

## Is the Phenomenon Political Consumption Overrated?

Uncovering Political Intentions and Values of Organic Food Consumption

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# IS THE PHENOMENON POLITICAL CONSUMPTION OVERRATED? - UNCOVERING POLITICAL INTENTIONS AND VALUES OF ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMPTION

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to create a more complex and holistic understanding of the value system of the political consumer. A case study was undertaken where the unit of analysis constituted 12 high users of organic food products. The empirical data was analysed by utilizing Reynolds and Gutman's laddering technique. The results revealed that the purposive selected informants activate different cognitive structures when boycotting organic food. In other words, the informants activate different values for similar attributes and consequences. This means that consumption of organic food is related to different value sets. That is, value sets where the political aspects are represented to different degrees. This means that some informants primarily boycott organic food for personal or family related reasons. For this group of informants, the focus is mainly on health related issues. Preservation of nature or environmental concern is important in the sense that it in the end relates to promoting personal security and health. This means that the environmental aspect cannot automatically be assumed to be a political motive when boycotting organic food, because it can be linked to personal motives. Understanding environmental issues solely as political motives thus reflects a rather mundane understanding. Further and more problematic it also leads to wrong results when trying to investigate the extent of political consumption from a positivistic paradigmatic posture. More specifically, survey studies will have a tendency to conclude that the phenomenon i.e. political consumption is much more prevalent than it actually is. The novel findings yield theoretical as well as practical implications. For practitioners a more comprehensive understanding of consumer values related to "politicized" products or services will enable companies to better understand consumers need and expectations. The latter being a necessity if confirmation of expectations, satisfaction, retention of customers and customer loyalty are goals of importance for the selling company.

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**Keywords:** Political consumer, boycotting, organic food, case study, means-end chains, attributes, consequences, values, qualitative research

## Introduction

Various research communities such as political scientists, sociologists, consumers and marketing researchers have for decades discussed the notion of political consumption / political consumerism. Political scientists have argued that political consumerism is a new participation form e.g. new kind of citizenship emerging as a consequence of the declining interest and trust in existing political institutions (Dahlgren, 2003; Stolle et al., 2005; Ward and De Wreese, 2011). It is argued that traditional forms of political participation are time consuming, do not promote individual expression and lack the sense of urgency.

Consequently, people search for less bureaucratic and formal forms which are perceived as more self-relevant, and hence more urgent. Micheletti (2003) has introduced the term *individualized collective action* which captures the self-assertive responsibility-taking action which combines the interest in taking care of your own as well as other's well-being.

Sociologists argue in line with political scientists that the political landscape is changing as a result of individuals implementing "life politics" or practicing "subpolitics" (Giddens, 1991, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Individuals are presented with new ways of dealing with and managing political problems and markets and products are becoming politicized. Individuals are ascribed a greater responsibility to reflect on their decisions, thus having a significantly more active role as a political player in different non-institutionalized political settings.

Consumer and marketing researchers have also tried to characterize, understand and make sense of consumer profile labelling such as the socially conscious, green, ethical, political consumer etc. (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Crowe and Williams, 2003; Newholm and Shaw, 2007; Shaw et al., 2006;). There are obvious conceptual similarities (Shaw et al., 2006) but in the context of this paper the definition of the political consumer is only presented. The political consumers are defined as individuals who in their boycott or buycott decisions make value-based considerations with the aim of promoting a political goal (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001). According to survey studies from Denmark results indicate that 30 to 50 % of all consumers can be classified as political consumers (Beckmann et al., 2001; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004) and international studies confirm this (Shaw et al., 2006; Neller and van Deth, 2006). Shaw et al. (2006) argue for an *empowered* consumer as a contemporary type of voting increasingly targeting responsible or irresponsible businesses.

From a business point of view, a more elaborate understanding of this type of consumers is rather interesting. The nature of running a business is evidently paying attention to consumer needs and adjusting the offering to capture interest, retain consumers and ultimately increase profitability. Furthermore, the merge of politics and consumption is an interesting boundary-crossing phenomenon from a theoretical point of view which we need to understand better in order to assess the importance of it.

