On Measuring Political Consumerism: An Exploratory Study Among Young People in the UK and in Greece

Georgios Kyroglou1 · Matt Henn2

Accepted: 9 April 2022 / Published online: 17 May 2022
© The Author(s) 2022

Abstract
Political consumerism consists of boycotting and boycotting and refers to the conscious and consistent use of the market for ethical, environmental and eventually political considerations. Nevertheless, at present there is no academic consensus about how best to conceptualise and empirically measure this form of political participation. The aim of this article is to address this gap by constructing a comprehensive survey instrument to measure political consumerism, in the form of the ‘Political Consumerism Index’ (PCI). This PCI is tested for validity and reliability and applied to a primary sample of young people in the UK and Greece, to shed light on the differing underlying motivations of young political consumers in the two countries. A combination of linear regression analysis and a series of non-parametric tests reveal the distinct advantages of this PCI over the commonly-used dichotomous behavioural measures of political consumerism. Our analysis reveals that political consumerism in both the UK and Greece is driven by young people’s conviction about the effectiveness of their consumer behaviour, their environmental motivations and their willingness to sign online petitions or join protests. There are also important differences across the two groups. Young UK political consumers are more likely to be female, relatively older, with a stronger local community outlook and postmaterialist sensitivities. Instead, young political consumers in Greece demonstrate both a generalised rejection of partisan politics and believe that market competition brings out the worst in people, while they perceive political consumerism as a means to support their national economy.

Keywords Political consumerism · Boycott · Buycott · Political participation · Survey research · Empirical measurement

Georgios Kyroglou
georgios.kyroglou@bristol.ac.uk
Matt Henn
matt.henn@ntu.ac.uk

1 School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK
2 Department of Social and Political Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK
1 Introduction

The term ‘political consumerism’ refers to citizens’ use of boycotting and buycotting as they seek to influence political outcomes within the marketplace, rather than through more traditional routes such as voting. It has been widely theorised as a lifestyle form of political participation, which reflects the progressively converging roles of citizens and consumers (Boström et al., 2019; Kyroglou & Henn, 2017). Evidence suggests that young people in particular are increasingly attracted to political consumerism as it offers them an opportunity to harness their individual consumer power to collectively express their political, ethical, and environmental concerns (Kyroglou & Henn, 2021; Stolle et al., 2010). Although several studies have attempted to assess the determinants of political consumerism (Atkinson, 2015; Copeland, 2014a), their findings are often contradictory. As a result, to this day, there is little academic consensus with respect to the demographic, attitudinal and behavioural determinants (Deegan-Krause, 2007) of political consumerism, especially since the varying analytical instruments used in each study significantly affect the empirical insights on the subject. The aim of this article is to address this gap by constructing a valid and reliable survey tool for the study of political consumerism—the Political Consumerism Index (PCI). Subsequently, it will test the PCI on a primary sample of young people from a country of the European north (the United Kingdom), and one of the European south (Greece), so as to identify the driving factors underpinning this form of political participation in different political and market contexts. Before discussing the construction of the PCI however, it is essential to delimit the existing varieties of political consumerism—without doing so, each market-oriented action might potentially be considered as political consumerism, eventually trivialising its political character. Gundelach (2020, p. 309) forewarns that, formerly “…apolitical activities such as conscious purchasing behaviour are all too easily interpreted as political participation, which undermines the political science concept of political participation”. This is particularly important since the findings of studies on the topic are likely to vary, depending on the definitions of the concept used. A precise delineation of what we mean by ‘political consumerism’ therefore, remains indispensable in order to avoid misleading comparisons and inaccurate conclusions.

The same applies to the way we measure political consumerism. The lack of a widely accepted and comprehensive survey instrument prevents researchers from consistently investigating this form of political participation and hinders comparability between different contexts. Although several studies emphasise the need to develop a comprehensive index (Gundelach, 2020; Stolle et al., 2005) capable of capturing the different behavioural components of political consumerism, along with its extent (breadth) and intensity (depth), we are still a long way from an academic consensus on the subject.

The first section of this article therefore problematises the concept of political consumerism as a form of political participation. Although several terms have often been used interchangeably to refer to the use of the market for political means, it is argued that on closer examination, these are not really referring to separate forms of political action (Zorell, 2019a). Instead, these alternative terms may be understood as subparts of the more inclusive term of ‘political consumerism’. Most scholars agree that political consumerism consists of two separate praxial elements—namely positive (buycotting) and negative (boycotting) political consumerism (Stolle et al., 2005; Zorell, 2019a). However, Copeland and Boulianne (2020, p. 9) report that most research tends to operationalise political consumerism as boycotting alone, while fewer studies focus exclusively on buycotting. Consequently,
the term political consumerism is often used interchangeably to denote either boycotting or buycotting (and more often boycotting only), blurring the boundaries between the two.

The second section of the article argues that political consumerism research should take into consideration both of these behavioural expressions of political consumerism—buycotting and boycotting. The case is made that using the general term ‘political consumerism’ to signify exclusive engagement in buycotts or in boycotts only (or in either or in both), fails to capture the differing underlying motivations, values and attitudes of citizens who take part in such actions—and may thus confound our understanding of this form of political participation.

The standard approach of most quantitative research in the field is to “combine one measure of boycotting and one measure of boycotting into a single, dichotomous variable coded 0 if the respondent did not engage in political consumerism and 1 if the respondent engaged in at least one mode of political consumerism” (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020, p. 9). However, we make the case that taking into account only the behavioural expressions of political consumerism—either separately or in combination—in isolation from the extent and intensity of the phenomenon, fails to account for the frequency and the responsibility behind the act.

Addressing this gap, the aim of this article is twofold. First and foremost, stands the question of operationalisation. How should we measure political consumerism? How can we make sure that the measure used captures those citizens-consumers (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017) who consistently and intentionally purchase (buycotters), or refrain from buying (boycotters), products or services for environmental, ethical or political considerations? This remains an issue of critical concern in the field, as we are still a long way from an intuitive, but comprehensive quantitative instrument that is capable of capturing political consumerism’s praxial components, along with the extent and intensity of the phenomenon, in a single index.

Secondly, notwithstanding a continuous increase and expansion in political consumerist activities (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020; Gundelach, 2020), not much is known about the profile, attitudes and motivations of political consumers (Baek, 2010; Dhaoui et al., 2020). By using the PCI as the dependent variable in an exploratory analysis among a primary sample of 634 young people from the differing social, economic and political contexts of the UK and Greece, we aim to shed some light in this direction. The aim of the exploratory study is again twofold: it aspires a) to identify the respective demographic, attitudinal and motivational determinants in each country, and in doing so b) to reveal the comparative benefits of the PCI to the—commonly used—dichotomous praxial variables, making in this way both an analytical and an empirical contribution to the study of political consumerism as a form of political participation.

2 Varieties of Political Consumerism

The aims and motivations underlying citizens’ decisions to engage in acts of political consumption (Copeland, 2014b), the variety of political consumerist approaches (Lekakis, 2013, 2015; Zorell, 2018), and the various forms that it has assumed across countries (Kyroglou & Henn, 2020; Pellantini-Simányi & Gulyás, 2018) and over time (Micheletti et al., 2008), have each already been the focus of an extensive body of academic literature. However, the focus of enquiry varies considerably in each study. For Zorell (2018), there are two main dimensions which are given particular attention. Firstly, some scholars focus
their research on the content of political consumerism (essentially the underlying intent of political consumers) by seeking to trace the variety of motivations, attitudes and aims underpinning buycotting and boycotting. Secondly, other scholars emphasise the “shape of the action” (2018, p. 41); that is, the different ways through which these motivations, attitudes and aims are expressed through actions. This second dimension includes the distinction between positive and negative consumption—via boycotting, buycotting or some combination of both.

With regards to the ‘content’ of political consumerism, several terms that seek to capture the underlying intent are often used interchangeably, even though the conceptual understanding attached to each varies. For example, issue-specific terms such as ‘sustainable consumption’, ‘ethical consumerism’ or ‘green buying behaviour’ (Andorfer, 2013; Atkinson & Kim, 2015; Rumpala, 2011) have often been used to denote the specific content behind the act in isolation—namely sustainability, ethical or environmental concerns. Other scholars however, may use the same issue-specific term but in its general context (Atkinson & Kim, 2015). Nevertheless, a closer look at the differing use of issue-specific terms within the relevant literature “reveals that, ultimately, all these terms are rather specialised sub-concepts which allude to the characteristics of a product, but they are not truly distinct types of actions used to communicate a political preference” (Zorell, 2019b, p. 41, 42).

