**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## CONSUMPTION IN ACTION
## Mapping consumerism in international academic literature

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**ABSTRACT:** The consumer-citizen and more generally, the emergence of active forms of citizenship mediated by consumption point to a change in the relations of production, consumption and distribution. These forms of citizenship come to encompass opposite poles of consumption such as hedonism and social responsibility. When consumption choices are associated with the social and environmental issues connected to manufacturing and distribution processes, the space claimed by the active consumer comes to represents a form of social identity recognition. This 'political' sphere, made up of individual and/or collective claims mediated by consumer society comes in the wake of a long period of market de-politicization. On the basis of these assumptions, this article surveys and evaluates the topics related to critical consumption that are most discussed in the social sciences. Such forms of socially oriented consumption – enacted in the form of individual or collective consumer choices – represent a new form of political participation and are understood as practices of active-citizenship promotion. The findings of this article are based on data gathered from 478 peer-reviewed articles published between 2004 and 2013. The articles were selected from Scopus on the basis of their broad connection to critical consumerism and forms of socially oriented consumerism. A software-based content analysis run through T-Lab software was used to generate an analytical model of the main research axis of the most recent international literature on these arguments. The heterogeneous body of scholarly literature on socially oriented consumption reflects the rich diversity of perspectives adopted to understand the political and ethical role of consumers in contemporary societies.

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## 1. Introduction: consumption, citizenship and participation

For a long time, the social sciences have maintained a distinction between the concepts of consumer and citizen. In sharp contrast with the logic of citizenship and democracy, consumers -- following a logic of instrumentality and rational calculation -- have been identified with the pursuit of their own interests**.** This dichotomy crosses both the public and private spheres; "while the idea of 'citizen' may be strongly linked to the notion of 'common good', the term 'consumer' is linked primarily to personal and instrumental preferences which need to be matched typically by 'private goods'" (Forno and Graziano 2014, 2). Characterized by the implosion of the traditional categories of public and private action, the figure of the citizen-consumer overcomes this dichotomy (Micheletti 2003; Micheletti, Follesdall, and Stolle 2011; Forno 2006; Tosi 2006; Sofer 2007, Vihalemm, Keller, and Kiisel 2015; Warde 2015) and represents a synthesis of studies in the fields of sociology and economics (Setiffi 2013). This new political role of the consumer is a result of the individual and collective choice of viewing the market as a political arena.

As Cohen observes (2000, 204), citizen-consumers are social actors who "take on the political responsibility we usually associate with citizens to consider the general good of the nation through their consumption" (Cohen 2000, 204) while costumer-consumers are exclusively concerned with maximizing their personal interests. In American society, the political space of the citizen consumer is founded on the individual or collective claims mediated by consumption that reaffirm its political role following a long period of de-politicization of the market (Cohen 2000; Schor 2007; Willis and Schor 2012). For the citizen-consumer, the market and its institutions are the political arena used to stimulate a culture of corporate social responsibility. Moreover, along with politics, the market partially shapes the identity of the citizen. And this is clearly exemplified by the consumer campaigns intended to put pressure on or check the actions of governments and corporations in order to promote the protection of the environment, the respect of human rights and the defense of workers' rights. With the adoption of responsible consumer behavior, against "excess consumption" (Schor

2005), and the establishment of an "overspending society" (Schor 1993), the market becomes a political arena and critical consumer practices a new way of communicating with commodities. This "new" form of consumption does not only involve social movements and other forms of social activism; it also extends to individual choices, ranging from solidarity to hedonism (Leonini 2008; Paltrinieri 2012; Secondulfo 2012). The opposition between solidarity and hedonism is not the exclusive form of ambivalence embedded in contemporary consumer society. To describe the ambivalent moral character of contemporary consumer society, Sassatelli (2011, 1428–1429) refers to the hegemonic moral nature of desire as "tamed hedonism." She argues that the notion is founded on the idea that "individual autonomous choice has a central place in consumer modernity" […]. In all consumption, there is the double necessity to desire and to govern desires, so that a convincing and strong image of the self can be projected. In postmodern society, consumption encompasses both ethical and hedonistic behaviors connected to a set of so-called postmaterial values (Inglehart 1977) which emphasize quality of life, community and self-expression.

