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## QUICK READ SYNOPSIS

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### The Politics of Consumption/ The Consumption of Politics

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### In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century

Juliet B. Schor, Boston College

*Background*

Research contributions have enormously enhanced scholars' understandings of the emergence and growth of consumer society regarding

- how consumers experience their consumption activities and goods, sub-cultures, consumer agency, and meanings;
- the role of consumption in the constitution of social inequalities such as gender, race, and class;
- the connections between consumption, nationalism, and empire; and
- the nature of retailing, spatial dimensions of consumption, and many more dimensions of consumption.

NOTE: This article considers three major traditions of consumer critique: Veblenian accounts of status-seeking, the Frankfurt School, and Galbraith and the economic approach to consumer demand. The article argues that the flaws of these models are not necessarily fatal, and especially that the ongoing debate about producer versus consumer sovereignty should be revisited in light of the changing political power of transnational corporations.

*Veblen*

The core of the Veblen approach is a hierarchical social structure driven by a competitive status competition in which position is determined by wealth.

- Publicly visible consumption is the mechanism by which wealth is validated in the competition, or “game.”
- The need to commit real resources eliminates pretenders and provides a readily assessable status claim.
- The emphasis on visibility also signals that this is a model of alternatives to private consumption (such as public consumption, savings, and leisure time).
- The critics of Veblen have rightly identified key shortcomings and limitations of both his theory and status models more generally.
  - The universe of goods is far more complex than the model suggests, and the informational demands on consumers to keep up with the array of goods are substantial and increasing.
  - However, the Internet has made information cheap and accessible. There may be an increasing preoccupation with consumption because the informational demands are so high.

*Adorno and Horkheimer*

Within the humanities, the Frankfurt School has been the most influential of the consumer critiques: In their classic article, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) outlined a pessimistic view of the “culture industries.”

- Consumers are trapped in a circle of manipulation and retroactive need.
- Life outside the factory (the sphere of leisure) is an “afterlife,” structured by a dehumanized workplace.
- Art loses its revolutionary potential, instead acting like a drug that lulls the worker into passivity outside the factory, and makes it possible for him (this is a very male vision) to return the next day to his mindless work.
- The critics see this as a so-called “totalized” and functionalist vision without contradiction or possibility for resistance and that it is elitist in its denigration of popular culture.

*Galbraith*

Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* was the most influential popular discussion of consumption in the post-WWII era.

- It makes three major claims about consumption:
  - that producers create consumer desire,
  - that the consumption–well-being link is weak, and
  - that the structural pressures to increase private consumption drive out public goods.
- Like the Frankfurt School, Galbraith has been criticized for viewing consumers as passive and manipulated, and he has been attacked as a hypocrite and an elitist, a charge leveled at many consumer critics.

*Conclusion*

So where does the discussion of market sovereignty leave us?

- Are we closer to the new wisdom that consumers rule, either through their considerable power to reject products they do not like, or through their growing role in the production of cultural innovation and ultimately not only products but marketing messages as well?
- Or is the growing corporate power that is widely acknowledged in other spheres, such as the state and the university, also relevant in consumer markets, in ways that are not identical to what Galbraith argued, but closely related?

- Having succeeded spectacularly well in ensuring growing demand for goods, perhaps the transnational companies that dominate consumer markets have redirected their attention to consolidating control over the environment in which they operate.
  - This growing power has been accompanied by the dominance of an ideology that posits the reverse—that the consumer is king and the corporation is at his or her mercy.
- Finally, the argument in this article is not that a return to the critical traditions of the early twentieth century is a sufficient basis for articulating a compelling challenge to contemporary consumer culture.
  - But it is a necessary first step to recovering a tradition of engaged, critical scholarship at the macro level.
  - From here the task is to construct a truly twenty-first-century approach: a new, critical paradigm that engages the ways in which consumption has grown and has radically transformed notions of individuality, community, and social relations.

## Capital, Consumption, Communication, and Citizenship: The Social Positioning of Taste and Civic Culture in the United States

Lewis Friedland, Dhavan V. Shah, Nam-Jin Lee,  
Mark A. Rademacher, Lucy Atkinson, and Thomas Hove,  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

### *Background*

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979/1984) has earned wide influence for its path-breaking and elaborate analysis of the economy of cultural goods: the social conditions for their production, consumption, and valuation.

- Bourdieu's great innovation was to connect the production, consumption, and valuation of cultural capital with the social practices of establishing hierarchies, maintaining distances, and legitimating differences between dominant and dominated groups.
- Since taste plays such an important part in these social practices, its logic needs to be examined sociologically and placed within a history of struggles between the dominant and the dominated.
- *Distinction* outlines a complex program for a science of cultural consumption. In pursuing this program, Bourdieu's goal was to demystify and expose the social misrecognitions that the Kantian tradition of aesthetic judgment helped rationalize.

### *The United States*

In this article, the authors take Bourdieu's concept of the field of consumption and apply it to the United States in 2000.

- The United States in 2000 differs not only in its class and cultural structure; it also lies at the other side of a historical shift in which consumption is less clearly the outcome of the intersection of class and culture but rather actively shapes it.

- Consumption of television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet has become an increasingly important marker of cultural consumption in this context.
- The authors generated correspondence maps of the social positioning of taste in the United States with the goal of exploring the social stratification of taste culture and integrating media consumption and civic practices into this investigation of the U.S. context.

#### *Examination of Four Quadrants*

To fully understand how occupation, media use, consumption, and civic and social practices define and situate distinct lifestyles in this social space, the authors examine each of four quadrants.

- *Quadrant 1: High volume of capital-communal orientation:* This first quadrant is inhabited by middle- and upper-income, well-educated individuals with patterns of cultural consumption that correspond to an emphasis on cultural capital.
- *Quadrant 2: Low volume of capital-communal orientation:* These are somewhat older, less affluent, and less educated individuals; at the bottom of this quadrant are individuals who did not graduate from high school and who earn less than \$10,000.
- *Quadrant 3: High volume of capital-individual orientation:* Individuals who possess a relatively high volume of capital, but in contrast with the first quadrant, their composition of capital is more economic than cultural.
- *Quadrant 4: Low volume of capital-individual orientation:* Individuals with relatively lower volumes of capital, though they still emphasize the economic over the cultural.

#### *Mapping Goals*

The preliminary mapping of the field of consumption in the United States has two primary goals:

- first, to compare the results with the general structure of the field of consumption found by Bourdieu;
- second, to understand whether the dual axes of volume and composition of capital remain determinant or whether some other principles may be at work in structuring the U.S. field.

