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Youth, consumption and citizenship: the Brazilian case

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YOUTH, CONSUMPTION AND CITIZENSHIP: THE BRAZILIAN CASE

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Abstract

There is evidence that points to a possible politicisation of consumption in Brazil, similar to what has been occurring in other countries. In this process, consumption attitudes, behaviors, and practices are perceived and used as a way of participation and political action. Theories of pos-materialism and hypotheses of mistrust in relation to political institutions have been used as an explanation for this phenomenon. However, little is known about the use of these actions by young adults in Brazil. To explore this question we developed a quantitative survey to analyze the perceptions, interests, forms of engagement, personal and institutional trust, and political practices, including political consumption, of 457 brazilian young adults. Respondents were aged 16 to 25, lived in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and were part of the three highest economic classes in the country – A, B, and C. The results obtained show that, in Brazil, involvement in activities of political consumption are low, with little variation regarding social and economic class, age and school level. This can be explained by the important role of the family in Brazilian culture and by the presence of numerous, active social organizations that seem to be the main actors of social changes, making individual action secondary. Our data do not confirm theories of post-materialism or lack of trust in political institutions as the explanation of political consumption phenomenon.

Key words: political consumption; youth; citizenship; political action; institutional trust.

Youth, Consumption, and Citizenship: the Brazilian Case

1. INTRODUCTION

As in many countries, a process of politicization of consumption seems to be underway in Brazilian society. This expresses a tendency of rapprochement with the civic values of consumer culture, as pointed out by several authors (Canclini 1996; Halkier 1999; Paavola 2001; Portilho 2005, Stolle et al. 2005; Trentmann 2006), who draw attention to the fact that recent years have seen a weakening of the boundaries between the categories of consumption and citizenship, symbolized by the construction and recurring use of the term “consumer-citizen.”

As a result, daily practices such as shopping, eating, drinking, bathing, washing dishes, cleaning house, going to work, etc. acquire political and ideological aspects and incorporate environmental and social concerns. Food, for instance, ceases to be merely a simple, private, and pleasant daily family activity, instead becoming a highly conscious, complex, regulated, political, and ideological activity which brings about changes in eating habits and ways of thinking about food (Barbosa 2009). Greater awareness of the issues surrounding our daily lives leads to the construction of responsibility arising from this consciousness.

This process led us to examine the relationship between consumption practices and political culture. We observed this situation by paying attention to the new ideologies and discourses that propose conscious, ethical, or sustainable practices of responsible consumption as a solution to social and environmental problems, a phenomenon that can be considered under the broader label of political consumption (Stolle et al. 2005).

Political consumption has been defined as the perception and use of practices and everyday consumer choices as a new form of engagement in the public sphere and in the political pressure arena (Halkier, 1999; Portillo, 2005, Stolle et al. 2005). This is an attempt to make concrete the adherence to values that support social and environmental improvement, materializing them and making them public. Examples of political consumption include actions such as boycotts, buycotts, reducing waste in the household use of goods and services (water, energy, automotive, waste separation, etc.), and the creation of cooperatives and consumer networks.

However, studies of participation and political action tend to focus exclusively on conventional, institutionalized, and collective forms of action that target the political system per se, which can end up leaving out new repertoires of political participation. Most studies that attempt to measure political participation, including the World Values Surveys study, do not include questions about political and consumption data, so these end up invisible. Such research may lead to the conclusion that political participation is declining, when in fact there may just be a change in the repertoires and political arenas, as well as in the actual content of politics (Stolle et al. 2005).

⁵ The World Values Surveys is a global study on socio-cultural and political changes, performed by a global network of social scientists based on surveys applied to national samples representing more than 80 nations from all continents, in historical series initiated in the early 1980s. Its latest edition produced representative data for more than 80% of the world population (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>).

Some evidence of the politicization of consumption can be observed in Brazil: (1) the creation of NGOs focused specifically on this issue, such as the Faces Institute of Brazil, the Kairos Institute, the Akatu Institute for Conscious Consumption, and ICONES (Institute for Sustainable Educational Consumption of Pará); (2) the frequent publication of stories on “sustainable”, “responsible”, or “conscious” consumption in several vehicles of mass communication; (3) the establishment of programs of “Education for Conscious Consumption”, both in the governmental and the non-governmental and business spheres; (4) the explosion of CSR initiatives; (5) the proliferation of certification and labeling; and (6) the strengthening of so-called new social and economic movements which presuppose the existence and action of “conscious consumers”, such as the solidarity economy, fair trade, and slow food movements.