In other words, the deliberate purchase of a product based on sustainable, ethical, or green considerations reflects the underlying motivations behind such a purchase; each could be categorised alongside general drivers of conventional purchases such as price, quality or brand loyalty (Zorell, 2019b). Just as voting—for example—may be driven by environmental, ethical, or green considerations (as well as conservative, liberal or nationalist ideological orientations), so may political consumerism be driven by similar motivations. However, unless one is examining a specific motivation behind one’s voting decisions, voting is generally perceived as a single mode of political participation—and is thus measured as such.

The use of such issue-specific terms, involves thus the risk of shifting the focus of enquiry from the actual act of political participation to its underlying content. Instead, the more general term ‘political consumerism’, presents the benefit of being able to accommodate all the various motivational sub-categories into one. In this way, political consumerism may stand alongside other types of political participation, such as voting, signing a petition, or demonstrating. When studying political engagement via the use of the market as a political arena therefore, the general term ‘political consumerism’ appears to be more accurate than the intent-driven terms ‘green’ or ‘ethical consumption’.

With regards to the second dimension—that is, the distinction between the positive and the negative behavioural forms of political consumption—the use of the term also varies significantly. This variation, however, differs from the one above insofar it does not relate to the underlying intent behind purchasing behaviours, but refers instead to the way that the individual consumer is acting. It thus captures the different ways this intent is being expressed with actions; that is, it captures political consumerism’s ‘praxial’ dimension. This may be expressed predominately in two ways: positive (buycotting) and negative (boycotting) political consumerism. However, Micheletti et al. (2012) have expanded the conceptual variation of political consumerism, identifying two additional praxial modes alongside buycotting and boycotting. These are ‘discursive actions’ and ‘lifestyle choices’ (Micheletti et al., 2012).

‘Discursive actions’ are defined as “the expression of opinions about corporate policy and practice and even consumer culture in a variety of communicative efforts and venues”
(Micheletti et al., 2012, p. 146). Instead, ‘lifestyle choices’ are classified as “the decision to integrate environmentally, ethically and politically responsible action consistently into one’s everyday life” (Micheletti et al., 2012, p. 145). In other words, political consumerism as a discursive action emphasises the extent of ‘openness’ behind one’s political consumerist activities, whereas ‘lifestyle choices’ relate to the frequency or consistency of the said action throughout an individual’s life. In response to the expanded classification offered by Micheletti et al. Zorell (2019a, pp. 42–47) states that notwithstanding if one boycotts or boycotts openly or more privately, or the frequency of such behaviour, the act itself consists essentially of either supporting a certain product or firm (buycotting), or deliberately rejecting it (boycotting).

Moreover, each of these two additional types of political consumerism may also involve other forms of political participation beyond buycotting or boycotting. For example, discursive actions may involve openly demonstrating, or circulating a petition or even exchanging emails as it occurred during the iconic mobilisation against the use of sweat-shops by Nike and other multinational corporations during the early 2000s. Similarly, with regards to lifestyle choices one may decide for example, to not only boycott meat and dairy products, but also to grow their own sustainable, organic plants privately in their backyard (White, 2011) or more openly in urban community gardens; as a way of building transitions towards post-capitalist urban commons (Chatterton, 2016). Consequently, this conceptualisation may conflate political consumerism to other forms of political participation, resulting eventually into what van Deth (2014, p. 351) has described as a ‘theory of everything’.

Summarising, both ‘discursive actions’ and ‘lifestyle choices’ encompass variable behavioural forms of political participation which may move beyond political consumerism (as for example, signing petitions, demonstrating or even voting). Therefore, instead of conceptualising them as separate variants of political consumerism next to boycotting and boycotting, they may instead be understood as extra features indicating the extent (in the case of discursive actions), and the intensity (in the case of lifestyle choices) of one’s involvement in political consumerism.

As a consequence, this makes them especially difficult to capture in political participation research. This is evidenced by the general lack of studies presenting empirical data on either discursive actions or lifestyle choices, particularly on a comparative, cross-national level (Micheletti et al., 2012; Zorell, 2019b, p. 43). Therefore, instead of conflating different forms of political participation, at the additional risk of raising comparability issues, concentrating exclusively on boycotting and boycotting seems to be the most fruitful approach when researching political consumerism. This is therefore the approach that will be followed in this article.

Nevertheless, in this article we acknowledge a further definitional distinction: that between ‘acts of political consumption’ and ‘political consumerism’. Although often used interchangeably in the literature (Atkinson, 2015) we will explicitly use ‘political consumption’ with reference to the acts of buycotting and boycotting for ethical, political or environmental reasons, that is, only the praxial dimension. By way of contrast, with the broader term ‘political consumerism’ we will denote those acts of political consumption which are enhanced by consistent and intentional responsibility-taking; that is the praxial dimension (buycotting and boycotting or both) coupled with the extent and intensity of the said acts. This distinction has been particularly useful in constructing our Political Consumerism Index (PCI) and will be further explored in the methodology section.

Within the praxial dimension of political consumption, even though most scholars acknowledge boycotting and buycotting as key behavioural components of political consumerism, only a handful of studies consistently scrutinise each in their own rights (Baek,
Instead, most research fails to distinguish between the two, often discussing political consumerism as a unified concept (Micheletti et al., 2012; Newman & Bartels, 2011). In some of these studies, this practice is unproblematic. For example, if political consumerism is being studied next to other forms of political participation, distinguishing between buycotting and boycotting may indeed not be necessary. For instance, Newman and Bartels (2011), perceive political consumerism as a single unified phenomenon and scrutinise it as a way of achieving policy objectives and expressing political preferences, in comparison to other means of political participation. For Newman and Bartels therefore, the emphasis lies on the positioning of political consumerism as a single-dimensional phenomenon alongside other repertoires of political participation, rather than highlighting the different drivers underlying buying and boycotting.

Nevertheless, boycotting and boycotting are based on fundamentally dissimilar motivations. On the one hand, boycotting entails the deliberate decision to purchase a certain product or support a specific organisation as a means to reward their ethical production process, or their business conduct in relation to environmental concerns. As such, it may be perceived as a form of economic voting (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017). Instead, boycotting entails the deliberate rejection of the business conduct of certain firms and the production processes behind certain products, and as such it may be understood as a form of economic ostracism. As a form of political participation therefore, one would expect boycotting to share similarities with politics of dissent, as for example demonstrations (Pickard, 2018). In contrast, boycotting—understood as a form of economic voting—would instead share similarities with electoral participation.

In view of the differing underlying motivations behind the two behavioural expressions of political consumerism, one may regard boycotting as an appropriate form of political participation for certain political, ethical or environmental claims, and boycotting for others. For this reason, when the object of analysis is political consumption in itself (and not in relation to other forms of political participation), using the general term to indicate engagement in either boycotting or boycotting, perceived as a unified phenomenon bears the risk of misinterpreting its ‘content’. Nevertheless, the findings of much of the research that considers citizens’ motivations to consume politically, often focus on a single, archetypal ‘political consumer’ and do not distinguish between the differing motivations of boycotters and boycotters. Doing so however, may yield significantly different (or even contradictory) results, depending on whether political consumption is being measured by engagement in boycotting or in boycotting.

To conclude, this section has argued that when studying political consumerism as a form of political participation, the more comprehensive term of ‘political consumerism’ is preferable to the more particularised terms ‘ethical’ and ‘green’ consumerism, or ‘sustainable consumption’—it allows the researcher to focus on the praxial component of the activity, rather than on its content (Zorell, 2019b, p. 47). Within this praxial dimension, however, treating boycotting and boycotting interchangeably is likely to underestimate their differences: drivers of boycotting may thus be erroneously attributed also to boycotters, or to those who engage in both. Moreover, the magnitude of these effects may also be erroneously reported if, for example, they are positive for boycotting and negative for boycotting, cancelling each other out. Furthermore, giving emphasis only to the praxial elements of political consumerism (that is in the actions only of boycotting or boycotting), may fail to capture the extent (breadth) and the intensity (depth) of one’s involvement in political consumerism. For this reason, we differentiate between the behavioural term ‘political consumption’ to the more consistent and intentional ‘political consumerism’.
In response to similar observations, Stolle et al. (2005) have already argued for the development of an Index of Political Consumerism. However, the index they developed has since been used only sporadically and received relatively little academic traction, arguably because of its complex operationalisation. More recently, Gundelach (2020) has reopened the issue of the challenges associated with the empirical measurement of political consumerism. Providing three separate alternatives, this work aimed to capture both the extent and the intensity of political consumerism by using one main question and several follow-up items (Gundelach, 2020, p. 314).