#### *Discussion*

Moving to the comparison with Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural consumption in 1960s France, the upper left quadrants in both *Distinction* and the author's analysis appear similar in some respects.

- The U.S. quadrant may be dominated by a larger class of professionals and knowledge workers shaped by legal and financial services and other highly educated fractions of the upper middle classes.
- There is a clear split between high-income members of this grouping, who appear to be higher cultural consumers, and a lower group that is among the most civically and politically active.
- There may be a shift to a principle of stratification defined by volume of capital and media use. The middlebrow in America confounds the presence of "high" culture.
- America in 2000 and beyond is a more age-segregated society, and much of this segregation is a direct principle of lifestyle segmentation.
- The use of various newspapers, television programs, radio formats, and magazines were particularly relevant in marking individuals' social position,

distinguishing them from others in the social space, while also providing aspirational reference points for consuming.

- Television consumption, especially of escapist fare such as sitcoms and reality shows, tends to cluster along the bottom half of the social space, whereas newspaper and magazine consumption tends to distinguish between those with higher and lower volumes of capital.
- There is a correspondence between civic behavior, political ideology, and the social positioning of taste cultures within the U.S. context.

## Representing Citizens and Consumers in Media and Communications Regulation

Sonia Livingstone, London School of Economics and Political Science; and Peter Lunt, Brunel University

### *Background*

This article considers the consequences for citizens and consumers of the changing regulatory regime in Western democracies, from “command-and-control” government to discursive, multistakeholder governance, focusing on the case of media and communications regulation in the United Kingdom.

- The authors show how the terms *consumer* and, especially, *citizen*, are variously used to promote stakeholder interests, not always to the benefit of the citizen.
- The new-style regulation moves away from the previous hierarchical, “command-and-control” regime.
- It claims to democratize power by dispersing and devolving the role of the state, establishing accountable and transparent administration, and engaging multiple stakeholders in the process of governance.
- Regulation must make unified and strategic decisions for the whole market that reflect economic, technical, and social policy trends and balance the needs of the market with those of an “empowered” public.

### *Communications Act*

In a lively debate over media and communications regulation, two distinct terms emerged as the discursive solution, *citizen* and *consumer*, supposedly resolving ambiguities in the plethora of “listeners,” “viewers,” “users,” and “customers,” of the legacy regime.

- Yet once the Communications Act was passed in 2003, this solution began to unravel, with boundary disputes demanding remedial action of various kinds on the part of the regulator and civil society.
- It was proposed that the consumer interest should be understood in relation to economic goals while the citizen interest inheres in cultural goals, and that these in turn map onto the domain of telecommunications networks and services, on one hand, and broadcast content, on the other.
- Consumers are understood as individuals while citizens have collective status.

NOTE: “It’s a very tricky question. Because some issues are obviously consumer issues and some issues are obviously citizen issues but at the end of the day we’re talking about people” (Helen Normoyle, director of market

research, Office of Communications). “The risk is if you have just the language of citizens then you end up with a load of nebulous and quite high level public interest-type objectives rather than actually seeing if people are getting the best deal in this market” (Allan Williams, senior policy advisor for communication at Which? [formerly the Consumers’ Association]).

- It is much easier to regulate consumer issues, which are basically economic issues, than citizenship issues involving social, cultural, democratic issues, which are more difficult to quantify and measure.

*Public’s  
Perspective*

Sixteen focus groups were carried out to see how the public envisions the role of regulation in their lives.

- They are neither apathetic and disengaged nor actively engaged and responsive to regulatory initiatives or consultations.
- Rather, they expressed strongly felt but contrary views that, though aware of the contradictions, they seemed unable to resolve.
- Alternative stories emerged of consumer failures, unprotected consumers, dangerous situations, and exploited individuals.
- Although the discussions covered many issues, those that directly influence people’s health, work, finances, or family generated more attention than media and communications issues.
- In short, the public struggles to speak as a collective, being torn between its self-image as agentic and as vulnerable.

*Access to  
Information and  
Communication  
Resources*

Most academics concerned with the relation between the media and politics agree that access to information and communication resources are fundamental to informed citizenship and a prerequisite for democratic participation.

- Many worry that neoliberal economics and neoconservative politics have altered the balance of power in media and communications to the detriment of citizens.
- Murdock and Golding (1989) focused on the distribution of communicative resources—notably, access to information and communication content and technologies, maximum diversity in content production, and mechanisms for feedback and to enable participation.
- Hamelink (2003) argued that governments and civil society bodies must guarantee the conditions for freedom of expression, universality of access, diverse sources of information, diversity of ownership, and plurality of representation.

*Conclusion*

Access to, and the content of, the press, television, Internet, and so on should be evaluated, therefore, not in terms of what contents or services they provide but in terms of the possibilities they afford or impede.

- The citizen interest, in other words, lies in determining what real choices are open to them in seeking to meet their needs, in a particular information and communication environment.
- McChesney (2003) has been spearheading a media reform movement that supports such interventions as developing community radio and television, applying antimonopoly laws to the media, establishing formal study to determine fair media ownership regulations, reinventing public service broadcasting, and so forth.

## Consumers and the State since the Second World War

Matthew Hilton, University of Birmingham

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R  
S

### *Background*

This article analyzes the development of, and compares the differences in, the various consumer protection regimes since World War II.

- It points to processes of convergence in consumer politics across the globe that saw the development of consumer political thinking in the Soviet bloc and the development of supranational protection regimes at the European level.
- In more recent decades, the politics of consumer society based upon access and the collective has been eclipsed with a politics that emphasizes choice and the individual.
- Such a change represents a profound shift in the relations between consumers, citizens, and governments. The significance of the 1950s as a key moment in consumer politics was the growth in interest in affluence as well as necessity.

NOTE: Elected politicians promised shoppers a better life just around the corner, state officials developed informative labeling schemes, business developed quality certification marks, and the cooperatives continued their campaigns against the abuses of the marketplace by trusts and cartels.

### *Government*

Twentieth-century governments have maintained a complex set of relationships with consumer organizations.

- Many consumer groups have been nurtured by public finances and incorporated within, or emerged from, the institutions of the state.
- What is clear is that consumer protection had become a state project.
- Defending the consumer-citizen and working to protect his or her standard of living, while offering rewards in the future, became a typical populist manifesto of politicians of all persuasions.
- As affluence arrived, governments around the world attempted to develop regimes of consumer protection to provide consumers with the confidence to enter and participate in the market.
- Specific legislative remedies to market abuses were backed up with the creation of entire bureaucracies for protecting the consumer.

