


Tasting Politics? The Relationship Between Neoliberalism, Political Consumerism, and the Slow Food Movement

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ABSTRACT

The literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of how neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement collectively shape contemporary socio-political landscapes, particularly within the context of food politics and consumer behaviour. This article aims to fill this gap by investigating the complex interplay between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement. The research synthesises insights from sociology, food politics, and economic theories to provide a multidimensional understanding of these interactions. The findings reveal that neoliberalism, through its emphasis on market efficiency and individual responsibility, has created conditions that both necessitate and facilitate political consumerism. The slow food movement, as a form of political consumerism, emerged as a response to the homogenisation and ethical void perpetuated by neoliberal market dynamics. The study also highlights the dual role of the slow food movement as both a critique of neoliberalism and a potential tool for perpetuating neoliberal ideologies through consumer-driven activism. This research contributes to the literature by offering a nuanced understanding of how neoliberalism drives political consumerism and how the slow food movement functions within this framework. The originality of this study lies in its integrative approach, combining insights from multiple disciplines to analyse the intersection of neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement. This study offers a fresh perspective on the role of consumer behaviour in shaping political and cultural discourses in the context of food politics.

Keywords: Food politics, food sovereignty, sustainable food practises, ethical consumption, food sociology

Introduction

Neoliberalism is an ideology that has significantly shaped economic and social policies worldwide. It promotes the idea of free markets, emphasising minimal government intervention and the belief that market forces should guide economic decisions (Harvey, 2007). This ideology advocates for deregulation, which involves reducing restrictions on businesses and industries, allowing them more freedom in their operations (Cingolani, 2019). Neoliberalism also emphasises individual responsibility, individuals should take charge of their own economic success and well-being, often through market-oriented approaches (Schram, 2018). Neoliberal policies have begun to cause mass reaction movements in different parts of the world. Thus, the concept of political consumerism emerged (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022).

Political consumerism emphasises the power of individual consumers to influence societal change through their purchasing decisions (Copeland, 2014a). In a neoliberal framework where markets are highly influential, political consumerism suggests that consumers can exert pressure on businesses and industries by choosing to support products and companies that align with their ethical, social, or environmental values (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022). This concept implies that consumer choices have the potential to impact not just the market but also broader societal issues (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Today, different actions can be mentioned within the scope of political consumerism. Anti-tourist or anti-tourism actions in Europe are perhaps among the most recent examples of this. These actions, such as the organised protests in Barcelona against the negative impacts of mass tourism on local neighbourhoods and the ‘Tourists Go Home’ graffiti in Venice, are among the most recent and vivid examples of political consumerism. In Barcelona, locals have staged demonstrations and formed grassroots movements to protest the rising cost of living, the displacement of residents, and the strain on public infrastructure caused by the influx of tourists (Novy & Colomb, 2017). Similarly, in Venice, the graffiti and public outcry reflect growing local resentment towards the overtourism that threatens the city’s cultural heritage and the quality of life for its residents (Seraphin et al., 2018). These actions illustrate how communities are increasingly mobilising against the neoliberal commodification of their cities, where tourism is prioritised over the well-being

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of local populations, thereby using protest as a form of political consumerism to assert their rights and resist the market-driven forces reshaping their environments. Political consumerism has also emerged in the food industry. Various studies have shown that vegan or vegetarian consumption is political consumerism (Beck & Ladwig, 2021; Dickstein et al., 2022; Kalte, 2021; Stanley, 2022). It is thought that another movement that can be considered as political consumerism in the food industry may be slow food (Siniscalchi, 2023; Thompson & Kumar, 2021).

The slow food movement emerged partly as a response to the trends promoted by neoliberalism, particularly within the food industry. This movement advocates for a departure from the mass-produced, globally sourced, and fast-consumption food culture. Instead, it promotes a shift towards locally sourced, sustainable, and artisanal food production and consumption. The Slow Food Movement preserves traditional culinary practises, support local farmers and producers, and encourage a more mindful and sustainable approach to food consumption. Even those with radical views often highlight the slow food movement as a significant form of resistance. The globalisation's trend of homogenisation has led to a local reaction, with slow food serving as a prime example (Ritzer, 2005). This perspective implies that the slow food movement has political implications, a view shared by many social science scholars who see food, food choices, and food practises as inherently political (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010).