Despite these clues, no one knows for sure if political consumption exists in Brazil. The evidence, however, seemed sufficient for us to justify empirical research on and analysis of the nature of the phenomenon in the country.

But how to capture this kind of engagement? How to measure informal, private, non-organized and non-institutionalized actions that are at the “edges” of classical political arenas? In fact, consumption is a less-organized and less-structured political act than conventional political actions. Furthermore, actions such as boycotts and buycotts are intertwined and diluted in the routines of everyday life, making it difficult to study and measure them. Research related to these attitudes often focus exclusively on consumers’ willingness to pay more for a product considered “green friendly” and rarely manage to capture the actual engagement in such practices.

With this intention, we developed a pilot survey in Brazil entitled “Youth, Consumption, and Citizenship.” For comparative purposes we relied on related research conducted with 1015 social sciences students in three countries—Sweden, Canada, and Belgium—which aimed to measure forms of political participation, including the actions of political consumption (Stolle et al. 2005).

The Brazilian research had three main objectives: to map the phenomenon of political consumption in Brazil among youth aged 16 to 25 years; to see the extent to which political consumption practices are consolidated among them and how they relate to conventional political practices; and to establish the initial bases for the creation of an index of political consumption for Brazilian society.

In this paper we present the main data collected in the survey and apply some of the major explanatory theories that have been used to explain the phenomenon of political consumption, in an attempt to understand the specificity of the phenomenon in Brazil in light of this country’s cultural characteristics. First, however, we present some issues that guided our research, some explanatory theories, and the methodology employed.

⁶ This research was coordinated by Professor Michele Micheletti (Karlstad University, Sweden), with the participation of Dietlind Stolle (McGill University, Canada) and Marc Hooghe (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium). The authors caution that this is not a representative survey of their populations, not even of the student population of these countries or those universities, but merely a pilot study to explore whether political consumption can be considered a consistent behavior pattern and whether it has been used as a form of political participation.

2. RESEARCH ISSUES

A first research question concerns who the consumers are, namely their socio-demographic variation. Do conventional indicators for measuring political participation, such as income, gender, age, and educational level, also apply here? Is it a reasonable and consistent hypothesis that women – traditionally responsible for buying for the home – are more receptive to political consumption, and thus are the group which most uses consumption as a way to press for social change? Is it plausible to assume in advance that the income factor is determinative – that is, that citizens with higher incomes are more likely to engage in political consumption activities than those with lower incomes?

The second research question relates to social embeddedness and the political values of citizens engaged in this non-conventional form of participation. Are these individuals no longer rooted in associations, networks, or groups of citizens, and therefore only “participate” individually? Are they people who, having had their basic material needs met, engage in post-materialistic values such as human rights and the environment, and post-modern questions such as the construction and expression of identities and personal biographies, choice and individual autonomy, or self-expression? Do these people engage in political consumption because they have developed a distrust of conventional political institutions (such as governments, elections, political parties, unions, social movements)?

The third question concerns the relationship between political consumption and conventional forms of participation and political action. Does political consumption reduce, replace, or complement the more collectivist forms of participation? That is, are people who engage in political consumption practices the same who take part in conventional political actions? Do they use political consumption to replace or expand their repertoire of political action? Do they see political consumption as a means of political influence and social change? Do they decide to take responsibility and act in the everyday sphere instead of delegating to professional political actors? Furthermore, could we expect that these people do not trust conventional political institutions, and that they therefore use new and different forms of participation to make their voices heard? Do they perceive political consumption as an effective action?

3. THEORETICAL ISSUES

Of the major explanatory theories used to analyze the phenomenon of political consumption, we will briefly highlight the following: post-materialism theory; the theory of depoliticization X politicization; the theory of distrust and loss of confidence in conventional political institutions; and the theory of new socio-economic movements.

