesis of post-materialism to loss of confidence in traditional political institutions. This paper sets out to map political consumption in the sphere of Brazilian society, focusing in particular on the young people who live in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, a process of politicization of consumption has been taking place in various countries. Civic values such as citizens' rights, equity, ethics, sustainability and social responsibility have been related more and more frequently to terms such as consumption and consumers, pointing to a possible breaking down of the borders separating these two worlds that have always been strangers - when not opposite - to one another (Hirschman, 1977; Gabriel & Lang, 1995). The expression "consumer-citizen" is characteristic of such changes (Canclini, 2001; Halkier, 1999; Paavola, 2001; Portilho, 2005b; Stolle et al., 2005; Trentmann, 2007). The joining together of these two words raises interesting questions in that the historical origins of both are based on utterly different principles, values and traditions. Citizenship and citizens go back all the way to Athenian democracy; in modern days they were reinterpreted by the American and French Revolutions. These concepts imply equality among the members of a community and freedom of thought and action. Fixing roots locally, defending the community, the willingness to give way to the will of the majority, and the feeling of defending and being responsible for the world around us are the characteristics that mark this social entity. This is the symbolic representation of political man who believes that a "good", fair and happy life can be achieved through political action instead of religion. Consumers, on the other hand, were and still are defined as subjects who come from an amorphous and territorially transcendent world. Their actions are not permeated by blame or social responsibility; they are not obliged by the community to give way on behalf of a greater good; they are subjects whose autonomy of choice reflects their interests. Private pleasures are their principal objectives, and they are associated with voluntarism, social atomism and to the idea that the "good", fair and happy life is to be found in the markets and in the seduction that merchandise exerts over them (Simmel, 1968; Marx, 1998; Bauman, 2007).

Given these different historical and ideological roots, it is by no means odd that this approximation should cause a certain discomfort or even repulsion in many authors, in social movements and in the media in general, who see in the society of consumption and its ideology – consumerism – a perverse threat to civic values that will transform citizens into consumers and shoppers (Bauman, 2007; Ewen, 1992).

More recently, authors whom Horowitz (2004) calls "post-moralists", such as Michael Schudson and Daniel Miller, among others, disqualify this opposition between consumers and society, and the negative reaction to this combination. In his article "*Citizens, Consumers and the Good Society*", Schudson (2007) claims that the time has come not to recycle this opposition between consumer and

citizen but rather to discard it, seeing as romanticizing both citizenship and politics cannot withstand comparison between their respective practices. Likewise, making consumption and consumers the villains cannot endure in-depth scrutiny. In many cases these are intrinsically political in the positive sense of the term, just as political actions can be intrinsically driven by the same petty-minded interests that are attributed to consumers. The need to transcend this opposition is evident in the indisputable fact that there is no desire, or even possibility, of doing without one and the other.

This recent approximation between political values and logics and consumption is part of a proposal to face today's social and environmental problems based on the actions and choices of consumers. It is designed to change traditional, automatic and private practices of consumption into responsible practices in which considerations of an ethical, moral, social and sustainability-minded order play a key role in people's choices. In this context, shopping, eating, putting out the light, having a bath, doing the dishes and going to work, among other daily actions, are evaluated according to their overall social and environmental impact. Eating, for instance, is no longer seen as an activity based on personal preferences and tradition, focused on individual pleasure and sociability; now it is a highly conscious, regulated and ideological activity that entails considerations about the quality of the productive processes and the socio-environmental impacts of what we eat. Considerations that become essential to our choices and provoke significant changes in the way we eat and think about food (Barbosa, 2009).

This proposal to use consumption as an instrument of political action and social transformation comes under the generic name of political consumption – or responsible, green, conscious, ethical, sustainable consumption, or even life-style politics and creative participation (Stolle et al., 2005). Although such nomenclatures can represent different and in some cases even opposite strategies (Portilho, 2005a), in this paper we prefer to use the term “political consumption”, which is more comprehensive and indicative of the ongoing process of politicizing consumption.

