ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

# Anti-consumption: an integrative review to understand the current state of scientific production

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ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the current status of scientific production about anticonsumption through an integrative literature review that identifies international and national studies published in highly relevant journals. The method applied was proposed by Botelho, Cunha & Macedo (2011). A total of 101 papers published between 2011 and 2021 were selected at the end of the analyses. The objectives were to identify the main conceptual definition used in studies on this topic, the target audience, the level of analysis and arguments for anticonsumption, the most applied research method, and the scope of this research. Furthermore, this paper attempts to highlight the main criticism of this theory raised by the scholars in this field, clarify possibilities for future research and introduce a new theoretical model that summarizes how the anti-consumption phenomenon takes place in different contexts/situations according to the findings on the studies analyzed by this integrative review. Hopefully, this paper can contribute to advancing and developing this field at the theoretical and practical levels by setting a research agenda.

KEYWORDS: Anti-consumption. Resistance to consumption. Integrative Review.

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Large corporations have taken several initiatives for sustainable development in an attempt to meet the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social). However, these efforts have not yet been sufficient to satisfy the current demands in these three spheres equally. Moreover, citizens are responsible, as an integral part of the social context, that tends to follow an anthropocentric paradigm that encourages unbridled consumption. Thus, sustainable consumption habits and practices could reduce the amount of purchased goods and post-consumer waste generated in favor of environmental preservation (LEE et al., 2011; WILSON; ROBSON; PITT, 2021).

This scenario arouses Marketing scholars' and professionals' interest in researching what makes some customers embrace the anti-consumption of specific products/services/brands to help them understand how to better position themselves in the face of a possible change in the current paradigm that defends consumption as "something good for the economy and the individual." This movement has become an increasing social trend that discourages purchase and consumption, preventing social value erosion and environmental deterioration (COVA; D'ANTONE, 2016).

Furthermore, over the last thirty years, anti-consumption has emerged as a discrete research topic in the Marketing literature, with only a few special issues dedicated to its discussion in some renowned journals, which justifies further studies on this topic. Some examples are Psychology and Marketing (2002), Journal of Business Research (2009), Consumption, Markets and Culture (2010), Journal of Consumer Behavior (2010), European Journal of Marketing (2011), Journal of Macromarketing (2013), Journal of Consumer Affairs (2016) and Journal of Public Policy and Marketing (2018) (AIDAR; DANIELS, 2020).

It is essential to point out some issues that prevent the evolution of this field of research. First, anti-consumption is more than "the opposite of consumption," Many studies have yet to present a clear and well-founded definition for this concept. Although some studies regard anti-consumption as a form of behavior, attitude, lifestyle, a set of motivations, and practices, the lack of consensus makes it difficult to establish interpretations that adequately represent the phenomenon, preventing its theoretical development. Second, many Marketing scholars question whether the research carried out on this topic was, in fact, able to offer significant contributions to the area or if they only reproduced similar results to those found in other

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

research on phenomena already present in the market, for instance, those that explore consumer behavior. Thus, these difficulties hinder the theoretical and practical advancement and public policies that might contribute to sustainable economic growth (CHATZIDAKIS; LEE, 2012; AIDAR; DANIELS, 2020; WILSON; ROBSON; PITT, 2021). Therefore, this context justifies an integrative review that attempts to answer the following question: what is the current status of scientific production on anti-consumption? Thus, we carried out a survey to identify international and national studies on anti-consumption published in highly relevant journals between 2011 and 2021, applying the method for integrative literature review proposed by Botelho, Cunha & Macedo (2011).

This paper's main objective is to understand the current status of scientific production on anti-consumption. The specific objectives are (i) to identify the main conceptual definition used in studies on this topic; (ii) to identify the target audience, level of analysis, and arguments for anti-consumption; (iii) to identify the most applied research approach; (iv) describe the scope of anti-consumption research; (v) to highlight the main criticism to this theory raised by the scholars in this field and clarify possibilities for future research; (vi) to introduce a new theoretical model that summarizes how the anti-consumption phenomenon takes place in different contexts/situations according to the findings on the studies analyzed by this integrative review. As a result, this paper can hopefully contribute to advancing and developing this field at the theoretical and practical level by setting a research agenda.