### *Consumer Citizenship*

Gunnar Trumbull has argued that there have been three broad models of consumer citizenship:

- an economic model of citizenship has regarded consumers as partners in the economy,
- consumers have been given the right to participate in forums dealing with overall structural issues, and
- a model of political citizenship emphasizes the rights of consumers and recognizes their roles as sociopolitical actors.

*The United States*

In the late 1960s, a regulatory framework emerged in the United States that was often far more rigorous than that achieved in European economies.

- The primacy of the market cannot be denied, nor the faith held in it as a solver of consumer problems.
- The individual consumer is also a rights-based citizen.
- Regulatory agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Energy Administration were strengthened and new consumer protection agencies came into existence.

NOTE: Consumer protection has become an international phenomenon from which states learn from one another and adopt measures that take best practices from different contexts.

*Europe*

The European Union has had a tremendous impact on national consumer protection regimes, ensuring that the differences between countries such as France and Germany have been blurred.

- It has also meant that in states where consumer protection was weak or underdeveloped, such as Greece, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, a ready-made model for consumer protection has been provided.
- Increasingly, that model of consumer protection has been dictated by the wider goal of market reform, ensuring an emphasis on choice, competition, and ever-expanding markets.

*Conclusion*

Consumer activists have often liked to argue that their heyday was in the 1960s and 1970s; if they have declined as a political and social force thereafter, it is due to their having achieved many of their own goals.

- Compared to the fledgling technocratic age of the 1950s, commodities no longer break down as soon as they are taken home.
- Guarantees and standard contracts ensure that forms of redress are available to dissatisfied customers.
- Advertisements might well continue to exaggerate, but there are restrictions on overtly false claims.
- Sources of information are available to shoppers other than those provided by the manufacturer or retailer.
- Most dramatically, the danger of death and injury from negligently assembled products has declined.

NOTE: Yet in all the measures that have been successfully implemented, there has also been a narrowing of the vision of consumer protection. Protection became unevenly distributed: those who can afford to choose alternatives can bear the costs of deceptive practices, and can simply live to spend another day, have their own protection mechanisms. But for the poor and disadvantaged, access to such protection is less readily available, and their participation in consumer society comes at a struggle and a cost.

# Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities

Lizabeth Cohen, Harvard University

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R  
S

## *Background*

This article argues that the link between consumption and civic engagement has an important local, not just national, history and that retailers' involvement in the downtown urban renewal of American cities in the post-WWII era offers a particularly fruitful avenue of investigation.

- The article focuses on New Haven, Connecticut, and Boston, where Edward J. Logue served both cities as development chief from 1954 to 1967.
- His record over these fourteen years offers a revealing case of how consumption and civic culture intersected at the local level.
  - In both cases, department stores were deemed essential to the viability of the central business district.
  - That priority limited the success of downtown revitalization, given the department store sector's suburban orientation and steady economic concentration from the 1960s on.
- As locally based urban planners and policy makers struggled to make downtowns appealing, economic decision making in corporate boardrooms, far out of their control, was undermining their efforts.

## *Department Stores*

The case of department stores' involvement in the enormous effort by American cities to revitalize themselves demonstrates that the link between consumption and civic engagement has an important local history as well.

- In New Haven and Boston, downtown department store owners and executives played central roles in urban renewal efforts, while their stores became important sites for redevelopment projects.
- Once the lifeblood of downtown development, after World War II the number of downtown stores steadily declined, their share of metropolitan shoppers and their dollars likewise shrinking.
- Still strongly identified with their home cities, department stores clamored for help sustaining downtown retail.
  - They called for thousands more off-street parking spaces, new roadways, improvements in mass transportation, slum clearance of "gray belt" neighborhoods bordering retail cores, and updated shopping environments that resembled the new modern malls beginning to appear in suburban rings.
  - They also complained of high real estate taxes.

## *Conclusions*

What can we learn from the tale of downtown urban renewal in New Haven and Boston, where in both cases department stores were viewed as the solution to downtown's ills?

- Department stores' insistence on suburban-style store designs often undermined the uniqueness of the urban experience and encouraged the construction of enormous, self-contained, superblock projects that were rarely adaptable to other purposes should the need arise.

- The cases of downtown New Haven and Boston testify to the importance of preserving a mix of commerce and a diversity of consumers to protect cities from falling victim to the internal restructuring of any one commercial sector or the shifting loyalties of any particular group of consumers.
- There is also a deeper lesson to draw about the way governments and corporations have been entwined in shaping the urban built environment.
  - Enormous amounts of federal, state, and local dollars all went toward buttressing old, and creating new, infrastructure to support downtown commerce.
  - This huge public investment, however, did not keep the tax code from favoring new suburban mall construction or major retailers from ultimately renegeing on that partnership by abandoning downtown stores.

NOTE: The advocates of urban renewal may have miscalculated what was possible in reviving downtowns, but we might rightfully ask what obligation these retail corporations had, and still have, to the urban citizens whose tax dollars have underwritten their postwar development.

## Should Consumer Citizens Escape the Market?

Eric J. Arnould, University of Arizona

### *Background*

Postmodern consumers' ability to act for themselves comes through recognition that one is "a participant in an ongoing, never ending process of construction that includes a multiplicity of moments where things (most importantly as symbols) are consumed, produced, signified, represented, allocated, distributed, and circulated" (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, 250).

- The above stresses consumers' proactive behaviors in contrast with the passive consumers of late modern social theory.
- Cyberspace may offer yet more freedom of action if one believes that in cyberspace the consumer is freed from constraints that hamper freedom of action in the sociophysical world.

### *Consumer Agency*

The ideas referred to above may improperly suggest that "consumers have free reign in the play of signs to piece together a collage of meanings that express the [individual's] desired symbolic statements" (Murray 2002, 428).

- Unfortunately, the agency construct encounters some fundamental conceptual problems.
  - First, the notion of agency attributes some form of innate capacity, ability, or intention to actors and their action.
  - Second, it is impossible to separate empirically autonomous, or "free," from "determined" behaviors.
- In the end, consumer agency is a folk model. In other words, if people act agentially, they are agentic (Fuchs 2001). This model also universalizes a Western version of actorhood and evokes ethnocentric notions of freedom, constraint, and transcendence of constraint via choice.

### *Consumers*

There is a sociological cottage industry devoted to the proposition that consumers cannot escape their degraded condition as pawns in a marketing power game.

