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The Citizen-Consumer: Media Effects at the Intersection of Consumer and Civic Culture

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Scholars in various fields have speculated that the commercialization of mass media has contributed to the decline of civic culture. They contend that the personal needs emphasized by product-saturated mass media diminish civic-mindedness by creating an individualistic consumption-oriented culture. Despite this critique, some scholars argue that mass media do not erode civic culture in favor of consumer culture; rather, the two are thought to be positively interrelated. Although these contrasting perspectives have been repeatedly discussed, research has rarely empirically investigated these contending claims. We examine media influences on civic and consumer culture while considering the interrelationships of consumer attitudes and behaviors with civic participation using the 2000 DDB Life Style Study. In doing so, we distinguish between news and entertainment media and between socially conscious and status-oriented consumption. A latent variable structural equation model is used to test hypotheses. Results suggest that consumption behaviors and civic participation are not conflicting, even though media foster commercial attitudes and motivate consumption. Overall, media effects on this dynamic are positive, suggesting that critiques of media demobilization may be misplaced.

Keywords civic participation, consumer culture, entertainment media, media effects, news media, socially conscious consumption, status-oriented consumption

Scholars in a variety of fields have speculated about the negative effects of mass media on civic life. Typically, these critiques stress factors such as time displacement from civic activities (Putnam, 1995) and the cultivation of "mean world" perceptions (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980) that lead to social mistrust. However, a third criticism of media has emerged, the contention that the commercialization of media diminishes civic-mindedness by creating a consumption-oriented culture (Bennett, 1996, 1998,

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2000; Turow, 1997). As activist and politician Ralph Nader (2000, p. viii) contends, the rise of consumerism "is due mainly to the increased reach of television and other media, which now broadcast the lifestyles of the rich and famous into the homes and hearts of every social class, including the very poor." Even news media are thought to spur a status game of competitive consumption due to the market-driven characteristics and information subsidies that characterize modern journalism (Gandy, 1982; McChesney, 2000). This view assumes consumption and civic engagement as opposing goals in a zero-sum game of inversely related behaviors.

A cursory survey of the contemporary media landscape seems to confirm the view that the media have become overly commercialized. News outlets increasingly feature new products and services (e.g., Circuits, *New York Times*), and entertainment programs (e.g., *Sex and the City* and *Friends*) weave a growing number of product placements into storylines (Wells, 2001). This is not to say that mass media are devoid of civically mobilizing content, but that the market orientation of the mass media dominates air and space and is thought to cultivate and reinforce material values (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Schor, 1998). That is, this overly commercial content may erode civic mindedness by sustaining a culture that focuses on individual rather than collective needs even while some content continues to mobilize.

Concerns about how consumer culture may be undermining civic culture have not been central to empirical studies in the sociology of political communication. Yet, radical critics of American society have long condemned its materialistic and consumerist tendencies and warned of the potential consequences of this dynamic for civic and political life (Marcuse, 1992; Mills, 1951/1956, 1956/1970). Similarly, Robert Bellah and colleagues (1985) drew attention to the challenges confronting American society due to its inability to reconcile the liberal economic philosophy of the markets with the "expressive individualism" and "moral intuitions" of the public sphere.[1] These classic sociological works share an underlying sentiment that the pressures of the commercial market often undermine the basic institutions of democracy, including, implicitly, the mass media.

Despite this critique, some scholars argue that mass media do not favor consumer culture at the expense of civic society; rather, consumption and participation, they contend, are inextricably linked together. As Scammell (2000) notes, "the act of consumption is becoming increasingly suffused with citizenship characteristics and considerations. . . . It is no longer possible to cut the deck neatly between citizenship and civic duty, on one side, and consumption and self interest, on the other" (pp. 351–352). This is most obvious in socially conscious consumers such as environmentalists and anti-globalists who consume in ways that demonstrate public spiritedness. Cultural capital gained through certain forms of consumption also may be essential to access networks of power and participation (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). Implying the reciprocity between consumer culture and community life, Schudson (1984) argues that "not only are people's individual needs defined socially, but their individual needs include a need for social connection which is sometimes expressed materially" (p. 146). Thus, individual consumption and communal affiliation may not exist in opposition (Thompson, 2000). In fact, some evidence suggests that communities can form around individuals' shared brand consumption patterns (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Said another way, consumer culture and civic engagement may be interconnected and mutually supportive rather than opposing, at least in the context of certain brand communities.

Although these perspectives on consumer culture and civic life have been repeatedly discussed, little research has empirically investigated this dynamic. Moreover, scholars who discuss the role of mass media in consumer culture and civic life have usually

treated media as a monolithic whole (Putnam, 1995), rather than a source of various types of news and entertainment content that produce distinct effects depending on genres of content and individuals' motives for use (Norris, 1996; Shah, 1998). Insights have been limited by a failure to recognize that news and entertainment content may have distinct effects on the relationships between citizenship and consumption.

To address these issues, this research examines differential influences of news and entertainment media on indicators of consumer and civic culture using a large national survey data set, the 2000 DDB Life Style Study. Further, we consider interrelationships of two consumption patterns—status-oriented consumption and socially conscious consumption—with civic participation. Building on current theorizing about media, consumer culture, and civic participation, this study has three objectives: (a) confirm the direct effect of media on civic participation, (b) examine media influences on consumer attitudes and consumption activities, and (c) clarify the associations among consumer attitudes and behaviors and civic participation.

Mass Media Use and Civic Participation

Although not the first to critique the media for their supposed role in the decline of civic-mindedness, Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) has done much to popularize the view that mass media, particularly television, are largely to blame for the erosion of social capital because individuals privatize leisure time rather than seek out activities with community members. Referencing the dual threats of time displacement and "mean world" perceptions, the effects of television are estimated without any consideration of *how* it is used, simply *how much* it is used.[2] However, as Norris (1996) notes, these critiques of the media are "drawn in black-and-white terms, as though there is one television experience, rather than multiple channels and programs, and one audience, rather than different types of viewers" (p. 475). Norris highlights the pro-civic effects of televised news content, echoing what communication scholars have known for quite some time: News mobilizes (see, for review, McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999).