It is often argued with reference to market volume that consumers are getting more and more interested in buying ethical products which then is used to confirm the increasing importance of the phenomenon. Surveys from the UK show the growth in the consumption of ethical products (Co-operative Bank, 2007). Despite these reports, ethical consumption is still a marginal field referring to the monetary values and we still know little about if the underlying motivations for boycotting are political. In other words are we witnessing a growth in the phenomenon political consumption?

In general, sales figures for organic and fair trade products are rather low and do not support that 30-50% of the consumers should engage in political consumption. More specifically, the market share for organic food in 2011 was 7,6% (Statistics Denmark, 2012) and for fair trade products, reports show that each consumer in Denmark spends approximately 10 Euros on a monthly basis on Fairtrade products (Fairtrade Denmark, 2009). This is evident despite the fact that the brand recognition of the Danish Fair Trade label was 76% (Fairtrade Denmark, 2009). Thus, the often re-occurring issue in consumer research about having a discrepancy between buying intentions and actual purchase is also found here. Questions such as; Is the political aspect in relation to buying organic overrated? Do consumers have an alternative understanding of the meaning of politics when buying organic food? Which cognitive structures can be identified pertinent to purchasing and consuming organic food, arise. This paper aims to answer these questions. Thus, the marketing perspective is emphasized in this study as opposed to a sociological or political science

perspective. The rest of this this paper is structured in the following way. First, the paradigmatic position and the methodology are elaborated. Then a review of literature is conducted. Hereafter, findings and discussions are presented which is followed by practical as well theoretical implications. Lastly, conclusion and future research avenues are proposed.

### **Paradigmatic position and methodology**

A case study was undertaken as research strategy, i.e. a holistic, pragmatic and qualitative paradigmatic posture. This is a research strategy that is broadly applied in many fields. It is further argued that the case study is especially appropriated to apply when one is searching for an understanding and meaning in a holistic limited system (Bonoma, 1985; Stake, 1974; Yin, 1994). More specifically, the unit of analysis was investigated in numerous cases, thus a summation design 2 was applied according to Grünbaum's (2007) typology. This is a case study design that enhances the confirmability, auditability, authenticity and transferability of the truth value of the findings. More concrete, key informant (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999) was purposeful selected, that is, informant should possess a deep and rich knowledge about searching, boycotting and consuming organic food. Furthermore, they should be able to express these experiences in a complex context dependent and convincing manner. Since we aim to understand consumers' intension and values pertinent to organic food consumption a means-end technic was utilized. This is a technique that conveys insight in consumer held values when buying a product by looking into which schemes and mental scripts consumers store and activated in the buying process (Peter and Olson, 2002).

The key informant was interviewed between two and three times during a period of three months. First, an interview with the purpose of understanding the context that surrounds the informant was conducted. Second, an interview followed with the specific purpose of a. uncovering the cognitive structures when buying organic food and b. assessing the degree of political intentionality. The latter deals with whether the consumers think political when boycotting. The informants were initially posed the question: "*Why do you buy organic food instead of conventional food?*" This question was though reformulated after two interviews to: "*Which factors influence your decision to buy organic food?*"

### **Literature review – research trends within political consumption**

Studying political consumerism as a kind of activism is not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century consumer boycotts have been investigated and several examples can be found in the literature (Friedman, 1999). More recent examples can also be found such as boycotting Shell due to the dumping of the oil drilling platform in the North Sea (Grolin, 1998) or the boycott of genetically modified product from GM (Gaskell, 2000) and. Boycotting is thus a well-known example of political participation that exemplifies a traditional, collectively organized way of participating politically. However, studying contemporary political consumerism seems to be more than studying collectively organized political activities, so interest has emerged around studying political consumerism as more unorganized, individualized political participation repertoires that take place in everyday, context dependent settings (Stolle *et. al*, 2005; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001). Various research communities have thus started to study the phenomenon political consumerism (Micheletti, 2001, 2002; Stolle and Hooghe, 2001) also by some termed political consumption (Halkier, 1999a, 2001c; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001; Sørensen, 2004). Political consumption research as an individualized participation form is however, still a rather under research area. Only relatively few studies mainly within the Scandinavia specifically focus on political consumption or the consumer type "the political consumer" (Svendsen, 1992; Goul and Tobiasen, 2001, Tobiasen, 2004; Sørensen, 2002, Micheletti and Stolle, 2004; Sestoft, 2002). Moreover, the focus of political consumption has not especially been concerned with

understanding the individual consumer, and the individuals' motivations and intentions of boycotting. The understanding of the politics behind products or put differently how embedded the political intention aspect is in everyday consumption acts is still an under-researched area.

