

Sharing representations in the relations between business proposals, consumption visions, and government policies



Compartilhamento de representações nas relações entre propostas de negócios, visões de consumo e políticas governamentais

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To cite this paper: Melo, P. T. N. B., Cambrinha, G. M. G., & Gómez, C. R. P. (2023). Sharing representations in the relations between business proposals, consumption visions, and government policies. *Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 24(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1678-6971/eRAMG230160.en>



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Abstract

Purpose: This theoretical essay aims to explore sustainable consumption, emphasizing the sharing of representations with business proposals and government policies.

Originality/value: Through consumption, gains in quality of life and forms of social insertion are created by social businesses. Studies on social representations can indicate the sharing of views between different social actors, such as companies, governments and consumers. The text continues with a discussion on the theory of social representations and the dynamics of sustainable consumption. Social representations guide the views, actions, and attitudes of individuals, including when it comes to insertion in the dynamics of consumption. Subsequently, business proposals for the base of the pyramid are highlighted, discussing different possible scenarios for their relationships with consumers and government policies.

Design/methodology/approach: The theoretical essay is characterized by the development of theory as a conceptual production, in which logic takes the place of data for evaluation and elaboration of propositions.

Findings: A greater or lesser sharing of representations allows for the design of different possible scenarios for the relationships between consumers with a moralistic or hedonistic vision, social or traditional business proposals, and governments with policies for sustainable or spurious development. Finally, propositions about the existence of gaps between the representations of the needs of consumers oriented towards sustainable development, value propositions of social businesses, and government instruments in emerging markets are mentioned.

Keywords: social representations, low income, social businesses, sustainable consumption, sustainable development



Resumo

Objetivo: O presente ensaio teórico tem o objetivo de explorar o consumo sustentável, enfatizando o compartilhamento de representações com as propostas de negócios e políticas governamentais.

Originalidade/valor: Por meio do consumo, ganhos em qualidade de vida e formas de inserção social são criados pelos negócios sociais. Os estudos sobre representações sociais podem indicar o compartilhamento de visões entre diferentes atores sociais, tais como empresas, governos e consumidores. O texto segue com uma discussão sobre a teoria das representações sociais e as dinâmicas de consumo sustentável. As representações sociais orientam as visões, ações e posturas dos indivíduos, inclusive quando se trata da inserção nas dinâmicas de consumo. Posteriormente, destacam-se as propostas de negócios para a base da pirâmide e discutem-se os diferentes cenários possíveis para as suas relações com os consumidores e as políticas governamentais.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: O ensaio teórico se caracteriza pelo desenvolvimento de teoria como uma produção conceitual, na qual a lógica assume o lugar dos dados para avaliação e elaboração de proposições.

Resultados: O maior ou o menor compartilhamento de representações permite o desenho de diferentes cenários possíveis para as relações entre consumidores com uma visão moralista ou hedonista, propostas de negócios sociais ou tradicionais e governos com políticas para desenvolvimento sustentável ou espúrio. Por fim, são lançadas proposições de que existem lacunas entre as representações das necessidades dos consumidores orientados ao desenvolvimento sustentável, das propostas de valor dos negócios sociais e dos instrumentos governamentais nos mercados emergentes.

Palavras-chave: representações sociais, baixa renda, negócios sociais, consumo sustentável, desenvolvimento sustentável

INTRODUCTION

The path to sustainable development necessarily takes place through social advances, aiming to reduce inequalities and better distribute wealth and quality of life. Thus, an attempt to achieve these social purposes has happened with the emergence of businesses oriented to low-income populations, including this part of the population in the consumption dynamics, that is, the social businesses, which assume that the social inclusion of populations of low income through consumption would be able to promote quality of life (Prahalad, 2005). However, the non-sharing of values and meanings between the proposals of social businesses and low-income populations, especially in identifying their needs, generates cognitive gaps that compromise their effectiveness (Angeli & Jaiswal, 2016). The analysis and discussion about sharing of meanings are justified to advance consumption patterns in the direction of sustainable development. Currently, we are witnessing the emergence of contemporary social ethics, which seeks to include concern for sustainable development in citizens' actions.

Sustainable development is understood as a situation in which economic growth respects the environment's natural limits, while it offers opportunities for improvements in the well-being of the population, including the next generations (Veiga, 2007). In this sense, sustainable businesses encompass the idea of sustainable development, expressing the creation of social values and environmental issues beyond the exclusively economic criteria of business tradition (Dentchev et al., 2018). These ideas guide the alignment between human activities and the pursuit of sustainability, which is reflected in the prioritized actions of environmental preservation and defends a change of attitude to reduce the impacts on ecosystems (Augustin & Almeida, 2006). Otherwise, the situation of spurious development happens when a logic only of economic growth predominates, sometimes associated with a strong dependence on government agencies' incentives, degradation of the environment, excessive exploitation of work, and carrying out of illegal practices (Santos, 2011).