There are a number of reasons for this relationship. Literature in political communication has found that news media can be effective sources of information about public affair issues (e.g., Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Shah, 1998). Scholars since Tocqueville (1835/1969) have argued that exposure to news promotes civic engagement by giving voice to community concerns. Thus, the positive effects of media use on civic participation tend to be concentrated among individuals who actively read or watch news to seek information about their community. This research does not claim that news is free of commercial appeals and has purely salutary effects; rather, it highlights the potential of some news content to activate citizens.

Empirical research connecting news media use and increased citizen participation is extensive. In general, research supports the premise that news use has positive effects (Norris, 1996). Specifically, McLeod and his colleagues (McLeod et al., 1996, 2001; McLeod, Scheufele, & Moy, 1999) have found that newspapers, with their deeper content and focus on community events, produce pro-civic consequences. Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) also observed the positive influence of newspapers, news magazines, and television hard news on civic participation. News media not only educate, they provide the basis for political discussion and deliberation that can lead to civic action (Scheufele & Shah, 2000).

News media may also channel the effects of basic demographic influences. That is, the effects of socioeconomic status on civic participation may be mediated by communication

variables, particularly news media use (McLeod et al., 1999; Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996). News provides people with community information and psychological resources, such as efficacy, that promote civic participation. In contrast, studies considering entertainment programming tend to focus on its negative effect on viewers' civic participation. Situation comedies, for example, are thought to present a "a 'life-world' that is generally free of social controversy and value conflicts" and therefore unlikely to encourage civic participation (Shah et al., 2001, p. 472). Research conducted by Sotirovic and McLeod (2001) and Shah et al. (2001) provides evidence of a negative relationship between sitcom viewing and participation.

A similar relationship may exist between the consumption of police dramas and civic participation but for different reasons. As opposed to the sanguine world of sitcoms, programs such as crime dramas prominently display a mean world "full of deception, betrayal, and wrongdoing" through the constant portrayal of "crimes, sinister happenings, and hazardous experiences" (Shah et al., 2001, p. 472). Consistent with a modified cultivation perspective, higher exposure to such programs should encourage perception of a dangerous world among viewers. Such perceptions may reduce participation in community life. Similar critiques have been extended to other genres of programming, including talk shows and reality programs, with their recurrent portrayals of suspicion and betrayal (Shah et al., 2001). Thus, we hypothesize the following relationships between media use and civic participation.

Hypothesis 1: News media use will be positively related to civic participation.
Hypothesis 2: Entertainment television use will be negatively related to civic participation.

Mass Media, Environmental Orientations, and Consumption Consciousness

A sizable body of research also suggests a connection between media use and consumer culture. Mass media have been found to play a role in consumer socialization by providing knowledge and skills regarding how and what to consume, creating material expectations and values (Atkin, 1981; Goldberg, Gorn, & Gibson, 1978; Schudson, 1984). Although there are a multitude of modes of consumption, two forms seem particularly relevant for understanding the relationship between media and civic engagement: socially conscious consumption and status-oriented consumption. Media content—programming and advertising—has long been thought to encourage conspicuous consumption as a sort of status game (Veblen, 1899/1965; Schor, 1998). Before turning to this relationship, we consider whether media foster concerns about social issues such as the environment and thereby encourage prosocial forms of consumption that reflect this orientation (Holt, 2000).

Notably, there is a growing movement of socially conscious consumption (Brooker, 1976) among consumers. "The socially conscious consumer is defined . . . [as] a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change" (Webster, 1975, p. 188). Work in the 1970s established concepts and theories related to socially conscious (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972), responsible (Fisk, 1973), and ecologically concerned consumers (Kinnear, Taylor, & Ahmed, 1974), now typically labeled ethical or green consumers (e.g., Drumwright, 1994; Shrum, McCarty, & Lowrey, 1995; Schlegelmilch, Bohlen, & Diamantopoulos, 1996; Strong, 1996). Holt (2000) notes that the alternate modes of consumption that socially conscious individuals adopt are not outside the mar-

ket; to the contrary, mass marketers can easily convert the nonstatus values that define these individuals into "more grist for the postmodern market" (p. 67).

Mass media, particularly news content, may encourage social consciousness in consumer culture by helping to create more informed individuals. In particular, news use has been linked with environmental concern and corresponding behaviors related to energy issues, environmental disasters, pollution levels, and health and social consequences of ecological degradation (see Halford & Sheehan, 1990; McIntosh, 1991; Butler, 1990; Granzin & Olsen, 1991; Wagner, 1997). Likely due to news reports on these environmental issues, green consumption has become the most visible type of socially conscious purchasing behavior (Krause, 1993).

Indeed, news media use not only promotes pro-environmental orientations but also influences actual green consumption (Zimmer, Stafford, & Stafford, 1994; Granzin & Olsen, 1991). Recent research by Holbert et al. (2003) showed that news media use is positively related to pro-environmental behaviors even after controlling for pro-environmental attitudes. Further, media provide a broad range of information about the social consequences of consuming goods beyond environmental influences (Kozinets & Handelman, 1998). For example, news media promote cause-related consumption by reporting about companies that support specific nonprofit organizations or causes (see Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). Consumers often become aware of a brand or company's level of social responsibility via news media, which in turn may affect purchasing behaviors. Therefore, we hypothesize the following effects of news media use.

Hypothesis 3: News media use will be positively related to a pro-environmental orientation.

Hypothesis 4: News media use will be positively related to socially conscious consumption.

Much research has linked environmental concern to socially conscious behavior such as a preference to consume environmentally friendly products (e.g., Anderson & Cunningham, 1972; Webster, 1975; Straughan & Roberts, 1999). Other studies have extended research connecting socially conscious consumer attitudes and behavior and assessed people's relative willingness to pay premiums for more environmentally safe products (e.g., Lavik & Lunde, 1991).

Further, environmental consciousness has been one of the few factors thought to be slowing civic disengagement among youth, and it has been related to alternative modes of civic participation, particularly at the community level (Ladd, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). Scholars contend that individuals who have stronger environmental concerns are more likely to be politically interested, public spirited, and active in civic life. Therefore, we hypothesize the following effects of environmental orientation.

