

From Conspicuous Consumption to Solidarity Consumption: Literature Review

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Abstract: In high consumption societies, the so-called “traditional” consumption model is in crisis. It advocates ownership at the detriment of use and sharing, and it does not correlate with the specificity of the present time: major ecological challenges, unprecedented health, socio-economic crisis, and the rise of resistance to “mass consumption.” This article attempts to analyze the decline of the “traditional” consumption model through consumption history, and it highlights different perspectives in the existing body of the literature with respect to the origin of solidarity consumption, and its genesis more particularly in the outbreak of COVID-19. The present article also analyzes the role of collaborative consumption in this process.

Keywords: Consumption, Consumption model, Consumer societies, solidarity consumption, Collaborative consumption

Introduction

Consumption is a prior concern of our modern model of society. It is not only a way of satisfying needs, or a way of expressing and positioning oneself in relation to others, but it is also an increasingly powerful tool that serves the consumer. This observation is more valid when it is placed in the current conjuncture referred to as "age of the customer" (or consumer era) where the priority is given first to the sharing of data, consumption experiences and knowledge, where the consumer takes back the power that has been monopolized by companies. In fact, for a long time, the company's main concern was to produce enough to cater for the demand although this situation could not last. Given the mechanisms of market saturation, companies continued to put the product at the heart of their preoccupation. It was, therefore, a question of highlighting the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of the products in order to satisfy the needs of consumers. With the advent of the « Age of information », power has shifted to the consumer, more particularly with the saturation of demand and the increase of supply on a large scale. The information age has placed the product and brand's information as a major concern. Consumers inform themselves, ask questions about product attributes, evaluate products and make decisions based on their perceived view on which products to purchase. This process does not only incorporate basic criteria, but it also encompasses more criteria including esteem, trust, image, status and values.

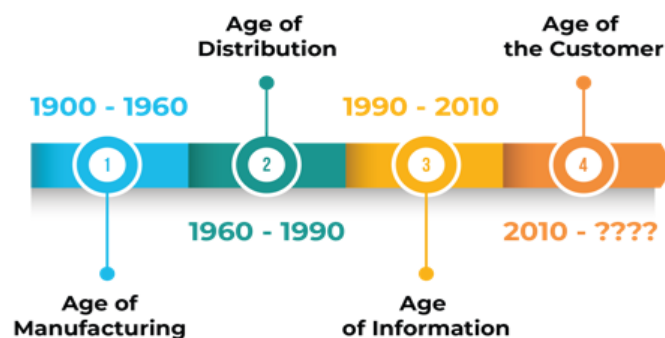


Figure 1. Tendency Timeline (source : A brief history of the age of the customer | WhosOn)

In the customer's age, consumers are placed at a higher rank in all brand activities. There has been an increasing awareness among consumers, which shifted their attention to their role as "actors" through the act of purchasing.

Through consumption, consumers live an experience. They form an opinion, shares their experience, and decides which brands can or cannot be part of their personal sphere, they are also aware of the subsequent consequences of their actions as well as the actions of companies.

In addition, the context of strong globalization in which lifestyles are profoundly changed, work and consumption patterns, by an accelerated digitalization, which permeates our daily lives and shapes our future, consumers tend to put into question the model of the dominant consumer society.

Contemporary crises such as climate change or the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis have amplified this questioning and have triggered growing consumer interest in new consumption models. In fact, many authors such as Harari (2020) or Morin (2020) have emphasized the repercussions that this pandemic crisis represents in terms of reflection on the economic and social models of our time. "When choosing between alternatives, we must ask ourselves not only how to overcome the immediate threat, but also what kind of world we will live in once the storm comes to an end. The storm will fade away, humanity will survive, most of us will still be alive - but we will live in a different world" (Harari, 2020).