Although the theme of political consumption is new both in the United States and Europe, many American and European researchers, especially in the areas of sociology, anthropology and history, have delved into the subject (Halkier, 1999; Halkier & Holm, 2008; Stolle et al., 2005 and Sassatelli, 2006, among others). At the same time, research endeavors to register the growth, dynamics and variables that bear most affect on political consumption. One good example is the recent work *GoodPurpose 4th Annual Global Study* which notes that 87% of the interviewees consider that companies ought to pay equal attention to social as well as business interests in their considerations and decisions.¹

However encouraging these data may be for those who defend consumption as a form of political action, few researchers in Brazil concentrate on this theme; this explains the limited understanding of the phenomenon beyond the simple rate of occurrence of a certain answer to a question on the willingness to pay more for a product or service that is "green-friendly". Nevertheless, there are signs of the process of politicization of consumption in several instances of Brazilian society. We can mention the NGOs set up specifically on this theme, such as *Repórter Brasil*, *Instituto Faces do Brasil*, *Instituto Kairós*, *Instituto Akatu para o Consumo Consciente* and *ICONES (Instituto para o Consumo Educativo Sustentável do Pará)*, among others. The number and frequency of reporting on “sustainable”, “responsible” or “conscious” consumption in different mass media have increased significantly, and indicators of sustainability are being created in many areas. The programs in “Education for Conscious Consumption” being introduced both in the governmental and non-governmental sphere are yet another example of this same phenomenon. The surge of Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, the profusion of certification and labeling systems, as well as the strengthening of the so-called new socio-economic movements (Gendron et al., 2006) which presuppose the existence and action of “conscious consumers” – such as solidarity economy, Fair Trade and slow-food movements - are other important signs of the growth and engagement of different levels of Brazilian society in political consumption. Despite these signs, data on political consumption incorporated and experienced by the different social strata in Brazil are practically non-existent.

Our objective here is precisely to remedy this lacuna. This will be done by focusing in particular on the young segment aged between 16 and 25 who belong to the A, B and C income brackets and live in

Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The choice of this age band and these cities and social groups is due to several factors. With regard to age, the criterion that guided the research was the fact that this generation of young people grew up in a context where environmental concerns were disseminated, especially those that associate the causes of current problems to life styles and choices of consumption. These young people, as pointed out by Stolle et al. (2005), are part of a generation exposed to environmental education campaigns and projects at school and socialized according to an awareness of environmental values.²

The second factor considered in the choice of the age bracket has to do with the possibility of setting a minimum parameter of comparison between our data and those of other countries. In this context, our main comparative reference will be the research coordinated by Professor Michele Micheletti (Karlstad University, Sweden) on 1,015 young Social Sciences students in three countries (Sweden, Canada and Belgium) for the purpose of gauging forms of political participation, including actions related to political consumption (Stolle et al., 2005).³ However, unlike the research carried out by these authors, for the Brazilian survey we decided to broaden our universe and consider young people from all the different levels of education. Our decision took into account the Brazilian tradition of high politicization among students of Social Sciences and the deep influence of Marxist thought in the teaching of these subjects, factors that could bias the results considerably.⁴ In the case of the cities chosen - Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo - here the criterion is self-evident in the context of Brazilian society. Both from the demographic and the economic, political and cultural point of view, these urban centers are decisive for an understanding of the dimension of the phenomenon under examination and for an assessment of the tendencies as regards what goes on in the rest of the country. In this first phase, the Brazilian research focused on two main objectives, namely, to map out the phenomenon of political consumption in Brazil among young people aged 16 to 25, and to ascertain whether and to what extent the practices of political consumption are consolidated among them.⁵

2 How to interpret political consumption?

There are several theoretical explanations for the political-consumption phenomenon. One of the most commonly expressed is the Theory of Post-Materialism developed by Ronald Inglehart in the late 70s. This theory suggests that the rapid economic growth enjoyed as of the Second World War led to the material needs of the vast majority of the population of the more advanced societies being satisfied, which in turn led to a reorientation of values toward those that the author calls “post-materialist”, that is to say, those that emphasize the quality of life, self-expression, the environment and human rights, among others. Accordingly, this phenomenon brought about changes in different areas of social life, above all in respect to the political sphere, since this reorientation of values was accompanied by a critical attitude in relation to conventional political institutions, such as parties and trade unions, and by lower rates of conventional political mobilization. According to the theory, however, this would not be a sign of political apathy but rather of a change in the repertoire of political action, since post-materialist values were associated with non-conventional political actions (Ribeiro & Borba, 2010), among them political consumption.