Since the 1900s, scientific studies on food have become a multidisciplinary academic field. Because of the nature of food linked to humanity, no single discipline has a monopoly on the food agenda (Reynolds, 2012). Although food is consumed every day to sustain life, it has secondary meanings and symbols (Mintz & Bois, 2002). An area that food's symbols evoke most is politics (Reynolds, 2012). In the realm of food politics, there is a growing expectation for individual consumers to address a range of food-related concerns, including safety, environmental impact, ethical considerations, and nutrition. This shift implies that ordinary consumers are now seen as playing a more conscious and active societal and political role. Current research reflects this changing perspective, with a focus on topic like political consumerism (Halkier & Holm, 2008). When the issue is evaluated from the perspective of neoliberalism, it becomes more interesting and controversial. However, tourism in general and gastronomy literature in particular have contributed little to this debate. Based on this deficiency, this article seeks to debate the intricate connections between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement. This study aims to explore how these phenomena interact, influence each other, and impact contemporary socio-political contexts.

In an era where neoliberal ideologies dominate global markets, this study sheds light on how these forces influence not only economic policies but also cultural practises and individual choices. By exploring the rise of political consumerism, particularly through the lens of the slow food movement, the article highlights how consumers are increasingly using their purchasing power as a form of political expression, challenging the market-driven narratives that prioritise profit over ethical and sustainable practises (Micheletti & Stolle, 2013). The broader implications of this study are significant, as it provides a nuanced understanding of how grassroots movements like slow food can serve as both a critique and a product of neoliberalism. This dual role underscores the complexity of consumer-driven activism, revealing the potential and limitations of using market mechanisms to address social and environmental issues (Bennett, 2017). The study also contributes to the literature on food politics and consumer culture by offering a comprehensive analysis of how these movements interact with broader economic and political structures. In essence, this study is significant because it challenges the reader to reconsider the role of consumerism in modern society and the ways in which individuals can engage with and resist the dominant economic ideologies of our time. It opens up new avenues for research and debate on the intersections of politics, economics, and culture, offering a richer understanding of how our everyday choices are intertwined with larger socio-political forces.

The Approach of the Study

This study employs a conceptual discussion approach to explore the intersection between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement. The study does not conduct a systematic literature review or rely on empirical data collection. Instead, it focuses on the theoretical exploration and critical analysis of the existing literature to build a comprehensive narrative on these interrelated concepts. The primary method involves synthesising insights from multiple disciplines, such as sociology, political science, and food studies, to create a multidimensional understanding of how neoliberal ideologies influence consumer behaviour and food politics. The article synthesises theoretical frameworks from seminal works in the fields of neoliberalism, political consumerism, and food politics. By drawing on well-established theories of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007; Schram, 2018), political consumerism (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013), and food sovereignty and ethics (Guthman, 2008), this study constructs a cohesive narrative that examines how these ideologies interact and shape contemporary socio-political dynamics. This approach is consistent with conceptual analysis methodologies commonly used in theoretical papers, where the aim is to explore and integrate existing knowledge rather than generate new empirical findings (Jaakkola, 2020).

The study also employs critical analysis to interrogate the underlying power dynamics and ideological assumptions embedded in discussions about neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement. Critical analysis (Fairclough, 2013) is used to examine how these concepts are framed in both academic and public discourse, particularly in relation to the ethical and

environmental implications of consumer behaviour. This allows the study to reveal the socio-political implications of consumer choices and how they are influenced by neoliberal market forces. A comparative analysis of the key concepts is also conducted, contrasting neoliberalism's market-driven ideology with the ethical and community-oriented values promoted by political consumerism and the slow food movement. This analysis highlights the tensions and synergies between these concepts, providing a discussion of how consumer-driven activism both critiques and reinforces neoliberal market dynamics (Thompson & Kumar, 2021).

Given the complexity of the subject matter, the article adopts an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from multiple academic traditions. This method enriches the analysis by incorporating perspectives from sociology, political science, economics, and food studies, which allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the connections between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and food politics (Cloutier & Langley, 2020; Crane et al., 2016; Whetten, 1989). This cross-disciplinary synthesis provides depth to the study's examination of how neoliberal ideologies manifest in consumer behaviour and food movements.