In this context, the present article draws on the literature review that takes ostentatious consumption as a starting point to present "a brief history of the consumption society", notably through the crisis of COVID-19, to new modes of consumption such as solidarity consumption. It underlines the decline of the consumption society model and highlights collaborative consumption as one of the multiple aspects of a new consumption model where solidarity consumption is a fundamental pillar.

The Evolution of the Consumer Society

In this section, we intend to identify the phases and events, which marked the history of the consumer society. This operation is part of an evolutionary logic: each period is explained in relation to the previous one and anticipates the next. In fact, we assume that consumption is part of a dynamicity whose logic is more vividly perceptible in a historical perspective. We also analyze it in occidental countries' context, as they form the core of this model of society.

The Industrial Revolution

The development of trade and cities in the Middle Ages and the technical revolution in agriculture during the 18th century are visibly at the origin of the settlement of the modes of exchange and production characteristic of the modern era. However, it seems that the period of industrialization created a real "breakdown" from which, at the cost of a long maturation, the consumer society itself has been shaped.

A Difficult Start

The economic expansion launched during the 19th century was slowed down by the crises of overproduction (the total depression of 1873-1895) and the world conflict that affected Europe at the beginning of the following century. Therefore, it was necessary to wait until the 1920s to clearly notice the efforts of the new production mechanism. H. Ford's model has largely contributed to the settlement of the mass consumption known today. His model incorporates an increase in income, which in turn generates consumption, which itself leads to an increase in the development of production, and therefore forming a virtuous spiral. By democratizing consumption, the Fordian vision has largely contributed to the emergence of mass consumption, which W.W. Rostow locates for the United States exactly in 1920-1929. The 1920s are sometimes referred to as the "Roaring 20s" because of the upheavals witnessed in the field of cultural and artistic activities. Mass consumption geared towards pleasure is settled, but the take-off was very short since the economy will be permanently shaken by the meteoric crisis of 1929. However, some countries like France had not experienced growth until 1938.

An Effective Implementation after the Second World War (1950s)

What has really changed in the 1950s, according to L. Buhl, author of "Histoire du mouvement consommateur" (1984) (Buhl, 1984), at the end of the Second World War western Europe, was the original purpose of business: the work of producers and distributors, traditionally oriented upon meeting needs, changed drastically towards a model based on the creation of requirements. A variety of commercial tools (credit, use of mass media,

advertising, marketing) should therefore come to serve this new philosophy of commerce that would lead to a consumption society. The following diagram provides a summary of the major stages described above, up to the effective implementation of the consumption society. Note the breaks linked to events crisis (wars or economic slowdown) that have delayed its occurrence.



Figure 2. The Periods of Implementation of the Consumption Society Diagram (Source: Adapted from Oettgen & Oettgen, 2004)

The Glorious Thirty: Harmonious Development of the Consumption Society

The glorious thirty have certainly not been smooth (fight for independence in several countries, the May 1968 protest, the women's movement in Western countries), this long period from the post-war period to the first oil shock was characterized by a singular economic upturn with an exceptional level of growth, a spectacular increase in purchasing power, a reduction in social disparities and, as a result, a strong increase in consumption. The following few clues give an idea about the extraordinary growth that have been witnessed in industrialized countries in 30 years after the war:

- Between 1960 and 1973, the average annual growth rate was 6.3% in France, 3.8% in the United States and 9.9% in Japan.
- An even tripled industrial production in France between 1938 and 1973.
- Also in France, the GNP per capital rose from \$1,060 in 1950 to \$2,500 in 1970.
- The number of cars per 1,000 residents increased sevenfold, from 36 in 1950 to 254 in 1970.

The Thirty Traumas

In his works, Mermet (1997) lists the shocks that France in particular has experienced since the end of the Glorious Thirty Years: a culture shock in May 1968, the fuel shocks of the 1970s, the financial shock of 1987, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the Gulf War, and the vast social movement of 1995. In addition to these events, from 1995 there is the spread of the Internet bubble, the attack of September 11, 2001, the economic slowdown, and the Iraqi conflict of 2003.

