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Chair of Political Sociology

**Political Consumerism as a Form of Political
Participation**

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Ai miei nonni.

Introduction

This elaborate examines the phenomenon of political consumerism and how it might be understood as a form of political participation and responsibility.

Micheletti, Stolle et al. (2010) have proposed that motivations may be utilized to separate political engagement from other types of societal behaviors in order to avoid the issue of labeling everything as “politics”. Therefore, they sustain that societal and political motivations should determine whether an act is political. However, there are issues with this way of thinking: scholars would be forced to concentrate on why citizens did what they did rather than what individuals have done to impact politics and society. This is why it is vital to adapt the concept of political commitment to encompass all actions that oppose or support any powerholder involved in the distribution of resources. Following this interpretation, we should recognize political consumerism as a proper form of political engagement, since it is not just about purchasing decisions at the supermarket but it also takes into account discursive actions, boycotts, and lifestyle changes, which are all political activities based on an individualized assumption of responsibility by the citizen, who, through these forms, opposes the distribution of resources and power. Therefore, political consumerism could be defined as an unconventional form of political participation that depends on individualized responsibility-taking, where “responsibility-taking” refers to the taking of the most reasonable of all choices for society's sake and “unconventional political participation” to the set of political actions which, among other things, do not require intermediation from other actors or institutions.

This paper is divided into three chapters. The first defines, analyzes, and draws a link between the concepts just mentioned: individualized responsibility taking and unconventional form of political participation, which constitute the basic fundamental notions of political consumerism.

The second chapter goes deep into political consumerism, presenting its four major forms of expression, outlining the profile of the average political consumer, and listing the most popular organizational settings where citizens can come across the trend. Organic food movement, eco-labels activism, and anti-sweatshop movement represent just some of the most significant ones. Finally, the conclusion of the second chapter is marked by an analysis and examination of the most known critics that can be moved towards political consumerism's effectiveness.

The third and final chapter is dedicated to the presentation of a survey research which I personally carried out on the identification of young Italians' consumption choices as a tool to measure the number of individuals who in the last twelve months have behaved like a political consumer.

Chapter 1: Individualized Responsibility-Taking and Unconventional Political Participation

1.1 Individualized Responsibility-Taking

The traditional differentiation between ‘homo politicus’ and ‘homo oeconomicus’ within the individual (Faber et al. 2002) revealed how the latter was envisioned as divided into two unrelated sections. The first portion focused on the public interests, while the second solely on the private ones, implying that one’s own political opinions did not influence nor impact one’s own economic decisions. Sagoff claims: “*As a citizen, I am concerned with the public interest, rather than my own interest; instead, as a consumer, I concern myself with personal or self-regarding wants and interests*” (Sagoff 1988). However, political philosophers are starting to believe that the choice of individuals as consumers can be understood as a form of participation in politics and that individuals as consumers are active in the public sphere to the same extent as citizens. They started figuring out this scenario after an investigation on how a reasonable choice can affect society, which brought them to claim that people should make responsible choices in front of complex problems and that the only way to achieve this goal is through the sharing of responsibilities deriving from such choices, meaning: the taking of full accountability for their own actions, decisions, and thoughts.

This discovery raised a central matter related to the conditions that need to exist for individuals to assume full accountability for their choices.

The concept of individualized responsibility-taking needs to be introduced to address this issue. Individualized responsibility-taking refers to the situation in which an individual, since he is aware that his choices have substantial effects on the entire society, decides to opt and make the most reasonable of all choices for the sake of everyone. This practice needs to be entirely voluntary and cannot be forced from the outside, but, at the same time, it has to be supported through encouragement and stimulation. In fact, for individualized responsibility-taking to exist, according to Micheletti and Stolle (2013), two conditions are necessary. The first is the existence of a series of methods that enable citizens to make reasonable choices, several means that aim to instruct individuals on how their choices affect the common welfare. Role models, examples, convincing information, news reports, and documentaries, for instance, can effectively fulfill this task. The second condition that should be present for individualized responsibility-taking to exist is a structure that offers individuals advices and opportunities in order for them to re-evaluate their past

choices and to make more future reasonable choices. Most of the time, this framework is provided by governments, NGOs, and social networks.

Furthermore, as specified by Micheletti and Stolle (2013), an individual is able to achieve individualized responsibility-taking only if two elements are present: individual motivation and empowerment. The first implies that an individual should feel motivated to search for reliable and convincing information to make the most reasonable decision and develop preferences and ethical values. Empowerment suggests that an individual should feel that his decisions matter to the extent that it pushes him to take responsibility for his choices and actions. The reason he feels like doing it resides in two factors, which are: his background and his sense of choice efficacy. His background consists of a few elements, including his education, socioeconomic resources, place of residence, and interest in politics. Instead, his sense of choice efficacy refers to his own feeling that his choices and actions make a difference in society, and therefore, they matter.

Inglehart (1997), Verba (2003) and May (1992) have found that all these factors are central in describing why individuals engage in individualized responsibility-taking practice.

To conclude, it is essential to remember that individualized responsibility-taking or individualization differs entirely from the notion of individualism. The latter, in fact, can be defined as a self-interested orientation to societal affairs, which is very different from the concept of individualization, which refers to actions practiced with the aim of caring for the public well-being and the common good.

1.2 Unconventional Political Participation

There are many ways in which citizens can participate in the political system. However, before presenting them, defining the general concept of political participation is essential.

One of the first definitions of political participation is the one by Verba and Nie, in which they claimed that “*political participation referred to those activities carried out by private citizens that can be directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and the actions they take*” (Verba and Nie 1972). Precisely because it was one of the first definitions coined on the matter, it is too narrow to be applicable, as it considers only voting, and political participation is much more than that. This is why other scholars, in defining political participation, went beyond this conceptualization and considered other forms of political actions. Among others, Barnes and Kaase (1979) differentiated political participation into “conventional” and “unconventional”.

Traditional participation included action repertoires like voting, discussion of politics, and other

activities related to the electoral procedure. Differently, unconventional participation comprised acts like demonstrations, protests, and carrying signs in public.

Taking into account all these forms of participation, Marsh and Kaase defined political participation as “*all the voluntary activities intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system*” (Marsh and Kaase 1979).

The most common type of political participation has always been conventional political participation, which includes activities widely accepted and located practically only within the electoral and parliamentary spheres. Despite this, particular pieces of evidence show how, nowadays, conventional political participation and its activities are starting to lose their charm due to a massive decrease in its use. Generally, political parties have always played the role of intermediaries between citizens and the political system present in the country. Despite this, many countries are currently facing a decline in party identification and membership, mainly because citizens no longer feel represented by their political parties. Because of that, they start losing faith in political institutions and actors. The most common consequence of this situation is that citizens stop engaging in the most known conventional form of political participation, which is voting, as the political parties they could vote for do not represent their beliefs and values fairly.

In addition, the decline in conventional participation can be attributable also to the rise of unconventional participation.

Unconventional participation is a direct method of political involvement that is easier and faster to access as it does not require other actors or institutions to be intermediaries. According to Tarrow and Tilly, it is an “*episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants*” (Tarrow and Tilly 2007). In this definition, the term “episodic” means that it happens occasionally, without pursuing a defined scheme, while the term “public” denotes the fact that those events are not organized and promoted by private organizations. For what concerns the term “collective action”, instead, the latter presupposes that citizens need to gather and organize themselves in order to achieve their objectives, through forms of organizations that differ in composition, competences, resources, and dimensions.

Unconventional participation usually involves provocative actions, which, most of the time, culminate in political protests. Political protests refer to the gathering and engaging of people in non-violent acts to gain attention from the public, media, and government. They can take different forms, like marches, demonstrations, and carrying signs in public, but a feature common to all is that they have political objectives.

The 1960s civil rights movement, the women's movement, and, more recently, the group Black Lives Matter have all adopted political protests to shed light on specific social and political issues. Another famous recent example on the adoption of political protests can be found in the World Naked Bike Ride, a competition that occurs every year from 2004 in some cities of the world, where a vast number of people get naked while cycling. They peacefully protest in this way to request to the government and the citizens concrete help in reducing carbon emissions and to show that a sustainable lifestyle is possible and easily accessible to all.

Although political protests are mostly pacific, they can sometimes even become violent and, therefore, dangerous, as illegal acts are carried on inside them; Rioting is an example.

Political scholars are pointing out how unconventional participation is becoming more and more common every day, as the activities within it are more practiced by younger people, who prefer turning to more manageable, flexible, and accessible means to express their political preferences. From the end of the twentieth century, in fact, protests and the signing of petitions have become, if not the only, the most used tools for citizens to express their political opinion and ideas.

Furthermore, the increased use of unconventional participation shows how political participation is shifting from being located only within the electoral and parliamentary spheres to being positioned mainly outside them. This implies that citizens' everyday actions are still political, even if they are not carried out for political purposes.

Lastly, it is crucial to claim that, independently from the forms of political participation someone chooses to engage in, the reasons that push an individual to mobilize himself politically are always two. The first is a reaction to the government's inaction on specific issues; the second is a reaction to some governmental decisions that they do not share. Therefore, what pushes an individual to engage in political participation is practically something that the government does not do or something that the government does but in a wrong or ineffective way.

1.3 Connection between Individualized Responsibility-Taking and Unconventional Political Participation

There is a strict connection between individualized responsibility-taking and unconventional forms of political participation. Micheletti, Stolle, et al. (2013) found the former concept to arise mainly, if not only, within unconventional forms of political involvement for five reasons.

The first motif is because individualized responsibility-taking occurs more commonly in horizontal and flexible structures than in traditional and rigid organizations, as the formers grant individuals

more freedom to enter and exit the political involvement. In fact, most of the time, citizens decide to participate and be active by following internet alerts or friendship networks.

Secondly, unconventional forms of political participation are the ones that encourage the most individualized responsibility-taking. They focus less on routine politics and more on lifestyle features, which means that even if citizens do not identify their everyday actions as strictly “political”, the latter are still seen as political expressions. This has led to the softening of the traditional division between the public and the private sphere, allowing political involvement to arise within the private sphere.

Thirdly, unconventional participation is less influenced by conventional political institutions, like parties and unions, that shape political engagement into a uniform model. They allow more flexibility in the citizens’ engagement and involvement, as the unconventional practices include, for instance, forwarding a politicized email, donating for a cause, or deciding to buy only certain types of products for environmental or ethical reasons.

The fourth reason is that unconventional forms of participation allow diversification of targets. Traditional, conventional participation has always been focused on targeting only the government or bodies related to the government. Differently, unconventional participation targets situations beyond the government, which need to influence the allocations of shared resources and values that have political power.

Finally, the last reason addresses the Internet as the infrastructure for individualized responsibility-taking. The latter, in fact, facilitates citizens in gathering relevant information, and it eases information communication and political action. The Internet is a powerful communication tool, as it is very flexible since it can be used outside the structure of traditional institutions and organizations and because it puts in contact an immense number of participants through a globalized network. Thanks to the Internet, political involvement is not limited to a specific geographic area, as it is for voting or labor strikes. Furthermore, it allows to save a considerable amount of money that otherwise would be spent on organizational and material entities.

Chapter 2: Political Consumerism

2.1 Forms of Political Consumerism

The most known form of unconventional political participation that depends on individualized responsibility-taking, according to McFarland (2010), is political consumerism. The latter, as stated by Micheletti and Stolle, refers to “*the creative ways in which citizens use the economic market as an arena for politics*” (Micheletti and Stolle 2006) or, more specifically, to “*the consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. It is based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practices. Whether political consumers act individually or collectively, their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context which may be called the politics behind products*”. (Micheletti et al. 2003).

However, the above definition raises a question: how can we understand and know if a consumer's choice of a product is made following a political reason? Or more precisely: how can we effectively distinguish between everyday shopping and political consumerism? According to Newman and Bartels, “*consumerism becomes political as soon as the individual gives a shopping decision a subjective political meaning and follows some political purposes*” (Newman and Bartels 2011). Therefore, what matters in determining if an action is political or not is the individual's conception of what the determining act represents to him.

Citizens-consumers are the actors in political consumerism, and the principal forms through which they act are four, according to Micheletti and Stolle (2013): 1. Buycotts; 2. Boycotts; 3. Discursive political actions; and 4. Lifestyle changes. These action repertoires constitute the phenomenon of political consumerism.

While buycotting consists of the voluntary decision to purchase a determined product over another for environmental or ethical reasons, boycotting relates to the voluntary and deliberate rejection of buying a product in order to express opposition to certain market practices. According to Jensen (2005) and Stolle (2003), buycotting is understood as a “positive” type of political consumerism since it implies buying a particular product over another to make a political statement. Differently, boycotting is viewed as a “negative” kind of political consumerism, as, in order to make a political statement, you refrain from buying a specific product.

Moreover, with discursive political consumerism Micheletti refers to "*the expression of opinion about corporate policy and practice and even consumer culture in a variety of communicative efforts and venues*" (Micheletti et al. 2012). Differently, with lifestyle commitments she refers to the internalization of responsible actions and political values into one's everyday life (Micheletti et al. 2012). Therefore, the former concept relates to how publicly one transmits an activity; The latter refers to whether an individual carries out or not the action in his private life.

2.1.1 Buycotts

Buycotting refers to the activity in which individuals purchase specific products over others for political, social, ecological, and ethical motifs. Buycotters, in fact, seek that goods are produced following specific conditions, for instance, no child labor or no damage to the environment. Those particular conditions are called labeling schemes.

Labeling schemes are labels, certificates, and information schemes that address one or more sustainable economic elements. They play a crucial role in the architecture of political consumerism because they assist consumers, both individually and collectively, to navigate the complexity and challenges of their purchase decisions. Despite this, labeling schemes still encounter various obstacles, as specified by Horne (2009). First, certification criteria may differ slightly between nations and goods. Second, they must be reliable and trustworthy. Finally, they must be seen to be most effective when used concurrently across a range of products so that customers can compare options and make educated decisions.

The close connection of buycotting to labeling schemes, despite being fundamental for buycotting to exist, can cause issues to the activity of buycotting itself, undermining it. The first one is that it may be hard and tedious to convince companies and corporations to cooperate in adopting specific labeling schemes, without which, however, buycotting would not exist. Secondly, many goods, mainly clothing, are never covered by labeling schemes in the first place. Finally, the goods that are effectively labeled can happen to be sometimes more expensive than non-labeled ones, discouraging individuals from purchasing them.

With the attempt to solve these issues related to the strict link between labeling schemes and buycotting, new forms of buycotting that don't employ a certification system are now emerging. The carrotmob is one of the most recent varieties, which relies on social media networks to group people into periodic events in order to fight a political consumer cause. The carrotmob was ideated by a college student who desired to use social media to combat climate change. He approached many convenience stores in his neighborhood, selected the one that offered to invest the most in energy efficiency, and meticulously planned the event. Then he encouraged customers to purchase

at that store on a specific day via social media. Subsequently to this event, the concept started to spread. Many restaurants and grocery stores prepared to donate most of their daily income to a certain cause have become carrotmobs targets. The installation of solar panels and energy-efficient lighting, as well as other expenditures aimed at lowering local companies' CO2 emissions, have all been the focus of carrotmobs.