Theory of Post-Materialism

One of the main explanations for the phenomenon of political consumption has been the sociological theory of post-materialism, developed by Ronald Inglehart at the end of the 1970s. The theory suggests that the rapid economic growth experienced since the Second World War has led to the satisfaction of material needs for the vast majority of the population in advanced societies, causing a value shift toward post-

materialist values, namely those that emphasize quality of life, self-expression, the environment, human rights, etc. This phenomenon has led to changes in various spheres of social life, especially the political, as this redirection is accompanied by an evaluative critical stance toward conventional political institutions such as parties and unions, and a reduction in rates of conventional political mobilization. This, however, is not a sign of political apathy, but rather of change in the repertoire of political action, since post-material values are associated with unconventional political actions (Borba and Ribeiro 2010), among them political consumption.

Theory of Depoliticization X Politicization

The study of “participation via consumption” forces us to think about its consequences for the political process and for citizenship. The discussions and proposals for addressing social and environmental problems through strategies of political consumption have been interpreted either as a form of depoliticization or of politicization (Portilho 2005). The first argument, widespread among Brazilian researchers, advocates the idea that the proposed “participation via consumption” has depoliticizing consequences and is therefore an individualist form of participation, an “easy citizenship” similar to “checkbook activism,” which leads to a “low participation cost” or a “fetish of the self”. This approach also considers the argument that consumption is a politically elitist form of participation, available only to those able to bear the higher costs of “green” goods and services. Moreover, the politicization thesis sees the same phenomenon as a possibility for the extension and renewal of the political field, as it enables groups of citizens to self-assign responsibilities, thereby increasing their interest and participation in everyday social and environmental issues, which in turn produces new ways of doing politics and existing as a political subject (Canclini 1996; Giddens 1997; Beck 1997 and 2002). The phenomenon in question is a spillover from political action toward everyday life and the private sphere, forming a new pattern of political engagement based on innovative, individual, less hierarchical, and non-institutionalized modes of political participation (Alexander 1995).

Theory of Distrust, or loss of confidence in conventional political institutions

Authors such as Beck (1997 and 2002) and Canclini (1996) emphasize that, in contemporary societies, we see some loss of credibility of, and distrust in, conventional political institutions (parties, unions, elections, institutionalized social movements, etc.), particularly among younger generations, which leads to a “non-institutional rebirth of the political” in which different social arenas, not previously thought of as political, undergo a process of politicization. This is explained through the concept of sub-politics, namely those politics at and beyond the edge of the nation-state’s political institutions, a policy directly involving individual participation in day-by-day decisions. For Beck (2002), the place of politics in contemporary societies is not the street or the factory door, but television, the Internet, and the market.

Theory of New Socio-Economic Movements

Classically, the study of political participation emphasizes the link between citizens and governments. In other words, the government and state are seen as the main target of protest movements. However, some social movements and citizens have used new arenas (subpolitics) and new repertoires of action, seeking to reach not the state, but the market—companies and international organizations. This transformation led to the conceptualization of new socio-economic movements, in which actors build a new culture of political action aimed at regaining control of the economy based on their own values (Gendron et al. 2006). Such movements are shaping demands for recognition and redistribution in the sphere of consumption, such as movements for the protection of consumer rights; the anti-consumption movement; movements for conscious consumption; or even movements that value territorial characteristics and “traditional” systems of production such as geographical indication, fair trade, social economy, and slow food. This interface between social movements and markets has been identified as the most distinctive feature, differentiating and polarizing current political mobilizations (Wilkinson 2008).

4. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research involved in this study reveals the characteristics of a particular population or a specific phenomenon based on larger representative samples, eliminating where possible the presence and influence of the researcher, and controlling the design of the study to ensure the proper interpretation of results.

The research strategy adopted was the survey of quantitative data collected through personal interviews at home, and the administration of a structured questionnaire with 100 open and closed questions, requiring approximately one hour and forty minutes to complete.⁴ The survey took place from June 24th to July 1st, 2010. The interviews were spread over four areas of the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with a total of 457 individuals (228 in Rio de Janeiro and 229 in São Paulo) between the ages of 16 and 25, belonging to the three upper income classes in the country – A, B, and C.⁵ Sample selection was carried out by a systematic process; in each household selected, the interviewer asked if there was a resident between the ages of 16 and 25. If so, the interviewer applied the Economic Classification Criteria, known as the “Brazil Criterion,” to identify the class and qualify – or not – the interview. If not, an attempt was made at the next residence. Upon successful completion of an interview, the interviewer skipped three homes and made a new approach.