#### **2 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

There is a broad scope of anti-consumption reactions characterized as active actions by individuals and groups, such as financial economy; frugality consisting in the ingenious use of material goods and services for the sake of saving money; need to reduce waste; political issues; moral issues; environmental sustainability; simple lifestyle, with more free time and less financial resources (voluntary simplicity); discomfort with the discrepancy between personal image and image imposed by the market about what is ideal; the desire to combat the prevailing consumer culture; religious motivations. As for the latter, there is Catholicism, for instance, which maintains a derogatory position towards consumption, acknowledging greed, gluttony, pride, and envy (some of the main drivers of material desires) as four of the seven deadly sins. The religious morality promoted by other religions with stricter rules and restrictions against material desires, such as Islam and Hinduism, also facilitates the adoption of anti-consumption behavior (COVA; D'ANTONE, 2016; CASABAYÓ; DÁVILA; RAYBURN, 2020).

In addition, there are other movements like Tightwadism, marked by reduced consumption due to the feeling of pain when spending (avarice), or the philosophy Freegan, which originated from the voluntary simplicity movement around the year 2000 and that seeks to minimize the environmental impact by feeding on discarded food and sharing of goods (PENTINA; AMOS, 2011).

Among the many scholars who have endeavored to conceptualize this phenomenon accurately are Penaloza & Price (1993) and Zavestoski (2002), who were recognized as the first researchers who attempted to propose a conceptual definition. Penaloza & Price (1993) described anti-consumption as a resistance to the dominant culture of consumption and the marketing of mass-produced goods, whereas Zavestoski (2002) described it as a resistance to, distaste of, or even resentment or rejection of, consumption. These authors relate anti-consumption to a resistance that materializes through an activity/attitude and state that this phenomenon occurs through a set of countercultural attitudes/behaviors that challenge the dominant capitalist system and oppose oppressive forces.

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

Other researchers oppose this definition because they believe that this asymmetry of power is not present in all anti-consumption instances that may depend on consumption.

Anti-consumption is used to achieve social or personal goals related to lifestyles involving the acquisition of goods/services, such as the purchase of eco-friendly products, instead of those that do not have a sustainable production system. Thus, the concern lies in how consumption is affected by this type of action and not in the existing power relations between consumer and market (LEE et al., 2011; KOSKENNIEMI, 2021). In this context, Lee et al. (2009) argue that anti-consumption research should focus on the "reasons" against consumption and not on "the characteristics of consumers' attitudes and behaviors" since what motivates an individual to purchase an eco-friendly product might not necessarily be the sustainable production system but its quality or cost-benefit.

It should be noted that the concepts of anti-consumption and resistance to consumption differ but also overlap. Anti-consumption focuses on "the reasons" against consumption, whereas resistance focuses on "the actions" of consumers that are against the products, practices, and partnerships associated with "a dominant structure". Although anti-consumption might be motivated by symbolic incongruity, negative experiences, or value inadequacy, resistance to consumption requires an "antagonist" for it to occur, be it a hegemonic company or the consumer society. Moreover, a consumer's resistance might even be manifested as a kind of dynamic behavior in the market through consumption. For example, some consumers deliberately start to purchase certain brands/products in a concerted action to bring about changes in other organizations in favor of the environment or society (boycotts). Resistance can also be expressed due to power imbalances present in the market, like the consumers who opt for intermediary channels, moving away, for instance, from buying from the dairy industry to dealing directly with milk producers who do not receive fair payment (LEE et al., 2011; KHAN et al., 2019).

According to Lee et al. (2011), this conceptual overlap hinders the segmentation of these concepts, which causes the researchers to discuss their results according to the conceptual definition closest to their findings. Thus, what is referred to as "resistance to" a particular product/service/brand in a specific case might be closer to the definition of anti-consumption since it focuses on the personal "reasons" that lead to this counter-consumption. In other cases, besides the reasons, there is also an "antagonist" or a "dominant force" that originated these reasons hindering consumption, which allows the findings to be discussed in the light of these two theoretical frameworks. Note that the conceptual definitions discussed in this integrative review and those different subdomains for anti-consumption describe the phenomenon based on the reasons given by individuals or groups that justify anti-consumption and that may or may not involve an antagonist, be it the capitalist system or the dominant culture of consumption, which confirms the multifaceted conceptualization present in this field of research and the need to choose conceptual definitions that are closer to the particularities of the investigated contexts to support studies on this theme (ERBISTI; ERBISTI; SUAREZ, 2019).