Another interpretation of political consumption sees it as a conflict between de-politicization and politicization of contemporary society. As shown by Portilho (2005b), the proposals of “participation via consumption” would have de-politicizing consequences, being individualistic, and would lead to “low-cost participation”. In addition, political consumption would be an elitist form of participation available only to those with financial resources who could afford the higher costs of green- and animal-friendly products and services. On the other hand, the thesis of politicization views the same phenomenon as a chance to broaden and renovate the political field, because this would activate groups of citizens who would take on new responsibilities, thereby increasing the interest and daily participation in social and environmental matters. These attitudes would generate new ways of doing politics and existing as a political subject (Canclini, 2001; Giddens, 1995; Beck, 1995). Accordingly, political action would overflow in the direction of daily life and the private sphere, and in this way would constitute a new pattern of political engagement based on innovative, individualized, less hierarchical and non-

institutionalized forms of political participation, which Alexander (1995) labels as “romantic-individualist”.

A third perspective is the theory that places emphasis on modern society’s loss of trust in conventional political institutions. Authors such as Beck (1995) and Canclini (2001) stress that contemporary societies are testimony to the loss of credibility in political institutions such as parties, trade unions, elections, institutionalized social movements, and so on, in particular among the younger generations, which accordingly leads to a “non-institutional rebirth of the political ” in which different social arenas hitherto not thought of as political arenas undergo a process of politicization, as would be the case of the Internet and the market. Hence the concept of sub-politics, that is, politics at the margin of and beyond the political institutions of the Nation-States, a direct form of politics that involves individual participation in everyday decisions.

And finally there is the theory of the new socio-economic movements that claims that social and citizens’ demonstrations have used new (sub-political) arenas and new repertoires of political action, set on reaching not the State that until then was the chief target of the contestatory movements but the market, corporations and international organizations. In this process a new culture of political action is characterized by a re-appropriation of the economy based on own values where recognition and redistribution in the sphere of consumption would be the tonic, as shown in the movements that defend consumers’ rights, anti-consumption movements, those that advocate responsible consumption, or those that valorize territorial characteristics and “traditional” productive systems such as geographical indication, fair trade, solidarity economy and “slow-food”. This interface between social movements and markets has been noted as the most outstanding, differentiating and polemical facet of present-day political mobilizations (Wilkinson, 2008).

3 Political consumption and its modalities

Boycotting, “buycotting”, consumers’ cooperatives, communicative/educative actions such as “cultural jamming”, and the rational use of water and energy at home: these are the principal forms of political consumption. Of these modalities, the oldest and best known is the practice of boycotting, which is defined as the planned and organized refusal to buy the products and services of a certain firm, shop or country as a form of pressuring and provoking changes in their policies or forms of production, these being perceived as ethically, socially or environmentally improper.

The opposite of boycott is “buycott”, a neologism used in English with the verb “to buy” that refers to the intentional option for products and services perceived as socially and/or environmentally ethical and “friendly”. A significant example of “buycotting” is the purchase of products with the *Fair Trade* seal, which attests that these were made according to proper production circumstances and that they try to correct the inequalities that exist between producers in developing countries and the negotiating conditions in place in the international market. Buying organic products is another form of buycotting. When we buy such products, we are opting for a productive process that is less aggressive to the environment, a process that follows the productive rhythm of nature.

Besides these actions, political consumption can also present itself in the ways that consumers organize in associations or cooperatives aimed at expanding the collective use of their buying power. In most cases, cooperatives seek more proximity to small producers, in general those that subscribe to organic agriculture and make direct, collective purchases without any intermediaries and without passing through the large supermarket chains. Besides better prices and more confidence in the quality of the products, the aim of these organized consumers is to contribute to the flow of small family production, pay a fair price for produce without generating profits for the large wholesale networks, and stimulate small-scale production rather than large agricultural firms.

Symbolic inversions, or “cultural jamming”, can also be considered a way of political consumption. Through acts of cultural interference and inversions of meaning promoted by groups that use mass media, negative comments are made about a product or brand, inverting the meaning that the

original announcement wished to convey to consumers. The proposal of the jammers is to shake consumers out of their apathy, arousing their attention by parodying what the advertising claims and changing it into what the big companies conceal or omit. The jammers, however, do not have a concrete proposal as far as changing market and entrepreneurial practices and policies is concerned. They are cultural mobilizers, more interested in denouncing than in proposing (Klein, 2000). This process of symbolic inversion, also called “subverting” or “*adbusters*”⁶, is present in several media, such as *Youtube*, and in outdoors (such as those promoted by the *São Francisco Suicide Group* on billboards in the United States and Canada), t-shirts and publicity films, as well as in “flash mobbing” in commercial stores in large North-American urban centers.