The choice of this age group was primarily due to the need to maintain correlation with the research by Stolle et al. (2005), which argued that this generation grew up in

⁴ Data were collected from questionnaires printed and stored in an *Excel for Windows (Microsoft Corporation)* database. The analysis and interpretation of data were performed with *SPSS software version 18 (Statistical Package for Social Science) for Windows*, using the following statistical tools: analysis of data related to simple and cumulative frequency, and average standard deviation, statistical hypothesis testing, and multivariate analysis (Cronbach’s alpha and factor analysis).

⁵ It is noteworthy that pilot interviews with individuals from income segments D and E revealed a great difficulty with and resistance to answering the questionnaire on their part, claiming disinterest in politics, technology, economics, and professional advancement, among other reasons. This fact made it impossible to fill the quota previously established for these groups, which forced the authors to change the sample and abandon the data collected for these segments.

a time when there was a profusion of environmental concerns, many of which linked the causes and possible impact of environmental problems with individual lifestyles and consumption choices. Furthermore, the authors believe these young people are likely to be a part of a generation that lived through environmental campaigns and education projects in their schooling and have thus been socialized with environmental values. Stolle et al. (2005) have assumed that, if such a process is happening, it can be best observed in youth.

Unlike Stolle and his colleagues, who chose to apply their study to college students taking courses in social sciences, we decided to expand this universe and visit young people from all different educational levels. Our choice took into account the Brazilian tradition of high politicization among social science students and the strong influence of Marxist thought in the teaching of these subjects, factors which could skew the results considerably.

The research tool controlled for six variables (income, religion, gender, age, city, level of education and information) that were later co-related with 11 subjects: (1) personal expectations for the future, the world, and the country; (2) level of information; (3) political values; (4) trust in people and institutions; (5) interest in politics and social issues; (6) type and frequency of political participation; (7) perception of the responsibility of different actors for the improvement of social and economic conditions in society; (8) political consumption practices; (9) consumer rights; (10) knowledge of certification campaigns and labels; and (11) fair trade.

It should be stated that this study cannot make any statement about the extent of the phenomenon of political consumption in the population as a whole, or even among young Brazilians in general, beyond the two cities studied and the controlled-for levels of income.

5. DISCUSSION

Due to the large amount of information collected and the lack of space, we chose to focus this paper on an analysis of issues directly related to political participation and consumption, leaving other questions for another occasion. For the same reason, this paper will consider only the variables of income, age, and educational level.

What do survey data indicate?

From the standpoint of the level of information, young respondents feel well informed; those between the ages of 21 and 25 and those in the A and B income classes are slightly more knowledgeable than those in class C, although this difference is not statistically significant. The three subjects about which they are best informed are sports, music, and fashion, while issues such as the environment and politics occupy sixth and seventh positions respectively, in a set of 11 options offered. Men see themselves as significantly more knowledgeable about sports than do their female peers, but there are no significant differences between the sexes about other subjects. Broadcast television is the primary means of information (82%), followed by the Internet (44%), and colleagues (43%), without any differences among the three variables adopted.

With regard to trust in people, 60% of respondents stated that they do not consider people reliable, and 75% think that, given the opportunity, people always seek to take

advantage. To assess young people's confidence in institutions, 21 choices were ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 corresponds to the highest degree of confidence and 1 the lowest. The most reliable institutions, in order of importance, are: family (average 8.9), church (6.8), and school (6.4), which led us to separate them from the rest and classify them as "traditional institutions." The least reliable are political institutions, such as political parties (average 3.1), followed by Municipal Government (3.7) and the National Congress (3.7).

Only 27% and 26% of respondents consider themselves engaged in environmental and social issues respectively. However, when asked their position on statements about issues related to the environment and politics, and about their interest in issues like income inequality, poverty, energy, and terrorism, the average response was equal to or higher than 3 (on a five-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). In this context, the attitudes of young people interviewed could be classified as "politically correct." They clearly positioned themselves in defense of the environment, felt that the Amazon issue can not be addressed by Brazilians decontextualized from the rest of the world, and fully agreed that Brazilians do not seem to be engaged with the issue of income redistribution in the country. However, when urged to take a stance on issues concerning politics at the municipal, state, and national levels, the average response on the same 5-point scale was 2.5 or lower. That is, negative statements about these three power levels received a higher number of "strongly agree" than "disagree." This attitude is driven home when we examine the frequency with which these young people reported talking about politics: 55% said they never or rarely do, 28% do so only occasionally, and only 7% reported doing so frequently.