Although there are guidelines on the paths and objectives of sustainable development (Raworth, 2017; Sachs, 2015), it is important to highlight that this knowledge needs to be incorporated into the daily thinking of political, social, and economic leaders, who are formulators and decision-makers. Above all, the common-sense knowledge, developed in social interactions and by the influence of the various media vehicles, is effective in solving problems faced in the real world, including sustainable development problems.

This common-sense knowledge, built and shared in interactions and social representations, results in social representations (Martins-Silva et al., 2016). In the search for solutions to the issue of consumption and its socioenvironmental implications, different actors use terms that carry differences regarding its scope, such as conscious, ethical, solidary, responsible, green, and sustainable, resulting in the emergence of a conceptual disorder (Costa & Teodósio, 2011).

To protect the environment from the threat of modern industrial market effects, ecological values highlight the need to stop irresponsible consumer behavior (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015). Guided by this appeal, many producers and advertisers, in their communications, send the implicit message that the consumer must buy goods and services from companies that care about sustainable development, suggesting a consumption without moral conflict (Santos, 2013).

The sharing of values and meanings ends up shaping the evolution behavior and the creation of mechanisms for sustainable development in the face of consumption dynamics. In this sense, through consumption, quality of life and forms of social insertion are created by social businesses. Social business models emerge, highlighting commitments to solutions for sustainable development, including proposals for low-income populations in emerging markets (Dentchev et al., 2018; Hart & London, 2005). Currently represented by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (Brics), the emerging markets are those made up of countries with the potential to be among the developed ones, but which are in an intermediate position in the world's economic order, suffering strong influence from the central countries.

This theoretical essay aims to present propositions for the understanding of sharing of representations in the relationships between business proposals, different views of consumption, and government policies. The theory of social representations enables the understanding of problems and creation of solutions for the sustainable development that different social groups elaborate and use in their communications. Sustainable development has been constantly discussed in different spheres and levels of society seeking to give meaning to this idea, which is interpreted and represented socially in a particular and polysemic way by different social groups (Kates et al., 2005).

In addition to pointing out contents and meanings, studies on representations can indicate questions for the dynamics of consumption and identify visions shared among different social actors, such as companies, governments, and consumers. The study by Dias et al. (2018) shows the potential of the theory of social representations. However, Martins-Silva et al. (2016)



highlight the lack of appropriate studies based on this theory in the area of organizational studies, pointing out a gap on which this theoretical essay is positioned. In addition, other studies point out the need to seek greater understanding of the cognitive processes and the role of institutions in supporting sustainability-oriented businesses (Dentchev et al., 2018; Steiner et al., 2018). In this quest for greater understanding, this essay also offers a contribution.

According to Araújo et al. (2021), recent studies on the subject of sustainable consumption converge on the need for participation of the various actors in the development of strategies and policies with effective contribution. Thus, this essay is an opportunity to deepen this discussion, proposing that the relationship structures between companies, governments, and consumers acquire a certain quality depending on the strength of the cognitive affinity between the actors, constituting a more or less effective sharing of visions for sustainable consumption. This discussion is developed in this essay, approaching theories of representations of social networks, sustainable consumption, and social business. The importance of alignment between consumers and business proposals for low-income populations is highlighted by Angeli and Jaiswal (2016). This essay is an opportunity to advance in this sense, based on the theory of social representations and offering frameworks of distinct scenarios with analytical potential for further studies. The different scenarios reflect possible combinations between social business proposals or traditions, hedonistic or moralistic views of consumption, and government policies oriented towards sustainable or spurious development.

Considering that discussions on sustainable consumption and social business can span a variety of psychological, marketing, sociological, technocentrist, ecocentrist discourses, among others, this article was designed as a theoretical essay, as explained in the following section. This study is based on the theory of social representations, dynamics of consumption, and social business proposals for the low-income population. Lastly, this theoretical essay brings final considerations and propositions for future studies.

CONDUCTING THE ESSAY

In a section dedicated to clarifying how to conduct a theoretical essay, initially, it should be noted that this type of text does not follow “the division and logic established by traditional scientific methodologies” (Meneghetti,



2011, p. 321). This section becomes important since, in the field of administration, it is recognized that theory development is not an aspect of history (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Furthermore, Meneghetti (2011, p. 330) emphasizes that the theoretical essay “is not a theoretical study, based on theoretical reviews that, later, will support empirical research or conceptual reflections, formatted within the classical division of science”. Thus, the theoretical essay is distinguished from and not confused with theoretical reviews, including bibliographic studies or bibliometrics, which systematically follow traditional methodological paths of collection and analysis of data. We do not intend to make an epistemological critique of theoretical studies guided by traditional methods or by positivist science itself, but to delimit what is to come throughout this text.

