

# Consumer Movements and Value Regimes: Fighting Food Waste in Germany by Building Alternative Object Pathways

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Consumer movements strive to change markets when those markets produce value outcomes that conflict with consumers' higher-order values. Prior studies argue that consumer movements primarily seek to challenge these value outcomes by championing alternative higher-order values or by pressuring institutions to change market governance mechanisms. Building on and refining theorization on value regimes, this study illuminates a new type of consumer movement strategy where consumers collaborate to construct alternative object pathways. The study draws from ethnographic fieldwork in the German retail food sector and shows how building alternative object pathways allowed a consumer movement to mitigate the value regime's excessive production of food waste. The revised value regime theorization offers a new and more holistic way of understanding and contextualizing how and where consumer movements mobilize for change. It also provides a new tool for understanding systemic value creation and the role of consumers in such processes.

*Keywords:* systemic value creation, value regimes, object pathways, consumer movements, food waste, sustainability

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[The] fact that we use the same word to describe the benefits and virtues of a commodity for sale on the market (the "value" of a haircut or a curtain rod) and our ideas about what is ultimately important in life ("values" such as truth, beauty, justice), is not a coincidence. There is some hidden level where both come down to the same thing.—Graeber (2013, 224)

Graeber postulates a hidden level in the market where higher-order values and value outcomes are made equivalent—that is, where the value a good or service produces aligns with a consumer's life priorities. That alignment is created in a value regime. Value regimes, a term coined by Appadurai (1986), are sociomaterial arrangements that systematically reproduce certain value outcomes. Value outcomes are the various ends that objects of value create or enable in the performance of practices (Arnould 2014; Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016; Graeber 2001;

Lambek 2013; Schau, Muniz, and Arnould 2009). The value-creating operations of a value regime remain hidden in plain sight as long as the value outcomes it produces are consistent with the higher-order values of consumers. All that changes, however, when value outcomes violate the higher-order values of key consumer constituencies. Repeated or egregious violations can trigger consumer awareness, peeling back the cloak of value regime operations and giving rise to a consumer movement intent upon changing them. This study develops value-regime theory and then applies it to the phenomenon of consumer movements. In so doing, it refines our understandings of both.

In 2012, something was rotten in the land of Germany, and consumers were up in arms. The German retail food sector had long striven to serve its customers food that was as fresh as possible. This came at a cost. Massive amounts of perfectly edible food with only slight blemishes were systematically thrown away. Consumers were unaware of the festering food waste problem until activists and journalists caught wind of it and exposed it (Gollnhofer and Schouten 2017). Discarding meal-worthy food conflicted with some German consumers' higher-order values related to thrift and sustainability, and exposure to the problem sparked the moral outrage necessary to mobilize a consumer movement to remedy the situation (Jasper 2011; Kozinets and Handelman 2004).

Certain peculiarities of this consumer movement drove our research interests. The first peculiarity was its surprising success. In the course of about two years it had achieved dramatic reductions in food waste; it had motivated lawmakers to rethink food waste legislation; and it had evolved from heated contention to relative harmony between consumer activists and retail store management. The second peculiarity was its strategy. Rather than the more purely discursive strategies of protest or lobbying, the activists chose to intervene directly in the material flows of food to waste. They physically diverted food from the waste stream and began creating an alternative object pathway. To understand the peculiarities of this movement, we turned to theorization on value regimes.

Appadurai (1986) originally defined a value regime as the structural conditions governing the production, appropriation, evaluation, and distribution of value in a particular context. Appadurai's theorization has recently received criticism for being too totalizing and out of step with contemporary market theorization (Caliskan and Callon 2009; Graeber 2001; Levy, Reinecke, and Manning 2016). We offer an updated conceptualization of value regimes that satisfies these contemporary critiques and serves our inquiry of consumer movements. We posit that value regimes systemically reproduce value outcomes through the interaction of three co-constituting elements: 1) higher-order values, 2) governance mechanisms, and 3) object pathways. We also show that while interventions into value regimes through championing alternative higher-order

values and lobbying for changes to governance mechanisms are well-established strategies for consumer movements (Jasper 2011; King and Pearce 2010; Kozinets and Handelman 2004), interventions into object pathways have received scant attention. This article remedies this theoretical omission by investigating how the anti-food waste movement chose building alternative object pathways as its primary strategy. Our inquiry was motivated by the following research question: How do consumer movements create and integrate alternative pathways into value regimes?

We begin by reviewing prior studies on consumer movements and develop our value regime model to give context to our inquiry and identify the gap in existing consumer movement literature. With our conceptual framework in place, we describe our research context, the German retail food system, in terms of our updated conceptualization of a value regime. We then detail our methodological approach, the extent of our ethnographic fieldwork, and our analytical procedures. Our findings elaborate how the movement first built a disjunctive object pathway and how and why it was later developed into a complementary object pathway. We conclude our article by discussing our study's contributions and limitations, and by identifying avenues for future research.

## CONSUMER MOVEMENT INTERVENTIONS INTO VALUE REGIMES

### Consumer Movements and the Question of Strategy

Consumer movements are organized consumer collectives that aspire to transform consumer culture or markets (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). As a subset of new social movements (NSM), they mobilize through shared moral outrage over what they perceive as injustices or ethical problems within markets or consumer culture (Jasper 2011). After mobilization, a movement crafts a collective identity and vision for change that allow the movement to publicize its message and recruit new members (Jasper 2011; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Exemplifying the power of these movements, recent studies recount various examples of consumer movements striving to induce market change (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; King and Pearce 2010; Weijo, Martin, and Arnould 2018).

Consumer movements usually have less power than those standing in the way of change, particularly marketers and institutions, which forces movements to embrace indirect means of action (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Weijo et al. 2018). Overall, social movement literature has emphasized the study of what Tilly and Tarrow (2015) call the "tactics of contention," through which movements express their identities or hinder the operations of their opposition (see also Jasper

2011). Similarly, much of the interest within consumer research has been on how movements frame their collective identities and ideological opposition (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) or employ their creative tactical repertoires (Weijo et al. 2018).

Smithey (2009) writes that this emphasis on collective identities and tactical repertoires has come at the expense of understanding movement strategies—that is, questions of where a movement engages its opposition and how it mobilizes resources to do so. Indeed, a bad strategy can doom a movement: choosing the wrong or too many tactical approaches and employing them in the wrong time and place hinders the coordination of actions, muddles member consensus over change goals, and intensifies contention from opposition (Goodwin and Jasper 2015; Jasper 2011). The strategy question is paramount particularly for marginal populations, given their probable lack of market legitimacy and access to resources (Castells 2015; Jasper 2011; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). We further explore these strategic issues of where and with what resources consumer movements seek changes to markets by developing theorization on value regimes. We use the value regime construct to identify different loci of market intervention for consumer movements, and by doing so we also pinpoint the theoretical gap our investigation aims to address.

Appadurai's (1986) original definition of a value regime—the structural conditions governing the production, appropriation, evaluation, and distribution of value in a particular context—equates a value regime with a particular mode of exchange and has been used extensively in traditional, and usually contrasting, anthropological analyses of gift-giving and monetary exchange contexts (Arnould 2014; Graeber 2001; Kopytoff 1986). A central dimension in this dichotomy is the relationship between commoditization and singularization, with the former being more the purview of monetary exchange and the latter of gift-giving (Kopytoff 1986). In consumer research, these theoretical ideas have proven influential in explaining how consumers singularize marketplace commodities via gift-giving and ownership practices (Belk 1988; Curasi, Price, and Arnould 2004; Epp and Price 2010) and how consumers ritually recombine their singularized possessions for resale in secondary markets (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Türe 2014). Recent studies have challenged Appadurai's theorization as being totalizing and out of step with contemporary market theorization (Caliskan and Callon 2009; Graeber 2001; Levy et al. 2016). We elaborate on these critiques and posit that a value regime is structured by three interrelated elements: 1) higher-order values, 2) governance mechanisms, and 3) object pathways (see figure 1). The interplay of these three elements systematically produces value outcomes for actors embedded within the value regime. Two of these elements, higher-order values and governance mechanisms, are

known loci of consumer movement intervention. Object pathways have received far less attention.

