Global Political Consumerism and its Democratic Potentials

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I. Introduction

This paper is about political consumerism. More specifically, it is about political consumerism as a mode of global political participation, or that which I shall term *global political consumerism*. The focus is primarily on the individual level, i.e. the political actions and identities of global citizens. The paper develops three arguments: first, it is argued that a more precise conceptualisation of global political consumerism is required; particularly in terms of when it is interpreted as being related to global citizenship. Further to this point, it is argued that discussion regarding global political consumerism has consequences for empirical operationalisation, as we must add a “target”-dimension to well-established operationalisations of political consumerism. The second argument goes like this: while there are theoretical and normative arguments for some kind of global political consumerism, very little empirical evidence exists at the individual level; one of the few studies that has actually been conducted suggests the following interpretation: “(…) political consumerism has a national orientation, implying that it is embedded in national public debates, awareness, and needs (…) rather than representing a true form of transnational citizen action embedded in a global public discourse” (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti 2003:10). This paper provides a preliminary analysis of global political consumerism at the individual level, which renders probable that there are also global aspects inherent to political consumption. Finally, it is argued that John Dryzek’s theory about “transnational discursive democracy” constitutes a useful democratic basis for global political consumerism. This is in opposition to positions arguing that political consumerism reflects civic republican or communitarian virtues.

This paper consists of five sections: Section II defines political consumerism as a mode of global political participation and embryonic global citizenship. Section III discusses empirical operationalisations of global political consumerism. Section IV discusses the democratic basis of political consumerism. Section V presents an empirical analysis of the basis of survey data as to whether it may be justified empirically that political consumerism is a mode of global participation and whether it goes hand-in-hand with discursive democratic values. Section VI concludes.
II. Global Political Consumerism

Empirically speaking, global political consumerism does not represent a new phenomenon. History is full of examples of international boycotts, e.g. economic sanctions against countries violating basic democratic and/or human rights, the boycott of Nestlé, Apartheid in South Africa, the Arab boycott of Jewish goods etc. (Micheletti 2003, 58-66). However, how do we define global political consumerism more precisely? How can it be substantiated? How can it be conceptualised as a form of global citizenship?

To respond to these questions we must first arrive upon a definition of political consumerism: “… actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. Their choices are based on attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or noneconomic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favourable and unfavourable business and government practice. Political consumers are the people who engage in such choice situations. They may act individually or collectively. Their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context”. (Micheletti 2003, 2-3). This definition does not demarcate the global aspect of political consumerism, for which reason the theoretical substantiation for discussing global political consumerism, instead of political consumerism in general, will be emphasised in the following.¹ This reasoning stems from sociological processes of change on both the macro- and micro-levels: (a) structural and institutional changes in the form of globalisation, global governance and reflexive modernisation, and (b) shifts in the political culture towards a personalisation of political responsibility, individualisation, self-reflexivity and so-called “everyday making” (Bang & Sørensen 1997). A number of authors share this point of departure:

Føllesdal argues for a “cosmopolitan consumer,” the normative legitimacy of which is that it can be interpreted as a response to the negative consequences of economic globalisation. His point of departure is that globalisation has resulted in a mismatch between the negative consequences of economic globalisation and political regulation on the grounds that there are no authoritative institutions at the global level. Føllesdal argues that this mismatch and lack of authoritative institutions at the global level provides consumers (and
with a kind of responsibility that is different than that which they possess at the state-level, where regulatory praxises are institutionalised. Føllesdal argues that; “So the constraints on business must be rethought. If global markets are to be normatively justified, the responsibilities for re-distribution and prevention of harm must be borne by agents other than the state – namely corporations and consumers. I submit that political consumerism may be interpreted in this light” (Føllesdal 2003, 13). Thus, according to Føllesdal, political consumerism is inherently global; the normative justification for political consumerism is that in the absence of political regulation the political consumer has a responsibility to act in various global regimes.

Micheletti adapts a similar approach, though with a slightly different focus. Her point of departure is global problems – what we might term ‘global commons’ – where states or other regulatory bodies do not have the capacity to regulate; global commons present new “governability problems” (Micheletti 2003, 5). This does not imply that there is no policymaking about these issues, but the policymaking proceeds in governance-networks, where there is no formal coordination and where policymaking and regulation is a “… process in which problems are dealt with in appropriate and adaptable ways. This means that policymakers – be they government officials, civil society activists, individual consumers, or private corporations – must start by looking at the character of the problem and then decide which tools to use to manage or to solve it. (…) The messages sent to business by political consumers are an example of the kind of new policy tools referred to here” (Micheletti 2003, 7). Global political consumerism may also be motivated by changes in political identities, such as that which Micheletti terms Individualised Collective Action (Micheletti 2003, 25-34). The sociological context for this type of action is postmodernisation, ecological and reflexive modernisation and (global) governance. Global political consumerism makes sense in this interpretation of political identities, since it entails that citizens have a responsible and self-reflexive attitude towards societal and political problems, including “global commons,” and that they practice this responsibility in everyday-life.