Hypothesis 5: Pro-environmental orientation will be positively related to socially conscious consumption.

Hypothesis 6: Pro-environmental orientation will be positively related to civic participation.

Mass Media and Status Consciousness

In contrast to socially conscious consumption, status-oriented consumption has been directly criticized as an agent in the erosion of civil society (Schor, 1998). The emphasis

on self and consumption, it is argued, reduces concern for the community and the situation of others. Specifically, mass media are often blamed for cultivating material values (Gerbner et al., 1980). Positive relationships between TV viewing and materialistic consumption have been noted across population groups and cultures (e.g., Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Cheung & Chan, 1996; Shrum, Burroughs, & Rinfleisch, 2004).

Specifically, television entertainment shows often portray luxury lifestyles and conspicuous consumption as the norm (see O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997). Branded goods are increasingly central to TV entertainment shows (e.g., *Friends* and *Seinfeld* episodes built around products) (Nelson, 2002). As part of these portrayals, viewers are exposed to branded goods in product placements, which are playing larger roles in storylines (Linnett, 2003). Due to these images on television entertainment programming, the "lifestyles of the upper middle class and rich have become a more salient point of reference for people throughout the income distribution. Luxury, rather than comfort, is a widespread aspiration" (Schor, 1998, p. 8). Thus, these images are thought to cultivate a desire for status goods and luxury and generally act to socialize such consumption activities (Jhally, 2000; O'Guinn & Faber, 1987; Richins, 1992).

In contemporary marketing, advertisers self-consciously engage in "lifestyle" marketing. By speaking about social relationships in terms of shared taste, lifestyle images in television programs convey status orientations. As Anderson observes, "Lifestyle messages constantly tell the consumer to scan the social landscape for the latest indicators of self-worth and social distinction. The social identities of those on the cutting edge of trends require 'avant-garde' taste . . . and the economic wherewithal to express that mark of distinction" (1995, p. 120). Fiske (1987) argues that viewers for television programs are conceived of as potential target markets for the product advertising *in* and *during* the program. For instance, through exposure to the fashions on *Sex and the City*, consumers are bombarded with persuasive messages that exhort certain patterns of consumption and relay markers of social distinction. The media images of "the good life" drive consumers to acquire more of the desired goods (Richins, 1992). In turn, we expect status-oriented individuals—those who focus on fashion, glamour, and styles and gravitate toward the latest brand names—to engage more actively in status-conscious consumption. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following relationships among media use, status orientation, and status-conscious consumption.

Hypothesis 7: Entertainment television use will be positively related to status orientation.

Hypothesis 8: Entertainment television use will be positively related to status-conscious consumption.

Hypothesis 9: Status orientation will be positively related to status-conscious consumption.

Although few studies to date have empirically examined the relationship between news and consumption patterns (for an exception, see Hartley, 1999), critics have noted the growing commercialization and infotainment of news (Anderson, 1995). News commercialization occurs in the form of tie-ins, cross-promotions, infotainment, video news releases, and "plugola," that is, news stories that promote entertainment events, products, or media content from which the news organization or corporate owner stands to reap financial gains (Anderson, 1995; McAllister, 2002; Schudson, 1984). In fact, news is increasingly used as a vehicle to sell consumer goods, particularly fashion and new technological innovations (e.g., Fashions of the Times, *New York Times*; Technology,

New York Times). A content analysis of prime-time television programming suggests that news programs feature more commercial content than other programming types (Avery & Ferraro, 2000; Ferraro & Avery, 2000). This research found that television programming presented about 15 brands for every half-hour. Surprisingly, news programs, which made up less than 10% of the sample, comprised more than 20% of all brand appearances.

If, as McAllister states, "plugola stories encourage viewers to immerse themselves in consumption" (2002, p. 399), we would expect that news media would promote both status orientation and status consumption. This is not to say that commercialized news media are completely void of content that encourages engagement in civic life; rather, they recognize that news consumption may also shape consumer attitudes and behaviors because of infiltration of commercial content into journalism. Accordingly, we hypothesize a positive connection between news use and consumers' status-conscious attitudes and behaviors.

Hypothesis 10: News media use will be positively related to status orientation.
Hypothesis 11: News media use will be positively related to status-conscious consumption

Consumer Culture and Civic Participation

Scholars and intellectuals have long criticized American consumerism. One of the earliest criticisms comes from Tocqueville (1835/1969) who discusses the paradox between democratic responsibility and materialistic, pleasure-seeking activity. While democracy and its resulting freedom of action are necessary to facilitate the procuring of material enjoyments, he argues, overindulgence in materialism could be harmful to democracy in the long run. Other critiques of consumer culture focus on two related concerns: "conspicuous consumption" for status competition within social groups (Veblen, 1899/1965) and consumption practices for maintaining the basic structures of power (Bourdieu, 1979/1984). The first critique argues that consumption divides citizens as they engage in a competitive status game. The second supposes that consumption creates class fractions in society by highlighting differences in cultural taste and social status between groups. Thus, both views implicitly recognize and are nonetheless critical of the relationship between social capital manifest in acts of participation and cultural capital resulting from acts of consumption.

Adopting these perspectives, Schor (1998) talks about "the new consumerism," characterized by "an upscaling of lifestyle norms, the pervasiveness of conspicuous, status goods and of competition for acquiring them" (p. 7). To her, hyper-consumerism has changed relevant reference groups. Comparisons are no longer likely to take place among those of similar means; rather, the wealthy have become the point of comparison. A shift toward "competitive consumption" coincides with a move away from community commitment, since the community is no longer the relevant reference group.

Such competitive consumption is thought to have negative effects on public goods and civic engagement (see Rahn, 1998; Taylor, 2000). Based on their analyses of American society, Bellah and colleagues (1985) contend that a culture of self-interest limits community action: "Utility replaces duty; self-expression unseats authority; 'being good' becomes 'feeling good'" (p. 77). This implies that a consumption orientation discourages public-mindedness in favor of personal interest and, ultimately, undermines civil society. Similarly, Schor (2000, p. 25) maintains that consumer culture leads Americans

to negligently consume environmentally damaging products (Schor, 2000). She suggest that this is the result of a decline in social connections; as people spend less time with friends and neighbors, they orient toward material culture found in media and advertising over community concerns.