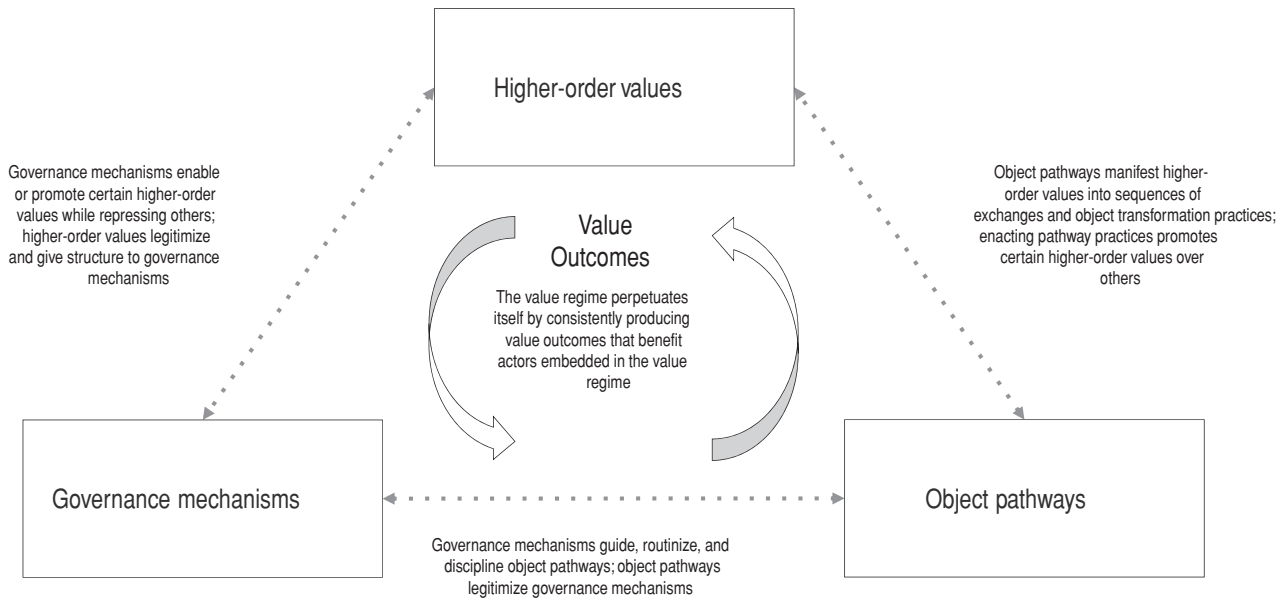
## Higher-Order Values

Higher-order values are the axiological considerations of ethics, morality, or other desirable ends within a sociocultural context (Dewey 1932; Graeber 2001; Holbrook 1999; Miller 2008). Higher-order values structure governance mechanisms and object pathways; they translate and materialize ephemeral axiological ideas into objects and practices (Graeber 2013; Holbrook 1999; Lambek 2013; Miller 2008; Otto and Willerslev 2013; Thompson and Troester 2002). For example, “a society's valuing of frugality may mean a greater demand for durable products, which in turn is articulated semiotically” (Karababa and Kjeldgaard 2014, 123). In a given social context, higher-order values are expressed through shared, circulating and, at times, competing narratives that articulate how or what objects can be useful, desirable, different, or better compared to other objects (Arsel 2016; Thompson and Troester 2002). The narratives also establish boundaries for the translation of higher-order values into object pathways. For example, certain higher-order values can be too sacred to be expressed in commodity form, or, when commodification is permitted, circulation may be limited and nonmarketized (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Narratives expressing the value regime's higher-order values can be multiple and conflicting. For example, a society may prize both sustainability and beauty. Which of these higher-order values is prioritized in producing value outcomes is contingent on the other regime elements, namely governance mechanisms and object pathways. Such narratives can also fluctuate over time, increasing the salience of some higher-order values over others (Thompson and Troester 2002). For instance, media coverage of natural disasters may intensify narratives on corporate greed or remind consumers of humanity's responsibility for caring for nature (Humphreys and Thompson 2014).

Higher-order values are well documented as a primary locus of intervention for consumer movements. As noted earlier, the moral outrage driving movement mobilization (Jasper 2011) stems from a disconnect between consumers' higher-order values and value outcomes produced by the regime. Consumer movements' awareness campaigns and championing of alternative market ideologies are, in essence, attempts to establish new higher-order values into a regime, or to articulate that existing higher-order values are not sufficiently respected by the regime (Izberk-Bilgin 2010; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). For example, boycotts often take aim at market offerings that consumer movements perceive as ethically suspect (Friedman 1985). The fatshionista movement called out other regime actors, namely fashion producers, for preventing plus-size women from equal expression of higher-order values of fashion

FIGURE 1

## THE ELEMENTS CONSTITUTING A VALUE REGIME



(Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Fatshionistas employed strategies that included seeking powerful allies from market institutions that shared their higher-order values and promoting narratives on favorable institutional innovations on the blogosphere. Some movements have sought fundamental restructuring of a value regime's higher-order values, whereas the radical movements studied by Kozinets and Handelman (2004) desired a complete overhaul of the ideology of consumerism.

### Governance Mechanisms

Governance mechanisms are legal or normative structures that promote certain higher-order values while repressing others. Contemporary views within marketing and consumer research emphasize that market contexts are held together through the interaction of various sociomaterial actors (Araujo 2007; Giesler and Fischer 2017; Harrison and Kjellberg 2016; Maciel and Wallendorf 2016; Martin and Schouten 2014). These actors do not have equal say in shaping markets and exchanges. Defining a value regime's governance mechanisms is usually the purview of the regime's most powerful members, such as supply chain actors, laws, courts, trade unions, state institutions, banks, and NGOs—formal institutions with legitimate authority within the regime (Levy et al. 2016). These actors facilitate, discipline, and institutionalize object pathways and related practice sequences by building and maintaining sociomaterial infrastructures,

legitimizing and codifying formal and informal exchange procedures, creating trust between actors, policing transgressions, and sharing knowledge (Araujo 2007; Harrison and Kjellberg 2016; Levy et al. 2016). The disciplining power of governance mechanisms thus guides the enactment of object pathways to serve certain higher-order values over others (Maciel and Wallendorf 2016).

Certain consumer movement tactics indicate a strategy of intervention via a value regime's governance mechanisms. Lobbying and letter-writing efforts, as well as the aforementioned awareness or protest campaigns, aim to reshape a regime's governance mechanisms by forcing institutional action to change market legislation or standards (King and Pearce 2010; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). For example, the religiously motivated temperance movement sought state intervention into the governance mechanisms of a value regime it viewed as illicit (Gusfield 1986). Sometimes governance mechanisms are themselves the movement's primary target rather than a means for change, as in cases when institutions are deemed corrupt or out of tune with consumer needs and wants (Tilly and Tarrow 2015).

### Object Pathways

Object pathways are made of largely predictable, routinized, and sociomaterially structured sequences of exchange and object-transformation practices through which objects travel. They materially manifest the more abstract concepts



of governance mechanisms and higher-order values into practice sequences. Appadurai (1986) argued that a value regime is characterized by its exchange practices, and that when an object moves between regimes, its value outcomes change as well. Recent critiques argue that exchange practices are often inherently and productively interlinked, calling into question Appadurai's strict demarcation of value regime boundaries (Miller 2008). For instance, Scaraboto's (2015) analysis of the geocaching community recounted how the blurry boundaries between monetary exchange, gift-giving, and sharing were instrumental to the negotiation of objects' communal statuses, and to the higher-order values of geocaching itself. When geocachers negotiated exchange procedures, they also addressed conflicting ideas over value outcomes, such as disagreements over whether an object was too important to the community to be sold outside of it and, therefore, should only be gifted. Caliskan and Callon (2009) similarly argue that object movements between monetary exchange and gift-giving contexts are not random. They write: "Nothing moves on its own. If a good is produced it is because it has a value for its producer; if it is distributed it is because it is a source of value for its distributor; and if it is consumed it is because it has value in its consumer's eyes" (389).

These works show that one particular mode of exchange cannot define the boundaries of a value regime. Rather, higher-order values and governance mechanisms legitimate the enactment of certain exchange modes between regime actors. When these exchanges become established into routinized sequences of practices, an object pathway will form. As objects travel through a value regime's pathways, they "also change states, from commodities to inalienable possessions, and even possibly, rubbish" (Arsel 2016, 34). Such changes of state are evident in preparatory practices prior to exchanges, such as material modifications of goods before entering market circulation or purifying symbolic labor prior to divestment (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005; Türe 2014). Object pathways are sociomaterially structured. Pathway practices cannot be performed without the presence of specific infrastructural elements, such as suitable exchange, object transformation, and consumption arenas (Araujo 2007; Arsel 2016; Caliskan and Callon 2009; Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016; Martin and Schouten 2014).

Interventions into object pathways have yet to be a central focus of attention in consumer movement studies. For instance, the globally organized protests sparked by the outrage over Nike's use of sweatshop labor articulated the broken link between higher-order values and value outcomes, yet did not lead to significant object pathway interventions from consumers (Bennett 2004; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Thompson and Coskuner-Balli's (2007) study of community-supported agriculture (CSA) investigated consumer participation in an alternative object pathway for the greater value regime of agricultural production

that championed different higher-order values. They found that consumers collaborating with small organic producers to bring food from farm to table—in stark contrast to industrial farming—used exchange practices to decommodify food items and imbue them with artisanal and rustic higher-order values. However, the study primarily concentrated on the meanings and motivations of consumer participants and did not elaborate on how consumers participated in creating and sustaining the object pathway. Furthermore, CSA collaboration was usually led by farmers. In some cases, consumers have supported emerging alternative pathways by championing or helping alternative producers (King and Pearce 2010), as with the taste transformations away from Big Beer to craft brewing (Kjeldgaard et al. 2017; Maciel and Wallendorf 2016). But again, in these cases entrepreneurial marketers, not consumers, have been seen as the primary agents of object pathway emergence.

The Restaurant Day movement protested stagnant bureaucracy by encouraging citizen-consumers to occupy public spaces with creative pop-up restaurants (Weijo et al. 2018). This strategy was motivated by a recognition of potential resistance to more contentious approaches, and by the easy mobilization of familiar material resources and competences related to cooking. Restaurant Day ultimately owed its market-changing potential to effective protesting of bureaucrat complacency and charismatic championing of higher-order values relating to cosmopolitan tastes. The pop-up restaurants were set up for only a day at a time, four times a year, constituting a temporary object pathway at best. Yet the movement's growing and iterative mobilization of resources—domestic items, cooking skills, connections, digital technologies—in serving ever more creative meals and experiences to fellow citizens allows for speculation that such mobilization could also serve the creation of an alternative object pathway. Outside the consumer movement literature, the case of consumer-driven launch of a Minimoto market also suggests that an alternative object pathway could emerge as the product of primarily consumer labor (Martin and Schouten 2014). As our analysis will show, consumer discontent with a value regime's current value outcomes can lead to a value regime intervention by way of a consumer movement seeking to build an alternative object pathway.

## The Production of Value Outcomes in a Value Regime

Value outcomes are the different ends that objects of value create or enable for different value regime actors in the performance of practices (Arnould 2014; Graeber 2001; Lambek 2013). A value regime perpetuates itself by consistently producing certain types of value outcomes through the interplay of the three value regime elements. Value outcomes can be multiple and contingent on the

forms of value an object is perceived to possess (Arnould 2014; Graeber 2001; Holbrook 1999). In this work, we distinguish between three value forms—use value, expressive value, and exchange value—which all produce value outcomes by enabling value regime actors to achieve certain ends in their practices. For instance, an automobile has use value as transportation, expressive value as a badge of identity, and diminishing exchange value in a secondary market. An object's symbolic significance or prestige relates to expressive value; things of expressive value thus add to the symbolic meaningfulness of practices (Schau et al. 2009). Exchange value derives from an object's ability to be exchanged for other objects within the regime (though usually for money), and from how well the object maintains its exchangeability. Perceptions of high or sustained use and/or expressive value will make objects more desired in exchange practices—a sandwich rots, but diamonds are forever (Graeber 2001; Marx 1844/1959; Simmel 1900/2004). Expressive value also connects to exchange practices: the exchange of gifts is strongly motivated by expected symbolic, identity, and social outcomes (Graeber 2001; Türe 2014).

