

Bachelor's Programme in Marketing

Political Consumption

The Four Interconnected Dimensions of Political Consumption

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Abstract

Political consumption is a multidisciplinary phenomenon, that has slowly risen to the awareness of the masses. In this paper, to understand the phenomenon of political consumption as broadly as possible to identify meaningful new information from the body of literature chosen, we have decided to use a broad definition of PC, in which PC is seen as consumption manifestations in relation to political ideologies (Chow et al., 2022). Ideologies behind political consumption can vary from leftist to rightist (Ulver and Laurell, 2020), and they are deeply rooted in the cultural and societal values (Yang et al., 2020) that an individual has acquired throughout their life.

To understand the emergent phenomenon of political consumption (PC) better, we have selected 30 previous academic papers done on political consumerism from highly valued journals, and done a comprehensive bibliometric analysis based on this body of literature. Based on the findings, we have identified four interconnected dimensions of political consumption: (1) contextual enablers, (2) individual and collective PC, (3) motivations driving PC and (4) consumption and anti-consumption actions that manifest political values in practice. With these new identified dimensions, we wish to shed light on how they collectively constitute the phenomenon of political consumption.

Keywords Political consumption, Political consumerism, Ethical consumption, Social responsibility, Boycott, Buycott

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1 Introduction

Political consumption, more commonly abbreviated as PC, is defined by “the actions by people to make choices to change objectionable institutional or market practices” (Micheletti in Chow et al., 2022). However, due to PC’s cross-disciplinary nature and differing views on its definition in various publications, we use a broad definition of PC, in which PC is seen as consumption manifestations in relation to political ideologies (Chow et al., 2022). Traditionally linked to only liberal ideologies, the most recent research showcases, that PC can be linked to any ideology, including feminism or religion (Cambefort and Pecot, 2020).

In their recent report “European Consumers Brace for More Uncertainty” (10.06.2025, BCG website) Boston Consulting Group discusses the rising pessimism among consumers in Europe. According to their report, “European consumers are even more discouraged about the political situation than about the economy, with 57% expressing pessimism”. This pessimism is directly linked to their consumption, and one-third of survey respondents told BCG that they boycott brands due to the ethical or political considerations of their owners. As can be seen from the survey results, political considerations - whether ethical or environmental - are no longer only considered but rather acted upon in purchase situations.

In this paper, we synthesize information from various fields (including business, sociology and politics), and academic papers regarding political consumption, and we attempt to explain further how and why it is affecting consumption behaviour among consumers in the 21st century. Due to the constantly changing political climate and ever rising tensions around the world, the future of consumption is continually and increasingly effected by consumers acting upon their ideologies and shared values. This paper offers implications for policy makers and managers to prepare for fluctuation in consumption behaviour more effectively, taking into consideration the underlying political nature of purchase decisions.

Firstly, we will guide you through a bibliometric analysis of PC: past research done on the subject, inclusion criteria for the publications used as referral material in this paper, and quantitative analysis conducted based on past research. Secondly, we will dive deeper into the qualitative thematic analysis of PC, explaining in-depth the recognised four themes of past research: (1) The contextual enablers of PC, (2) PC’s division between individual and collective behaviour, (3) Motivations behind PC and (4) Consumption and Anti-Consumption behaviours linked to PC. After scrutinizing the qualitative thematic analysis, we will provide some implications for policy makers and corporate managers and present some future research possibilities.

1.1 Artificial Intelligence Statement

In this paper AI has been used to help correct language and sentence errors, to give more academically suited synonyms for words and expressions and to summarise articles' findings. AI has not been used to generate any new text, it has only worked with our own output.

2 Methodology and bibliometric analysis

This bibliometric analysis focuses on the literature of political consumption. We will present our search strategy used to gather all relevant publications relating to the topic and showcase the various quantitative and qualitative metrics we used to analyze the information from the included publications. The aim of the bibliometric analysis was to get a clear understanding of the existing literature and identify joint themes among chosen publications and possible opportunities for future research agenda.

2.1 Search strategy

Figure 1 represents the phases of data collection process. Web of Science was chosen as the main database used for finding suitable publications for this paper. To start, an advanced search was conducted in Web of Science under the topic “political consumption”, that resulted in 102 publications. Although the pool of scientific articles was comparatively small, the search result was in line with the article search done in 2022 by Chow et. al, which resulted to 341 initial search results using Scopus database with a much more indeterminate inclusion frame for chosen publications.

Secondly, we included in the study only the relevant backgrounds of study, including business (32 articles), sociology (16 articles) and later political science (12 articles), after concluding, that although having a business perspective, other fields of study could add to our understanding of the topic. These three areas of study were the most prominent for this paper, as they were the ones most of the publications were published under. These three areas of study included in our study resulted in 60 results. Most of these results were written in English, but to ensure understanding and further narrow down the scope of chosen articles we excluded few articles written in Spanish, resulting in 57 matches.

Due to having a small pool of novel scientific articles, we could not rely on the citation amounts of the published articles. We had to ensure the quality of chosen articles somehow and decided to use the ranking of journals the articles were published in to guarantee the quality of articles used. Therefore, we excluded the articles published in journals under Q1 ranking (or journals without any ranking). This resulted in 45 matches in total (25 business, 10 sociology and 10 political science articles).

Lastly, we decided to manually screen through the publications to include only the thematically related ones. The inclusion criteria for the article were to have PC as the main topic of the article and more specifically have a focus on the consumer perspective of political consumption. After this manual exclusion, we had left the chosen 30 articles, that this paper will use as the base for further analysis.

Other keywords under the topic could have been used (such as “boycott” or “anti-consumption”), but due to them falling under the theme rather than being alternative keywords to PC, we decided not to include them to keep the focus of the paper on purely the concept of political consumption.