Despite carrotmob is now receiving a lot of media attention, the most common and spread form of boycotting still remains the one connected to labeling schemes, through which people rely to choose products.

The most extensive campaign of boycotting in recent years has been against Palm oil's product, as the increasing production of this good is contributing to the destruction of the forest. According to the Global Palm Oil Output, production has increased by approximately 10 percent annually, which means that the amount of farmed land has increased by at least ten times, harming forests. Studies have shown that nowadays, we consume about 1.6 million tons of palm oil per year, an average of 36 kg per person, 25 of which are found in diesel engines, 7-8 in food, and 3-4 in products for washing and cosmetics. Boycotters sustain that, by choosing to purchase in less quantity, or no quantity, products involving palm oil, the amount of the latter consumed averagely per person could reach 5kg, mainly benefitting the environment.

2.1.2 Boycotts

Boycotting, in its simplest form, refers to the activity in which an individual refuses to buy a certain company's product to push for a change in its behavior or in its production practices. By rejecting to purchase a product, in fact, a boycotter is supposed to damage the name and reputation of the company and, therefore, their profit and influence.

Other than the denial to buy a good, boycotts also include activities that require more vigorous participation and commitment by citizen-consumers, such as protests, demonstrations, and the signing of petitions.

Boycotters, throughout history, have engaged in extensive campaigns against powerful companies. The most famous ones were against Nike and Nestlé.

The boycott against the multinational corporation of Henri Nestlé, credited as the inventor of the infant formula, was launched in 1977. The boycott was initiated in response to business practices, which were carried out principally in emerging countries, as the population within them is less educated and, thus, more easily convincible. Those business practices included the free distribution of baby formula samples and the direct marketing toward mothers regarding the benefits of Nestlé's infant formula, which the company marketed as "as healthy as natural." However, the main problem

was not so much that the formula was clearly not as healthy as women's breast milk, as they advertised, but that this strong advertising campaign was carried out in developing countries, where there is a significant complexity in obtaining clear water to dilute the formula and where most of the women, not knowing the English language, were unable to read the product instructions. This led to disastrous consequences on the health of newborns.

The boycott started in the USA but quickly spread to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Europe, as a growing amount of people began to be very concerned by Nestlé's marketing of baby formula "as equal to breast milk". Because of this general apprehension that has shed light on the matter, in 1981, the World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which banned the encouragement and marketing of breast milk substitutes. In 1984 Nestlé agreed to implement this Code, leading to the suspension of the boycott. Despite this, from 1984 on, the company has been accused several times of breaching the Code, which is why the boycott is still ongoing.

Another significant boycott campaign was the one against the Nike clothing company. Reports showed that Nike abused workers in East Asia, giving them low wages and making them work in poor conditions. In fact, in 1991, the activist Jeff Ballinger, along with others, started publishing documents reporting the terrible working conditions in Nike's factory in Indonesia by showing, for example, that an Indonesian worker for Nike earned less than the minimum wage allowed in Indonesia, earning fourteen cents an hour. His report and others that followed gained plenty of media attention, and protests against Nike began to arise, leading consumers to largely stop purchasing Nike's products.

In 1999 a change began to be felt with the foundation of the Fair Labor Association, a non-profit group created by Nike, with the goal of providing supervision and a code of conduct, which, among other things, listed the minimum age a worker had to have to be employed by Nike and the maximum time the latter could work per week.

In 2005 the boycott finally ended when Nike issued an accurate report disclosing the working conditions and wages all its workers had to undergo in all of Nike's factories.

To conclude, boycotting represents one the most common political action in which citizens engage. Following a survey from the Global Market Institute Poll of 2005, more than a third of individuals in the world boycott at least one brand in their life.

2.1.3 Discursive Political Actions

Discursive political consumerism denotes the situation in which citizens seek information on company's practices because they worry about the political meanings and processes behind certain

products. Discursive political consumers, in fact, are individuals who debate about the politics of products with their friends and family, wear logos or messages of corporate practices, or spread culture jam. This type of political consumerism is of central importance, as it allows citizens to be politically involved without engaging in boycotts or buycotts.

The Internet has stimulated and increased the growth of this political action, especially concerning the practice of culture jamming, which represents the most common and popular form of discursive political consumerism. Culture jamming refers to changing the meaning of a company's advertisement, logo, or slogan by moving the text and image from their usual location to a different semantic context in which their meaning changes. Culture jammers do this to encourage individuals to consume more critically and consciously.

The most popular and known case of culture jamming is represented by Banksy's art, which often depicts figures of American consumerism and capitalism in absurd situations in order to make a political and social statement. In fact, one of his most famous paintings shows McDonald and Mickey Mouse, two of the most popular representations of American capitalism, holding hands with the "Napalm girl." With this painting, Banksy is acting like an anti-sweatshop activist, shedding light on the fact that many American companies exploit third-world countries' people, especially children, in order to make larger profit.

Culture jamming comprises many forms of action, from shopdropping to antibranding.

Shopdropping, which is the opposite of shoplifting, is leaving in stores brand commodities altered in their meaning to include political messages. The most famous case of shopdropping was when in 1993, a group of activists, later known as Barbie Liberation Organization, after having switched Barbie's vocal devices with those of G.I Joe's dolls, placed them "altered" on the store shelves. By changing the vocal devices on the dolls, in fact, they made Barbie speak with the voice of a man in order to criticize the role that Barbie was having as a negative gender stereotype for women.

Antibranding, which is another form of culture jamming, is transforming the logos of famous brands to make political statements. Some well-known examples of antibranding have been: turning the brand Gap's logo into "Income Gap, An American classic" or painting on a T-shirt of the brand United Colors of Benetton a man filled with dollars inside his mouth, advertising "The true colors of Benetton."

2.1.4 Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle changes represent another form of political consumerism, where an individual consciously decides to engage in politics within his private life sphere, as he realizes that his everyday decisions

have global implications which should influence his lifestyle choices. An example of it can be becoming vegan or cutting off plastic from one's life.

Individuals who engage in this political action consider their personal life as a political activity or project, to the point that they are disposed to alter some of their previous routines and behaviors to keep faith to it.

Although lifestyle politics represent one of the four forms of political consumerism, it goes beyond the other three, as it requires the practice of all of them. For example, individuals who decide to become vegetarians engage in all four forms of political consumerism: they boycott by avoiding buying meat products; they buycott by choosing to purchase only the goods labeled as vegetarian; they engage in discursive forms of political consumerism, as they probably debate their food choices with others; and finally, they engage in lifestyle politics since they change, most of the times, their entire lifestyle to fit into their principles.

Lifestyle politics can be of different types depending on their classification, which relies on two dimensions: the level of organization and the strategic logic. The level of organization can be both individual and collective. The former can be referred to as "*an individual's choice to use one's own private life sphere to take responsibility for the allocation of common values and resources, in other words, for politics*" (Micheletti and Stolle 2011), while the latter as when individuals "*consciously and actively promote a lifestyle as their primary means to foster social change*" (Haenfler et al. 2012). Instead, strategic logic can be divided into direct or indirect. Direct strategies can be oriented inward, meaning that they focus on changing the lifestyle of an individual or of a collectivity, or placed outward, which means that they focus on stimulating a lifestyle conversion within the entire society. Differently, indirect strategies, while attempting to modify an individual or a collective lifestyle, also create pressure on companies and governments to advance change requests.

Although these forms of lifestyle politics follow different levels of organization and strategic logic, they all originate from the same assumption: lifestyle changes are the central tools for achieving social change.

To conclude, lifestyle political consumerism is becoming an increasingly shared phenomenon, even in universities, among students who are now very engaged in this action repertoire. An example of it is the protest of May 2009 moved by Berkley students in order to prevent the building of a fast food restaurant on their campus, as they believed it to be "*unhealthy and unsustainable*" (Arias 2009).

2.2 Who Is a Political Consumer?

To outline the potential profile of a political consumer, we must consider various sociodemographic characteristics, which scholars were able to analyze thanks to the cross-national survey carried out by the European Social Survey in twenty European countries and the United States.

These sociodemographic factors are mainly seven: 1. Education; 2. Age; 3. Employment status; 4. Religion; 5. Geographical location; 6. Political affiliation; and 7. Gender.

Education is a central factor in determining if an individual is a political consumer or not, as the presence of it gives him the skills he needs to participate in politics and develop political opinions. In fact, it was found that highly educated individuals are likelier to be political consumers than non-political ones and that citizens with university degrees are, on average, four or five times as likely to be political consumers as citizens with no degree. This is because to be a political consumer, you have to acquire a determined level of education to inform yourself politically and develop a political interest.

Regarding the age factor, political consumers are mostly middle-aged citizens between thirty and fifty years old. They represent the age group most likely to have a job and receive an income, which they can spend, impacting the economic market. In Sweden, for instance, 71 percent of this age group takes part in ethical consumerism. Despite this, younger generations are increasingly becoming involved in political consumerism, thanks to their familiarity with the internet and openness to adopting new lifestyles.

The third factor is employment status. In all the survey countries, employed respondents were more engaged in political consumerism than unemployed ones. Even if the difference is not as big as regarding education, being employed almost doubles the likelihood of engaging in political consumerism. This is due to the fact that employed individuals receive an income and, often, taking part in political consumerism requires some financial asset. If we take as an example the fact that labeled goods most of the time cost more than non-labeled ones, we arrive to claim that to be a political consumer you have to have a high income. The survey pointed out that most political consumers in the countries surveyed were recipients of high salaries.

The geographical location represents the fourth characteristic. Through the survey, scholars discovered that individuals living in urban areas are more attracted to political consumerism than those living in rural areas. Thus, political consumerism is more common and spread among citizens of big and globalized cities.

The fifth factor is religion. It was found that atheists and those not part of any religion are significantly more absorbed in political consumerism than those religiously affiliated in many European countries like Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Poland. However, taking into

consideration those religiously affiliated, Protestants were found to have more likelihood to be political consumers compared to Catholics and other religions.

Sixth, we find political affiliation. In general, political consumers are more often left-wing extremists. However, there is the exception of Eastern Europe, where political consumers are mostly right-leaning, as the right-wing citizens in Eastern Europe are the ones who possess Western values.

The last factor is gender. Scholars have observed that women are more likely to be political consumers than men in many countries, even if not all. In Sweden, for example, 67 percent of women are political consumers compared to 54 percent of men. In the United States and in many European countries, women and men are approximately at the same level of political consumerism. Despite this, there is not a single European Social Survey country where women were found to participate remarkably less than men.

According to the ESS, action repertoires like signing petitions, boycotting, and boycotting were predominantly carried out by males before 2000, the year in which this gender gap started to be equalized and, in some situations, also reverted. The World Values Survey showed proof of this, as it highlighted that around the 2000s, in ten out of sixteen European countries, men were found to participate less than women. Additionally, the ESS also discovered that boycotting is nowadays almost an entirely women's activity in all the countries surveyed.

So, why are women more engaged as political consumers? According to Micheletti (2006) and Young (1994), the reasons for it are three and at least two share the same assumption: women have always been the gender who shop more often. The first reason is that, because of the premise, they have used more frequently their consumer power to make changes in society. Secondly, again as a consequence of the assumption, they have come into more contact with ethical shopping opportunities. Thirdly, women are, in general, more motivated to make economic decisions taking into account environmental and health issues than men. These motifs are reasonable since women have traditionally been more engaged in purchasing products and goods than men. Nevertheless, this does not provide an extensive explanation of why women consider more than men the ethical and political implications of their shopping decisions.

Therefore, why do they do that? Micheletti and Stolle (2005) have found only two possible explanations for it. First, women are more likely to be part of environmental or animal rights groups, where they learn about consumer concerns which then influence their shopping behavior. Secondly, women generally care more about specific topics like protecting animals or children than men when they make shopping decisions.

Following the ESS findings, the profile of the average political consumer is represented by a middle-aged woman, citizen of a big urban area with a high-income employment, highly educated, and more likely affiliated with the left-wing party.

Apart from the features that outline and describe the average political consumer, the European Social Survey have also investigated the shared behaviors among political consumers.

The first recurrent trend among political consumers highlighted by the ESS, consists of being far more tolerant than non-political consumers. In fact, political consumers have been found to have a more tolerant perspective in seventeen countries out of twenty-one of the survey. Secondly, the survey showed that political consumers compared to non-political ones, are remarkably more concerned about climate and environmental issues and much less regarding unemployment, economic crisis, and terrorism. These presented tendencies reveal that political consumers exhibit a postmaterialist behavioral outlook: they believe more in values like freedom, participation, creativity, and environment rather than economics and physical security.

The ESS also discovered that political consumers trust international organizations like the United Nations more than non-political consumers in most countries surveyed. Moreover, the cross-national survey also found that political consumers trust other people more than non-political consumers. This is undoubtedly because, as specified by Micheletti and Stolle (2013), since political consumerism is a collective phenomenon, political consumers have to believe that others also do their part and take their own political stand, engaging in action repertoires.

The last significant attitudinal finding, pointed out by the ESS, indicated that political consumers were found to engage more in innovative politics, including acts like signing petitions and protesting, than non-political consumers, as we would probably expect. Despite this, the survey also found out that political consumers are still more engaged than non-political consumers in conventional action repertoires. This means that even if political consumers are more engaged in innovative politics than non-political consumers, they are still highly involved in traditional politics. To conclude, as stated by Micheletti and Stolle (2013), political consumerism does not exclude other forms of participation but coexists with them, representing a supplementary involvement tool for individuals already active.

2.3 Organizational Settings for Political Consumerism

It is crucial to explore and illustrate the different avenues via which individuals may meet political consumerism. For some, sports events or social networks might be effective means of information

and inspiration; however, friends or one's local community can also significantly boost curiosity and interest in political consumerism.

Despite this, the most known way people can come across political consumerism is through market campaigns administered by groups or organizations that embody the organizational setting for political consumerism.

According to Micheletti and Stolle (2013), the key organizational settings for political consumerism are seven: 1. Organic food movement; 2. Fair trade movement; 3. Eco-labels activism; 4. Forest and marine stewardship; 5. Anti-sweatshop movement; 6. Farm animal activism; and 7. Lifestyle activism.

2.3.1 Organic Food Movement

The organic food movement is one of political consumerism's most significant organizational settings. They support animal rights and welfare, community agriculture, and small-scale organic farming.

The bestseller *Silent Spring* by Racheal Carson marked a critical moment for the movement, as it was the first time someone publicly spoke about pesticide use in agriculture. This caused a massive wave of discontent towards chemical and seed companies, which ended with 1972's ban on pesticides issued by the US government.