### **The 1970's segmentation research**

Research focusing on the consumer as a socially responsible or an environmentally conscious individual can be traced back in the marketing literature to the start of the 1970's. For example, Henion, (1972) focus on the consumer as a political actor. Through experimental studies evidence showed that information concerning phosphate content in washing powder enhanced environmental conscious consumption behaviour. More specifically, consumers reacted positively to the increased environmentally relevant information. This further, had a concrete positive effect on the sale of washing powder with lower phosphate content (Henion, 1972). With point of departure in these findings marketing researchers developed a growing interest in establishing a consumer profile in order to produce more efficient and effective market segmentation and positioning strategies.

A range of other studies are published in this period, which attempt to establish the profile of, respectively, the socially conscious consumer (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972, Webster, 1975) as well as the ecologically/environmentally concerned/interested consumer (Kinnear *et.al.*, 1974). It was, however, not possible to reach consensus understanding on which variables were suited for characterizing an, "environmentally related" consumer profile. The result from various studies was, however, ambiguous and blurred.

### **Segmentation research for the 1980's and beyond**

Following a number of years with relatively few publications within segmentation research (Antil, 1984; Balderjahn, 1988), it is attempted, in spite of the experiences of the 1970's research, to establish consumer profiles in the 1990's and onwards both internationally and nationally. Numerous studies of different consumer profiles such as the ecologically, politically, ethically and environmentally conscious consumer can be found (e.g. Lavik, 1990; Lavik and Enger, 1995; Granzin and Olsen, 1991; Grunert, 1992; Bennulf and Selin, 1993; Hackett, 1995; Crowe and Williams, 2003, Pickett *et.al.*, 1993, Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001, 2004; Micheletti and Stolle, 2004; Strømnes, 2004, Harrison *et.al.*, 2005).

Lavik (1990) thus publishes in the beginning of the 1990's an investigation of Norwegian consumers' environmental consciousness, and she finds a connection between, for instance, the fact that environmental behaviour correlates with socio-economic status and political affiliation. It is thus claimed that the more well-heeled consumers, who are found on the left wing of the political ideological spectrum, are those who shop in the most environmentally friendly way. Socio-economical variables contribute, therefore, in the Norwegian research to discriminating between more or less environmentally conscious consumers, which the research from the 1970's was partly in disagreement with (Kassarjian, 1971; Kinnear *et.al.*, 1974). Comparing the results of Lavik (1990) with recent surveys on profiling the political consumer, similar variables seem to characterize the environmental and political consumer (Strømnes, 2004; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004), which indicate overlaps between different profiles and leaves the impression of less distinctiveness. Nevertheless, other studies again tend to disagree on the discriminating variables, which leave a blurred picture of what characterizes the various profiles. Bennulf and Selin (1993) find no support for connections between, for example, socio-economic status and environmentally friendly actions. Knowledge about how to preserve the environment is also not considered to give rise to more environmentally friendly behaviour, which other studies indicate as an

important prerequisite for environmentally correct/conscious behavior (Grunert, 1992, Ellen, 1994; Folkes and Kamins, 1999; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004).

Even though it seems difficult to find agreement on what characterises the different profiles, attempts are continuously made. After an era with conceptualizing the socially conscious and the environmentally conscious consumer, the characterization of the ethical and the political consumer enter more and more into the segmentation research. Especially in Scandinavia publications emerge studying such consumer profiles as the ethical, ECO-foods and the political consumer (Grunert, 1992; Grunert and Kristensen, 1995; Gallup, 1997; UgebrevetMandag Morgen, 1995; Thulstrup, 1997,1998; IFF and Elsam, 1996; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001, 2004).