These events have maintained or even exacerbated the feeling of disorder and anxiety and have exerted a decisive impact on the psychology of the consumer. In this regard, we suggest to present a distinction of three main phases corresponding to the changes in the consumer's behavior from the end of the Glorious Thirties until 2000.

The Bulimic Phase (Peak Years)

The 1970s are considered a reckless period, where consumers indulged in frenetic consumption, reinforced by an uncomplicated pursuit of gratification and pleasure. In addition, during this year, the development of a less rational relationship was witnessed with consumption: basic needs, which have been partially satisfied during the 1950s and 1960s, purchasing motivations are now based more on image components, and objects are also appreciated from the point of view of their psychological added value.

The Individualistic Phase

The Eighties, as they have been called, "firmes" years, mainly those of the paradox:

- The effects of the crisis are becoming more and more noticeable, but at the same time consumers do not recognize them. Although the level of consumption was decreasing at the beginning of the decade, interest in luxurious goods has never reached such a level;
- The implementation of a new social policy aimed at reducing inequalities but, at the same time, individualistic behaviors and "money-king" dominate social life;
- While unemployment continues to rapidly increase, measures must be taken to fight poverty, consumers indulge in uncontrolled consumption, gambling on market demands.

During the 1980s, image values reached their paroxysm, and the hedonistic dimension of the act of purchasing was reinforced. Consumption is increasingly playing a cornerstone role in ensuring the economy is performing well.

The Opportunistic Withdrawal Phase

After a long period of crisis denial, the beginning of the 1990s was accompanied by a brutal awareness, apparently triggered by a series of traumatic events:

- The Soviet bloc's collapse has resulted in a feeling of anxiety over the search for new global equilibrium;
- Real estate speculation has suffered serious setbacks;
- None of the measures taken seem to be able to prevent the rise in unemployment;
- The European construction is being carried out reluctantly;
- The Gulf War adds the final touch to the gloomy picture of a depressed economy. It can be said that it is the event that ends up undermining the already low mood of the consumers.

The customer now shows a desire for control and reverses the balance of the producer-consumer relationship into his favor. To compensate for this decline in consumption and this distancing from the consumer, manufacturers will be enticed to develop more incisive marketing adapted to new purchasing behaviors.

During the nineties, the consumer became more autonomous, demanding and competent. They have become more complex and no longer correspond to the sub-missive customer of the pre-crisis years.

The Contemporary Consumption Society

The rise of new technologies opens the era of "communication". Excitement seems to be sustained and the revival of the desire to consume seems to be well established, according to some studies conducted in 2000.

Currently, everything suggests that we have now managed to flee from the tunnel of crisis and are entering a new virtuous spiral. Nevertheless, the changes in the consumer over the past few years are well anchored.

Actually, there are various determinants of contemporary consumer behavior:

- The awareness of quality criteria is more and more asserted;
- The concern for authenticity is widely claimed;
- The search for the best price or "the good deal" is increasing;
- Brand loyalty is no longer taken for granted;
- the search for pleasure (hedonism) is now accompanied by a quest for meaning and intensity;

Schematically, the consumer went through different psychological states during the crisis period: after indulging in unbridled and uninhibited consumption, he/she followed an individualistic and statutory logic before showing a certain withdrawal in the early nineties. 1995 was a pivotal year in the development of an informed, thoughtful and somewhat masterful consumer. After two years of unsuccessful recovery, buyers' needs remain focused on

the intrinsic components of the offer (price, promotion, quality) but now include other subjective components primarily associated with the ethical and social dimension of the products.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Consumer Era

The world we live in is going through a 4th industrial revolution. "Today, we are witnessing the 4th industrial revolution which started at the end of the 20th century with a digital revolution and the development of artificial intelligence. Its dissemination is faster and more globalized than the previous ones and with unlimited and complex implications" (Schwab 2017). Simultaneously, and from a marketing perspective according to the Forrester Research study, we are witnessing an evolution of the "Age of the Customer" starting from 2010. In fact, it is seen as a new era that broke the traditional communication pattern, strengthening the power of the consumer over companies. This era is essentially based on data sharing and popularization of information. In this context, ostentatious consumption because it represents one of the most studied forms of consumption in sociology, it constitutes a solid basis for the model of consumption societies.