In contrast with these views, a growing number of scholars point out that the "competitive consumption" critique fails to provide an adequate picture of material values and community involvement (Scammell, 2000). Fukuyama (1995) and Dahl (1998) assert that democracy and markets need each other despite the potential for conflicts. Notably, earlier work on communication and participation did not draw a sharp line between consumption and community engagement. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) treated political choices and consumer choices as inherently similar. More recently, Scheufele and Shah (2000) suggest that interpersonal influence in political and consumer decision making may rest with the same set of opinion leaders. As this implies, status-conscious consumption and community participation may be rooted in the dispositional characteristic of personality strength—individuals' confidence in leadership roles, their aptitude at shaping others' opinions, and their self-perceived impact on definitions of taste (see Noelle-Neumann, 1999; Weimann, 1994).

Similarly, Riesman and colleagues (Riesman, Glazer, & Denney, 2001) contend that contemporary consumer culture is described by "other-directed" consumption rather than conspicuous consumption. Their analyses indicate that this "other-directed" character type has been overtaking an older "inner-directed" one. This other-directed character type is chiefly influenced by the existing social situation (e.g., peer groups), whereas the inner-directed character is guided by one's own value system internalized in early childhood. In contrast with conspicuous consumers, "other-directed consumers seek experiences rather than things and yearn to be guided by others rather than to dazzle them with display" (Riesman et al., 2001, p. 118). Those who place emphasis on integrating rather than competing are thought to be participatory citizens.

Schudson (1998), after outlining "the republican perspective," which supports the negative relationship between consumer and civic culture, also argues that consumer culture has often been a building block for an active democratic society, not a barrier to it. Historical accounts support this view. Political activism prior to the American Revolution, worker movements during the 1920s, and political protests during the 1960s often revolved around consumption activities (Breen, 2004). Breen (1993) reminds readers that the American democracy began with a consumer revolt—the Boston Tea Party. Consumers often coalesce around issues of common concern and shared tastes, even if these reinforce class differences.

Even Veblen (1899/1965) saw conspicuous consumption as a signal of a well-defined social order in which consumption patterns reinforced class and status distinctions. According to him, those who consume conspicuously are more likely to follow social rules and hold power in their communities. Likewise, Bourdieu (1979/1984) acknowledged that consumption could provide entry into certain social circles by conveying appropriate tastes and fashions. From this perspective, conspicuous consumption may be linked to the same social structures that are critical for civic participation. This view does not apologize for or repudiate the status game of consumption but simply recognizes that consumption and participation may be anchored in a shared set of personality traits and social structures.

Thompson (2000) argues that theories of consumer culture have not adequately addressed the complicated links between consumption and community engagement. He writes (2000, pp. 69–71):

> Consumption . . . links individuals together. On a small scale, consider the social bonds enacted through the ritual sharing of a meal or gift exchange. On a larger scale, think of youth-oriented "rave" cultures, Harley-Davidson enthusiasts, or the virtual communities coalescing around popular culture entertainment (for example, the resurgent *Star Wars* community). Accordingly, an effective politics of consumption must move beyond a critique of materialism and address the deep connections between personal and communal identity and consumption practices.

Others have noted the political potential of consumption practices manifest in public negotiations of cultural mores, mobilization against harmful corporations, and expression of marginalized views (e.g., the anti-Nike movement protesting unfair labor practices) (see Klein, 1999). Reducing consumption to a "status game" disregards the fact that "consumer culture gives expression to a multitude of meanings, values, and social interests" (Thompson, 2000, p. 71). Countercultural values enter the mainstream even as they are co-opted; for example, once marginal views about environmentalism are now widely accepted, at least partly through the efforts of marketers who adopted a protest position and broadcast it to the mass public. Given the counterpoints to the basic "competitive consumption" arguments, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 12: Socially conscious consumption and civic participation will be positively interrelated.

Hypothesis 13: Status-conscious and socially conscious consumption will be positively interrelated.

Hypothesis 14: Civic participation and status-conscious consumption will be positively interrelated.

Method

Data

The data used in this study were gathered in 2000 in an annual mail survey conducted by Market Facts and funded by the DDB Needham advertising agency. Market Facts uses a stratified quota sampling procedure, beginning with a large list of names and addresses acquired from commercial list brokers. A sample, counterbalanced along demographic characteristics to account for expected differences in response rates, is drawn from the pool of approximately 500,000 individuals. Then the final sample of approximately 5,000 individuals is drawn so as to best approximate the "actual distributions *within the 9 Census divisions* of income, population density, panel member's age, and household size" (Groeneman, 1994, p. 4). Although this panel underrepresents the very poor, the very rich, transient populations, and certain minority groups, the data have proven to be an effective barometer of mainstream America (Putnam, 2000; Shah et al., 2001). This particular survey comprises 3,122 adult respondents. The response rate against the mail-out was 62.4%.

Measures

The variables included in the present analysis can be categorized into four groups: (a) the endogenous core of variables predicted by other variables in the model (socially

conscious consumption, status-conscious consumption, and civic participation), (b) antecedent endogenous variables predicted by exogenous variables or other antecedent endogenous variables and predicting final endogenous variables (status orientation and environmental orientation), (c) exogenous variables (news media use and entertainment television use), and (d) four demographic control variables residualized in our structural equation modeling of the data.

To control for potential confounds, we residualized four demographic variables. Gender (57% female) and age (M = 48.64, SD = 4.31) are self-explanatory. Education level of each respondent was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from *attended elementary* to *post-graduate school*. The sample mean was 4.98 (5 indicates *attended college; SD = 1.18*). Household income was assessed on a 15-point nonlinear scale that increased in $5,000 increments from *below $10,000* to *$49,999*, then in $10,000 increments to *$100,000 or more*. The mean and median (both 8) represent the $40,000–$44,999 bracket (SD = 4.24).