The determination of, specifically, the political consumer continues in 1996, perhaps as a consequence of concrete political cases, such as the consumer boycott of the French government, where the market functions as a clarion call for political agendas. Nevertheless, instead of focusing only on defining profiles, emphasis is put on the phenomenon political consumerism/consumption where multiple disciplines discuss different aspects of this phenomenon. Surveys results published highlighting the consumer profile but further attempts are made to measure the proportion or spread of the phenomenon and also to provide a more nuanced picture of political participation as a more individualized type of participation (buycotting) versus more traditional market based forms (boycotting) (Andersen, 1993; IFF and Elsam, 1996; Thulstrup,1997). In a publication by IFF and Elsam from 1996 it is stated that 40.3% of the respondents had boycotted goods, while 52.9% had buycotted products based on their evaluation of environmental, animal welfare or human rights aspects. These numbers are supported by another publication, where the proportion of political consumers who had boycotted companies or countries due to political reasons in June 1996 was 29%, and the proportion of consumers who had buycotted organic food products during an ordinary week was app. 50-55% (Thulstrup,1997).

Based solely on the percentage of consumers that boycott organic goods, it is difficult to assess how many actually ascribe this kind of purchase to a political motive. In the literature, varying motives are defined for the buycotting of organic food products, such as personal health motives or decidedly political environmental motives (Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis, 1998; Beckmann, 2001 *et.al.*; Magnusson *et.al.*, 2001; Sørensen, 2002). There can, therefore, be a mix of motives, which makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the purchase of organic goods is politically motivated. Due to the lacking discussion of when buying behaviour can be classified as political little can in reality be said about whether the individualized, unorganized buycotting of organic food products constitutes a political act or if the buycotting is driven by other motives.

The attempt to establish consumer profiles continues, and from 2001 and forward a number of Scandinavian publications arrive that attempt to clarify the profile of the political consumer in Scandinavia, i.e. Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Strømnes, 2004; Micheletti and Stolle, 2004; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001, 2004). Strømnes (2004) for example determines that the political consumers in Norway consist of very resourceful citizens who are city residents, well educated, interested in politics and, politically, identify themselves mostly with the left wing parties and slightly more women than men can be found. At the same time, she finds that the income variable does not influence whether one is a political consumer, which is an aspect that has also previously been found.

Nevertheless, research on determining various consumer profiles leaves behind a fragmented picture of how to characterize certain profiles. The value of applying segmentation variable is therefore an issue that is discussed and questioned. (Pickett *et.al.*, 1993; Antil, 1984; Balderjahn,1988; Granzin and Olsen, 1991; Schlegelmilchet. *al.*, 1994). It is thus argued that the ability to predict behaviour based on especially demographic and

socio-economic segmentation variables is limited leading to inconsistent results. Schwepker and Cornwell (1991) argue that concern for the environment cannot be seen as an issue that occupies marginal parts of the population, but that, as is highlighted, "*Environmental concern is becoming the socially accepted norm*". This is supported by several British studies, in which it appears that 82% consider the environment as an important and pressing problem (Dembkowski and HammerLloyd, 1994), moreover, that 69% of the general population experience pollution and other environmentally related problems as issues that have a significant influence on their daily lives (Worcester, 1993). Therefore, it ought not to be expected that a high degree of green consumer behaviour reflects itself in particular socio-demographical segments within the population (Schlegelmilchet.al.,1996).