Around the 1980s, there was a considerable public debate around genetic engineering and genetically modified organisms, which increased interest in organic food and allowed the creation of groups whose aim was to fight for this cause, mobilizing themselves through demonstrations and boycotts. A famous boycott was the one carried out by the Pure Food Campaign in 1992, which asked for the labeling of all genetically modified food products and paved the way for the 1999's demonstration where activists chained themselves to gates in Spain to pass the "take the GM out of animal feed" message. Activist campaigning started sensitizing the public on the topic, and because of that, the public attitude changed, and people started to strongly oppose GMOs in food. For instance, major food corporations, like Nestlè, Heinz, and McDonald's, decided to eliminate GMO food products from their line and, in Europe, supermarkets started stocking a considerable number of organically labeled products.

The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, founded in 1972, represents the most extensive global organic non-profit organization, with members from more than a hundred countries worldwide. The goal of this organization is to raise awareness of the need for sustainable production and to foster the adoption of sustainable agriculture.

2.3.2 Fair Trade Movement

A second crucial and ancient organizational scenario of political consumerism is represented by the fair trade movement, which began to take shape around the 1970s when people began to worry about the consequences of international trade in developing countries. The fair trade movement, in fact, shares and supports the mission of the fair trade system, which is: greater equity in international trade and, thus, protection of small producers' rights, especially in developing countries. The fair trade system can pursue its goal because of fair trade labelling schemes, which guarantee consumers that the product they purchase follows quality standards and is not produced by exploiting workers or small companies. Moreover, these labeling certifications ensures that consumers pay a fair price for a product resulting from fair trade in order to safeguard artisans, local farmers, and family businesses.

Despite this, the process that led to the creation of fair trade labeling schemes was long and arduous. Before their creation, in fact, the issue was that fair trade goods were not available in large supermarkets where people were accustomed to shopping, but only in tiny shops. Therefore, selling fair trade products at large supermarkets, where customers were accustomed to shopping, was the only practical method to boost visibility and, thus, sales of these products. However, this led to another issue: how to sell fair trade products in large stores among numerous other products while still persuading buyers that their purchases were effectively helping small producers.

In 1988, with the creation of the first fair trade certification initiative, Max Havelaar, the solution was found. With the help of this labeling project and others, which developed rapidly in the first half of the 1990s, in fact, fair trade products could finally be sold outside of small local shops, reaching more customers while letting them know that the products they were buying were benefiting from fair trade.

The establishment of fair trade certification schemes represented a turning point for the fair trade movement. Thanks to them, sales of fair trade products took off, and an increasing number of people got interested in the movement's mission. Some activists started to conduct campaigns targeting brands to mobilize people for the cause. For example, they organized a national day of protest to push Starbucks company to sell fair trade coffee. Furthermore, they created a website called "Fairtrade Your Supermarket" that encouraged consumers to leave messages on the shelves of the supermarkets or pushed them into speaking with the store manager to pressure the stocking of more fair trade products.

Today there are two leading organizations that issue fair trade labels: Fairtrade International and the World Fairtrade Organization.

The Fairtrade International (FLO), founded in 1997, who was previously called Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO-I), represents the largest and most widely recognized fair trade labeling system in the world. As of today, Fairtrade International has registered over thirty five thousand fair trade products in one hundred fifty-eight countries around the world and coordinates various development and inclusive trade projects in collaboration with the European Commission. The World Fairtrade Organization, instead, operates in seventy-six countries around the world with over one thousand registered companies and more than one thousand five hundred fair trade points of sale. It establishes international standards for fair trade, proposing a code of ethics shared by operators in the sector.

2.3.3 Eco-Labels Activism

Eco-labels represent the third organizational setting for political consumerism, which, confronted with the organizational settings presented before, has no long historical roots and is not very popular.

This corporate setting was born after the green activism of the 1960s, in which people started to be concerned about how much consumption and production impacted the environment. Activists organized boycotts to lessen the use of paper and mercury batteries other than instituting green shopping events to raise consciousness on consumption's environmental effects.

In this case, differently from other organizational settings, governments gave their support to activists almost immediately, including the European Union, which according to scholars, has played a central role in establishing eco-labeling schemes (Jordan, Wurzel, and Zito 2003).

Eco-labels are systems of labels that ensure to consumers that the product, packaging, or service displaying the brand is designed to minimize its environmental impact throughout its life cycle.

The Blue Angel represents the first eco-label certification in the world. It was created in Germany in 1977 in response to the pressures that the German public made concerning having greener shopping opportunities and today certifies more than twelve thousand products.

The most extensive network of ecolabelling organizations is the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN), a non-profit association established in 1994 with twenty-two countries members worldwide. Its goal is to certify many different commodities, from detergents, computers, and batteries to washing machines and motor vehicles.

2.3.4 Forest and Marine Stewardship

Stewardship, as stated by Worrell and Appleby, is “*the responsible use of natural resources in a way that takes full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other*

species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society” (Worrell and Appleby 2000).

There are two types of stewardship, a forest and a marine one. Thus, one is concerned with protecting the forests from deforestation and the other one with safeguarding the sea and sustainable fishing practices. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) were instituted following environmental activist campaigns on the lack of regulations on habitat degradation in the forest and fishing industries. More precisely, the Forest Stewardship Council was established in 1993 after Greenpeace, WWF, Rainforest Action Network (RAN), and others, around the late 1980s, called for boycotts of wood furniture targeting famous brands like IKEA or Home Depot. The Forest Stewardship Council aims to certify all wooden products during their entire process, including their packaging, manufacturing, distribution, and retailing, together with protecting workers' rights and indigenous people. In 2011 it had more than one thousand forest areas certified in more than eighty countries in the world, even though its certification density remains very low, as it covers only two percent of the world's forests. This is why awareness campaigns are still essential for consumers to engage in different shopping practices.

Differently, the Marine Stewardship Council was established in 1997 after green activists called for boycotts of tuna, as it was found that dolphins and sea turtles were often caught during tuna fishing. This pushed tuna companies to find a way to get tuna without endangering dolphins, and it also forced governments to establish dolphin-free labeling schemes. A few years later, WWF contacted the largest purchaser of frozen fish, Unilever PLC, and they decided to create the Marine Stewardship Council. In 2001, the latter became a fully independent non-profit organization with the goal of labeling seafood products, certifying fisheries, and providing consumers with sustainable seafood recipes. As of 2011, MSC had labeled more than ten thousand seafood products and certified more than two hundred fifty fisheries worldwide, even if the latter accounted for only six percent of the global fishery harvest.

2.3.5 Anti-Sweatshop Movement

The anti-sweatshop movement represents the youngest and most creative organizational setting for political consumerism. When human rights and anti-sweatshop activists around the 1990s ramped up their efforts through campaigns to improve working conditions and raise salaries for employees in sweatshops and manufacturing facilities, the anti-sweatshop movement was created.

Despite being one of the most popular organizational settings for political consumerism, it lacks a labeling scheme, which, according to scholars, makes this movement even more noteworthy since it had to invent successful new tactics and ways to raise consumers' consciousness without a labeling

scheme (Lipschutz 2004, Merk 2008). Because of its absence of labeling schemes, activists were able to pressure sweatshop facilities into not exploiting their workers, mainly through boycotts and protests. This has been the case especially in North America, where, in 1989, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras mobilized 120 organizations to oppose through protests workers' treatment in manufacturing plants. Differently, in Europe, there has been a less aggressive behavior with the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), founded in 1989 as the leading European anti-sweatshop organization. The latter, in fact, has never officially called for boycotts or strikes but just corporate attention on specific issues.

Even if anti-sweatshop campaigns started in the 1990s, the most crucial year for the anti-sweatshop movement was from 1995 to 1996. That year marked a long period of general public awareness on the topic, where, among other things, it was found that many immigrants were confined illegally to work in a garment factory in Southern California and that a twelve years old boy was exploited in making footballs for Nike. Precisely because of this, that year was labeled by De Winter-Schmitt and Ross (1997) "*the year of the sweatshop*".

Although the anti-sweatshop activists initially focused on targeting lesser-known brands, when the movement became more influential and popular, anti-sweatshop activists started targeting mainly, if not only, famous clothing and shoe brands, like Gap, Nike, H&M, Benetton, Prada, and others. In fact, one of the most known anti-sweatshop campaigns has been the "Just stop it" campaign against Nike to stop the exploitation of workers in developing countries.

2.3.6 Farm Animal Activism

Farm animal activism is an organizational setting for political consumers which focuses on raising the public's consciousness of the role of farm animals in human consumption. Farm animal activists are concerned about farm animals' confinement and slaughter, and they argue that there are no ethically reasons for defending the human consumption of animals.

This type of activism was born around the 1800s; however, it reached its peak in 1975 with Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* book, which was considered one of the factors that brought to life this activism, as Rachel Carson's book did with the organic food activism.

When animal rights started becoming a general concern, many associations sprang up to sponsor and support animal welfare, even arriving to lock themselves in cages during public protests and manifestations, replicating the treatment of farm animals in order to raise awareness and push people to stop eating them. In a less extreme way, when animal welfare began to be a heard topic, some food chains started enacting some internal changes to protect animals as much as possible from confinement and painful forms of slaughter. Burger King is one example.

In 2007, in fact, one of the largest hamburger chains in the world, Burger King, decided that pork and eggs would have been purchased solely by ranchers who allowed the animals to live free and not confined in cages and that chickens would have been bought only by suppliers who would have killed them with gas instead of electric shocks before slaughtering them. The latter, in fact, is considered a more cruel and painful method than the first.

It may have seemed like a very trivial step on Burger King's part, but it was very significant, as many animal welfare organizations believed it would have prompted other food companies to follow its example. According to Temple Grandin, an animal welfare activist, "*when the big boys move, it makes the entire industry move*" (Grandin 2007).

In spite of everything, Burger King's decision didn't come out of nowhere, it came under considerable pressure from PETA. The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), founded in 1980, represents the most famous animal rights group worldwide. Since its founding, it has pushed and continues to push, through a series of strong campaigns, many food and fast food companies to change their practices to make them more animal-oriented. Additionally, while it advocates a full non-animal consumption life, PETA's goal is not to stimulate people to engage in this lifestyle but to encourage them, when making food decisions, to take into account an ethical concern for animals.

2.3.7 Lifestyle Activism

The organizational setting for lifestyle change engages in all four forms of political consumerism and involves three significant developments: slow food, simplicity, and Buy Nothing Day.

Slow food, as we can imagine by its name, represents a protest against fast food. It is a global phenomenon founded by the Italian activist Carlo Petrini in 1986 that includes non-profit organizations and groups aiming to promote small-scale production of quality food, local food heritage, and sustainable production. Thus, it merges matters from many other organizational settings of political consumerism, including the organic food movement and the farm animal activism. In 2004 the slow food organization also opened a University of Gastronomic Sciences both in Piedmont and Emilia Romagna whose mission is to raise awareness of good food and nutrition.

Simplicity advocates for "*voluntary, long-term lifestyle changes that involve accepting significantly less income and consuming less*" (Hamilton and Mail 2003). Moreover, according to Wilks and Huneke, simplicity is a "*consciously chosen voluntary poverty among the individuals who choose to limit material consumption to free one's resources or seek satisfaction through non-material aspects of life*" (Wilks 2008, Huneke 2005). Simplicity is a form of living that opposes the high

consumerism in today's societies and advocates for a simpler life of reduced consumption. It sustains that people should minimize the expenses of consumer goods and seek non-material sources of satisfaction. Moreover, simplicity finds its premise in the idea that individuals can live happy and meaningful lives without consuming much more than what nature offers.

The New Dream, formerly Center for a New American Dream, represents the largest non-profit organization that encourages individuals to engage in simplicity by helping them find a balance in life.

Buy Nothing Day is an event organized by Adbusters Media Foundation that encourages individuals to boycott all shopping on a particular day. The first "Buy Nothing Day" ever organized was in Vancouver in 1992, and, since it gained a lot of curiosity from the public, from that year on, one day of each year, people are challenged to "*detox from shopping in order to tune into life*" (buynothingday.co.uk).

2.4 Critics to Political Consumerism

The most frequent criticism to political consumerism regards its effectiveness as a form of engagement. Following this, Micheletti, Stolle et al. (2013) have identified four main problematic issues of political consumerism that could jeopardize its effectiveness.

The first one questions people's altruism, claiming that consumers are self-interested individuals who can't be trusted with the responsibility of solving global issues. As they are focused on themselves and their interests, they are not able to engage in actions oriented towards helping others. Consumers are just involved in purchasing products that benefit themselves, not others. Having said this, of course, we can find some exceptions to this statement, like the individuals that take into account also social and ethical principles when purchasing. Despite this, as surveys carried out in the US, France, and Germany found out, the average trend is the one just explained above. This critique is not solely addressed to action repertoires of political consumerism but also to activities of conventional participation, like voting, which people have often assumed is moved by individuals' self-interest. Anthony Down states in his book *The Economic Theory of Democracy*: "*each citizen casts his vote for the party he believes will provide him with more benefits than any other.*"

The second critique claims that, since political consumers ignore central economic principles and truths, they often end up harming the people they want to help, especially when considering boycotts and boycotts. In fact, regarding boycotting, scholars have shown that often by buying fair trade goods, farmers are hit by more negative effects than in the case consumers would buy

standard goods (Lindsey 2003, Booth and Whetstone 2007). Equally, they have proved that by boycotting companies and corporations with the aim of opposing child labor, you only foster the employment of the child worker in other sectors, which are less controlled (Basu and Zarghamee 2005).

The third critique argues that political consumerism activism is not able to successfully change the strong production practices present within corporations, as it does not have functional governing tools. In fact, to cope with global social problems, political consumers limit themselves to adopting a soft-law approach that includes the use of labeling schemes and codes of conduct, which despite everything, are too weak to combat complex political and social issues effectively.

Micheletti, Stolle et al. (2013) sustain that the only way for companies to change their production practices is if governmental regulations or laws require it. This is why some scholars believe that political consumerism should limit itself to just pressuring governments to introduce more rules and regulations to re-establish market control (Utting, 2008).

Finally, the last critique holds that political consumerism is a trend of developed countries; therefore, it does not take into consideration producers and workers in developing countries.

Micheletti, Stolle et al. (2013) believe that labeling institutions for fair trade and organic food, among others, lack the necessary transparency within their operations and certification procedures for developing countries to participate actively. Moreover, they are also too expensive and bureaucratic for developing countries' small producers. Moreover, Lund-Thomsen sustains that *“political consumers' activities undermine local cultures and communities and operate in a top-down manner, with little or no input from southern stakeholders”* (Lund-Thomsen, 2008) and Brook that *“political consumers' campaigns rely on stereotypes of third-world people as disempowered victims in need of the Northern help to mobilize them to action”* (Brooks, 2007).

