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"From Boycotts to Ethical Consumption: A Historical Perspective on the Evolution of socially responsible consumption"

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Abstract

This article traces the historical development of socially responsible consumption (SRC), highlighting the influence of consumer movements and political consumerism. As early as the 18th century, boycotts were used as political weapons, particularly during the colonial period, when American colonists protested against British taxes by refusing to import certain products. Over time, various social movements, such as the Montgomery bus boycott or the anti-apartheid protests in South Africa, have demonstrated how consumers can influence corporate and government policies.

The article also explores the emergence of ethical consumerism, where consumer choices are directed towards products that meet social and environmental standards. Consumer associations in the early 20th century, notably in the USA, played a pioneering role in encouraging consumers to favor companies that respected workers' rights. The text also highlights the impact of ethical investment in the 1960s-70s, as well as the rise of consumer resistance movements against practices deemed immoral by corporations. Political consumerism is thus presented as a strategy for challenging market practices while building new ethical and social value systems.

Keywords: socially responsible consumption (SRC), ethical consumerism, Political consumerism

Introduction

In recent decades, responsible consumption has become a prominent part of societal discourse, but its roots lie deep in history. Although the concept of socially responsible consumption

(SRC) emerged from marketing studies in the 1970s, the idea that consumers can use their purchasing power to influence social and political change is not new. Indeed, consumer movements have

existed for centuries, demonstrating the ability of consumers to make their voices heard through their purchasing choices. This article explores the historical evolution of responsible consumption, highlighting prominent examples and iconic figures who have transformed the act of purchasing into a lever for social action. From the iconic boycotts of the American colonies to the buyer movements of the early 20th century to shareholder activism during apartheid, we examine how consumption has been used as a political weapon and how it continues to shape contemporary business practices.

The objective of this article is to trace the historical development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by examining key movements and trends in consumer activism, political consumerism, and ethical consumption. It aims to highlight how consumer power, through actions such as boycotts and shareholder activism, has played a critical role in shaping CSR practices and encouraging companies to adopt more socially and environmentally responsible behaviors. Additionally, the article explores the transformation of consumption into a political and ethical tool for social change.

1. History of SRC:

Socially responsible consumption was conceived in marketing studies and research in the mid-1970s and is becoming increasingly important in today's society. However, the use of this consumption for specific purposes is not a new phenomenon.

Historically, consumers often used their purchasing power to achieve specific goals. These consumer movements can be considered one of the origins of CSR, if not necessarily to adhere to altruistic goals. Here are some famous examples and individuals who used consumption as a political weapon. The first historical boycott took place during the colonial period in the 18th century (Witkowski, 1989). In 1764, Great Britain had 13 colonies on American territory. These colonies were originally composed of Puritans but maintained close ties with their home countries.

Most imports came from other British colonies. These were mainly raw materials such as wine, salt, wool, cotton, sugar, and linen. However, between 1764 and 1776, the colonies adopted a strategy of not importing into the country of origin in protest against fiscal policies. In particular, the colonies rejected the demands of the "Stamp Act" passed in 1765 and the "Townshend Act" in 1767 which imposed taxes on books, maps, newspapers, advertisements, glass, leather, paper, and tea. As imports fell by half between 1768 and 1770 and nearly quadrupled between 1774 and 1775, the non-importation movement received much attention. The colonists' idea was to inflict economic losses on British merchants and manufacturers in order to put pressure on Parliament. The royal powers quickly considered the Americans as rebels and sent a large British army. In 1776, the Patriot Movement announced its decision to sever all ties with the king and create an independent state.

Another famous case of boycott is the same one that coined the term "boycott" (Amirault-Thébault, 1999). In 1880, Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott, a farm manager in the west of Ireland, was blacklisted by the Land League. The harvest was so bad that the league asked Mr. Boycott to reduce farm rents by 25%, but he refused. Beware of the Irish who refuse to give work or food to this deadly guard, citing inhuman harshness towards small farmers. The latter can no longer find servants, no longer find workers, and can no longer buy anything even at the price of gold.