### Summing up

A steady stream of research have been published during the 1990's, but again, as with the 1970's contribution, there seems to be a lack of consensus surrounding what characterises environmentally friendly and environmentally conscious consumers (e.g. Seippel, 1995; Strandbakken, 1995; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Pedersen and Broegaard, 1997). Most of the segmentation research bases itself on primarily quantitative research approaches, and the criticism from a range of research contributions with an alternative research approach emphasise that the individual's environmental behaviour is difficult to explain with the help of fixed segmentation bases (Jensen, 1997a; 1997b; Halkier, 1998a; Lindén, 1994; Eden, 1993). In the 1990's segmentation research, in contrast to the 1970's, the political consumer profile is examined with focus on the situation-determined boycott actions that occurred in this period. The way in which this consumer profile is determined is, however, still dominated by the quantitative approaches where, again, different demographical, socio-psychological, personality, as well as attitudinal and lifestyle variables are employed. The overall problems are again that they try to capture and understand the complexity of behaviour as an outcome of predetermined characteristics. Political consumption becomes, according to a segmentation study, the result of certain socio-economical factors, rather than individual, context related factors, which play a role in everyday life. In addition, the concordant between actual sales volume of environmental friendly goods and the extent of political consumers in the market place that per se would buy these types of goods, cannot be established. In other words, there exists a forecasting demand paradox in relation to sales of environmental friendly goods. Therefore, based on the segmentation research, it is difficult to establish an understanding of the importance that for example environmentally friendly goods play for the individual, and thereby make any statement concerning the motives that lie behind the boycotting and boycotting of certain goods.

### Findings and discussion

The guidelines offered by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) regarding the data analysis were followed in this study. Thus, first a content analysis was performed based on summary content codes of the attributes, the consequences and the values identified in the data material. This leads to the implication matrix which conveys a map of hierarchical values. Table 1 below depicts the summary content codes.

**Table 1**Summary content codes

Attributes →	Consequences →	Values
1. No pesticides 2. Taste/Quality 3. Luxury 4. Price 5. Convenience	6. Healthier for me 7. Good for the kids and the family 8. Better for the environment 9. Signal who you are 10. Prepare more tasty food 11. Influencing consistency in shopping behavior 12. Some products to expensive	16. Family health and security 17. A strong health/live longer 18. Taking a responsibility/Show consideration for others 19. Inner harmony and solidarity with nature 20. Self-respect

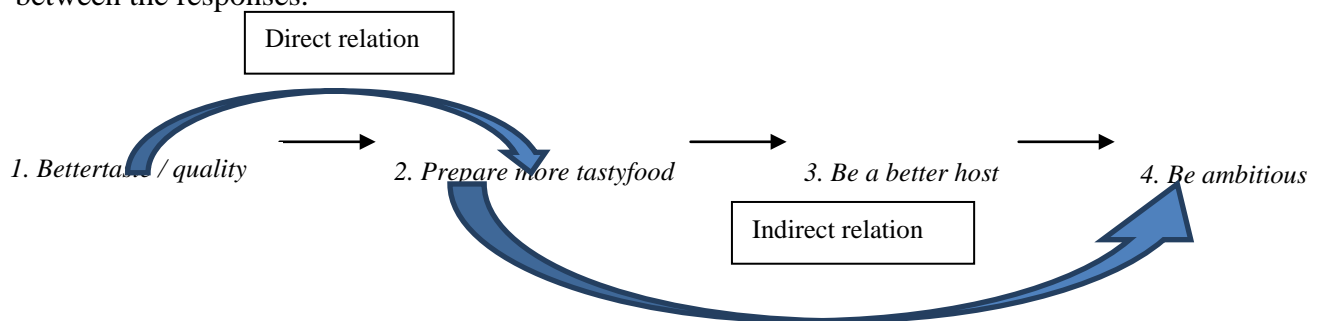
	13. New food experiences 14. Makes daily life easier 15. Being a better host/house wife	21. Ambitious 22. Social recognition
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The content codes are thus an important element in creating knowledge. Thus one might pose, how are the codes more precisely formed? An example in relation to the attribute “No pesticides” is offered below.

In the data material, a number of different statements were given concerning the problems of using pesticides and chemicals in producing conventional food and conversely the positive aspects of not using it in the production of organic food. Statements such as; “*I don’t like, that they are sprayed and I just think about the picture of an airplane flying over a field and spraying a lot of chemicals out- I am not keen on eating such food*” or another statement. “*The (organic) are without artificial preservatives and other chemicals*” Such statements are to a wide extent expressing the same content, namely that organic food are boycotted because they are free of pesticides/chemicals. These statements are assigned as an attribute under the content code “no pesticides” in the summary content codes.