Ostentatious Consumption and Consumption Society: Concepts and Criticism

The notion "consumption society" first appeared in the 1950s and 1960s to reflect the emergence of lifestyle criticism. In its simplest form, "a consumer society is one in which the entire society is organized around the consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity, and standing" Baudrillard (1998). Consumption society is also a society where consumption serves as both a means of communication and an element of distinction. Thus, it derives its legitimacy from ostentatious consumption as an "ancestral" mode of consumption. While the majority of people had only limited access to consumption during the 19th century, increasing wage and salary levels enabled increasingly large portions of the population to access consumption of durable goods starting from the 1950s. Consumption is then part of this pursuit of happiness and makes it possible to measure its level: the greater the consumption, the higher the level of satisfaction and the higher the level of happiness is could be. The major value of a consumption society is therefore happiness. This value is measured by certain standards: owning a nice car, going on vacation, etc. While neoclassical economists consider that an individual buys a good or a service to satisfy a need, Baudrillard (1996) sees consumption as the purchase of signs intended to get in contact with others. However, before moving on to his critique about the consumer society, it is essential to review the different phases that marked the establishment of the consumption society.

Several scholars and researchers have attempted to identify the characteristics of the consumption society, such as Katona (1966), who attempts to consider three major characteristics in the mass consumption society:

- A considerable increase in the number of consumers;
- A recognition and an increase in the power of consumers given their economic weight;
- An increased role of the psychological aspect during consumption.

Oettgen and Oettgen (2004) examined the effects induced by mass consumption.

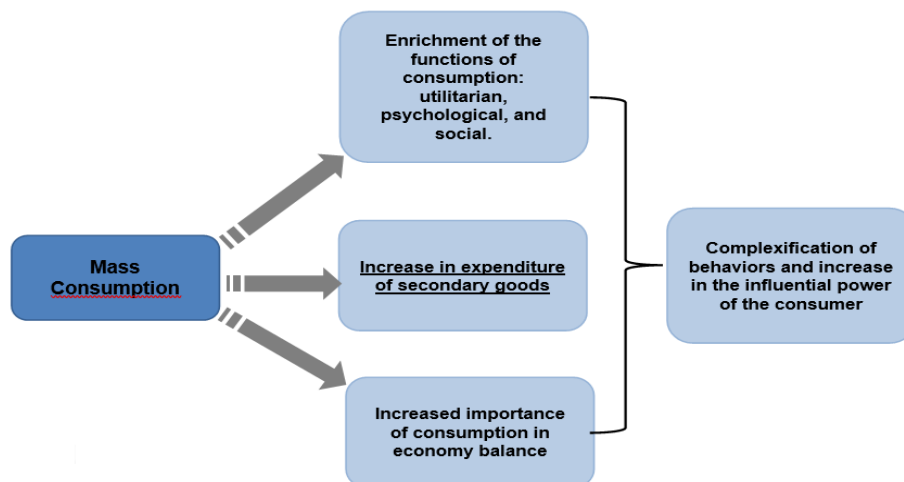


Figure 3. Adapted by Oettgen and Oettgen (2004) - Les mutations du consommateur français, EMS Editions, p. 260.

The theory of Oettgen and Oettgen (2004) maintains the role of the consumption society in the complexification of the consumer's attitudes and the increase in the consumer's influential power.