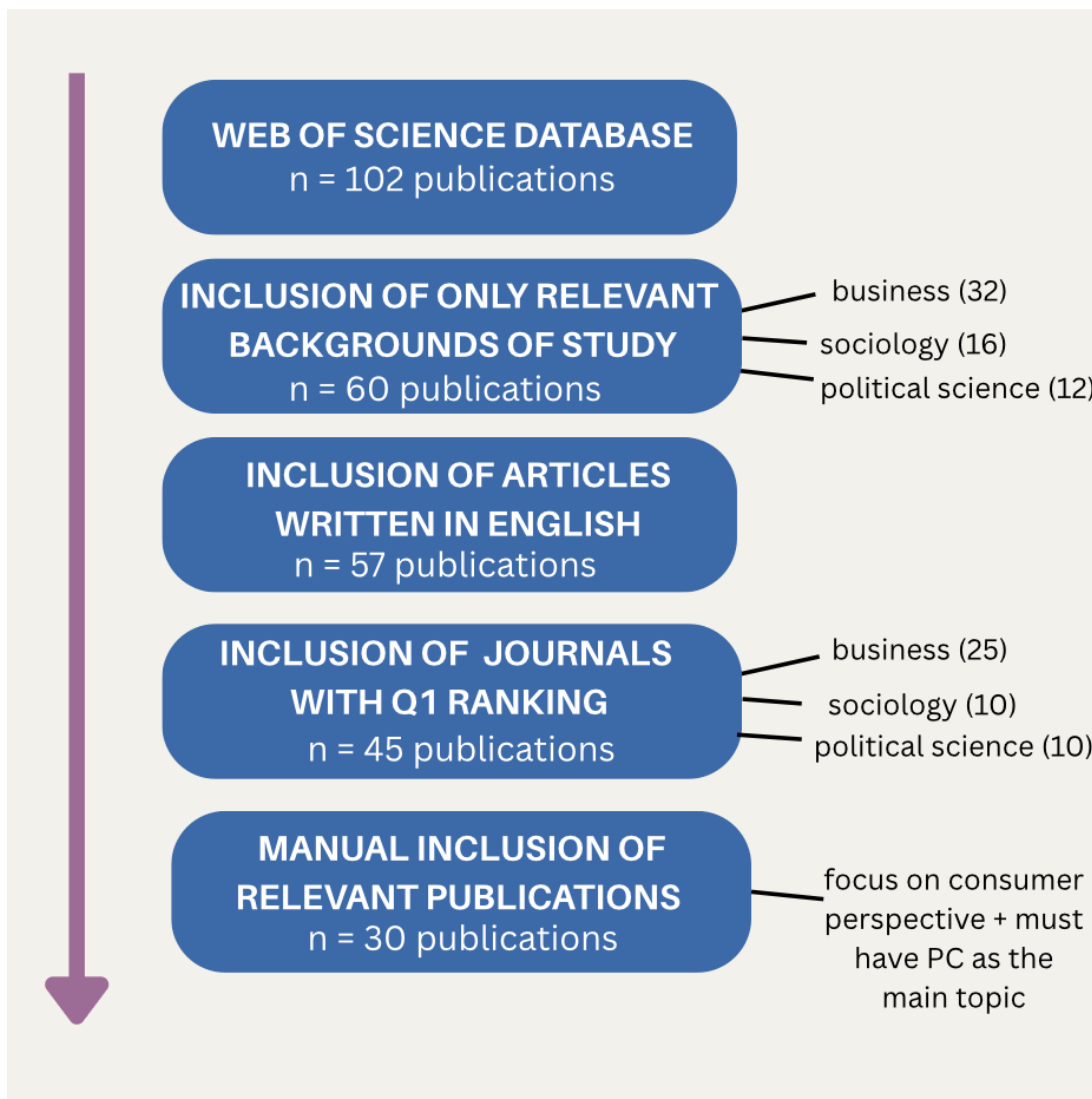


Figure 1: search and filtration process of the data collection

3 Quantitative analysis

The first part of the bibliometric analysis is the quantitative analysis done based on the chosen articles. The quantitative analysis of the publications includes publication timeline, the geographic distribution of publications and most eminent journals.

3.1 Publication timeline

A time trend analysis was conducted to see how publications on political consumption spread across the timeline (Figure 2). As can be seen, all the chosen publications have been written after 2008, showcasing the only recent increase in interest regarding the topic. It is difficult to identify a clear publication trend based on the publication's dates, as during some years several papers have been published while during others none. This may be due to the multidisciplinary nature of PC, as several separate studies are conducted in different fields. The topic is clearly of interest, but an increase in publication trend in the future may require collaboration among researchers from several different fields of study.

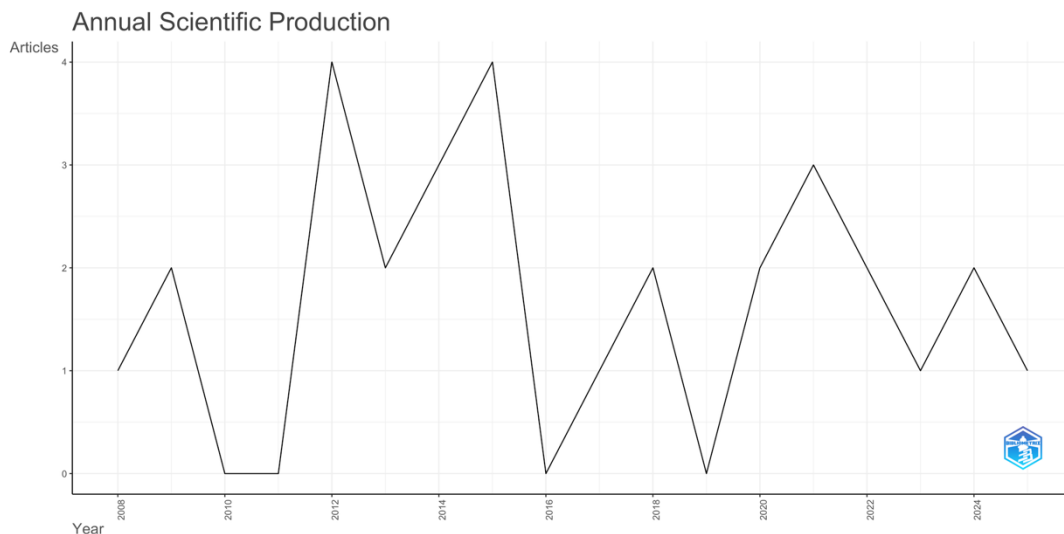


Figure 2: The annual publication timeline for PC papers (2008 - 2025)

3.2 Geographic distribution of publications

We wanted to conduct a metric showcasing the geographic distribution of the chosen publications. Predictably, most of the publications were done in the USA or in some European countries. We identified a few exceptions: some publications were produced in Israel and China, contributing to a more diverse geographical distribution.

Country	Freq
USA	23
SPAIN	8
FRANCE	7
SWEDEN	7
UK	6
CHINA	5
ISRAEL	4
BRAZIL	3
DENMARK	3
JAPAN	3

Figure 3: The countries that have the highest frequency in publishing PC papers

3.3 Most eminent journals

As shown in Figure 4, the journals with the most publications were International Journal of Consumer Studies (9), Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (3) and Journal of Consumer Culture (3). The not-mentioned journals (13 journals in total) had 1-2 articles each.

All the 16 journals chosen from the fields of business, sociology and political science had a Q1 ranking according to Scientific Journal Rankings (SJR). As stated before, the chosen journals all had to have this ranking to ensure the quality of the chosen articles due to the lack of citations on many of the articles.