A theory combines concepts, definitions, and propositions, explaining and predicting phenomena or facts (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Theories tend to be complex and abstract, with multiple variables, while being valuable and useful in research by narrowing the range of interesting facts or phenomena, suggesting the most appropriate study approaches, indicating data classification systems, informing uniformities about the object of study and predicting additional undiscovered facts (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Whetten (2003) clarifies that theory development is a conceptual production, in which logic takes the place of data for the evaluation and elaboration of propositions that make sense in conducting future research. Theory development expands the frontier of knowledge, providing justifications, logics, searchable propositions, and explanations for features of an object of study (Whetten, 2003).

The theoretical development path with the greatest possibility of contribution, according to Whetten (2003), is the inclusion of perspectives from other fields of study. Whetten (2003) also highlights that the development of theory provides changes in the existing view of the phenomenon or object of study and practice of search. In this sense, this theoretical essay includes a perspective of psychology in the theoretical development of administration on consumption and social business. It also points out a shift in business research practice socially, requiring the inclusion of consumers in the scope of analysis.

Besides the theoretical aspect, this text is also an essay. Thus, it presents the outline of a theory (Bertero, 2011). Barros (2011, p. 335) clarifies that “etymologically related to the Latin terms *exagium* (regret) and *exigere* (to test) and, in French, to *essayer* (to put to the test) and *essai* (to try), the term essay carries the idea of an attempt at speculative and interpretive action.”

In this respect, Meneghetti (2011) emphasizes that the essay allows for the development of intellectual autonomy of those who interact with it and the formation of their own knowledge, with questions and reflections being more relevant than conclusions and affirmations in the traditional sense.

According to Bertero (2011), the theoretical essay has an intuitive dimension, with knowledge being acquired immediately by contemplating the ideas, concepts, or forms, without the progression through mediating stages and methodologies, as it happens in positivist science. According to Bertero (2011), decisive intuitions are taken, mixed, and elaborated in various formats. The theoretical essay is pointed out by Meneghetti (2011) and Bertero (2011) as an important form of knowledge throughout history in the fields of administration of economic sciences and philosophy in the world, as well as in the understanding of Brazilian society. Once this section is posted, this theoretical essay unfolds below.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

The beliefs and values that people nurture with participatory approaches to the community are relevant to change current unsustainable situations towards sustainable development (Reed et al., 2006). The cultural dimension is highlighted by people who assume, in a cognitively elaborated way, sustainable development as one of its main responsibilities (Steiner et al., 2018). A psychological identification between communities and organizations in this context allows reaching the highest level of social license to operate, through the existence of trust (Boutilier, 2014). In this sense, the theory of social representations has the analytical potential to contribute to the discussion about sustainable development. In the area of organizational studies, Martins-Silva et al. (2016) state that studies based on this theory are still incipient and superficial.

Social representations are processed and materialized in everyday life through gestures and speech, being elaborated by symbolic aspects, which, in turn, are produced through social practices. Social representations are a means to apprehend the concrete world, managing to make sense and integrate behavior in networks of relationships linked to their object (which, in this case, is sustainable development). Thus, social representations provide the notions that make these stable and effective relationships, as well as determine the field of ideas present in the visions shared by the groups and

govern the behaviors that are accepted (Moscovici, 2012). The formation of social representations is linked to systems of communication that the social group uses in a context (Camargo & Bousfield, 2011). The theory of social representations unfolds on the thesis of Moscovici (1961), originally published in 1961, within the scope of social psychology (Palmonari & Cerrato, 2011), which has had its theoretical domain considerably expanded since the initial work (Jodelet, 2001).

Structurally, social representations are composed of two parts: the central core and peripheral elements (Abric, 2003; Sá, 1996). On the one hand, the central core is directly related to and determined by historical, sociological, and ideological conditions, being strongly marked by the collective memory and norms of a social group. The central core constitutes the collectively shared common ground of social representations. It is established through consensus, defining and achieving the homogeneity of a social group. The core also has the function of giving continuity and consistency to social representation, since it is stable, coherent, and resistant to change. On the other hand, peripheral elements have the function of fixing social representations to the context, being sensitive and determined by the characteristics of the context. New information or events that threaten the stability of the central core are first absorbed as peripheral elements.