Bennett’s point of departure is also the social, cultural and economic change associated with globalisation (2003, 102-105). He works with the concept “Global Consumer Activism,” which is a form of “lifestyle politics” in which politics have become personal,

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1 Naturally this does not set aside other forms of political consumption, but as the focus of this paper is global political consumerism (the reason for demarcating this as an independent object of study
individualised and non-governmental (Bennett 1998; 2003, 102). Global consumer activism indicates that citizenship and democracy changes and assumes a global character. Political consumption is thus interpreted as a form of global citizenship, defined as, “…. broad coalitions of groups using campaigns against corporations, along with other tactics, to press for greater public accountability in trade regimes, labor practices, human rights, environmental quality, and other areas of corporate social responsibility” (Bennett 2003, 101).

The brief interpretation presented above regarding how various authors point out a global dimension of political consumption establishes that it makes sense theoretically to discuss a form of global political consumerism in the event that political consumption is interpreted in the light of globalisation, the risk society, reflexive modernity and individualisation. However, as long as global political consumerism on the individual level is not the primary focus of any of the authors, it is necessary to further specify what I understand as global political consumerism. Global political consumerism is oriented towards influencing a specific form of policy or collective outcome, i.e. policy dealing with “global commons”, which is regulated in global issue networks (e.g. issue networks regarding global environment) with specific regime values and norms and with a number of actors, including (multinational) corporations. The global political consumer can then also raise global controversial questions that are not institutionalised, but which they feel decisions ought to be made about.

As is apparent from the above, several of the authors argue that political consumerism represents a form of ‘global citizenship’, and they tie contrasting values and norms to this status. However, there is a lack of an actual accounting for how political consumption can be analytically regarded as a form of global citizenship. Such an accounting is important in order to avoid watering-down the citizenship concept. In the following I will argue that acting as a political consumer cannot in itself be regarded as constituting global citizenship; rather, only to the extent that it constitutes a part of a coherent conglomerate with global political (democratic) orientations and identities (see Tobiasen 2002, Chapter 3, for a more detailed argumentation that citizenship requires a measure of correlation between political action and political identities. See also Andersen et al. 1993). I return to the possible concrete content of the democratic values in Section III. Here the focus in on the analytical

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follows below), there is a need for demarcation.
dimensions such as political participation and global political consumption that must hang together for it to be possible to meaningfully speak about global citizenship. This conception of global citizenship is based on a political cultural perspective on global citizenship, i.e. a conception that emphasises individuals’ relationship to global political life in the broad sense and where political culture can generally be defined as a “more or less cohesive pattern of values, norms, opinions, knowledge and patterns of action, which on the one hand contribute to the integration of citizens and institutions in a democratic public sphere, and on the other hand are active in connection with the analysis, formulation, passage, legitimisation and filling-out of public policies.” (Andersen 1992, 3 – own translation).

But what does global political identity then mean – this phenomenon which action as a global political consumer must hang together with if it is to be meaningful to talk about global citizenship? Generally, global political identity is an umbrella concept that integrates various types of political orientation. Global political identity is understood as the orientation of citizens’ consciousness towards global political systems (global issue networks), towards other individuals in the global community and the citizens’ own role in the political system. The task at hand hardly allows for an in-depth discussion of the individual analytical dimensions of global political identity, but they can be summarised in three principal dimensions (for further clarification see Tobiasen 2002, 56-65):

1. global political engagement (interest and cognitive orientation)
2. evaluatory orientation (opinions/feelings towards ‘is’)
3. normative orientation (opinions/feelings towards ‘ought to be’)

Political participation and various dimensions of global political identities constitute the empirical analytical dimensions of global citizenship. These dimensions are “empty” in themselves; they are analytical categories. If one wishes to define global citizenship qualitatively it is necessary to analyse theories about global democracy on the basis of their assumptions on the political cultural level, i.e. the expectations of the theories and the global political identities and global political participation of the citizens. We shall touch upon this discussion lightly in Section III. The main point to be drawn forth at this time is that if one is

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2 Demarcating that which constitutes political participation first requires the demarcation of politics itself (van Deth 2001, 9).
to talk about global political consumerism as a form of global citizenship it is important to avoid diluting the citizenship concept. Further to this point, it is claimed that global citizenship can be analysed from a political cultural perspective that assumes that global citizenship is a compounded, integrated phenomenon. This means that global political consumerism in itself cannot constitute a form of global citizenship; rather, it can only be so to the extent that it enters into a conglomerate with opinions and values as a part of a global political identity. If one is to speak about a global political democratic citizenship, then one must further first analyse that which various theories assume regarding global political consumption, as well as the content of global democratic political identities.

III. Operationalisation of Global Political Consumerism

As political consumerism exceeds the classic distinction between politics and economics, the manner in which political consumption is operationalised becomes an important question (Goul Andersen & Tobiasen 2001, 9-19; 2003, 204-207; Stolle & Hooghe 2003, 279-284). A number of more or less established dimensions, which are central when operationalising political consumption, are presented and developed in the following. In addition, argument is forwarded that when one specifically speaks about global political consumerism – thereby distinguishing it from other forms of political consumption – it becomes necessary to add yet another dimension to the operationalising-repertoire, viz. a ‘target-dimension.’ The target-dimension distinction resurrects a classic distinction in the literature about political participation, which merely has not been made explicit to a particularly great degree because modern understandings of political participation have assumed that politics are to be equated with politics within the territorial borders of the nation-state.