To conclude, political consumerism is criticized in four main ways: 1. It can't effectively influence citizens and consumers into responsibility-taking, as individuals are self-centered and can't be trusted with the responsibility of solving global issues; 2. It can potentially generate more harm than if it was not present, especially considering action repertoires like buycotts or boycotts; 3. It lacks governing tools and, therefore, can't be substituted with the government; 4. It can't successfully help people in developing countries.

Despite this, Pellizzoni (2009), an important sociologist of participatory phenomena, have identified other two major critics that can be moved towards political consumerism.

The first critique questions the vision of political consumerism as a form of collective political action. He is aware that many political consumer action repertoires, like boycotts or symbolic attacks on the image of the products, are collaborative activities and can take place effectively only

if organized collectively. However, he also sustains that the bulk of political consumerism does not consist of boycotts or discursive political actions but of individual purchasing choices. In other words, he claims that political consumerism is exercised mainly in front of store shelves by individuals deciding what good to purchase. Before deciding, of course, they can acquire information and discuss it with others, but in the crucial moment of the purchase, they are alone, sovereign of their own choice.

To conclude, Pellizzoni believes that political consumerism can indeed be a collective phenomenon, but it is primarily and mostly an individual one.

The second critic regards the concept of individualized responsibility-taking and the fact that its existence is strictly dependent on the agencies that provide information to consumers influencing their decision-making.

Pellizzoni, this time focuses on the fact that the existence of individualized responsibility-taking is strongly influenced by a series of agencies like environmental organizations and civil society groups that aim to instruct individuals on how their choices affect the common welfare. He believes that the assumption that environmental and consumer groups are always trustworthy and the information provided by them is always correct, is wrong. This is why, consumers' confidence in consumer ideals and values could be misplaced by listening to "improper" or "inaccurate" sources. We can take as an example Greenpeace's 1995 boycott campaign against Shell, which was based on the assumption that sinking the Brent Spar oil platform would cause severe damage to the North Sea ecosystem. This assumption was contradicted by Shell and independent experts, who pushed Greenpeace to later admit that its claims about the amount of oil in the deposit were inaccurate. Thus, if, as individuals, we had supported the Greenpeace campaign, then we might have helped to support the wrong answer to the problem.

Chapter 3: Survey on Political Consumerism

3.1 Survey's Structure

I designed and outlined a 20-question survey to investigate whether individuals make responsible consumer choices, engage in repertoires of political consumerism, and are more political consumers than they realize.

I shared the survey throughout my social media and contacts in a Google Form version and obtained 61 responses.

Even though the survey left the possibility to respond regardless of age and citizenship, I considered only the Italian people aged between 18 to 30 to narrow the survey's focus and make it more effective.

The structure of the survey is as follows:

1) Age

- *Less than 18*
- *18-30*
- *More than 30*

2) Are you Italian?

- *Yes*
- *No*

3) Gender

- *Male*
- *Female*
- *Other*

4) Do you consider yourself a 'political consumer'?

- *Yes*
- *No*
- *I don't know what it means*

5) In the past 12 months have you taken into consideration the effects that your shopping decisions may have had on others?

- Yes
- No

6) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

7) In the past 12 months have you considered and confronted the prices of the products when buying?

- Yes
- No

8) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

9) In the past 12 months have you looked, when buying, labels or lists of ingredients on the products you wanted to purchase to check if they have had or will have consequences on the environment or on animal rights?

- Yes
- No

10) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

11) If yes, would you choose a different product if you discover that the one you wanted to purchase has had or would have environmental or ethical drawbacks?

- Yes
- No

12) Imagine this situation: you are at the supermarket because you have to buy a bottle of shampoo. There are two exact same bottles of shampoos but one costs more than the other. This is because, the first has written on its label that the bottle in which the shampoo is contained is biodegradable, while the other no. Which of the two bottles of shampoo would you purchase?

- The one that costs more
- The one that costs less

13) In the last 12 months, have you avoided buying something because you were against the multinational procedure of that product, which, for example, allowed the testing on animals?

- Yes
- No

14) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

15) In the past 12 months, have you protested or signed petitions because you were against a multinational procedure that, for example, exploited children in producing the product?

- Yes
- No

16) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

17) In the past 12 months have you debated about company's practices with your friends and family because you were worried about the processes behind certain products?

- Yes
- No

18) If yes, have you done this with what frequency?

- Hardly ever
- Few times
- Often
- Every time

If yes, what?

19) In the past 12 months have you changed part of your lifestyle because you have realized that your everyday decisions have global implications that should influence your lifestyle choices? (for example: avoiding buying plastic bottles or becoming vegetarian)

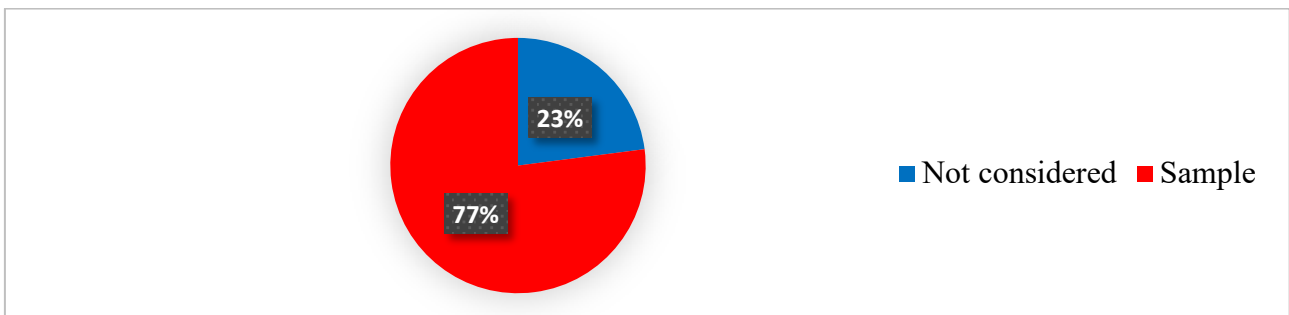
- Yes
- No

20) If yes, what?

3.2 Presentation and Explanation of Survey's Findings

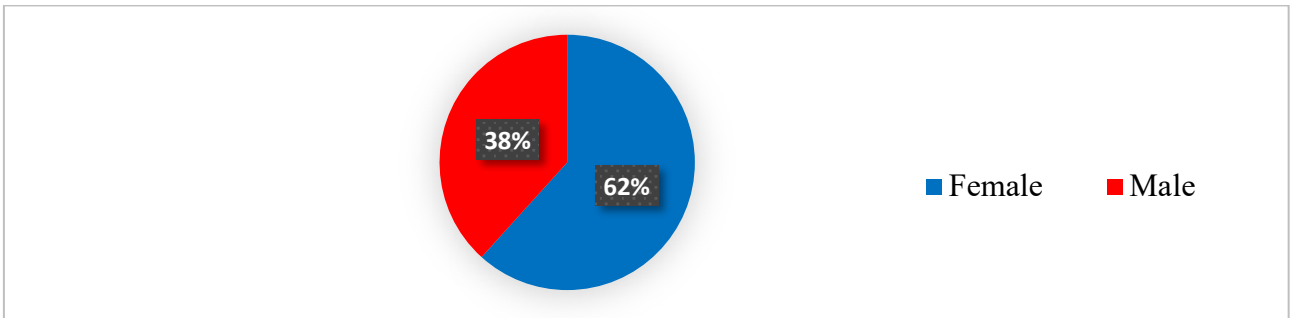
I will now present and explain each survey's answer with the help of graphs I designed to analyze, examine and compare the answers given.

Refers to questions 1 and 2: Survey sample



The graph above shows that of the 61 respondents to my survey, I only considered 47, i.e., 77%. This is because, since I wanted to detect only the consumption behaviors of Italians between eighteen and thirty years old, I had to eliminate from the total population the individuals who were not Italian and who aged more than thirty or less than eighteen. Following this, I came up with a sample of 47 respondents, as 14 individuals, 23% of the population, were not comprised in the categories of age and nationality I wanted to examine.

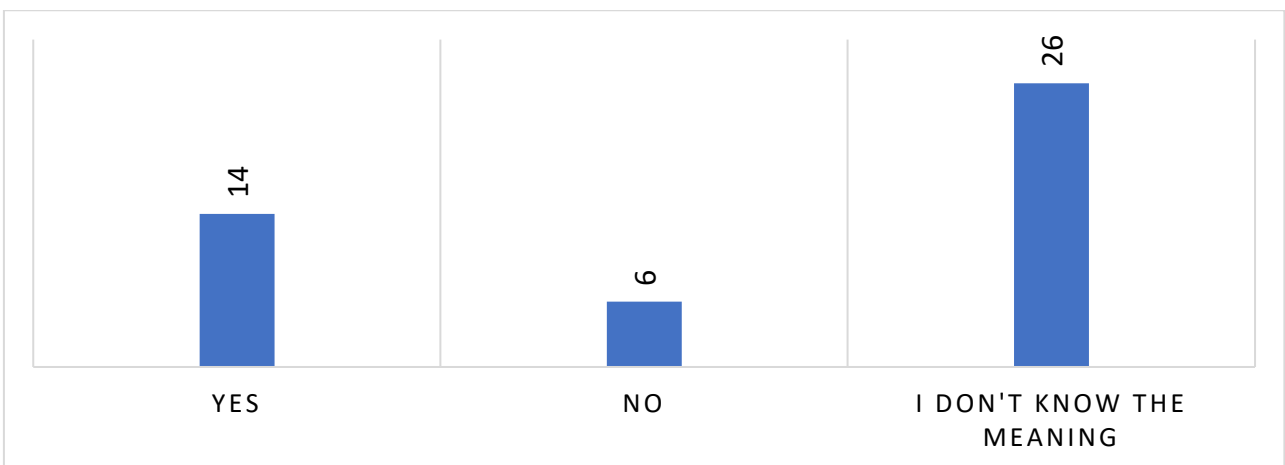
Question 3: Gender



Gender represents a significant factor of analysis in my survey, as I wanted to understand if males and females differed significantly or not in their consumption choices and responsibility. For this reason, in my survey analysis, I will present graphs showing the different behaviors between males and females.

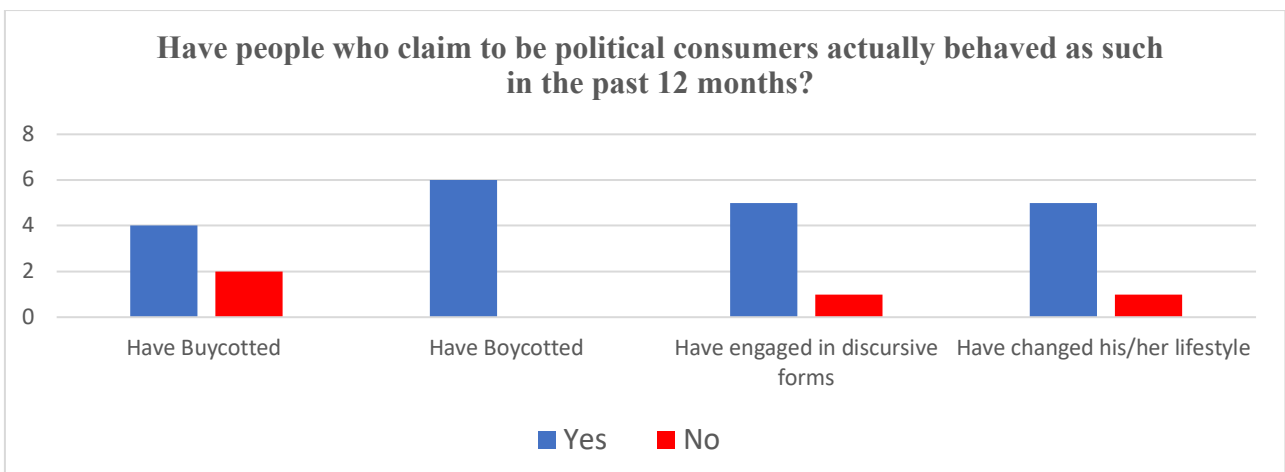
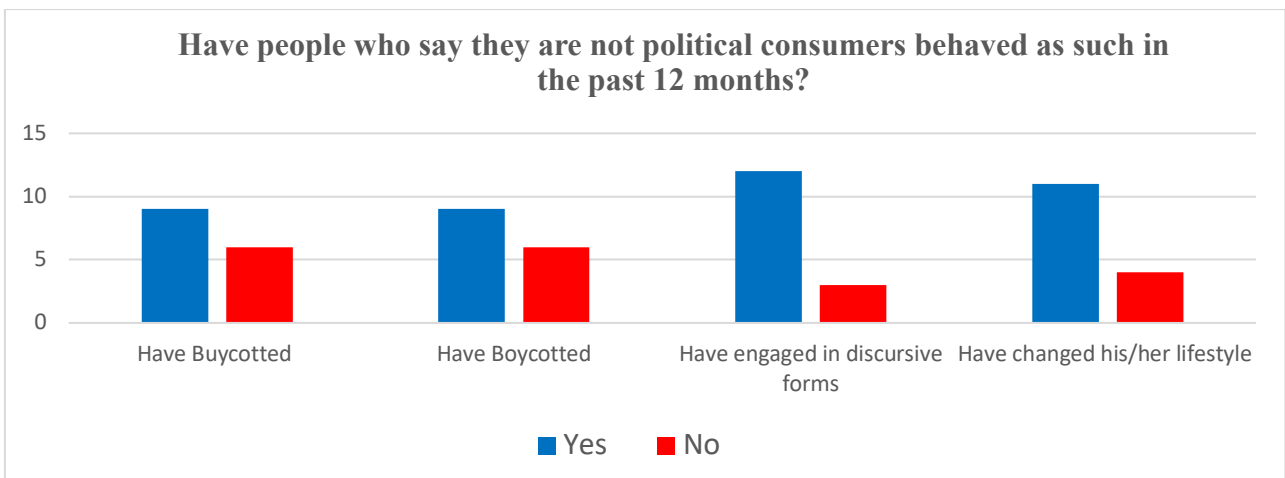
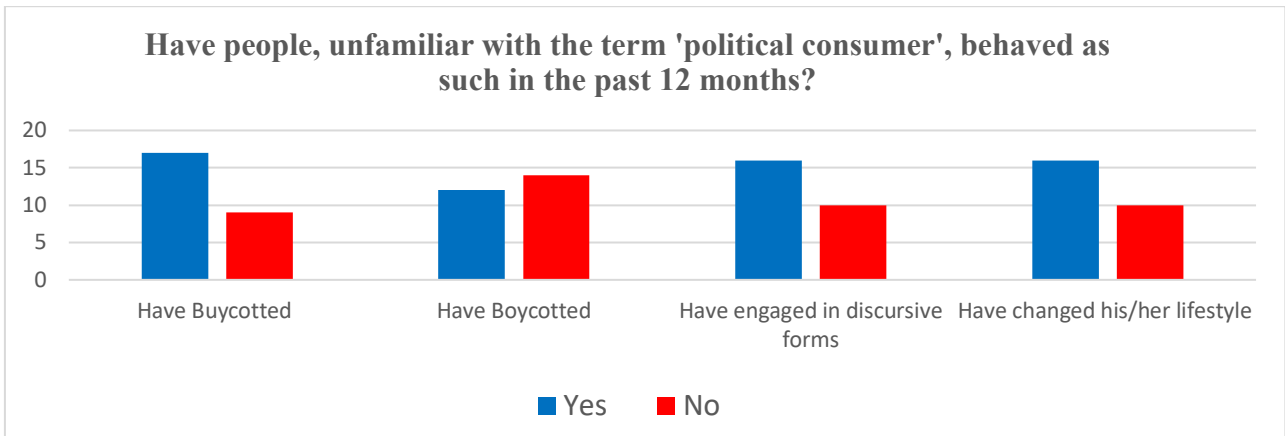
In the graph above, I have just highlighted the percentages of male and female respondents within the sample: 18 males and 29 females.