#### **3 INTEGRATIVE REVIEW METHOD**

This paper has applied the methodological process for carrying out integrative reviews proposed by Botelho, Cunha & Macedo (2011). The results gathered through the stages of this process are presented and discussed below.

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

#### 3.1 Theme identification and definition of the research question

In this stage, the researchers formulate the research question that will guide the integrative review and highlight the topic to be investigated. For this specific study, we formulated the following research question: what is the current status of scientific production on anti-consumption? Afterward, we defined the search strategy descriptors or keywords and the electronic database or libraries to be consulted. The keywords searched were anti-consumption, resistance to consumption, anticonsumo, and resistência ao consumo. This integrative review has consulted the following database: Portal da Capes, Science Direct, Scielo, and Spell.

The selection procedure used the following search filters in the databases: title, abstract, keywords, and full papers. Furthermore, we opted to include the keyword resistance to consumption and *resistência ao consumo* because these concepts overlap and are closer to the conceptual definition of anti-consumption.

#### 3.2 Establishing the eligibility criteria

This stage establishes the eligibility criteria for selecting papers available in the database. The research was carried out between September and December 2021, considering papers published between 2011 and 2021. This study applied the eligibility criteria for systematic mapping suggested by Parmiggiani & Mikalsen (2013), which excludes articles that do not provide a clear and solid definition of the investigated phenomenon and articles that have the keywords, but that discusses another phenomenon present in the literature.

These criteria that have guided the selection of papers were fundamental, mainly due to the many search results found. For instance, the first search on Portal da Capes identified 7,077 entries for the keyword resistência ao consumo and 58 for anticonsumo.

### 3.3 Analysis of selected studies

This stage requires a thorough reading of selected studies considering the eligibility criteria to achieve a final sample of studies that will be analyzed in the integrative review. A total of 271 papers were selected in the first analysis by reading the title, abstract, and keywords: 100 on Portal da Capes, 106 on Web of Science, 39 on Scielo, and 26 on Spell.

Duplicate papers were excluded in the second analysis, limiting the sample to 204 studies. There was another screening in the third stage based on the criteria proposed by Parmiggiani & Mikalsen (2013), which excluded papers that did not provide a clear and solid definition of the investigated phenomenon, thus achieving the final sample with 101 papers as described in Table 1.

Table 1 – Titles and number of citations of articles selected for the integrative review

#### **Scientific Paper**

ADAPA, S. Factors influencing consumption and anti-consumption of recycled water: Evidence from Australia. **Journal of Cleaner Production**, v.201, n.1, p.624–635, 2018.

AIDAR, L.; DANIELS, P. A critical review of voluntary simplicity: Definitional inconsistencies, movement identity and direction for future research. **The Social Science Journal**, v.1, n. 14, p.1-14, 2020.

ALBUQUERQUE, F. M. F. DE; PEREIRA, R. DE C. DE F.; BELLINI, C. G. P. Do repertório de comportamentos do consumidor: retaliação e vingança no ciberespaço. **Revista de Administração**, v.46, n.2, p.135–149, 2011

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

ALI, B. J. Impact of Consumer Animosity, Boycott Participation, Boycott Motivation, and Product Judgment on Purchase Readiness or Aversion of Kurdish Consumers in Iraq. **Journal of Consumer Affairs**, v.23,n.1,p.23-32, 2021.

AMINE, A.; GICQUEL, Y. Rethinking resistance and anti-consumption behaviours in the light of the concept of deviance. **European Journal of Marketing**, v.45, n.11/12, p.1809–1819, 2011

ANTONIA RUSSELL, C.; RUSSELL, D. W.; NEIJENS, P. C. Consumption expressions of ideological resistance. **European Journal of Marketing**, v.45, n.11/12, p. 1715–1724, 2011.

APOSTOLIDIS, C.; MCLEAY, F. To meat or not to meat? Comparing empowered meat consumers' and anti-consumers' preferences for sustainability labels. **Food Quality and Preference**, v.19, n.1, p.31-47, 2019.

ARSLAN, Y.; YILDIRIM, E.; DINÇER, M. A. M.; TÜRKMEN BARUTÇU, M. Examining consumers' anti-consumption tendencies towards food products. **British Food Journal**, v.120, n.9, p.1980–1993, 2018.