4 Political consumption and marketing

It is important to differentiate political consumption from the marketing of social causes (“cause marketing” or “cause-related marketing”) and entrepreneurial philanthropy. In both cases the companies involved have gains, be they financial, by deducting income tax from the money donated, in the case of philanthropy, or gains through their enhanced image, as is the case of marketing social causes.

Marketing social causes normally results from the partnership between a profit-making company and another that is non-profit, joined together for mutual benefits both in the form of resources and image. But in this case, different from entrepreneurial philanthropy, the company puts out resources on behalf of some cause. Included among these modalities are various initiatives that act in different ways in pursuing to do good to others. The most common criticism made of these initiatives is that the costs involved in the campaign marketing are sometimes higher than the money that the beneficiaries receive. Another critique is the use of celebrities, as well as legitimizing and stimulating buying and consumerism. Yet in this modality the critical aspect lies in deviating the focus of attention from the quality of the relations of production and with the environment toward other beneficiaries (Ponte et al., 2009). This last point is crucial to distinguish between cause-related marketing and what today is called political consumption. In the latter, the consumer lends his buying power to social movements so as to enable them to vent their concerns effectively and convincingly and at the same time leveraging the possibilities of sanctioning those whose conduct is untenable and anti-ethical. Political consumption is a form of collectivization of the consumers’ choices. In the case of *causumerism*, this is a matter of attending to the specific needs of an “other” without taking into account how the goods and services were produced. Specific causes are granted priority, rather than structural changes, disregarding that in many cases it is precisely the mode of production and the treatment of the environment that are the roots of the problems to be solved.

5. Political consumption and youth in Brazil today

But how do young Brazilians fit into the context of the proposals of political consumption and the theories used to explain it? To answer this question we conducted a survey of quantitative data collected by means of personal home interviews, applying a structured questionnaire with 100 open and closed questions, in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The research involved a total of 457 individuals, 228 residents of Rio de Janeiro and 229 of São Paulo, aged between 16 and 25 and belonging to the three top economic classes in the country – A, B and C. The research structure controlled 6 variables (income, religion, gender, age, city, level of education and level of information) that were later co-related with 11 themes: (1) expectations for personal future, the world’s future and that of the country; (2) level of information; (3) political values; (4) trust in people and institutions; (5) interest in politics and social matters; (6) type and frequency of political participation; (7) perception of the responsibility of the different actors to improve social and economic conditions; (8) practices of political consumption; (9) consumers’ rights; (10) knowledge of campaigns and certification seals, and (11) fair trade.⁷ Nonetheless, because of limited space, here we shall concentrate on specific data on political consumption.

Trust in people and institutions

As far as trusting people is concerned, 60% of the respondents declared that they do not consider people trustworthy and 75% feel that, if given the chance, people always try to get the upper hand. To assess young people's trust in institutions, 21 options were offered on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 corresponds to the highest grade of trust and 1 to the lowest. The most trustworthy institutions are, in order of importance, the family (average of 8.9), the church (6.8) and school (6.4), which led us to separate them from the others and consider them "traditional institutions". The least trustworthy are precisely the political institutions, such as political parties (average of 3.1), followed by the city government (3.7) and the National Congress (3.7).

With regard to interest in politics and social issues, the scenario is as follows: only 27% and 26%, respectively, of the respondents consider themselves engaged in environmental and social matters. Nevertheless, when asked to state their position on affirmations concerning themes related to the environment and politics, and about their interest in questions such as the inequality of income, poverty, energy and terrorism, among others, the average was equal to or above 3 (based on a scale of five points that varied from "I completely agree" to "I disagree completely"). In this context, the positions adopted by the young people interviewed could be classified as "politically correct". Their stance is clearly in defense of the environment, they considered that the Amazon cannot be treated by Brazilians divorced from the rest of the world, and they fully agreed that Brazilians do not appear to be engaged in the question of redistribution of income in the country. However, when asked to state their position on questions concerning city, state and national politics, the average answers remained around 2.5 or lower (this scoring was obtained based on statements and a scale identical to the one used previously), in other words the negative opinions on these three levels of power received a bigger number of "I completely agree" than "I disagree". This posture is reinforced when we examine the frequency with which these young people declared that they talk about politics: 55% of them said they never or rarely do so, 28% that they do sometimes, and only 7% declared they do so often.