Question 4: Do you consider yourself a political consumer?



This graph represents the percentages corresponding to each option for answering the question: “Do you consider yourself a political consumer?”. To this question, 15 people answered “No”, 6

answered “Yes, and 26 said to not know the meaning of the term ‘political consumer’, which is very interesting, as it shows how the terms ‘political consumerism’ and ‘political consumer’ may be unknown to the majority of young Italian people. Precisely because of this, I wanted to investigate whether the people that claim not to know the term ‘political consumer’ typically engage in actions of political consumerism and also whether the respondents who replied “No” or “Yes” to the question are coherent with the answer given. Therefore, I have designed three graphs

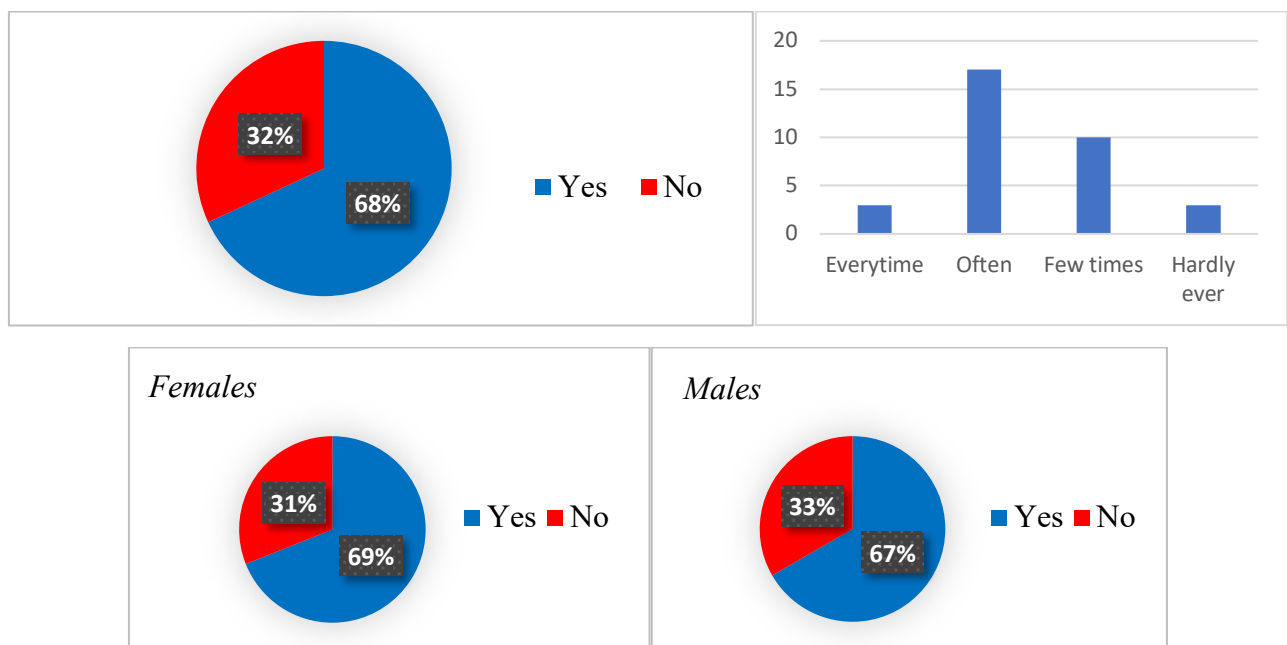


In the first graph, it is evident that the young Italians surveyed have behaved as political consumers in the past year, despite not knowing the term ‘political consumer’. The majority of them, in fact, have boycotted, engaged in discursive forms of political consumerism, and changed their lifestyle for ethical or environmental reasons.

The second graph shows that, among all the respondents who declared not to be a political consumer, more than half of them have engaged in all forms of political consumerism in the past year. This data is remarkable because it indicates that the Italians interviewed between 18 and 30 are far more political consumers than they think.

Finally, the third graph demonstrates that the people who answered “Yes” to the question were coherent with their choice.

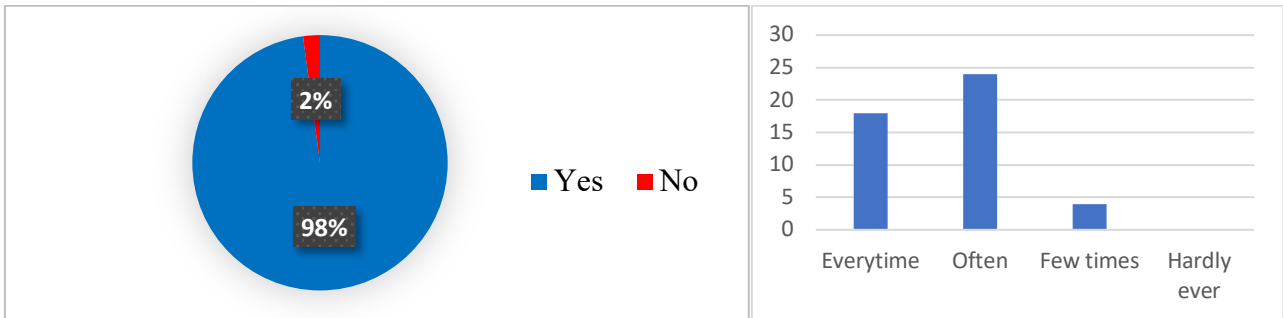
Questions 5 and 6: *In the past 12 months have you taken into consideration the effects that your shopping decisions may have had on others? If yes, with what frequency?*



Regarding the effects of one’s own purchasing decisions on others, the surveyed sample appeared to be very responsible, showing a more other-oriented behavior when purchasing, a typical feature of individuals who engage in political consumerism. Political consumers, in fact, when they shop, don’t limit themselves to consider only their self-interested matters but also the effects and consequences that their purchasing decisions can have on others. This does not mean, however, that they do not have the same high level of self-interest as every other citizen. Still, it means that they feel more personally accountable for the effects of their decisions on other people.

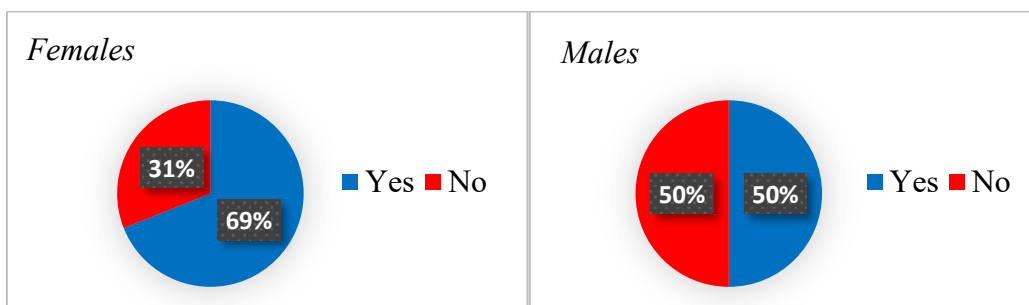
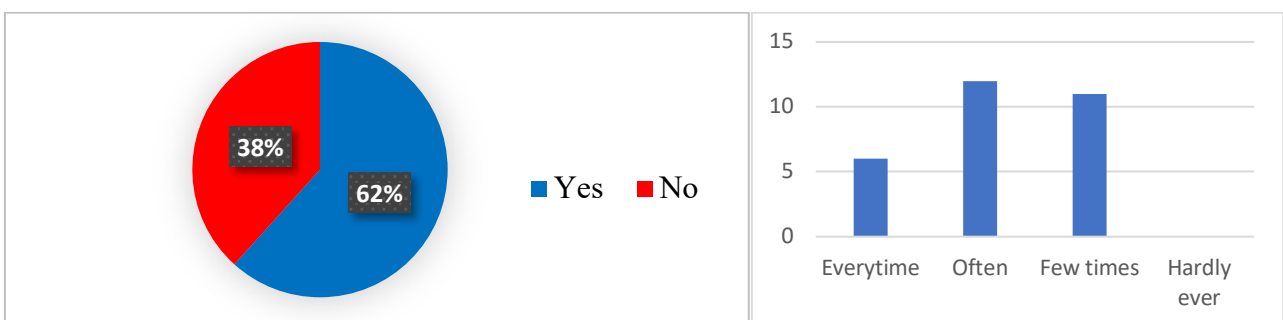
Since I was interested in understanding if there was a behavioral difference between young Italian males and females surveyed, I designed two graphs highlighting males' and females' behavior on the matter. I was surprised to learn that males and females have equal responsibility for considering the consequences for others of their own shopping decisions.

Questions 7 and 8: *In the past 12 months have you considered and confronted the prices of the products when buying? If yes, with what frequency?*



To this question, only one person has answered “No”; all the other 46 people have been confronting prices when buying this last year. This is very relevant, as it shows that the majority of the young Italian people surveyed are comparative shoppers, meaning: responsible consumers that keep in high consideration the prices of the products when purchasing.

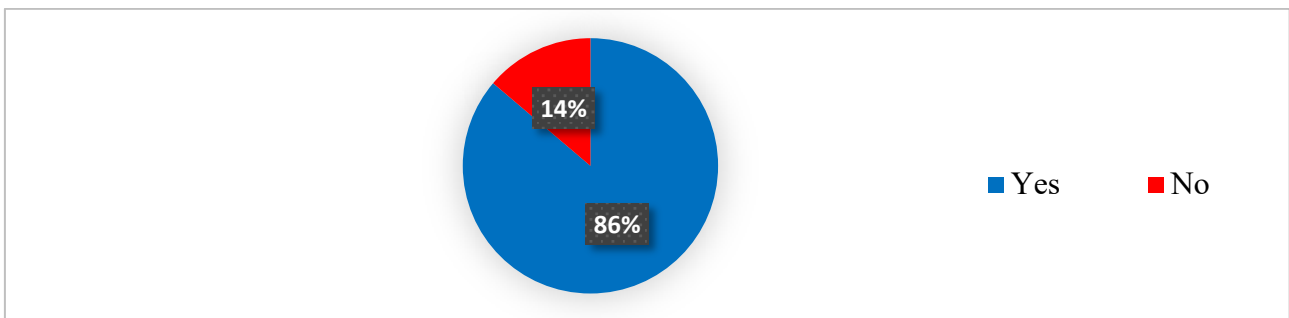
Questions 9 and 10: *In the past 12 months have you looked, when buying, labels or lists of ingredients on the products you wanted to purchase to check if they have had or will have consequences on the environment or on animal rights? If yes, with what frequency?*



The above question wanted to measure the presence or absence of interest in environmental, animal rights, and societal issues. The young Italians surveyed showed a high degree of concern and regard for these issues, as in the last 12 months, most looked at and checked product labels and lists of ingredients before buying them.

Moreover, by searching for a potential difference between males and females in checking labels before buying a product, I discovered that more females than males have engaged in this checking activity.

Question 11: *If yes, would you choose a different product if you discover that the one you wanted to purchase has had or would have environmental or ethical drawbacks?*

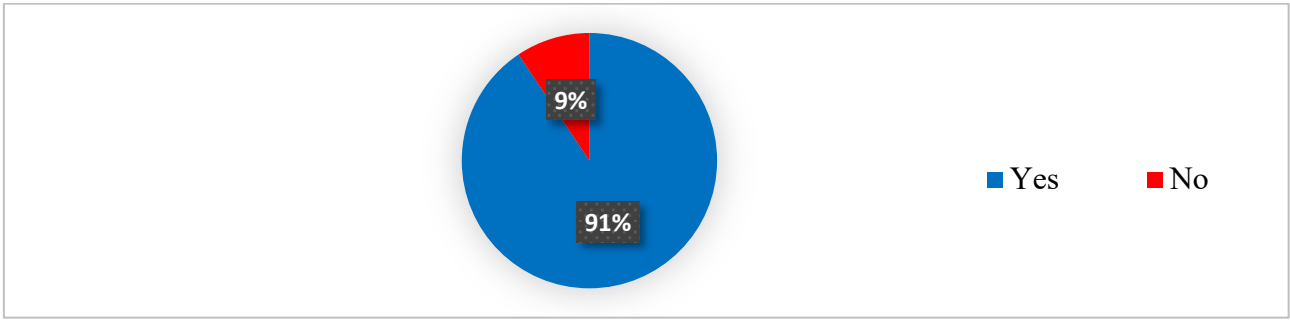


Since I was curious to find out, among the ones who replied “Yes” to the previous question, who would purchase a different product to the one they initially wanted for ethical reasons, I created a graph.

The above graph reports the percentage of Italians between 18 and 30 who effectively choose another product after checking the label of the initial product they wanted to purchase and finding out that the latter has had or will have ethical consequences. This activity is named *buycotting*.

From the data, we can deduce that most of the surveyed young Italians that check a product’s label and get ethically concerned by it engage in *buycotting*. More precisely, of the 29 people who check goods’ labels, only 4 of them are not showing a *buycotters’* behavior.