The first criterion for political consumption is motives. Consumption is only political in the event that it is aimed at influencing other actors and a collective outcome. One can object that the effect is the same, e.g. if we think about consumption of organic products, the effect is the same regardless of whether the consumer is motivated personally or politically. However, this is the very reason why it is necessary to emphasise the motive criterion, for if we instead measure in terms of effect alone, then all consumption becomes political when the level of analysis is the individual level, as here. It is important to

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3 Strictly speaking, ‘motives’ is a criterion for all types of political acts when the unit of analysis is the individual level. There may be a grey area in other respects, e.g. people may participate in political
emphasise that demarcation of the motive is not synonymous with demarcation of specific social, ethical or political values. The goal can also be realisation of one’s own interest, where attempt at advancing one’s own interests entails that one must become engaged in public-oriented interests. The motive criterion thereby integrates both the “public virtue” and “private virtue” traditions of politics (Micheletti 2003, 19-20). It is also relevant to underline an aspect-consideration in this discussion (Tobiasen 2002, Chapter 11). Every form of consumption also contains apolitical aspects (see also Sørensen 2004, xx), e.g. one could hardly be regarded to have chosen not to purchase French wine in the event one is allergic to wine and therefore never purchases wine. The point is that there are often other, apolitical aspects than just purely political ones that must be fulfilled with regards to the everyday praxis of the consumer. Political consumption will often be mixed together with other types of motives, e.g. health, price etc.; the political aspect thus represents merely one aspect of consumption. One can imagine that the political aspect will occasionally be dominant, e.g. if one owns an automobile and chose not to purchase Shell gasoline when the Brent Spar case was in the news. At other times the political aspect will be less prominent, e.g. in the case of some foodproducts.

Action/behaviour. One does not become a political consumer merely because one has opinions on, or knowledge about, political and social aspects of consumption. There has traditionally been talk of two forms of political consumption: boycott, i.e. opting against certain products at the market, and buycott, i.e. opting for specific wares at the market (Friedman, Micheletti). There has also been discussion of how political consumption can be practiced individually or collectively, cf. the definition above. Boycott and buycott can be practiced when grocery shopping, but can also adopt other forms ranging from political investments to participation in consumer groups/organisations, just as they can also be combined with other forms of political participation, e.g. signing petitions or discussion forums on the Internet.
**Informed and deliberate consumers.** Another criterion for political consumption is that the consumer must possess a certain level of awareness regarding the product, and the choice of product must be deliberate (Stolle & Hooghe 2003, 280, see also Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti 2003, 8,11).

**Regularity of political consumption.** “the actor must take decisions on a regular basis; a one time decision is not sufficient to be considered as a form of “political consumerism”” (Stolle & Hooghe 2003, 280).

**Target.** Studying global political participation does not have conceptual consequences as such; ever since the first studies of political participation, the basis has been that “Participation goes on in many places – we must study it where it occurs” (Verba 1967, 77). Global political participation has also principally been included in definitions of political participation, but this has not been the focus of discussions of operationalising, and empirical studies have predominantly been focused on participation in associations and organisations that have been classified as “transnational social movements,” “national reactions to international phenomena” (Hein Rasmussen, 1997, 7), “non-union organisations” and “significant individual questions in the parliament” (Damgaard et al. 1980, Chapter 3, 107), “issue-oriented interest organisations” or “political organisations” (Goul Andersen 1993). The target-dimension, however, is actually a classic element in the literature about participation. Verba thus determines the social structure of political participation by, inter alia, stating that, “The target of participatory act: The act of participation may be directed at any one number of targets: the President, congressmen, party leaders, or bureaucrats … One major distinction among targets is the extent to which they are centralized or dispersed” (Verba 1967, 61). The quote indicates that the target-dimension has first and foremost been utilised in relation to the objects or actors that participation is aimed at.

The Target-dimension has also been taken up in recent research by Norris, among others, who argues that a central dimension of new social movements is the ‘target’ that the participation is directed at, viz. the non-state activities that are directed “toward diverse actors in the public, nonprofit, and private sector. Well known examples include international human rights organisations, women’s NGOs, transnational environmental

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4 These authors combine motives and awareness into one dimension. Since there is a qualitative difference between motivation and awareness, they are separated here.
organizations, anti-sweatshop and anti-landmines networks, the peace movement, and anti-
globalization and anticapitalist forces” (Norris 2002, 193).

However, as the errand at hand is to demarcate a ‘target’ for global political consumerism, the central distinction is different, i.e.: local/national/regional/global. On this basis, global political consumption can be empirically operationalised using two partially overlapping aspects: the first aspect is the motive, i.e. for an act of consumption to qualify as a global political act, the motive must be to influence regulation and policy formulations regarding “global commons.” These motives are not necessarily tied to international human rights norms, which are emphasised by Føllesdal (2003) and others. The motives can be quite diverse; what is important is that they are oriented towards the regulation or influencing of global commons. The other aspect is the concrete actors, i.e. that the action is oriented towards influencing (multinational) corporations or political institutions that influence the regulation of global commons.