The relationship between value outcomes and exchange, use, and expressive value is iterative and co-constituting: objects enable value outcomes in practices, which in turn affirms the value of these objects and creates expectations of future value outcomes for similar objects. When actors learn to expect certain value outcomes from their interaction with objects, that expectation routinizes the object pathway and further legitimizes the regime's higher-order values and governance mechanisms (Akaka et al. 2014; Arnould 2014; Arsel 2016; Lusch and Vargo 2011). That said, the routinization of the object pathway does not mean rigid determinism. Value outcomes can indeed be multiple and at times uncontrollable and even negative for consumers. For example, a delicious meal and its use and expressive values can provide value outcomes of satisfied hunger and a pleasant social experience with friends, but also a negative outcome of guilt for overindulgence. The routinization of object pathways simply denotes that certain practice sequences within the regime are more likely. When negative or uncontrollable value outcomes become too commonplace, consumers may initiate collective action to challenge the workings of the respective value regime. Conversely, changing a value regime necessitates establishing and routinizing the production of alternative value outcomes.

## CONTEXT AND METHOD

### The German Retail Food Sector as Value Regime

We explored our theorization of consumer movement interventions into value regimes through an ethnographic study in the context of the German retail food sector. The production, distribution, and consumption of food readily

illustrate the workings of a value regime. To give context to our study, we will first map the German retail food sector onto our updated theorization of value regimes as constituted by higher-order values, governance mechanisms, and object pathways. These three elements were together responsible for what is widely seen as a food waste problem. The destruction of good food was clearly a negative, albeit largely incidental, value outcome. It was the by-product of a long historical process driven by desires to make food safer, cleaner, and cheaper for consumers. We elaborate how German consumers became aware of the misalignment between their higher-order values, particularly relating to sustainability and the ethical handling of food, and the negative value outcome of food waste. This misalignment sparked consumer interventions into object pathways, which ultimately became the focus of our ethnographic inquiry.

*Higher-Order Values: Profits, Abundance, Health, and Consumer Safety.* Food practices in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which included the two world wars, were governed by higher-order values relating to scarcity. Mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century cookbooks often emphasized avoiding food waste as a central consumer responsibility (Evans, Campbell, and Murcott 2012). Post-war prosperity brought rising incomes, low unemployment, and technological innovation to industrialized countries. Entire economies shifted from food scarcity to abundance (Friedmann and McMichael 1987) and to hedonic and individualistic food consumption (Langer 2013). In the 1950s, the average German consumer spent 44% of household income on groceries; in 2015 the figure was 13.6% (Statista 2016). The German food value regime is primarily organized around higher-order values relating to consumer safety, health, profitability, and abundance of choice. Recent global narratives emphasizing wellness have further established health and freshness as important consumer values (Cederström and Spicer 2015; Thompson 2004; Thompson and Troester 2002). These higher-order values have been championed by actors such as governments, corporations, NGOs, trade associations, consumers, and retailers (Coveney 1998; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

*Governance Mechanisms: Prioritizing Healthy Citizenry and Profit Maximization.* Governance mechanisms enable or promote certain higher-order values while repressing others. Governments in industrialized countries—Germany is no exception—have actively shaped food value regimes by promoting food freshness, healthiness, homogeneity, and consumer safety through mechanisms such as health education programs, school diets, and legislative codes (Coveney 1998; Kjaernes 2003; Yngfalk 2016). Post-war industrialization, rising prosperity, and government initiatives inspired new legislative codes, standards, and programs. The best-before date, introduced in 1981, ensures consumer protection and prioritizes safety and

freshness. Government initiatives, education, and changing discourses on food have also disciplined consumers to problematize their food intake and pursue healthier options (Coveney 1998; Yngfalk 2016).

*Object Pathways: Farm to Table (or Trash).* Food products follow highly institutionalized and routinized object pathways through markets to consumers. They begin on farms (we acknowledge that these, too, have consequential upstream suppliers), pass through some combination of processing and logistical operations, move on to retailers, and finally are purchased, or not, by consumers. In food retail, such pathways are highly codified and institutionalized, resulting in their routinization into a system with a significant amount of “value-homogenizing drive” (Appadurai 1986, 77). Foods sold at the supermarket are indeed pure commodity: mass produced, homogeneous, and nonsingular (Belk 2010). However, as the food item passes through consumer lifeworlds, monetary exchange gives way to exchange practices like sharing and gift-giving. Consumers share and cook meals as gifts, especially in domestic contexts (Belk 2010; Moisiso, Arnould, and Price 2004). For example, a commodity apple becomes singularized by inclusion into Grandma’s secret sauce, without which the annual family Thanksgiving get-together would not be the same (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Further illustrating the connectedness of value regime practices, retailers often promote domestic and gift-giving practices by sharing appropriate recipes close to holidays and stocking shelves with an abundance of related commodities.

*Growing Misalignment between Consumers’ Higher-Order Values and Value Outcomes.* Food is special. It is necessary, mundane, and fundamental, but it is also sensuous and expressive. People care about food. It ties to societally important higher-order values, particularly domestic and social ones (Belk 2010; Moisiso et al. 2004). It would be futile to try to account for all the possible value outcomes food produces for consumers. Our research focused on a particular value outcome that was causing significant unease for consumers: food waste.

Germany has a long history of being sustainability-oriented and a global leader in progressive green politics and consumption initiatives (Papadakis 1984/2014). Yet German consumers had long been ignorant of the high levels of food waste, partly because of their alienation from food production processes (Andersen 1997). The pathway condemning massive quantities of food to premature destruction had been kept invisible to consumers through retailers’ backstage operations. Eventually, however, the combined work of activists, documentary filmmakers, and the media brought food waste and its negative value outcomes into public debate. Two documentary films in particular were impactful in bringing hidden truths about food waste to the general public in German-speaking countries.

The popular Austrian documentary *We Feed the World* (close to 800,000 viewers in German-speaking Europe) provided a detailed critique of food waste rooted in overzealous reactions to diminishing exchange and use value, and the roles of politicians, managers, and consumers in perpetuating these practices. This film also linked food waste to industrial production and its underlying higher-order values of profit maximization. One film critic noted that while the film sometimes ventured into polemic, it undeniably illustrated “the absurdity of the system” (Zarzer 2005). Another film, *Taste the Waste* (2011), garnered media attention by winning several documentary film prizes and a showing on a major German television channel. This film further underlined the negative value outcomes of the value regime by showing people reclaiming and eating the so-called waste, to no ill effect. Concerns regarding food waste eventually reached the German *Bundestag* (Parliament). During recent years (legislative period 18: 2013–2017), food waste and best-before dates have been regular topics of discussion in German politics. Parties across the political spectrum proposed strategies against food waste (17/7458), initiatives for stopping food waste (18/2214), or efforts to rewrite food safety laws (18/6319).

As Thompson and Troester (2002) write, higher-order values are expressed through competing and circulating narratives in consumer culture. These documentaries, and the public debate they inspired, produced powerful and easily recitable narratives where higher-order values of sustainability were being threatened and undermined by the large amounts of food waste produced by the value regime. Growing awareness led to consumer action. Our ethnographic fieldwork concentrated on the German anti-food waste movement, which strategically intervened through object pathways.

## Field Research and Data Analysis

We conducted this study using ethnographic methods. Because the focus of the study was food and its circulation through a value regime, we chose, in both the construction and the analysis of the ethnographic data, to follow the food and the practices associated with its handling, exchange, use, and meanings. The first author and sole field researcher began fieldwork in December 2012, in a German-speaking region of Europe, after an encounter with affluent “dumpster divers.” Dumpster diving, or food scavenging, refers to the recovery of items from the large trash bins used mostly by retail and industrial establishments, and it is usually associated with poverty and homelessness (Hill and Stamey 1990). Yet dumpster diving had also become the domain of relatively affluent individuals—activists with nonsubsistence goals—who were driven by higher-order values of sustainability (Gollnhofer 2017a, 2017b). They scavenged for discarded food, even though they could afford to buy groceries.



The researcher engaged in this activist dumpster diving, participating in scavenging forays and interviewing other participants. Through referral sampling, online forums, and attending events in the Freegan scene, access to new informants among this population increased steadily. All of the informants for dumpster diving had a steady income and were in their twenties or thirties. The field researcher conducted 18 semistructured, in-depth interviews about the practice of dumpster diving and other consumption behaviors, at informants' homes or cafés, depending on their preferences. Initial grand-tour questions (McCracken 1988) led to narratives regarding general consumption behaviors, lifestyles, values, and eventually the practice of dumpster diving. Many informal, in situ interviews, conducted in the course of fieldwork, were conversational and recorded as field notes. The researcher also conducted five in-depth interviews with indigent food scavengers.

In late 2012, some former dumpster divers launched an initiative called Foodsharing, along with its online platform, *foodsharing.de*. Foodsharing operates in collaboration with retailers to intercept food, normally destined for disposal and destruction, and redistribute it to willing consumers, regardless of their financial status (Gollnhofer 2017a, 2017b; Gollnhofer, Hellwig, and Morhart 2016). The emergence of Foodsharing, as well as the growing scope of dumpster diving, also sensitized the first author to perceive the unfolding consumer activities as consumer movements (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Formal interviews with Foodsharing members at different levels of the initiative totaled 19 and followed the same basic protocol as those with dumpster divers. The interviewer followed a semistructured interview guide that started with broad questions about informants' lifeworlds and their higher-order values. Gradually, the conversations converged on their understanding of food and food waste, their practices with food, and their contributions to the Foodsharing movement. Foodsharing informants had varying levels of responsibility in and commitment to the initiative. While most of the Foodsharers were in the same age range as the dumpster divers, there were a few older ones, including some retirees.

Deep immersion and long-term engagement in Foodsharing also afforded the field worker opportunities to interview seven retail store managers that participated in the Foodsharing scheme. Here we were especially interested in the cooperation between retailers and Foodsharing, the synthesis of their practices, and potential conflicts. We interrogated the meanings, motivations, and considerations behind retailers' cooperation with Foodsharing, and we probed economic factors, such as the fear of losing revenue by giving away food. The formal, recorded interviews are summarized in table 1.