Veblen (1899) first introduced ostentatious consumption or status consumption in his book *Leisure Class Theory*. The term ostentatious means "which is done ostentatiously". Ostentation originates from the Latin word "ostentio". It is "the act of showing insistently and excessively." The Larousse dictionary defines ostentation as "the indiscreet display of an advantage or a quality and the attitude of someone who seeks to be noticed" (Frédéric et al., 2010). The interest in this key concept in sociology is to show one's entourage and social environment, a standard of living that reflects a good image in order to spread what one possesses excessively, or to make people believe what one possesses.

The philosopher and sociologist Baudrillard (1970) attempts to describe and address a criticism of the mass consumption society. In a society, going through the period of the 30 glorious years, attentive to marketing, turned towards consumption, the latter constitutes a mean of differentiation and not only of satisfaction. In this sense, this vision is similar to that of Simmel (1905) regarding fashion, where consumption is analyzed as an affirmation of one's own individuality and difference.

However, Baudrillard goes further indicating that the individual lives via the objects consumed, if not consumed by the objects. In fact, humans need to create objects in order to build themselves, and at the same time these objects, given their abundance, end up drowning the consumer. We may want to synthesize Baudrillard's remarks by considering that it is consumption that renders the consumer, and that the object leads to the existence of the subject. We are therefore faced with two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, it is a question of elaborating objects of consumption as a means of self-fulfillment, and on the other hand of consuming them and hence destroying them in the more or less long term in order to exist. Accordingly, "The consumption society needs its objects to be and more precisely needs to destroy them" (Baudrillard, 1970).

Following the overwhelming economy of the second industrial revolution, consumption underwent a paradigm shift in the 2000s. In fact, the marketing strategies deployed by companies encouraged consumers, so far, to consume without moderation, swarming with goods and services and thus leading to excessive indebtedness of households that over consumed vain and superfluous objects. The emergence of new information and communication technologies has revolutionized the traditional channels of consumption.

Moreover, the economic crisis and ecological awareness have led to the emergence of a new mode of consumption that is overturning the laws of the market, consumer lifestyles and consumption patterns. Citizens wish to regain power over what they consume. They wish to take concrete action in the field by consuming differently, or via sharing. More demanding than ever, they want to get what they want, when they want and, as they want. Consequently, several practices are coming back to the spotlight, such as exchanging, reselling or renting between individuals. Furthermore, this is called collaborative consumption. This phenomenon, based mainly on social values, sharing and mutual aid, influences the consumer's behavior. This phenomenon has become very popular among consumers who prefer the benefits associated with the use of a good to the expense of its possession, from local to global and from community to individual.

The Pandemic Context, Emergence of New Consumption Pattern

COVID-19 is a disease that may cause respiratory problems or even symptoms similar to a common flu. Some patients may also develop a severe respiratory infection such as pneumonia - causing acute respiratory distress that can lead to death (WHO, 2020). The WHO first declared a COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020. On May 14th, it believes that the new coronavirus may "never go away" and become a disease that humanity will have to learn to coexist with it. The consequences of this relatively new situation include having to deal with high mortality rates, threats of collapse of health systems, social and economic restrictions, etc. The WHO also alerted on the impacts of lockdowns on a short, medium and long term. The lock-down imposed during the spring of 2020 and which concerned more than 4 billion individuals (according to statistics carried out by the French Press Agency), alone, has profoundly modified our lifestyles, and remarkably changed consumption patterns. Although there are positive consequences for reducing the spread of the virus and thus death rates, WHO believes that this can have serious devastating consequences for individuals, communities and societies, as it leads to an almost total shut-down of social and economic activities.

In Morocco, according to the High Commissary for Planning, the demanding side of the national economy is expected to be negatively affected by the health crisis, in parallel with the offer, noting that quarantine and

restriction measures are expected to bring about changes to the market behavior and to household consumption patterns. In this context, household consumption is expected to decline in 2020, because of the fallout from sanitary restrictions and income contractions associated with the decrease in production and the succession of two bad agricultural years, which should lead households to lower their consumption spending, particularly on durable goods, transportation, food, and leisure activities. Moreover, the current crisis is leading consumers to resist or even reconsider the way they consume on a daily basis.