1.1 Buyers' social movement

A particularly interesting case is also the social movement of buyers' associations that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. These leagues began in the United States in 1891 and have since spread to Europe. They are mainly composed of women and their main objective is to protect workers' rights through consumption. Concretely, these associations create lists of companies that respect their employees, called "white lists". The members of the Federation encouraged consumers to buy products exclusively in these stores. They also recommended not shopping on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, not shopping during peak hours to avoid overloading suppliers, and not looking for the lowest prices (Chessel, 2004). These associations considered consumerism as a political weapon and sought to raise public awareness in this regard. The reasoning is that "every act of consumption is intrinsically linked to an act of production, and therefore the consumer (the employer) is indirectly responsible for the well-being of the producer" (Glickman, 2004). However, the illusion of unethical consumer behavior does not exist. The influence of the league was minimal, but their goal was to establish socially responsible consumption.

In some cases, individuals do not use their purchasing power for such glorious purposes as the boycott of German Jewish businesses decreed by the Nazis on April 1, 1933. Some disputes between nations. For example, the widespread boycotts of Israeli-affiliated businesses by the countries of the Arab League.

- Since 1933, Palestinian groups have organized a Jewish boycott in the suburbs of Jaffa to protest Jewish immigration. The following year, in October 1934, the Arab League banned access to Jewish businesses and called for a general boycott.
- In 1949, the Arab League created a "blacklist" of companies doing business with Israel, which was updated regularly. The 1976 list included over 6,000 companies, including 2,000 in the United States and 350 in France.
- In 1955, the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to let a white man board the bus first, sparked a boycott of public transportation in Montgomery, Alabama. The one-day boycott lasted a year. Through these events, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his strategy of nonviolent resistance became nationally known.
- 1960s: National anti-racist protests in the American South, particularly at the major department stores Woolworths and Kress. The results were mixed. Desegregation was in place in 140 cities in the southern periphery, but widespread adoption in the Deep South would have to wait until a 1964 law was passed.
- 1960-1964: In the United States, attention shifted to job opportunities for blacks in the northern states. Activists focused on consumer goods manufacturers and retailers, which were vulnerable to boycotts. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), successfully recruited several people into retailers under threat of boycott. CORE also ensured that major companies featured people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in their advertising.
- Several local organizations banded together to form FIGHT (Freedom-Integration-God-Honor-Today) in

1965 while still in the United States after the Rochester, NY race riots of 1964.

- In 1966, the battle decided to use Eastman Kodak as an example and set off a domino effect. Subsequent events prompted FIGHT to buy stock in the company and lobby religious and civil rights groups to force Kodak shareholders to pressure the company. This was the origin of shareholder activity as we know it today.

1.2. Shareholder Activism and Boycotts in South Africa and Angola

In the mid-1960s, against the backdrop of apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in Angola, American shareholder activism and boycotts spread to investors based in Africa. University students were the main promoters of the protests here.

- 1966: Public attention was drawn to an American bank that had lent to the South African government six years earlier. These loans were intended to replenish the country's foreign exchange reserves, which had collapsed after the police massacre of blacks in Sharpsville. Several universities, religious groups and individuals sold stakes in these banks. As a result, \$23 million was withdrawn from these financial institutions in protest at their support for the South African government.
- In 1969, a subsidiary of Gulf Oil Corporation was established in the Portuguese colony of Angola. Several groups tried to persuade Gulf Oil to withdraw from Angola, claiming that royalties paid to the Portuguese government were used to finance the occupation. In 1972, the discussion moved to universities. Black students successfully persuaded Columbia University and Cornell University to sell their shares in Gulf. That same year, the PALC (Pan African Liberation Commission) organized a boycott of golf resorts in 10 states, targeting the percentage of black car owners. Unfortunately, the first victims were black gas station owners in the Gulf, so the impact of the boycott was virtually nil. In addition, the boycott overlapped with the oil crisis to prevent discrimination of consumer brands based on scarcity.
- In 1976, riots and demonstrations by black students in Soweto drastically reduced domestic and foreign investment, forcing South Africa to borrow heavily from foreign banks again. In 1977, following a shareholder resolution, First National City Bank announced that it would stop lending to the South African government and its companies. Several banks also made this decision, including the National Central Bank of Chicago and the First Bank of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