"Socially oriented consumption" takes on many forms: political consumerism, green consumption, etc.. Though all of these terms represent a common form of subject-consumer responsibility, international scholarship deals with them from a variety of approaches, perspectives, and disciplines, leading to a fragmented definition and conception of how the consumer thinks and acts. Political consumerism, ethical consumerism and green consumerism are a few of the definitions that frequently appear in scholarship. Forno and Graziano (2014, 2) define political consumerism as "the purchase of goods and services based not only on price and product quality but also on the behavior of producers and production methods (i.e., environmental sustainability, workers' rights, human rights, etc.)". If the focus shifts from collective choices to individual behavior, ethical consumption can be defined as "any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment towards distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity to the actors involved" (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, and Malpass 2005, 29). Also related to the theme of individual choice, green consumerism can be defined as a "process that has led to individuals feeling both responsible for and empowered in dealing with risks to both themselves and to the wider environment" (Connolly and Prothero 2008, 141).

Despite the growing interest of scholars in understanding and analyzing alternative forms of consumption, literature on the subject is rather fragementary, for a couple of reasons:

1.) The research on the actions, significance and networks of socially oriented consumption comes from many different disciplines (sociology, political science,

economics, marketing, social history, social geography, environmental studies, etc.)

2.) Depending on the context, authors use different definitions to delineate the field of investigation. This is particularly evident for empirical studies that require a precise delimitation of the values and practices of consumption.

From these assumptions, the study aims to provide a systematisation of the academic literature related to the large category of socially oriented consumption, which encompasses different disciplines and is characterized by diverse scopes and methodologies.

With the objective of identifying the different lines of research on "socially oriented consumption" we searched the Scopus database, selecting, with an inclusive search approach, those articles that used the terms political consumerism, green consumerism, ethical consumerism and those words closely related to or synonymous with them (for further information, see section 2). In this way we were able to gather a corpus of studies aimed at investigating purchasing and consumption practices that supersede the functional utility of the goods and to which the consumer ascribes a "social value". The cluster analysis discussed in section 3 provided us with the macro areas of scholarship dedicated to forms of socially oriented consumption, revealing four distinct groups. The differences between the four groups stem from the multitude of disciplines involved. To conclude, though all these types of consumerism use the market as a political arena, international academic scholars define the boundaries between different kinds of consumerism according to different strategies and behaviors. Since all of the citizen-consumer practices refer to a form of political participation (individual and collective choices) many similarities emerge. However, given the interdisciplinary (e.g. political science, sociology, marketing strategies and business behavior) and the fragmentary nature of the literature, some differences also occur. Just as the approaches used to define the different forms of socially responsible consumption are many and varied, it is also difficult to group the various practices and definitions of "responsible consumption" under one, all-encompassing definition. Sassatelli has proposed the expression "critical consumption", understood as "a normative frame which proposes a particular vision of the consumer, foreshadowing a shift in the way markets and politics may be conceived within liberal-democratic ideologies" (2006, 220).

## 2. Research method

Mapping the bibliographic information of scholarly publications (such as the authors, titles, abstracts and keywords) provides an insightful, analytical perspective that can be

used to track the development of trends over time and understand how ideas are diffused. Such an approach allows one to reveal the main themes and the relationships among different topics in the field under investigation (Waltman, van Eck, and Noyons 2010; Assefa and Rorissa 2013).

We were interested in analyzing studies dealing with the actions of citizens who use consumption as a tool for making choices related to political, ethical or environmental issues. As such we identified political consumerism as a key concept, considering the different forms and the various actions that may fall into this category.

Political consumerism, defined in a broad sense as "using the market as an arena for politics and consumer choice as political choice" (Boström, Føllesdal, Klintman, Micheletti, and Sørensen 2005, 9), problematizes the concept of consumption as a complex phenomenon embedded in economic, social, and political norms as well as in everyday interactions and discursive practices.

More and more frequently academic research has ascribed attributes such as conscious, critical, alternative, fair, etc. to these types of consumption practices. Forms of "socially oriented" consumption, such practices are enacted within the sphere of everyday-life; and carry a political significance, for those who carry them out as well as for the effects that they can provoke at the institutional level. The adjectives associated with this type of consumption imply a certain system of values, evoking a specific system of solidarity and collective identity (Ceccarini 2004).

Beginning from this assumption – and taking into consideration the study of Boström *et al.* (2011, 20), which proposes that "the complexity of consumption implies challenges for the development of an adequate terminology"; "further research should consider how ethical, political, and green consumerism as well as citizen-consumerism are related and whether they should be distinguished from each other" – our research aims to investigate how the discussion of consumerism as a form of political, social and ethical action has evolved in scholarly literature from 2004–2013 by surveying the main themes researched in relation to this argument in the social sciences and evaluating the relationships between them.