Neoliberalism and Consumer Behaviour

Neoliberalism has profoundly affected how individuals behave as consumers (Harvey, 2007). It promotes ideologies that prioritise market-driven dynamics, emphasising the freedom of choice and individualistic decision-making in economic matters (Johnston & Bauman, 2007). Under neoliberal principles, markets are seen as the primary mechanism for determining what goods and services are available and how they are accessed (Lawn & Prentice, 2015). This ideology places a significant emphasis on the role of markets in shaping consumer behaviour (McDonald et al., 2017). In a neoliberal framework, market forces—composed of supply and demand dynamics, pricing mechanisms, and competition—play a pivotal role in shaping consumer culture (Miles, 2012). An emphasis on convenience and affordability characterises this culture (Wearing et al., 2013). Companies often compete by making products more accessible, convenient, and affordable for consumers, aligning with the market-driven ideologies promoted by neoliberalism (Thompson & Kumar, 2021). However, this market-centric approach has led to a disconnect between consumers and the sources of the products they consume (Ulver, 2022). The emphasis on cost-effectiveness and efficiency often means that consumers prioritise these factors over ethical considerations, such as the environmental impact of production or the working conditions of those involved in the supply chain (Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). As a result, consumers may not always have a clear understanding or direct connection to the origins or production processes behind the products they purchase (Rejman & Czubochoa, 2019). The convenience and affordability driven by neoliberal markets, while appealing to consumers, often obscure the ethical dimensions of consumption, deepening the disconnect between buyers and the origins of their purchases. This disconnect has been further intensified by neoliberal principles that emphasise market efficiency and cost-effectiveness, contributing to a scenario where ethical considerations in consumer choices are often overlooked (Kanai & Gill, 2020).

The focus on maximising profit margins and minimising costs within a competitive market environment tends to overshadow concerns related to ethical sourcing, environmental sustainability, or social implications of the products being consumed (McDonald et al., 2019). Consequently, the influence of neoliberalism on consumer behaviour has fostered a consumer culture driven by market forces, emphasising convenience and affordability but often resulting in a lack of awareness or consideration of the ethical aspects of consumption choices (Campbell, 2013). This situation highlights a significant challenge: the prioritisation of cost and efficiency over ethical considerations in the marketplace (Ritzer, 2021). In response to these issues, some consumers have turned to political consumerism as a means to address the sensitivities ignored by neoliberal policies.

Political Consumerism as a Response to Neoliberalism

Humans have been a part of consumption since the day they existed. Consumption has become a subject of debate among scientists due to neoliberal policies making people more consumption-oriented day by day. Since capitalism emerged, various groups like the Puritans and Marxists have scrutinised and debated the productivity, rationality, and ethical dimensions of consumerism (Clarke, 2008). Furthermore, consumption has been a significant topic in political discourse and contention since the late 19th century (Gurney, 1996). At the beginning of the 21st century, Micheletti (2003) introduced the concept of political consumerism to express society's attempts to influence politics through consumption preferences. Micheletti defined political consumerism as an individualised collective form of political participation. It is useful to draw attention to the concept of the collective. Although political consumerism movements are considered individual, most originate from social movements (Balsiger, 2010). Political groups or consumer organisations organise the action. Therefore, there is a state of collective organisation in the background of engaging in consumption behaviour for political reasons (Lorenzini, 2022). As political consumerism evolved, it increasingly confronted the challenges posed by neoliberal consumerism, leading to a more nuanced understanding of how individual choices can address perceived deficiencies in market-driven systems.

Political consumerism, a form of activism expressed through consumer choices, has emerged in response to a variety of societal, political, and economic shifts (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022); especially as a response to what are perceived as deficiencies or shortcomings within the framework of neoliberal consumerism (Neilson, 2010). Within neoliberal ideologies, where consumer choices primarily revolve around market forces, some individuals have recognised limitations or ethical concerns inherent in this system (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). Advocates of political consumerism deliberately align their purchasing decisions with values beyond mere market considerations (Neilson & Paxton, 2010). These values encompass ethical, environmental, or social concerns (Bossy, 2014). Rather than solely focusing on price or convenience, political consumerism involves consciously supporting businesses, products, or practises that align with the consumer's ethical, environmental, or social beliefs (De Zúñiga et al., 2014). Political consumerism operates on the principle that individuals can leverage their economic power to influence broader social or environmental changes (Gundelach, 2020). In this context, political consumerism is described as using the market to influence corporate or market practises deemed ethically, environmentally, or politically objectionable, or to support companies with positive practises (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013). Political consumerism extends beyond boycotts; individuals may also intentionally purchase products to reward companies or brands for their positive business practises (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). This raises the question: should all consumer movements, whether in the form of boycotts or buycotts, be considered part of political consumerism?