Social representations have an internal dynamic that aims to turn something that is unknown into something familiar (Moscovici, 1981; Vala, 2006). In this internal dynamic, two processes take place distinctly, but simultaneously: anchoring and objectification. Anchoring puts something unknown into categories and familiar images, connecting them to a known reference point for interpretation and comparison. Objectification transforms abstraction into something almost physical, translating something that is in thought into something concrete and reproducing visibly and tangibly the unknown. Memory is the basis of action for anchoring and objectification. In anchoring, memory is directed to the search of stored things, people, and events that serve to identify the unknown, while, in objectification, memory is directed to produce concepts and images about something new.

When it comes to articulating the theory of social representations related to the interaction of society with the environment, Arruda (1993) and Reigota (1995)' studies show analytical efforts in this scope. Arruda (1993) highlighted that postgraduate students in Ecology organize the set of representations about the environment from the context in which they are inserted, with technology being considered an important resource when the subject is in an external situation and exerts predatory action on the environment or

considered a threat when the subjects are integrated into the environment. When he examined the social representation of the environment by participant professors from a specialization course in Environmental Education, Reigota (1995) found a “naturalistic” social representation, which considers environment a synonym for nature, understood as the space where living beings inhabit.

Techio et al. (2016) identified that the representation of sustainability of Civil Engineering university students is composed of environmental elements, reflecting a preservationist vision and making the environmental dimension predominant and central. Techio et al. (2016) suggest that this representation seems to guide the production of more sustainable constructions, but it fails to consider the impact generated on social life and the surrounding economy in order to achieve the ideal of sustainable buildings. In turn, the social and economic dimensions of sustainability would be in the peripheral zones of representation, through expressions that reflect awareness, development, economy, and responsibility.

For the local leaders of communities involved with the Social Technologies for Water Management in Santa Catarina project, water is understood as an essential element of life and health, which needs to be preserved (Polli et al., 2009). In this understanding, the health element appears strongly linked to the elements of life and quality, with great importance at the core representation center. The center of the representation is constituted by the words life, preservation, health, survival, nature, and sustainability, composing a field of homogeneity, whose positive characteristics and the prevention of problems related to water are common elements (Polli et al., 2009).

The social representation of health and the environment, present in the daily lives of teams of the Family Health Strategies (governmental action), is related to the salubrity of the territory, being anchored in the elements of water, solid waste, pesticides, and air pollution (Dias et al., 2018). The understanding of this social representation, according to Dias et al. (2018), is constituted from the observation of the damage caused to health by exposure to lead residues, mercury, and pesticides, requiring the management of environmental issues and educational actions for the population as practices capable of providing a healthy environment and impact on people’s health.

Among other aspects of the theory, Martins-Silva et al. (2016) clarify that social representations are collectively elaborated and shared at the cognitive level, contributing to the communication that happens based on references common to people participating in symbolic relationships. The study by Dias et al. (2018) reinforces the notion that social representations are structured through the processes of anchoring and objectification, which, respectively,

correspond to the formation of a central core with peripheral elements and the form of externalization of representation. Then, different valued anchors, forming different central cores, show gaps between the social representations of consumers' needs and the business proposals, which are objectified in divergent discourses. The processes of anchoring and objectification are similar to implicit and explicit cognitive orientations studied by Steiner et al. (2018), highlighting that there are pronounced gaps between perceptions of organizational values and attitudes towards sustainability.

Social representations guide the visions, actions, and postures of individuals, even when it comes to insertion in the dynamics of consumption. According to Lorek and Spangenberg (2014, p. 33), consumption is sustainable “only if it meets simultaneously with human needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, and accepts the limitations imposed by the need to sustain capacity of the environment to meet present and future needs”. The focus on what Lorek and Fuchs (2013) call “strong sustainable consumption”, which is based on a risk-averse perspective, can reveal a needs assessment and strategies for radical change oriented towards degrowth, while the “weak sustainable consumption” approach focuses on improving efficiency derived from technological advancements.

For defenders of a hedonistic vision, consumption is favorable, highlighting the benefits for business, society, and the low-income population through immediate rewards of consumption (Hemais et al., 2013). Hemais et al. (2013) clarify that defenders of a moralistic discourse blame consumerism for social problems, highlighting actions of corporate manipulators. Citizens receive messages encouraging the purchase of products and services, while being required to reflect on their consumption, leading to disoriented behaviors (Costa & Teodósio, 2011). According to Lipovetsky and Serroy (2015, p. 399), ecological requirements have been integrated into the evolution of behaviors, giving rise to sustainable hyperconsumption instead of stopping consumerism: “The hyperconsumer is one who struggles against the dead times of life, who seeks to ‘rejuvenate’ their experience of time, revive it with novelties that bring you, without risk, the scent of adventure”.