BALDERJAHN, I.; LEE, M. S.; SEEGEBARTH, B.; PEYER, M. A sustainable pathway to consumer well-being. The role of anti-consumption and consumer empowerment. **Journal of Consumer Affairs**, v.1, n.16, p.1-14, 2019.

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CENGIZ, H.; TORLAK, Ö. Investigating the Demographics and Behavioural Characteristics Associated with Voluntary Simplicity Lifestyles in a Developed and a Developing Country: A Comparison between US and Turkish Simplifiers. **Global Business Review**, 097215091880708, 2018.

CHA, M., LEE, H. The relationship between anti-consumption lifestyle and the trust triangle in a ride-sharing platform: A cross-cultural study of U.S. and Indian consumers. **International Journal of Consumer Studies**, v.24, n.1, p.110=123, 2021.

CHANEY, D.; SLIMANE, K. B. Rethinking consumer resistance through institutional entrepreneurship. **International Journal of Market Research**, v.61,n.5, p.468–477, 2019.

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ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

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ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

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Source: Integrative review data, 2023

Specific characteristics regarding these studies should be noted. Of 101 papers, 15 were written in Portuguese, and the others in English. These papers are distributed in 44 journals, of which only 12 are Brazilian. As for the most cited papers, four stand out: Seegebarth et al. (2016), cited by 122; Chatzidakis & Lee (2013), cited by 136; Lim (2017), cited by 195; and Cherrier, Black, & Lee (2011) cited by 269. The journals with the most published papers are the European Journal of Marketing (14 papers, of which 11 were published in 2011), the International Journal of Consumer Studies (8 papers), the Journal of Consumer Affairs (7 papers), and the Journal of Consumer Culture (6 papers). Furthermore, the journals with the most significant number of publications are focused on areas such as General and Applied Marketing, like the European Journal of Marketing, Consumer Behavior, the International Journal of Consumer Studies and the Journal of Consumer Affairs, and Consumer Culture, like the Journal of Consumer Culture.

#### 3.4 Categorization of selected studies

In this stage, the information extracted from the selected scientific papers is summarized and documented. One of the strategies applied is the synthesis matrix, which consists of analysis categories and offers a guideline for evaluating the selected sample. The categories established were: definition of anti-consumption; the target audience, level of analysis and arguments for anti-consumption; research method; scope of this research; criticism of this theory; and possibilities for future research.

### **4 EVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION OF CATEGORIES (RESULTS)**

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

#### 4.1 Definition of anti-consumption

The review showed that most of the analyzed studies are based on the conceptual definition proposed by Lee, Fernandez & Hyman (2009), Lee et al. (2011), Zavestoski (20), and Iyer & Muncy (2009). These authors share similar and complementary understandings of the anti-consumption phenomenon. According to them, anti-consumption will occur depending on the reasons of individuals and social groups that justify adopting a position against consumption and are seen as triggers. When triggered, anti-consumption can be manifested by rejection, restriction, and recovery implicit in anti-consumption practices such as boycotts, voluntary simplicity, and sustainable anti-consumption, among others. Note that anti-consumption might be expressed by an active consumer stance when they choose to buy certain products instead of others due to personal reasons, as discussed previously.

#### 4.2 Target audience, level of analysis, and arguments for anti-consumption

According to Aidar & Daniels (2020), literature often cites satisfaction in consuming less, life satisfaction, increased happiness, and well-being as proven grounds or reasons for anticonsumption at the micro level (which impact the individual). On the other hand, at the macro level (which impacts companies), they cite the anti-consumption behavior of individuals that compromises the organization's image and reputation, leading to a decline in sales and profitability. Finally, at the meso level (which impacts a country), there are anti-consumption behaviors that can impact a nation, especially economically, due to the rejection of their products/services/brands by other countries. From the 101 papers analyzed in this integrative review, 61 investigated the anti-consumption phenomenon at the micro level, 17 at the macro level, eight at the meso level, and 15 focused on the systematic or integrative literature review, which does not involve field surveys. Furthermore, studies focused on the meso level were carried out in developed countries such as the United States, Spain, France, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The results did not find research that seeks to explore anti-consumption implications at this level in emerging countries. At the micro level, the following situations are described in the selected studies: improvement of well-being and quality of life; reduce the oppression and inequalities caused by the capitalist system; concern about environmental impacts (environmental awareness); disappointment with previous purchases that did not meet a specific need. At the macro level, there are boycotts of products made from natural resources aiming at environmental preservation, brand avoidance due to moral evasion (belief characterized by the moral duty to avoid certain brands due to the negative impacts they cause on society), boycott lousy service. Also, at the meso level, there is a reluctance to purchase products from countries that do not have a positive social and environmental image and a resistance driven by animosity towards a country due to cultural, political, military, and economic reasons.