This has undoubtedly been a significant step in the right direction. However, despite aiming “to construe a short and practical survey instrument, which would be suited for space-limited international surveys” (2020, p. 317), the author’s determination “to pay explicit attention to political motives of consumption behaviour to avoid significant over-estimation of political consumerism” (Gundelach, 2020, p. 324) renders all three variants considerably time-consuming and thus impractical for time and space-limited surveys. Gundelach, concedes that the first and third variants proposed (with the inclusion of more than 20 questions) are particularly time-consuming, whereas the second burdens the respondent with its “cognitive complexity” (2020, p. 325).

The present article engages with, and builds upon previous research, and proposes a more intuitive variation, in the form of the ‘Political Consumerism Index’ (PCI), which will subsequently be assessed for validity and reliability. The PCI will then be used as the dependent variable for the analysis of the respective political demographic, attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of young political consumers from the UK and from Greece.

3 Research Questions and Methodology

This study adopts a paired-country comparison research design. The decision to compare and contrast political consumerism in the UK and in Greece, has been dictated by both their similarities, but also by the differences of the expressions of political consumerism in each. The 2017–2020 wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) reports that young people up to 29 years of age in Greece had engaged or were willing to engage in boycotts by 61.4%, while the same figure in the UK was 55.6%. These figures among the two countries are essentially comparable at the European level, as it can be seen in Fig. 1.

However, available literature paints a picture of political consumerism in the UK driven primarily by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) schemes, which seek to monetise on consumers’ demand for ethical and political responsibility (Soulas and Clark, 2013). For example, latest figures for the value of all ethical purchases in the UK recorded an 8.5% rate of growth during 2018 to an impressive £38 billion of overall value, whereas consumers’ ethical spending in their local community surged by 11.7% (Triodos, 2018). The latter figures exhibit a continuous growth trend for the thirteenth consecutive year, reflecting the persisting appeal of political consumerism, despite the ongoing financial crisis.

Instead, political consumerist initiatives in the European south seem to be shifting away from the mainstream market supply, so as to include local-based exchange networks, alternative currency systems, time-banks and community organisations (Sotiropoulou, 2012); that is, grassroots civic initiatives that seek to experiment in practice with the theoretical frameworks of Economies of De-growth and the Transition Movement (Schneider et al., 2010). Although the expansion of such initiatives can be observed across Europe, these are particularly prominent in the European south since they are being perceived as alternative,
inclusive and participatory ways of withstanding the disproportionately adverse effects of the 2008 global financial crisis, both on practical (Petmesidou, 2016), but also on ideological terms (Kousis, 2017).

As the greatest part of existing research on political consumerism is based either on large population studies or on independent case studies (Copeland & Boulianne, 2020), a paired-country comparison approach is expected to offer useful insights in the field. Moreover, the respective PCI scores of our survey respondents in Greece and in the UK have been found non-statistically different, providing thus an additional advantage: having effectively comparable dependent variables in both countries (that is political consumerism as measured by the PCI), allows us to unpack the country-specific drivers behind political consumerism in each.

Following Stolle et al. (2005), this study acknowledges four broad areas of inquiry into the study of political consumerism. These are outlined in the research questions below:

RQ 1: Firstly, who are the young political consumers in the two countries? Previous research describes political consumerism as a ‘gendered’ form of political participation, with women being particularly more likely than men to engage (Stolle and Micheletti, 2006). Also, given the centrality that political consumerism places on the market, do income levels, class and socio-economic factors also play a role in young people’s decision...
to use the market as a political arena? Stolle et al., (2005, p. 252) argue that “income makes a difference here; citizens with deeper pockets might be able to afford ethical products (…) while those with more limited budgets might not”.

RQ 2: A second issue of concern is how these economic conditions may affect the value orientations and the social embeddedness of young political consumers. Post-modernisation literature (Inglehart, 1997) has consistently emphasised the role of the prevalent economic conditions during one’s formative years, towards the development and crystallisation of postmaterialist values. These in turn, have been found to be associated with a perceived increase of lifestyle forms of political participation. However, this theory was developed in times of unprecedented economic prosperity. Would the same apply to contemporary young political consumers in the UK and in Greece, who are socialised in times of economic austerity instead (Henn et al., 2017)? Further to this, how does satisfaction with the market-environment or the internalisation of neoliberal governmentality (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017) affect their decisions to use the market as an arena for politics?

RQ 3: A third issue derives from social capital theory, which broadly put, suggests that embeddedness in informal networks such as voluntary associations, promotes generalised and particularised social trust, and allows young citizens to overcome collective action problems (Putnam, 1995). Mobilisation theory (Almond and Verba, 1963) expands on this rationale, suggesting that networks and associations facilitate recruitment for political participatory acts (Almond and Verba, 1963). The theory of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006) in turn, implies that the personal outlook of the agent affects their conception of the ingroup and may further enhance the engagement of young people in participatory activities. Kyroglou and Henn (2021) have recently discerned an association between an ‘expanded’ identity outlook, observing that it impacts on young people’s political consumerist motivations. A related question here is, what is the role of the formation of individual and collective identities on young peoples’ propensity to engage in political consumerism?

RQ 4: Finally, what is the relationship between political consumerism and other forms of participation? From the standpoint of risk society and sub-politics (Beck, 1992), we should expect that political consumers would be less trusting of political institutions and would therefore utilise alternative ways of making their voices heard. Is however such a relationship exclusive, in that political consumerism is ‘crowding-out’ institutional forms of political participation? Or are young political consumers likely to engage in boycotting and buycotting along other, both electoral and contentious (Pickard, 2018; Theocharis and van Deth, 2018) forms of political participation?

Of course, the research questions above cannot be examined in isolation, especially since they are largely interrelated. Our analysis will therefore assume a multi-layered process (Zorell, 2019c) with regards to the examination of political consumerism in providing useful insights on the research questions above. In doing so, it will also discuss the relative advantages of the use of the PCI, as opposed to the use of dichotomous behavioural measures of political consumption.

With regards to our independent variables, several questions were adapted from the European Social Survey (ESS) and the World Values Survey (WVS). All of the variables included in the study are outlined in Table 1 below. These are categorised in eight broad thematic categories, which in turn reflect the thematic areas of inquiry above.

Our dataset consists of a primary sample of young people from a survey disseminated and completed in 2018. A convenience sampling method yielded 634 completed responses among young people, 18 to 29 years of age, from both Greece (n=313) and the UK.
The UK participants were recruited at Nottingham Trent University while the participants from Greece were from the National and Technological University of Athens. The selection of these educational institutions was made because they provide relatively easy access to a large pool of respondents within the age cohorts of concern. This article therefore does not make claims for generalisability of its findings. Instead, it primarily aims to test the PCI on differing samples, and to unveil its analytical advantages over the use of the dichotomous behavioural variables, while at the same time providing useful insights with regards to the research questions outlined above.

Out of the 634 respondents, 49.4% were respondents from Greece, while the remaining 50.6% were from the UK, for an almost equally divided sample. Across the overall sample, 64.5% (n = 409 respondents) reported that they had actively engaged in buycotts in the past 12 months, as opposed to 59.6% (n = 378) who took part in boycotts. The percentage of those who engaged in either or both, reaches 73.2% (n = 464), indicating that political consumption continues to be one of the most widespread forms of political engagement, especially among the young (Stolle et al., 2010).

Our analysis consists of two parts: Firstly, a stepwise linear regression of all the variables of each thematic category in Table 1, against the PCI score of each respondent (in both the UK and Greece). This allows us to narrow down the 56 variables included in our survey to a handful of statistically significant predictors for each country.

Secondly, a series of non-parametric (Chi-square) tests for each of the drivers outlined in the previous step. This allows us to further test their relationship with the individual

---

1 A scoping study of previous research indicated that such a sample size was reasonable, considering the exploratory nature of this study. For example, in their seminal and widely influential study on political consumerism, Stolle et al. (2005) based their study on a sample of 372 university students from Canada, 284 from Sweden, and 187 from Belgium.
behavioural components of political consumerism (i.e. buycotting only; boycotting only; and engagement in either or both). Measures of statistical significance are reported and discussed both across the overall distribution (p-values), as well as within the categories (adj.res.).

However, before proceeding with the analysis, we first need to develop our dependent variable in the form of the PCI. The section that follows discusses the construction of the PCI and subsequently tests it for validity and reliability, making in this way a significant methodological contribution in the field.