Participant observation in both dumpster diving and Foodsharing allowed the field researcher to understand these interventions into the value regime in a naturalistic

setting. Observation also allowed comparisons with verbal reports (Arnold and Fischer 1994), leading to a deeper understanding of the meanings of the interviews. Totalling 173 pages, field notes captured observational data and insights from informal interviews and participant observation. We also drew liberally from online data and ongoing media coverage. Archival data included 48 newspaper articles and 45 single-spaced pages of material compiled from Facebook groups and forums dedicated to dumpster diving and Foodsharing. Additional archival data consisted of protocols, laws, and other documents acquired from the *Deutsche Bundestag* (Parliament) archives, spanning from 1949 to the present. Data collection ended in June 2016.

Consistent with general ethnographic practice and prolonged engagement, early analysis occurred in the field and guided the direction of study. Purposeful sampling of sites and informants responded to emergent findings and questions. It led the fieldwork from the practices of food scavengers (both affluent and indigent) to Foodsharing practices and, finally, to collaborating retail stores. Deeper and more detailed data interpretation came after most of the fieldwork was completed, and followed an approach that was both hermeneutic (Arnold and Fischer 1994) and abductive (Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

We now transition to our findings, which we have divided into two main themes. In the first theme, we show how awareness of the food waste problem—and the misalignment of higher-order values and the value outcomes it represented—sparked consumer intervention through object pathways into the German food value regime. In the second theme, we show how these consumer interventions developed from building a disjunctive pathway to building a complementary pathway. We underline that these two interventions were interconnected, but we present them as distinct for analytical clarity.

### BUILDING A DISJUNCTIVE OBJECT PATHWAY: THE CASE OF DUMPSTER DIVING

Many supposedly new practices are in actuality variations of older ones (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). The first activist response we observed was the reconfiguration of dumpster diving, which has long been the purview of homeless or destitute populations scavenging for edible food discarded by retailers, restaurants, and other consumers (Hill and Stamey 1990). Activist consumers repurposed dumpster diving, expanding it until become a disjunctive object pathway. We conceptualize a disjunctive object pathway as a consumer-built object pathway that conflicts with or stands in contrast to the value regime's established object pathways, prevailing higher-order values, and/or governance mechanisms.



TABLE 1  
DATA SOURCES

Name	Sources	Dataset	Purpose
Recorded interviews with homeless dumpster divers (semistructured)	Indigent dumpster divers	Transcribed verbatim Five interviews Average length: 39 minutes; range 30–49 minutes	Embedding our phenomenon in a larger societal context and understanding boundary conditions
Recorded interviews with affluent dumpster divers (semistructured)	Affluent dumpster divers	Transcribed verbatim 18 interviews Average length: 57 minutes; range 35–91 minutes	Understanding the practice of affluent dumpster divers and its embeddedness within the German food value regime
Recorded interviews with Foodsharing members	Active Foodsharing members	Transcribed verbatim 19 interviews Average length: 95 minutes; range 32–112 minutes	Understanding the practice of Foodsharing and its embeddedness within the German food value regime
Recorded interviews with retailers	Retailers, cooperating with Foodsharing	Transcribed verbatim Seven interviews Average length: 37 minutes; range 23–51 minutes	Understanding the perspective of retailers on food and food waste
Field notes	Based on fieldwork at different spots	173 pages of field notes	Understanding and observing practices and interactions between different actors in depth
Photography	Photography during fieldwork	82 photos	Visualizing the observed practices; capturing material factors
Newspaper articles	Retrieved through Factiva and Wiso (aggregated news platforms)	48 newspaper articles	Embedding food valuations in a larger societal discourse
Online data	Facebook groups and forums dedicated to dumpster diving and Foodsharing	45 single-spaced pages	Triangulating the emergent findings
Documentaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Taste the Waste</i> (2011)</li> <li>• <i>We Feed the World</i> (2005)</li> </ul>	Two documentaries	Identifying food waste discourse and as an overall phenomenon
Archival research	Deutsche Bundestag archives	From 1949 to 2017; analysis of 29 documents (average path length: seven)	Embedding our context further into the macro-context (i.e., regulations)

### Dumpster Divers' Desire for Alternative Value Outcomes

The two aforementioned documentaries contributed to moral outrage over food waste, but they also introduced viewers to a practice that might channel the simmering outrage and desire for alternative value outcomes into action. *Taste the Waste* portrayed middle-class consumers engaged in dumpster diving and described them as actively combating food waste. Beatrice, a 29-year-old engineer and active dumpster diver, recounted the film's impact on her and other consumers in her circle: "I saw this film with my boyfriend at the cinema. We went out and we started looking straightaway for retailer dumpsters. Such a shame that so much food gets thrown away . . . [I thought] if other people can do it, I can do it as well." Beatrice displayed a homological identification with the subjects of the documentary, which motivated her to copy their practices. Beatrice, Maureen, and Alex all traced their initiation into dumpster diving back to this film.

Our informants' narratives revealed that dumpster diving allowed the practical enactment with previously marginalized higher-order values, which subsequently defined new and preferable value outcomes. Many of our informants

explicitly mentioned the higher-order value of sustainability as a key motivator. For instance, Reto linked his initiation into dumpster diving back to an "unexplainable feeling that I wanted to do something sustainable." Emma similarly recounted a long-standing "interest in sustainability," which she had previously expressed by buying green products. Dumpster diving gave her a new way "to pursue this meaningful orientation" and counteract the regime's value outcomes where marketable, nutritious food is transformed into waste by a mere management decision. As she recounted: "What you see [in the supermarket] today will be in the dumpster tomorrow. The cycle is just so ridiculously short. The potato has some minor spots, but you could still sell it. Instead they throw it away!" Our interpretation of our informants' narratives suggests that they initially started dumpster diving because the practice provided a meaningful way to do *something* against a problem that they themselves recognized was complex and systemic. Their jump from outrage and frustration over undesired value outcomes to direct, creative, and mostly uncoordinated local practices resembles the mode of movement mobilization identified by Weijo et al. (2018) in a similarly food-related context.

## Practice Innovation and Emerging Value Outcomes

The activists' middle-class backgrounds facilitated practice innovation. Compared to homeless or indigent dumpster divers, affluent dumpster divers had access to additional resources, such as kitchens with knives, brushes, water taps, and sinks to clean up food and sort items according to their salvageability. Stoves, refrigerators, and freezers allowed for cooking and storing food, which permitted the recovery of greater quantities and varieties of it. Similar to the mini-motocross enthusiasts in [Martin and Schouten's \(2014\)](#) study, dumpster divers drew on the affordances of material affluence to reimagine value outcomes. The affluent version of dumpster diving became an integration of novel practice meanings (a reemphasis of ethical treatment of food and new higher-order values relating to anticapitalism), familiar material elements (retail dumpsters, discarded food, and domestic equipment), and accessible and malleable competences (domestic cooking practices and emulation of homeless scavenging procedures). Together, these coalescing practice elements turned dumpster divers into "transformative agents [who] revive objects that border on rubbish" ([Türe 2014](#), 60).

Dumpster-diving practices produced new value outcomes that challenged common perceptions of food. The value regime had conditioned consumers and other actors to perceive even small blemishes as negative expressive value, which also meant reduced use value for consumers and diminished exchange value for retailers. Dumpster divers learned to see past the regime's established processes that deem discarded food to be devoid of value through a more sensorial engagement than that of typical supermarket shopping. The act of recovering food from a dumpster entailed frequent touching, smelling, sorting, and slicing open food items to judge their use value. As Lucia tells us: "We all know that you can eat a yogurt after the best-before date. With items out of the dumpster it is something similar. You have to open it, then you smell it, or you taste a tiny bit of it."

Many of our informants learned to judge food primarily for its use value instead of its superficial expressive value. Sabrina, a psychology instructor, professed that salvaged food became powerful symbols that stood in dramatic contrast with the value outcomes produced by the value regime: "The food items that I pull out of the dumpster are of equal value to me as the food items I buy in the supermarket . . . They are still edible, although the retailer has thrown them away. . . They are of even higher value to me, as they are not vehicles of the capitalist system. . . I love the notion of consuming waste. I love the waste." In addition to reinstating use value, dumpster diving for Sabrina infused food objects with new and potent expressive value as symbolic victories over rampant consumerism. Sabrina's "love" of waste also denotes the food's liberation

from existing regime practices, which she associates with the higher-order values of capitalism.

Dumpster-diving practices increased consumer reflexivity over the misalignment between their desired value outcomes and the regime's higher-order values. For instance, Maureen called out the retail sector for "pretending to live in a sterile world, more sterile than it actually is." These narratives contrasting current value regime practices and dumpster diving often echoed the dialectic of Gnostic versus Romantic myths of nature and technology ([Canniford and Shankar 2013](#); [Thompson 2004](#)). The value regime's ethical inferiority stemmed from its cold, rationalistic, consumerist, and disrespectful Gnostic practices of treating food as mere commodities. Laurel opined that eating food recovered from dumpsters is "a far better way than all the products that come out of the consumerist society, processed up to the point that no nutritional value is left inside them." Her account is illuminating. She emphasizes how the value regime's prevailing practices produce, in the interplay with capitalistic higher-order values and food regulations, diminished use value ("no nutrition"). The infusion of expressive value onto recovered food apparently has a halo effect for use value.

The practice of sacrifice is inherent to consumption, like when consumers sacrifice money, time, or effort in attaining the goods they desire ([Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003](#); [Simmel 1900/2004](#)). Sacrifice can also link higher-order values to consumption objects ([Simmel 1900/2004](#); [Türe 2014](#)). The substantial time and effort required by dumpster diving infused expressive value into redeemed food objects by turning them into trophies of success. Some informants described the practice of dumpster diving itself to be enjoyable, even exciting. Anna found dumpster diving thrilling, "like a hunting experience." Alice described positive affect and a sense of fulfillment: "It's a success. It feels. . . it feels nice. It's funny, because it doesn't feel bad when you don't find anything." We also learned that going "on the hunt" together and sharing bounties provided social value outcomes such as positive feelings of communion.