#### 4.3 Research method

This study showed that the qualitative approach predominates in empirical studies on anti-consumption (46 papers) along with systematic and integrative literature reviews (15

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

papers). The literature reviews seek to analyze the concepts and discussed definitions of this phenomenon critically and map the scope of the literature, develop analytical schemes of an evolutionary nature, and suggest specific research proposals for the field to advance in theory and practice. On the other hand, the other empirical studies with a qualitative approach explore descriptive study methods such as ethnography and netnography. As for the quantitative approach studies (36 papers), they largely applied questionnaires, especially online ones that can be spread across the internet. Regarding the analysis techniques, those that aim at confirming hypotheses and relationships between variables stand out, such as factor analysis, linear regression, and structural equation (which combines linear regression and structural equation). Also, four papers adopted a quali-quantitative approach, applying some of the collection and analysis methods described.

#### 4.4 Scope of the research on anti-consumption

The predominant conceptual conglomerates in these studies were: resistance to consumption; resistance to foreign products/brands; avoidance of products/services/brands; anti-consumption to meet sustainability / green consumption purposes; involuntary anti-consumption; voluntary simplicity; boycott/consumer activism. As discussed previously, anti-consumption behaviors can be expressed through the resistance in which consumers oppose a dominant force, i.e., the resistance requires an antagonist to manifest itself. This integrative review has identified as antagonists the capitalist system, the dominant consumer culture, and the values imposed by society and companies that oppose personal values, including those of a religious nature (PEIFER; CHUGANI; ROOS, 2019).

Products/services/brands avoidance focuses on the active rejection marked by the abandonment behavior (giving up a product/service/brand previously consumed). These negative emotions are related to expectations not met during the acquisition and use of products/services and to unaccepted corporate behavior, generating dislike, anger, worry, embarrassment, and disappointment, all negative emotions that motivate anti-consumption (KUANR et al., 2021). The anti-consumption for sustainability is based on the principles of sustainable consumption, which recognizes natural resources, often used as raw materials to produce specific products, as non-renewable. This area also includes animal welfare (APOSTOLIDIS; MCLEAY, 2019). As for involuntary anti-consumption, this practice can be considered undesirable because for the poor or those lacking financial resources, the identity of 'non-consumer' is not viewed as the 'desired ideal'. Voluntary simplicity refers to consumers that willingly reduce or simplify their consumption patterns to limit spending on goods and services and cultivate non-materialistic sources that are satisfying and meaningful. This movement represents a lifestyle adopted by individuals that wish to avoid consumption, buy less or use their resources more efficiently (HERZIGE; BERKESSEL; STEINNES, 2020).

Boycotts represent an extreme stance within the scope of ethical consumption, in which consumers collectively refrain from purchasing certain products and services from companies that display unacceptable behavior. Individuals involved in boycotts may resume consumption if the imposed conditions are met, such as changing the offending company's policies (HOFFMANN et al., 2018).

Symbolic anti-consumption will occur when individuals seek to build their identities from the rejection or acquisition of certain products/services/brands because the products

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

individuals buy, the activities they perform, and the philosophies and beliefs they follow reflect who they are and how they identify themselves. These behaviors of rejection or acquisition of products/services/brands work as signs or information transmitted to themselves and to other individuals in the social contexts they favor (COMASSETTO et al., 2013).