In order to establish a corpus of scholarship to analyze we began by collecting the titles and abstracts of articles published over the last 10 years in peer-reviewed academic journals from the database Scopus[1]. We first looked at the "classic"

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[1]Scopus is the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature: scientific journals, books and conference proceedings. It includes tools to track, analyze and visualize research outputs in the fields of life, social, physical and health sciences. References stored in Scopus are indexed in various fields, including article title, author, keyword, etc. (www.scopus.com). In Scopus, the social sciences database was selected for its appropriateness in indexing sociological and political science literature on the topic.

categories of political, ethical, and green consumerism. As these terms connote multiple meanings, we decided to make our search broad, including terms closely related to or synonymous with three key concepts: 1) "critical consumption", used as synonym of political consumerism (Forno and Graziano 2014) and closely tied to the avoidance of certain products; 2) "responsible consumption", more tied to the characteristics of the product; and 3) "conscious consumption", which is based on the acquisition of a more general knowledge about products purchased. We also considered the different nuances that all these definitions imply, such as "alternative consumption", "anti-consumption" and "consumer activism".

References containing the terms *political consum\*, critical consum\*, ethical consum\*, green consum\*, responsible consum\*, alternative consum\*, anti-consum\* or \*consumer activism* in their titles, abstracts or keywords were considered.

In total, we selected 478 articles[2] from 249 different international academic journals. Our study focused on studies published in English, mainly in (but not limited to) sociology, political sciences, marketing and ethics journals.

We are aware that this analysis does not cover the entire field of studies related to the argument of socially oriented consumption since it only includes articles that fit the research criteria established in the initial search (studies published in English, in peer-reviewed academic journals that are present in the Scopus database). Nevertheless, we believe that the such a study, with the limits just mentioned, can provide a good idea of the themes and directions in which international scholarship is moving in this sector. Figure 1 quite evidently shows that there was a dramatic rise in research focused on "socially oriented" consumption during the 2004–2013 period, in particular after 2007. Indeed, the concept of political/critical consumerism is relatively new. It was introduced in the mid-1990s and was traditionally used to define the phenomenon of boycott. However, it is currently also used in relation to other behaviors, such as the choice of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (Ferre Fons 2006).

Clearly, alternative consumption practices are deeply rooted in the context of contemporary societies, particularly because of the new role that consumption plays in post-industrial societies.

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[2]We began with an inclusive approach with respect to the search criteria. Subsequently, we reviewed the results from Scopus and excluded the references that were not relevant to the subject. The research in Scopus yielded 550 articles; we excluded 72 from the analysis.

**Graph 1 – Peer reviewed articles by year (2004-2013)**
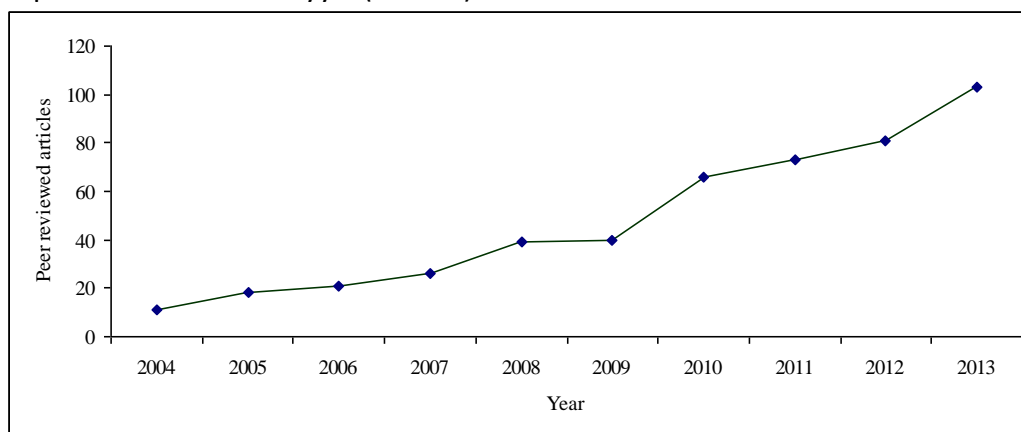


It is also clear that consumption now involves more than just an abstract notion, its meaning can be discussed in concrete terms, it can be empirically studied, and its consequences can be observed (Tosi 2006). For all these reasons, the political nature of these consumption practices and their subsequent inclusion as new forms of participation have become the subject of an increasingly intense debate among the international scientific community.

In order to construct an overview of the international debate on argument, we performed a software-based content analysis with T-Lab software, a linguistic and statistical tool for content analysis and text mining. The software uses a kind of text-driven automatic approach that allows meaningful patterns of words and themes to emerge (Lancia 2004, 2014)[3] [4].

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[3] As previous research shows (see also Capone and Petrillo 2013; Maturo, Lombi, Canestrini, Manca, and Moscatelli 2012; Assefa and Rorissa 2013; Pattaro and Setiffi 2014; Pattaro 2015), T-Lab is an appropriate tool for studies such as this one.