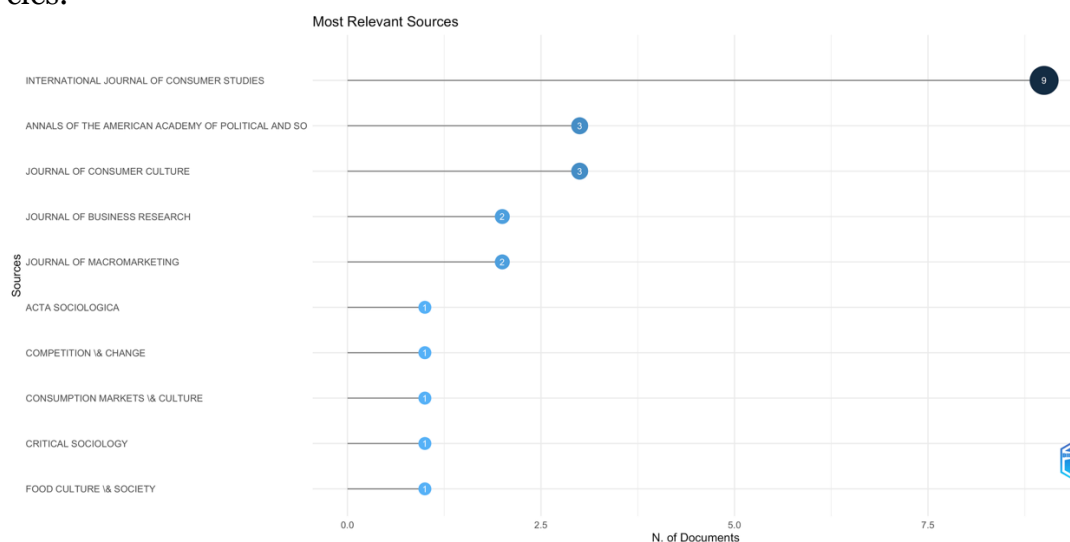


Figure 4: The distribution of articles in the chosen journals

4 Qualitative thematic analysis

The second part of the bibliometric analysis will focus on the thematic analysis of the articles, as four rising themes from thematic map are analyzed thoroughly one by one.

4.1 Conceptualising political consumption

Political consumption is defined by “the actions by people to make choices to change objectionable institutional or market practices” (Micheletti, 2004 in Chow et al., 2022). Although the research and literature on PC is quite recent, political consumption has been practiced long prior to its formal conceptualization, for instance through African-American resistance movements (Brown, 2015). Already in 2004, 34 percent of the populations of twenty European countries reported acts of political consumption (Neilson and Paxton, 2010 in Willis and Schor, 2012). In this paper, to understand the phenomenon of political consumption as broadly as possible to identify meaningful new information from the body of literature chosen, we have decided to use a broad definition of PC, in which PC is seen as consumption manifestations in relation to political ideologies (Chow et al., 2022). Ideologies behind political consumption can vary from leftist to rightist (Ulver and Laurell, 2020), and they are deeply rooted in the cultural and societal values (Yang et al., 2020) that an individual has acquired throughout their life.

Political consumption offers an alternative way of participation in public issue debates, whereby individuals engage through their selection of products or producers based on social, ethical or environmental considerations, rather than solely through more traditional and passive forms of participation, such as voting (Shah et al., 2007:217 in Llopis-Goig, 2013; Zamwel et al., 2014). That is to say, engagement in political consumption requires the exercise of political agency (Halkier and Holm, 2008), implying that individuals must possess such agency. Although some academics consider political consumerism highly individual, as it can be seen “as a form of personal expression, allowing consumers to express their values to society” (Barcellos et al., 2014), there has been a shift towards the view, that alongside individual practices, participation in consumer associations allows consumers to similarly modify existing market logics (Kjeldgaard et al., 2016 in Stigzelius, 2018). To rephrase, political consumption manifests through individual’s positioning, collective supporting or boycotting brands, institutions and products (Barcellos et al., 2014).

Based on our manual browse through the literature, we have identified that political consumption involves the actor (individual or a social group), the ideology behind the action (values, motivations) and how this manifestation of values is executed (consumption or anti-consumption). Based on this

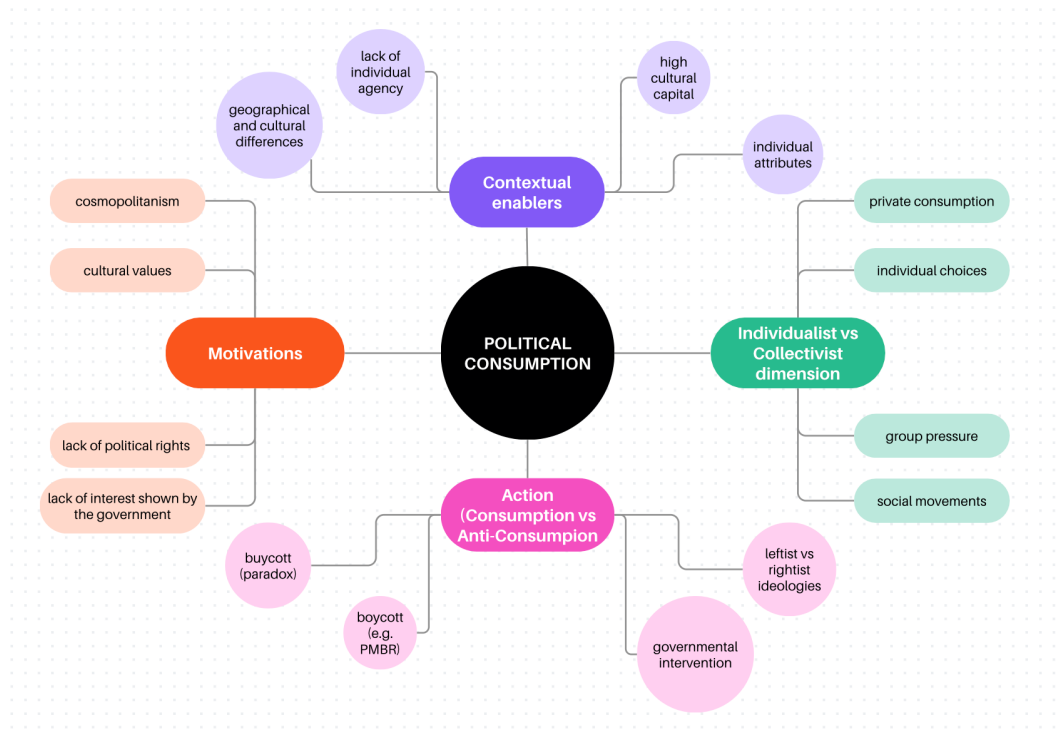
observation, we have created our own thematic map based on the chosen body of literature, that we will present next.

4.2 Thematic map

Due to our chosen body of literature on PC being scattered across various fields of study, we found it challenging to identify common themes and considerations of publications through automated measures (*Biblioshiny*). Although we were initially guided by the word cloud, which provided an overview of common themes, we ultimately examined each piece of literature manually, identifying four interconnected dimensions of political consumption. These dimensions were labelled as it follows: (1) contextual enablers of PC, (2) individual and collective PC, (3) motivations driving PC and lastly (4) consumption and anti-consumption actions that manifest political values in practice (*graph 2: Thematic map*).