An objection against distinguishing between local/national/regional and global as a necessity with respect to operationalisation is that political consumption is potentially empowering, regardless of whether it is directed towards local, national, regional or global politics. However, the reason for it being important to include this dimension is that the reason why global political consumption is important is that it can be regarded as being a part of an embryonic global citizenship; it thereby has significance for the development of a form of global democracy. The target-dimension is important if it is to be possible to investigate the democratic consequences of global political consumerism. This raises the question about which global democratic potentials are inherent to global political consumerism? This is discussed in the following.

IV. Democratic potentials of Global Political Consumerism

Political participation is an important ingredient in any living democracy (see e.g. Almond & Verba 1963, Andersen et al. 1993; van Deth 2001). Many of the potentials of political participation have more-or-less explicitly been first and foremost based on the conventional forms of political participation, while the development of unconventional forms of political participation (e.g. political consumption, petition signing, donations, channels of user influence) have occasionally been regarded as an actual threat against the vital components of democracy, including the possibilities for reproduction of a political community (Andersen et
al. 1993, 237). Others basing their work in characteristics relating to political consumption, viz. that participation has shifted from formal political channels to informal political channels, from the input side to the output side of politics, and from collective to individual forms of political participation (Togeby et al. 2003, Chapter 4), have a more positive perspective on this development (see also Goul Andersen & Tobiasen 2001, 65-68). Additionally, there has been a good deal of normative criticism of political consumption, including that political consumption legitimises irresponsible political decision-makers, builds on manipulated and media-steered waves of sentiment, and that boycott campaigns often have innocent victims (Goul Andersen & Tobiasen 2001, 66-68). Other points of criticism are that political consumption is illegitimate to the extent that networks and organisations supporting political consumption are undemocratic and that political consumption represents cultural imperialism via the market mechanism (Føllesdal 2003, 4).

Thus, the diagnosis is that the democratic consequences of political consumption are unclear and that problems can be raised regarding political consumption from a normative democratic perspective. It is therefore somewhat pressing when Stolle and Hooghe point out that one of the central research questions in connection with new forms of participation, including political consumption, is, “… what exactly is the link between these forms of participation and democracy” (2003, 276). This question can be examined on both theoretical and empirical-analytical levels; in the task at hand I will limit myself to a theoretical response regarding the democratic basis for global political consumerism. This response is based on John Dryzek’s global discursive democracy. Before doing so, however, it can be useful to summarise how other scholars have expounded upon the democratic basis for global political consumerism.

Beck has great confidence in political consumption as considered in terms of ideals regarding direct democracy. He thus makes a statement concerning the political consumer that, “Världskoncernernas och de nationella regeringarnas handlande utsätts för tryck från världsoffentligheten. Därvid är den individuella och kollektiva delaktigheten i globala handlingssammanhang avgörende och anmärkningsvärd. Medborgaren upptäcker att köpakten är en direkt valgsedel som han alltid och överalt kan använde politiskt. I bojkotten förbinds och förenar sig på sätt det aktiva konsumtionssamhället med den direkta demokratin – och det över hela världen” (Beck 1998:98, italics in original). Beck thus has confidence in
the democratic potential inherent to political consumption and draws parallels between the act of purchasing and the ballot that can be used in a number of political contexts.

Føllesdal argues that the political consumer has a central role in the regulation of the negative side effects of globalisation. The argument here is that because the institutional arrangement on the global level is influenced by economic globalisation to a great degree, one must re-think institutions in which the political consumer is allotted a unique responsibility. In addition, Føllesdal points to a number of values that the political consumer can potentially promote, including individual freedoms, tolerance and participation. Moreover, it is assumed that political consumption can foster “a shared understanding of what it means to be a responsible and fully human person” (Føllesdal 2003, 7). In terms of democracy theory, it must be said that these values largely represent civic republican and communitarian values.

While Micheletti does not explicitly refer to democracy theory, there are a number of democratic values that can be read into her characterisation of political consumption as “individualised collective action,” that can inform us about the democratic values behind political consumption. Individualised collective action is defined as “… the practice of responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life. Individualised collective action involves a variety of different methods for practicing responsibility-taking including traditional and unconventional political tools” (Micheletti 2003, 26). This “responsibility-taking”-role “… goes beyond citizen obligations and rights and the civic republican demand that citizens participate in their territorially based community and political systems. It is part of the normative theory of cosmopolitan citizenship that considers citizens as embedded in wider issues of responsibility for nature, unborn generations, and in a variety of settings representing a diversity of private and public spheres” (Micheletti 2003, 33). The central values are thus the personalisation of the political responsibility as based on values regarding the common best of the globe and humanity.

The above indicates that (global) political consumerism can be thematised in relation to a broader debate on democracy. The positions outlined above share in common that they are normative positions attempting to develop normative ideals with regards the socio-cultural context; globalisation, reflexive modernity and individualisation. Whether the
political consumer possesses this disposition is also an empirical question, which we will briefly return to in Section V. Just to remain on the theoretical level for a moment, however, I will argue in the following that one can also conceive of an alternative democratic basis for political consumption, viz. *transnational discursive democracy* (Dryzek 2000). The reason for selecting Dryzek’s democracy theory is that it is formulated in a context of reflexive modernisation, individualisation and globalisation, which is largely the same societal context in which we have grounded global political consumerism in the above. The theory furthermore solves the problem often raised against political consumption, i.e. the voice of the political consumer is very unclear and diffuse.