Political consumerism expresses itself mainly through two avenues: boycotts, which punish companies for unethical practises, and buycotts, which reward companies for ethical behaviour. By refusing to support companies with harmful practises or choosing to purchase from companies that align with their values, political consumers seek to reshape market dynamics. Copeland (2014a) notes that these actions create incentives for companies to improve their business practises. While large corporations like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Nestlé have been frequent targets of boycotts, buycotts have often focused on supporting green consumerism and local trade initiatives (Lekakis & Forno, 2017). While buycotts and boycotts are the most well-known forms of political consumerism (Littler, 2005), scholars have broadened the concept to encompass more sustained efforts like community-supported agriculture, lifestyles that reject consumer culture (voluntary simplicity), and actions that challenge market norms. These actions are considered indirectly related to markets and therefore may be viewed as part of political consumerism, although there is no consensus among researchers on this matter. Micheletti (2003) argues that political consumerism should be limited to boycotting or buying products for political reasons, and including other actions could lead to conceptual issues. This perspective has merit, as encompassing all actions that challenge mainstream market dynamics within the realm of political consumerism could create conceptual challenges.

Zorell (2019) identified three key factors that influence political consumerism: the perception of responsibilities held by the state, corporations, and individuals; trust in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and product certifications; and access to alternative products that align with consumers' ethical preferences. These factors are important in explaining why political consumerism has gained such traction in a market-driven world. As neoliberalism has reshaped political and economic systems, many people have turned to the marketplace as a space where they feel they can exert influence over corporate and political decisions, even if they are disillusioned with traditional forms of civic engagement (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022). Indeed, political consumerism has become an important form of society's tendency to somehow be on the political stage and behaviour that is becoming more popular among the public (Van Deth, 2014). For example, 35% of the public in the United States (Endres & Panagopoulos, 2017), 36% of the public in Denmark, 37% of the public in Finland, and 32% of the public in France are engaged in political consumerism. On the other hand, approximately 27% of people in nine African countries participate in or are inclined to participate in consumer boycotts (Adugu, 2019). In Brazil, around 19% of the population engages in boycotts or buycotts (Echegaray, 2015). These statistics highlight the global trend of using purchasing decisions to enact political change. Political consumerism stands out as a distinctive mode of engagement, capable of shaping market behaviours and, indirectly, influencing governmental actions by highlighting citizens' principles and pinpointing areas that might necessitate government oversight and control (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). This movement challenges the dominant narrative of neoliberalism, which prioritises market-driven choices and often sidelines ethical, environmental, or social concerns (Copeland, 2014a). Political consumerism stands as a counter-narrative, advocating for a broader understanding of consumer power beyond mere market preferences (Shah et al., 2007). By emphasising values-based consumption, it questions and challenges the dominant neoliberal discourse that solely prioritises profit and market efficiency (Gundelach, 2020).

Scholars attribute political consumerism's rise to several factors, including lifestyle politics, cosmopolitanism, and postmaterialism values, which reflect a shift towards personal choice as a means of political engagement. According to the socio-cognitive theory of planned behaviour, attitudes, social norms, and perceived control over one's actions shape the intentions and behaviours of political consumers (Bray et al., 2011). However, one critical yet underexplored factor driving political consumerism is the spread of neoliberalism (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022). Neoliberalism, as Harvey (2007) defines it, operates as a form of governmentality, promoting the market as the central mechanism that shapes social and political life. Neoliberal ideology asserts that market-driven solutions are inevitable and beneficial, deeply influencing both economic practises and how people think about the world. Harvey argues that neoliberalism has become a pervasive force, affecting everyday thinking and political-economic systems.

Brown (2015) builds on this by suggesting that neoliberalism has contributed to the erosion of collective political engagement, gradually undermining traditional forms of democracy by shifting the focus from civic participation to market-based solutions.

In recent years, political consumerism has become a widespread tool used by individuals to address ethical and political concerns. Disillusionment with traditional politics and dissatisfaction with neoliberal policies have prompted people, not just the youth, to turn to non-institutional forms of political engagement (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022). Across many countries, political consumption—whether through boycotting unethical companies or supporting ethical ones (buycotting)—has gained prominence as a way for consumers to challenge corporate behaviours or promote positive change. The global rise of movements such as "Buy Local" campaigns, fair trade initiatives, and the increasing popularity of organic and sustainable products reflect this shift. These acts of political consumerism extend beyond individual choices, often incorporating collective actions like local exchange trading systems, cooperatives, and alternative currencies (Lekakis & Forno, 2017).

Despite its growing importance, the relationship between neoliberalism and political consumerism has not received sufficient attention in the academic literature. While studies have explored how neoliberal policies contribute to political disengagement, there has been less focus on how these same policies promote political consumption as a form of activism. Neoliberalism by emphasising the individual's role in the market and sidelining collective political actions, inadvertently fosters political consumerism. People, seeing limited options for participation through traditional politics, are "pulled" into the marketplace as an alternative arena for political expression (Kyroglou & Henn, 2017). However, this shift also reinforces neoliberal values, as individual consumer choices are framed as the primary means of political action, reducing the emphasis on broader structural change (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022).