4 The entire imported texts consist of 478 article titles and abstracts (corpus); with a size of 80.485 words (occurrences of word tokens), the corpus is therefore considered medium-large (Tuzzi 2003). There are 8196 word types, with 3653 words that occur only once (hapax). All the corpus texts are associated with two classification variables: the academic journal in which the article was published (249 modalities, corresponding to 249 peer-reviewed journals) and the publication year (2004–2013).

The analysis was performed on 1247 selected words, with a minimum threshold of 6 occurrences indicated by T-Lab. The word types are 10,18% of the occurrences and the relationship between hapax and word types are about 44,5%; the language is thus rather specific, but the corpus can be analyzed by a statistical approach, as the ratio of word types/word tokens is <20% and the ratio of hapax/word types is <50% (for the methodological criteria, see Tuzzi 2003; Bolasco 2004).

The titles and abstracts of the articles were analyzed using the *Thematic analysis of elementary contexts* tool. This T-Lab tool provides a representation of the corpus's content by grouping them in a small number of meaningful thematic clusters.

Each cluster consists of a set of elementary contexts (i.e. sentences, paragraphs or short texts) characterized by a similar pattern of keywords and is described through the lexical units (i.e. words, lemmas or categories) and the variables most characteristic of the context units from which it is composed (Lancia 2014).

In many ways, the results can be thought of as an "isotopy map"[5] (iso = same; topoi = places) (Rastier 1987), where each cluster is characterized by the co-occurrences of semantic traits and is composed of a set of sentences dealing with relatively analogous topics, allowing a researcher to traces a map of ideas within the overall corpus.

Each cluster can also be explored both by the words that characterize it most (Chi square test), as well as by the most significant elementary contexts contained in it.

The thematic analysis of elementary contexts has a similar objective to classic content analysis, because it allows the researchers to identify the most recurrent topics in a corpus (Reinert 1986), but it also makes it possible to effectively analyze a text on both a statistical and hermeneutic level (Nigris 2003).

## 3. Cluster analysis

The analysis represents the contents of article titles and abstracts through significant clusters, grouping lemmas that co-occur in the same elementary contexts (sections or sentences). From this analysis, four clusters were identified and a label was assigned to each of them: 1*) Ethics, consumption and market*, 2) *Ethics, consumers and identity*, 3) *Environmental attitude, values and green products* and 4) *Consumerism, individual choice and collective action* (see: table, 1). In order to interpret the clusters we identified the words with the highest Chi-square and the principal elementary contexts of each cluster.

[5] Isotopy refers to a meaning's conception as a "contextual effect", that does not belong to words considered one by one, but as a result of their relationships within texts.

Isotopies facilitate the interpretation of texts, as each of them identifies a context shared by several words, which however does not result from their specific meanings, but within the logic that the whole is other than the sum of its parts. Therefore, an isotopy's detection, is not a simple fact observation, but the result of an interpretation process (Rastier 1987).

In T-Lab logic, the detection of isotopes derives from the analysis of occurrence and co-occurrence tables.

**Table 1 - Cluster analysis**

| Cluster | Elementary contexts in Cluster | % (in a total of 2309 elementary contexts) |
|---|---|---|
| CLUSTERS 1 – Ethics, consumption and market | 594 | 25.73% |
| CLUSTERS 2 – Ethics, consumers and identity | 553 | 23.95% |
| CLUSTERS 3 – Environmental attitude, values and green products | 728 | 31.53% |
| CLUSTERS 4 – Consumerism, individual choice and collective action | 434 | 18.80% |

The cluster analysis presented in the next two sections (3.1 and 3.2) refers to the articles' quotations, which mainly characterize each cluster.

## 3.1 Understanding the ethics of the market and the political action of the consumer

The first and fourth clusters (table 2 and 3) represent two distinct lines of international research. The first cluster predominantly shows management and marketing studies dedicated to revealing the effect that corporate social responsibility and ethical brands have on purchasing behaviors; instead, the second cluster, which includes anti-consumption, groups together studies and theoretical reflections on individual and collective consumption practices aimed at politicizing the market. The first cluster, which we will call *Ethics, consumption and market* includes a corpus of articles that investigate the role played by ethical brands on purchasing choices and the corporate image. The articles are strongly characterized by their discussion of brand management aimed at increasing sales and research by companies about how to establish a relationship of trust with its consumers. The ethical connotation of a brand can come from various factors: from a company's declaration of responsible behavior in relation to the environment (green brand) or from a series of positions against the discrimination of workers and in favor of a culture of equal rights mediated by its goods (ethical brand). The research in the cluster investigates consumer behavior and his or her interest in forms of green and ethical consumerism which, in a logic of company profit, are mediated by brand trust. As Minestroni (2003) reminds us, already at the end of the 80s brands began to assume an existence that was inseparable from the product itself, reducing the complexity of an overcrowded market of hyper-choice in contemporary consumer society. The brand has the function of directing consumption choices. This cluster underlines its role in communicating the ethical and responsible behavior of the company. Company values are communicated and diffused by the brand which becomes the reason for choosing or refuting the product.