As the first dimension of PC, contextual enablers consist of both intrinsic individual attributes (such as demographic factors or possessed cultural capital) as well as extrinsic contextual actors (such as lack of individual agency or geographical and cultural differences). The second dimension of PC relates to the division of individual and collectivist PC: traditionally political consumption has been considered the most individual form of resistance (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007 in Saraiva et al., 2021), but in the recent years academics have also recognized the importance of social movements and boycotts as the empowering force behind individual resistance – blurring the distinction between individual and collectivist efforts of PC.

The third dimension, motivations driving political consumption, encompasses both adopted values and extrinsic urgency as the two main drivers of political consumerism. Universally adopted values of globalization such as cosmopolitanism and self-transcendence, as well as the necessity to exercise individual agency in situations where political rights are limited or government actions are non-existent, have been identified as powerful sources of motivation leading to action in practice. Lastly, the fourth dimension, consumption and anti-consumption actions, delves into how political consumerism is both individually and collectively practiced through positive and resistant consumption. This dimension aims to explain how individuals and collectivist groups manifest their political values through boycotts and boycotts, how ideology acts as a key element behind these manifestations, and how globalization and the governance of a nation can influence these concrete acts of resistance.



Graph 2: Manually crafted thematic map that identifies the four key dimensions of PC

In the following sections, we examine the four identified dimensions of political consumption, exploring in-depth why and how they are interconnected, and how they collectively constitute the phenomenon of political consumption.

4.3 Contextual enablers of political consumption

It could be argued that there are contextual enablers to political consumption. In their article Ferrer-Fons and Fraile (2013) stated, that political consumption “requires particular skills, a certain level of information, and a personal predisposition that is more likely to be found in high educational groups and in people with cultural capital”. In addition, political consumption has been linked with certain demographic characteristics (such as income or education level) in many empirical studies, further supporting the statement that there are certain repetitive aspects to political consumers, that we should observe while examining the wider phenomenon of political consumption. Furthermore, we want to showcase how these contextual enablers can influence the consumer in an individual or national level, and what kind of limitations exist to this enabler’s theory.

Majority of the articles on political consumption agree, that there is a direct link between demographic factors (or “individual attributes”) of consumers and political consumption. In many instances, being white (Baumann et al.,

2015), income (Koos, 2012; Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021), and having a higher level of education (Baumann et al., 2015; Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021; Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2006) have been predictors for having a positive attitude towards political consumption and being more likely to consume politically (whether it be through boycott or buycott). Especially higher degree in education (secondary or tertiary) has stated to be a strong enabler of PC due to consumer's educational background playing a huge role in understanding the complexities and concerns regarding the sustainability of manufacturing and distribution of goods (Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021). Consumers with a higher education have been found to be three times more likely to engage in boycotting or boycotting (Baumann et al., 2015). Some scholars have argued for the influence of social class as a predictor for PC (results of analysis from European Social Survey (ESS) datasets of 2002/2003 in Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021; Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013), but this has been declined by others as not relevant due to individual consumption choices being decreasingly influenced by traditional social forces (Koos, 2012). Overall interpretation is, that individual demographic factors play a part in predicting the probability to consume politically.

Another individual attribute contributing as an enabler of PC has found to be the cultural capital a consumer possesses. Consumers associated with a relatively high cultural capital (HCC) were more likely to consume politically, as it was seen as a superior way to express one's values and social distinction, therefore generating further cultural capital through their consumption (Baumann et al., 2015). For HCC consumers political consumption serves as a "symbolic boundary marker" (DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004) in Baumann et al., 2015), and a vehicle to showcase their sophisticated taste and claim status. This status claiming can be interpreted as a result of class position (Bourdieu, 1984 in Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013), making the social class of a consumer relevant predictor of PC through HCC after all. Although being linked to higher social classes, Bourdieu's concept of habitus in Carfagna et al. (2014) (a working-class preference for utility and a higher-class preference toward luxury) risks oversimplifying the classification for a HCC consumer: traditionally consisted of only the dominated fractions of the dominant classes (Baumann et al., 2015), according to the research done by Carfagna et al. (2014), many of the HCC classified consumers have limited incomes and "enact a set of ecologically oriented high-status tastes that are central to their identity projects". Although HCC consumers are often in a "privileged position to engage in critical consumption because they are socialized in contexts that are free of material scarcity" (Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013), and due to this they often act as early adopters of new ideologies (Holt, 1998 in Carfagna et al., 2014), changes in their consumption habits frequently influence mass consumption patterns (Carfagna et al., 2014), ultimately driving positive social and environmental outcomes.

On the other hand, there are also barriers to individual's choice to consume politically. For instance, ongoing conflicts (such as the occupation of Palestine) or non-voluntary simplicity in consumption habits due to economic disadvantages (Leipäama-Leskinen et al., 2014 in Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021) can hinder consumers' individual desire to enact political values through their consumption habits. An intention-action gap of this sort has been explained through "situated agency" (Choi, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2012 in Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021), which "positions individual negotiations for boycott participation against personal, political, economic and sociocultural contexts and entanglements at a particular time in history". This is very crucial aspect to consider in conflict situations, in which the disadvantaged consumers rely on any work or produce they can get, without having alternative options to choose from. In the Palestine occupation conflict Palestinians rely on the production of Israel due to not being able to mass produce quality goods themselves (interviews done by Ger & Belk in the West Bank in 2015, in Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021).

While individual attributes can facilitate value-based consumption, these decisions are only viable when economic stability, political institutions and social protections against unemployment and poverty are in place (Koos, 2012; Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013). In their article Ferrer-Fons and Fraile (2013) went through datasets from 2002/2003 showcasing that in Western Europe one in three citizens practiced some form of political consumerism in the beginning of the new millennium, and that the amount of people consuming in line with their ethical values has just increased every year since then. This is the case for majority of the countries considered in the chosen articles, as the articles published and their research is mainly based on Western countries and societies (check *Figure 3*), whose economic affluence and governmental safety net in the form of benefits allows citizens to consume according to their individual values and ethics. There are even differences among geographically similarly located countries: in the Northern and economically more advantageous European countries (such as Germany or Switzerland) political consumption seems to be more customary due to their opportunity structures and government support towards green consumerism through different methods, such as involvement in eco-labeling (Sonderskov and Daugbjerg, 2011 in Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013). In more economically stable and affluent countries the variety of alternative selection is much broader, which is a further example of nationally built opportunity structure for consumer activism. National differences in the structure of the retail sector also further influence individual consumer's income attribute: a budget restriction for consumption might not be an equal burden for consumers in an affluent country compared to consumers in a poorer country due to having higher financial degrees of freedom (Koos, 2012; Zhang, 2015). Some scholars have also suggested a connection between a country's state model and the degree of political consumption: countries with a dominant centrally organized state can be expected to lower the possibility of consumer activism within its citizens (Jepperson,

2002:67 and Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001:812 in Koos 2012) as they lack the institutional encouragement. National differences in political consumption are further influenced by the prevailing culture, PC being most common in countries that prioritize individual responsibility, generalized trust and post-materialism (Neilson and Paxton, 2010 in Koos, 2012). As we can notice, consumer's individual attributes are intertwined with their environment, and together they can either increase or decrease the probability of political consumption through governmental support (such as offering free higher education to its citizens).