While political consumerism offers individuals an accessible way to make ethical decisions, it may not be a substitute for collective political engagement. The focus on individual choices can sometimes obscure the need for systemic change. Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on personal responsibility and market-based solutions, risks reducing political participation to isolated consumer acts rather than encouraging deeper, more collective forms of activism. While boycotting or buycotting can influence corporate behaviour, broader societal shifts—such as stronger regulations, policy changes, and grassroots political movements—are needed to address structural injustices that cannot be solved through consumption alone (Kyroglou & Henn, 2022). In conclusion, political consumerism reflects both a reaction to and a product of neoliberalism. It allows people to engage in political life through their consumption choices, but it also underscores the dominance of market-based thinking in contemporary society. By offering individualistic approaches to political participation, political consumerism can simultaneously challenge and reinforce neoliberal ideologies. Therefore, while political consumerism provides an important avenue for ethical engagement, it should be seen as one tool among many in the broader landscape of political activism.

The Rise of the Slow Food Movement

Nutrition has been the most important source of life since the day humans existed. However, the increasing number of people around the world and the insufficient resources every day bring with them some problems. Perhaps the most important of these problems today is related to nature. Man has tended to use nature as he wishes to provide food, which is essential for his life. As a result, the different types of nutrition have emerged. Differences in nutrition styles have also begun to cause people to worry about the products they eat (Fischler, 1998). Neoliberalism, emphasising global market integration and efficiency, often leads to a homogenisation of food cultures (Gaytán, 2004; Chrzan, 2004). However, standardized and mass-produced food options overshadow diverse and unique culinary traditions (Pietrykowski, 2004; Hsu, 2015). The slow food movement has emerged as a response to the trends encouraged by neoliberal economic principles in the realm of food (Simonetti, 2012). Given the homogenisation of food cultures under neoliberalism, movements such as slow food appear to pose a stance against globalised trends and advocate for the preservation of local culinary traditions and values.

The slow food movement emerged in response to the rise of fast-food outlets in Italy, initially opposing not just a type of food but an entire cultural shift. This movement argued that fast food was emblematic of neoliberal values (Petrini & Padovani, 2006). The relationship between Italian leftist politics and consumption was strengthened by the autonomist idea that acts of social resistance should embody, rather than simply represent, challenges to capitalist labour control (Negri, 2005). This philosophy gave rise to *Autonomia Operaia* (AO), a new political group that sought to establish a broad network of activist collectives engaged in diverse political battles (Negri, 2005). However, the AO experienced a significant decline in the early 1980s due to government pressure and public criticism following statements by some members endorsing violent actions. The lack of established political entities paved the way for new social movements to unite Italy's fragmented left-wing groups around different causes (Schneider, 2008). Among these movements was *Arcigola*, established in 1977 by Carlo Petrini and the Italian Communist Party to promote regional cuisine. *Arcigola* garnered international attention in 1986 for its demonstrations against the opening of a McDonald's near Rome's Piazza di Spagna. These actions eventually led to the official formation of the slow food movement as an organisation in 1989 (Thompson & Kumar, 2021). Building on its early roots in Italy, the slow food movement quickly grew beyond its initial focus on local activism, expanding into a global force advocating for regional culinary traditions and sustainable food practises.

The International Slow Food Movement was established two years after the publication of the first slow food manifesto, with its launch occurring at the Opéra Comique in Paris. As membership grew in France, Switzerland, and Germany over the next decade, slow food started to broaden its political focus. This expansion included the initiation of the "endangered foods" campaign, as described by Leitch (2012). The campaign addressed the possible loss of regional tastes and unique products. Another concern was the perceived threat of rapid Europeanization following the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Slow food has expressed concerns about the impact of the new European Union standards on the production of cured meats and cheeses. They argue that these standards, tailored for large producers, could jeopardise traditional production methods and threaten the survival of small-scale local producers (Leitch, 2012). Slow food positions itself as a model for envisioning alternative forms of global interaction, advocating for the networking and flourishing of minority cultures (Madison, 2001). As the movement grew globally, it not only focused on preserving local foods but also evolved into a larger political force addressing broader issues tied to consumption, sustainability, and social justice.