**The implication matrix**

The implication matrix represents an overview of the number of times a response causes another response. The enumeration is done by listing how often for example a response such as (1) no pesticides leads to the response (9) better for the environment and this procedure is continued for the complete data set. Finally, this results in a matrix expressing the aggregated ladders for the group of informants. The implication matrix illustrates the relations between the stated responses. The relations are composed of both direct relations and indirect relations. Characteristic for the direct relations is that there is a direct connection between the responses.



The direct element relates to the fact that there is a sequential order expressed by the numbers (1-4). That is, 1. *Better taste/quality* causes the response, 2. *Prepare more tasty food*, this is a direct relation. The same applies for the response 2. *Prepare more tasty food* which has a direct relation to the response 3. *Be a better hostess /host*. These direct relations are shown in the implication matrix as the number before the comma. However, indirect relations also exist. That is, response 2. *Prepare more tasty food* and 4. *Be ambitious*, above. Indirect relations are in nature more tactic and thus difficult to interpret without using the attribute, consequence, value typology. The direct relations between responses appear before the comma and the indirect after the comma in the implication matrix, illustrated below in table 2.

Attributes, consequences and values is displayed in full length in table 1 above.

**Table 2** Implication matrix

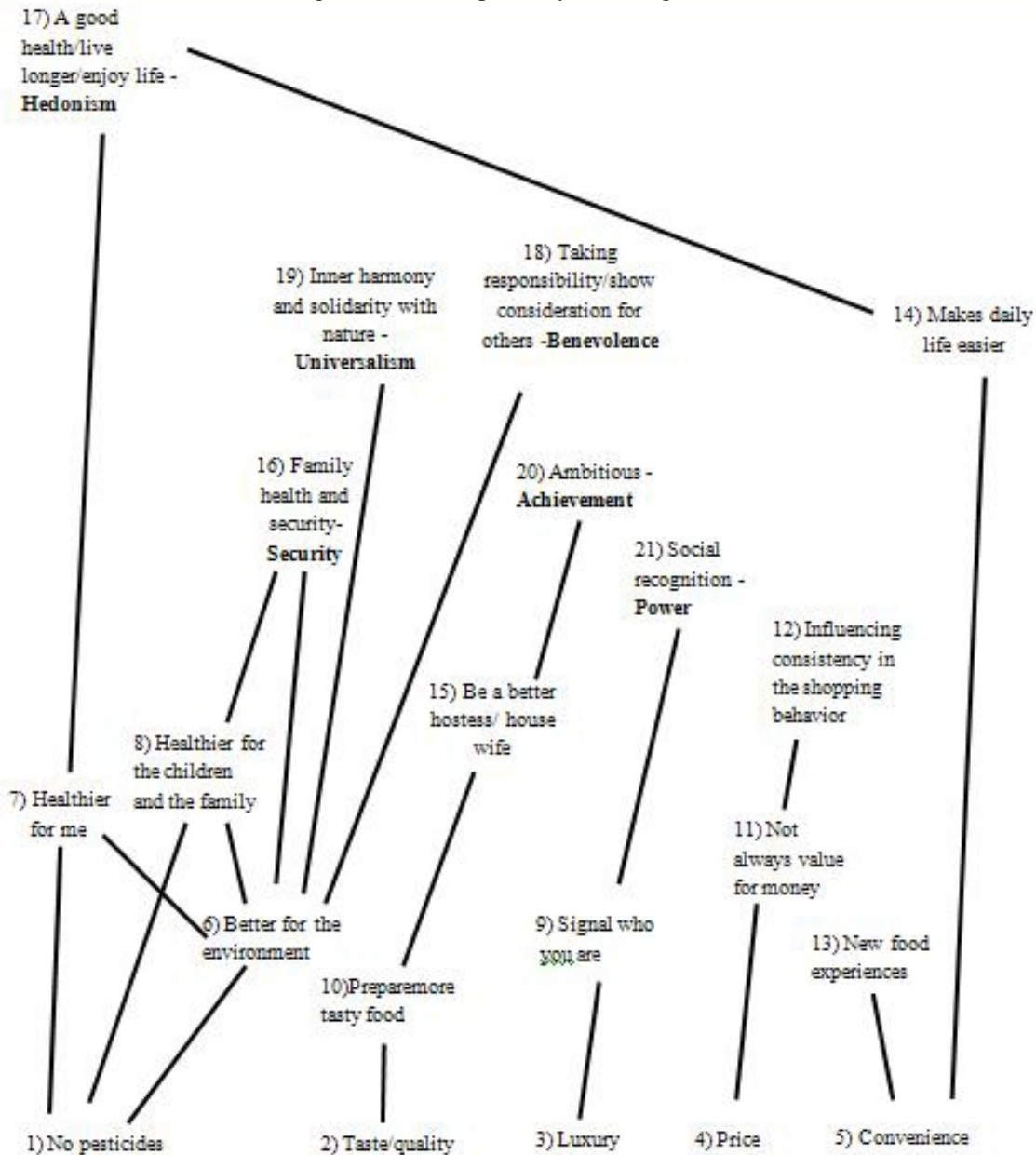
Content codes	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
Attributes																	
1. Pesticides	11.0	8.05	8.04									0.1 2	0.1 3	0.0 2	0.0 4		
2. Taste					2.00					0.0						0.0	