4 Constructing the Political Consumerism Index (PCI)

It has been argued above that any attempt to measure political consumerism as a single unified concept carries with it the risk of misinterpreting one’s motivations behind the action, whether that involves positive (buycotting) or negative (boycotting) consumerism. Although researching buycotting and boycotting as distinct behavioural expressions may be more revealing than using a cumulative measure (‘buy/boycotters’)2, either approach by itself fails to fully capture the extent and intensity of political consumerism. It follows therefore, that any effective operationalisation of political consumerism needs to incorporate both of these dimensions (extent and intensity) in addition to its behavioural components. For Stolle et al. (2005), there are three elements which need to be taken into consideration for a meaningful analysis of political consumerism as a form of political participation. These are (a) behaviour, (b) motivation, and (c) frequency.

The first element—behaviour—refers to the two praxial components of political consumption. Obviously, the PCI needs to take into consideration whether consumers buycott or boycott certain goods and services before they may be classified as political consumers. This implies that citizens who never make any independent consumer decisions, either because they do not have their own income, or because they do not engage in shopping, are automatically excluded from this form of political participation. Most existing large-scale studies only include a cumulative measure (‘buy/boycotters’), but as already discussed, distinguishing between its praxial components may reveal a different aspect of political consumption. For this reason, the PCI developed here, incorporates both positive (buycotting) and negative (boycotting) political consumption and also attributes additional weight when engaging in both.

The second element refers to the motivation behind the action. According to its commonly used working definition, political consumerism involves the act of deliberately buying or refusing to buy certain goods and services for ethical, environmental and political considerations (Stolle et al., 2005). It is possible that individuals buy fair-trade or organic products simply because they are partial to how they taste or because they were on sale. For example, some people may never go to McDonald’s (or other multinational fast-food franchises) not because they protest against what they consider to be the cultural hegemony of Americanism (Bové & Dufour, 2002)—but simply because they do not like hamburgers. Stolle et al. therefore argue that for political consumers to be classified as such, they need to be “motivated by ethical or political considerations, or at least by the wish to change social conditions, either with or without relying on the political system” (Stolle et al., 2005, p. 255). The second component of the PCI therefore is designed to capture how responsible

---

2 For the purposes of this article, ‘buy/boycotters’ includes those who either boycott or boycott, or those who engage in both.
respondents feel with regards to the environmental, ethical or political impact of their purchasing decisions; that is, the intensity behind their consumption behaviour.

The third element of the PCI in turn, refers to the extent, or frequency behind these consumption patterns. Although an isolated act of political consumption can be important in and by itself (and would automatically classify the agent of the action as a political consumer in the majority of published studies on the subject), the PCI suggests that the habitual consistency of these actions is equally important. Consequently, regular involvement in political consumerism activities needs also to be considered and distinguished from sporadic engagement. The third component of the PCI, therefore, seeks to capture the commitment to political consumerism, whereby consumers who engage in it often or almost always when shopping, are attributed with greater weight in their PCI scores. Summarising, the respondent’s engagement in political consumerism will be operationalised by a single scale, consisting of three components which will capture the participants’ behavioural, attitudinal and habitual patterns.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was considered to be the most appropriate dimension reduction technique for constructing the PCI. Although Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is much more common in the social sciences, it is considered to be more of a theory-generating procedure. CFA instead, is a theory-generated process and is therefore preferred when the index is based on a strong theoretical or empirical foundation. The CFA allows the researcher to specify the exact factor model in advance and is mainly used when constructing new scales to further ensure that the items load appropriately on their hypothesised constructs. In turn, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is often used as an initial step in CFA as it provides information regarding the maximum number and nature of factors involved (Field, 2017). In our case, the theory has dictated the inclusion of all three behavioural, attitudinal and habitual components and we wanted to confirm that these indeed load together on the component plot in rotated space in Fig. 2.

![Component Plot in Rotated Space](attachment:image.png)

**Fig. 2** Component plot in rotated space with all items indicating 2 separate factor loadings: (PCI = \{Q17.1, Q18, Q19, Q20\} and PCE = \{Q15.1, Q16.1\})
Moreover, we also wanted to confirm against the inclusion of any additional theory-driven components. For instance, Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti refer to the attitudinal component of their political consumerism index, as the extent to which “respondents believe in the political effectiveness of buying certain products and services, in addition to their view on whether citizens in general have the responsibility to choose the ‘right’ company (ethically or politically speaking that is) from which to buy products and services” (2005, p. 11). However, it is important to clarify that the attitudinal component of the PCI in this study will be capturing only the responsibility aspect behind one’s consumer decisions and not its effectiveness. This is because when testing the PCI index for validity through a Principal Component Analysis (PCA), with the inclusion of the behavioural (BUY and BOY), Responsibility (RES) and Frequency (FRE), along with both of the Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE-Local and PCE-Global) variables, the component plot in rotated space indicated two separate factor loadings. Figure 2 again illustrates these differences.

The exclusion of the Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE) from the PCI as measured in this study, significantly improves the index previously developed by Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti (2005), since their factor analysis revealed several similar difficulties as discussed above. Although their reliability analysis confirmed that their index provided a reliable tool for the measurement of political consumerism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, their factor analysis proved to be considerably more problematic. In their article they report that their factor analysis revealed that the more reflexive survey questions concerning whether respondents perceived boycotting as an effective tool for social change, displayed similarly low factor loadings. This was also the case with respect to their industry-specific ethical considerations when choosing restaurants, banks, and paper products. Generally, attitudes of an ethical nature did not load as sturdily on their factor analysis as behaviours did. For this reason, both industry-specific questions and consumer effectiveness were dropped from the PCI in the present study; instead we assess political consumerism as a phenomenon which transcends the effectiveness of the said behaviour in the various industries of the economy.

Finally, the inclusion of 13 items for the attitudinal component of Stolle and Micheletti’s index seemed to be an overly complicated and time-consuming method for measuring political consumerism, especially for national polls and surveys which often suffer from financial and time constraints. These items would only hamper the subsequent use of the index in future studies. Instead, in this article we have devised a much easier-to-use and time-efficient scale. The measurement of the PCI has thus been reduced to a single manageable scale, consisting of only four variables and three components. These are (a) behaviour (‘BUY’ and ‘BOY’), (b) attitude (measured as consumer responsibility ‘RES’), and (c) habitual consistency or frequency (‘FRE’). The PCI therefore assumes the following form:

\[ \text{PCI} = (\text{BUY} + \text{BOY}) \times (\text{RES} + \text{FRE}). \]

3 Drawing from consumer studies research, the PCE is being defined as the extent to which consumers have confidence in their individual consumer behaviour as a means of solving environmental issues. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) suggest that it is a critical factor in explaining environmental consumer behaviour. Here we distinguish between PCE-Global for the word as a whole, and PCE-Local for the respondent’s local community.

4 Cronbach’s alpha for their 13-items battery was .86; higher that the .70 reliability cut-off point, confirming that their index consistently measured the phenomenon.
The actual phrasing of the 4 questions included in the PCI are as follows (see also Appendix 1):

BUY: In the past 12 months, did you actively purchase one product or brand over another for ethical, environmental or political reasons? (0: No; 1: Yes).

BOY: In the past 12 months, did you actively refuse to purchase a product or brand based on ethical, environmental or political considerations? (0: No; 1: Yes).

RES: How responsible do you feel with regards to choosing the 'right' brand when you go shopping? (five-point scale where 0 = Not at all responsible, and 4 = Very responsible).

FRE: How often do you purchase, or avoid purchasing certain products, services or brands for ethical, environmental or political considerations? (five-point scale where 0 = Hardly ever, and 4 = Every time I go shopping).

With regards to the distinction between political consumption and political consumerism therefore, the component (BUY + BOY) captures only the former, i.e. those acts of political consumption for ethical, political or environmental considerations; whereas the inclusion of the component (RES + FRE) ensures that these acts are both consistent (FRE) and intentional (RES) for them to be considered as political consumerism.

BUY and BOY are both dichotomous variables, which assume the value ‘0’ if the respondents have not deliberately purchased (buycotted), or if they have not purposely refrained from buying (boycotted), a product or brand for political, ethical and environmental considerations in the previous 12 months. Conversely, they assume the value ‘1’ if the respondents have engaged in these activities over the same period. As a result, the combined behavioural component (BUY + BOY) assumes the value ‘0’ if the respondents have engaged in neither of the two activities; ‘1’ if they have engaged in either buycotting or boycotting only; and ‘2’ if they have engaged in both. The variable RES ranges from 0 (‘Not at all responsible’) to 4 (‘Very responsible’). Likewise, the variable FRE ranges from 0 (‘Hardly ever’) to 4 (‘Every time I go shopping’). As a result, the combined component (RES + FRE) may assume values ranging from 0 to 8.