Consistent with a line of research that groups together scholars of market and management interested in investigating the ethical and green behaviors of consumers, giving particular attention to the sentiments – positive and negative – that brands awaken in consumers, two journals from the sector emerge from the list of the key terms and variables which most characterize the cluster: *The Journal of Business Research* (Riv-140) and the *Journal of Business Ethics* (Riv-139). The questions of how consumer behavior is influenced by the moral attitude of a brand or the socially incorrect behavior of a company is at the center of the empirical analysis and theoretical reflections of the two journals**.** For example, an article by Lee, Motion and Conroy (2009, 178) investigates how moral avoidance "involves a societal focus that extends beyond the needs of the individual. […]" Moral avoidance takes the form of transgressing and subverting marketing, boycotting iconic and hegemonic brands, and supporting local brands."

The objective of the research grouped in this cluster is to investigate the ethical consumer in order to identify market opportunities through a positive recognition of the brand at the moment of purchase or the consumption of goods and services. The consumer is the target of the market who must be understood in order to be "seduced" through the strong communicative power of the market. These studies implicitly underline the power acquired by consumers over time, making him/her capable of penalizing socially incorrect company behaviors through forms of boycott or brand avoidance, demonstrating the maturity of the postmodern consumer.

The fourth cluster (table 4), *Consumerism, individual choice and collective action* groups together studies that investigate both the role of the citizen-consumer and forms of resistance against the society of mass-consumption (boycotting). In the cluster the words *politics*, *political participation* and *civic participation* underline the strong affiliation between consumption as a new form of political action and the traditional forms of political acts, such as voting and participation in institutions. As argued by Baek (2010), the polarization between scholars who emphasize the role of political consumerism as an emerging civic and political engagement and those who discredit its "democratic potentials" leads one to imagine a paradigm shift at the macro level of society where citizens are moving to new forms of political participation and engagement.

**Table 2 - Cluster 1: Ethics, consumption and market**

| Lemmas and Variables | Chi$^2$ |
|---|---|
| Brand | 306.519 |
| Negative | 98.983 |
| Responsibility | 93.997 |
| Company | 84.444 |
| ETHICAL_CONSUMPTION | 69.913 |
| Value | 69.697 |
| Avoidance | 62.931 |
| BEHAVIOR | 62.465 |
| Clothes | 61.876 |
| Corporate | 58.48 |
| Loyalty | 52.332 |
| Responsible | 44.54 |
| _RIV_140 | 43.547 |
| Socially | 43.248 |
| _RIV_139 | 41.114 |
| Social | 41.027 |
| Customer | 39.783 |
| Develop | 37.629 |
| Business | 36.219 |
| Personal | 33.686 |

**Members: 594 elementary contexts (e.c.) out of a total of 2309 classified, equivalent to 25.73%.**

Political consumerism is a new form of citizen engagement; it is not an alternative to conventional forms of participation such as electoral or institutional involvement. It is a civic and political tool that uses both politics and the market. Political consumerism can be defined as a new form of collective action, political participation and a reaction by citizen-consumers. Alongside traditional forms of political participation (e.g. parties), citizen-consumers have found different ways to express their political opinions. Many of the articles which best exemplify this cluster analyze the relationship between political activism, distrust and political consumerism (see: Newman and Bartels 2010; Delacote and Montagné-Huck 2012; Acik 2013).

As mentioned above, this cluster is comprised of articles that use the label "anti-consumption" to describe forms of resistance and critique of capitalistic society which are based on individual choices. In contrast with political consumerism, which can be expressed through an individual or collective choice, the articles in this cluster discuss forms of anti-consumption expressed for the most part through choices made by the single consumer in order to demonstrate his or her disapproval of a product and/or company (Cherrier 2009; Sharp, Høj, and Wheller 2010). Whereas the sphere of political consumerism underlines the existence of a consumer who uses the market as

an arena for political communication, in the case of anti-consumption the identity of the subject-consumer is more greatly defined by his or her choices of resistance in relation to consumption (e.g. boycotting). In the first case, the articles investigate political consumerism and its effects on other forms of political participation, while in the second the scholarship is more interested in investigating the typical profile and motivations that drive consumers to adopt an attitude of refusal in relation to capitalist society.