The intrinsic restrictions in the task at hand do not allow for a more detailed discussion of Dryzek’s theory about transnational discursive democracy, but we must touch upon some of the central points. Dryzek bases his societal diagnosis on reflexive modernity, the risk society and globalisation, including global governance and global issue-networks.

His normative complaint regarding this development is that collective action in contemporary international systems is undemocratic on the grounds that the citizens it affects do not have the abilities or opportunities to participate in them. Dryzek defines democratic legitimacy as “…the ability or opportunity to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subjects to collective decision (…) Thus claims on behalf of or against such decisions have to be justified to these people in terms that, on reflection, they are capable of accepting. The reflective aspect is critical, because preferences can be transformed in the process of deliberation.” (Dryzek 2000, 1). In contrast to liberal democratic values, Dryzek does not place emphasis on the management or aggregation of interests, nor is his focus on rights and representation. Instead, Dryzek speaks about *authentic deliberation*, which has two conditions: first, that communication inspires reflection concerning preferences in an unconstrained manner; cheating, intimidation, threats etc. are excluded. Second, that communication must tie the particular to the general. Authentic democracy – or rather, democratisation – deals with the influence that reflexive preferences has on collective outcomes, i.e. on the content of the discourses the individual operates within and which are the sources of social order. Reflection regarding preferences implies the *contestation* of

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5 Exact references still needs to be added.
6 Dryzek defines discourses as “A shared set of assumptions and capabilities embedded in language that enables its adherents to assemble bits of sensory information that come their way into coherent wholes” (2000, 121).
discourses in the public sphere, and it is this contestation that constitutes the democratic control of discourses. Contestation first and foremost transpires in the civil society, which criticises, raises questions, and establishes new knowledge. The reason why civil society is an attractive site for democratisation is that the organisations found here are often relatively more “unconstrained” than are e.g. state organisations, i.e. interests are not frozen, but rather, they can be made into objects for reflection, which is precisely the essence in a discursive democracy. It is therefore usually democratically advantageous for the actors in civil society to be independent of states, IGOs and the like. The latter are more constrained in as much as they represent specific interests that they cannot depart from and can therefore not live up to the democratic criterion concerning reflection. The governance structure characterising the global level is thus also more conducive to democracy than are the government structures we are familiar with from the nation-state.

There are four mechanisms through which civil society can influence global discourses and global actors: first, it can impact the themes in the political discourse, thereby affecting the content of public policy, including the regulation of enterprises. Second, these movements can have a sustainable effect on the political culture, e.g. by legitimising and expecting certain forms of political action, including e.g. boycotts. Third, deliberative forums can be established within civil society in which horizontal relations also hold good. Fourth and finally, influence can be attained via protest and the creation of fear of political instability, e.g. if a boycott threatens vital interests or market shares.

But how does it make sense to interpret global political consumerism according to this theoretical framework? It is straightforward as regards collective and organised forms of political consumption, as the Global Consumer Activist network or collectively organised boycotts are political movements that can be interpreted as being part of a global civil society oriented towards global discourses concerning global economic regulation, regulation of human rights, etc. What about the individual political consumption practiced in everyday life, however? How can it represent an aspect of authentic deliberation? Here it is relevant to draw upon Dryzek’s understanding of the type of arguments that hold good in authentic deliberation. While Dryzek is greatly inspired by Habermas’ rational discourse, he also

Dryzek acknowledges that it is an empirical question whether civil society organisations are more egalitarian and more open for reflection. Moreover, while he concedes that not all civil society represents democratic vitality, the assumption is that civil society can act in a more unconstrained manner with regard to the freedom to define interests than can e.g. state actors.
includes – inspired by Iris Young – a number of other types of communication, including storytelling, testimony, greetings and rhetoric. Argument can be made for or against whether individual political consumption can be included under these categories; however, to the extent that there is a message to be delivered through political consumption, the important thing from a discursive democracy perspective must be that the individual political consumption lives up to the criteria for authentic deliberation: that it must not involve compulsion and that it connects the particular with the general, which is another way of saying that consumption is only political in as much as it is oriented towards collective problems, cf. the definition provided in Section I.

Dryzek also raises the question whether it is at all likely to assume that actors will reflect upon their own interests. The response is affirmative, which he bases on reference to reflexive modernisation and the risk society, which means that political actors cannot take things for granted, must constantly decide on matters and must thereby assume a personal responsibility for risks and the like.8

Referring to John Dryzek’s theory, one can also substantiate why it is at all important to demarcate global political consumerism instead of merely talking about political consumption in general. The reason is that global forms of political participation, including political consumption, are important because they can be perceived as a solution for the democratic problem that arises when ordinary people are influenced by decisions and discourses that are not institutionalised in democratic praxis. Global political consumption can thus be perceived as constituting a central aspect of the democratisation of global processes.

V. Empirical assessment – is political consumerism a global mode of participation and does it promote values inherent in global discursive democracy?