*The Market*

- This work unintentionally distorts the lived experience of consumer culture because of the use of analytic methods that generally rely either on no data or on aggregate data, which leads to a confusion of causes with effects.
- Another problem with the portrayal of consumers in much of the critical sociology of consumption is an implicit class bias concerning “popular culture.”

Market capitalism is often attacked as the primary contemporary source of all kinds of social pathology.

- These attacks fix advertising, brands, commercial electronic media, marketing research, and marketing formula squarely in their sights.
- It is claimed that consumer conformity, loss of autonomy, falsity, materialism, kitsch, ecological collapse, routinization, global poverty, addiction, and obesity flow from the expanding reach of the market.
- We should recognize that late market capitalism democratizes the space of consumption, but at the cost of a growing gap between rich and poor and exacerbation of the effects of economic externalities such as pollution and resource depletion.
- But alienation and social pathology really emerge only when people are unable to perceive the means of self-creation through consumption, or because objective conditions prevent self-creation, not from the engagement with markets or consumption objects.
- And it is easy to identify all kinds of market-mediated social and political activism. Consumers act through market-mediated forms because there are no templates for action and interpretation located in some utopian elsewhere from where they might act.

*Commercial Media*

Active participation in contemporary commercial media plays a complex social and potentially liberatory political role, and is thus at odds with the sociology of marketing and consumption supportive of the dupe theory.

- Critical sociologists also recognize the importance of discriminating markets as an idealization of neoliberals and as social and political forms whose effects and purposes are susceptible to influence through discourses and practices in which state, corporation, national, and global regulatory bodies as well as citizen activists play a governance role, if often unequal ones.

## A Carnavalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption (or) Grotesque Realism and the Analytics of the Excretory Economy

Craig J. Thompson, University of Wisconsin–Madison

*Background*

This article addresses the moral critique of consumption as a profligate pursuit, driven by status emulation, leading to indolence, insipidness, and invidious comparison.

- The key assumption is that personal well-being, family life, aesthetic virtues, natural resources, and the inhabitability of the planet are all being sacrificed on the altar of status-chasing consumerism.

*The carnivalesque*

The carnivalesque body is equally copulative and excretory, salacious and scatological, vibrant and on the way to becoming decomposing humus.

- The carnivalesque de-centers subjectivity and directs attention toward the web of transpersonal and ecological interconnections that sustain an indissoluble cycle of degeneration and regeneration.
- Bakhtin's (1965/1984) portrayal of the carnivalesque is structured by two dimensions: transgressive resistance and grotesque realism.
  - The transgressive dimension has been embraced as an emancipatory practice through which consumers can elude and defy the ideological imperatives, conformist mandates, and materialistic inducements of the capitalist marketplace.
- In contrast, writings on the politics of consumption have studiously ignored the implications of grotesque realism and the degrading project of critically situating socioeconomic relationships of power, and their ennobling rationalizations, in the excretory economy.
- Bridging this chasm between the politics of consumption and the reeking reality of corporate capitalism's shit requires that critical theorists abandon moralistic preoccupations with consumers' well-being, their existential states, their creative defiance, or slack-jawed submissions to the interruptions of the marketplace.

NOTE: The author's overriding agenda is to assert the generative power of this latter dimension for developing realpolitik critiques of commercial culture and mobilizing consumer citizens to take transformative actions.

*The Analytics of the Excretory Economy*

The theoretical and realpolitik differences that distinguish the politics of consumption, in its moral/therapeutic form, and an analytics of the excretory economy, can be demonstrated through a comparison of two parallel critiques of commercial culture, one that is unabashedly spermatic in moral tenor and the other that digs into the excretory muck: George Ritzer's (1993) *The McDonaldisation of Society* and Eric Schlosser's (2002) *Fast Food Nation*.

- Much like proposals for downshifting and voluntary simplicity, Ritzer's action strategies seek to place some (therapeutic) boundaries on the corporate colonization of everyday life, but they do not challenge the underlying structural conditions that make these encroachments possible and problematic.
- An action-oriented insight that academics can glean from Schlosser is the importance and realpolitik value of investigating a defined market system within commercial culture, rather than making sweeping generalizations that presuppose the operation of a singularly dominant ideology.

*The Press*

The institutional erasure of investigative journalism—which can shine a critical light on all the shit that corporate power brokers would just as soon remain out of public view—is a major structural impediment to consumer citizenship and democratic dialogue.

- If the “fourth estate” is suffering from investigative constipation, being unable to move muckraking exposés past the colonic blockages of ideology, economics, and institutional disincentives, then some roles for academics are to
  - leverage their skills and cultural authority to bring institutional power structures to light,

- critically interrogate the network of relationships and alliances through which they operate, and
- identify their institutional contradictions and susceptibilities to various kinds of change strategies.
- By transgressing conventional boundaries between academics and activism, critically minded researchers can facilitate grassroots political action and empower consumer citizens with realpolitik knowledge for collectively redressing specific failings, excesses, abuses, and exploitations of a given market system.

## Why Not Share Rather Than Own?

Russell Belk, York University

### *Background*

The focus in this article is on shared consumption.

- Rather than distinguishing what is *mine* and *yours*, sharing defines something as *ours*.
- In addition to sharing tangibles, we may also share abstract things like knowledge, responsibility, or power.
- Individuals, groups, and even nations can share.
  - Production units may share in producing something through profit sharing, employee-owned corporations, stock share ownership, and other joint ownership of the means of production.
  - But the emphasis here is on shared consumption.

### *Commodity Transactions*

In economic theory, commodity transactions are balanced with no lingering indebtedness and no residual feelings of friendship.

- Each partner need never see the other again.
- Many forms of business exchange involve embedded relationships and are better characterized as gift exchanges than commodity exchanges.
- But neither commodity exchange or gift giving are the same as sharing.

### *Sharing Issues*

A recent hotbed of sharing activity and discussions involves the Internet. Sharing with others online includes open-source code writing, Internet bulletin boards, chat rooms, and so on.

- Some see such sharing as a new age of altruism brought about by the magic of cyberspace; others suggest that such acts are largely egoistic.
- The Internet revolution is also fostering a new age of expanding intellectual property rights that threatens to replace the altruism of sharing with the egoism of commoditization.
- Issues arise in sharing human organs and personal information: at issue is what can or cannot be shared and under what conditions.

### *Sharing Process*

Sharing, like ownership, is an interpersonal process, sanctioned and prescribed by culture.