1.3. Peace Movement

During the 1960s and 1970s, anti-war activists used a variety of political consumer tactics against companies that appeared to benefit from the conflict.

- 1966-1969: The Dow Chemical Corporation, responsible for the production of napalm, received disproportionate attention from protesters compared to other companies.
- In 1967, activists organized a boycott of two of Dow's best-known and most politically exposed products. Saran Shawl and Practical Dress. But with Sarang sold, the boycott appeared to have mixed results. The round amount exceeded expectations by 6.5%. The supposed

interpretation is that those who supported the war probably contributed to the sale (hence the "boycott") to show their support.

1.4. The emergence of ethical investing

The peace movement also led to the emergence of socially responsible investing as a political strategy.

- In 1969, Boston financial analyst Alice Stepper Merlin compiled a list of companies not involved in the production of war supplies for the local synagogue. Given the interest generated by the publication of this list in the New York Times (more than 600 individuals and organizations requested additional information), Marlin aimed to elevate the role of investors by providing detailed information and created an organization, the Economic Priority Council. Information that politicizes the social performance of a company.
- In 1972, Dreyfus created the largest social responsibility fund (\$26 million in assets). Other funds, such as the Pax World Fund, are created and designed primarily for individual investors. However, relatively few investors will be interested at first.

2. Impact of consumerism

One of the trends that has strongly influenced the development of CSR concepts is consumerism.

2.1. Consumption or consumerism?

Consumption is the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair, and disposal of products or services (Campbell, 1995; cited in Miles, 1998). However, this definition fails to take into account the social importance of consumption and the relationship between culture and the economy. McCracken (1990, cited in Miles, 1998) broadens the definition of consumption to include culture, influences, and experiences. Bocoock (1993, cited in Miles, 1998) goes further and argues that consumerism, as a set of social, cultural, and economic consumption practices, justifies capitalism in the eyes of millions of people. For these authors, the concept of consumerism therefore has a broader meaning than that of consumption. If it is an act, consumerism is a lifestyle, a cultural expression, a manifestation of the ubiquity of consumption. Miles rejects the negative definition of the term, which is often used to describe "a life too busy with consumption" (Miles, 1998, p. 4), and defines the term as an increase in the consumer defense movement. He prefers to describe consumption as ubiquitous rather than excessive. His aim is to highlight the sociological debates around consumption as a lifestyle. The authors explain that consumerism is a psychosocial expression in that it represents a bridge between the individual and society. But Miles emphasizes that consumption brings both power and coercion. Therefore, it is a personal experience, engaging and engaging, and also one that controls daily life.

2.2. Consumerism: The Religion of the 20th Century:

Consumerism is everywhere. Life in the developed world is characterised by its relationship with consumer goods. Consumerism is a solution to many, if not all, problems and an escape from the simple realities of everyday life. Urban centres are places of consumption rather than cultural centres, our homes are temples of consumption and our lives are always juxtaposed with styles of consumption.

Miles (1998) cites several sources on the consumer society. Industrial Revolution, Urbanisation, Fordism. Industrialisation produces standardised products at low cost, and what was once a luxury item becomes a commodity. Subsistence production was replaced by paid labour and urban populations were both consumers and producers.

However, the development of a consumer society emerged through a substantial growth in the purchasing power of the working class. Fordist economics led the mass market. Fordism, the pioneer of mass production systems, relied on workers' surplus income to invest in currently available products. Consumption began to play an increasingly important role.