As touched upon earlier, recent explorative studies of political consumption on the level of the individual have suggested that political consumption is formed by the national context and discourse (Stolle, Micheletti, Hooghe 2003). Other individual-level analyses have indicated the likelihood that political consumption would actually appear to include aspects of global political consumerism (Goul Andersen & Tobiasen 2001, 57-68, and cf. the conclusion in

8 This argument thus strongly resembles the manner in which Micheletti substantiates and defines Individualized Collective Action, cf. above.
In addition, studies of campaigns and consumer groups (see among others Bennett 2003; Micheletti 2003, 58-66), which render probable that political consumption includes global aspects. The principal impression, however, is that as far as analyses on the individual level are concerned, there is still a lack of adequate empirical data. Earlier analyses are elaborated upon in the following (cf. Goul Andersen & Tobiasen, 2003, 214-216) with recent data from 2002. As I will return to below, there is by no means talk of ideal indicators, but rather, the analysis can provide an impression as to whether political consumption involves global aspects and expresses a global political citizenship identity on the level of political culture. Ideally we ought to have had indicators with which we had questioned the respondents in terms of the objectives of their political consumption; interest had then been focused on whether it has been oriented towards “global commons,” e.g. the global climate, human rights, etc. Another path of enquiry regarding global orientation in political consumption could be pursued via questions concerning the respondents’ motives regarding political consumption, thereby uncovering attitudes to the regulation of global policy issues. A third strategy would be to ask the respondents as to which problems political consumption could be regarded as an efficient solution to, including “global commons.” Finally, questions pertaining to participation in global boycott actions such as “Boycott Nike,” ”Boycott Israel,” and other global consumer activism networks, could provide insight as to whether political consumption is connected with global politics on the individual level.

Another approach to the empirical investigation of whether it is meaningful to talk about global political consumerism builds on the assumption that political consumption can be seen as an expression of global citizenship. Further to the views presented above on global citizenship as a cohesive phenomenon, we will assume that political consumption correlates with global political orientations and global political identities. Using this latter approach as a point of departure, global political consumerism will be investigated in the following. The assumption is, then, that in as much as there is a correlation between political consumption and various indicators of global political orientation and global political identity, political consumption can be interpreted as involving global aspects. It must be emphasised that there is not talk of a causal relationship. The assumption is that in so far as political consumers prove to be more globally oriented and possess a greater degree of global political
identity than persons that are not political consumers, it can then be interpreted as comprising a conglomerate, which together constitutes global citizenship on the level of political culture.

The other problem that is investigated empirically in this section is the democratic consequences of political consumption. If it is to make empirical sense (at the level of the individual) to interpret political consumption within the framework of global discursive democracy, we will expect that political consumers place greater emphasis on the values that are part of this global democratic ideal.

**Global Political Consumerism**

The hypothesis is, then, that political consumption is positively associated with global political orientations and identities. The data is from Denmark and the indicators focus on five aspects of global political orientations and identities (for questions wordings and construction of indexes, please see the appendix)⁹:

- Knowledge of international organisations (*Citizenship survey 2000*)
- Attachment to supra-national territories and communities (*Citizenship survey 2000*)
- Global solidarity (*Citizenship survey 2000*)
- Attitudes towards level of decision-making for various policy-problems (*European Social Survey 2002*)
- Involvement in organisations with a global orientation (*European Social Survey 2002*)

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<th>Dependent var./index of political consumerism</th>
<th>Index 0-10 (simple average)</th>
<th>Index 0-10 (controlled for age, gender and education)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge about international organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eta/beta</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Political consumerism and global political orientations. 2000. Average and eta/beta. N=1640.

⁹ The analysis of the 2000–data has earlier been presented in Goul Andersen & Tobiasen 2003, 214-216.
The first section in Table 1 presents the correlation between political consumption and knowledge about international organisations (EU, NATO, UN, OECD, WTO, and Amnesty International). On average, knowledge about these organisations is rather limited, but it is significantly higher among political consumers. The correlation remains, although slightly weakened, even after control for age, gender and education (eta= .20 to beta= .16).

The next section examines the correlation between political consumerism and an index of feelings of supra-national attachments: to the Nordic countries, to Europe, and to the world. In this case, however, the correlation is weak, even before we enter any controls. A possible source of explanation is that these questions are characterised by low reliability; however, it seems more likely that identity in the very narrow sense of feeling attached to some region in the world or to the entire world has very little impact on behaviour. A strong issue-orientation or a more specific sense of solidarity may have a greater impact.

The third section describes an index of relevant questions about what it takes to be a ‘good global citizen’: treating immigrants fairly, helping poor people around the world, and supporting human rights. This index correlates nicely with political consumerism (beta=...
Furthermore, a factor analysis of a battery of such ‘good citizen’-questions not only reveals that these three questions comprise a common factor; actually, they do so together with a fourth question about political consumerism (data not presented).

Finally, the last section in Table 1 enters yet another index on ‘global solidarity’ based on an item about a more equitable distribution of the Earth’s resources, and two items on human rights; this index is quite strongly correlated with the former (r= .46), and the results in terms of association with political consumerism are similar (beta= .19).

Table 2. Political consumerism and global orientations. 2002. Segment indicating that the decision level ought to be international. Percentages and Cramers V. N=1259-1493.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not political consumer</th>
<th>One act as political consumer</th>
<th>More than one act as political consumer</th>
<th>Cramers V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the environment</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting against organised crime</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies about aid to developing countries</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and refugees</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest rates</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All correlations are significant to at least the.05 level. Ns= not significant.