- Sharing can reduce envy and create feelings of community, or it can create dependency and foster feelings of resentment and inferiority.
- When someone shares with us, we can see their action as a sincere effort to please us or as insincere and designed to pacify and placate us.

*Sharing  
Impediments*

There are some impediments to sharing.

- If ownership allows sharing, feelings of possessiveness and attachment toward the things we own or possess discourage sharing.
- Another factor that inhibits sharing is materialism, defined as the importance a person attaches to possessions.
- Another impediment to sharing is the perception that resources are scarce, and if we share we may miss something we might have enjoyed.

*Sharing  
Intangibles*

There are some incentives to sharing intangibles.

- In academia, we are satisfied with the fame or reputation that may result from sharing knowledge and ideas with people we may inspire, even though we may also enjoy indirect economic benefits.
- We can share or give away some things without losing them—a song, a joke, a story, our bodies, things we put up on the Web.
- The Internet is leading to a global community of sharing, communicating, and giving, with a free flow of information providing equality of access.
- There is the effect of feeling a part of a community of kindred spirits.
- The joint possession of certain goods can also convey status and power by demonstrating the group's command of scarce resources.

*Sharing  
Tangibles*

There are also some incentives to sharing tangibles.

- There may be the sense of paying back for one's prior good fortune.
- There is also genuine altruism and helping others to nourish a self-image that we are generous and helpful.
- A further incentive for sharing tangible things is an extension of the keeping-while-giving motivation identified with nontangible things.
- It can make not only economic sense but also “leverage” our lifestyle when we share things we would otherwise all have to purchase.
- Another incentive to share tangibles is when our extended sense of self embraces other people outside of our immediate family.

*Conclusion*

As we have replaced social security with financial security, trust in money and things have supplanted trust in people, and economic capital has become more important than social capital.

- Individual bank accounts and credit cards are growing as joint accounts and cards decline.
- Ironically, we are becoming more likely to share our deepest secrets, insights, information, and loyalties with someone whom we know only by an online pseudonym than we are with our partners or family.
- Materialism, possessive individualism, and the conviction that self-identity must be developed by extension into possessions are all factors that inhibit sharing.
- Still there are some reasons to hope; possessions and individual ownership can be a burden, many resources are scarce, and the “virtual corporation” shows that ownership is not always best.

## Downshifting Consumer = Upshifting Citizen? An Examination of a Local Freecycle Community

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### *Background*

Critics suggest that contemporary consumer culture creates overworked and overshopped consumers who no longer engage in civic life.

- This research examines those who reject the “work and spend” cycle by examining these downshifting attitudes among members of freecycle.org, a grassroots “gift economy” community.
- Results of an online survey show that downshifting consumers are less materialistic and brand-conscious. They also civically engage through boycotts and buycotts and online political participation.
- The authors contend that alternative forms of consumption might be a new form of civic engagement.

NOTE: The purpose of this study is to investigate whether people who simplify their lives or downshift their work and/or consumption behaviors then “upshift” or increase their civic life.

### *Downshifters*

In response to hyperconsumption and the stress, overtime, and psychological expense that may accompany it, a growing number of people (estimated at 19 percent of the U.S. population [Schor 1998]) are simplifying their lifestyle.

- The above are “downshifters,” people who voluntarily choose to work less and/or consume less. They want more time and less stress.
- As a result of reduced incomes or a less materialistic life, downshifters often try to repair, reuse, share, and make goods rather than buy them.
- Downshifters may focus on civic reengagement—they have more time in their lives and use it to help the community or society.
- Downshifters are primarily white consumers with middle- to upper-middle-class incomes from Western, affluent countries.

### *Consumer Culture*

Critics have argued that the increased availability of consumer goods partnered with increased disposable income has resulted in hedonistic, individualistic consumers.

- Instead of using consumption to achieve social equality and other collective social goals, these consumers are viewed as seeking personal satisfaction through goods at the expense of democracy.
- In a recent critique of consumer culture, Schor (1998) cited statistics that show increased work hours, credit card balances, and stress levels and decreased household savings and quality-of-life indicators such as time spent with family and happiness.
  - In addition, scholars have argued that contemporary American culture is witnessing the decline of civic-mindedness.

NOTE: The ultimate response to the decline thesis is that civic engagement now includes a wider range of activities—debating and seeking political information online and political consumption (e.g., boycotts and buycotts).

*freecycle.org*

Among the downshiffters, freecycle.org members are an interesting case because their practice in reusing consumer goods is characteristic of voluntary simplicity.

- Some shop at secondhand stores or flea markets for fun, while others are doing so out of economic and material necessity.
- The motivations for freecycle membership were fairly balanced between self-oriented motivations and environmental reasons.
- Unlike consumers, who view consumption objects as a reflection of self or as a means of maintaining social hierarchies, consumers seeking to truly engage in de-cluttering must be able to dispose of goods and de-couple notions of “identity” from goods.
- The findings also support the assertion made by Elgin (2000) that those who engage in work and consumption downshifting are also likely to express their personal values and political orientation through consumer activism such as boycotts and buycotts.

*Internet Use: Consumption and Civic Society*

The Internet, as a new public sphere, may provide opportunity for people to engage in socially responsible consumption, such as the reuse and recycling witnessed among the freecycle community, and to engage civically in Web and geographic communities.

- Spending time online should not be viewed as automatically detrimental to civic life.
- Instead of asking how much time people spend online (i.e., time displacement), it is more beneficial to ask *what* are they doing online.

*Conclusion*

Overall, the findings of this study imply that the critique of consumption eroding civic life is too simplistic to truly capture the nuanced roles of consumption and civic life in contemporary society.

- As the case of freecycle illustrates, individuals brought together around consumption acts can have a positive relationship with both consumption and civic life.
- The ultimate effect of alternative consumption communities like freecycle on consumer or civic culture, however, is yet to be realized.
- By engaging in alternative forms of consumption while simultaneously holding antimaterialist and anti-brand-conscious values, by engaging in political consumption, and by participating in civic life, downshiffters may ultimately serve as “moral agents” (Shi 1985) who, through their behavior, challenge the consumer culture from within.

## Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Social Justice

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McGill University

*Background*

This article studies the antisweatshop movement’s involvement in global social justice responsibility-taking. The study shows that the movement actors view the role of consumers in four different ways:

- support group for other causes,
  - critical mass of shoppers,
  - agent of corporate change, and
  - ontological force for societal change.
- Government Inaction* Government inaction on global social justice responsibility is of central interest in political science.
- Existing political institutions charged with caring for the world are not proving that they can successfully take on global problems.
  - Even if good laws are in place, governments in developing countries for different reasons may not have the capability or willingness to prosecute transnational garment corporations for wrongdoings.
- Garment Industry* In weakly regulated settings as in global garment manufacturing, corporate conduct frequently creates social injustice and environmental problems.
- Corporate conduct has been shown to be harmful but not necessarily illegal and, therefore, not really solvable through law.
  - These developments show the difficulty in applying conventional responsibility models because their logic of accountability assumes
    - a governmental regulatory framework, and
    - an intimate link between problem cause and problem solving that allows government and citizens to bring wrongdoers to court and be sanctioned and forced to right their wrongs.
- Overcoming Weaknesses* Weaknesses in the conventional responsibility model and disappointment with the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) policy on free trade have led the antisweatshop movement to developing new ways to fill the responsibility vacuum created by government and corporate inaction.
- Movement actors may use public law and prod governments to enact better laws.
  - For the antisweatshop movement, the most important strategy is to target global capitalism and logo corporations.
- Antisweatshop Cause* Old and new civil society teamed up in the antisweatshop cause. The movement globally includes more than one hundred organizations.
- Noteworthy is the less common cooperation between unions and consumers, as illustrated by
    - the UNITE! (Union of Needle, Industrial, and Technical Employees) and the National Consumers League's Stop Sweatshop campaign that reached out to more than 50 million, and
    - the coalition of the AFL-CIO, UNITE!, and students that led to the founding of United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS).
  - The need to develop innovative tactics and solutions for global social responsibility-taking is giving new life to social justice-oriented old civil society, which has been out of touch with younger generations.
- Consumer Role* What unites the heterogeneous organizations into a movement is their agreement that the common goal is improved workers' rights in the global garment industry where consumers can play key roles.

- For unions, consumers are supporters that help them to solve sweatshop problems through increased unionization.
- International humanitarian organizations and USAS (United Students against Sweatshops) want to use consumer practice to promote the development of a market for sweat-free goods and indirectly influence corporate practice.
  - Critical mass shopping is an important step toward a more equitable world—mobilized consumers can “use their purchasing power to tilt the balance, however slightly, in favour of the poor” (Oxfam International 2006).
- New consumer thinking about consumption can shift present power alliances, shake up governments, and force corporations to change.

*Sports*

Targeting big sports is increasingly important for the movement.

- Millions of people follow these high-media-profile events, which anti-sweatshop actors use to play on the virtues of fair play and fair competition associated with sports and which make sportswear companies easy targets.

*Effectiveness*

Measuring effectiveness is very difficult when activism, as in the present case, is (1) controversial and understudied; (2) not solely collectively organized; (3) not delimited to one target, issue, and time frame; and (4) focused on corporations that, unlike many governments, are not required to reveal important information for scholarly assessments.

- The critics are right when they say that high visibility and recognition of sweatshop problems and even a mobilized consumer do not automatically lead to corporate change.
- However, ongoing research finds that corporations are developing more antisweatshop-friendly policies and practices as a consequence of movement pressure.

*Conclusion*

To succeed, the movement must continue to mobilize consumers as supporters, as critical shopping mass, as a spearhead force of corporate change, and as ontological agents of deeper structural societal change.

## Political Brands and Consumer Citizens: The Rebranding of Tony Blair

Margaret Scammell, London School of Economics  
and Political Science

*Background*

This article describes how and why branding is used in politics, focusing in particular on the rebranding of Tony Blair in 2005.

- It argues that branding is the new form of political marketing.
- Branding is now the hallmark of marketed parties and candidates.
- It is a demonstration that we are moving from mass media model to a consumer model of political communication.

- Branding* The peculiar property of the brand, as distinct from the product, is that it is not under the sole authorship of the owner companies.
- Ultimately, the brand is “only as good as the grapevine says it is.”
  - The customer or voter contribution is known as brand equity.
- Brand Research* The task of brand research lies in discovering how differentiators operate in consumers’ perceptions and in finding patterns of differentiation.
- While brand differentiators emerge from multiple and diverse experiences and psychological associations, they often work at a low level of consumer attention.
  - The skill of brand research is to make explicit that which is normally unexpressed and to convert it into a prioritized order that can assist brand development and promotion.
- Rebranding Tony Blair* Reconnecting Tony Blair with disaffected voters prior to the 2005 election offers a sharp illustration of the centrality of brand thinking in politics.
- Charles Travail, branding consultant and cofounder of Promise consultancy, argued that Labour was a “premium brand”—a high-cost, high-service product that, precisely because it raised consumer expectations to high levels, was vulnerable to credibility problems.
    - It was decided a new perspective was needed on the New Labour brand.
    - Promise summarized the emotional experiences of Blair under three broad headings: “you’ve left me,” “you’ve become too big for your boots,” and “you need to reflect on what you’ve done and change.”
  - Women’s anger towards Blair stemmed from perceptions of Blair’s patronizing tone and self-justificatory response to criticism.
  - Promise suggested the rebranding of New Labour as “progressive realists”: passionate, friendly, and inclusive for the benefit of all.
    - It needed to show strength in depth by promoting a greater range of spokespeople.
    - It needed to emphasize through public services (“this brand is about *we*, not *me*”) and communications that it was “in touch.”
- Political Branding Value* Branding as a concept and research method has both particular and general value for campaigners as demonstrated in the Blair “reconnection strategy.”
- The general thrust of Promise’s recommendations was to demonstrate that the party was still in touch and listening.
  - New Labour needed to change tack and reestablish “Tough Tony” as the listening, caring, in-touch leader that target voters thought he was when they first elected him.
  - The crucial added value of branding is that it provides a conceptual structure to link advertising insight into all aspects of the brand, positioning, development, and promotion, and unlike advertising, it is not wedded to a particular form of communication.
- NOTE: The permanent (continuous) campaign focuses on the instruments of media politics; the brand concept uncovers the underlying strategic concerns of efforts to maintain voter loyalty through communication designed to provide reassurance, clear differentiation from rivals, consistency of values, and emotional connection with voters’ values and visions of the good life.

*Consumer Communication Model* Below are a few preliminary conclusions of the consequences of consumer politics:

- The mass-media-dominated, agenda-setting, advertising-driven model of political campaigning, while far from dead, is in decline.
- Political brand equity has shallow roots and is easily buffeted. This is a striking difference from commercial branding where much of the effort is directed at retaining the loyalty of existing customers.