Exogenous variables included news media use and entertainment television use indices. News media use consisted of three sub-indices constructed using dichotomous measures. Newspaper use (M = 1.7, SD = .95, r = .24) included reading most or all of the news section, the business section, the editorial section, and the lifestyle section.[3] News magazine use (M = .27, SD = .64, r = .23) included reading *Business Week*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Finally, television news use (M = 1.16, SD = 1.05, r = .29) measured viewership of the evening network news, news interview programs such as *Dateline* or *Meet the Press*, and morning network news shows such as *Good Morning America*.

We operationalized entertainment television use with three variables: sitcom, drama, and talk show. All television entertainment program use variables were measured dichotomously, with respondents indicating that they did or did not watch the program. A sitcom viewing index was created by summing responses to items tapping viewership of *Friends, Frasier, Third Rock from the Sun,* and *Spin City* (M = 1.06, SD = 1.26, r = .25). A drama viewing index was developed by summing responses to items tapping viewership of *Law & Order, NYPD Blue, Chicago Hope, E.R., Party of Five,* and *Beverly Hills 90210* (M = 2.04, SD = 1.91, α = .68). Finally, talk show use (M = .38, SD = .69, r = .22) included viewing the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, *David Letterman*, and *Saturday Night Live*.

Next, two types of consumer attitudes—status orientation and environmental orientation—were created to function as antecedent endogenous variables. The construct of status orientation was operationalized with two manifest variables, appearance consciousness and brand consciousness. An additive index of appearance consciousness (M = 27.86, SD = 7.00, α = .78, r = .31) combined eight items measuring respondents' consciousness of appearance, fashion, and taste and personality traits related to appearance such as sexiness, glamorousness, stylishness, and trend setting. Each item was measured on a 6-point scale. Brand consciousness was measured as an additive index of three items (M = 9.87, SD = 2.98, r = .26) tapping how much respondents believe brand names are important in consumption behaviors. The measure of environmental orientation was less robust, created by using a single item that tapped attitudes toward the energy issue and its environmental consequences (M = 9.87, SD = 2.98).

Final endogenous variables comprising the final core included status-conscious consumption, socially conscious consumption, and civic participation. The latent construct of status consumption included three manifest variables: fashion purchase, luxury travel purchase, and gourmet food purchase. Fashion purchase was measured with an additive

index containing two indicators: buying clothes at high-end department stores and purchasing hair care products from a salon (M = 14.33, SD = 4.52, r = .25). An additive index for luxury travel purchase was created from two indicators: staying at a luxury-priced hotel and taking a trip abroad (M = 2.28, SD = .72, r = .31). Finally, the construct of gourmet food purchase was measured with two items: buying gourmet coffee and having wine with dinner (M = 4.05, SD = 2.42, r = .27). The latent construct of socially conscious consumption was operationalized with two manifest variables, green consumption and cause-related consumption. An additive green consumption index (M = 8.68, SD = 2.85, α = .53, r = .27) was created from three items tapping respondents' efforts to protect the natural environment in their consumption behaviors. Cause-related consumption was measured on a 6-point scale by asking to what extent respondents make efforts to buy from companies that support charitable causes (M = 3.50, SD = 1.30). Finally, civic engagement was ascertained through questions regarding involvement in club meetings (M = 1.96, SD = 1.60), volunteer work (M = 2.38, SD = 1.86), and community project work (M = 1.49, SD = 1.04).

Analytic Methods

To test our hypotheses, we employed latent variable structural equation modeling techniques. Including measurement relationships as well as structural relationships, latent variable modeling makes it possible for researchers to investigate complex theoretical structures and test a wide variety of hypotheses at a higher level of abstraction (Mackenzie, 2001). Another advantage of this approach is its ability to test convergent and discriminant validity (Bollen, 1989; Kline, 1998). We can consider the coherence of the measures in indicating an underlying construct distinct from other latent constructs included in the model. Further, latent variable modeling explicitly deals with the unreliability of measured variables by relegating such variance to an error term (Bollen, 1989; Kline, 1998). These error estimates contain variance attributable to measurement error and variance associated with unique aspects of the indicator.

This study included a total of 2,328 respondents in the analysis (listwise deletions account for missing data). The covariance matrix of the observed variables was used as input. As noted above, we residualized four demographic variables. The structural equation model was fit with LISREL 8.3 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). We tested different models to specify a final model including only meaningful and substantively interpretable parameters.

Results

Model Performance

A variety of statistics exist to assess the adequacy of a structural model with latent variables (Bollen, 1989). Most of the goodness-of-fit statistics of the proposed final model indicated an acceptable fit. The chi-square statistic for this model was 328.63 (df = 106).[4] The root mean square error of approximation (.03), standardized root mean square residual (.03), and goodness-of-fit index (.98) indicated an acceptable fit.

For the measurement model, the standardized factor loading of every observed variable on its latent variable was significant (see Figure 1). Beginning with news media use, three observed variables—newspaper (λ = .39, $p < .001$), news magazine (λ = .48, $p < .001$), and TV news (λ = .35, $p < .001$)—significantly contributed to the latent