Consumer goods are no longer just functional, they have taken on a sense of identity. Miles points out that some commentators see this development as a movement of emancipation of the working class, who are now able to feel like full members of the society from which they were previously excluded. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, with the advent of credit cards and advertising, consumption has become a new experience and a new way of life, and mass consumption has permeated the economic sphere, social activities, household structure and psychological levels. They participate in the construction of identities, the formation of relationships and the elaboration of activities and events according to their experiences. Post-Fordist consumption will become more volatile and diversified. Consumption is no longer determined by the manufacturer. Heterogeneity, diversity and flexibility become the norm. Lee (1993, cited after Miles, 1998) argues that the change in the accumulation regime and its mode of regulation in the post-Fordist era is not on the side of production, but rather in terms of symbolic commodities and the transformation of commodities. Outside there is. In this sense, consumption will play a fundamental role in modern society and we can begin to speak of consumerism.

2.3. Consumerism and political consumerism:

One may wonder whether political consumerism is not a way to gain or regain some purchasing power, or a way to free oneself from the constraints of consumption, markets and institutions. Firat and Venkatesh (1995) propose that the prevalence of postmodern consumption styles can free individuals from the domination of the market. In fact, more and more consumers are looking for areas where they can create and practice their own culture to compete with established values, without giving up the marketer's advantage. Political consumption is therefore considered as one of these spaces.

The similarities between political consumerism and consumerism (or consumer society in the sense of Baudrillard (1970)) and between actors and systems are interesting. Consumerism in the sense of consumption of meaning and search for identity manifests itself as a system that imposes and creates social regulations that have their own rules from which it is difficult to escape. Political consumerism breaks free from these rules to build its own value system in which the meaning of things takes on a completely different meaning. Goods and services no longer only tell consumers what they believe, what they want to be, what they want to be, but above all, how the world should work.

2.4. Ethical Consumerism and Ethical Consumers:

Ethical consumption is consumption that is concerned with the problems of the Third World, where producers produce cheap products for multinational companies with low wages and poor

conditions, and profit greatly from it. Refers to the actions of a person. Sales to Western consumers (good, 1996). Fair trade is an application of ethical consumption (Bird and Hughes, 1997). Micheletti (2003) uses the concept of political consumerism to describe the responsible (ethical) consumption movement. The authors believe that consumption is political because each product is part of a political context in which political issues and social values are influenced by the company. According to Micheletti (2003), political consumerism is based on the idea that consumers, through their product choices, aim to change unacceptable market practices. In fact, consumers can choose to accept or refuse the purchase of certain products. Boycotts and boycotts are both positive and negative forms of political consumption and can be used to solve political problems. Negative political consumerism (boycott) is the refusal to buy a particular product in order to force a company to change its behavior in the market. In the perspective of a positive consumer policy (boycott), consumers choose products whose labels distinguish products that meet ethical, environmental and social standards from ordinary products. The purchase of fair trade products is a good example of a boycott. Micheletti and Stolle (2005) add a new form of political consumerism. Controversial political consumerism: This translates into the use of communication tools to improve our business practices. Jamming culture exemplifies discursive political consumerism by focusing on the problems of consumer society to educate consumers. This has the potential to change the fundamentals of this society and the behavior of socially responsible companies. Negotiating, discussing or ironically using corporate slogans are also good examples of subversive political consumerism. Gendron, Lapointe and Turcotte (2004) present political consumerism as a new economic and social movement. Indeed, not only political consumerism but also new social movements take into account the social dimension in economic transactions. Economic transactions are no longer limited to commercial transactions based on the logic of maximizing consumer profit. Rather, it is an ongoing social relationship that considers morality and politics. According to these authors, responsible consumption emerges through three mechanisms: Tags or labels, certifications and codes of conduct.

A code of conduct is the set of obligations or standards of an organization that it imposes on its business partners. Labels are signs that allow consumers to distinguish products that meet environmental and social standards from conventional products. These standards are specified by certification bodies. However, some codes of conduct and labels are exempt from certification.