This means that if the respondent has engaged in either buycotting or boycotting or both (values 1 and 2), but they reported not being ‘responsible’ when they did, and they simultaneously reported doing so ‘Hardly ever’ in the past 12 months, the component (RES + FRE) will assume the value ‘0’, eventually nullifying the PCI. Conversely, if the respondents reported high responsibility and high frequency with regards to their consumer decisions, but they reported that they had not engaged in either buycotting or boycotting in the past 12 months, the component (BUY + BOY) will similarly assume the value ‘0’, similarly nullifying the PCI. If however, the respondent has engaged in both buycotting and boycotting, then (BUY + BOY) assumes the value ‘2’, eventually doubling their score in (RES + FRE). The PCI therefore takes the form of a continuous scale, ranging from 0 to 16.

Testing for reliability, Fig. 3 below reports that the Cronbach’s Alpha score was above the conventional cut-off point of 0.700, suggesting that the PCI is highly reliable, precise, reproducible, and consistent from one testing occasion to another. That is, if the survey was repeated with a different group of respondents, then broadly the same results would be obtained.

![Fig. 3](image-url)
Moreover, Fig. 4 reports that the PCI in this study is also reliable for both the subsamples of the UK (Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.720) and Greece (Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.734), further supporting the reliability of the scale. The validity of an index instead, refers to the degree to which the tool measures what it claims to measure. Assessing for validity using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), the PCI has been shown to be one-dimensional (Eigen Value: 2.480) and captures 62% of the variance in political consumerism (see Fig. 5). In addition to the use of the PCI however, the exploratory analysis that follows complements the analysis with the use of individual
behavioural measures for boycotting (BUY), boycotting (BOY) and having engaged in either or both (BUY/BOY). This approach provides the benefit of discerning whether there may be found any differences between boycotters and buycotters in the two subsamples. The comparison between the PCI developed in this paper with simple dichotomous behavioural measures in the section below will unveil the analytical advantages of the PCI.

5 Political Consumerism Among Young People in the UK and in Greece

An independent sample t-test revealed that the respondents from Greece (M<sub>GR</sub> = 7.58<sub>PCI</sub>, SD<sub>GR</sub> = 5.21) did not score significantly differently from those in the UK (M<sub>UK</sub> = 6.50<sub>PCI</sub>, SD<sub>UK</sub> = 5.34), (t<sub>(554)</sub> = 2.41, p = 0.016), indicating that there is not a statistically significant difference in the expression of political consumerism among young people in the two countries (Fig. 6).

Having developed and subsequently validated the PCI as a continuous scale (ranging from 0 to 16), it is now used as the dependent variable in a stepwise linear regression analysis to reveal the relative weight of each of the 56 variables in the survey (see Table 1). Stepwise regression is an ideal method of analysis, not least because it provides an efficient method for identifying the relative weight of potentially large numbers of different factors hypothesised to ‘predict’ the dependent variable (Field, 2017). An additional advantage is that it has the capacity to automatically fine-tune the model so as to choose the best predictors from the available options. Consequently, this method allows for narrowing down the relationships between all 56 variables into a handful of predictors for each country, and therefore offering a comprehensive overview of the major drivers of youth political consumerism in the UK and in Greece.

![Fig. 6 Mean score of the political consumerism Index (PCI) for young people in Greece and the UK](image)

Fig. 6 Mean score of the political consumerism Index (PCI) for young people in Greece and the UK
On Measuring Political Consumerism: An Exploratory Study Among…

Table 2 presents the results from the comparative Stepwise Linear Regression analysis. This final model reports an adjusted R-squared (Adj.R²) of 0.415 for Greece and 0.432 for the UK, indicating that the model accurately predicts 41.5% and 43.2% of the variation of political consumerism in Greece and the UK respectively. The analysis of all of the variables included in the survey, excluding for covariances between them (Stepwise Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter ≤ 0.050, Probability-of-F-to-remove ≥ 0.100) results in a set of eleven predictors of political consumerism among young people, 18 to 29 years of age, in both countries.

The differing size of the bars in Fig. 7 graphically present the relative weight of each independent variable on the PCI.

In terms of their similarities, the examination of all the variables included in the survey has thus revealed that political consumerism in both the UK and Greece is generally driven by young people’s Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE) on their local community, which has been found to be a statistically significant predictor for political consumerism in both countries, and more in Greece (b = 0.261, p < 0.001) than in the UK (b = 0.197, 

| Factor | Dependent variable: PCI | GR | UK |
|--------|--------------------------|----|----|
| 1      | Perceived consumer Effectiveness (Local) | 0.261*** | 0.197*** |
|        | (1-Very ineffective, 5-Very effective) | (0.343) | (0.323) |
| 2      | Competition              | −0.254*** | − |
|        | (1-Harmful, 10-Good)     | (0.136) | − |
| 3      | Intention to demonstrate | 0.216**  | 0.155* |
|        | (1-Very unlikely, 5-Very likely) | (0.322) | (0.269) |
| 4      | Environmentally responsible lifestyle | 0.219**  | 0.248*** |
|        | (1-Not willing to pay more, 4-Willing to pay a lot more) | (0.480) | (0.456) |
| 5      | Gender                   | −   | 0.263*** |
|        | (1-Male, 2-Female)       | −   | (0.653) |
| 6      | Sign a petition          | 0.224**  | 0.174** |
|        | (1-Very unlikely, 5-Very likely) | (0.284) | (0.332) |
| 7      | Age                      | −   | 0.205*** |
|        | (18–29 years old)        | −   | (0.152) |
| 8      | Local community          | −   | 0.165** |
|        | (1-Strongly disagree, 4-Strongly Agree) | − | (0.440) |
| 9      | National Economy         | 0.142*  | − |
|        | (1-Not willing to pay more, 4-Willing to pay a lot more) | (0.771) | − |
| 10     | Party affiliation        | −0.138*  | − |
|        | (1-No, 2-Fairly 3-Strong) | (0.799) | − |
| 11     | Postmaterialism Index    | −   | 0.133* |
|        | (1-Materialist, 12-Postmaterialist) | − | (0.332) |
|        | Constant:                | −6.969**  | 1012.780*** |
|        | (2.452)                  | (303.320) |
| N      |                          | 313  | 321 |
| Adj. R²|                          | 0.415 | 0.432 |

PCI = (BUY + BOY) * (FRE + RES), 2 countries: Greece, United Kingdom, Standard errors in parentheses below the coefficients, * p < 0.05, ** p < .01, *** p < 0.001
$p<0.001$). As it was expected, even though the PCE was excluded from the construction of the PCI (see discussion above), it still loads as a significant predictor of political consumerism in both countries. Also, political consumerism in both countries seems to be primarily an elite-challenging form of political participation, with ‘Intention to demonstrate’ being a statistically significant predictor for both Greece ($b=0.216$, $p<0.01$) and the UK ($b=0.155$, $p<0.05$). The environmental motivations of young political consumers is the third common predictor of their likelihood to engage in political consumerism, with young people in both Greece ($b=0.219$, $p<0.01$) and the UK ($b=0.248$, $p<0.001$) being willing to pay more for a product or service in order to ‘Promote environmentally responsible lifestyles’. Moreover, in both countries political consumerism is associated with online forms of political participation, with the variable ‘Intention to sign a petition online’ being the fourth common statistically significant predictor for both subsamples (Greece: $b=0.224$, $p<0.01$; UK: $b=0.174$, $p<0.01$).

Figure 8 graphically illustrates that among these four common drivers, (a) Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (at the local level), (b) Intention to demonstrate and (c) Intention to sign a petition demonstrate a higher weight in Greece than in the UK. By comparison, young people in the UK are (d) willing to pay more to promote environmentally responsible lifestyles, than in Greece.