## From Practice Innovation to Alternative Object Pathways

Object pathways are made of largely predictable, routinized sequences of exchange and object transformation practices. Previous research has identified that consumers employ certain dispersed practices to create and maintain more holistic sets of practices called "integrated practices" ([Arsel and Bean 2013](#); [Seregina and Weijo 2017](#)). Synchronization refers to aligning practices across different regime actors into a temporal sequence. In our interpretation, synchronization is a key practice for building an alternative object pathway.

In simple terms, dumpster divers' alternative pathway sought to divert discarded food items onto consumer plates

instead of to the landfill. As the previous section illustrated, dumpster diving was initially an ad hoc practice wherein consumers worked alone or in small groups and sought out promising dumpsters to salvage what they could for their own use. As the practice grew and dumpster divers became more connected and organized, an alternative object pathway emerged. The effective synchronization of material resources was key to building pathway viability. Dumpster divers synchronized their use of bikes and cars with dumpster raids to recover food from wider areas across cities, carrying larger amounts to their homes. The appropriation of vehicles into dumpster diving increased the circulation potential of the alternative pathway—food could be passed onward rather than consumed alone. As Sandra described: “My car is one of the main facilitators and vehicles for distributing the food items to my friends.” Rebecca similarly professed: “Without my bike, I couldn’t even really go dumpster diving. I have two baskets, one in the front and one in the back. And then I put two sacks on each side of the handlebars.” Other technological affordances included headlamps, which allowed for the discovery and retrieval of food items during nighttime raids. Digital media were crucial for synchronizing in that they allowed dumpster divers to communicate about promising dumpsters and to synchronize the arrival of able bodies and vehicles (Figure 2).

Dumpster divers incorporated and rearranged material elements in their homes to improve the object pathway and its circulation potential. They purified and processed salvaged food with familiar domestic materials like brushes, peelers, sinks, and cutting boards. They were not oblivious to the hygiene dangers of eating food recovered from dumpsters; recovered food items were often separated from regular supermarket goods. Alex described this difference in object pathways between dumpster and supermarket food: “I do not keep the food items that I got out of the dumpster in the same fridge with purchased food items. I think this would feel strange. So, I either store them in my separate fridge or on the balcony, to keep them fresh. And cleaning them meticulously is also very important to me. . . That way I don’t have a problem eating them.”

Ritual cleaning decontaminates the food items, improving value outcomes by removing some of the concerns relating to their consumption. Repurposed material affordances play a crucial role in his new practice sequence. Alex’s account of feeling “strange” about having regular and salvaged food in the same place illustrates boundaries to what kind of value outcomes dumpster diving can produce. His narrative also illustrates certain material limitations of building alternative pathways—not all dumpster divers had the luxury of having extra fridges or balconies.

FIGURE 2

EXAMPLES OF DUMPSTER DIVING



NOTE.—First Author participating in a Dumpster-Diving Raid (left); example of a collectively gathered Dumpster-Diving Haul (right)



## Diffusing and Developing the Object Pathway

Facebook groups and other digital enclaves became central hubs for redistributing recovered food items into consumer lifeworlds. We learned that when a haul proved to be too bountiful for the actual dumpster raiders, quickly fired social media or text messages summoned other people in the network to share the wealth. As dumpster diving evolved and the amount of salvaged food grew, dumpster-diving activists had to consider certain rules and restrictions to govern their alternative object pathway. Their countercultural mentality and desire to underscore the contrast in higher-order values between them and other regime actors (specifically retailers) led them to shun monetary exchange practices for the food. We looked and could find no evidence of a secondary market for scavenged food. Food items were recovered and shared collectively or redistributed to other interested individuals as gifts. Free distribution was a matter of ethos, as Omar emphasized: “I never thought about selling the food. I think it would not feel right. I am not in this to make a profit. For me the food item is more important, as is sharing it with fellow consumers. I think this is a way to have the most impact. Really to share and to distribute those food items, but always for free. Otherwise we would go back to the status quo.”

Similar to Emma earlier, Omar suggests that, by virtue of the food having been salvaged from the dumpster, its value outcomes are transformed. He argues that the practice of selling salvaged food would be “going back to the status quo.” We interpreted this as a belief that the undesired value outcome of food waste is partly encapsulated in the way food is exchanged as commodity—a value outcome dumpster divers must not repeat. This invokes the opposition between gift-giving or sharing and monetary exchange practices. Sharing strengthens social ties and induces social types of value outcomes, whereas monetary exchange serves the more utilitarian types (Belk 2010; Scaraboto 2015).

Türe (2014) writes that object pathways are contingent on the availability of exchange partners with similar skills and dispositions to perform necessary practices. Recruiting other practitioners was key to maintaining and expanding the alternative pathway for salvaged food. Sharing or gifting the food beyond activist circulation networks served as a means for recruiting and educating interested consumers. Karin, Maureen, and Emma have all shared salvaged food both in and outside their activist networks. Maureen shared food waste meals with colleagues at work, and Emma periodically invited friends to her home for food waste dinners. Whereas homeless or indigent dumpster divers practice food salvaging mostly out of sight so as not to attract attention (Hill and Stamey 1990), activist dumpster divers welcomed the attention to build awareness for their cause and their higher-order values. Some informants engaged in

advocacy to recruit practitioners (Seregina and Weijo 2017) and to align expectations for value outcomes. Sabrina explained:

Once a week at the university I organized dumpster diving and events for shared cooking. I taught dumpster diving for freshmen as a part of a class. There were around 15 students, let's say 10 to 20, and each week I took other people dumpster diving. . . Last year there was also a conference in the city. A lot of students came from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, altogether around 300. We cooked for them three times a day. It was mainly food out of the dumpster, around 80%.

By teaching dumpster diving at the university, Sabrina spread the practice and related object pathways. Institutional complicity and support from the university provided legitimacy to the practice, which likely facilitated recruitment efforts. Beatrice also offered an introductory class on dumpster diving in conjunction with an environmental political organization. These courses communicated the dumpster divers' higher-order values relating to sustainability through practice, speech, and narrative. Their events allowed for the sharing of retrieval know-how, dumpster locations, and inspirational stories of dumpster diving.

We now provide an interim summary of the alternative object pathway. After retailers have thrown food away, but before garbage haulers pick it up and take it to the landfill, dumpster divers intervene to recover edible food. Practice synchronization lies at the heart of integrating dispersed practices into an alternative object pathway. For instance, dumpster divers cleaned, stored, cooked, and circulated the food explicitly through gift-giving and sharing practices. By traversing through this alternative pathway, food items saw their use value reinstated and their expressive value reimagined. These value outcomes were aligned with the activists' higher-order values of sustainability, counterculture, and anticapitalism. In the following two subsections, we discuss the limitations and challenges to the alternative pathway. The disjunctive pathway was not well aligned with the regime's governance mechanisms and certain higher-order values championed by other regime actors, particularly retailers.

## Stigma and Contagion Endanger the Alternative Pathway

Dumpster diving is a messy affair. For some of our informants, this produced value outcomes of fear of physical contagion and related health concerns. As Maureen said: “The strange feeling of climbing into the dumpsters, of then swallowing the waste. . . For me it is—although I understand that the food items are often packaged and have only wandered from one place to another—but, still, there is this feeling of dumpsters: dirty, the smell. . . I always



had the feeling that I'm eating waste and not being sure whether the food items were still okay, always questioning the quality."

Foul odors as a value outcome may emanate from a single source and, from there, induce further contamination that endangers the entire practice sequence. For Maureen, bad smells evoked an undesired expressive value, even when she tried to assure herself that consumption would be safe and healthy. Reto reported something similar: "I look in to the dumpster. In theory, I know there is a lot of good stuff in there. . .but I hesitate." And from the first author's field notes: "We found huge amounts of Lindt chocolate bunnies and eggs after Easter. We took it home, but the smell was so disgusting, and we couldn't get rid of it because it was kind of attached to the wrapping of the chocolate." These examples illustrate strong negative value outcomes that endanger the viability of the alternative object pathway.

Fear of contagion extended to the personal identities of some activists (Frazer 1984), further undermining the alternative object pathway. Emma recounted: "In the beginning it was difficult for me, the awareness that someone has thrown these items away. It was depreciated. There was no value left. And I am taking stuff that has no value. Does this depreciate me as well? I think it is a psychological effect of others telling you that you cannot use those items any longer."

Though Emma eventually overcame these feelings of depreciated self-worth, her account illustrates that the dumpster, as a material element in the object pathway, had an undesired spillover effect on activists' identities as well as strong use-value consequences ("you cannot use those items any longer"). Emma also faced identity costs from sharing dumpster spoils at work, which her coworkers characterized as "strange and crazy." Beatrice believed that her "sister would die of a heart attack if she found out" that she was dumpster diving. Alice reported that her mother objects to the practice, even though its higher-order values of sustainability align with her own higher-order values: "My mother only buys renewable electricity, and she is proud of consuming in a sustainable way and only buying organic stuff. But dumpster diving—that is too much for her. . . My parents just don't want to see their daughter as a bum scavenging for food."

### Other Regime Actors Suppress the Alternative Pathway

By taking food from retail bins, dumpster divers were actively interfering with established object pathways, higher-order values, and even governance mechanisms. While the activists professed sustainability as their primary higher-order value, their utterances were often combined with anticapitalist rhetoric (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) and scorn for retailers. Retailers took note of dumpster

divers' rhetoric and responded in kind, linking dumpster-diving practices to anarchy, thievery, or trespassing. Ludwig, the manager of a small retail chain, exclaimed in an interview: "[Dumpster diving] is an illegal practice! Similar to stealing!" Retailers also retaliated at the practical level, which escalated the conflict. Our informants reported, for example, that some retailers struck back by putting locks on dumpsters. Dumpster divers, for their part, countered by sabotaging the locks with glue. We also learned that retailers deliberately contaminated dumpster contents. A rant in a private Facebook group recounted: "Some retailers really suck. They keep the bread inside the store until it perishes, so that no one can eat it anymore. Such idiots! Others try to fight back with fences. And others put disgusting stuff or coffee grounds on top of the good stuff so that you do not find the good stuff. Or it becomes so disgusting that you don't want to lay your hands on the nice stuff." Dumpster divers were both surprised and upset by retailer reactions. Retailer retaliation was a common topic in the dumpster divers' private Facebook group and decried as "ridiculous," "unbelievable," "shocking," and "depressing." Martina, a dedicated dumpster diver, lamented that retailers effectively shut down many "dumpster paradises."