But what is the political participation of these young adults?

From a set of 13 different types of participation, 79% stated that their main form of political participation is through the vote. All other options were below 28%, dropping to 7% in the case of affiliation with political parties. Given that voting is compulsory in Brazil, we consider that all spontaneous political participation falls below 28%.

Regarding alternative means of political participation (youth organizations, social movements, Web activism, volunteerism, consumer associations, and consumer awareness), given four options ranging from "frequently participate" to "never attend," the proportion of youth who declared never having participated in any of the methods ranged between 87% and 96%. Those who reported having participated in some of them were asked about 10 possible forms of assistance, including donating money to NGOs, wearing campaign badges, attending meetings, and signing petitions. The proportion of those who never participated decreased, ranging from 39% to 68%.

Regarding the responsibility of different actors to improve the living conditions of societies, the most cited were: the federal government (51%), followed by citizens (40%), the UN (29%) and consumers (24%). If we add the responsibility of citizens to that of consumers, we have 64%. When detailed, the "responsibility of citizens and consumers" suggests that there are many doubts and much ignorance. With regard to participation via consumption, about 32% said they believe an individual has the power to influence society through boycotts, while 22% thought that collective action is superior to individual political action; 21% had no opinion, 12% think they can have an influence in this way but that this type of activity can lead to a worsening of the problems, and 13% disagree. The proportion of those who think they can have an

influence through boycotts is somewhat larger (34%), while 14% think they cannot, followed by 13% who think that this form of political action may wrongly privilege environmental issues over job creation, and 12% who think that these issues are new trade barriers imposed by rich countries against developing countries.

In addition to measuring whether they believe or not in the possibility of influencing society through their consumption habits, we also measured whether respondents have in fact participated in some kind of boycott or buycott. As in the research conducted by Stolle et al. (2005), our data indicate that although at a low rate, buycott practices are more frequent than boycott campaigns: 98% said they never participated in boycotts, but with respect to buycotts the numbers are a bit more encouraging: 81% answered negatively, and 19% positively. Price (45%) and distribution (39%) are the main reasons given for not buying socially and environmentally responsible products. Questions about certification, personal taste, and the quality of green-friendly products complete the list of other reasons.

Further to consumption practices, when respondents were asked if they think citizens have a responsibility to inform themselves about the social and environmental practices of firms, 57% agreed while 31% said they do not know and 12% believe that is not their responsibility. Moreover, 52% of respondents feel well informed about the products they consume, while 48% do not. Out of 13 types of information about products they own or are interested in buying, the three most popular options are: expiration date (92%), brand (50%), and composition (46%). Information about whether the product is environmentally friendly (10%), certified (5%), or sourced from fair trade (3%) received the lowest proportion of responses.

The criteria for purchasing goods and services most applied by respondents are: price (89%), quality (86%), offers and promotions (69%), and brand (55%). The least used are, in order: appropriate conditions of production (16%), ethical treatment of animals (13%); does not stimulate prejudice (9%); and negative reviews on websites (8%).

Only 10% of respondents claimed to know what fair trade means, and only 30% of these actually indicated the correct choice. With respect to the rights of consumers, 68% are unaware of the Code of Consumer Rights,⁶ while 77% have never felt disrespected in consumer relations. 84% have never made any claims against stores and/or supermarkets, and 97% have never made complaints to legal consumer protection bodies; those who have (16% and 3% respectively) are from the higher income bracket and over 19 years in age. 50% said they know an organization that advocates for consumers, the most cited being Procon.⁷

What kind of insight into Brazilian young adults do these figures provide?

Certainly, they suggest neither intense commitment nor effective political participation in the sense understood by social sciences, especially political science. The rates of trust in people and institutions, especially political institutions, are extremely low, especially when compared to institutions such as family, church, and school. This

⁶ Brazil's Code of Consumer Protection, considered by most jurists to be one of the most advanced in the world, is a law passed in 1990 establishing standards of protection and consumer protection.