Panoply of initiatives has concretely emerged in Morocco, where solidarity has been the slogan adapted for our battle against the pandemic. These initiatives first came from His Majesty the King Mohammed VI who decided to prioritize public health over the economy, and called for the generalization of support on the most diminished and always stressed the importance of the values of the nation as solidarity, the common support and efforts. The crisis associated with COVID-19 is in fact only one factor among several which have emerged throughout the history of consumption and the model of the consumption society. These factors highlight the limits of this model and question it in particular because of its multiple consequences on both living conditions and the planet. Resistance to the "consumption society" in the most common sense of the term is increasingly perceived and is now being reinforced by the effect of the drastic measures imposed by various countries around the world. This resistance hides a long-standing struggle against injustice and social inequalities that have long been sustained by the unrestrained consumption of goods and services. If this theme is mobilized, it is articulated with a more or less explicit social criticism. Collaborative and solidarity consumption then become the resistant response to a profoundly unjust society.

The sanitary crisis caused by COVID-19 has led our company to take a fresh look at the notion of collective risk. Since the emergence of the virus and its global spread, our vulnerability to this pandemic highlights the fragility of our bodies, and even more the organic nature of our societies, composed of interacting individuals. This pandemic, which has been reported as never before since 1918 and the Spanish flu pandemic, strongly questions our models of economic development built since the Second World War around an international division of labor and interdependencies between large economies and since the end of the 1990s around the model of globalization accentuated by the digital revolution. The pandemic is driving people to reconsider their vision about their society. They are often no longer individualistic, in this vision and because of this pandemic; they are increasingly incorporating a global, human and solidarity-based vision: society as an organism in which we live, which is not immune to bacteria and viruses, just like our physical bodies. This vision implies a common or even solidarity-based feedback to the crisis context. Solidarity is therefore the slogan shared during crisis management. This principle has already been mobilized in history, particularly in the context of the great medical discoveries that came out of the Pastorian revolution.

Nowadays, "to collaborate" means, for customers, regaining power over the marketing, design, distribution and use of the goods and services they wish to consume. The influence of consumer communities is as important on the image of companies as it is on their business. In fact, collaborative consumption, by giving a market value to unused goods and the unused skills of individuals, creates new distribution channels and innovative service offers. By freeing itself from traditional sales networks, it is actually redrawing the boundaries between producers, distributors, users and customers and revitalizing markets that have become mature or sluggish as a result of the economic crisis. In any case, 'C to C' continues to develop throughout the world, facilitated by new technologies and the emergence of new concepts of common support and sharing.

This market has become a new business that has attracted the interest of large groups, as well as small entrepreneurs in Morocco. The basic principle of collaborative consumption is to value "access over ownership" (Botsman, R., & Rogers, R. (2010) . Firms and consumers believe that sharing is a sustainable and profitable alternative to ownership (R. Belk, 2007 and R. Botsman and R. Rogers, 2010). It's no longer the time when online platforms only allowed to buy products/services, it has now become a place to share products, services, skills, space, workplaces, land and much more (Yannopoulou, N., Moufahim, M., & Bian, X. (2013). It is a new way of consuming that perfectly matches the new social paradigms (M. Alain 2001). Therefore, it is the needs and experiences fulfilled by the products that have become a priority to the detriment of the permanent act of purchasing. People only buy access to temporary use of products (R. Botsman and R. Rogers, 2010). Digital transformations have also contributed in the emergence of collaborative consumption. In many sectors, digital operators around the world have been redirecting the habits of consumption towards collaborative platforms like in the transport sector in Morocco where "Online transport services increasingly offer a different, economic, social and attractive collaborative offer which is gradually taking parts of the market, especially among young people".