Table 2 illustrates the correlation between political consumption and whether one feels that a number of policy problems ought to be addressed at the international, European, national or local levels. Of the issues listed, it would appear reasonable to expect that four of them assume a more global character in an institutional and objective sense, viz. environmental problems, fighting against organised crime, policies about aid to developing countries, and immigration/refugees. It is therefore expected that a greater number of those persons
identified as political consumers than those persons identified as not being political consumers will prioritise that these issues ought to be attended to on the international level, and that such a correlation does not exist in relation to the other issue areas (defence, agriculture, social welfare, and interest rates). It is apparent from the table that it is correct that there is a correlation between political consumerism and opinions towards the level of decision for global issues, roughly as expected. The correlations are weak, however (cramers v between .09 and .11), though strongest in relation to the area that must particularly be expected to include global aspects, viz. environmental problems, where approximately 50 percent of the political consumers indicate that they ought to be attended to at the international level against 38 percent among persons who are not political consumers. While this analysis hardly provides reason to be convinced about the hypothesis regarding global political consumerism, this must also be considered in light of the rather blurry character of the indicators, as the issue-areas include local, national and global aspects.

Table 3. Political consumerism and involvement in global organisations. 2002. Segment indicating involvement within the last 12 months. Percentages and Eta/Beta. N=1493.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Humanitarian organisation</th>
<th>Environmental/peace/animal org.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, involved Percentages</td>
<td>N (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not political consumer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either boycott or boycott</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both boycott and boycott</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eta/Beta α1</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

α1 Beta; controlled for sex, age, education.
All correlations are significant to the .000 level.

Tabel 3 presents the correlations between political consumption and involvement in two types of organisations that presumably include a significant element of global orientation, viz. humanitarian organisations and environmental/peace/animal organisations. There is evidently a very strong correlation, which does not vary considerably when taking gender, age and
education into account (eta .22 and 23, respectively). Moreover, the correlation runs in the expected direction: political consumers are involved in the two types of organisations to a much greater degree than are those who are not political consumers.

Generally speaking, even though the correlation between political consumption and “decision-level” is not terribly convincing, we nevertheless find quite strong evidence indicating that political consumerism is linked to a sense of global solidarity, to knowledge about international organisations and to participation in globally oriented organisations. To repeat, this does not constitute any strong test of our macro-level interpretation of global political consumerism rooted in processes of globalisation and as a kind of embryonic global citizenship; nonetheless it adds to the plausibility of such an interpretation.

**Political consumers and democratic values**

The correlation between political consumption and democratic values will be investigated in this section. The errand is to investigate whether political consumers place less emphasis on democratic values as critics have argued, as well as investigating the type of democratic values that political consumption is particularly associated with. Further regarding the discursive democratic perspective, it becomes interesting whether political consumption is connected with democratic norms regarding reflexivity, participation and tolerance and openness towards diversity. There is again by no means talk of ideal indicators, neither is there talk of a ‘hard’ test of whether political consumers place emphasis on specific democratic values; however, the opportunity to perform explorative analysis exists.

It is apparent from Table 4 that for all of the types of democratic values where there is a significant correlation (there are no instances where these require considerable revision subsequent to accounting for gender, age and education), the correlation is positive; political consumers place greater emphasis on democratic values than do persons who do not engage in political consumption. While the correlations are typically quite weak (eta between .07 and .17), that which is important is that the direction is positive, as it does not provide much support to those who criticise political consumption as being disconnected from a political culture placing emphasis on democratic values. There are some interesting exceptions, however: while making reservations for the correlations not being statistically significant, there is actually a negative correlation between political consumption and values such as respect for the law and solidarity.
Table 4. Political consumerism and perceptions of good citizenship. 2000 and 2004. Eta and Beta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of association (Pearson r)</th>
<th>2000 Eta</th>
<th>Beta A)</th>
<th>2002 Eta</th>
<th>Beta A)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be active in politics</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be active in voluntary organisations</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To vote in elections</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law-abidingness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To always obey laws and regulations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never to try to evade taxes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support/show solidarity to people who are worse of than themselves</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To think of others more than yourself</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>Ns</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To form you opinion, independently of others</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To subject your own opinions to critical examination</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A) Beta; controlled for sex, age, school-education.

All correlations are significant to at least the .05 level. Ns= not significant.

If we then examine the values that political consumption is first and foremost associated with, we can begin by referring back to Table 1, from which it was apparent that there is a moderate correlation with norms concerning global solidarity. Next, it is apparent from Table 4 that the strongest correlation involves participatory norms (though not unambiguously regarding the norm pertaining to activity in voluntary associations) and reflexivity (though not unambiguously as concerns the norm pertaining to forming one’s opinion independently of others). On the other hand, political consumption is not associated with norms pertaining to respect for the law and the correlation with solidarity in the broader sense than global solidarity is not unambiguous, neither. Granted, the indicators are hardly adequate; but having said that, the analysis indicates that it would certainly appear to be promising to continue...
work with a hypothesis along the lines that global political consumption promotes some of the values included in normative conceptions regarding global discursive democracy.