⁷ Procon (Program for Consumer Orientation and Protection) is an agency of the Ministry of Justice created in 1987, with offices in every Brazilian state and many cities, which provides information to consumers and fields complaints.

lack of trust and political participation in conventional political institutions is not accompanied by an increase in any of the alternative forms of participation mentioned by the questionnaire. Those who claim to participate in any of the alternative arrangements suggested do not do so systematically. In some cases, these alternative forms reach only 4% of the entire sample. When analyzing engagement in political consumption practices (boycotts and buycotts) as criteria that guide the purchase and search for information about products and services, this situation does not change. In the case of these young Brazilians, lack of interest in and loss of influence and leadership from conventional political institutions have not led to an increase in alternative forms of participation, which leads us to conclude that, in Brazil at any rate, the theory that distrust or loss of confidence in conventional political institutions necessarily leads to a “non-institutional rebirth of politics” – through political consumption for example – is not proved.

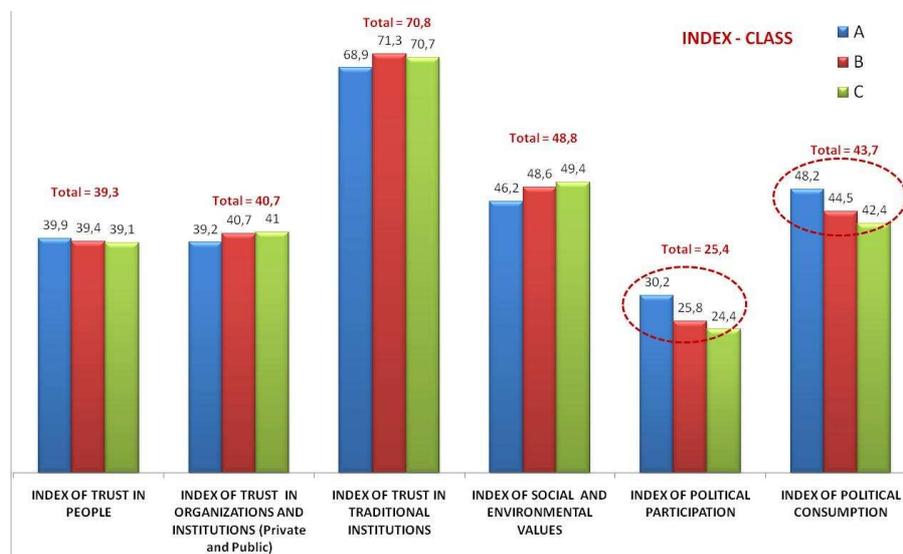
Can we, therefore, endorse the view that the current generation is more politically alienated than, for example, the generation of the seventies? We believe not. When analyzing the interests that mobilize these young people (such as poverty, income inequality, and terrorism) and their agreement on environmental, social, and political values, the thesis of alienation does not hold. Rather, the data suggests that the young people surveyed are interested in social issues, perceive the environment as an important issue for Brazil and the world, and recognize the need for greater involvement of people and individuals in the public sphere as a way to eradicate poverty. It is true that they have doubts and questions about the extent to which environmental policies and restrictions would simply act as tariff barriers by rich countries against products from developing countries, but overall the respondents positioned themselves on the side that could be termed “politically correct in relation to environmental issues.”

Nor do the data support the theory of post-materialism, which indicates that environmental values, among others, increase as a society begins to provide enough to solve the material problems of its members. Aside from the numerous objections that we could make to this theory – ranging from a “Maslow’s pyramid” in disguise to extreme evolutionism, in which people can reflect on morally significant values and issues only after they have filled their bellies – this perspective is also in opposition to the history of social mobilization in Brazil which, in addition to the struggle for access to the material conditions of existence, includes a large number of environmental organizations devoted to so-called “post-materialist values.” It is also worth noting, as a particularity of environmentalism in Brazil (and Southern countries in general), the perception of the inseparability between social and environmental issues (Guha, Ramachandra and Martinez-Alier 2000), which can be confirmed by the construction and extensive use of the term *socio-environmental* in Brazil. In other words, it is not the case that a mobilization around post-materialistic values can only emerge or increase after social problems have been solved.

How then to explain the data about young Brazilians revealed by our investigation?