Though investigated from different perspectives the politicization of the market is evident in both cases, emphasizing the individual and collective social role of mediated political consumerism as well as anti-consumerism's importance as a form of political resistance. This consumer cynicism (Odou and Pechpeyrou 2011) constitutes a new form of anti-consumerism that cannot be related to a simple act of resistance as an expression of reflexive discourses (Littler 2005).

**Table 3 - Cluster 4: The political consumerism and the anti-consumption**

| Lemmas and Variables | Chi$^2$ |
|---|---|
| POLITICAL_CONSUMERISM | 408.274 |
| ANTI-CONSUMPTION | 367.082 |
| Political | 194.971 |
| Resistance | 130.753 |
| Form | 117.689 |
| political_participation | 104.222 |
| CONSUMERISM | 95.236 |
| Activism | 79.963 |
| Cultural | 78.875 |
| Culture | 73.88 |
| CONSUMER_ACTIVISM | 70.967 |
| Citizen | 68.764 |
| Civic | 63.988 |
| _RIV_010 | 60.456 |
| Land | 58.127 |
| Pedagogy | 54.014 |
| Identity | 52.786 |
| Discourse | 48.552 |
| Loan | 48.485 |
| _RIV_076 | 48.249 |

**Members: 434 elementary contexts (e.c.) out of a total of 2309 classified, equivalent to 18.80%.**

The term "resistance" clearly expresses a social behavior directed against the traditional lifestyle of capitalistic society. This resistance takes the form of practices that embody different protest actions. Such actions refer to behaviors directed against mass consumer culture and clearly represent the heart of anti-consumption. The

presence of both the *Annals of the American Academy of Political Sciences* (Riv-010) and the *European Journal of Marketing* (RIV_076) among the lemma of this cluster underlines the coexistence of various practices of consumption which are all characterized by a political dimension.

### 3.2 Understanding the identity of the ethical and green consumer

The second and third clusters clearly indicate the presence of two other lines of research in international scholarship aimed at understanding the identity of the ethical and green consumer. Indeed, a growing range of consumer behaviors today seems to be driven by ethical choices and social evaluations. They express the growing attention of some consumers to these issues, in terms of the social and collective impacts, private as well as public, of their individual behaviors. "The concept of ethical consumerism is generally accepted as being borne out of the environmental movement and green consumerism" (Freestone and McGoldrick 2007, 446). However, it is important to distinguish between green consumerism and ethical consumption.

Green consumerism refers to the values and beliefs that motivate consumer choices on the basis of – at least in part -- environmental concerns, which translate into behaviors like avoiding products that might endanger the health of people, animals and the environment. Ethical consumption – which includes the ethical and moral aspects present in the production and delivery of goods (Uusitalo and Oksanen 2004) encompasses a broader range of issues, entails a more complex decision-making process for consumers, and is more directly and deeply concerned with the 'people' element of consumerism (Freestone and McGoldrick 2007). Ethical consumption implies that consumers prioritize their own ethical concerns when choosing products, and that their practices aim to fulfil the objectives of socially responsible trade (Uusitalo and Oksanen 2004; Freestone and McGoldrick 2007). The number of academic publications focused on ethical consumption has increased, but as a review highlights, the "literature on this topic is scattered, complex, and disparate" (Papaoikonomou, Ryan, and Valverde 2011, 198).

Cluster 2 seems to arrange parts of these themes, gathering together concerns about the ethical nature of everyday practices. It is composed primarily of keywords such as consumption, fair trade, practices, global, sustainable consumption (table 4).

Part of the texts in this cluster focus on the key ethical drivers behind the decision-making processes of consumption, the ethical concerns of consumers and more extensively, the 'ethical self' of the ethical consumer. Ethical and responsible consumption behaviors are studied in relation to their contribution to identity

construction in the postmodern world (see e.g. Ozcaglar-Toulouse 2007), where everyday shopping practices can be considered to be opportunities for making a difference via ethical consumption choices (see e.g. Adams and Raisborough 2010), with a conception of consumption as being ethically-embedded (see e.g. Hall 2011), and thus playing a role in political citizenship and moral subjectivity (see e.g. Dixon and Isaacs 2013). These issues are related to the cultural role of consumption, which reflects fundamental choices about the kind of society in which someone wants to live and the kind of person one wants to be (Sassatelli 2007). We can note a connection between this line of thought and the two prevailing sociological observations of late modernity (Adams and Raisborough 2008): 1) that the self is engaged in its own reflexive production (Giddens 1991) and 2) that consumption increasingly emerges as a site for this identity work (Adams and Raisborough 2008).

Another theme that clearly emerges in this cluster – maybe because it is the most widespread and concrete expression of these practices and a primary example of ethical consumption (Adams and Raisborough 2008) – is linked to fair trade, mainly in relation to food consumption.