										2						1	
3. Luxury				3.00												0.02	
4. Price						4.00	0.03										
5. Convenience								2.00	2.00				0.02				
<i>Consequences</i>																	
6. Healthier													13.0				
7. Family												12.0		4.00	2.00		
8. Environment	5.00	4.00															
9. Signal																	2.00
10. Prepare										2.00						0.01	
11. Consistency																	
12. Expensive								3.00									
13. Food experience																	
14. Easier													2.00				
15. Better host																1.00	0.03
<i>Values</i>																	
16. Family																	
17. Health																	
18. Responsibility																	
19. Harmony																	
20. Self-respect																	
21. Ambitious																	2.0
22. Recognition																	

The implication matrix is subsequently applied to construct the hierarchical value map. The hierarchical value map is a graphical and visual representation of the relations between the informants’ responses. According to Reynolds and Gutman, the hierarchical value map is the most important contribution in the analysis of the laddering data as it gives an overall visual presentation of the results without assessing the previous step of the analysis. This knowledge is especially valuable for product development or marketing tasks such as crafting responsive marketing strategies for organic food products. The value map for the 12 informants’ pertinent to buying and consuming organic is illustrated in figure 1 below. Furthermore, the value map is constructed based on the implication matrix.

Figure 1. Value map for boycott of organic food



Several lessons can be conveyed based on the constructed value map displayed in figure 1. The map shows the means-end chains that were expressed via the laddering interviews.

### Means-end chains for the attribute "No pesticides"

The attribute, "no pesticides" causes different means-end chains, resulting in various responses both at the consequence and value level. That organic foods are free of pesticides is by some of the informants seen as an important factor in boycotting organic products, but different ladders are constructed. For example, the attribute "no pesticides" produces at the consequence level the responses "healthier for me", "healthier for the children and the family" as well as "better for the environment", which again relates to different values among the informants. The consequence "healthier for me" relates exclusively to the informants' personal wish for a longer and healthier life, where the individual strives for a life condition dominated by harmony and enjoyment, so the value hedonism is applied in this case. The

consequence “healthier for the children and the family” also related to the value hedonism, but at the same time this response also relates to the value security. The desire for food free of pesticides contains a dual wish because it considers the health of children and family that reflect a personal interest but also the health and security of external individuals. Consuming organic food here is therefore about minimizing potential risks, where the well-being and security of family members is considered. Finally, the consequence “better for the environment” is stated by some informants, which considers the long-term positive perspectives in organic food production, and thus related to thinking about nature as a fragile resource and showing consideration for others by behaving in a way that show solidarity with nature. The value that relates to the response “better for the environment” is argued to be benevolence.

### **Means-end chains for the attribute “taste/quality”**

The attribute taste/quality produces the consequences “prepare more tasty food” and “be a better hostess”. A single informant stated that this referred to being the star in the kitchen, and the housekeeping and cooking was a territory where personal ambitions were accomplished and thus signalled to the external world. This is the reason why “being a better hostess” relates to the value achievement.