NOTE: Branding is not easily categorized as a force for either good or ill. It does not, any more than any other marketing technique in politics, supply single-route solutions. Its research results, like any other, must be interpreted and negotiated by the relevant political actors. Its application, as for any commercial brand, will be shaped by consideration of the environment, the structural, social, and cultural factors which affect people's choices.

## Logo Logic: The Ups and Downs of Branded Communication

W. Lance Bennett and Taso Lagos, University of Washington

*Background* Attacking corporate brands is not in itself a new thing for activists.

- Labor unions have long promoted boycotts and “buycotts” to use consumers to discipline the labor policies of companies.
- NGOs and activist groups have also used campaigns to get corporations such as Nestle to stop offending practices.
- Activists are learning to tap into personal identification with brands and to recognize the importance of lifestyles as the organizers of personal meaning in everyday life—using the often negative publicity about the brand to develop political relationships with corporations.

*New Ways to Connect with Issues* Citizens in postindustrial societies are detaching from parties and group-based memberships and finding new ways to connect more directly with issues that impact how they live their personal lives.

- If Starbucks coffee can be associated with the destruction of bird habitat, consumers can be brought to the issue in ways that avoid conventional political action, yet express personal values.
- A sustained public challenge to an otherwise strong lifestyle brand may produce a response from the company.
- The brand is the key because, increasingly, what is being sold by corporations is less the product than the brand image.

*Digital Communication* The advance of digital communication technologies enables activists, at a low cost, to “Be the Media,” as the slogan for Indymedia puts it.

- Branded messages cross diverse social networks more easily than conventional political content.
- The viral transmission, network-jumping, and media boundary-crossing of Jonah Peretti's famous Nike sweatshop culture jam has become legendary.
- In many cases, branded messages may be picked up as humor, consumer news, or business stories about troubled companies.

*Behavior  
Change*

- Similarly, hard-to-sell messages about labor conditions in foreign factories become easier to deliver when simplified and paired with a brand that already travels far and wide (e.g., Nike-sweatshop).

The ultimate goal of much of this communication is to use consumer power to pressure companies and industries to change their behaviors.

- Getting companies to mouth the words of social responsibility is one thing, but evaluating their actual practices is something else.
- Even when companies cooperate, activists must find resources to conduct effective monitoring and certification of compliance.
- In short, there is a long chain of political relationships between getting the attention of consumers and using that attention to develop effective industry standards and certification systems that work.

*Problems*

Despite encouraging developments in industries from food, to fashion, to forest products, there are also problems inherent in using logo campaigns to leverage nongovernmental regulatory schemes.

- Logo campaigns may also send mixed messages due to lack of coordination among different organizations.
- The lack of (governance) mechanisms may result in the proliferation of different and sometimes competing standards systems.
- Where this makes for confusing signals to consumers, the chain of communication power driving these systems may be broken.

*Conclusion*

While branding communication may help messages travel, do those messages actually raise consumer awareness about the politics beyond the brands?

- On the plus side, the growth of certification systems seems clear—the steady growth of Fair Trade sales is an example.
- The story becomes a bit less clear when we consider the diversity of certification systems and issue frames that may end up confusing the very consumers whose continuing demand is so important to the effectiveness and growth of the process itself.
- In the absence of institutional support, the viability of many systems depends on finding the resources to pay for the monitoring and certification of corporate compliance, and to expand markets for certified goods so that companies may eventually self-regulate on grounds that it is simply good for business.
- The grand dilemma is that logo campaigns and culture jamming may win public attention and success at some levels, but many other links in the process must be joined to create a successful system for producing “clean” clothes or “just” coffee.

## Digital Renaissance: Young Consumer and Citizen?

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*Background*

This article explores the relationship between Internet use among young people, their political consumption, and their political participation.

- The study widens the notion of online civic and political engagement and includes measures of active and passive forms of participation.

- The research results demonstrate the importance of the Internet for political activities for young people.
- They also show that most online activities (ranging from news use, peer communication, and consumption to online service use) are positively related to political participation. It is shown that the young online consumer is also politically active.

### *The Internet*

The Internet offers a vast opportunity to be politically engaged: searching for information, at your discretion, from your preferred source, at your preferred time, and in your preferred mode.

- The Internet thus increases the opportunities for individuals to be part of civic and political discussion and for becoming informed.
- The Internet provides potential for youths who are often politically engaged at local levels and in untraditional forms of participation.
- Digital modes of political participation include forums, polls, discussion groups, or organizing a Web site on a civic or political issue.

NOTE: Based on findings suggesting that some young people tend to act as active Internet “inter-actors” and multitaskers, we expect that online activity, in general, is positively related to online political participation.

### *Results*

In the investigation of how media use relates to political participation among young people, we see the following:

- News consumption in both traditional and online media is positively related to political participation.
- Use of online services (such as e-banking), keeping updated with clubs and associations, as well as consumption of entertainment products, are all significantly related to our dependent variables.
- We can confirm that interactive online communication is positively related to political participation.
- As expected, the explanatory value of Internet use exceeds the explanatory value of “traditional media use” for understanding variation in political engagement and participation.

### *Discussion*

This article set out to investigate the relationship between Internet use among young people and their “political consumption” and political participation.

- First, it found that use of news and current affairs media, both offline and online, is generally positively related to online political engagement and participation for young people but that online news use is a stronger predictor for online participation.
- The study also shows that it is not the time spent online (or with another medium) that matters but rather the activities undertaken.
- Online communication, use of digital services, and being part of online networks and communities were all found to be positively related to political participation.
- Our findings corroborate the observation that social networks matter but very importantly point out that *online* social networking and interactivity with others is also good for political participation.
- The study found robust positive relationships between diverse uses of the Internet, including services and consumption, and various measures of engagement and participation.

- Among young people, communicating online and making use of online services correlate strongly, significantly, and robustly with online political participation (such as, for example, taking part in online polls, online petitions, email letters to the editor, etc.).
- All of this suggests that a specific kind of “digital citizenship” is observable. Civic-mindedness, digital political participation, consumption, and online social networking can go hand in hand.

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## Political Consumerism: How Communication and Consumption Orientations Drive “Lifestyle Politics”

Dhavan V. Shah, Douglas M. McLeod, Eunkyung Kim,  
Sun Young Lee, Melissa Gotlieb, Shirley S. Ho, and Hilde Breivik,  
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### *Background*

In this article, research results demonstrate how communication practices and consumption orientations work together to influence political consumerism beyond previously delineated factors.