The alternative pathways also conflicted with the regime's governance mechanisms, which supported retailer practices. Institutional legitimacy allowed retailers to repress the alternative pathway through legal action against dumpster divers. Marcel, one of our informants, was arrested for trespassing. However, despite setbacks, dumpster divers' activism managed to call into question the regime's governance mechanisms. For instance, prosecutions generally backfired, and charges were dismissed, leading the media to depict retailers as foolish, petty, and cruel (Mösken 2012; Woldin 2014). Growing media attention prompted politicians to take sides as well. The left-wing party in Germany publicly declared that they did not see dumpster diving as a crime (Binder 2012).

## BUILDING A COMPLEMENTARY OBJECT PATHWAY: THE CASE OF FOODSHARING

As we show next, the struggles and the small victories gained by dumpster divers paved the way for a different method of enacting the strategy of intervening in object pathways. Foodsharing, and the alternative pathway it created, was more complementary to existing value regime elements compared to the disjunctive pathway of dumpster diving. We conceptualize a complementary object pathway as a consumer-built pathway that complements or does not actively clash with the value regime's established object pathways, prevailing higher-order values, and/or governance mechanisms.

Foodsharing's origins can be traced to dumpster diving both through shared higher-order values as well as through key mobilizing actors. A particularly important actor was Valentin Thurn, the director of *Taste the Waste* and dumpster-diving advocate. Thurn and collaborators initially developed Foodsharing as a peer-to-peer platform for sharing surplus food among private households. Yet this first version of Foodsharing (1.0) was inefficient to the point of being self-defeating. As reported by Eva, a food activist: "I am really supportive of the idea, but I used it only twice. . . I had to cycle for about 35 minutes just to pick up a package of tea. I just do not have the time. And I live in a really central location and not in the outback. What do I really gain by saving one package of tea?" Eva professed that her higher-order values aligned with those of Foodsharing 1.0, but the service proved difficult to synchronize with her domestic practices. Jana similarly described Foodsharing 1.0 as "too much effort for zero results."

### Changing the Strategy of Value Regime Intervention

Thurn and some of his collaborators had come to recognize that, since most consumers would never be comfortable with the risks of hygiene and stigmatization, dumpster diving had limited potential to fight the food waste problem. They understood that circumventing the dumpster itself would be a key point for the viability of any alternative object pathway. The relationship between dumpster-diving activists and retailers had been contentious. Foodsharing activists realized that seeking support from, and possibly allying with, these more legitimate institutional actors (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) may help overcome dumpster diving's limitations.

In early 2012, at about the same time as Foodsharing 1.0 was finding it difficult to build traction, two activist dumpster divers approached a retail store and formed the first true collaboration between food activists and retailers. They proposed a system, which they dubbed *Lebensmittelretten* (LMR, "saving food items"), aimed at redistributing surplus food before it reached the waste stream. Retailers would turn over unwanted food surpluses to volunteers, who in turn would make the food available to willing consumers through an online platform (*lebensmittelretten.de*). While Foodsharing 1.0 had gained consumers' attention by appealing to a specific customer segment's higher-order value of sustainability, it remained inefficient due to its unsynchronized object pathways. LMR activists had built a more appealing object pathway that required less effort and coordination, and turned out to be more viable. The two platforms were officially merged in the autumn of 2014 (henceforth, Foodsharing).

### Finding Alignment between Higher-Order Values

Dumpster divers created an alternative pathway that conflicted with the higher-order values of other actors in the regime. Foodsharing, on the other hand, aligned their alternative pathways with retailers' primary higher-order values (profitability, consumer safety, retail brand image). For example, the first author attended a training session for novice Foodsharers, who were given specific verbal scripts for retailer interaction: "When the employees at the store tell you that they do not have anything for Foodsharing today, you should say, 'That is perfect, because it means that no food is wasted.'"

This exemplary interaction illustrates that the primary higher-order value of Foodsharing (i.e., sustainability) should not conflict with the higher-order values of retailers. The retailers' primary function of selling food, when fully realized, results in *not* having surpluses for Foodsharing. Further underlining the desire to align sustainability with other existing higher-order values, trainers at the session also encouraged Foodsharers to code-match with retailers by dressing up in business attire and using appropriate business lingo. Foodsharing's online platform included talking points for retailer recruitment, such as the cost and profit benefits of Foodsharing and how to use Foodsharing in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The emphasis on sustainable and legal action, and distance from anticapitalist rhetoric, facilitated synchronization with retailer practices and promoted involvement in language familiar to retailers (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). One participating retailer recounted joining Foodsharing because it "aligns well with our sustainable principles" and "corporate social responsibility goals." Foodsharers also provided stickers that allowed retailers to promote their Foodsharing partnerships to consumers.

### Aligning with Governance Mechanisms

In contrast to dumpster divers, Foodsharing ensured that its alternative object pathway aligned with the existing governance mechanisms of the value regime. For instance, Foodsharing developed legal disclaimers for members to sign to protect retailers from responsibility for the redistributed food after the best-before date. Martina, an activist who had grown disenchanted with the illegal nature of dumpster diving, expressed her enthusiasm for Foodsharing: "The supermarket doesn't learn anything from dumpster diving. . . But Foodsharing resonated with me 100%. Sustainable and legal action! . . . The impact is far broader." Martina's narrative is revealing. Because the supermarket "doesn't learn," dumpster diving amounts only to a Pyrrhic victory. Martina saw retailer cooperation not as selling out, but as a promise for "broader impact" in changing the value regime.

We speculate that Foodsharing's successful alignment of their higher-order values of sustainability with governance mechanisms also made it an attractive option for other regulators and politicians. Ilse Aigner, Federal Minister for Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (2008–2013), added Foodsharing to her “Too good for the dumpster” agenda. The Ministry for Nutrition and Agriculture listed Foodsharing as an ally in their battle against food waste. Foodsharing was discussed twice at the German Bundestag as an exemplar for fighting food waste (18/179 and 18/3733).

### Routinizing and Disciplining Emerging Value Outcomes

Although some of the new labor under Foodsharing was done by retailers, consumers still did most of the heavy lifting. Material affordances in consumer lifeworlds were again key. Foodsharers repurposed the dumpster-diving practice of coordinating members' car and free time usage to deliver surplus food to common sorting areas. Public refrigerators, accessible to everyone, were co-opted into redistribution centers. When retailers sign up for the service, they expect that excess food will indeed be collected. To keep these promises and to maintain the hard-won practice synchronization with retailers, Foodsharing exerted significant effort to routinize and discipline object pathways. As recounted by Nicola, an early member of the revamped Foodsharing: “We cannot just start a cooperation like this. It takes time to build up a team. And if we pick up food there from Monday to Friday, we need a team that consists of about 15 people. And those need to be reliable, and also to show up. And then we need a system to distribute the food or store it.”

Nicola lists difficulties in synchronizing resources, time, and manpower as obstacles to pathway routinization. Needing people to “be reliable” and “show up” speaks directly to the importance of practice synchronization for pathway viability. Many of these challenges were overcome through regular get-togethers and the use of Foodsharing's online platform for motivating people and sharing knowledge.

Practice disciplining also meant snuffing out emergent value outcomes and related higher-order values that activists feared would endanger the newfound collaboration with retailers. Early on, Foodsharing expelled two members who championed the idea of distributing food to homeless people. Lucia justified the decision: “We do not object that food is distributed to homeless people. But this is not what [Foodsharing] should be about... There are other institutions that can take care of that, and I think the security network in Germany works pretty well... This is about saving food from the landfill, that someone uses the food and appreciates it. The income of the consumers is not relevant at all; neither is their status.”

The motivation of these charity-minded consumers aligns with the view that object disposition should serve a more general goal of improving societal welfare (Türe 2014). However, Lucia fears that enacting higher-order values of charity might muddle the sustainable higher-order values of the project and endanger retailer support. If charitable thinking became an established higher-order value of Foodsharing, it might send mixed signals about who the appropriate consumers for the service are and what the goal of the project is, eventually triggering backlash from other value regime actors. Nicola similarly opined: “It is necessary to build a common understanding. We don't do this to earn money or to help the poor! You cannot just let the members do whatever they want to do.” Nicola argues that overt profiteering (“we don't do this to earn money”) and the seemingly noble higher-order values of helping the poor were both at odds with the greater goal of reducing food waste. Her statement illustrates how heterogeneous higher-order values and value outcomes—even when they are otherwise preferable—can create uncertainty that puts collective action at risk (Thompson and Troester 2002).

To maintain the primacy of sustainability-related higher-order values, activists devised rules, procedures, newsletters, and a Foodsharing wiki page. Newcomers to the organization were required to review training material and pass quizzes as an initiation procedure. Routinization and disciplining took trial and error. Nicola further recounted: “[Foodsharing] grew far too quickly and we did not always manage to adjust our structures accordingly... There were incidents where something really went wrong. For instance, there was one television report where a lady comes to a local distribution point, takes a pretzel, and then puts 1 Euro in a donation box. That is not acceptable, and it is against the purpose of Foodsharing. I called the responsible person immediately.”

Nicola's narrative illustrates a breakdown of the alternative object pathway due to fast growth, insufficient knowledge sharing, and a lack of socialization for new practitioners. The seemingly benign act of donating money in exchange for the discarded food item conflicts with Foodsharing's higher-order values. The Foodsharing website also featured the following decree: “It is forbidden to all participants to sell the food items or to use them for barter. The saved food items are for personal consumption or to be shared with fellow consumers.” In other words, Foodsharing activists feared that a multiplicity of exchange practices might lead to ambiguity over value outcomes (Miller 2008; Scaraboto 2015) and jeopardize retailer participation. This logic was heavily reinforced.

In contrast to dumpster diving, Foodsharing is not practiced in the shadows and thus is more palatable to mainstream consumers. Alex also emphasized the inclusiveness of Foodsharing: “Foodsharing is a form of collective action that is visible and has impact. We redistribute food items

with the help of retailers. There is no clandestine activity, unlike in dumpster diving. No stigma attached. No messy dumpsters. Together—by which I mean everyone who is interested and wants to participate, even politicians and retailers—we take an active stance against food waste. It just feels good to be on the right path.”