In terms of their differences (which is the focus of analysis of this article), (e) Gender, (f) Age, (g) Local-community personality outlook, and (h) Postmaterialist value-orientation are country-specific drivers of political consumerism, but only in the UK. Table 2 above, confirms gender as a statistically significant predictor of political consumerism in the UK, whereby young political consumers are statistically more likely to be females ($b=0.263$, $p<0.001$). Previous research (Gotlieb & Wells, 2012) reports a similar factor weight to this study among all the ages examined. However, Stolle et al. (2010) report that
although there is still a small gender difference in the overall descriptive statistics, gender becomes a non-significant indicator of political consumerism in multivariate analysis for the 18–29 age group. The present study instead, indicates that political consumerism can indeed be perceived as an engendered form of political participation for the 18–29 years age cohort, when responsibility and frequency behind the action are also taken into consideration, albeit only for the UK. Non-parametric analysis of only the behavioural elements of political consumerism in Table 3 below, further reveals that this is due to the lack of a significant association of boycotting in Greece ($p > 0.05$).

In turn, the presence of relative age (within the general 18–29 age cohort) as a statistically significant predictor in the model, demonstrates the concrete advantage of the PCI, as opposed to political consumption measured using only by the behavioural factors. The non-parametric analysis of age against boycotting, boycotting and engagement in either or both in Table 4 below, portrays political consumption as statistically non-associated with relative age within the 18–29 cohort, when accounting only for the behavioural components of political consumerism (BUY and BOY). However, after incorporating the responsibility (RES) and frequency (FRE) of boycotting and boycotting within the PCI, age becomes a statistically significant predictor ($b = 0.205$, $p < 0.001$) for the UK (see Table 2), disclosing the analytical advantage of the PCI over the dichotomous behavioural measures.

Fig. 8  Common drivers of youth political consumerism in the UK and Greece

Measures of statistical significance (Pearson’s Chi-Square and p-values) among the whole distribution are reported at the bottom of each category for each activity (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < 0.001$). Instead, adjusted standardised residuals (adj.res.) are reported next to the percentages of each respective category. This is important because it allows us to assess whether the observed cell counts are significantly different from the expected cell counts. An adjusted residual value higher than the minimum cut-off point of ±1.7 indicates a significant association within the categories. A value higher than the conventional cut-off point of ±2.0 indicates a highly significant association. By way of contrast, a value between -1.7 and +1.7 indicates there is no statistically significant difference between the observed cell counts and that of a normal distribution. Figures highlighted in bold in Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 indicate thus statistically significant relationships, either across the overall distribution ($p < 0.05$), or within the categories (adj.res. > ±1.7).
This indicates that the older the UK participants (within the 18–29 age cohort), the more likely they are to engage in political consumerism. This observation may be interpreted in terms of Milbrath’s (1977) life-cycle effect, according to which the younger respondents may still be lacking those civic skills that foster their civic engagement, and as such it parallels a similarly observed life-cycle effect in voting (Wass, 2008). With respect to political consumerism however, it may also mean that younger people are still lacking the income (and thus the consumer power) to engage politically through their purchasing decisions. Nevertheless, the data indicate that age is indeed a predictor of political consumerism in the UK, when one accounts not only for its behavioural components, but takes also into consideration the extent (breadth) and intensity (depth) of the phenomenon.

Although Graziano and Forno (2012) have previously suggested that political consumerism in southern Europe is more rooted in local communities, this is not confirmed in this study. The non-parametric analysis of the variable ‘Local-community personality outlook’ is shown in Table 5 to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) only for buycotters in both the UK and Greece.

However, when one accounts for the frequency and responsibility components of political consumerism as captured by the PCI (Table 2), this factor has been found to be
statistically associated only for the UK (b = 0.165, p < 0.01). The inclusion of this variable in the final model further supports the understanding of political consumerism as a community-oriented form of political participation, but only for the UK. Importantly, it also reveals the analytical shortcomings of measuring only the behavioural (buycotting and boycotting) dimension of political consumerism.

Similarly, although the non-parametric analysis of political consumption against post-materialism indicates the existence of a robust association in both countries (Table 6), when the responsibility and frequency elements are also taken into consideration (Table 2), postmaterialism is shown to be a significant predictor of political consumerism only in the UK (b = 0.133, p < 0.01), but not in Greece. This observation portrays political consumerism among young people in the UK as part of ‘movements of affluence’, motivated by higher-order postmaterialist values. Instead, the absence of postmaterialism for Greece, along the higher weights of engagement in demonstrations and signing petitions online—both of which may be broadly considered as politics of dissent—paints political

Table 5  Local community outlook

|                  | Buycotters | Boycotters | Buy/Boycotters |
|------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
|                  | Greece     | UK         | Greece         | UK           | Greece       | UK           |
|                  | % Res      | % Res      | % Res          | % Res        | % Res        | % Res        |
| Disagree         | 56.8 ‑2.0  | 54.2 ‑2.3  | 55.4 ‑1.7      | 48.6 ‑1.7    | 70.3 ‑1.4    | 62.6 ‑2.1    |
| Agree            | 69.0 2.0   | 67.3 2.3   | 66.5 1.7       | 58.9 1.7     | 78.2 1.4     | 73.8 2.1     |
| Total            | 66.1 62.9  | 63.9 55.5  | 76.4           | 70.1         |              |              |
| Significance     | Pearson’s Chi Sq 6.947 6.067 3.394 3.519 1.989 4.28 |
| p-Value          | 0.031*     | 0.048*     | 0.183          | 0.172        | 0.158        | 0.039*       |

Table 6  Postmaterialism index

|                  | Buycotters | Boycotters | Buy/Boycotters |
|------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
|                  | Greece     | UK         | Greece         | UK           | Greece       | UK           |
|                  | % Res      | % Res      | % Res          | % Res        | % Res        | % Res        |
| Pure materialist | 55.9 ‑1.3  | 40.8 ‑4.6  | 55.9 ‑1.0      | 35.5 4.0     | 67.6 1.3     | 47.4 ‑5.0    |
| Mixed materialist| 56.3 ‑2.2  | 61.8 ‑0.3  | 51.3 ‑2.7      | 46.1 ‑2.1    | 66.3 ‑2.5    | 65.2 ‑1.2    |
| Mixed postmaterialist | 62.9 ‑0.8 | 69.5 ‑1.6  | 59.8 ‑1.0      | 65.3 2.3     | 71.1 ‑1.5    | 80.0 2.5     |
| Pure postmaterialist | 80.4 3.7   | 82.0 3.4   | 80.4 4.2       | 78.7 4.1     | 92.2 4.6     | 90.2 3.8     |
| Total            | 66.1 62.9  | 63.9 55.5  | 76.4           | 70.1         |              |              |
| Significance     | Pearson’s Chi Sq 22.27 35.653 23.063 36.166 21.526 35.923 |
| p-Value          | 0.001***   | 0.000***   | 0.001***       | 0.000***     | 0.000***     | 0.000***     |
consumerism in Greece as part of an evidenced re-emergence of a new wave of ‘grievance’ movements, such as the contemporary anti-austerity movements which are especially prevalent in the European south (Della Porta, 2015).

The overall country-specific findings for the UK are graphically summarized in Fig. 9. Compared to the UK youth sample, the country-specific statistically significant drivers of political consumerism among young people in Greece include (i) Support for the national economy, (j) Party affiliation, (k) Support for market competition. Table 2 indicates that the motivational variable ‘support for national economy’ is found exclusively related to Greece \( (b=0.142, p<0.05) \). Although the relevant literature perceives political consumerism as a predominately postmaterialist phenomenon (Copeland, 2014b), it often overlooks nationally motivated political consumerism, or ‘economic nationalism’, which has been particularly prominent across southern Europe under austerity (Lekakis, 2015). Indeed, Table 7 confirms that ‘Support for national economy’ is statistically associated with boycotts in Greece \( (p<0.001) \).

Table 2 also reveals a negative relationship between ‘Party affiliation’ and political consumerism as measured by the PCI, where young people are being ‘pushed out’ of Greek party politics (Kyroglou & Henn, 2020) by a relative effect of \(-0.138\), significant at \( p<0.05 \). This, once again, demonstrates the comparative advantage of the use of the PCI over the dichotomous behavioural measures of political consumption. The non-parametric analysis in Table 8 reveals no evidence of any association between ‘Party affiliation’ and political consumerism \( (p>0.05) \) in either of the two countries. Only within the categories was a statistically significant association revealed—this was for those young boycotters in Greece who were ‘not a supporter’ of any political party, alongside a negative association for the respondents from both Greece and the UK who were unsure of their political
affiliations (‘Don’t know’). However, taking into consideration both the responsibility (RES) and the habitual consistency (FRE) behind the actions, the linear regression analysis indicates that party affiliation is a statistically significant predictor of political consumerism in Greece, but not in the UK.