We wish to emphasize that, while both individual traits and contextual actors can act as enablers or barriers to political consumption, they are only partial influences and cannot fully explain why one person is more likely to consume politically than another. Moreover, these influences often result in support for the ideology behind PC rather than in concrete action (Baumann et al., 2015). In addition to individual attributes and contextual actors, a strong correlation between conventional political activism and political consumption can be found (Baumann et al., 2015; Bröckerhoff and Qassoum, 2021), as PC is seen as an additional way to have influence on politics. In conclusion, individual traits, contextual actors as well as individual's familiarity with politics all play a part in their likeness to consume ethically.

4.4 The division between individual and collective PC

In this paper, we uphold the notion that political consumption can be manifested through both individual and collective action. By individual action, we refer to consumption choices made by individual consumers based on their personal values, identities, and lifestyles. Collective action, on the other hand, refers to social groups composed of individuals, who are likely also participants in individual political consumption. Given that these collectives consist of individual political consumers, we pose the following question: can these two dimensions of PC even be treated as separate, or are they intertwined in every respect?

Political consumption has previously been defined as a social movement consisting of both individual and collective actors (Bossy, 2014: 179 in Saraiva et al., 2021), and various proposals have been made for naming the interplay between these two dimensions, such as "individualized collective action" (Micheletti, 2004 in Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015) or "collectivized individual action" (Holzer, 2006 in Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015), depending on which dimension is assumed to exert a greater influence on the other. Halkier and Holm (2008) further highlight the intertwined nature of these dimensions, stating that political consumption can be "both individual and collective at the same time, because by assuming active responsibility for the 'good life', citizens can do good for themselves at the same time as doing

good for the broader collectivity”. Likewise, Saraiva et al. (2021) argue that consumption as a political tool is manifested through changes in both collective and personal efforts. The main difference between these two forms of PC appears to lie in differing views on responsibility: blaming the human condition and ignorance encourages more individual action, whereas blaming managerial elites and governments encourages collective efforts (Valor et al., 2017).

Although nowadays often seen as intertwined with the collectivist dimension of political consumption (PC), the individual dimension was historically considered the ultimate form of PC, as scholars emphasized the importance of consumption activities confined to the private sphere and the broader privatization of responsibility (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020; Bauman, 2008 in Saraiva et al., 2021). Some academics regard it as the most individualized form of activism (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007 in Saraiva et al., 2021). At the individual level, political consumerism is manifested through practices such as ‘voluntary simplicity.’ Through voluntary simplicity, consumers “embrace post-materialist values such as social justice and environmentalism” by engaging in local consumption and resisting global problems at a grassroots level within the existing political and economic framework (Zamwel et al., 2014).

We observe that operating within the prevailing system is a recurring characteristic of individual PC. Ritson and Dobscha (1999 in Cherrier, 2009) similarly note the existence of ‘futile’ consumer resistance, manifested by individuals who regulate their consumption privately and choose not to act against the system. Beyond acting within society’s established political and economic structures, individual political consumerism also stems from the desire to bring personal change to one’s own life (Zamwel et al., 2014) and to reinforce personal values and identity through value-based political consumption (Cherrier, 2009). Cherrier (2009) identifies two distinct identities of an individual political consumer: a hero identity and a project identity. The former expresses a desire for an alternative society and resists capitalist structures, while the latter develops new consumption patterns within the existing economic system. A political consumer with a hero identity resembles collective PC in its resistance to dominant powers, whereas a consumer with a project identity is more likely to place responsibility on themselves and manifest PC through control over their own consumption - consistent with theories of “voluntary simplicity” and “futile” consumer resistance.

Like we have stated, the collectivist dimension is not that far away from the individual dimension of PC as scholars have historically thought: “individuals’ voluntary simplicity has acquired a group consciousness that is an important and necessary phase in the maturation of a social movement into a

more potent social and political force” (Alexander and Ussher, 2012 in Zamwel et al., 2014). In other words, collective political consumption is acted out by social movements consisting of already individually politically consuming consumers. Dubuisson-Quellier (2015) therefore declares the the main objective of social movements or groupings to be the the organization of individuals that already share the same framing of what should drive consumption, such as social or environmental considerations. Although social movements and environmental organizations also aim to recruit and guide new individuals through different ‘market devices’ such as labels and purchasing guides (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015), it is much more time-efficient for them to recruit “friends” (already politically consuming individuals) over “strangers” (new recruits) to target companies and governments for change (Jasper and Poulsen, 1996 in Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015).

According to Ritson and Dobscha (1999 in Cherrier, 2009), collective dimension of PC would represent the ‘not futile resistance’ groups, whose “manifestations are public and include complaining to sponsoring organizations, boycotting a specific manufacturer or retailer”. In contrast to ‘futile’ individual consumers, organizing these individuals together promotes the empowerment of individuals by providing them with new abilities for action through collective groupings that magnify the impact of their consumption choices (Scott, 1985 in Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015; Shah, 2012). These collective social groups can have various forms: they can be large international environmental organisations (such as WWF or Greenpeace) or national organisations striving to promote inclusivity within the ecological transition (Laruffa et al., 2025), or even smaller grassroots organisations promoting local trading systems and alternative consumption choices (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015). Some of these collective actors use market-driven consumer campaigns to achieve sustainability and social justice goals (Willis and Schor, 2012) but some more critical and reformist organisations advocate profound change such as degrowth through blaming both the individual consumer as well as the managerial elites and governments (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015). Benford and Snow (2000 in Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015) have however noted, that the “collective action frames not only attribute blame, but they also propose solutions to the problem” – that is to say, if consumers are part of the problem, they also must appear as part of the solution.

There have been many instances, where individualized form of PC has been the core of social movements while providing a collective identity (Rössel and Schenk, 2018 in Saraiva et al., 2021), such as the Anti-ELAB Movement in China, in which individual citizens expressed support of ‘yellow food shops’ standing for pro-democracy against the Chinese Communist party (Mak and Poon, 2024). This is a clear illustration of the interconnected

individual and collective dimensions of PC: individual political consumers supported these pro-democratic food shops through their consumption preferences, and these food shops later supported these individuals through channeling resources to arrested protesters, raising humanitarian funds and even offering employment to supporters of the movement (Mak and Poon, 2024). Religious boycotts in the past offer another demonstrative case of individual-collectivist PC: in 1966 John Lennon stated his band to be 'bigger than Jesus', which ended up triggering tension among religious individuals that organized collectively a boycott against the Beatles (Kalliny et al., 2018). In both instances, self-interest and public-interest do not appear contradictory, but rather complimentary of each other (Atkinson, 2012; Willis and Schor, 2012).