- Boycotting is part of a broad array of behaviors that are shaped by a desire to express and support political and ethical perspectives.
- The politics of consumption is central to a large number of modern social movements, including but not limited to World Trade Organization (WTO) protests, fair-trade advocacy, and antisweatshop activism.
- Such political consumerism deserves special attention because it involves a much larger cross-section of the citizenry and has come to structure a wide range of consumer decisions.

### *Political Consumerism*

Political consumerism may provide people with an alternative mode to engage with public issues outside of conventional political and civic behaviors such as voting or volunteering.

- Consumers seek to hold companies and governments responsible for the manner in which products are produced, as well as for the nature of social and environmental consequences of this production.
- They expand narrow definitions of political participation.
- Political consumerism has been linked to factors known to explain political participation such as religiosity, partisanship, and government trust, but it is also associated with postmaterialism and a sense of moral obligation (i.e., lifestyle politics).

### *Mass Media Effects*

The effects of mass media on participatory behaviors are typically not only direct but operate through factors such as political talk and pro-civic attitudes.

- The effect of both traditional and online news media use on civic participation is mediated by political talk among citizens.

- The research findings illustrate the role news plays in prompting political talk and the implications of talk for political action.

### *Discussion*

Historians and cultural theorists have long asserted that consumer behavior is an expression of political concerns and social preferences—social scientists have only begun to explore the factors that contribute to political consumerism.

- This research observes direct and mediated relationships with dispositional factors, communication variables, and consumption orientations—confirming some of what is known about this practice while adding substantially to our understanding of the factors that drive “lifestyle politics.”
- The consistency seen across both static and change models largely confirms the theoretical model of mediated effects of information seeking variables on this economic form of political behavior.
- However, media use may also have some suppressive effects by reducing the desire to protect others from harmful messages.
- These results demonstrate how communication practices and consumption orientations work together to influence political consumerism beyond previously delineated factors.
  - In particular, information seeking through conventional and online news sources appears to encourage orientations toward politics and society—namely, greater frequency of political talk and more pronounced concern about the environment.
  - These two factors, in turn, encourage political consumerism, along with the sizable effects of advertising paternalism.
- The relationship between media consumption and advertising paternalism complicates this dynamic, with habitual entertainment television viewing and conventional news use both decreasing ad paternalism and indirectly suppressing political consumerism.

NOTE: Thus, media use may both encourage and discourage political consumerism through indirect effects on political talk and consumption orientations.

### *Conclusion*

These findings have important implications for research on the intersection of consumer and civic culture.

- Consumer-citizens view the economic realm as a meaningful, day-to-day manner in which to advance their deeper concerns.
- This may reflect anti-institutionalism, as Stolle and colleagues (2005) asserted, though the authors find little evidence of that here. Instead, they find political consumerism to be a more dynamic behavioral response to contemporary information and the orientations that are a consequence of exposure to news.
  - This underscores the importance of communication factors in political consumerism and “lifestyle politics.”
- Moreover, political consumption may be a more expedient way of expressing dissatisfaction than protesting in the streets, especially since companies are increasingly responsive to such efforts.

## Citizens, Consumers, and the Good Society

Michael Schudson, University of California, San Diego

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### *Background*

There is reason to be wary of the tradition of moralizing about consumption—it offers a narrow and misleading view of consumer behavior as well as an absurdly romanticized view of civic behavior.

- A great deal of consumer behavior is anything but selfish. Rather, it is a form of gift-giving.
- There are reasons to believe that the contrast between consumer and citizen is neither as flattering to political choice nor as favorable to a strong civic life as those who uphold the distinction may imagine.
- Five reasons complicate the consumer/citizen contrast:
  - First, sometimes consumer choices are political in even the most elevated understandings of the term.
  - Second, consumer behavior is more than just the moment of choosing; it is a complex set of activities, some of which enable, enact, and engender democratic values.
  - Third, sometimes political choices are, and have long been, consumer-like, that is, self-centered, intended to maximize individual or group (class, ethnic, racial, or religious) utility rather than to consider the public good.
  - Fourth, sometimes political behavior in a democracy is not a morally elevating education in democratic values.
  - Finally, consumer and civic behavior and styles are in flux—critics in 2006 should not be trapped with models of citizenship or consumption that are out of date.

### *Consumer Choice Can Be Political*

Consumer choice being political is the easiest point to make based on thinking about boycotted grapes to support the United Farm Workers union, or deciding to drive a hybrid car to help conserve the earth's resources.

- Even when consumption is not intended to be political, it may have important consequences that are politicizing rather than distracting.
- Far from being distracting, consumption can create the conditions for political action and mobilization.

### *Consumerism Can Serve Democracy*

In both consumer behavior and civic action, individuals enact social rituals that instruct them and others in a set of expectations and values.

- These expectations and values either enhance democracy or endanger it; it all depends on what kind of consumer behavior or civic action we are talking about.
  - Private people come together safely in public, commercial spaces to talk and to socialize around food and drink.
  - McDonald's will not turn China into a democracy, but it is perfectly apt to recognize it as a small Trojan horse.

### *Political Behavior*

Political behavior, in terms of its moral framework, may be a particular kind of consumer behavior.

- Voters often look at political candidates in terms of benefits and costs they might inflict on them through raising taxes.

- This is not to say that voters are simply selfish or self-interested—however, self-interest is frequently politically motivating and mobilizing.
- The activist liberals want ordinary people to vote their interests, in an informed way, even though the activists themselves may be seeking to serve others more than they want to serve themselves.

*Political  
Practice*

Political practice is often not virtuous or public-spirited.

- The motives of political actors are ordinarily mixed: political motivation is about the narcissistic pleasure of winning, of being in the public eye, of dispensing favors, of ironing out a compromise others were unable to achieve, the thrill of seizing the moment or seeing the opportunity to untie a political knot that stymied others, the pulse-quickenning excitement of competition and of victory.

*Different  
Behaviors*

The distinction between citizen and consumer remains a stand-in for the difference between the self-centered and the public-spirited.

- The above can be misleading—both consumer choices and political choices can be public-spirited or not, respectful of others or not.
- In the ordinary act of politics, the circle of people one *should* be thinking about should extend to the boundary of whatever polity one is acting in—if not further.
  - Politics feels tense and dangerous because it is performed in the midst of, and because of significant conflict with others.
- Consuming feels good not only because it may provide material pleasures but because it is enacted within a comfortable social circle.

NOTE: We need to determine what the political act and the consuming act really are, and what variety of things they are or have been in different times and places and civic circumstances.