Towards Solidarity-based Consumption

The world is rushing towards a social and solidarity-based economy. In fact, since the end of the traumatic thirty years and the beginning of the 2000s, when consumers could no longer deny the role of consumption as a civic act and an expression of their power vis-à-vis brands, the global economy has been shaken by the express democratization of access to NICTs and the transition to the fourth industrial revolution. A revolution characterized by immediate access to data, big data, Artificial Intelligence and social networks that particularly contribute to profound changes in relation to brands. The pandemic crisis associated with COVID-19 has amplified these changes and led towards awareness of social injustices, production processes, the effect of overconsumption, mass farming techniques (suspected of being the source of the spread of H1N1 viruses). All this reinforces a multiplication of solidarity initiatives and social actions. Consumption has become a civic act of redistribution and solidarity. One only has to look at the multitude of experiences in the world seeking to reconcile solidarity and initiative, which bring together enterprise and sharing, economy and the society in an orthodox thinking, to realize that this other model of consumption does exist: there have been many self-help groups in Germany (sanitary and domestic assistance), social cooperatives in Sweden or Morocco, community development organizations in Anglo-Saxon countries, popular groups in Canada; and in South America (Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil).

Whether the initial objective is to respond to the specific needs of a population, to integrate unemployed people or to act for the preservation of the natural environment, what these initiatives have in common is that they blur or even erase the boundaries between what is economic (market) and what is social (redistribution) via putting reciprocity at the heart of the "passage to economic action" (Ibid., p. 99), to assist in the creation of activities and jobs through the strengthening of social cohesion and through new relations of solidarity. It is not only the emergence of such economic actions that is distinctive, but rather their consolidation, the fact that they manage to survive under particular financial conditions, since they combine market resources (sales revenue) and non-market resources, and both monetary (from redistribution) and non-monetary (time, skills, expertise, etc.) resources.

Today, the economic solidarity can be defined, in the broadest sense, as "the set of activities contributing to the democratization of the economy based on the involvement of citizens" (Laville in Merlant et al., 2003, page 108). Although it actually takes various forms, it is currently developing mainly in four areas:

- Fair trade seeks to make consumers in the North aware of the conditions suffered by producers in the South and to help improve the situation of the latter,
- Solidarity finance covers a whole continuum of activities that goes from welcoming and advising project leaders to monitoring the business, including of course the granting of credit or the acquisition of shares. In addition to the reciprocal approach, there is also the collective dimension to encourage (re-)socialization dynamics.
- Non-monetary exchange networks such as Local Exchange Systems (LES), systems for the reciprocal exchange of knowledge, collective self-production, are all initiatives that prevent all social exchanges from being reduced to monetary exchanges, via relying on geographical proximity and via valuing the freedom of action and capacity of initiative of local actors. These networks recall the economy of the ground floor, "material civilization" of Braudel.
- Local initiatives and new cooperations in the field of health services, care and personal services, sports and cultural activities, etc. seek to improve the quality of everyday life, highlighting human and social considerations.

The solidarity-based economy represents a tangible reality. A new paradigm is emerging which, because of some consumption modes such as collaborative consumption, seeks to impose itself at detriment of mass consumption in order to provide a serious response to the major issues of our time. Also, to rebalance relations with brands and society, in order to move towards greater fairness and solidarity in economic relations.

During the spring of 2020, and more particularly the quarantine period, which concerned more than 4 billion people (According to statistics by Agence France Presse) including the Morocco, it profoundly modified lifestyles, and remarkably consumption patterns.

Although there are positive consequences in reducing the transmissibility of the virus and therefore the death rate, the WHO believes that this measure can have serious deleterious consequences on individuals, communities and societies, as they result in an almost total shutdown of social and economic life (WHO, 2020).

In Morocco, according to the High Commission for Planning, the demand components of the national economy

should, along with supply, bear the negative effects of the health crisis, noting that restriction measures should generate changes in market behavior and household consumption patterns as a whole (Haut-Commissariat au Plan, 2021).

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