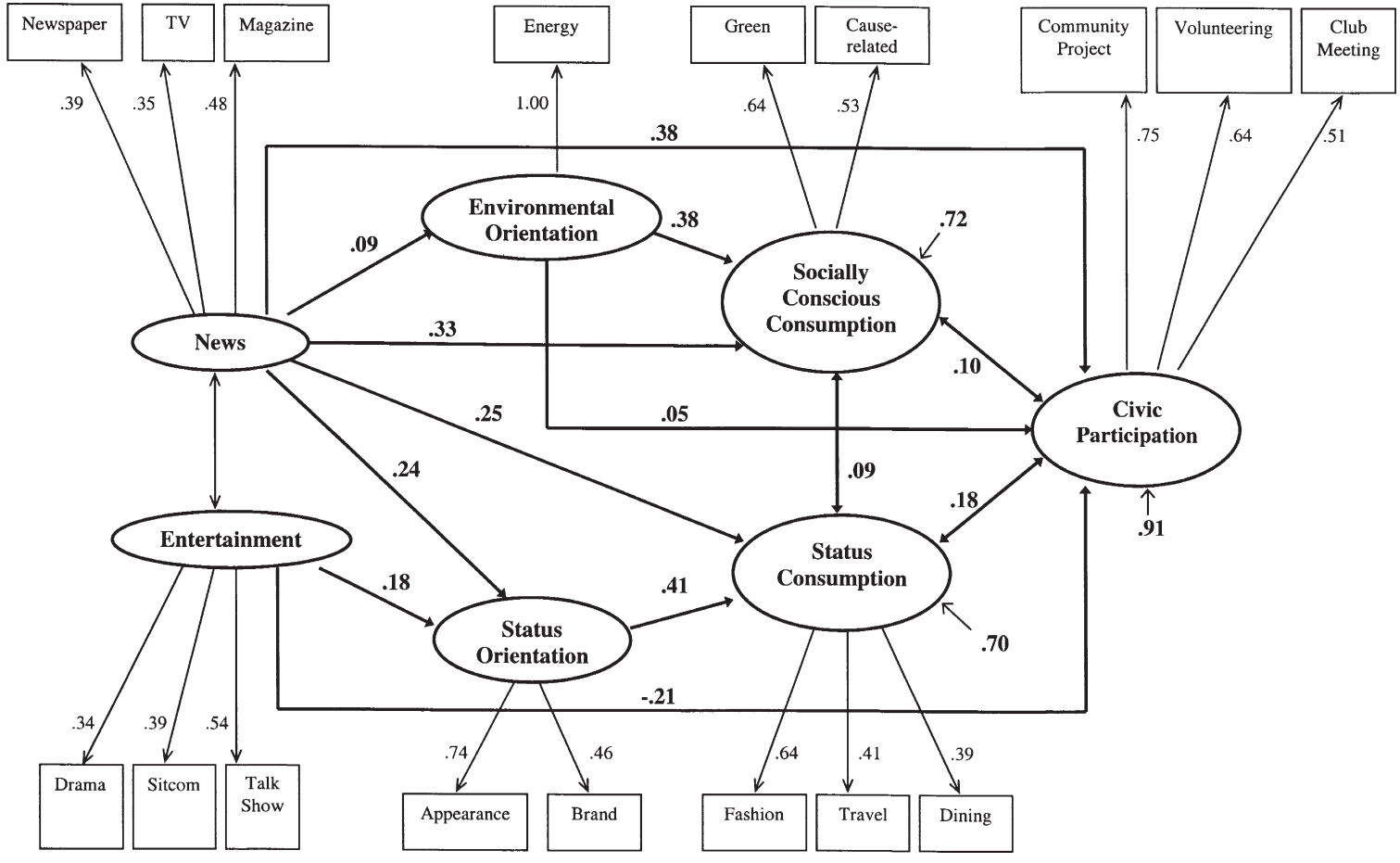

Figure 1. Structural equation model of media use, consumer culture, and civic participation.

variable. The latent construct of entertainment television use was also significantly reflected in three manifest variables: sitcom ($\lambda = .39$, $p < .001$), drama ($\lambda = .34$, $p < .001$), and talk show ($\lambda = .54$, $p < .001$). Likewise, the latent construct of status orientation was significantly reflected in both appearance consciousness ($\lambda = .74$, $p < .001$) and brand consciousness ($\lambda = .46$, $p < .001$).

This was also true of the factor loadings of observed variables on the latent variables comprising the endogenous core. The latent construct of socially consciousness consumption was significantly reflected in both green purchases ($\lambda = .64$, $p < .001$) and charitable purchases ($\lambda = .53$, $p < .001$). Status conscious consumption was significantly related to three manifest variables: fashion purchases ($\lambda = .64$, $p < .001$), luxury travel purchases ($\lambda = .41$, $p < .001$), and gourmet food purchases ($\lambda = .39$, $p < .001$). The final endogenous latent variable, civic participation, was also significantly associated with three manifest variables: community project ($\lambda = .75$, $p < .001$), volunteer work ($\lambda = .64$, $p < .001$), and club meeting ($\lambda = .51$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis Testing

As is apparent from Figure 1, almost all predicted paths were statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. One exception was the expected direct link between TV entertainment program use and status conscious consumption (H8). Notably, the variables included in this model accounted for 30% of the variance in status consumption, 28% in socially conscious consumption, and 9% in civic engagement. This is above and beyond the effects of the residualized demographic factors (see Table 1).

News media use was found to have a significantly positive effect on civic participation ($\gamma = .38$, $p < .001$), whereas entertainment television use was found to have a negative effect ($\gamma = -.21$, $p < .001$), as predicted. Given these results, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported. Media use variables were also related to consumer culture. In terms of consumption consciousness, respondents who consumed news media were more likely to hold a pro-environmental orientation ($\gamma = .09$, $p < .001$). As can be seen in Table 1, news media use was found to have significant direct and indirect effects on socially conscious consumption (direct effect: $\gamma = .33$, $p < .001$; indirect effect: $\gamma = .04$, $p < .001$). These results provide support for Hypotheses 3 and 4.

As expected, environmental orientation positively predicted socially conscious consumption ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and civic participation ($\beta = .05$, $p < .01$), yielding support for hypotheses 5 and 6. Beyond socially conscious consumption, media use was also found to have an influence on status-conscious consumption. TV entertainment program use ($\gamma = .18$, $p < .001$) promoted status orientation but did not have a direct effect on status-oriented consumption. Even though there was no direct association between entertainment television use and status-conscious consumption, as predicted by Hypothesis 8, a significant indirect link between the two variables was observed ($\gamma = .07$, $p < .01$), mediated by status orientation (see Table 1). As expected, we also found a strong positive relationship between status orientation and status-conscious consumption ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). This pattern of direct and indirect effects provides strong support for Hypotheses 7 and 9 and implicit support for Hypothesis 8.