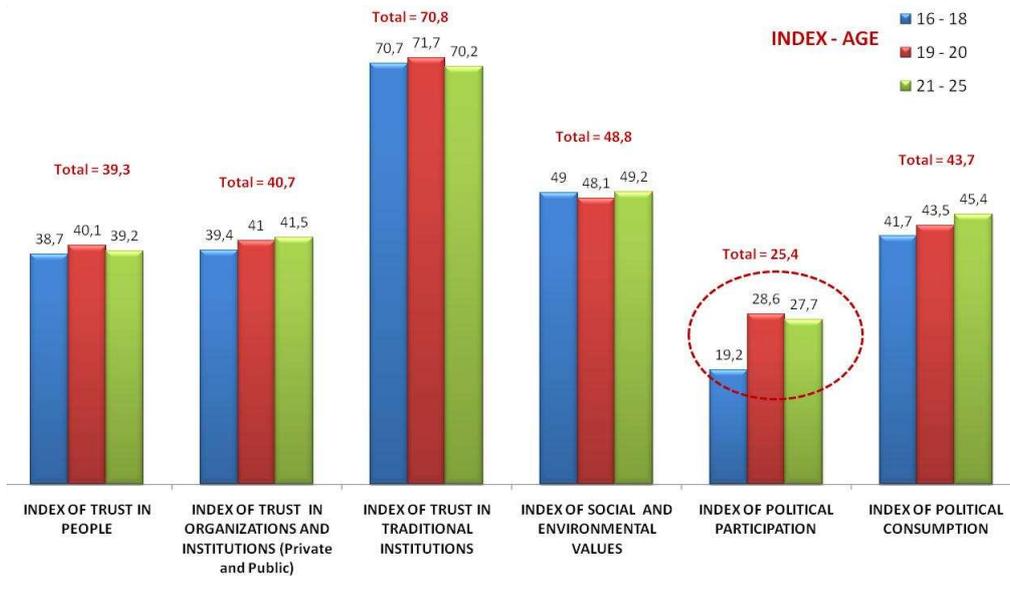
It is here that we would like to introduce a broader scope of interpretation. When we analyzed the six indices⁸ constructed from survey data – level of trust in people, in political institutions, in traditional institutions (family, church and school), social and environmental values, political participation, and consumption – they mostly showed very few changes across the three variables considered (income, age, and education), and the level of trust in traditional institutions was strongest. These indices and their correlations with the variables can be observed in the three graphs below.