How do these young people participate politically?

In a set of 13 options of different types of participation offered, 79% declared that they mainly participated in politics through the vote. All the other options stayed below 28%, reaching close to 7% in the case of affiliation to political parties. Considering that voting is obligatory in Brazil, we can infer that any type of spontaneous political participation ranks below 28%. As far as political participation in ways considered "alternative" is concerned (youth organizations, social movements, activism via the Internet, volunteer work, consumers' associations and political consumption), in the context of 4 options that vary between "I often take part" and "I have never taken part", the proportion of the young who declared never having participated in any of the modalities varied between 87% and 96%. For those who declared they had participated in some of them, 10 options were offered of ways contributing, including items such as donating money to NGOs, wearing campaign lapel-buttons, attending meetings and signing petitions. The proportion of those who never participated dropped, varying from 39% to 68%.

As for the responsibility of the various actors for improving the quality of life in societies, the federal government (51%), followed by the citizens (40%), the United Nations (29%) and the consumers (24%) were the most mentioned. So, as far as participation through consumption is concerned, about 32% answered that they believe that an individual has the power to influence society through boycotts, although 22% considered that individual political action is not the best way, but rather collective action; 21% did not know how to answer, 12% think that they can bear some influence this way but that this type of action may make matters worse, while 13% disagree. In the case of influencing by engaging in "boycotts", the proportion of those who feel they can bear some effect in this way is not much higher (34%), whereas 14% believe they cannot, followed by those who think that sometimes this manner of political action makes social and environmental issues predominate over creating jobs, when it should not

(13%), and 12% feel that these questions are new commercial barriers built by the rich nations against the developing countries.

Besides whether or not they believe in the possibility of influencing society through choices of consumption, we sought to measure whether in fact the respondents have already taken part in any type of boycotting or “buycotting” activity. Our data show that, albeit few, “buycott” practices are more frequent than boycotting (as in the research done by Stolle et al., 2005): 98% answered that they never took part in boycotts, but the figures presented in the case of “buycott” actions are a little more encouraging: 81% answered negatively while 19% said yes. Price (45%) and distribution (39%) are the main reasons given for not buying socially and environmentally responsible products. Doubts about certification, personal taste and the quality of the products considered green-friendly complete the “other motives” chart.

Still on the subject of consumption practices, when asked if they think that citizens are responsible for keeping themselves informed on the socio-environmental practices of corporations, 57% agree, while 31% answered that they do not know, and 12% feel that this is not their responsibility. On the other hand, 52% of the respondents think they are well informed in respect to the products they consume, against 48% who do not think so. The three types of information on products that they possess or are interested in buying, out of a total of 13 options offered, are: the expiry date (92%), the brand (50%) and the composition (46%). Information as to whether the product is environmentally friendly (10%), certified (5%) and in compliance with fair trade (3%) were the answers that received the lowest figures.

The criteria most used by the young respondents in buying goods and services are: price (89%), quality (86%), discounts and sales (69%) and brand (55%). The least used are: proper conditions of production (16%); ethics with regard to animals (13%); do not encourage prejudice (9%); and complaints in sites against the product (8%).

Only 10% of the respondents affirm that they know what Fair Trade means, and only 30% of these managed to indicate the correct option. As for consumers’ rights, 68% are not even aware of the Consumers’ Rights Code⁸, while 77% never felt offended in consumption relations; 84% never lodged any complaint in shops and/or supermarkets, and 97% never complained before legal entities for consumer protection. Those who already did so (16% and 3%, respectively) were from the highest income bracket and over 19 years old. Fifty percentage declared that they knew some organization for consumer protection, the best-known being Procon⁹.

What do these numbers imply about young Brazilians?

For sure, they do not suggest intense engagement or effective political participation, as this is understood by the social sciences and especially by political science. The percentages in respect to trust in people and institutions, in particular political institutions are extremely low, especially when compared with institutions such as family, church and school. This lack of trust and political participation through conventional political institutions is not accompanied by an increase in the alternative forms of participation offered as options. Those who claim to participate in some of the alternative modalities offered failed to do so systematically. In some cases, these alternative forms post only 4% of the whole sample. When we analyze engagement in practices of political consumption (boycott and “buycott”), the criteria that orientate purchasing and looking for information on products and services, this scenario does not change. Therefore, in the case of these young Brazilians, lack of interest and loss of influence and leadership on the part of conventional political institutions have not produced an increase in the alternative ways to participate, which leads us to conclude that in Brazil the theory that disbelief or loss of confidence in conventional political institutions necessarily leads to a “non-institutional revival of politics”, as in the case of political consumption, does not hold true.