To conclude, "individuals are not only subject to multiple relations of power but also reconverted into subjects participating in those power relations" (Valor et al., 2017). The private actions of individual political consumers and the collective dynamics of social movements increasingly overlap, through digital platforms that enable individuals to participate in public discussions and political processes (Mak and Poon, 2024). Social media and publicity of PC movements do not only offer the possibility for a wider discussion but additionally encourage political consumerism: Zorell and Denk (2021) state, that "the more attempts (of influencing one to consider political consumption) individuals encounter, the more likely they are to consider ecological and ethical aspects of consumption regularly. Therefore, "organizing collective action that is able to effect profound normative, cultural and political modifications in society" (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2015) by forming collectives of existing political individuals should be considered as a key pathway for fostering systematic change.

4.5 Motivations behind PC

Another dimension under political consumption identified in previous research is motivation, which is closely connected to the relational and collectivist aspects of the phenomenon. In this article, we discuss motivation through values and urgency, which both provide direction for motivation and therefore act as instigators for possible political action through consumption practices. We tackle cosmopolitanism as a core value leading to political consumption (Llopis-Goig, 2013) and how the 21st century socially conscious consumer not only considers ethical matters in the national, but rather in the global level (De Barcellos et al., 2014) due to globalisation. In addition, we take into consideration national and governmental differences between countries, and how the lack of governmental intervention in ethical issues might lead to urgency for citizens to enforce needed change.

One of the key motivators for political consumerism has historically been lack of trust in the nation's government and other political institutions (Stolle et al., 2005 in Zhang, 2015; Zamwel et al., 2014) or lack of ways to demonstrate their political views through conventional politics in authoritarian or oppressed countries (Shi, 1997 in Zhang, 2015). According to Zhang (2015) PC is negatively related to having political rights in these affluent countries, "where people have limited political rights but have a certain level of civil liberties, political consumerism would sever as an alternative approach for people to participate in the politics." When citizens or a minority have no real vote in elections, they find other ways to exert political influence: a good example of this was the 'black capitalism' movement after the first world war in the United States, through which African-American consumers raised awareness of their unfair social standing through extreme consumer resistance against whites and their production (Brown, 2015). The need for political consumption can be driven both by rising economic inequality, as observed in mainland China (Zhang, 2015), and by increasing economic prosperity among citizens of formerly authoritarian governments (for instance Brazil), who are now able to express political values through their consumption (De Barcellos et al., 2014). Although distrust has primarily been examined in countries with limited political rights, research shows that citizens in Western democracies have turned to political consumption to effect change when trust was undermined (Halkier and Holm, 2008).

In all cases it's not the lack of trust in the government but rather lack of interest shown by the government in considering the issues citizens regard as essential. There are multiple emerging countries which have gone through a major economic and societal structure changes during the last decade and are now adjusting to the changes. This societal change has enabled the ever-growing middle class to take initiative in changing consumption to a more sustainable direction through social movements and activation of the socially-aware consumers (De Barcellos et al., 2014), some academics even considering the possibility for consumers from these countries to progress in their consumption directly pass the "resource-intensive consumption styles in industrializes countries" (Schäfer et al., 2011 in De Barcellos et al., 2014). This activation of citizen-consumers indicates an increasing level of concern on consumption nationally as well as globally.

Globalization has further contributed to the transformation of consumer values. "Globalization as a concept refers to both to the compression of the world and the intensification of our consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992:8 in Llopis-Goig, 2013), therefore creating an idea of joint responsibility of the well-being of the globe as well as its citizens. A core value of this compressed world order could be considered to be

cosmopolitanism: a cultural orientation characterized by openness and receptivity to practices and ideas of other cultures (Tomlinson, 1999 in Llopis-Goig, 2013) as well as “moral commitment to universal values” (Nussbaum, 1996 in Llopis-Goig, 2013). Such cosmopolitanism manifests in individuals’ intentional political consumption, with decisions informed by consideration of their impact on the collective wellbeing (Halkier and Holm, 2008; Miller, 2001 and Mohr et al., 2001 in Llopis-Goig, 2013).

The values underlying political consumption practices have been studied using Schwartz’s theory of basic human values. Based on the theory, that understands values as “desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people’s lives” (Schwartz, 2005 in De Barcellos et al., 2014), benevolence and universalism were ranked the highest in the empirical study that identified values of political consumers (De Barcellos et al., 2014). This result is aligned with Schwartz’s theory, in which values like benevolence and universalism were located in the self-transcendence dimension, in contrast to values such as power and conformity that were located in the self-enhancement dimension. In a way, political consumption can be seen as an example of new types of reflection and action forms that consumers have adapted due to emerging universal problems that cannot be controlled in a national level (Føllesdal, 2003:13 in Llopis-Goig, 2013). In addition to these adapted universal values functioning alongside an awareness of the urgency for collective, universal action, value-aligned consumption also reinforces consumer identity. By purchasing ethically, individuals articulate who they are, or how they wish to be perceived (De Barcellos et al., 2014).

In his article about the “black capitalism” and African-American people arising to take matters into their own hands in the 20th century, Brown (2015) states: “there is value in a process that allows for the oppressed to mobilize themselves, as opposed to having others mobilize them on their behalf”. Whether political social movements, past or present, produce concrete material outcomes is not the primary motivator for political consumption. Rather, the motivation of ethical consumers lies in raising awareness through individual consumption choices and in expressing values oriented toward collective wellbeing, therefore encouraging political consumption as well as several other forms of political involvement (Willis, 2012 in Zhang, 2015).

4.6 Consumption and anti-consumption related to PC

Now that we have tackled the contextual enablers of PC, how motivations guide individual’s consumption behaviors and how this consumption has both individual as well as collective dimensions to it, we want to showcase how these political manifestations actualize into consumption and anti-

consumption behaviors. By consumption, we refer to positive buying or 'buycott', defined by Micheletti (in Koos, 2012) as "the purchase of products with specific environmental, political or ethical qualities" in mind. The other form of PC is anti-consumption, in which consumers reject or restrict their consumption due to political, ethical or symbolic reasons (Lee et al., 2011 in Cambefort and Pecot, 2020), demonstrated usually in the form of a boycott of some sort. Both forms of political consumption serve as means of translating individual consumers' political ideologies into concrete action, enabling them to engage civically by 'voting' through their choices in the marketplace (Shah et al. 2012; Sandicki and Ekici, 2009). Although we examine PC through the actions of individual consumers or the collectives they form, the role of globalization and national governance cannot be overlooked in addressing social-ecological problems, as both can limit or shape the functioning of capitalism and the processes through which economic growth is generated (Laruffa, 2025).