### **Means-end chains for the attribute “luxury”**

Organic foods are by some informants perceived as premium products and more luxurious. This perception is based on for example the packaging, the image, the type of product etc. The attribute luxury produces the consequence “signal who you are” which relates to social recognition achieved by being able to exclusively buy these types of products. The most appropriate value encompassing the content of signalling who you are is Power.

### **Means-end chains for the attribute, “price”**

An often “unreasonably” high price on some organic products was a factor that influenced the buying behaviour of some informants. Some informants stated that they did not to the extent that they wanted boycott organic products because they perceived the price-value relation for the product as too low. The attribute price thus caused responses that could be captured as the consequence “not always value for money” which further lead to the consequence “influencing consistency in the shopping behaviour”. As regards the attribute “price” the responses did not reach the value level but remained responses that could be assigned to the consequence level.

### **Means- end chains for the attribute, “convenience”**

The last attribute mentioned among the informants is labelled convenience, referring to something that is easier or more comfortable. The convenience term arose out of responses coming from informants subscribing to an online delivery service of especially organic fruit and vegetables. These informants stated that the organic dimension and the form of distribution were considered under the same umbrella and it was argued to be easier, more convenient and more exiting in daily life. The excitement of opening up the boxes or baskets with tailor-made recipes in was one aspect that was described as a value adding aspect that made this service attractive. In the case of the informants subscribing to the delivery of organic products, it can be difficult to answer clearly, what is more important, convenience or the fact that the products are organic or maybe more likely that it is a mixture of several value adding aspects. Nevertheless, the informants said, that they would not subscribe to a delivery service offering conventional baskets or boxes. This could indicate that organic food and the

distribution to the front door are two important parameters supplementing each other well, and the convenience issue is a value-creating element that goes well in hand with boycotting organic foods. The attribute convenience produced the consequence "makes daily life easier", which ultimately meant that the informants had more time for things that were perceived as self-relevant, increasing their personal welfare, referring to the value hedonism.

### **Conclusion, implications and future research avenues**

The results of the laddering procedure show that the informants activate different cognitive structures e.g. different values are activated for similar attributes and consequences. This means that consumption of organic food is related to different value sets. That is, value sets where the political aspects are represented to different degrees, thus, some informants primarily boycott organic food for personal or family related reasons. For this group of informants, the focus is mainly on health related issues. Preservation of nature or environmental concern is important in the sense that it in the end relates to promoting personal security and health. This means that the environmental aspect cannot automatically be assumed to be a political motive if you buy organic food but is an aspect that is closely linked to personal motives. Understanding environmental issues solely as political motives thus reflects a rather mundane understanding. Moreover and more problematic it also leads to ambiguous results when trying to investigate the extent of political consumption from a positivistic paradigmatic posture. More specifically, survey studies will have a tendency to conclude that the phenomenon i.e. political consumption is much more prevalent than it actually is. The means end chains, however, did also reveal the existence of a more pure political consumer where the external, societal focus was dominant when buying decisions was performed. We need, albeit, to understand more about this type from a qualitative research perspective.

Even though little still is known about the extent to which consumers consciously try to influence society through their consumption acts, studies show that consumers have begun at least valuing social and ethical goals in their decision making process. Even if consumers do not actually link every day purchases with the possibility to use their buying power politically, consumers are still evaluating and looking for responsible companies (Dawkins and Lewis, 2003). Thus, assessing value orientations to estimate market potential and to create responsive marketing strategies are interesting aspects for researchers as well as practitioners. More specifically, the results indicate that consumers activate a more complex value orientation constituting of both traditional and political motivational goals when buying products.

For practitioners a more comprehensive study of consumer values related to "politicized" products or services would provide knowledge about the important value set and thus make it easier for companies to meet consumer or stakeholder expectations.

Characterizing consumers as being either ethical, political or socially responsible and then directing their marketing messages based on this perception could give a to simplified picture of what is valued by the consumer. A further investigation of the complex network of motives connected to certain consumption acts could provide a better basis for developing marketing strategies. Future investigations of consumer motivations and values could emphasize more specific analysis within different empirical areas such as food, energy, transportation etc.

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