Based on this, might we subscribe to the thesis that today’s generation is politically more alienated if compared, for example, to the generation of the seventies? We believe not. When we analyze the interests that mobilize these young people (such as poverty, inequality of income, and terrorism, among others) and the concordance in respect to environmental, political and social values, the thesis of alienation is likewise unsustainable. On the contrary, the data suggest that the young people interviewed

are interested in social questions, perceive the environment as an important issue for Brazil and the world, and recognize the need for more involvement of people and individuals in the public sphere as a way to eradicate poverty. It is true that they have their doubts and questions concerning to what extent environmental policies and restrictions might simply be customs barriers erected by the rich nations against the products of the developing countries, but as a whole they indicate that their stance is what we could define as "politically correct as regards socio-environmental matters".

The data also do not corroborate the theory of post-materialism that indicates that environmental values, among others, increase as societies manage to provide enough to solve the material problems of their citizens. Besides the numerous objections that we could make in respect of this theory – objections that accuse it of being a “Maslow pyramid” in disguise or even extreme evolutionism in which people dedicate themselves to reflecting on morally significant values and questions only after their stomachs have been filled – this perspective also stands counter to the history of Brazilian social mobilization, which, above and beyond the struggle for access to the material conditions of existence, boasts myriad environmental organizations geared to “post-materialist” values. Also, here it is appropriate to underline, in specific reference to Brazilian environmentalism – and to the countries of the South in general – the perception that social and environmental questions are inseparable (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 2000), which can be confirmed by the creation and wide use, in Brazil, of the expression “socio-environmental”. In other words, a solution was not given first to social problems, only for mobilization around post-materialist values then to appear or increase as a consequence.

How, then, does one explain the data on young Brazilians gathered in our investigation?

This is precisely the point that we would like to interpret in greater depth. When we analyze the 6 indices¹⁰ constructed on the research data – trust in people, political institutions, traditional institutions (family, church and school), socio-environmental values, values of participation and political consumption – they mostly present very few variations in relation to the three variables under consideration (income, age and education), with the index on trust in traditional institutions presenting the highest degree of solidity (see Charts 1, 2 and 3).

Chart 1 – Indices per segment of income.

Indices	Class A	Class B	Class C	Total
Trust in people	39.9	39.4	39.1	39.3
Trust in organizations (private and public)	39.2	40.7	41	40.7
Trust in traditional institutions	68.9	71.3	70.7	70.8
Social and environmental values	46.2	48.6	49.4	48.8
Political participation	30.2	25.8	24.4	25.4
Political consumption	48.2	44.5	42.4	43.7

Source: quantitative Brazilian research.

Chart 2 - Indices per age bracket.

Indices	16 – 18	19 – 20	21 – 25	Total
Trust in people	38.7	40.1	39.2	39.3
Trust in organizations (private and public)	39.4	41	41.5	40.7
Trust in traditional institutions	70.7	71.7	70.2	70.8
Social and environmental values	49	48.1	49.2	48.8
Political participation	19.2	28.6	27.7	25.4
Political consumption	41.7	43.5	45.4	43.7

Source: quantitative Brazilian research.

Chart 3 - Indices per segment of education level.

Proceedings: Global Research Forum on Sustainable Consumption and Production Workshop, June 13-15, 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Indices	Complete primary I	Incomplete primary II	Complete primary II	Incomplete secondary
Trust in people	32	31.3	39.7	40.6
Trust in organizations (private and public)	60.9	36.9	39	43.4
Trust in traditional institutions	84.2	78	66.9	74.3
Social and environmental values	40.4	50	53.6	49.8
Political participation	6.7	12.2	29.5	19.8
Political consumption	46.4	32.6	35.4	40.4

Indices	Complete secondary	Incomplete university	Complete university	Total
Trust in people	37.9	41.3	41.8	39.3
Trust in organizations (private and public)	40.1	38.2	41.4	40.7
Trust in traditional institutions	68.7	69.5	67.3	70.8
Social and environmental values	50.8	43.6	46.8	48.8
Political participation	28.2	29.4	30.1	25.4
Political consumption	43.6	49.7	56.2	43.7

Source: quantitative Brazilian research.