Graph 1 – Income

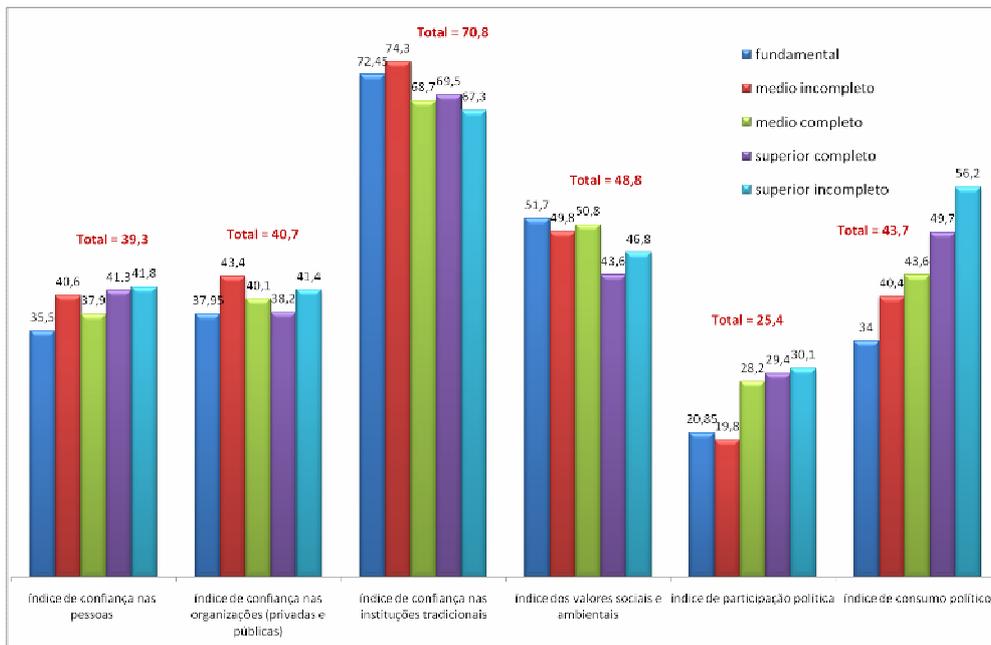


⁸ As political consumption is a multidimensional phenomenon (attitudes, perceptions, and motivations), we chose to use the Factor Analysis technique to calculate the indices that will be presented. This technique extracts information about the covariance structure, summarized in the correlation matrix, and allows us to classify the original variables according to their participation in the total variance in the database. To select the attributes to be used to calculate the rates of consumption, we first made a choice based solely on the authors' interpretation. After this initial selection of attributes, we used two multivariate analysis methods for exclusion of attributes: Cronbach's Alpha and Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis - Communalities. All statistical developments used in this article are substantiated and supported by specific statements, referenced in the literature (Johnson & Wichern, 1998), so we will not demonstrate the relevant theorems here.

Graph 2 – Age



Graph 3 – Educational level



Regarding the rates of confidence, whether in people, political institutions, or traditional institutions, and also the rates of socio-environmental values, these variations were irrelevant (one to two percentage points) relative to both income and age range, indicating a high homogeneity of practices and views among young people surveyed.

However, with respect to the indices of political participation and political consumption, results differ somewhat, with a slight directly proportional relationship;

i.e. the higher the income, age, and education level, the greater the participation in general and the engagement in political consumption practices. However, this relationship is not highly significant, which again confirms the relative homogeneity.

The data confirm the structure of Brazilian society, in which family is considered the most important institution, functioning largely as a total institution insofar as it provides its members with emotional and financial assistance, among other aspects (Goffman 1974).⁹ Because young Brazilians commonly live in their parents' home until a relatively late age⁸, issues relating to their physical and social reproduction remain the responsibility of the family (father and mother). Their autonomy in terms of consumption is very low, although attendance to individual preferences is an extremely important value in these families. As a result, the process of construction of social identity in Brazil, contrary to what is observed in North America and Europe, occurs not so much through opposition to their parents' generation, but out of admiration for it. Although these youth are well informed about what happens around them, they do not engage, in practice, with the wider world. However, several examples show that, under certain circumstances, these young people are politically mobilized⁹.

It is also possible that the low participation in acts of political consumption is motivated not by alienation, disinterest, or misinformation, but because many (according to data presented above) do not believe in the efficiency of this practice (47% for boycotts and 39% for buycotts), for a variety of reasons.

6. CONCLUSION

Our indices suggest that, in Brazil, political participation and consumption seem to increase with income, age, and education level, but still do not approach European and North American levels. The explanation seems to lie in the importance of the institution of family in Brazilian culture, a system that provides solutions and support that individuals in European and North American societies have to seek in the community or the public sphere.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider that despite lacking deep social roots, Brazilian social organizations are both numerous and extremely active, achieving changes in legislation, public policies, and the marketplace, which ends up making individual action secondary. Examples of important achievements realized through pressure by these organizations include the São Paulo Agreement on certified wood, the food industry's pledge to reduce sodium, a ban on advertising aimed at children, and a quota policy for universities, businesses, advertisements, and soap operas.

As a final conclusion, given that contemporary societies are characterized by an intense degree of particularism, in conjunction with a high degree of universalism, we

⁹ According to Goffman (1974, p.11), "a total institution may be defined as a place of work and residence where a great number of similarly situated people, cut off from the wider community for a considerable time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life."

⁸ Unlike their European and North American counterparts, who typically leave their family immediately on completion of high school, young Brazilians tend to stay at home at least until the age of 25.

⁹ Good examples are the "Diretas Já" (Direct Elections Now campaign) of 1983; the young movement "Caras Pintadas" (painted faces) which led to the impeachment of President Fernando Collor in 1992; and the "free pass" campaign for no-cost public transportation for students in uniform, implemented after an extensive wave of demonstrations and protests.

could conclude that today's political action would be precisely the simultaneity of a strong state (the one that regulates and acts quickly to meet the demands of its citizens) with equally "strong" citizens; conscious, responsible, active, and assertive, who do not expect government to solve problems.

The analysis of the phenomenon of political consumption through surveys proved useful in providing a first frame of the real situation, but it must be supplemented with qualitative research that will enable us to further our knowledge and answer new questions we pose, mainly about the relationship between political values (equality, freedom, liberalism, strong state, minimal state, etc.) and political consumption practices.

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