Further, we found that news media use ($\gamma = .24$, $p < .001$) enhanced status orientation and directly and indirectly affected status-conscious consumption (direct effect: $\gamma = .25$, $p < .001$; indirect effect: $\gamma = .10$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypotheses 10 and 11 were supported. The three criterion variables showed significant positive interrelationships. Status-conscious consumption and socially conscious consumption were positively asso-

Table 1
The structural model of media use, consumer culture and civic participation

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. News media use						
2. Television entertainment use	.62**					
3. Status orientation	.24**	.18**				
	.24**	.18**				
4. Environmental orientation	.09**					
	.09**					
5. Status-oriented consumption	.25**		.41**			
	.10**	.07*				
	.35**	.07*	.41**			
6. Socially conscious consumption	.33**			.38**	.09*	
	.04**					
	.36**			.38**		
7. Civic participation	.38**	–.21**		.05*	.18*	.10**
	.00					
	.38**	–.21**		.05*		

Note. All cell entries are standardized path coefficients. Coefficients in the first row of each cell indicate direct effects, coefficients in the second row indicate indirect effects, and coefficients in the third row indicate total effects. Coefficients for relationships between consumption patterns and civic engagement are nondirectional psi coefficients and the coefficient for the relationship between news media use and TV entertainment use is a nondirectional phi coefficient. Therefore, no indirect and total effects are listed for these links.

*$p < .01$, **$p < .001$.

ciated with each other ($\psi = .09$, $p < .01$). Civic participation was significantly and positively related to socially consciousness consumption ($\psi = .10$, $p < .001$) and status-conscious consumption ($\psi = .18$, $p < .001$). These findings among the final endogenous core of variables lend support to Hypotheses 12, 13, and 14.

In sum, individuals who use news media were particularly likely to engage in both status-conscious consumption and socially conscious consumption as well as civic life. The observed effects were direct and indirect, through status orientation and environmental orientation. For entertainment television use, viewing was found to negatively influence civic participation and positively influence status orientation; it worked through the latter to influence status-conscious consumption. Notably, the indirect effects of media use on consumption patterns indicate the important mediating role of consumer attitudes. Most important, the endogenous core of civic participation and the two forms of consumption were all positively interrelated. With the exception of Hypothesis 8, all hypothesized relationships were supported, providing general substantiation for our theorized model.

Discussion

We began this study with three goals in mind: (a) confirming the effects of media on civic participation, (b) examining media influences on consumer attitudes and consumption activities, and (c) clarifying the associations among consumer attitudes and behaviors and civic participation. The results of this study, which largely confirm the model we hypothesized, speak strongly on behalf of a more complicated view of the connections among mass media, consumer culture, and civic engagement.

First, the results certainly complicate the conventional wisdom about mass media in this dynamic. Contrary to Putnam's (1995) claims, media do not have largely negative effects on civic participation; rather, news use appears to contribute to civic engagement, whereas entertainment consumption—particularly sitcom, police drama, and reality program viewing—seems to reduce participation. Our results confirm the findings of Norris (1996) and others who have criticized Putnam's (1995) general critique of television, while also clarifying the conditions under which television might cultivate antisocial perceptions. Replying to these critiques, Putnam (2000) has clarified that "habitual viewers" whose primary entertainment source is television are significantly less involved in civic activities than "selective viewers" who watch television for information. Our findings confirm his corrected claims about television.

Somewhat similarly, mass media appear to sustain consumer culture in more complex ways than often assumed. Media have positive effects on seemingly opposing consumer attitudes and behaviors—social consciousness and status consciousness. From this perspective, exposure to mass media—and the advertising they contain—has dual effects on consumer culture, spurring an awareness of the social responsibilities associated with consuming and a pursuit of status-oriented lifestyles (Anderson, 1995; Krause, 1993; Holbert et al., 2003).

Notably, we observe that news media appear to have stronger and more direct effects on consumer culture and civic participation than entertainment television. In fact, news media use has strong direct effects on all three criterion variables and significant indirect effects on the consumption variables through consumer attitudes. In contrast, entertainment television use has direct effects only on status orientation and civic participation (positive and negative, respectively). This may be explained by audience receptiveness—or lack of skepticism—to messages contained in news content relative to entertainment content. Or, it could be that the more direct, factual mode of most news presentations has greater sway over audience attitudes and behaviors than entertainment portrayals. This finding may also be due to the potentially contrasting effects of the different genres of entertainment content—that is, sitcoms, dramas, and talk shows—included in our latent variable (see Shah et al., 2001). These distinct genres of content may work to influence the criterion variables in unique ways, thereby attenuating the overall effect of our latent variable. Nonetheless, we find little support for the broad critiques of television in civic life, especially assertions that entertainment media diminish civic-mindedness by emphasizing overconsumption, materialism, and a sense of individualism.

We also find little support for the claim that the status game of competitive consumption erodes sense of commitment to community and civic engagement. The endogenous core variables of socially conscious consumption, status-conscious consumption, and civic participation were all found to be positively interrelated, suggesting that consumption practices are increasingly embedded with civic considerations, and vice versa. In general, this indicates that consumer culture and civic culture do not appear to be opposing goals in a zero-sum game.

Of the two relationships between consumption patterns and civic engagement, the connection between socially conscious consumption and civic participation is less surprising. Individuals who weigh social and environmental responsibilities in their consumption behaviors should commit themselves to the public good in other ways. Conversely, individuals who are involved in their communities may be made aware of products and brands that do or do not support particular causes, reinforcing what is very likely a reciprocal link. In short, conscientious consumers and good citizens generally act in similar ways—albeit in different domains—affirming social and civic duties.

More surprising is the positive interrelationship between status-conscious consumption and civic participation. As Thompson (2000) and others have suggested, communal affiliation does not necessarily run counter to consumption; in fact, collective identity may be created and maintained through brand subcultures (e.g., Apple computer aficionados, Saturn car enthusiasts) and lifestyle consumption (e.g., wine connoisseurs, golf communities, biker bars). Indeed, as Veblen (1899/1965) and Bourdieu (1979/1984) both imply, cultural capital gained through specific acts of consumption may be closely tied to the social capital so essential for participation. That is, consuming certain products and brands may be critical to being part of the social order. It is important to remember that all of these relationships controlled for the effects of basic demographic variables, defending against the possibility that the observed linkages reflect the effects of a third variable such as age, education, or income.