#### 4.5 Criticism of this theory and possibilities for future research.

Despite the growing academic interest in anti-consumption, the lack of a clear definition and the use of several concepts that overlap is detrimental to the literature, preventing anticonsumption research from reaching its maximum potential through concrete and meaningful results (AIDAR; DANIELS, 2020). The impacts of anti-consumption lifestyles on the well-being of people that live in a consumer society remain unclear. Many studies give an exaggerated emphasis on finding a positive relationship between anti-consumption and well-being. However, precise answers regarding this relationship have not yet been obtained (BALDERJAHN et al., 2019). It is necessary to identify more clearly whether certain social actors present in our society influence people to adhere to anti-consumption, in addition to their personal motivations. It is also necessary to analyze whether there is a relationship between anti-consumption and economic development, as consumer culture differs significantly between advanced Western societies and developing countries. Another deficiency identified in anti-consumption research is regarding the local culture. It is unclear if the values that measure anti-consumption behavior, its reasons, and practices are universal or if they vary between different national cultures. Furthermore, this study shows there is a lack of practical solutions proposed by research to guide the anti-consumers in managing their consumer choices in the market in order to make anticonsumption more attractive to society and to normalize it rather than treating it as a practice that can cause suffering in most situations (AIDAR; DANIELS, 2020).

#### **5 CONCLUSION**

To better demonstrate these findings and offer contributions to the advancement in this field of research, we developed the following model (Figure 1), which describes how anticonsumption occurs based on the conclusions of the articles analyzed in this study.

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

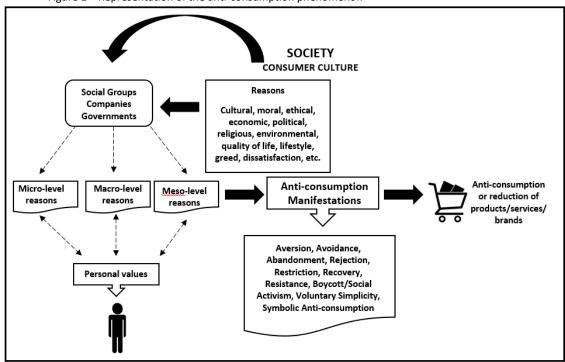


Figure 1 – Representation of the anti-consumption phenomenon

Source: Integrative review data (2023)

- 1. According to the proposed model, consumers acquire personal values throughout their life (through their social relationships and experiences) that may be regarded as long-lasting beliefs that guide their behavior in different situations, including acquiring goods and services. However, these values can be replaced with social actors' influence in our society. For instance, when an individual is part of a social group, they may recognize the values shared by the other members as the best beliefs to guide their attitudes. In terms of consumption, these shared values can change their perception of consumption.
- 2. In our society, there are social groups made up of individuals with values (beliefs/ideologies) that may even be manifested as lifestyle or personal reasons justifying anti-consumption. These lifestyles and reasons are characterized as micro-level reasons for anti-consumption (which impact the individual) and influence their consumer behavior, leading them to reduce or stop consuming certain products/services/brands when they recognize these reasons as legitimate.
- 3. Conversely, companies that offer products and services may exhibit inappropriate behavior, such as not meeting consumer expectations and anti-ethical/irresponsible attitudes that are at odds with the values legitimized by society. When these situations are acknowledged by consumers and generate negative emotions (e.g., dislike, anger, worry, embarrassment, and disappointment), they become macro-level reasons for anti-consumption (which impact companies), which may affect their image and reputation, thus reducing their sales and profitability.
- 4. Some countries may impose barriers to prevent the consumption of foreign products and services for political, cultural, economic, and environmental reasons, for example. When these barriers are legitimized through specific laws, they become meso-level reasons for anti-

ISSN 1980-0827 - Volume 19, número 2, 2023

consumption (which impact countries), especially at the economic level due to foreign consumers' resistance/rejection of its products/services/brands.

5. When micro, macro, and meso reasons are acknowledged by consumers, becoming individual motivations demonstrating the immediate personal benefits that can be obtained, they lead to anti-consumption manifestations that directly impact the consumption of products and services. 6. The dominant consumer culture that sees excessive materialistic consumption as a symbol of 'the good life', 'freedom', and 'progress' might become a reason for anti-consumption to individuals and social groups that value conscious and sustainable consumption, for example. In fact, consumer culture may subside the construction of consumer identities that would prevent/ease anti-consumption, as the products an individual purchases and the activities they perform reflect whom they want to be and how they identify themselves. Therefore, acquisitions (purchases of goods/services/brands) send signs or information to other individuals in the social contexts they favor. Thus, if the reasons against the dominant consumer culture are not consolidated, anti-consumption manifestations will not occur, especially in social groups with higher purchasing power and who tend to be more individualistic rather than collectivist. Individualism can be characterized as a tendency to value personal material and immaterial needs related to the needs of the collective, i.e., of society.

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