These mechanisms allow consumers to be aware of the social and environmental impact of their consumption and to consume responsibly. This is evident in the case of fair trade, where consumers in the North take into consideration the social conditions of small producers in the South to morally purchase fair trade products.

In 1996 in England, ethical consumerism was considered a marketing concept in its infancy. It is a source of competitive advantage for socially responsible organizations (Strong, 1996).

According to Strong (1996), the manifestation of ethical consumption for which they developed fair trade principles is due to several factors. We quote the most important part:

Evolution of consumer concerns, advocacy support and media attention in the 1990s. In these years, more and more consumers

expressed environmental concerns while demonstrating social awareness, leading to an increase in consumers of fair trade products (Strong, 1996). As a result, informed consumers demand not only fair trade products, but also ethical guarantees. In response to these demands, the fair trade label was born. According to Strong (1996), consumers in the 1990s pay attention not only to the price and quality of a product, but also to its environmental and social aspects. The author conducted a survey of 1,000 British consumers in the 1990s. The survey results show that a quarter of the respondents regularly buy fair trade products. In addition, 24% of respondents stated that they would actively try to buy fair trade products, 11% were often hesitant and the rest rarely or rarely bought these products. This last group only buys when fair trade products are presented at charity events,

3. Consumer resistance movements

In the field of marketing, definitions have been formulated that advocate conceptualizing resistance as a reaction to corporate behavior. Thus, Fournier (1998) describes it as "the set of acts that engage someone in response, neutralization or opposition, with the aim of thwarting, foiling or defeating maneuvers deemed oppressive". Peñaloza and Price (1993) recall "how individuals and groups implement strategies of expropriation in response to dominance structures". Approaches to consumer resistance in marketing are relatively new compared to the various philosophical and sociological positions taken against consumption and market society in the 1960s (Barthes, 1957; Packard, 1958; Dichter Debord, 1967; Marcuse, 1968; Baudrillard, 1970). Consumer pressure and the first legislative interventions in regulatory practices have changed the mindset of marketing to take criticism more seriously. Faced with the danger of ignoring it or leaving it to the authorities to speak "on behalf of the consumer" (Chatriot, Chessel and Hilton, 2005), the positions taken in the 1970s (Kotler and Lévy, 1969; 1971) have prevailed. The decade has been enriched by a series of works revealing numerous manifestations of consumer resistance.

3.1. Resistance as a sanction for unethical behaviour of firms:

The second reason for resistance is personal concern for the future. While companies and their practices remain traditional targets of criticism, consumer dissatisfaction with materialistic and (excessive) consumption-oriented lifestyles can quietly generate negative feelings towards the system, the businessman and the world he has helped to shape (Zavestoski, 2002). The libertarian invective of the 1960s, concerned with protecting the individual from the standardisation of mass consumption or from certain bad management practices, is today combined with the claim of responsibility for future consequences (Jonas, 1990).

The destruction of resources and environmental damage in affluent societies thus lead to financial constraints (downshifts) (Schor, 1998) and voluntary simplicity (Elgin, 1981; Leonard-Barton, 1981; Dobscha, 1998; Etzioni, 1998; Zavestoski, 2002; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Shepherd, 2002). While both trends involve a reduction in consumption, the former is characterized by a reorganization of the relationship to work and leisure for a better quality of life, while the latter is mainly a spiritual and ethical exploration of the opposite of materialism (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Moreover, the issues are not limited to the world of consumption: they reflect the choices of engaged citizens and testify to the rise of true political consumerism today (Jensen, 1998; Micheletti, 2003; Chessel and Cochoy, 2004). The general

malaise in the contemporary world and the spiritual void that accompanies the inability to achieve self-fulfilment through consumption stimulate a new awareness (Zavestoski, 2002). Deconsumption seems to be the best and greatest negative response to the system, which, according to Ritson and Dobscha (1999), is the ultimate frontier of rebellion, beyond explosions or protests. Getting angry at the system and leaving the market – whatever its competitive structure – is an aggressive form of exit in the sense of Hirschman (1970), which then constitutes a betrayal rather than an expression of the betrayal that the behavior represents. (Voice) This is how Dobscha (1998) describes the choices of American women who say they are against the system. While realizing that they cannot get rid of it completely, they refuse to stimulate production by buying new items, repairing and reusing old ones, favoring recycled products, and refraining from doing anything that seems unnecessary or harmful to the environment.