The dynamics between consumption and business proposals are directed and supported by government policies, restricting or encouraging an orientation towards sustainable development. The elaboration and implementation of public policies directed to consumption practices imply an articulation, listening to the actors of the civil society and the market to participate together in a proposal with the dissemination of initiatives of sustainable

consumption (Costa & Teodósio, 2011). Governments can, according to Tukker et al. (2008), report on the most fundamental issues related to problems that conflict with conventional paradigms and beliefs; support agreements on difficult-to-plan objectives, with radical changes and uncertain means; or support conventional paradigms and beliefs by the implementation of their instruments and measures, keeping away from an orientation towards sustainable development.

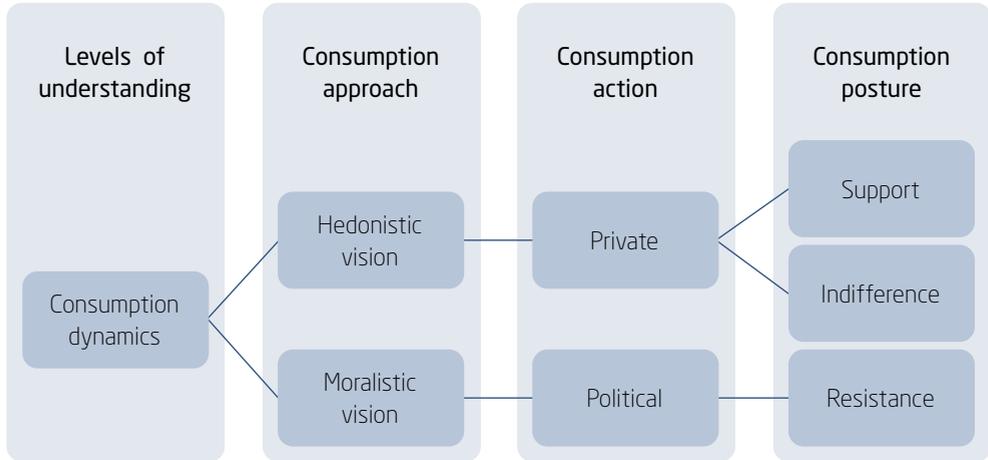
Currently, consumption is a facilitator of small pleasures in the fight against the crystallization of everyday life, as well as compensating for the incompleteness felt by the isolation and discomfort that are accentuated in spaces of widespread disorientation (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015). Lipovetsky and Serroy (2015) highlight that the waste realized by consumer capitalism has been counteracted, making consumers responsible for their lifestyles, among other treatments. In contrast to individualist consumerism, Barbosa et al. (2014) understand political consumerism as an ongoing process of using consumption choices as a tool for social change, trying to influence institutional practices of public policies and the market.

In Brazil, acts of political consumerism, according to Barbosa et al. (2014), occur at low levels due to the representation of public or private organizations that act in the defense of consumers, perception that the action is only effective if it is collectivized, and protection of families towards young people in terms of responsibility for their consumptions. This discussion provokes reflection on organizations, especially government agencies, being focused on recognizing individuals as consumers with their own individual interests or as citizens with shared values in the community (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

In driving consumerism, the understanding of power is essential, as it creates barriers to make it sustainable, considering who sets the agenda, rules, narratives, instruments of governance, targets, behavior, and people's options (Fuchs et al., 2016). The explanations of political consumerism are in the deeply-rooted practices of sociocultural institutions that are specific to a region or country, and there is a tendency that the consumer behavior of young people remains under influence of the family for longer (Barbosa et al., 2014). Regarding the attitude towards consumption, Arora and Romijn (2012) highlight the importance of heterogeneity in the everyday practices of social life and complex responses to how low-income populations resist, collaborate or present indifference to the new institutions of global capitalism. Figure 1 summarizes related concepts in the dynamics of consumption at the levels of approach, action, and posture of consumers.

Figure 1

Consumption dynamics and levels of understanding



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The establishment of legislation, concessions, and tax policies on sustainable consumption could encourage changes in the performance of companies and civil society, institutionalizing a fairer consumption pattern (Costa & Teodósio, 2011). Furthermore, sustainable consumption is more imperative because of climate change, economic growth, population growth, and related trends, but it depends on fundamental changes oriented towards a new paradigm of ecological systems (Lim, 2017).

SOCIAL BUSINESS AND ARTICULATION WITH GOVERNMENT POLICIES

In promoting sustainable consumption, companies can assume the role of informant, with the use of seals and labels that help consumers make decisions regarding purchases, as well as the role of developer of sustainable products accessible to the mass, considering the dimensions of sustainable development in the value chain (Oliveira et al., 2018).