As Alex put it, Foodsharing’s alternative object pathway is the product of “everyone” joining in—including previously antagonistic retailers and politicians in charge of governance mechanisms. The “good path” aligns different ideas over higher-order values, which allows for the synchronization of practices into an effective, viable, and legal object pathway. As of December 2018, the Foodsharing organization featured 47,582 participating members, over 104,000 followers on Facebook, and 4,943 co-operating retailers. Foodsharing had helped save over 19,025,178 kilograms of surplus food, and more than 4,000,000 kilograms in 2017 alone. It warrants mentioning, however, that despite activist consumers’ substantial success in recovering edible food from the waste stream, the value regime still produces large amounts of waste. Dumpster diving and Foodsharing activists neither replaced nor fully revised value outcomes produced by the German food value regime. But they unquestionably brought more food onto consumer plates that otherwise would have ended up in landfills.

## DISCUSSION

This ethnographic inquiry of collective consumer action to reimagine the value outcomes as produced by the German food value regime offers two primary contributions to theory. First, it expands our knowledge about consumer movement strategies by recognizing three different loci of intervention of consumer movements and the strategy of creating alternative pathways. Here we also identify conditions that make intervention into object pathways more likely. Second, our conceptualization of value regimes provides a useful analytical tool for the study of markets, market dynamics, and systemic value creation within markets.

### Consumer Movement Strategies and Building Alternative Pathways

Studies of consumer movements have often focused on movement identities and their tactical repertoires for seeking change (Jasper 2011; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Weijo et al. 2018). This framing has come at a cost for understanding movement strategies—that is, questions of where movements decide to take the fight and with what resources (Smithey 2009). Our study foregrounded this question of strategy in our investigation, which also motivated our development of value regime theorization.

Our study investigated how a consumer movement worked to improve the alignment between its members’ higher-order values and their desired value outcomes within a value regime. As Graeber (2001, 105) writes, “value, after all, is something that mobilizes the desires of those who recognize it, and moves them to action.” The misalignment between higher-order values and value outcomes in our empirical case was profound, producing the kind of collective moral outrage or sense of injustice that is known to spark consumer movement mobilization (Jasper 2011; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Consumer movements are often concerned with the issue that their worldview—as expressed in higher-order values—is not aligned with actual value outcomes as produced by market systems. Revisiting prior studies of consumer movements from our value regime perspective reveals collective and strategic attempts to change value regimes through their governance mechanisms and higher-order values. Lobbying and proposing alternative designs for governance mechanisms are well-known strategies of consumer movements (Gusfield 1986; King and Pearce 2010). Similarly, the desire to raise awareness or “change the conversation” regarding higher-order values is a known cause for movement mobilization (Buechler 1995; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013).

Our value regime model offers a useful way to understand consumer movement strategies and their respective loci of intervention and resource mobilization. We believe that consumer intervention into object pathways—by way of building disjunctive and/or complementary pathways—represents a newer and more direct strategy for consumers attempting value regime change. We believe building a new object pathway is similar to what Appadurai (1986) described as the “creative recontextualization of value,” by which regime actors seek to legitimize their “own value claims and manipulations to enhance their personal interests” (55). As Appadurai (1986) further writes, “[t]he diversion of commodities from specified paths is always a sign of creativity or crisis” (26). In our case, it was both creativity and crisis that underscored the evolving nature of this strategy; the tactical approaches of the anti-food waste movement changed, but the overall locus of intervention did not. At the risk of oversimplifying, we can view the process of value regime change in German food retail as a one-two punch. Dumpster divers, by repurposing scavenging techniques to create a disjunctive object pathway, caught the public imagination, unveiled and questioned underlying value-creating processes, and questioned the workings of the value regime. Foodsharing built on the idea of an alternative pathway but, in contrast to dumpster divers, developed one that was aligned with the other value regime elements, namely governance mechanisms and higher-order values. This change in tactics—but not strategy—resulted in significant legitimacy gains for the consumer movement. Here our findings complement recent



studies finding that the legitimacy of a movement is not static, and that a movement can do much on its own initiative to improve its public image and opportunities to attract institutional allies (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Weijo et al. 2018).

Our study provides some insight into the question of when consumers are more likely to intervene in value regimes by building alternative object pathways rather than protesting, lobbying, or signing petitions. We identify three conditions that make consumer interventions into object pathways more likely: 1) physical access to object pathways, 2) a systemic challenge, and 3) mastery of digital media.

First, it appears that physical access to the object pathway is an important, if not necessary, condition. Dumpster divers could access food waste to divert it for consumption, allowing them to create a disjunctive pathway. In the case of sweatshop labor in foreign countries, the lack of access to critical points in the object pathway puts such a strategy out of reach for activists, who must resort to less direct action, such as protests and boycotts (Bennett 2004; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Community-supported agriculture (CSA), in building a complementary object pathway to food retailing, did not require access to existing object pathways because active disruption was not part of the strategy (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). Another precondition we identify is the competency, in terms of skills and available resources, to manipulate the material flows of an object pathway. Both dumpster divers and Foodsharers made extensive use of affordances such as domestic cooking skills, food preparation devices and facilities, personal transportation, and social media in building an alternative object pathway.

Second, we speculate that object pathways are a more likely locus of intervention when consumers face a systemic issue, making a single culprit difficult to identify. Retail food waste was not attributable to a single firm but, rather, to all firms in the sector. Government and regulations were also implicated. Protesting—with a focus on governance mechanisms and/or higher-order values—is easier when the movement can identify a clear enemy either in form of a single corporation or government agency (Bennett 2004; Buechler 1995; Jasper 2011; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). The responsibility for creating the food waste problem was indeed distributed across different actors (Devin and Richards 2016; McKenzie, Singh-Peterson, and Underhill 2017). There was no single institutional target for consumers to attack or lobby, so they resorted to the more immediate and material means of raiding dumpsters. The Restaurant Day (RD) case documented by Weijo et al. (2018) lends support to our interpretation. The movement's founding activists were frustrated by the complacency of governance mechanisms in the value regime of food culture. This prompted them to build a temporary alternative pathway, circumventing restaurants, by

setting up pop-up restaurants in public places. Building these restaurants relied on ready-at-hand domestic materials as well as familiar cooking skills. Pop-up restaurants are by their nature fleeting and difficult to conceptualize as a true alternative pathway. RD addressed this issue by repeating on a quarterly basis and using social media to synchronize diverse and shifting individual practices and capabilities into a viable object pathway. The emergent ethos of RD was complementary to the higher-order values of government, which used the event to promote tourism, and of businesses, which got into the pop-up act as a promotional tool.

Third, our findings and those of Weijo et al. (2018) suggest that digital media have a central role in building alternative object pathways. Digital technologies are reshaping the way movements (not only consumer movements) mobilize for change (Castells 2015; Earl and Kimport 2011; King and Pearce 2010). Our findings suggest that building object pathways is likely to benefit the most from digital proliferation, given the amount of coordination it takes to create practice sequences. Here we identify overlap with established research streams such as consumer entrepreneurship (Guercini and Cova 2018; Martin and Schouten 2014) and co-creation (Arvidsson 2011; Schau et al. 2009). Both literature streams highlight the growing scope of these collective consumer endeavors, as well as the increased likelihood of antagonism from established institutions such as marketers and governments.

Prior research points implicitly to consumer interventions into object pathways, and our value regime model allows for reinterpreting these studies. Giesler's (2008) study of the marketplace drama surrounding Napster can be reinterpreted as a disjunctive pathway within the highly entrenched value regime of the recording industry. Giesler highlights the conflict between higher-order values relating to possessive individualism and social utilitarianism in the context of music consumption. From our value regime perspective, we posit that institutions and marketers favored possessive individualism as a higher-order value and reinforced this through governance mechanisms such as copyright laws. This also legitimized the production, circulation, and consumption of music in commodity form. Consumers thus faced a highly entrenched value regime that inhibited their preferred consumption practices and related value outcomes. Giesler recounts how a faction of consumers embraced novel practice materials (e.g., file-sharing technologies) in creating disjunctive object pathways for music consumption that aligned with higher-order values of social utilitarianism. These alternative pathways increasingly gained visibility and prominence, which prompted marketer responses. Marketers lobbied for new governance mechanisms that pushed the emerging pathways into legal gray areas and hindered practice sequences with copy-inhibiting technologies like digital rights management (DRM) codes. More recent developments, such as

music streaming and MP3 downloading, can be viewed as complementary pathways that have become routinized and institutionalized by aligning the alternative pathway with the higher-order values (you have to pay for streaming, often in the form of a subscription) or governance mechanisms (it is a legal business model).

Kuruoğlu and Ger's (2015) study of the circulation of Kurdish folk music cassettes illustrates an extreme case of building a disjunctive object pathway. The authors show how the higher-order values-based conflict between marginalized Kurdish people and hegemonic Turkish authorities unfolded through the contestation of object pathways. For the Kurdish population, the cassettes manifest the higher-order values of freedom, resistance, and Kurdish pride, whereas Turkish authorities perceive them as symbols of anarchism and terrorism. Pressured by the threat of discovery and confiscation of these tapes by Turkish authorities, Kurds create complex pathways for cassette circulation built on tape recording, hiding, inconspicuous bartering, equally inconspicuous consumption, and eventual tape destruction for security reasons.

The case of community-supported agriculture (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) shows consumers bypassing retailers completely and going straight to farms to purchase food and, in some cases, even to participate in its production. This new way of delivering food items to consumers allowed the enactment of new or previously marginalized higher-order values like sustainability, communality, organic, health, and local agrarian ideals through a new object pathway. Similar to Foodsharing, the higher-order values of CSA did not actively clash with existing governance mechanisms or prevailing higher-order values, making it a complementary pathway.

Table 2 catalogues how and where consumers and other actors intervene in value regimes through all three identified elements. This breakdown is not exhaustive, as actors such as NGOs might also intervene in value regimes. The

last two rows should be seen as avenues for further research to apply our value regime model in other contexts and to other market actors.