Positive consumption within political consumption arises from the notion that "the only possibility to advance social-ecological aims is to reframe the latter in economic terms" (Laruffa, 2022 in Laruffa, 2025), reflecting the idea that given capitalism's role as the driving force in society, one must engage with the system strategically to effect change. This is in many ways paradoxical, as critics see consumer culture and today's level of consumption as the root causes for many social problems (Baumann et al., 2015), yet within capitalist societies, higher levels of consumption are likely to align with improved social-ecological outcomes (Laruffa, 2025), as capitalist elites and corporations tend to transform sustainability critiques into marketable products. Due to this, many politically driven consumers are tempted to conform and buy these specified products (Kenis and Lievens, 2015: 12-13 in Laruffa, 2025), especially in some cultures, in which consumers tend to avoid restricting actions that could upset others or violate social expectations (Flecha-Ortiz et al., 2024; De Barcellos et al., 2014) and rather enforce their political stance e.g. through a buycott. Although positive consumption provides one way for action, achieving more transformative consumption change calls for a dual strategy of both consumption and anti-consumption, in order to move beyond the growth-centered ideology of capitalism. A politically driven consumer can simultaneously purchase politically ethical goods and participate in movements that question capitalism and its continual demand for growth (Jones and Ström, 2024 and Jaffee, 2007:266 in Laruffa, 2025).

The most favored form of anti-consumption and political consumption in general is boycotting, in which consumers refuse to collectively and intentionally to consume a particular good or service in an organized manner to force a target (e.g. an unethical company) to implement actions aligned with socially responsible and ethical practices (Friedman, 1985 in Sandicki

and Ekici, 2009; Sandicki and Ekici, 2009). In the context of globalized world, tourism boycotts provide a crucial example of political demonstration, where individuals refrain from visiting certain countries to signal their political stance (e.g. boycotting Israel until a ceasefire in Gaza). These boycotts function across multiple levels: national authorities may issue travel advisories, which are then amplified through media and online communications, potentially mobilizing consumers to participate in organized boycotts (Yang, 2023). We must however point out that, in contrast to positive consumption behavior (which is typically practiced over the long term and can be viewed as an element of broader lifestyle choices), boycotts tend to be relatively short-lived, as their duration is tied to whether the underlying demands are met or unmet (Sandicki and Ekici, 2009). Nevertheless, there are forms of boycotting that have greater longevity, and which are not tied upon the fulfilment of specific demands. One example is politically motivated brand rejection (PMBR), in which consumers permanently refuse to purchase or use a brand due to its perceived association with a political ideology they oppose (Sandicki and Ekici, 2009).

Ideology is therefore a crucial aspect of political consumption. Political ideology is defined as a “belief system that explains and justifies a preferred political order for society, either existing or proposed, and offers a strategy for its attainment” (Christenson, 1971:5 in Sandicki and Ekici, 2009). Cambefort and Pecot (2020) argue in their article, that a majority of the reasons against consumption that have risen from consumer research relate to progressive demands, and therefore political ideology behind consumption should be researched as a dimension of anti-consumption. Especially, as the political ideology behind individual’s consumption is present in all stages of the consumer journey, from search to the disposal of a product (Schmitt et al., 2022). Regardless of most of the research done on progressive consumers, there is strong evidence that a political ideology can influence anti-consumption behavior irrespective to the type of political ideology an individual possesses (Parsons et al., 2017 in Cambefort and Pecot, 2020): research shows, that both right- and left-leaning voters are likely to boycott (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014 in Cambefort and Pecot, 2020; Ulver and Laurell, 2020). Just as leftist motivations, such as opposition to overconsumption and anti-capitalist principles can conflict with consumerism, right-wing beliefs may also challenge it; for instance, nationalism opposing the concept of a global market or traditionalism resisting continuous novelty (Stearns, 1997 in Cambefort and Pecot, 2020). Cambefort and Pecot (2020) even highlight, that “within the same claim, different individuals or small groups may seem to engage in a similar anti-consumption behavior but actually rely on different political ideologies”: radical right can express dissatisfaction against consumption and globalization the same way as progressive consumers.

Schmitt et al. (2022) remark, that “the ideological system of consumerism establishes rules and regulations, that are enforced through social institutions such as governmental organizations, private firms, entrepreneurs and consumer agencies”. This suggests that state regulation and institutional guidance play a crucial role in shaping how the ideologies behind political consumption are actualized. The extent to which a government is receptive to individuals taking political stances affects the overall level of political consumption within a country. Participation in political consumerism is a privilege, as not all individuals have the resources or capabilities (shaped in part by state governance) to engage in it, even if they are willing (Schmitt et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2012). In addition, a nation itself can influence its citizen-consumers to take a stance based on a national ideology. In his article, Yang (2023) studied China’s governmental intervention to a political crisis: according to him, political events such as the THAAD deployment “activated China’s state ideology of humiliation, which stems from China’s contemporary history of invasion and colonization by foreign powers” (Yang et al., 2020 in Yang, 2023), and due to feeling threatened, the government mobilized its citizens to a geopolitical tourism boycott. The amount of these types of nation-led boycotts is likely to increase in the coming years due to a greater number of geopolitical tensions and building-blocks of globalization such as tourism being constantly politicized, e.g. through COVID-vaccination passports (Yang, 2023). Nation-led political consumerism and political tourism may intensify existing tensions, and due to this, many scholars emphasize the importance of mobility in influencing geopolitical narratives and global orders (Hall 2017 in Yang, 2023).

5 Discussion

In this paper we have discussed political consumption and discovered how four different qualitative themes: (1) contextual enablers, (2) individual vs collective dimension of PC, (3) motivations and political desires behind PC and (4) (anti)consumption, influence political consumerism in general. In this section we will conclude our analysis as well as introduce policy and managerial implications and further research possibilities.

As demonstrated in this paper, political consumption is an increasingly prominent multidisciplinary phenomenon that requires further research and cross-disciplinary collaboration (political science, business, sociology) due to its significant implications for consumption behavior and potentially, for national relationships through government-led boycotts. Based on our qualitative analysis of previously published academic studies, we have identified four key dimensions of political consumption, each of which explains the phenomenon from a distinct perspective.

The first (1) dimension, contextual enablers, addresses the background factors influencing political consumption, including psychographic characteristics and the contextual aspects of an individual's life that shape their decision to engage in political consumerism. The second (2) dimension, political consumption as an individualist versus collective practice, illustrates how political consumption encompasses both individual purchasing actions and pre-planned collective efforts aimed at mobilizing other consumers. The third (3) dimension, motivations, highlights the role of cosmopolitan values and urgency as drivers of engagement in political consumption through motivation, reinforcing individual commitment to action. The fourth and final (4) dimension considers consumption and anti-consumption as different forms of expressing political values, demonstrating how the ideologies of individuals and nations can either constrain or reinforce political consumer behavior. Taken together, these four dimensions provide a comprehensive understanding of political consumption, explaining who engages in it and why individuals make consumption decisions based on political ideologies. Importantly, the four dimensions are relational: the actualization of political consumption (through consumption and anti-consumption) is closely linked to its collectivist aspects, while an individual's contextual enablers (background, income, culture, nationality) are strongly connected to their value system, which in turn shapes motivations and ideology: the primary drivers of political consumption.