Slow food occupies a special position in the symbolic field created by different actors working to politicise consumption. This field has its roots in the defence of pleasure with slow food as the basis of politics (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010). Slow food is an international, not-for-profit group that seeks to safeguard and enhance local cuisine and traditions. Its goals include rekindling consumer interest in food, reestablishing lost ties between consumers and producers, and challenging the neoliberal capitalist framework (Petrini, 2003). It would be limited to viewing the slow food movement solely through the lens of cuisine. Over time, slow food has broadened its political consumer objectives by collaborating with other like-minded social movements. This expansion encompasses concerns such as sustainability, biodiversity, social equity, fair trade, and animal welfare (Van Bommel & Spicer, 2011). Therefore, the slow food movement is more than just an enjoyable meal consisting of locally grown ingredients and enjoyed with family and friends (Berkley, 2012). In this regard, Andrews points out that the most distinctive feature of slow food is that it places the pleasure of food in an environmental context, and states that slow food is the combination of gastronomy and ecology (Berkley, 2012). While the slow food movement positions itself in opposition to neoliberalism by advocating for sustainable and ethical consumption, its growing global influence has raised questions about whether its strategies align with the very forces it seeks to counter.

Neoliberal policies are closely tied to consumer culture. While slow food opposes these policies, it does not reject consumption altogether. Instead, slow food advocates a different approach to consumption, focusing on consuming "right" rather than consuming less, as a means to address social and environmental issues (Blankenship & Hayes-Conroy, 2017). The difference between the slow food movement and neoliberal policies is to consume correctly. On the other hand, considering that slow food is a global phenomenon, concerns that this movement could be used by global powers may also come to mind. So is the slow food movement different from neoliberalism? Or is it another version of neoliberalism? When looking at the literature, it is noteworthy that slow food's strategies and cultural policies have been widely criticised (Leitch, 2012). These concerns about slow food's relationship with neoliberalism prompt deeper questions about its role and identity, raising debates about whether it serves as a genuine critique of market trends or merely as an elitist initiative.

The initial critiques in the literature revolve around the fundamental question of whether slow food should be classified as a movement or an interest group. Slow food is a complex and enigmatic social phenomenon. It presents itself as a movement that defines its identity, stimulating discussions about the values and traditions that shape the quality of life and economic structures in post-modern societies. This aspect of slow food has attracted significant attention and media coverage (Miele & Murdoch, 2002; Pietrykowski, 2004; Pratt, 2007). Nonetheless, the slow food movement functions as both an economic and cultural initiative, advocating for artisanal products by spreading cultural significance (Donati, 2005; Nosi & Zanni, 2004; Tregear et al., 2007; Leitch, 2003). These diverse aspects have been crucial focuses within the slow food movement since its establishment and have been topics of discussion since its early stages. Consequently, slow food has encountered additional scrutiny: Does slow food truly offer a meaningful critique of current trends in globalising markets, or does it simply promote an elitist form of exclusivity that perpetuates market inequalities? In essence, is slow food harmful or exclusive? (Sassatelli & Davolio, 2010). This scrutiny of slow food's identity and critique leads to broader debates about its role within consumer society, where deviation from norms is often seen as politically significant and can also reflect exclusivity.

Consumer society is often perceived as a system that imposes uniformity and rigidity. Acts of consumption that deviate from these norms are viewed as politically radical (Heath & Potter, 2005). The desire for differentiation primarily influences consumer desires, making such non-standard practises increasingly notable in society (Simonetti, 2012). Building personal connections with producers and dedicating time to shared meals with close companions are activities that require significant resources. In essence, this represents a form of luxury consumption that conveys exclusivity and is growing in popularity, characteristic of products that confer status (Simonetti, 2012). Yet, accusing the slow food movement of elitism diminishes its ethical credibility by suggesting that its values and taste standards are merely a veiled expression of social status, a concept referred to as *culinaris* (Johnston & Baumann, 2014). This critique of elitism introduces a broader debate about the slow food movement's alignment with neoliberal ideologies.