Question 12: *Imagine this situation: you are at the supermarket because you have to buy a bottle of shampoo. There are two exact same bottles of shampoos, but one costs more than the other. This is because, the first has written on its label that the bottle in which the shampoo is contained is biodegradable, while the other no. Which of the two bottles of shampoo would you purchase?*

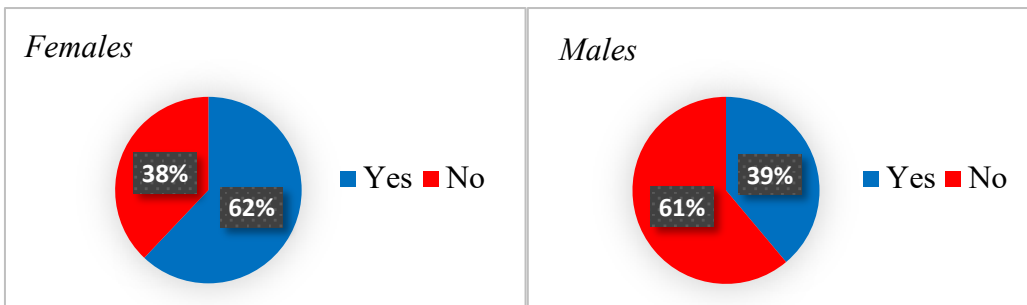
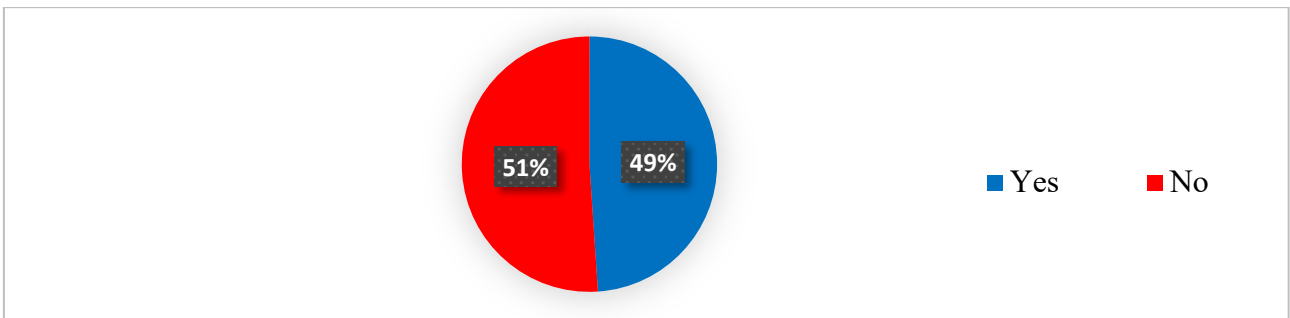


This survey question was asked to measure how much, among the ones who said “Yes” to boycotting, would effectively choose a more ethical and sustainable product over another, even if that would mean paying more for a product they could buy for less.

The above graph shows that most people who answered affirmatively to boycotting would still choose the more ethical product, despite the price. However, almost 10% of individuals also give more relevance to the price rather than the moral process of a good, not behaving as proper boycotters.

This data is very significant because it shows that many young individuals still tend to give more importance to prices, despite being concerned about environmental and ethical issues.

Refers to questions from 9 to 12: Have you boycotted this past 12 months?

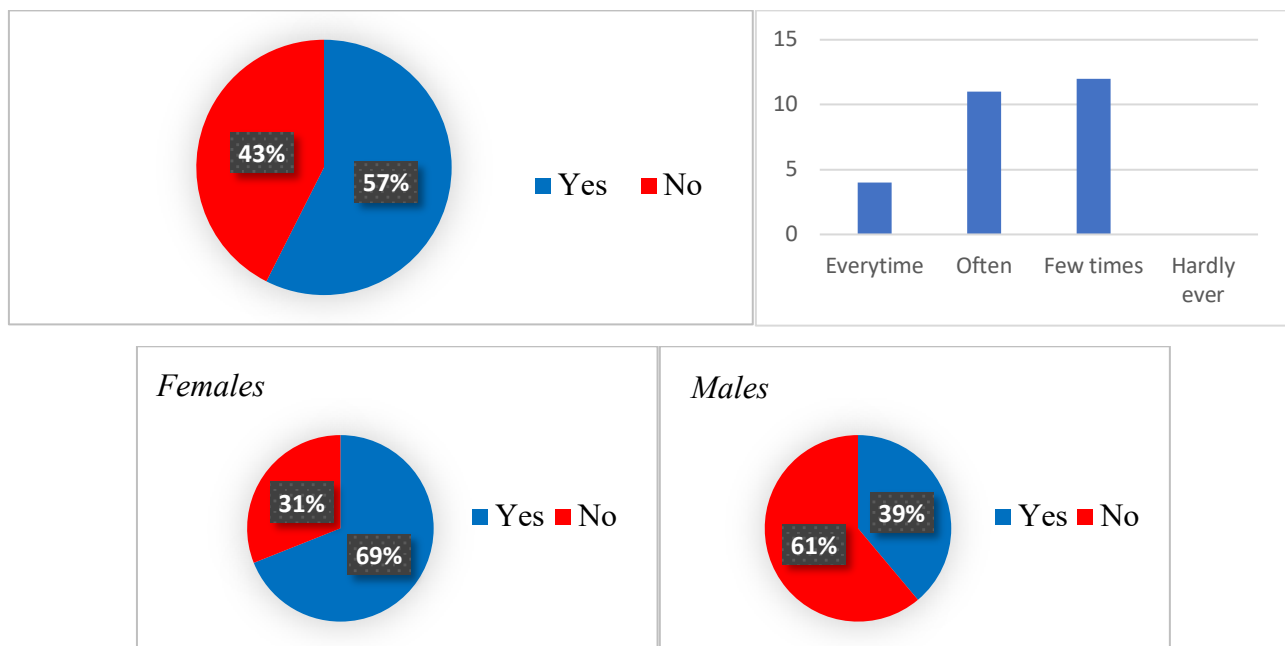


We can conclude that the ones who have said that these past 12 months have checked labels before buying, chosen one product over another for ethical reasons, and preferred to buy the sustainable

product over the unethical one despite the price, have boycotted. They, in fact, acted as boycotters, differently from the ones who have replied at least one “No” to one of these questions.

The graphs above point out that more people have not boycotted than boycotted and that females are much more into this action repertoire than males.

Questions 13 and 14: *In the last 12 months, have you avoided buying something because you were against the multinational procedure of that product, which, for example, allowed the testing on animals? If yes, with what frequency?*

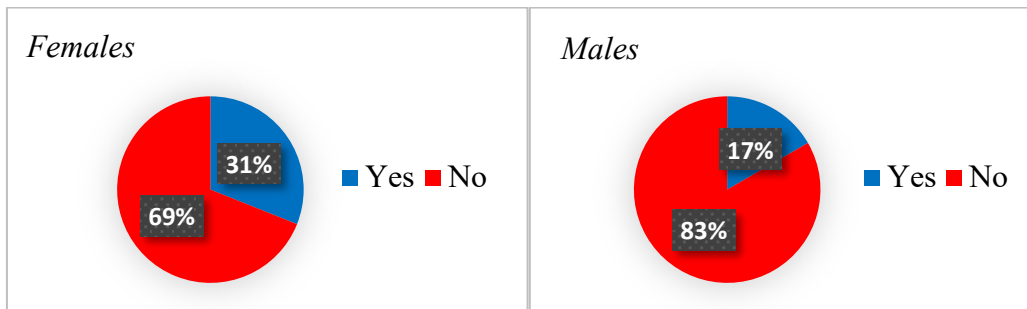
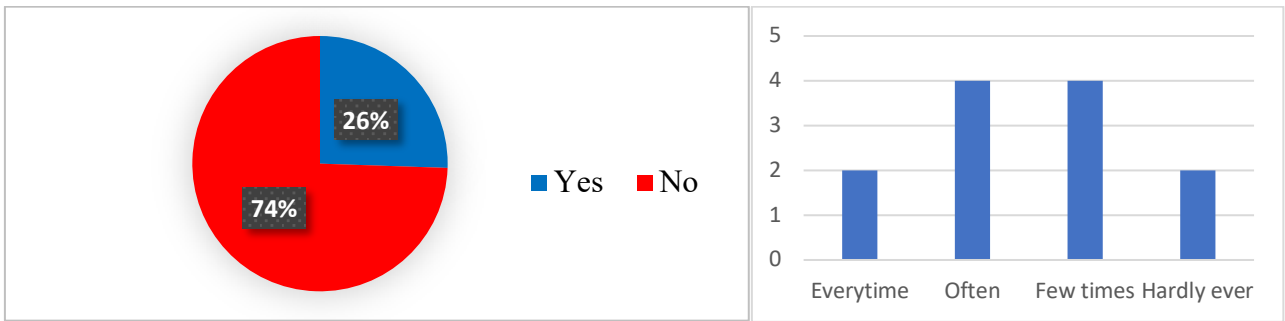


The above shows the percentage of Italian individuals surveyed who have engaged in the past 12 months in the simplest form of boycotting: avoiding buying a product because of the multinational procedure behind that product.

As we can see, 57% of the individuals surveyed have engaged in this action repertoire, and 43% have not. This means that, although the majority of Italians surveyed have boycotted, a considerable number of individuals have not, demonstrating that this activity is not very frequent.

Moreover, we can deduce from the two other graphs that the surveyed women are much more engaged in boycotting than the surveyed men.

Questions 15 and 16: *In the past 12 months, have you protested or signed petitions because you were against a multinational procedure that, for example, exploited children in producing the product? If yes, with what frequency?*

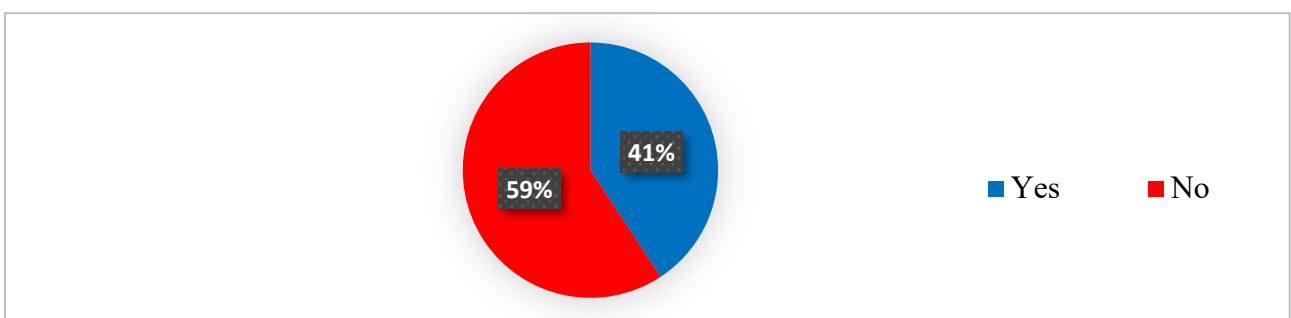


This graph reports the percentage of the sampled people who have signed petitions or protested in this past year, engaging in the strongest form of boycotting, which requires deep and intense involvement.

Only 12 people, 26% of all the respondents sampled, have answered “Yes, indicating a very scarce degree of participation in this form of boycotting.

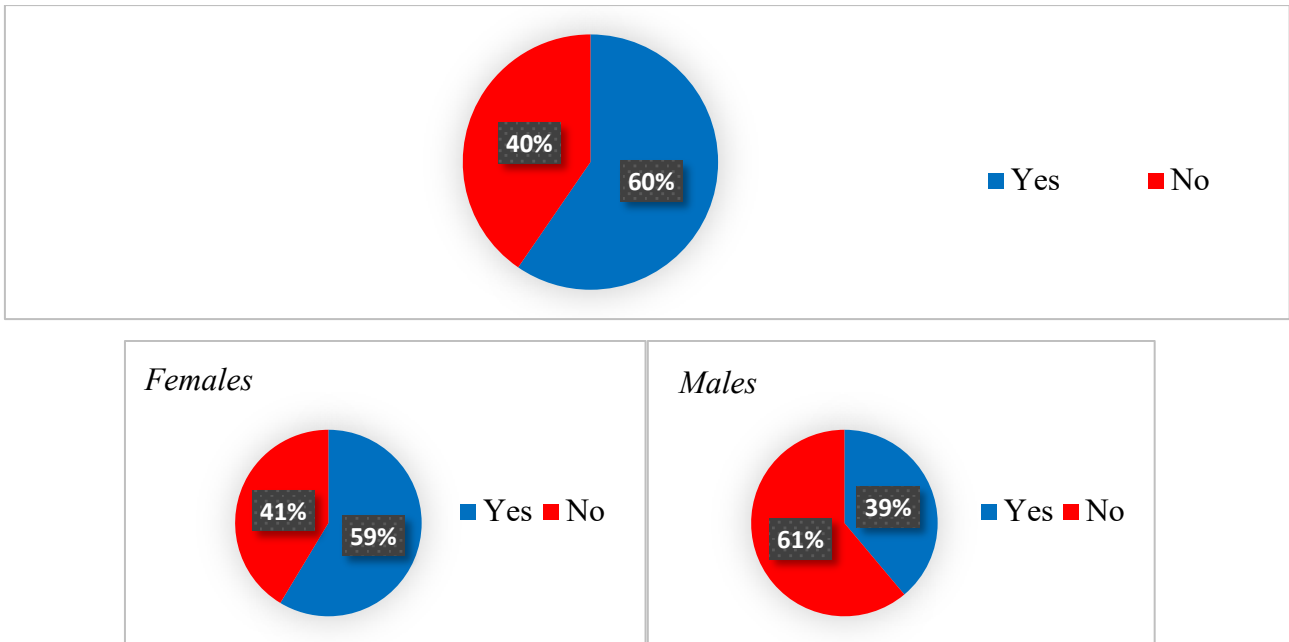
Between males and females, the females, again, have demonstrated to be more boycotters than men. However, the levels of engagement, in this case, are very low for both genders.

Refers to questions from 13 to 16: Have you engaged in both forms of boycotting this past 12 months?



Considering that there have been more young Italians engaged in avoiding unethical products rather than protesting against unethical multinational product procedures, I wanted to understand the number of people surveyed that in the last 12 months have engaged in both forms of boycotting. We can deduce that not even half of the individuals who have claimed to have participated in at least one form of boycotting have also engaged in the other.

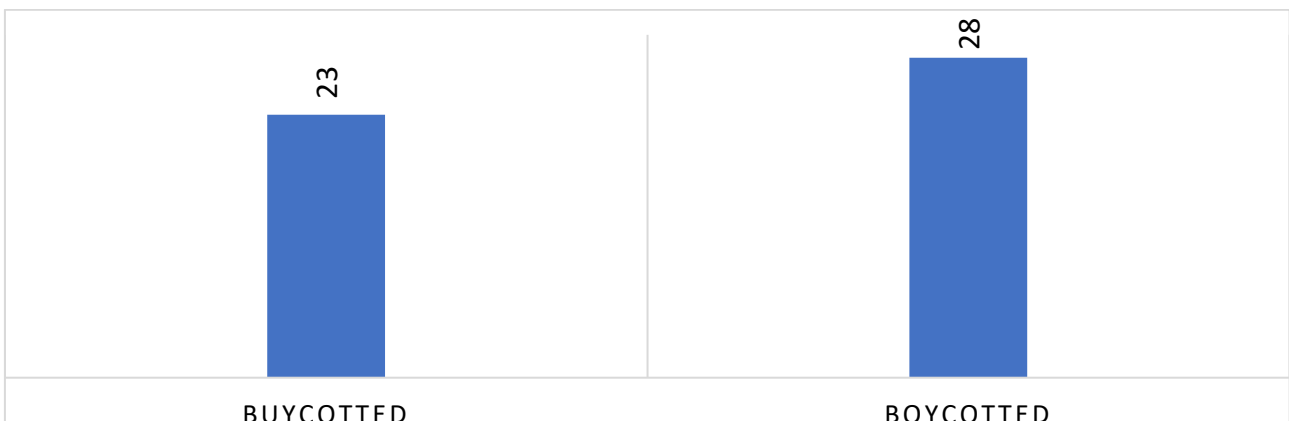
Refers to questions from 13 to 16: Have you boycotted this past 12 months?