## Value Regimes and the Study of Systemic Value Creation

Value is central to consumption and the constitution of markets (Holbrook 1999; Woodruff 1997; Zeithaml 1988), yet it has proven conceptually nebulous (Graeber 2001, 2013; Karababa and Kjeldgaard 2014; Penalosa and Mish 2011). The study of systemic value creation has paved the way toward a more holistic understanding of value and value creation. Studies emphasizing market perspectives have accounted for the plurality of actors that participate in value creation (Akaka et al. 2014; Lusch and Vargo 2011). These studies have remained loyal to the typical view of the co-creating consumer as an innovator of new product or service ideas or as a source of alternative and more authentic brand meanings (Arvidsson 2011; Schau et al. 2009). By doing so, these studies have marginalized consumer roles in determining how, when, and by whom objects can be circulated and exchanged in the value context (Arnould 2014; Lambek 2013). Figueiredo and Scaraboto (2016) illuminated consumer negotiation of object circulation and exchanges in a consumer-to-consumer context, which necessarily limited the roles of actors like marketers, retailers, middlemen, and legislators who all have an undeniable influence on value creation (Caliskan and Callon 2009). We believe our value regime model provides an important analytical tool that allows for a more holistic contextualization of value creation. Here our model answers a number of calls from the literature on value creation and the study of market system dynamics.

*Contextualizing Value Creation and the Study of Market System Dynamics.* Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue that the field of cultural consumer research has privileged

TABLE 2

### LOCUS OF INTERVENTION IN VALUE REGIMES

	Higher-order values	Object pathways	Governance mechanism
<i>Consumers</i>	Consumer movements engage in protest (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) or other discursive strategies (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013) to create awareness for their cause.	Consumers create either disjunctive or complementary object pathways that allow for new circulation practices and value outcomes (Giesler 2008; Kuruoğlu and Ger 2015).	Consumers influence the design of governance mechanisms through voting, protesting, or lobbying in an indirect way (Gusfield 1986; King and Pearce 2010).
<i>Regulators</i>	Regulators sponsor and develop educational and awareness campaigns that champion certain higher-order values over others (Coveney 1998).	Regulators build and maintain important market infrastructures (Caliskan and Callon 2009).	Regulators draft and pass new regulations and laws that affect markets and consumption (Caliskan and Callon 2009; Phipps and Ozanne 2017).
<i>Marketers</i>	Marketers use advertising, education, and incentivizing to promote their preferred higher-order values (Rothschild 1999).	Marketers develop channels and logistical chains to push products to the market (Lusch and Vargo 2011).	Marketers influence governance through lobbying or self-regulate through industry alliances (Caliskan and Callon 2009).

lived experiences and consumers' meaning-making at the expense of the historical, global, societal, practice-based, and institutional contingencies that give context to consumption. The literature on value in cultural consumer research has illustrated a similar tendency by chiefly equating value with meaning and experience (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Holbrook 1999; Penaloza and Mish 2011). Research into market system dynamics has proliferation in large part as a response to such limitations (Humphreys 2010; Kjeldgaard et al. 2017; Martin and Schouten 2014). Giesler and Fischer (2017) write that studies of market system dynamics highlight that markets are complex social systems where multiple actors—including consumers—contribute to the co-constitution of marketplace realities, often in an iterative and evolving fashion. Given the centrality of value creation for the evolution and overall functioning of markets, we believe our value model promises greater analytical clarity for studies of market system dynamics. Analyzing market systems through the interaction of a value regime's three principal elements—higher-order values, governance mechanisms, and objects pathways—allows for the kind of micro-meso-macro sensitivity and longitudinal focus that Giesler and Fischer (2017) and Askegaard and Linnet (2011) call for. Furthermore, appreciating the role of value outcomes in reproducing the value regime offers a new way of understanding how, why, and when market actors may be triggered to seek a change in dynamics, and through which element of the regime.

*The Role of Consumers in Value Regimes.* Our value regime model resembles the one proposed by Levy et al. (2016) in their study of the emergence of a value regime for fair trade coffee. The emerging value regime engaged higher-order values of fairness, sustainability, and economic justice for coffee producers in developing countries. The regime's object pathways and related circulation practices adhered to these higher-order values and allowed for a more equal distribution of value outcomes between farmers, middlemen, and retailers. The emerging value regime also developed governing institutions and regulations (NGOs, fair trade certifications, etc.) to champion certain higher-order values and to routinize exchanges. Similar to our findings, they emphasize the iterative and co-constituting nature of value regime evolution where "parties dynamically adjust their strategies in interaction with each other and their environment" (28) through the constant evaluation of opportunities, interests, and oppositional reactions. However, their model maintained that object pathways were still organized by a singular logic exchange, similar to Appadurai (1986), while ours emphasized the co-constituting presence of multiple exchange logics (Arnould 2014; Scaraboto 2015). Furthermore, consumers were notably absent from their story and thus implicitly reduced to passive recipients of marketplace

offerings. By bringing consumers back into the story, our study moves the literature one step closer to completing the picture of what value regimes are, how they emerge, and how they evolve. As noted above, we identify significant synergy opportunities between the study of value regimes and research into how consumers influence or change market system dynamics (Giesler and Fischer 2017; Karababa and Ger 2010; King and Pearce 2010; Kjeldgaard et al. 2017; Martin and Schouten 2014; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013).

*Time and Order in Value Regimes.* Studies of temporality, in its multiple manifestations, have recently found stable footing in consumer research (Husemann and Eckhardt 2018; Shove, Trentmann, and Wilk 2009; Woermann and Rokka 2015). By accounting for the temporal ordering of value-creating practices, our value regime theorization and findings suggest that the routinization and institutionalization of value regime's practice sequences, from a temporal standpoint, contribute to the entrenchment of value regimes. Accounting for such entrenchment helps explain why consumers so often struggle to challenge value regime practices. When consumers intervene in a value regime's object pathways, the resulting temporal interruptions threaten the stability of the regime. Here our value regime theorization resonates with Shove et al. (2009), who write, "Time is about coordination and rhythm, but it also involves material, emotional, moral and political dimensions" (2).

Our findings diverge from those of Figueiredo and Scaraboto (2016), who argue that, although practices of value creation seem sequential, they happen concomitantly as objects circulate simultaneously and trigger these processes in an overlapping fashion. That conclusion, while justified for their context of consumer-to-consumer circulation, fails to hold in the value regime we studied. Geocaching nodes are sturdy and durable. They may lie immobile for weeks before the next consumer comes along and puts them into circulation. In fact, most studies of value and value regimes treat circulating objects as mute within their own value-creating processes, merely waiting for human actors to impose value outcomes upon them (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986). In contexts such as ours, however, wherein value objects are materially dynamic, the importance of sequencing becomes more evident. Being perishable, food items insist on certain practices with some urgency, as decay erodes both use and expressive value. Such material dynamism is not limited to food, however. Value regimes for clothing, with its fashion cycles, or automobiles, with their notorious depreciation and huge secondary markets, also establish particular sequencing of exchanges in order to stabilize and maintain value (Türe 2014). Yet accounting for temporality also improves analytical clarity when material perishability is low. For instance, Csaba and Ger's (2013) study of Turkish



rugs shows that patina—the result of oxidization, wear and tear, and sunlight over the years—brings authenticity and induces singularization, which increases the value of the rugs and their desirability in exchange. The passage of time also transforms durable possessions into family heirlooms, which again alters the value of and exchange considerations for such objects (Curasi et al. 2004; Türe and Ger 2016).

Overall, our value regime model provides a useful tool for more expansive analysis of the temporal constitution of markets and consumption, and for reinterpreting prior studies. For example, Bradford and Sherry's (2017) study of wedding registries illustrates how relations between exchange practices, and especially their sequential ordering, reproduce a social context and its value outcomes. A wedding registry ties together self-gifting practices (the engaged pair selects what they want), monetary exchange practices (the store manages the registry and sells products to wedding guests), and dyadic gifting practices (the guests present gifts at the wedding) into a sequence. Though wedding registries cause tension by commodifying gifting practices within an inherently sacred context, they have become instrumental to North American wedding rituals and their higher-order values of new beginnings and family union. They allow marrying couples to collect a novel set of possessions to tell a story of the new "we" they are about to become. In similar fashion, Seregina and Weijo's (2017) study of cosplay showed how temporality, as manifest in time constraints and crushing deadlines, influences the negotiation of object pathways. Cosplayers cherish higher-order values relating to artistry, communality, and self-crafting, which presents certain limitations to how cosplay costumes can be constructed and circulated outside of the community. The community's shared understanding of the struggles inherent to costume completion legitimized some expansion of object pathways outside of cosplay networks.

### Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

Our findings come with limitations and contextual restrictions. For one, the activist consumers' willingness to cooperate with retailers was perhaps a product of the German context and citizen-consumers' respect for societal order and legitimacy. Investigations into other sociocultural contexts may identify alternative trajectories in value regime evolution.

Our theorization of value regimes opens interesting avenues for future research. For example, our data indicates how the Foodsharing pathway had an innovative spillover effect on established pathways. Edeka, one of the leading supermarket chains in Germany, now markets blemished produce with the tagline, "Nobody is perfect." Edeka is, in effect, intervening in its own established object pathway in order to profit from produce that would otherwise be

destroyed or, through Foodsharing, given away. We observe something similar in other countries where grocery stores have opened in order to sell food items after their best-before date.

As already noted, using our value regime model for analyzing consumer roles in changing market dynamics provides a potent avenue for future research (Karababa and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). We also believe our model could be used to revisit other prior works in consumer research. For example, a reinquiry into what kinds of object pathways emerged within the Minimoto (Martin and Schouten 2014) or Turkish veiling (Sandikci and Ger 2009) contexts would be of great interest. Lastly, the development and proliferation of digital technologies into new market contexts is changing the way consumer movements mobilize and organize (Earl and Kimport 2011; Weijo et al. 2018). We propose that future research investigate the increasingly blurry boundaries between consumer entrepreneurship, consumer activism, and consumer collaboration with marketers that digitalization affords.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first author collected all data under the guidance of the third author as part of a doctoral dissertation project using interviews, observation, participation, and archival data during the period of fall 2012 to spring 2016 in the German-speaking area. The first author translated key data from German to English and the second and third author interrogated the translations for more nuanced meaning. The authors conducted data analysis jointly for this report.

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