VI. Conclusion
In this paper I have, first, shown how various authors substantiate that political consumption involves a global dimension and that it is therefore theoretically meaningful to analyse political consumption as involving a form of global political consumerism. Second, I have argued that if one is to operationalise global political consumerism in a meaningful manner, it is fruitful to supplement the repertoire of operational dimensions with a target-dimension. Third, I have argued that if global political consumerism is to be a “full global citizenship,” then it must be integrated with other dimensions of a global citizenship, including global political orientations and identities. Fourth, the paper has discussed how global discursive democracy can comprise a democratic basis for global political consumerism. Finally, an empirical analysis, though hardly building upon ideal operationalisations, makes it likely that it is meaningful to talk about global political consumerism, as promoting values included in global discursive democracy; the analysis has at least shown that it is a promising hypothesis to pursue in the future.
Appendix: questions wording and indexes

Table 1

A. Political consumerism index

This index is based on two items, with the following wording:

There are different ways of attempting to bring about improvements or resists deterioration in society. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? A. Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, B. Boycotted certain products. Response-categories: Yes/no.

Distribution on index:
Both boycott and buycott (19 pct.), at least one of these, typically buycott (28 pct.), none (53 pct.)

B. Knowledge about international organizations:

This index is based on six items, which made up one battery of questions. The exact wording was:

How much knowledge would you say you have about the following organizations and the issues they work with. If any of the organizations are unknown to you, please tell.

a) EU
b) NATO
c) UN
d) OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)
e) WTO (World Trade Organization)
f) Amnesty International.

Response-categories:
0=very little knowledge
10=very much knowledge
Respondents who answered ‘don’t know’, ‘never heard about the organization’ or ‘no answer’ are excluded from the index.

Cronbach’s Alpha: .93.

C. Attachment to above nation-state level:

This index is based on three items, which were asked as part of a question battery about attachment:

Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your attachment to the place you live, for instance to the neighborhood, the town or the country in which you live. On this scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “no attachment at all” and 10 means a “very strong attachment”, how attached are you to...

a. the neighborhood or village in which you live
b. the municipality or town in which you live
c. the region in which you live
d. Denmark as a whole
e. the Nordic countries
f. Europe
g. the world, humanity as a whole

A factor analysis results in two dimensions, where items e) the Nordic countries, f) Europe, and g) the world, humanity as a whole, falls out on one dimension.

Respondents who answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘no answer’ are excluded from the index.

Cronbach’s Alpha: .78.
D. Global solidarity I:

This index is based on three items, which were asked as part of a question battery about citizenship duties. The exact wording of the introductory text and the items were:

As you know, there are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. I would therefore like to ask you to examine the characteristics listed on the card. Looking at what you personally think, how important is it:

1. Not to treat immigrants worse than native Danes.
2. To try to help those people in the rest of the world who are worse off than you.
3. To support the observance of human rights in every part of the globe.

Respondents who answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘no answer’ are excluded from the index.

Cronbach’s Alpha: .75.

E. Global solidarity II:

This index is based on three items, which were asked as part of a question battery about (political) attitudes. The exact wording of the introductory text and the items were:

Now I have some additional questions about viewpoints from the political debate. And I would like to know if you completely agree, partly agree, partly disagree or completely disagree with the following ... [respondents could also answer ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘don’t know’]:

1. Denmark ought to work for a better distribution of the Earth’s resources, even if it means that we in countries like Denmark have to adjust to a lower standard of living.
2. The government should be forced to listen more to Amnesty International, also when Denmark is the object of accusation.
3. Denmark should take the lead in the protest against countries that violate human rights, even if it is harmful to Danish export interests.
Respondents who answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘no answer’ are excluded from the index.

Cronbach’s Alpha: .55.

Table 2

A. Political consumerism Index
This index is based on two items, with the following wording:

There are different ways of trying to improve things in Denmark or to help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following? A. Boycotted certain products. B. Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons. Response-categories: Yes/No.

Distribution on index:
Both boycott and buycott (19 pct.), at least one of these (29 pct.), none (52 pct.)

B. Preferred decision-level

Question wording:

Policies can be decided at different levels. Using this card, at which level do you think the following policies should mainly be decided?

A… protecting the environment
B… fighting against organised crime
C… agriculture
D… defence
E… social welfare
F… aid to developing countries
G… immigration and refugees
H... interest rates

Response-categories:

1. International level
2. European level
3. National level
4. Regional or local level

Table 3

Question-wording:

For each of the voluntary organisations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and if so, which?

A.... an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants
B.... an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights

The question asks about membership, participation in the organisation, donation of money, and voluntary work. For the purpose here, we only include the variable 0=none, involvement 1=some kind of involvement.

Table 4

Citizenship – survey 2000:

Question-wording:

As you know, there are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. I would therefore like to ask you to examine the characteristics listed on the card. Looking at what you personally think, how important is it:
A. To show solidarity with people who are worse off than yourself
B. To vote in public elections
C. Never to evade taxes
D. To form your own opinion independently of others
E. Always to obey laws and regulations
F. To be active in organisations
G. To think of others more than yourself
H. To subject your own opinions to critical examination

Response-category: scale running from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (very important).

European Social Survey 2002:

Question-wording:

To be a good citizen, how important would you say it is for a person to …
A … support people who are worse off than themselves
B… vote in elections
C… always to obey laws and regulations
D… form their own opinion, independently of others
E… be active in voluntary organisations
F… be active in politics

Response-category: scale running from 0 (extremely unimportant) to 10 (extremely important)
References


Hein, Rasmussen 1997…