In connection with ethical consumption and in line with Krier's (2001) perspective, De Pelsmacker, Driesen and Rayp define fair trade as "… an alternative approach to trading partnerships that aims for sustainable development of excluded and/or disadvantaged producers. It seeks to do so by providing better trading conditions, raising awareness, and campaigning […]. In the broadest sense, the concept incorporates environmental as well as social issues" (2005, 367).

The ethical food discourse is also distinctly present in cluster 2. Here ethical consumption is expressed (mostly) through the ethics of food, often described as alternative, organic, fair trade and high quality (see e.g. De Tavernier 2012). The research interests seem to be particularly focused on consumer values and behaviors in relation to food consumption, interpreted here as a political act. Within this framework great emphasis is given to the process of the self-attribution of responsibility (see e.g. Portilho 2010).

Although the academic literature is complex and fragmented, the themes in this cluster clearly show a set of defined fields of study, confirming that studies on ethical consumption represent "fertile territory to explore the dynamic intersections of reflexivity, ethics, consumption and identity" (Adams and Raisborough 2008, 1167).

**Table 4 – Custer 2: Ethics, consumers and identity**

| Lemma and variables | Chi$^2$ |
|---|---|
| Consumption | 370.301 |
| Fair Trade | 133.204 |
| Practice | 127.433 |
| Global | 114.251 |
| Sustainable consumption | 89.827 |
| Politics | 75.177 |
| Movement | 69.513 |
| Space | 59.447 |
| Network | 55.71 |
| Everyday | 53.502 |
| Commodity | 48.758 |
| Draw | 48.004 |
| Moral | 47.805 |
| Power | 47.08 |
| Capitalism | 46.41 |
| Ethic | 46.23 |
| Tourism | 40.907 |
| Ecotourism | 37.262 |
| Life | 36.542 |
| Discourse | 34.562 |

**Members: 553 elementary contexts (e.c.) out of a total of 2309 classified, equivalent to 23.95%.**

Cluster 3, instead, groups together articles focused on green consumerism. It is the cluster with the highest percentage of elementary contexts (31,53%), confirming that green consumerism is a large and historically significant facet of socially oriented consumption (table 5).

**Table 5 – Custer 3: Environmental attitude, values and green products**

| *Lemma and variables* | *Chi²* |
|---|---|
| Green | 370.922 |
| Product | 307.663 |
| Green Consumerism | 243.221 |
| Purchase | 157.906 |
| Environmental | 146.095 |
| Information | 110.288 |
| Price | 87.024 |
| Buy | 78.203 |
| Label | 65.442 |
| Survey | 50.373 |
| Attribute | 49.321 |
| Questionnaire | 46.104 |
| Pay | 42.309 |
| Willingness | 40.806 |
| Segment | 39.943 |
| Apparel | 39.757 |
| Actual | 38.28 |
| Attitude | 37.094 |
| Result | 36.212 |
| Adoption | 34.46 |

**Members: 728 elementary contexts (e.c.) out of a total of 2309 classified, equivalent to 31.53%.**

Themes in this cluster are particularly related to the characteristics of green products - especially environmental standards, but also price and quality – (see e.g. D'Souza, Taghian, and Lamb 2006; Jansson, Marell, and Norlund 2010; Olson 2012), the way the consumer perceives these products and the reasons why he or she buys them (see e.g. Lu, Bock, and Joseph 2013; Luzio and Lemke 2013).

More specifically, some of the clustered studies aim to understand the impact of values and beliefs on green behavior, the attitudes – and sometimes the inhibitions – linked to green consumer behavior (see e.g. Mazar and Zhong 2010; Noor, Jamil, Mat, Mat, Kasim, Muhammad, and Salleh 2012). In this regard, green consumerism can be conceptualized as "a personal ethical orientation or as a set of pro-environmental personal values and attitudes that inform a particular form of socially conscious or socially responsible decision making" (Moisander and Pesonen 2002, 329).

A clear interest, especially in marketing, in how green consumerism fits into the market also emerges. Part of the articles in this cluster are aimed at profiling types of

green consumers according to a series of variables (socio-demographic and psychological, among others) in order to understand which of them most influence the consumers' perception of the green concept (see e.g. Rezai, Teng, Mohamed, and Shamsudin 2013).

Therefore this cluster highlights a heterogeneous body of research, in which green consumerism represents an umbrella category for environmental actions, "covering both consciously organised forms of environmental behaviour shaped as political activism, as well as routinised everyday consumption behaviours that go without saying" (Spaargaren and Martens 2005, 51). Therefore, the following actions are grouped together under the umbrella: the green-conscious consumer making an individual choice in favor of environmentally friendly products, the green citizen-consumer participating in the development of more responsible consumption practices (e.g. energy, technology and transportation issues), the collective choice in relation to environmental impact, as well as green business and marketing strategies from the corporate perspective to make/sell products in an environmental and responsible way and/or influence the chosen, green consumer segments.