I have designed this graph to understand the number of people surveyed that have engaged in boycotting this last year. As a result, I considered both the people who have answered “Yes” to avoiding buying non-ethical products and the individuals who have replied “Yes” to having signed petitions or protested the last 12 months. The Italians surveyed who have not engaged in any of these two forms of boycotting in the past 12 months are expressed in red.

The first graph expressively shows that the surveyed individuals engaged in boycotting to a greater extent this past year than those who did not. Additionally, females were much more boycotters than males.

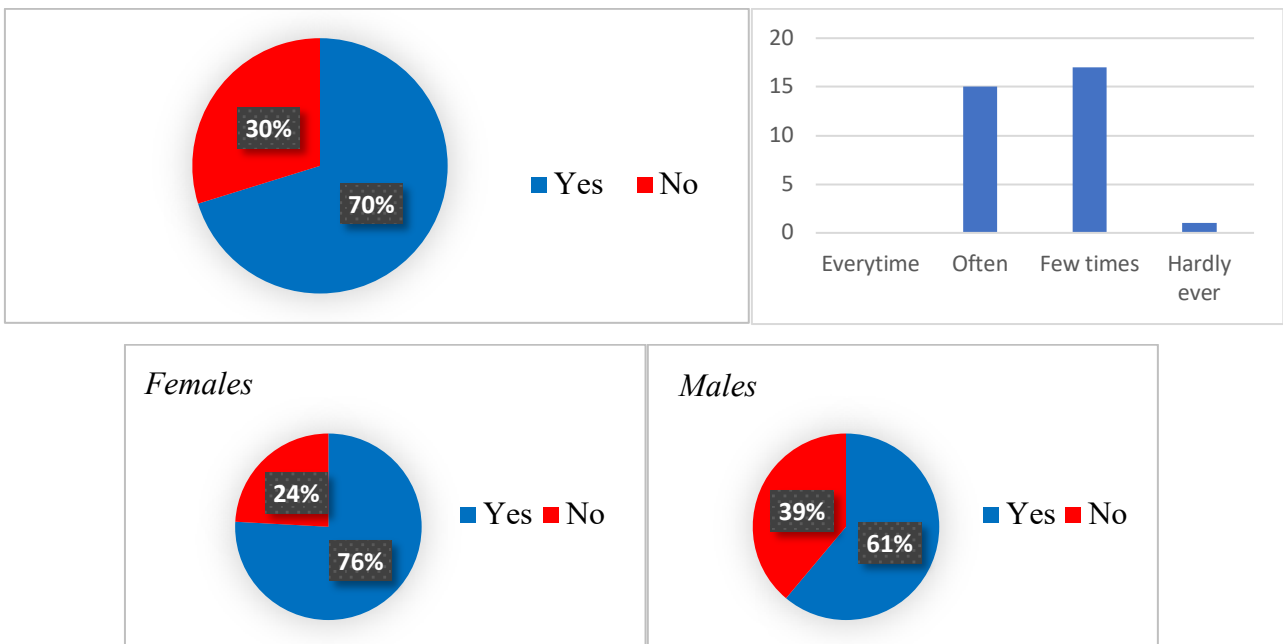
Refers to questions from 9 to d 16: Were there more people who buycotted or boycotted this past year?



This time I wanted to understand if, among the Italian individuals surveyed, more people have been taking part in boycotting or boycotting in these past 12 months. To do this, I confronted the graph I previously designed concerning boycotting and boycotting.

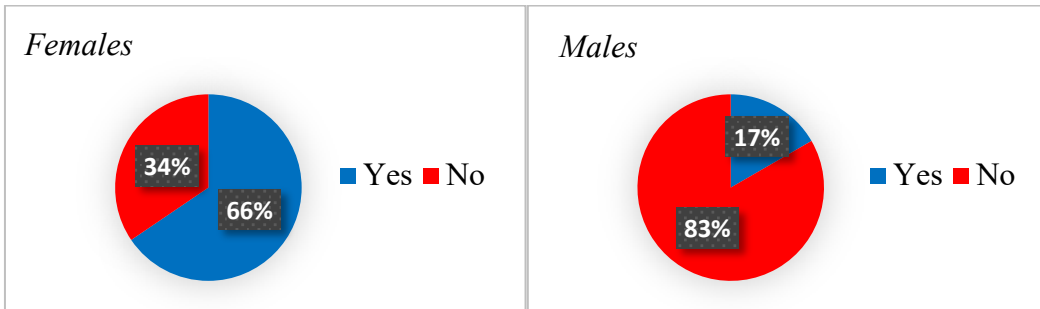
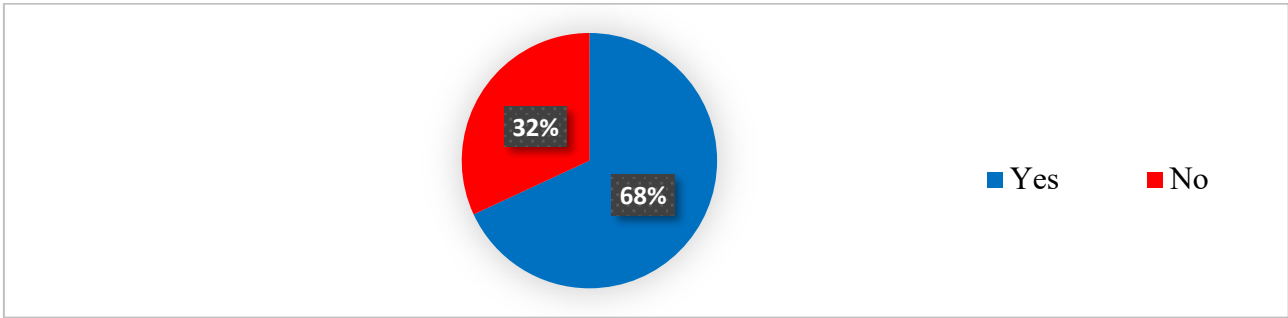
I discovered that among the sample of respondents to the survey, there had been more boycotters than boycotters: 23 people boycotted and 28 people boycotted.

Questions 17 and 18: *In the past 12 months have you debated about company's practices with your friends and family because you were worried about the processes behind certain products? If yes, with what frequency?*



This graph represents the percentage of young Italians that took part last year in discursive forms of political consumerism. In fact, most of them have discussed and debated some controversial company practices with their family and friends. This is a sign that young people have a strong interest and concern for corporate procedures and practices, both females and males.

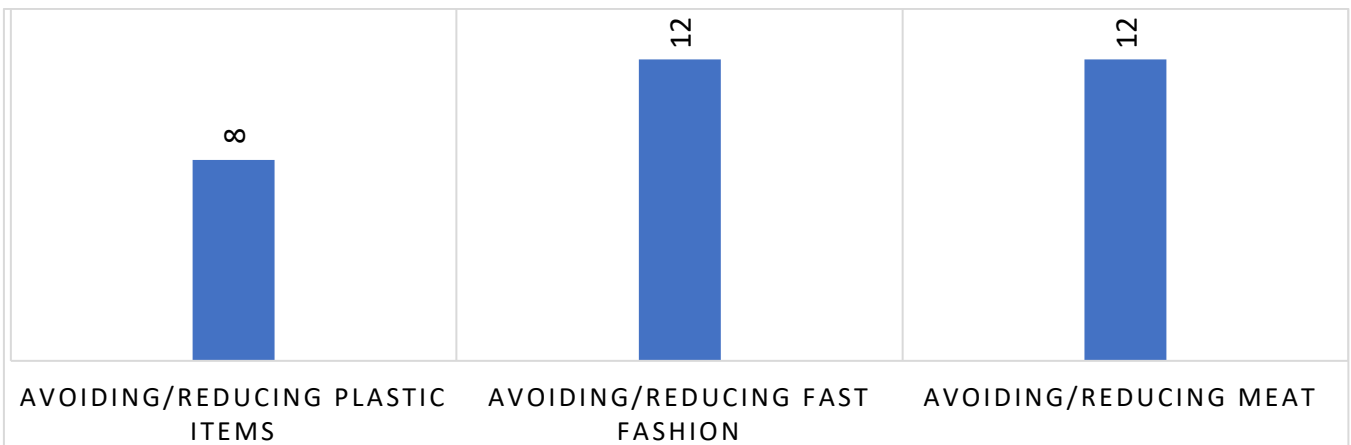
Question 19: *In the past 12 months have you changed part of your lifestyle because you have realized that your everyday decisions have global implications that should influence your lifestyle choices? (for example: avoiding buying plastic bottles or becoming vegetarian)*



This graph represents the percentage of young Italians engaged this past year in the fourth form of political consumerism: lifestyle commitments.

Most of the surveyed individuals claimed to realize that their everyday decisions have global implications; thus, they assumed individualized responsibility. Moreover, they have also claimed that because of this, they have changed their lifestyle. This responsibility-taking that led to a lifestyle change in the past 12 months has happened with almost no distinction between males and females.

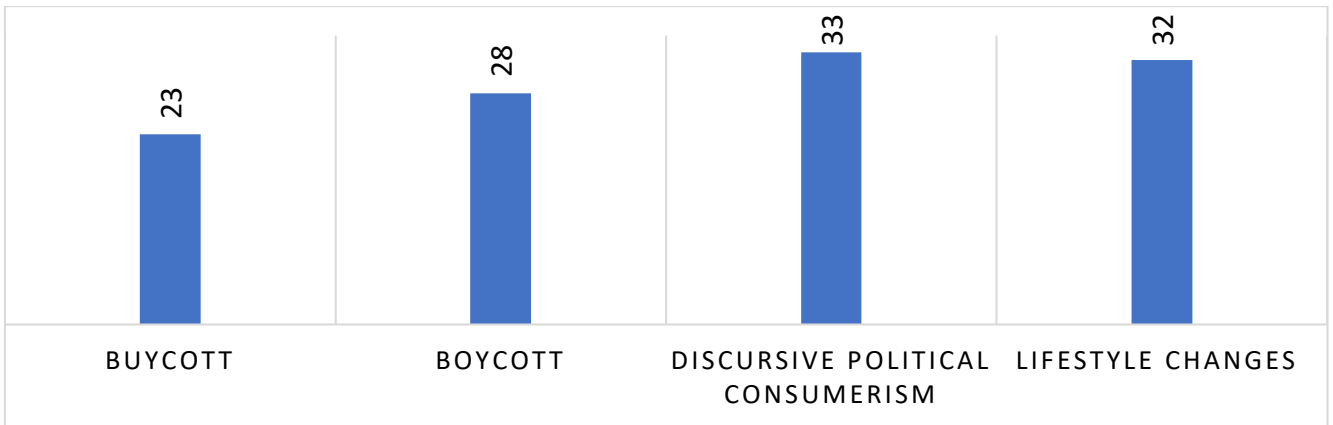
Question 20: If yes, what?



The above histogram indicates the most common lifestyle changes the individuals surveyed have undergone this past year. In fact, among the 32 people who have changed their lifestyle this past year, out of 47, 8 individuals have claimed to have reduced or avoided the use of plastic bottles and

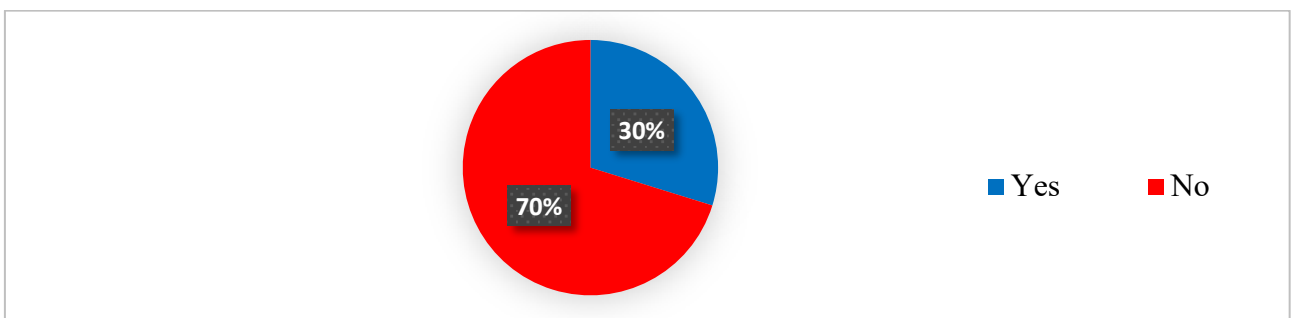
items, 12 people have said to have stopped or reduced buying fast fashion, and finally, the rest 12 people have declared to have stopped or significantly reduced their meat consumption over the last year.

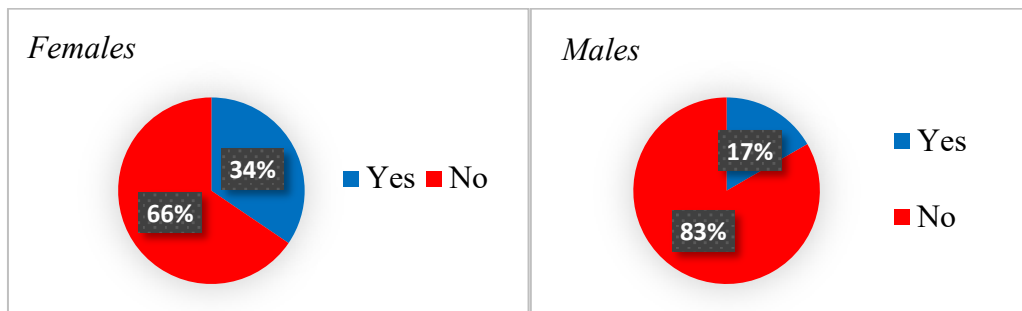
Refers to questions from 9 to 20: Which form of political consumerism (buycott, boycott, lifestyle commitment, discursive forms) has been more practiced this past 12 months, among the surveyed individuals?



The graph indicates that the most common and practiced activity related to political consumerism among individuals surveyed last year was discussing and debating business practices with others. However, lifestyle changes have also been very popular with nearly the same number of individuals as in discursive political consumerism. To my surprise, buycotting was the least practiced action repertoire among the Italians interviewed, together with boycotting, which had a very low degree of engagement compared to the other two.