According to Prahalad and Lieberthal (1998), success in large emerging companies transforms companies beyond the size of the opportunities and challenges that their managers see in their quest for growth. In this sense, a social transformation is possible, which, according to Prahalad (2005), is about the number of people who believe they can aim for a middle-class

lifestyle, based on the evidence of opportunities, role models, and real signs of change.

According to Hart (1997), business corporations have the role of leading the movement for sustainable development. However, this view is not a consensus, considering those who identify the State as the main agent in the reduction of various forms of social exclusion that challenge sustainable development (Rezende, 2008). Furthermore, national authorities define the political-institutional context, which facilitates or hinders the implementation of initiatives oriented by intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) (Lazaro & Gremaud, 2017). There are also those who emphasize the importance of an articulation between State actors, civil society, and the market in the implementation of guidelines for sustainable development (Costa & Teodósio, 2011). This last view provides support and is reinforced in this essay.

According to Prahalad (2012), the low-income population demands a new understanding and supports new applications of products and services, which are crucial to participating in these markets with innovation dynamics for the profitable growth of companies globally. Angeli and Jaiswal (2016) provide practical guidance on how models of traditional businesses can be disrupted to serve new needs, detailing specific strategies that guide business model change to greater accessibility and inclusion.

The main strategies that sustain business success in a low-income population, according to Angeli and Jaiswal (2016), are the co-creation of needs with customers, community engagement, ongoing consumer engagement, innovation technology, a focus on human resources, strategic partnerships, economies of scale, and cross-subsidization. These strategies deal with the difficulties of multinational corporations to compete in the low-income population and with a dualist institutional environment in which they need to serve, simultaneously, both high and low-income markets, in terms of local needs and standardized global routines (Angeli & Jaiswal, 2015). Bendul et al. (2017) highlight the structural barriers, challenges, and solution approaches for the design of supply chains for the low-income population and reinforce the importance of involving local actors and clients to improve the acceptance and market success of multinationals in developing countries. In different national and regional contexts, institutional arrangements assume important roles in stimulating and accelerating the development, diffusion, and sustainability-oriented business success (Dentchev et al., 2018). In turn, the performance and capacity of the low-income population are also intertwined in global institutional and cultural contexts, along with the local social rela-

tionships with its immediate and historical constraints, as they are relational (Arora & Romijn, 2012).

The conceptualization of business models in the context of inclusive services for low-income populations needs to be refined and extended, adding the discovery process, in which needs are identified and co-created by customers and the organization (Angeli & Jaiswal, 2016). It is this discussion, highlighting the importance of meeting the needs of the low-income population, that the present theoretical essay intends to advance, especially in understanding the direction of traditional organizations for this new market.

Angeli and Jaiswal (2016) propose a social business model composed of four dimensions, which are value discovery, value proposition, value creation, and value appropriation. These authors add to the systematization of models of most well-known social businesses the value discovery dimension, with this being derived from the traditional dimension of value proposition. According to Angeli and Jaiswal (2016), the customer value proposition is a process that comprises the identification of a problem and its solution by the producers, considering the consumers' cognition resistance issues. Angeli and Jaiswal (2015) emphasize that distinctions between the perspectives of producers and consumers in identifying a problem and its solution generate cognitive gaps. These gaps restrict the sharing of social representations of the needs of consumers and the proposals of the business.

To eliminate the cognitive gaps between consumers and producers, Angeli and Jaiswal (2016) propose the dimension of value discovery for social businesses, in which consumers' needs are identified as a result of a co-creation process between consumers and producers, and not only imposed by the latter. This process includes community engagement strategies, enabling raised awareness of needs in a way that is legitimate for individuals (Angeli & Jaiswal, 2016). It is assumed that the greater or lesser sharing of representations allows for the design of different possible scenarios between consumers with a hedonistic or moralistic view and their relationships with businesses based on the traditional model or oriented towards sustainable development issues, particularly, social businesses (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Scenarios of sharing of representations between consumers and producers

BUSINESS MODEL	TRADITIONAL	SCENARIO 1 <i>Greater sharing</i>	SCENARIO 2 <i>Lesser sharing</i>
	SOCIAL	SCENARIO 3 <i>Lesser sharing</i>	SCENARIO 4 <i>Greater sharing</i>
		HEDONISTIC	MORALISTIC
CONSUMPTION VIEW			

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

One of the scenarios (scenario 1) of sharing of representations between consumers and producers corresponds to a market environment in which the consumer prioritizes a hedonistic vision and businesses have traditional purposes that are predominantly economic. Scenario 4 is characterized by a context in which consumers are oriented by a moralistic vision and by social businesses. Both scenarios, 1 and 4, would also have the characteristic of having a greater sharing of representations between consumers and producers in the identification of needs, with the distinction that scenario 1 guides the situation towards a spurious development, and scenario 4 directs the situation towards sustainable development. Furthermore, scenarios 2 and 3 correspond to contexts in which business value propositions, whether traditional or social, do not consider the views of consumers, generating less sharing of representations.