Another critique of the slow food movement revolves around the perception that it aligns with the marketing and liability ideologies of neoliberalism. These critiques are significant, with scholars arguing that movements like slow food inadvertently uphold the neoliberal status quo. This is because they promote the idea that socially responsible consumer actions in the market are the most effective means of addressing broader social issues. This perspective is discussed in various studies (e.g. Alkon & Mares, 2012; Blue, 2009; Guthman, 2008; Johnston, 2008; Lavin, 2009; Lockie, 2009). Blankenship and Hayes-Conroy (2017) take a similar perspective but interpret the issue in terms of activism, stating that slow food activists use the rhetoric of individualism and personal responsibility to deal with industrialisation. This ensures the continued existence of neoliberal capitalism (Eser & Karaosmanoğlu, 2023). However, according to historians like Leitch (2003), slow food originated from the unique cultural and political context in Italy following World War II. Andrews (2008) states that slow food should not be seen as an elitist middle-class movement and that it is a 'post-materialist' movement as a form of political action. The rhetoric of individualism and personal responsibility attributed to slow food advocates also allows neoliberal capitalism to perpetuate itself (Blankenship & Hayes-Conroy, 2017). Neoliberalism also places a special emphasis on the concept of individualism (Rose 1992; Eser & Karaosmanoğlu, 2023). In addition, although slow food advocates criticise modern industrial agriculture by stating that despite the increase in cultivated areas, use of fertilisers, water consumption, and pollution, production is still not enough to feed everyone, they do not explain how to return to the old situation (Simonetti, 2012). In addition to these ideological critiques, the movement faces accusations of elitism that intersect with discussions about its social inclusivity.

Slow food, as a social movement engaging with the neoliberal capitalist system, promotes the idea of enjoying food mindfully (Petrini, 2013). However, it has faced criticism for being elitist, with some associating it with economic and racial privileges (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010). Arcigola's approach to political resistance and autonomous action has also been criticised for prioritising hedonism over genuine political engagement and for presenting a superficial radicalism that glorifies left-leaning aesthetic tastes (Laudan, 2004). These criticisms often centre on the perception that the enjoyment of slow food is limited to affluent and white individuals (Blankenship & Hayes-Conroy, 2017). This brings us back to the core issue of slow food's social implications and its broader impact on consumer culture.

Intersections and Challenges

The intersection of neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement signifies a complex interplay between economic ideologies, consumer behaviour, and sustainable food practises (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2018). Neoliberalism's emphasis on free markets and individual choice influences both political consumerism and the slow food movement but in different ways (Bennett, 2017). Political consumerism seeks to use consumer choices as a force for positive social or environmental change (Copeland & Boulianne, 2022; De Zúñiga et al., 2014). In contrast, the slow food movement, while also aiming for positive change, focuses on sustainable food practises that prioritise quality, locality, and traditional methods (Chrzan, 2004; Gaytán, 2004). However, within a market-driven system shaped by neoliberal principles, businesses are primarily motivated by profit (McDonald et al., 2017; Guthman & DuPuis, 2006). This creates challenges for political consumerism as it attempts to redirect consumer power towards ethical, sustainable products while operating within a framework where profit motives often override ethical considerations (Gundelach, 2020; Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). Similarly, the slow food movement faces obstacles within a neoliberal framework that prioritises efficiency and profit maximisation (Pietrykowski, 2004; Schneider, 2008).

The focus on efficiency in a market-driven economy often leads to mass production methods that prioritise speed and cost-effectiveness over sustainable, traditional, or local food practises (Siniscalchi, 2023; Hsu, 2015). This economic model clashes with the values upheld by the slow food movement, which advocates for practises that are often at odds with the neoliberal focus on efficiency and profit maximisation (Pietrykowski, 2004; Schneider, 2008). The neoliberal economic model, driven by the pursuit of maximum efficiency and profits, sometimes disregards the importance of sustainable, locally sourced, and traditional food practises advocated by the slow food movement (Thompson & Kumar, 2021; Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2018). As a result, both political consumerism and the slow food movement face significant hurdles in achieving their objectives within a neoliberal environment. The convergence of these forces creates a complex landscape where political consumerism strives to redirect consumer choices for positive change while encountering resistance within a profit-driven market system (Shah et al., 2007; Copeland, 2014b). Simultaneously, the slow food movement contends with difficulties in promoting its sustainable practises in an economic climate that prioritises efficiency and profit (Chrzan, 2004; Pietrykowski, 2004).

In summary, the intersection of neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement highlights the complexities arising from attempts to promote ethical and sustainable practises within a market-driven system (Thompson & Kumar, 2021; Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2018). Both political consumerism and the slow food movement encounter challenges stemming from the dominance of profit motives and efficiency within the neoliberal framework. These challenges make their objectives of effecting positive change in consumer behaviour and food practises more difficult to achieve, as they must navigate a landscape that often prioritises economic efficiency over ethical considerations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The interaction between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement highlights the intricate and multi-layered nature of modern socio-political dynamics (Thompson & Kumar, 2021; Guthman & DuPuis, 2006; Ulver, 2022). These phenomena represent various facets of consumer behaviour, economic ideologies, and societal movements that intersect and influence each other in complex ways (Neilson, 2010; Copeland & Boulianne, 2022; Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007). Understanding how these movements and ideologies interact is crucial for assessing the potential for substantial change within societies driven by consumer behaviour (De Zúñiga et al., 2014; Neilson & Paxton, 2010). By comprehending the interplay between neoliberalism's market-driven approach, political consumerism's advocacy for ethical consumption, and the focus of the slow food movement on sustainable practises, it becomes possible to identify opportunities and challenges for effecting meaningful change (Thompson & Kumar, 2021; Neilson, 2010; Pietrykowski, 2004).