This is also one of the trends revealed by second-hand goods in the clothing category. Some wealthy people even ignore waste and consumption motives, even to the point of recycling clothing. Throw away (Roux, 2006).

While globalization is suspected of increasing the risk of fragmenting criticism by localizing "clearly designated enemies" (Baker, 2003), the presence of a consumer backlash is still palpable. The use of the Internet in cyber activism has helped to amplify the impact of protests, as opposed to dissatisfaction with public action (Hirschman, 1983), leading to a veritable revival of protest movements (Sommier, 2003; Denegri-Knott, 2003). Peretti (2001) gave another example of cultural resistance that he himself practiced. In 2000, Nike gave consumers the opportunity to personalize their sneakers by writing their own words. Peretti ordered a pair of shoes with the word "sweat shop" engraved on a dedicated website. Nike apparently refused the request, but that does not mean that such a gesture did not have an impact. Peretti estimates that more than 11 million people of all nationalities heard the story via e-mail. This table summarizes the work of consumer resistance in marketing.

Table No 2: Main research on consumer resistance F. Lecompte (2005)

Authors (year)	Forms of resistance studied	Definitions
De Certeau (1980)	Consumer resistance: the poetics	These are all the tactics adopted on a daily basis to divert objects from their initially intended function.
Hermann (1993)	Exit the market: boycott or creation of substitutes	Resistance consists either in boycotting or in developing mechanisms to replace the market: consumer unions to obtain accurate information, purchasing or credit cooperatives.
Penaloza and Priée (1993)	Resistance	Many forms: boycott, buying products rather than others (buying black dolls in the USA), word of mouth, complaints, misuse of the meaning of objects (decorating a refrigerator, buying ripped jeans, etc.), parodying advertising

Dobscha (1998)	Resistance consume as little as possible	Living on the margins of the market: refusing to buy unnecessary products, consuming less than the prescribed doses, buying second-hand, consumer cooperatives...
Ritson and Dobscha (1999)	Resistance	It comes down to diverting brand logos and slogans to give another message.
Holt (2002)	Resistance	It is a liberation that comes from the multiple modes of consumption. By becoming more creative, singular, the consumer differentiates himself and frees himself.
Rumbo (2002)	Cultural resistance (Culture jamming) Anti-consumption	It is the fact of leaving the market to truly escape advertising manipulation: example, action of Adbusters in Canada (days without consumption), culture jamming
Peretti (2004)	Resistance	Promoting change by making consumers aware of corporate or state practices, through humor. This often involves diverting logos and marketing slogans to parody a brand. Peretti (2004) asked Nike to have the word "sweatshop" written on its sneakers.

Source : CREDOC

Conclusion

In this article, we were able to present part of the history of SRC and see how various trends and movements have nourished the concept of socially responsible consumption. It became possible to observe how social values have evolved in the field of consumption and how consumers take into consideration ecological and social concerns in their rice consumption behavior.

The article demonstrates that socially responsible consumption (SRC) has been fueled by various social movements and consumers who have used their purchasing power to advance political and ethical causes. From the use of boycotts to the rise of ethical consumerism, these actions have transformed the way companies perceive and integrate social and environmental concerns into their strategies. Today's consumers are no longer mere buyers, but engaged actors who influence the practices of companies through their consumption choices. This shows that SRC is intrinsically linked to social and political values and that it will continue to evolve as consumer concerns become more diverse and complex.

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