Several fields of empirical studies can be fruitful in evaluating the theoretical elaboration presented in this essay – for example, the social business of sustainable construction and solid waste collection. Many ventures of sustainable housing seek to explore the trend of “green” consumption, exploring the opportunity to obtain premium prices, which are unfeasible for low-income consumers. In turn, some social businesses are coming up with proposals whose central elements are the promotion of well-being and the facilitation of the cost of reforms in housing for low-income people. For instance, Moradigna is a social business that was created in 2014. It carries out housing improvements in neighborhoods on the periphery of the East region of São Paulo, renovating houses providing access to credit, projects,

and guaranteed low costs. This proposal also offers material and local labor, generating work and income for workers in the community itself. In addition to providing housing that is more suitable for people's health, the reforms make the electrical and hydraulic systems more efficient, contributing to sustainable consumption. Therefore, these proposals tend to have a greater sharing of representations with the needs of low-income consumers.

The provision of an environment that is suitable for people's health can be improved with the work of cooperatives of recyclable material collectors, whose actions promote environmental education and the idea of a circular economy. In that sense, it is likely that there is a greater sharing of representations in the proposals of these cooperatives and professionals involved in public health. The joint marketing of materials, in a network of cooperatives (for instance, Cata-Vida, which was created in 2001 and comprises 17 developments in 18 municipalities in the interior of the state of São Paulo), plays an important role in obtaining income for social businesses. The effectiveness of this dynamic lies in the greater sharing of representations between the proposals of the recycling industries, which appear as buyers of the recyclable material, and all the other actors in the chain to the final consumers.

Dentchev et al. (2018) highlight the importance of the specific context in studies on sustainable business models, referring to the sector of activity and the countries' economic development. In partnership with civil society organizations, entrepreneurs, and local governments, corporations can help build a bottom-up governance system (Hart & London, 2005).

Complementarily to what is shown in Figure 2, the role of governments in building a path to sustainable development, through their political orientations, is pointed out in a series of studies (Tukker et al., 2008; Costa & Teodósio, 2011; Santos, 2011; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014; Dentchev et al., 2018). Each actor – government, business, and society – has its roles and interrelationships between them to achieve the principles of sustainable development (Silva et al., 2011). In addition to the importance of community imbrication and ability of economies of scale, studies on the implementation of sustainable business models in low-income contexts show the importance of supporting government agencies (Dentchev et al., 2018). Figure 3 shows a set of possible scenarios.

Figure 3

Scenarios of sharing of representations between producers and governments

GOVERNMENT POLICY	SPURIOUS DEVELOPMENT	SCENARIO 1 <i>Greater sharing</i>	SCENARIO 2 <i>Lesser sharing</i>
	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	SCENARIO 3 <i>Lesser sharing</i>	SCENARIO 4 <i>Greater sharing</i>
		TRADITIONAL	SOCIAL
		BUSINESS MODEL	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

It should be noted that the alignment of visions with the business sector is a historically present element in the economic policies of many regions, including emerging countries (Chesnais, 2013; Medeiros, 2017), corresponding to an affinity between spurious development and traditional business models (scenario 1). The importance of narrowing the visions between governments and companies is highlighted through policies with content oriented towards sustainable development and social business proposals (scenario 4).

The organizational articulations between governments and companies, among other actors, who develop initiatives, projects, or businesses for access to drinking water, are an investigative context capable of revealing shared representations. The access of the low-income population to water in adequate quantity and quality for consumption is a challenge that has been the target of a network movement. In that sense, the performance of industries and sanitation companies unfolds, articulated with governmental organizations, institutes, foundations, and technical and residents' associations to apply social technologies (for instance, Water+Access, an initiative that was created in 2017 and is active in eight states with the involvement of 16 organizations). This action promotes supply in communities with scarcity of water and agricultural activities as a source of income, whose commercialization of production makes it possible to keep the system applied, constituting an initial proposal of networked social business. Thus, a greater sharing of representations between the network actors, centered

on the importance of life and health, is essential for the population's involvement. Other contexts of articulation in networks of actors, including companies and governments, are also conducive to investigations that reveal the presence or absence of sharing of representations, such as projects in clean and renewable energy sectors to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The participatory processes in social enterprises are situated in structures of asymmetric local power relations between heterogeneous communities with low-income and corporate capital streams (Arora & Romijn, 2012). When it comes to environmental limits, Hart et al. (2016) point out that there is a disconnection between studies on social business and research on the environmental dimension of sustainable development, highlighting the importance of reinforcing ideas and innovative approaches to reconcile poverty eradication and environment.