As these movements evolve, it becomes apparent that addressing the tensions between market forces, ethical consumption, and sustainable practises requires a multifaceted approach (Copeland, 2014a; Rejman & Czubocho, 2019; Neilson & Paxton, 2010). Dialogue among stakeholders—consumers, businesses, policymakers, and advocacy groups—is essential to foster mutual understanding and collaboration (De Zúñiga et al., 2014; Shah et al., 2007). Policy interventions are crucial to create frameworks that incentivize ethical and sustainable practises while also ensuring market viability (Neilson, 2010; Bossy, 2014). Moreover, collective action, where various actors collaborate towards common goals, is necessary to drive significant change (Micheletti et al., 2012; Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007; Gotlieb & Cheema, 2017).

The goal is to shape a future where equity and environmental consciousness are integral components of societal structures (Copeland, 2014b; Bennett, 2017; Shah et al., 2007). By addressing the tensions between market-driven forces, ethical consumption, and sustainable practises, societies can strive towards a more balanced and responsible approach to consumption and production (Pietrykowski, 2004; Schneider, 2008; Rejman & Czubocho, 2019). This entails not only individual choices but also systemic changes that align economic incentives with ethical and environmental values. Recognising the interplay between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement sheds light on the complexities of modern socio-political dynamics (Thompson & Kumar, 2021; Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007; Copeland & Boulianne, 2022). Understanding these interactions is crucial for envisioning and implementing strategies—through dialogue, policy interventions, and collective action—that can lead to a more equitable, environmentally conscious, and sustainable future (De Zúñiga et al., 2014; Neilson, 2010; Copeland, 2014b). As long as neoliberal capitalism continues to exist as a system of exploitation and domination (Springer 2010), new forms of ashore will surely emerge that continue to survive and thrive in a privileged way in the vortex of modern life (Blankensihp & Hayes-Conroy, 2017).

The study reveals several key insights. First, neoliberalism's focus on market efficiency and individual responsibility fosters conditions that give rise to political consumerism, as consumers increasingly turn to ethical consumption as a form of socio-political expression. Second, the slow food movement emerged as both a critique of and a response to neoliberalism, advocating for local, sustainable food practises that resist the market-driven homogenisation of global food cultures. However, the study also highlights the limitations of political consumerism within a neoliberal framework, where consumer-driven activism, while impactful, is constrained by the overarching power structures that prioritise profit and market efficiency. While political consumerism and movements like slow food offer valuable tools for resistance, broader systemic changes are required to address the root causes of neoliberalism's socio-political impacts.

The current study makes significant theoretical contributions by advancing the understanding of the interplay between neoliberalism, political consumerism, and the slow food movement, illustrating how neoliberal market dynamics not only foster political consumerism but also shape the slow food movement as both a critique and a product of these dynamics. This theoretical framework enriches the discourse on consumer behaviour by linking it more closely to socio-political contexts and providing a nuanced perspective on how consumer choices can serve as a form of political engagement. Practically, the article offers valuable insights for activists, policymakers, and practitioners in the fields of food politics and sustainability, highlighting the potential of political consumerism to drive social change while also acknowledging its limitations within a neoliberal framework. These contributions underscore the importance of considering both the empowering and constraining effects of neoliberalism on consumer-driven movements, thereby informing more effective strategies for promoting ethical and sustainable food practises.

The study acknowledges its limitations due to the lack of empirical data and reliance on conceptual discussion. Future research should incorporate empirical studies to validate the theoretical claims made, especially in relation to the motivations and behaviours of political consumers within the slow food movement. In general, eating is an act that gives pleasure to people in addition to consumption. However, this study also reveals the political side of eating, specifically slow food. In this context, the political, consumption, and pleasure dimensions of the discourses or consumer perceptions regarding the slow food movement can be investigated. Additionally, a systematic literature review could provide a more structured understanding of the existing body of

study and identify research gaps (Snyder, 2023). Thus, it will be possible to find empirical support for the subject or to open new horizons on the subject.

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