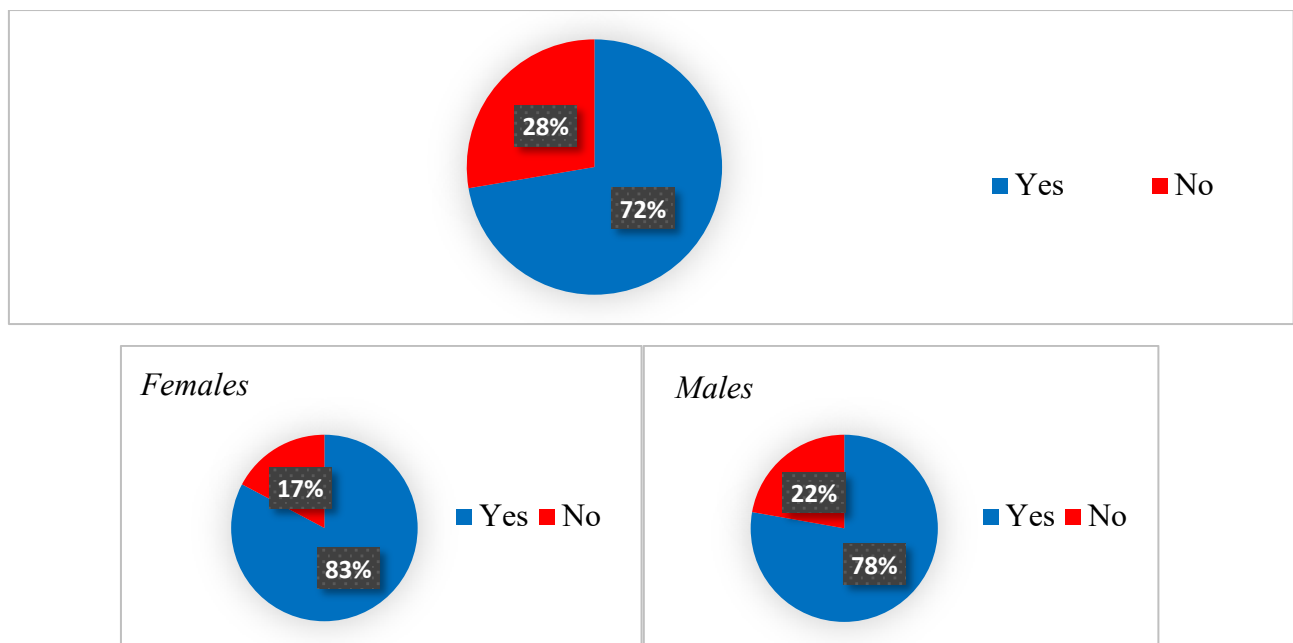
Refers to questions from 9 to 20: Which is the percentage of surveyed individuals who have engaged in all four forms of political consumerism this past year?





The percentage of sampled individuals who behaved this past year as actual political consumers, engaging in all four forms of political consumerism, is 30%, which is well under half, despite, as we have seen before, most individuals have participated in at least one form of political consumerism. Therefore, the majority of young Italians surveyed took part in some forms of political consumerism but very few in all of them. Moreover, thanks to this graph and others previously exposed, females have demonstrated to be much more political consumers than men.

Refers to questions from 9 to 20: Which is the percentage of surveyed individuals who have engaged in at least one form of political consumerism this past year?



As we can understand from the graph, 72% of the individuals surveyed have participated in at least one form of political consumerism this last year. This percentage is very high and optimistic, as only 13 out of 47 sampled people have never acted as political consumers this past year, unlike the other 34 who have behaved as such, with no distinction between males and females.

3.3 Survey's Conclusions

My survey was created to measure whether Italian young people are accountable respondents, whether they consider the political, ethical, and environmental consequences of their shopping choices and whether they engage in forms of political consumerism.

The average of sampled individuals, which included more women than men, demonstrated to have had a partial political consumer's behavior these past 12 months. The majority of them, in fact, have taken into consideration the effects that their decisions have had on others, confronted the prices of the products on an everyday basis, boycotted by avoiding purchasing unethical products, engaged in discursive political actions, and have made lifestyle changes. Despite this, just a tiny percentage of people have boycotted, boycotted through protests against corporate's procedures, and engaged in both forms of boycotting.

Among the surveyed individuals, there have been more people involved in boycotting than boycotting this last year. However, if we consider all the forms of political consumerism, the most popular one has been discursive political consumerism with lifestyle changes just following. In fact, almost all sampled individuals have claimed to have reduced or stopped the use of plastic, meat, and fast fashion.

Despite this, the number of people who have acted as actual political consumers, engaging actively in all four forms of political consumerism this past year, has been minimal, differently from the number of surveyed individuals who claimed to have participated in at least one form of political consumerism.

The survey has not highlighted significant behavioral differences between females and males, even if the females were found to be slightly more involved in all four forms of political consumerism. As for the questions related to the frequency with which an individual included in the sample claimed of carrying out a certain behavior, they were asked to investigate the intensity of the latter's consumption behaviors, since habitual participation in political consumerism should be distinguished from just an intermittent involvement in it. It was found that most individuals who participated in the four forms of political consumerism did so "often" or "a few times", but rarely "every time" or "hardly ever". This indicates that most respondents who claimed to have conducted certain political consumption behaviors in these past 12 months have done so both regularly and sporadically.

Conclusions

In a world where governments and political institutions may no longer be capable or inclined to tackle some contemporary issues, citizens have developed and conceived new strategies and solutions to these challenges, assuming responsibility for themselves. Political consumerism, the purest example of unconventional political engagement based on individual responsibility-taking, is the most well-known method by which they accomplished this. Political consumers, in fact, may choose to avoid certain products or engage in a lifestyle policy that changes their lives significantly in order to engage in global problem-solving. Precisely because their way of acting has proved to be effective in solving global issues, responsible political consumers are of crucial importance. However, it is improper to consider as a political consumer anyone who engages in the above activities. In fact, someone can decide to avoid eating meat just because he does not like it or can agree to change part of his lifestyle for multiple reasons, which may not be related to politics. For this reason, Stolle et al. stressed the importance that to be considered a real political consumer one must be “*motivated by ethical or political considerations, or at least by the desire to change social conditions, with or without relying on the political system*” (Stolle et al 2005). Therefore, what distinguishes a political consumer from a non-political one, are the motivations or wills that push the latter to act. The same thing is true in the distinction between political consumerism, understood as a form of political engagement, and non-political consumerism, which merely represent people’s habit of purchasing goods. According to Van Deth (2014), in fact, consumption, which should be an apolitical behavior, can become an effective form of political participation if it is driven by political reasons and, therefore, utilized for political objectives. Despite this, according to Rosenstone and Hansen, political motivations alone are not sufficient to delineate a political form of participation, as political participation “*is the action that influences the distribution of social goods and values*” (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). However, having repertoires of action that strongly affect the distribution of principles and power, once again, political consumerism proves to be a form of political participation at all levels.

Riassunto in Italiano

Questo elaborato esamina il fenomeno del consumismo politico come forma di partecipazione e responsabilità politica.

Al fine di evitare il problema di etichettare tutto come "politico", Micheletti e Stolle (2010) hanno proposto di utilizzare le motivazioni alla base delle azioni come riferimenti per separare l'impegno politico da altri tipi di comportamenti sociali. Pertanto, loro sostengono che un atto può venire etichettato "politico" solo se le motivazioni sottostanti quest'ultimo sono politiche.

Tuttavia, ci sono alcuni problemi con questo modo di pensare. Uno di questi è che gli studiosi sarebbero costretti a concentrarsi sulle motivazioni che hanno spinto gli individui ad agire, invece che soffermarsi ed analizzare le effettive azioni compiute da essi per avere un impatto sulla politica e sulla società. Per evitare questa situazione, è fondamentale fare in modo che il concetto di impegno politico comprenda tutte le azioni che sostengono o si oppongono a qualsiasi detentore del potere coinvolto nella distribuzione delle risorse. Seguendo questa interpretazione, il consumismo politico dovrebbe essere riconosciuto come una forma di partecipazione politica poiché non si riferisce solo alle decisioni di acquisto al supermercato ma tiene conto anche di boicotts, boicottaggi, forme discorsive di consumismo politico e cambiamenti dello stile di vita. Queste attività politiche, infatti, sono tutte basate sull'assunzione individualizzata di responsabilità da parte del cittadino, il quale, attraverso queste forme, si oppone alla distribuzione delle risorse e del potere. Oggigiorno sempre più cittadini scelgono di opporsi, attraverso queste azioni politiche non tradizionali, perché i governi e le istituzioni politiche, a cui si dovrebbero affidare per risolvere le problematiche globali, non sono né più tanto in grado né particolarmente disposti ad affrontare alcune questioni. Per questo motivo, i cittadini hanno dovuto sviluppare nuove strategie per far fronte a queste difficoltà da soli, assumendosi la responsabilità delle loro azioni. Il metodo più noto ed efficace con cui sono riusciti a far ciò è stato il consumismo politico, ovvero l'esempio più puro di impegno politico non convenzionale basato sull'assunzione di responsabilità individuale. Il cittadino che si impegna in questa attività, detto anche consumatore politico, infatti, tenta di risolvere alcune problematiche globali attraverso l'utilizzo di azioni politiche non tradizionali. Una delle tante è rappresentata dallo scegliere di evitare di comprare un determinato prodotto perché contro le sue procedure di produzione, come per tante persone è il caso della carne. Un altro esempio potrebbe essere chi decide di impegnarsi a cambiare alcune abitudini della sua vita perché dannose verso l'ambiente, come nel caso di chi sceglie di muoversi in bicicletta rispetto che in macchina.

Proprio perché il loro modo di agire si è dimostrato efficace, la presenza di consumatori politici al giorno d'oggi è di rilevanza cruciale. Tuttavia, è improprio considerare come consumatore politico chiunque si impegni nelle attività sopra elencate. Qualcuno infatti può decidere di evitare di mangiare la carne solo perché non ne apprezza il sapore o può decidere di muoversi in bicicletta soltanto perché gli è più conveniente della macchina.

Per questo motivo, Stolle ha sottolineato l'importanza che per essere considerato un vero consumatore politico bisogna essere *“motivati da considerazioni etiche o politiche, o almeno dal desiderio di cambiare le condizioni sociali, con o senza fare affidamento sul sistema politico”* (Stolle 2005). Pertanto, ciò che distingue un consumatore politico da uno non politico, sono le motivazioni o le volontà che lo spingono ad agire.

La stessa cosa vale nella distinzione tra consumismo politico, inteso come forma di impegno politico, e consumismo apolitico, che rappresenta semplicemente l'abitudine delle persone ad acquistare beni. Secondo Van Deth (2014), infatti, il consumo, che dovrebbe essere un comportamento apolitico, può diventare una forma effettiva di partecipazione politica se guidato da ragioni politiche e, quindi, utilizzato per obiettivi politici. Tuttavia, secondo Rosenstone e Hansen, invece, le motivazioni politiche da sole non sono sufficienti a delineare una forma politica di partecipazione, in quanto la partecipazione politica *“è l'azione che influenza la distribuzione dei beni e dei valori sociali”* (Rosenstone e Hansen 1993). Avendo, però, dei repertori di azione che incidono fortemente sulla distribuzione dei principi e del potere, anche in questo caso, il consumismo politico si rivela una forma di partecipazione politica a tutti gli effetti.

La presente tesi, divisa in tre capitoli, esamina ed analizza il consumismo politico come forma di partecipazione politica.

Il primo capitolo definisce, presenta e collega i concetti alla base del consumismo politico: assunzione di responsabilità individualizzata e forma di partecipazione politica non convenzionale. *“Assunzione di responsabilità individualizzata”* si riferisce all'assunzione da parte del cittadino della più ragionevole di tutte le scelte per il bene della società, mentre il termine *“forma di partecipazione politica non convenzionale”* indica l'insieme delle azioni politiche che non richiedono l'intermediazione di altri attori o istituzioni. Questi concetti rappresentano la base del consumismo politico, poiché quest'ultimo rappresenta la forma più nota di partecipazione politica non convenzionale basata sull'assunzione di responsabilità individuale.

Il secondo capitolo inizia con la presentazione delle quattro principali forme di espressione del consumismo politico: il boycotting, il boicottaggio, le forme politiche discorsive ed i cambiamenti dello stile di vita. Il boycotting indica l'attività in cui gli individui acquistano prodotti specifici rispetto ad altri per motivi politici, sociali, ecologici ed etici, mentre il boicottaggio, si riferisce al

rifiuto, da parte di un cittadino, di acquistare il prodotto di una determinata azienda per spingere ad un cambiamento nel suo comportamento o nelle sue pratiche di produzione. Il consumismo politico discorsivo, invece, denota la situazione in cui i cittadini cercano informazioni sulle pratiche dell'azienda perché si preoccupano dei significati e dei processi politici alla base di determinati prodotti. Infine, i cambiamenti di stile di vita si riferiscono alla situazione in cui un individuo decide consapevolmente di impegnarsi politicamente all'interno della sua sfera di vita privata, poiché si rende conto che le sue decisioni quotidiane hanno implicazioni globali che dovrebbero influenzare le sue scelte di vita.

Il capitolo prosegue delineando il profilo del consumatore politico medio ed elencando i contesti organizzativi più popolari in cui i cittadini possono imbattersi in questa tendenza. Tra i più famosi ci sono l'attivismo per le etichette ecologiche, il movimento per il cibo biologico, e il movimento contro le fabbriche sfruttatrici.

La conclusione del capitolo è segnata da un'attenta analisi di alcune delle critiche più note che possono essere mosse verso l'efficacia del consumismo politico. Una delle tante, avanzate da Micheletti e Stolle, afferma che il consumismo politico non possa influenzare efficacemente l'assunzione di responsabilità da parte di cittadini e consumatori, dato che gli individui sono di natura egocentrici ed interessati solo a sé stessi.

Il terzo ed ultimo capitolo, infine, è dedicato alla presentazione di una ricerca di indagine, che ho svolto personalmente, sull'identificazione delle scelte di consumo di un campione di quarantacinque ragazzi italiani tra i diciotto e i trent'anni. Ho infatti adoperato il sondaggio come strumento per misurare la frequenza con cui il campione d'indagine si è comportato da consumatore politico negli ultimi dodici mesi. Ne è emerso che la maggior parte di loro si è comportata come tale, prendendo in considerazione gli effetti che le proprie decisioni avrebbero avuto sugli altri, evitando di acquistare prodotti non etici, impegnandosi in azioni politiche discorsive e facendo cambiamenti al proprio stile di vita. Nonostante ciò, però, solo una piccola percentuale di loro ha boicottato, ovvero scelto di acquistare un prodotto rispetto ad un altro per motivi politici o etici.

Il sondaggio ha inoltre evidenziato come la maggior parte dei ragazzi intervistati negli ultimi dodici mesi abbia preferito le forme politiche discorsive ed i cambiamenti al proprio stile di vita rispetto al boicottaggio e al boicottaggio. Infatti, quasi tutti, hanno dichiarato di aver ridotto o addirittura completamente smesso, nell'ultimo anno, di utilizzare la plastica, indossare capi di moda non sostenibile e consumare la carne.

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