Gold and Schleper (2017) propose the theoretical perspective of recognition to facilitate business with proposals oriented to sustainable development, which requires the constant attribution of values to others, especially to the low-income population and objects, such as the resources of the environment, and that these elements are inherently valuable without primarily serving economic reasons. There was a reduced concern with the environmental dimension in social businesses, with raising awareness and actions on the importance of environmental issues still being a novelty (Morais-da-Silva et al., 2018).

Regarding the environment, according to Hart et al. (2016), there is a tendency to disregard environmental issues, referring to a vision of development in which these are two independent problems. The principle of recognition recalls the genuine claim that the concept of sustainable development prevails overall and guides companies to adopt a caring posture, interact more closely with people and organically imbricate their actions within the broad institutions for the interests of society (Gold & Schleper, 2017).

Next, some final considerations are presented, pointing out propositions for future studies.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This theoretical essay aimed to present propositions for the understanding of sharing of representations in the relationships between business proposals, different views of consumption, and government policies. This essay contributes to the analysis of sharing of meanings, highlighting the oppor-

tunities for evolution in emerging markets and the dynamics of consumption, in terms of sustainable development.

Based on the framework presented, it is assumed that the development of emerging markets is driven by strong representational sharing between consumers anchored in a hedonic vision and traditional businesses. In contrast, the relationship between social business strategies and consumption in a moralistic vision leads to sustainable development, which is provided by greater sharing of representations between companies and consumers, reflecting sustainable development purposes.

To understand the sharing of visions in the relationships between different social actors, the theory of social representations provides appropriate foundations. This study, in addition to presenting the theory of social representations, showed the results of studies based on this theory, whose object of analysis was sustainable development, the environment, or its elements. The theory of social representations allows for a deeper understanding of the relationships between consumers and producers or a comparison of the sharing of meanings between these actors in different scenarios (Figure 2) or the same scenario in different locations, regions, or cultures.

It is proposed that there are gaps between the representations of the consumers' needs oriented towards sustainable development and value propositions of social businesses in emerging markets (proposition 1). Even if the gaps between representations are smaller in a scenario in which the perceptions of social business producers and consumers' expectations in a moralist vision are aligned, such complete alignment is an ideal situation. The understanding of the remaining gaps becomes relevant to the dimensions of needs discovery and value proposition in these markets.

The present study also focuses on the sharing of visions of relationships with government organizations. From the first theories about social business up to the latest discussions, partnership and collaboration relationships with government organizations have been seen as important elements. Relationships with governments constitute cognitive gaps or affinities between business proposals and government instruments. These relationships generate an environment that may be more favorable for maintaining traditional business models or the emergence of social businesses. Starting from the assumption that governments in emerging markets are predominantly oriented towards economic growth issues, while social and environmental issues are relegated to the background, it is proposed that there are gaps between the representations of the social businesses' value propositions and government instruments in emerging markets (proposition 2).

In this theoretical essay, the choice for the theory of social representations is due to its suitability to analyze the sharing of meanings and values between participants of a social group or between different social actors, given it belongs to the domain of social psychology. To analyze the sharing of meanings oriented towards sustainable development, other theories could be alternatives to the theory of social representations. For management as a field of study, the theories that advance in the construction of explanations of the social processes of designing strategies and subjective perceptions of performance are particularly interesting, sheltered in the school of strategic thinking (or design). However, these theories do not allow for inferences at the relational level.

The propositions presented in this theoretical essay contribute to the actions of social entrepreneurs and public policymakers aimed at economic and social insertion of the low-income population. They also contribute to the public that identifies with the ideal of sustainable consumption. These actors broaden understanding of current challenges, including the reflection on the importance of sharing a mindset oriented towards sustainable development, which is different from that which prioritizes exclusively economic concerns.

This theoretical essay has limitations regarding the choices of paths for discussions, leaving other theoretical contributions absent. The discussion in this theoretical essay is centered on the purposes of organizations, which find space in the area of organizational studies. The debate on consumption intention and willingness to buy products or services understood as sustainable, which is supported in the area of marketing, is another relevant path of reflection that has not been widely discussed in this essay. As a suggestion for future research, it is recommended to carry out empirical studies capable of testing the theoretical propositions presented in this essay, which can be performed with multiple-case studies or comparative studies between different contexts and cultures.

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