## 4. Conclusion

All the consumerism/consumption definitions explicitly or implicitly recognize the consumer as a social and political actor and acknowledge his or her influence in the marketplace. Nevertheless, the corpus of scholarly literature on socially oriented consumption appears to be rather fragmented, comprising a wide-range of diverse journals aimed at studying the political and/or ethic dimension of shopping.

Several definitions are presented in the body of scholarship and many differences emerge from the various perspectives used by scholars. Political participation and acts of resistance to consumption and/or western consumer culture stress the market's political role, while ethical and green consumerism behaviors often underline the symbolic and cultural meanings of consumption choices. All types of consumerism have impacts on lifestyles but the strength of their influence changes with respect to the actions and subjects involved in the process of consumption. Scholarship on political consumerism and anti-consumption stresses the political role of purchases, through participation and resistance underlying a collective choice based on an individual act. On the other hand, scholarship on ethical and green consumerism underlines individual choice, such as support for fair trade.

The cluster analysis underlines the existence, in international scholarship, of four areas of study that represent the different actions, practices and meanings taken on by consumption and choice making processes. In the first cluster we mainly find articles from the management and marketing sectors aimed at investigating the influence of ethical brands and corporate responsibility on consumption choices. In the second, the literature deals with the ethical dimension of the consumer and its importance in processes of subject identity construction. The third cluster grouped together articles that investigate the beliefs, attitudes and values of the green consumer. And in the fourth cluster we find scholarship interested in the political choices of the citizen-consumer. As we have demonstrated, the cluster analysis allows us to reconstruct the principle lines of research on socially oriented consumption -- specifying, when possible, the pertinent fields of research and the keywords most commonly used to identify areas of theoretical and empirical research – while moving beyond the differences of labels such as "political consumption" and "ethical consumption" that normally belong to separate and distinct fields of research.

As we have seen, there are many definitions used to delineate forms of socially oriented consumption. On the one hand, the results of the search carried out with Scopus reveal a growing interest on the part of scholars in the ethical, political and social relevance of consumption practices. On the other, the results indicate an excessively fragmented approach to defining the field of study, brought about, above all, by the multidisciplinary nature of the field which makes it difficult to compare theoretical frameworks as well as the instruments, approaches and results of empirical investigations. However, the corpus also clearly shows some "lacuna". In particular, in the field of socially oriented consumption, there is no debate on the relationship between education and/or socialization to consumption (Setiffi 2013, 2014). A discussion of this theme would be fundamental for understanding the origin of the processes and motivations – as well as socio-cultural background – that determines and/or influences these consumption practices. Though international scholarship dedicates ample attention to the relationship between "classic" forms of political participation and practices of responsible consumption as well as to the connection between purchase choices and the ethical and social responsibility of the citizen-consumer, it scarcely begins to investigate the ties that connect education and socialization to consumption processes with practices of responsible consumption. Most likely the lack of attention paid to these processes is due to the multidisciplinary nature of the approaches used to study the phenomenon in the social sciences, as well as to the clear-cut division between scholarship concerned with studying practices of promoting active citizenship and studies interested in stimulating forms of educational

responsibility in relation to consumption behaviors. As an exception to this trend within international scholarship, we can cite Leonini and Sassatelli's (2008) study on the processes of socialization to critical consumption.

To conclude, the heterogeneous literature on socially oriented consumption reflects the rich diversity of perspectives adopted to understand the political role of consumers in contemporary societies. Some articles have already adopted a multidisciplinary approach, while other studies have already crossed international boundaries, producing reflections that involve different cultures and national perspectives. One would hope that the combinations of different disciplines and cross-country research will increase over the next decade, together with a deeper understanding of the relations between the macro and micro levels of political, cultural and social actions.

According to the above conclusions and because the analyses are based exclusively on titles and abstracts, one major limitation of the study is that we could not compare the different theoretical positions of the scholars. Likewise, we could not analyse in detail the different measures and methodologies used to conduct the empirical studies.

Despite these limitations, the article offers several suggestions. Our findings bridge the gap among the different definitions used to analyse socially oriented consumption. The results provide a systematisation of the vast but often fragmented academic literature, a record of the development of trends over time and an explorative insight that is useful for further research in this field.

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The article is the result of a close collaboration of both authors. The individual contributions may be specified as follows: Chiara Pattaro wrote Sections 2 and 3.2; and Francesca Setiffi wrote Sections 1 and 3.1. Sections 3 and 4 were written together by both authors.

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