Finally, ‘Support for market competition’ is also a statistically significant driver for youth political consumerism in Greece. Table 2 demonstrates a strong negative effect of 0.254, significant at $p < 0.001$, indicating that these young political consumers perceive market competition to be ‘harmful’. Non-parametric analysis of the behavioural elements of political consumerism in Table 9 confirms this clear rejection of the rules of market competition, on the grounds that these are ‘Harmful: they bring out the worst in people’. This finding corroborates previous qualitative findings according to which neoliberalism ‘pushes’ Greek youth away from institutional politics (Kyroglou & Henn, 2020) and

| Table 7 | National economy |
|---------|------------------|
|         | Buycotters | Boycotters | Buy/Boycotters |
|         | Greece | UK | Greece | UK | Greece | UK |
| % | Res | % | Res | % | Res | % | Res |
| Not willing to pay more | 52.5 | $-3.7$ | 57.6 | $-2.0$ | 57.4 | $-1.6$ | 52.5 | $-0.9$ | 72.3 | $-1.2$ | 62.7 | $-2.7$ |
| Willing to pay more | 73.8 | $3.7$ | 68.8 | $2.0$ | 66.8 | $1.6$ | 58.1 | $0.9$ | 78.7 | $1.2$ | 76.9 | $2.7$ |
| Total | 66.7 | | 64.5 | | 63.7 | | 55.9 | | 76.6 | | 71.4 | |
| Significance across the whole distribution | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pearson’s Chi Sq | 13.799 | 3.978 | 2.715 | 1.554 | 1.554 | 7.096 |
| p-Value | 0.001*** | 0.137 | 0.257 | 0.212 | 0.212 | 0.008** |

| Table 8 | Party affiliation |
|---------|------------------|
|         | Buycotters | Boycotters | Buy/Boycotters |
|         | Greece | UK | Greece | UK | Greece | UK |
| % | Res | % | Res | % | Res | % | Res |
| Not a supporter | 67.6 | $1.0$ | 58.5 | $-1.4$ | 66.4 | $1.7$ | 51.9 | $-1.1$ | 78.7 | $1.8$ | 68.1 | $-0.6$ |
| Fairly strong supporter | 67.4 | $0.2$ | 65.4 | $0.8$ | 58.7 | $-0.8$ | 58.1 | $0.8$ | 71.7 | $-0.8$ | 70.6 | $0.2$ |
| Strong supporter | 83.3 | $0.9$ | 69.2 | $0.7$ | 66.7 | $0.1$ | 53.8 | $-0.2$ | 83.3 | $0.4$ | 73.1 | $0.3$ |
| DK | 35.3 | $-2.8$ | 66.7 | $0.4$ | 41.2 | $-2.0$ | 62.5 | $0.7$ | 52.6 | $-2.3$ | 75.0 | $0.5$ |
| Total | 66.1 | | 62.9 | | 63.9 | | 55.5 | | 76.4 | | 70.1 | |
| Significance across the whole distribution: | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Pearson’s Chi Sq | 8.875 | 6.064 | 11.547 | 12.378 | 6.603 | 0.646 |
| p-Value | 0.181 | 0.416 | 0.073 | 0.054 | 0.086 | 0.886 |
reinforces the understanding of political consumerism in Greece as part of ‘grievance’ movements that bring “capitalism back into protest analysis” (Della Porta, 2015, p.1).

The overall country-specific findings for political consumerism in Greece are graphically summarised in Fig. 10, and include seven predictors.
6 Conclusion

Given the twofold aim of this article, we have presented both our methodological and empirical contributions in the study of political consumerism. With regards to the methodological contribution, we introduced an intuitive but comprehensive survey instrument capable of capturing the different dimensions of political consumerism. We have first provided a detailed examination of the key terms used by scholars when referring to politically-oriented purchasing behaviours, as well as a critical engagement with the debates concerning their underlying character. We argue that any effective operationalisation of political consumerism has to incorporate not only both of its two behavioural components (buycotting and boycotting), but also the intensity (responsibility) and extent (frequency) of the said actions. Building upon previous research, we thus propose an intuitive measurement instrument, in the form of the ‘Political Consumerism Index’ (PCI).

Previous attempts to construct an index that captures all three dimensions of political consumerism in a single index (Gundelach, 2020; Stolle et al., 2005) tend to be considerably more time-consuming and thus impractical for time and space-limited surveys. Instead, the Political Consumerism Index (PCI) proposed in this study is significantly more time-efficient and easy to interpret, as it is a continuous scale consisting of only four variables. It has been tested for validity and reliability and has been found to be consistent and replicable. Finally, it has been employed as the dependent variable in an exploratory analysis of political consumerism among young people in the UK and in Greece. This has enabled us to unveil the comparative advantages of the PCI over the commonly used dichotomous behavioural variables of political consumption. In this way, the article provides a state-of-the-art methodological contribution to the study of political consumerism, and by extension to the broader study of political participation.

With regards to its empirical contributions, we assessed this new PCI index on a primary sample of 634 young people from the UK and Greece. This has allowed us to effectively narrow down the ascriptive, motivational, attitudinal and behavioural drivers of political consumerism in each country. The empirical analysis of this article therefore sought to shed light on the following research questions:

RQ1: Who are the political consumers?
RQ2: What do they believe in?
RQ3: What is their identity orientation? With whom do they belong?
RQ4: What is the relationship of political consumerism with other forms of political participation?

Our analysis has outlined a set of shared characteristics among young political consumers in the two countries, but also significant differences. With regards to the similarities in terms of RQ2, our findings suggest that young political consumers in both the UK and Greece are driven by Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE) at the local level—that is, they consider that through their consumption they can bring about desired change at least in their local communities. However, their end-goal in engaging in political consumerism is to promote environmentally responsible lifestyles at the global level. With regards to RQ4, young people who engage in political consumerism are also likely to participate in other elite-challenging forms of political participation either in real life (demonstrations) or online (signing a petition).
In terms of their differences, young political consumers in the UK are more likely to be relatively older females (RQ1), with postmaterialist sensitivities (RQ2) and a local community outlook (RQ3). In contrast, political consumerism in Greece seems to be crowding out electoral participation, with young boycotters in Greece being less likely to be a supporter of any particular party (RQ4). Moreover, although young political consumers in Greece believe that market competition ‘brings out the worst in people’ (RQ2), they tend to use an inherently market-oriented form of political participation to support their national economy (RQ3) indicating a nationalistic identification, despite their environmental goals behind the action.

These findings provide a first understanding of the main drivers of the phenomenon among young people in the UK and in Greece. However, more emphasis should hereafter be placed on the ways in which this understanding can influence policies that may enhance young people’s engagement with politics—and in particular, with political consumerism. For instance, policy makers who are responsible for youth engagement and civic education programmes which seek to foster young people’s political engagement in either country, may benefit from considering the differing motivations and value orientations of young people, as evidenced by this study. Since a single, comprehensive and time-efficient methodological instrument for the study of political consumerism has now been devised, comparability in empirical research should henceforth be much easier across differing socio-political contexts.

Indeed, although this study has applied the PCI in a primary sample from a country of the European north (UK) and one of the European south (GR), it is time to transcend the Eurocentric and North-American focus of the overwhelming part of existing literature on the subject. The examination of political consumerism through the PCI in countries or communities beyond the global capitalist north should produce interesting insights. This would also allow politicians, political scientists, and youth advocacy organisations alike to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of market-oriented forms of political participation and by extension, of political engagement more broadly. It would also allow for informed policies and strategies to address young people’s concerns and empower them to actively engage in political and community affairs.
### Appendix

#### Appendix 1: Survey Questions used in the PCI

1. **In the past 12 months, did you actively purchase one product or brand over another for ethical, environmental or political reasons?**
   - [ ] Yes, I have actively purchased a product or brand for ethical, environmental or political reasons.
   - [ ] No, I have NOT purchased any products or brands for ethical, environmental or political reasons.
   - [ ] Don't know

2. **In the past 12 months, did you actively refuse to purchase a product or brand based on ethical, environmental or political considerations?**
   - [ ] Yes, I have refused to purchase a product or brand for ethical, environmental or political reasons.
   - [ ] No, I have NOT refused to purchase any products or brands for ethical, environmental or political reasons.
   - [ ] Don't know

3. **How responsible do you feel with regards to choosing the 'right' brand when you go shopping?**

   | Not at all responsible | Not responsible | Neither responsible/nor not responsible | Responsible | Very responsible | Don't know |
   |------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|
   | Responsibility for choosing the right brand |   | | | | |

4. **How often do you purchase, or avoid purchasing certain products, services or brands for ethical, environmental or political considerations?**

   | Hardly ever | Not so often | Often | Nearly every time I go shopping | Every time I go shopping | Don't know |
   |-------------|-------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|
   | Frequency |   | | | | |
Acknowledgements  The authors wish to thank the participants of the survey in both the UK and Greece.