5.1 Implications

With the help of our analysis, we have recognized some implications for both, policy makers as well as managers of international companies working in today's turbulent socio-economic environment.

Like mentioned before, political consumerism doesn't manifest anymore only through the actions of individuals in certain social groups but also through an alignment of a nation's citizens, reinforced by the nation itself. As tensions are rising and more traditional form of conservatism is re-emerging after decades of neo-liberalism domination (Geiselberger, 2017 and Hawley, 2016 in Cambefort and Pecot, 2020), the new ability of a nation to mobilize its citizens to action (e.g. to boycott another nation) must be taken seriously. In his article Yang (2023) states, that due to Chinese citizens boycott towards South Korean tourism, the tourism industry in South Korea faced almost immediate retaliation. This highlights the need to investigate how tourism and other forms of citizen mobilization can be framed as politicized activities, enabling stakeholders to respond effectively to comparable situations. Collaboration with other nations and international bodies, including the EU (in a regional context) and the UN (in a global context), is essential to establish comprehensive guidelines.

Secondly, policy makers need to consider the trust between a nation and its citizens. The ability to mobilize citizens to consume in particular ways can represent a significant source of influence for a nation, but this is only possible if a foundation of trust has been established. Drawing on urgency as a motivational driver and acknowledging geographical differences (where some countries provide greater space for citizens to express political views, e.g. Nordic countries compared to more restrictive nations such as North Korea) trust is reinforced when citizens' needs are met: they have political rights, feel that their voices matter, can engage in boycotts without governmental interference, and ideally, receive support from the state in achieving their political objectives (e.g. through promoting green consumption). When such trust exists, citizens are less likely to act against the nation on political grounds. By collaborating with progressive scholars, policymakers can design pragmatic yet transformative policies (Bärnthaler, 2024:8 in Laruffa, 2025) that are more likely to satisfy politically driven citizens.

There are also important managerial implications to guide corporations through turbulent political times, as highlighted by the Boston Consulting Group in their June report on rising consumer pessimism. First, corporate managers need to integrate the political aspects of consumption (such as ethics and social responsibility) into their business practices, not solely as a strategic advantage, but as a core aspect of their operations. Doing so can help build trust between corporations and their customers. However, companies cannot rely only on riding the "green wave." As noted earlier, political consumers are continuously seeking ways to transform the market while simultaneously engaging in sustainable consumption within the framework of existing market practices and capitalism. If sustainability or ethical practices are treated only as a strategic advantage, or if corporations cooperate with other politically monitored firms, they risk becoming targets of politically motivated brand rejection (PMBR), which can be extremely difficult to

overcome, even if the corporation accepts the boycott demands (Sandicki & Ekici, 2009).

Another important consideration for managers is the international political elements of consumption. For multinational corporations, it is crucial to anticipate how to respond when the prevailing cultural and political contexts of the countries in which they operate differ from one another. This capability can help them navigate difficulties similar to those faced by Starbucks, which was criticized in Saudi Arabia for upholding local traditions and failing to demonstrate sufficient support for equality, while simultaneously being criticized in the United States for challenging tradition and undermining established social hierarchies (Cambefort & Pecot, 2020). Managers must also account for how the political climate, and the corresponding policy implications we have outlined previously in this paper, may affect business practices, particularly in the context of nation-led boycotts.

5.2 Limitations and Future research

Before discussing into some future research possibilities, we acknowledge several limitations of our study, that may have influenced our contributions. AS noted by Zorell and Denk (2021), most of the research on political consumption has focused on Western countries, which may limit the generalizability of our contributions (for instance, political consumerism requires political agency, which is currently not universally available for every individual). Secondly, our research was limited to 30 papers of academic literature, and while informative, this provides a partial view of the phenomenon of political consumption. Thirdly, our bibliometric analysis was based on algorithmic findings, which may have overlooked some crucial aspects needed for a more comprehensive analysis.

Given that research on political consumption is scattered across various fields, we suggest that academics of these disciplines conduct joint studies to examine the different aspects of political consumption in depth in every paper addressing the phenomenon. In addition to business, sociology and political science, psychology could offer crucial new insights into value and ideology formation, which we have identified to be crucial for understanding political consumerism.

In addition to researching political consumption as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon in the future, we suggest that researchers investigate country-led boycotts and how they may serve as catalysts for international conflicts. Relatedly, the trust established between a nation and its citizens should be studied, comparing nations with high level of citizen trust to those where such trust is lacking.

Researchers should also examine the combined influence of lifestyle changes and government support, as suggested by Stigzelius (2018). As established in this paper, individuals are more likely to engage in political consumption when their environment is favorable; that is, when political rights are secured and governments actively support political consumption through initiatives such as backing ethical organizations through financial support or enabling projects like eco-labelling (Sonderskov and Daugbjerg, 2011 in Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013). It would be important to investigate the extent to which each factor (lifestyle change and government support) affects political consumption independently, as well as how their influence is increased when individual motivations and supportive external conditions align.

6 Conclusion

On the final note, we want to summarize the key insights that this paper has made in regard to the PC literature. From the quantitative part of bibliometric analysis we established, that the PC literature is mainly focused on the Western countries (with some exceptions such as Israel and China), with a growing number of citizens engaging in political consumption. Most of the literature on PC has been done during the recent years, but there is no clear trend to be seen in the literature, possibly due to the cross-disciplinary nature of the phenomenon (aspects to be considered on the fields of business, sociology as well as political science) and therefore academics of various fields should join their forces in the future for a deeper insight into the phenomenon.

Given the fragmentation of the literature, we sought to further structure existing research further and identified four interconnected dimensions of political consumption. These four dimensions explain political consumption as a whole and answer to the following questions:

- 1) Why do some people tend to be more likely to consider political issues while consuming?
- 2) How can PC be seen as both individual as well as collective behaviour?
- 3) What are the drivers of motivation that instigate political consumerism?
And
- 4) How do political consumers actively practice political consumption?

Although we deliberately avoided limiting our research by defining research questions prior to reviewing the existing academic literature on political consumption, by identifying common themes (the four dimensions) manually from previously published papers, we are now able to address the previously posed questions with reference to the corresponding dimension: (1) the contextual enablers of PC, (2) individual and collective PC, (3) motivations driving PC and (4) consumption and anti-consumption actions that manifest political values in practice.

To summarize, political consumption can be conceptualized through four key dimensions: (1) contextual enablers, encompassing individual attributes and external factors that increase the likelihood of political consumption; (2) the distinction between individual and collective actors, both of whom participate in political consumption; (3) motivations, including individual values and situational urgency that drive engagement; and finally (4) concrete political actions, manifested through consumption or anti-consumption practices, which can be shaped by globalization or governmental influences.

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