To clarify the mechanisms behind these relationships, future research should examine the roles of individuals dispositional factors, such as personalities and values, in the relationships among media, consumption, and civic activities. It has been well established that dispositional factors motivate media use, in turn influencing various behaviors that reinforce existing beliefs (Klapper, 1960; Palmgreen, 1984). The fact that news media use, the two different types of consumption considered in this study, and civic participation are all positively related may signify that there are certain underlying personality characteristics or value orientations that account for consumption and activism. Personality strength—that is, confidence in leadership roles, an aptitude for shaping others' opinions, and self-perceived impact on adoption of innovations—is one very likely candidate (see Noelle-Neumann, 1999; Scheufele & Shah, 2000; Weimann, 1994). Future research should examine this possibility along with the potential influences of extroversion, active/passive personality types, and materialist and postmaterialist value orientations on media use, consumption behaviors, and civic participation.

Although this study suffers from a number of limitations endemic to secondary analysis of existing data, such as constraints in question wording and availability of items for index construction, it nonetheless represents an important step in unraveling the connections among these constructs and expanding the scope of the sociology of political communication. Our findings portray a social world in which consumption and civility do not stand in opposition. That is, consumer culture and civic culture both manifest themselves through integration into certain social roles and sets. From this perspective, it is easy to see how potentially conflicting forms of consumption are interrelated and tied to civic participation. To be clear, this study does not seek to defend or advocate a culture focused on status and materialism, nor one that requires the proper display of taste to enter into networks of engagement and social power. It does, however, seek to begin to clarify our understanding of the complex connections among these constructs and shed greater light on the role of the media in generating consumer and civic culture.

Notes

1. *Expressive individualism* "arose in opposition to *utilitarian individualism*. Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized. This core, though unique, is not necessarily alien to other persons or to nature. Under certain conditions, the expressive individualist may find it possible through intuitive feeling to merge with other persons, with nature, or with the cosmos as a whole" (Bellah et al., 1985, pp. 333–334).

2. Putnam adjusted his argument about television slightly in this book length treatment of the "Bowling Alone" argument, partly inspired by critiques of his initial claims. Although he notes differences between news and entertainment content on a civility index, he still maintains television as one of the key culprits in the decline in social capital.

3. Due to the sensitivity of Cronbach's alpha to small numbers of items in a scale, as well as the use of dichotomous measures, mean interitem correlations (r) were reported in cases where alpha would likely underestimate the reliability of the index. Typically, scales with four of fewer items are reported with r in place of alpha.

4. The chi-square statistic used as a goodness-of-fit test is very sensitive to sample size. If the sample is large, the chi-square statistic may be significant even though the model fits the data well. In that case, if the score of a chi-square statistic divided by degrees of freedom is less than 3, the model is acceptable. The chi-square statistic of our model is not supposed to indicate an ill fit considering the large sample size and other goodness-of-statistics showing an acceptable fit. The adjusted goodness-of-fit index (.98), normed fit index (.91), non-normed fit index (.92), comparative fit index (.94), incremental fit index (.94), and parsimony-normed-fit index (.66) also indicated an acceptable fit.

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APPENDIX
Question Wording

Control Variables: Demographics

Gender: Sex of respondent (1 = male, 2 = female)

Age: Exact age (years)

Education: 1 = attended elementary; 2 = completed elementary; 3 = attended high school; 4 = grad high/trade school; 5 = attend college; 6 = graduated college; 7 = post-grad school

Income: Into which of the following categories does your annual household income fall?

1 = under $10,000; 2 = $10,000–$14,999; 3 = $15,000–$19,999; 4 = $20,000–$24,999; 5 = $25,000–$29,999; 6 = $30,000–$34,999; 7 = $35,000–$39,999; 8 = $40,000–$44,999; 9 = $45,000–$49,999; 10 = $50,000–$59,999; 11 = $60,000–$69,999; 12 = $70,000–$79,999; 13 = $80,000–$89,999; 14 = $90,000–$99,999; 15 = $100,000 or more.

Media Use

Newspaper: Below is a list of sections of the newspaper. Please "X" each section that you read most or all issues of ("X" as many as apply).

News section
Business section
Lifestyle section
Editorial section

Magazine: Below is a list of magazines. Please "X" each magazine that you read most or all issues of ("X" as many as apply).

Business Week
Newsweek
Time
U.S. News and World Report

Television: Listed below are different television programs. Please "X" each television show you watch because you really like it ("X" as many as apply).

News: News interviews (*60 Minutes, 20/20, Nightline, Meet the Press,* etc). Morning network news shows (*Today Show, Good Morning America*, CBS morning programs)

Sitcom: *Friends, Frasier, Third Rock from the Sun, Spin City*

Drama: *Law & Order, NYPD Blue, Chicago Hope, E.R., Party of Five, Beverly Hills 90210*

Talk show: *Tonight Show with Jay Leno, David Letterman, Saturday Night Live*

Status Orientation

Appearance consciousness: For each statement, please circle the number that best describes your feelings about that statement.

I want to look a little different from others
I enjoy getting dressed up
I have much better taste than most people
I like to pamper myself

For each word, please circle the number that best describes how much or how little you would like to be seen by other people.

Glamorous
Sexy
Stylish
Trendsetter

Brand consciousness: For each statement, please circle the number that best describes your feelings about that statement.

When I have a favorite brand I buy it—no matter what else is on sale
I try to stick to well-known brand names
I prefer to buy products with designer names

Environmental Orientation

For each statement, please circle the number that best describes your feelings about that statement.

I would be willing to accept a lower standard of living to conserve energy.

Status Consumption

For each activity listed, please place an "X" in the appropriate box to indicate how often during the past 12 months you have engaged in this activity.

Fashion: Purchased clothes at high-end department store (Saks, Neiman Marcus, Nordstorm, etc.)
Bought hair care products from a salon

Luxury travel: Stayed at a luxury priced hotel while on a nonbusiness trip
Traveled to another country

Gourmet food: Visited a gourmet coffee store
Had wine with dinner

Socially Conscious Consumption

For each statement, circle the number that best describes your feelings about that statement.

Green: I try to buy products that use recycled packaging
I make a strong effort to recycle everything I possibly can
Contributed to an environmental or conservation organization

Cause related: I make a special effort to buy from companies that support charitable causes

Civic Participation

For each activity listed, please place an "X" in the appropriate box to indicate how often during the past 12 months you have engaged in this activity.

Went to a club meeting
Did volunteer work
Worked on a community project