As far as the indices of trust are concerned, whether in people, political institutions or traditional institutions, as well as the indices of socio-environmental values, these presented irrelevant variations (one or two percent) both in respect to income and age bracket, indicating substantial homogeneity of practices and positions among the young people surveyed. Nonetheless, as far as the indices of political participation and political consumption are concerned, the results differ a little from the previous ones, with a slight directly proportional relation, that is to say, the higher the income, age and education, the more participation in general and engagement in political consumption practices. Nevertheless, this relation is not highly significant, which once again confirms relative homogeneity.

The data obtained suggest that in Brazilian society the family is held to be the most important institution, and in large measure it functions as a total institution¹¹ (Goffman, 1961), providing its members with economic, emotional and financial assistance, among others. Since it is common for young Brazilians to remain in their parents' house until a late age¹², questions relating to their physical and social reproduction remain the responsibility of the family (father and mother). Their involvement in terms of family consumption is very low, as is their participation in domestic tasks, including buying everyday supplies. In this way, contact with the practical aspects of existence occurs far later here than in the United States and Europe. Although these young people are relatively well informed about what goes on around them, they have no direct involvement with practical matters of physical reproduction of family life, which they relegate entirely to their parents. However, some examples show us that under certain circumstances these young people can mobilize politically, especially when their immediate interests are at stake¹³.

It is also possible that the low participation in actions of political consumption is motivated not by alienation or lack of interest or information, but because many – according to the data presented above – for several reasons do not believe in the efficiency of this type of practice (47% in the case of boycotts and 39% in the case of “boycotts”).

5 Conclusion

Our indices suggest that participation and political consumption in Brazil seem to increase with income, age and level of education, but even so they do not seem to follow the direction of European and North-American levels. The explanation for there is would seem to be the different dimensions not taken into consideration by the usual explanatory theories. The first of these is the institutional dimension. In Brazil the family plays a fundamental role in the physical and social reproduction of the young by providing a system of support and solutions that individuals in European and North-American societies have to find in the community, that is to say, in the public sphere. In such a context, young people become independent and responsible for their practical life far earlier, facing the task of making options and taking decisions that will appear in a concrete sense only much later for young Brazilians. Hence the low rates of political participation presented by the young people in this survey, albeit accompanied by their familiarity with socio-environmental issues.

Added to this role of “the total institution” fulfilled by the family in Brazil is the activity of social organizations. Besides being numerous, they are extremely active and manage to bring about changes in legislation, in public policies and in the market, which ends up making individual action something secondary. We see an example of this in the important conquests achieved through pressure exerted by these organizations, such as the São Paulo pact with regard to certified timber, the pact of the food industry to lower the level of sodium in foodstuff, the prohibition of children in advertising, and the quotas policy in universities, companies, advertisements and soap-operas, to mention just a few examples. In this sense, progress toward political consumption practices occurs passively, with young people consuming products that satisfy ethical demands, as a consequence not of the initiatives of individuals but of organized social groups.

This brings us to another relevant aspect, namely the way that the individual and his responsibility are formed in Brazilian society. Analyses of this process (Barbosa, 1999) indicate that, as suggested by Simmel (1968), we can distinguish between individualism of difference and individualism of equality. In the first case, after sharing a common egalitarian base, subjects seek differentiation among themselves so as to evidence their specificities and idiosyncrasies. In the second modality the subject does not seek his differentiation but rather aims always to attenuate his specificities and differences within the group. Although the young people in this survey pointed to citizens as the second most responsible actor for the changes to be made in society (40%), nearly always they find that this will only be effective if “everyone does the same thing”. This creates a situation of social inertia where individual action is only perceived to be effective if collectivized.

As a final conclusion we could affirm that the effective practice of political consumption, albeit a phenomenon in the expansion stage, depends on socio-cultural and institutional factors in societies, as shown above. High indices of adhesion to the principles espoused by political consumption does not necessarily imply high indices of individual practice. Analyzing the phenomenon of political consumption by means of surveys has proved useful in providing us with an initial mapping of the phenomenon in Brazilian society, but it is necessary to complement it with qualitative research (already underway) that will enable us to delve into the question deeper and in further detail and then answer other questions.