Declarations

Conflict of interest  No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Open Access  This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

References

Almond, G. A., & Verba, S. (1963). The Civic Culture: Political Culture and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Anderson, B. (2006). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. London: Verso books.
Andorfer, V. A. (2013). Ethical consumption in Germany. Zeitschrift Für Soziologie, 42(5), 424–443.
Atkinson, L. (2015). Locating the politics in political consumption: A conceptual map of four types of political consumer identities. International Journal of Communication, 9, 2047–2066.
Atkinson, L., & Kim, Y. (2015). “I drink it anyway and I know I shouldn’t”: Understanding green consumers’ positive evaluations of norm-violating non-green products and misleading green advertising. Environmental Communication, 9(1), 37–57.
Baek, Y. M. (2010). To buy or not to buy: Who are political consumers? What do they think and how do they participate? Political Studies, 58(5), 1065–1086.
Beck, U. (1992). Risk society: Towards a new modernity (Vol. 17). London: Sage.
Boström, M., Micheletti, M., & Oosterveer, P. (2019). The oxford handbook of political consumerism. Oxford Handbooks.
Bové, J., & Dufour, F. (2002). The world is not for sale: Farmers against junk food. Verso.
Chatterton, P. (2016). Building transitions to post-capitalist urban commons. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 41(4), 403–415.
Copeland, L. (2014a). Conceptualizing political consumerism: How citizenship norms differentiate boycotting from buycotting. Political Studies, 62(1), 172–186. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12067
Copeland, L. (2014b). Value change and political action: Postmaterialism, political consumerism, and political participation. American Politics Research, 42(2), 257.
Copeland, L., & Boulianne, S. (2020). Political consumerism: A meta-analysis. International Political Science Review. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120905048
Deegan-Krause, K. (2007). New dimensions of political cleavage (pp. 538–556). Oxford handbook of political behaviour.
Della Porta, D. (2015). Social movements in times of austerity: Bringing capitalism back into protest analysis. Polity.
Dhaoui, O., Nikolaou, K., Mattas, K., & Baourakis, G. (2020). Consumers’ attitude towards alternative distribution channels of fresh fruits and vegetables in Crete. British Food Journal, 122(9), 2823–2840.
Field, A. (2017). Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics: North American. Sage.
Gotlieb, M., & Wells, C. (2012). From concerned shopper to dutiful citizen: Implications of individual and collective orientations toward political consumerism. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 644, 207.
Graziano, P., & Forno, F. (2012). Political consumerism and new forms of political participation: The Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale in Italy. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 644, 121.
Henn, M., Oldfield, B., & Hart, J. (2017). Postmaterialism and young people’s political participation in a time of austerity. The British Journal of Sociology, 69(3), 712–737.
Gundelach, B. (2020). Political consumerism as a form of political participation: Challenges and potentials of empirical measurement. *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement*, 1–19, 309–327.

Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kollnuss, A., & Agyeman, J. (2002). Mind the gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior? *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 239–260.

Koos, S. (2012). What drives political consumption in Europe? A multi-level analysis on individual characteristics, opportunity structures and globalization. *Acta Sociologica*, 55(1), 37–57.

Kousis, M. (2017). Alternative forms of resilience confronting hard economic times. A South European perspective. *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 10(1), 119–135.

Kyroglou, G., & Henn, M. (2017). Political consumerism as a neoliberal response to youth political disen- gagement. *Societies*, 7(4), 34. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc7040034

Kyroglou, G., & Henn, M. (2020). Pulled in and pushed out of politics: The impact of neoliberalism on young people’s differing political consumerist motivations in the UK and Greece. *International Political Science Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120935521

Kyroglou, G., & Henn, M. (2021). Young political consumers between the individual and the collective: Evidence from the UK and Greece. *Journal of Youth Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2021.2012139

Lekakis, E. J. (2013). *Coffee activism and the politics of fair trade and ethical consumption in the global north: Political consumerism and cultural citizenship*. Springer.

Lekakis, E. J. (2015). Economic nationalism and the cultural politics of consumption under austerity: The rise of ethnocentric consumption in Greece. *Journal of Consumer Culture*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540515586872

Micheletti, M., Follesdal, A., & Stolle, D. (2008). Politics, products, and markets: Exploring political consumerism past and present. *Economic Geography*, 84(1), 123–125.

Micheletti, M., Dietlind, S., & Berlin, D. (2012). Habits of sustainable citizenship: The example of political consumerism. In A. Warde & D. Southerton (Eds.), *The Habits of Consumption: The Example of Political Consumerism* (pp. 141–163). Helsinki, Finland: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

Milbrath, L. W., & Goel, M. L. (1977). *Political participation: How and why do people get involved in politics?* Rand McNally College Pub. Co.

Newman, B. J., & Bartels, B. L. (2011). Politics at the checkout line: Explaining political consumerism in the United States. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(4), 803–817.

Pellandini-Simányi, L., & Gulyás, E. (2018). Political consumerism in central and Eastern Europe. In M. Boström, M. Micheletti, & P. Oosterveer (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of political consumerism*. (Vol. 1). Oxford University.

Petmesidou, M. (2016). *Child Poverty, Youth (Un) Employment, and Social Inclusion*. Columbia University Press.

Pickard, S. (2018). *Politics, protest and young people Political participation and dissent in Britain in the 21st century*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Putnam, R. D. (1995). *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital*. *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65–78.

Rumpala, Y. (2011). ‘Sustainable consumption’ as a new phase in a governmentization of consumption. *Theory and Society*, 40(6), 669–699. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-011-9153-5

Schneider, F., Kallis, G., & Martinez-Alier, J. (2010). Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18(6), 511–518.

Sotiropoulou, I.C. (2012). Exchange networks and parallel currencies: Theoretical approaches and the case of Greece. Doctoral dissertation, Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης. Σχολή Κοινωνικών Επιστημών. Τμήμα Οικονομικών Επιστημών. Σουλας, D., & Clark, J. (2013). *Cone Communications/Echo Global CSR Study*. Boston, MA, USA: Cone Communications.

Stolle, D., & Micheletti, M. (2006). The gender gap reversed: Political consumerism as a women-friendly form of civic and political engagement. In B. O’Neill & E. Gidgengil (Eds.), *Gender and Social Capital*. London: Routledge.

Stolle, D., Hooghe, M., & Micheletti, M. (2005). Politics in the supermarket: Political consumerism as a form of political participation. *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale De Science Politique*, 26(3), 245–269.

Stolle, D., Micheletti, M., & Berlin, D. (2010). Young people and political consumerism. Fokus 10. En Analys Av Ungas Inflytande.
Theocharis, Y., & van Deth, J. W. (2018). The continuous expansion of citizen participation: A new taxonomy. *European Political Science Review*, 10(1), 139–163.

Triodos. (2018). UK Ethical Consumer Markets Report 2018. Ethical Consumer. EC Markets Report 2018 FINAL.pdf (ethicalconsumer.org). Accessed on 03 May 2022.

Van Deth, J. W. (2014). A conceptual map of political participation. *Acta Politica*, 49(3), 349–367.

Wass, H. (2008). Generations and turnout: The generational effect in electoral participation in Finland. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Helsinki.

White, M. M. (2011). Sisters of the soil: Urban gardening as resistance in detroit. *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*, 5(1), 13–28.

Zorell, C. V. (2013). Why are boycotters not automatically buycotters? Investigating the aims underlying citizens’ decision to consume politically across countries. In *APSA 2013 annual meeting paper, American political science association 2013 annual meeting*.

Zorell, C. V. (2018). *Varieties of political consumerism: From boycotting to buycotting*. Palgrave Macmillan US. [http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ntuuk/detail.action?docID=5534465](http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ntuuk/detail.action?docID=5534465).

Zorell, C. V. (2019a). Political consumerism at the individual level. In C. V. Zorell (Ed.), *Varieties of political consumerism* (pp. 129–164). Springer International Publishing.

Zorell, C. V. (2019b). Perspectives on political consumerism. In C. V. Zorell (Ed.), *Varieties of political consumerism* (pp. 37–75). Springer.

Zorell, C. V. (2019c). Political consumerism as a multi-layered process. In C. V. Zorell (Ed.), *Varieties of Political Consumerism* (pp. 165–182). Springer International Publishing.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.