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¹ The research *GoodPurpose 4th annual global study* is the fourth annual edition that explores consumers' attitudes toward socially and politically correct positions and how these are translated into the evaluation, reputation and acquisition of products and brands. The survey is conducted by the *Strategy One* company and consists of 20-minute interviews with 7,259 adults from 13 different countries. In the case of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Holland, the United Kingdom, the United States and the UAE, the interviews were held with representatives of the population by Internet; in the case of China and India the interviews were face-to-face (<http://www.goodpurposecommunity.com>).

² In Brazil this process began around 1999 with the environmental education programs introduced into the formal curriculum of schools. Considering that these young people systematically and non-systematically received information that was absent from the education of the generations before them, it would be proper to suppose that ecologically speaking they are more aware and mobilized by socio-environmental matters and their multiple implications.

³ The research also relied on the participation of Dietlind Stolle (McGill University, Canada) and Marc Hooghe (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium). The authors warned that this questionnaire is not representative of the population of these countries, or even of the student population of these countries or universities, but only a pilot survey to explore whether political consumption can be considered a consistent pattern of behavior and if it has been used as a form of political participation.

⁴ We also take into account that in the absence of information on the theme of political consumption it would be interesting to begin by setting up a broader sample to suggest further questions that deserve to be researched.

⁵ This research is comprised of two phases: the first is quantitative and presents the results obtained, while the other is qualitative and is still being developed. Both will serve as a basis for a broader study on representatives of the different income and education brackets of Brazilian society.

⁶ *Adbusters* also became the name of one of the best-known NGOs that promote "cultural jamming" (<http://www.adbusters.org/>).

⁷ The data of this research were collected in questionnaires printed and stored in an *Excel for Windows (Microsoft Corporation)* databank. The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained were carried out with the help of the software *SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for the Social Science)*, Version 18, using the following statistical tools: analysis of data related to simple and accumulated frequency, average and standard deviation; statistical inference tests and multi-variate analysis methods (Cronbach's Alpha and Factor Analysis). The survey took place between 24 June and 1 July 2010. The sample was selected by a process of systematic choice, that is, for each residence selected, the interviewer asked the resident if there was a young person aged between 16 and 25. If the answer was affirmative, the Criterion of Economic Classification, known as the "*Brazil Criterion*", was applied to identify the class and qualify – or not – the interview. If there were no young residents, the next residence was visited. Once the interview was over, the interviewer skipped three residences and made a new approach. The interviews lasted on average one hour and forty minutes. It bears emphasizing that this study does not allow any affirmation to be made about the diffusion of the phenomenon of political consumption among the Brazilian population as a whole, or even among the young Brazilians in general, beyond and outside of the two cities and specific income brackets used in the study.

⁸ The Consumers' Defense Code, held by most jurists to be one of the most advanced in the world, is a Brazilian law enacted in 1990 which establishes rules to protect and defend consumers.

⁹ Procon (*Program to Guide and Protect Consumers*) is a branch of the Ministry of Justice set up in 1987, with offices in all the Brazilian states and some cities to receive denunciations and provide consumers with information.

¹⁰ Since political consumption is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (attitudes, modes of behavior, perceptions and motivations), we opted to use the Factor Analysis technique to calculate the indices to be presented. This technique gathers information on the covariance structure, summarized in the correlation matrix, which enables the original variables to be classified according to their participation in the total variance of the databank. Selection of the attributes to be used in calculating the indices of consumption was done by first making a choice based only on the

Proceedings: Global Research Forum on Sustainable Consumption and Production Workshop, June 13-15, 2012, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

interpretation of the authors. Following this first selection of attributes, two methods of multivariate analysis were used for exclusion of attributes: *Cronbach's Alpha* and *Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis – Communalities*. All of the statistical developments used in this article are duly based on and proven by specific demonstrations in the referenced bibliography (Hair, 2006), so there is no need to demonstrate the pertinent theorems.

¹¹ According to Goffman (1961, p.11), “a total institution can be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of individuals in similar circumstances, separated from the broader segment of society by a considerable period of time, lead a closed and formally managed life”.

¹² Unlike what happens with their European and North-American peers, who leave their family environment as soon as high school is completed, young Brazilians usually stay at home until at least the age of 25.

¹³ Good examples are the campaign for “Direct Elections Now!” in 1983, the “Painted Faces” movement that led to the impeachment of President Fernando Collor in 1992, and the “Free Passes” campaign for public transportation for children wearing school uniform, implemented after a tremendous wave of demonstrations and protests.