



CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AS A WAY TO STUDYING SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE



 Amar Ahmed

Ph.D. Candidate, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.
Email: ahmed.aj.amar@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

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As a term, consumption had a monetary and economic presupposition to it and was mainly a sub-field of Marketing under 'consumer behaviour'. This paper will argue the interdisciplinary aspect to the term by utilizing existing research and then propose possible directions for future research. It will suggest consumer behaviour theory as a way to studying Sociology of Culture. Through reviewing selected research and literature, the paper aims to a) analyse the terms consumption and consumer behaviour; b) connect the terms to the field of sociology and other closely related fields such as anthropology; c) argue the significance of the consumption behaviour to studying cultures and connecting the two terms leading up to Consumer Culture Theory (CCT); and d) offer potential research questions within sociology of culture and cultural sociology using theories consumer behaviour. This paper helps marketing, consumer behaviour, sociology, and cultural studies researchers to understand how cultures influence consumption while, in the same time, consumption constructs cultures.

Contribution/ Originality: This paper's primary contribution is finding that consumer behaviour is an interdisciplinary field that can be utilized to researching specifically sociological and cultural contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I argue that we may consume objects, experiences, and ideas such as art, education, order and safety, nature, and culture and I reject the notion of consumption simply meaning spending money in a marketplace which tends to be vilified as selfish. Van Raaij and Antonides (1998) start their book stating that the view of consumption merely involves eating and drinking with a negative connotation is limited. They go on to discuss the evolution and development of consumer research starting with Adam being the first consumer when he ate the apple offered by Eve to argue that the word 'consumer' is old in concept. However, the term 'consumer behaviour' is only a century old. When the last century started, consumers in general were no longer struggling for food and basic needs and started getting involved in choice making after it was only limited to high social classes (Van Raaij & Antonides, 1998).

The main objectives of this paper are to a) demonstrate how consumer behaviour theories may be utilized by researchers to study sociocultural contexts and issues; b) argue that consumer behaviour and consumption as concepts are interdisciplinary; and c) suggest future research for sociology of culture researchers, especially ones that would fall under the canopy of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). I divide this paper into sections where I a) analyse the development of the notions 'consumption and consumer behaviour'; b) make the connection between

consumer behaviour and sociology; c) link consumer behaviour and studying cultures, with CCT getting an assigned sub-section; and d) conclude with how the theories discussed throughout the paper may be utilized to study sociocultural issues where I suggest research questions for future works.

Consumption was, for a long time, mainly connected to the marketing field. I will show in the following sections that this is no longer the case. Goodman and Cohen (2004) list three main reasons for the difficulty to studying consumption outside the marketing field. Firstly, the lack of rich history of scholarship due to changes in consumption during the early modern period. The scholarship was not obvious along with the gender division of labour. Second, the habit of thinking that consumption is a natural thing being independent of social and historical context. Third, scholars think of consumption only in relation to their work.

Since then, consumption scholarship has developed once scholars realized the importance of the contexts that dictate consumption behaviours and the implication of it. In the next section, I will look into the development of the consumption and consumer behaviour research and the relevant literature.

2. CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In order to argue the interdisciplinary nature of 'consumer behaviour' as a field, it is important to look at the developments that took place. According to McCracken (1990) advances in the field are fairly recent due to the reluctance to study the relationship between consumption and culture. It started by broadening the definition of 'consumer behaviour' from the old definitions that usually reflected 'purchase behaviour' and moved towards including all interactions prior to and after obtaining the good. Moreover, the move from 'decision-making process' to the role of cognitive processes, such the symbolic, further expanded the field. Another development was the willingness to look into consumption from the social and cultural systems and contexts as opposed to the usual psychological one. Lastly, marketing scholars started accepting research that has no direct relevance to the marketing field which in turn broadened the definition within the marketing community.

Van Raaij and Antonides (1998) divide the history of consumer research into seven stages. The first is *pre-scientific* which is the period prior to the 1940s where the behaviour of consumers is researched through the philosophical and socio-critical approach starting with Veblen and Tarde. This was followed by the *motivation* approach until the mid-1960s which was more psychoanalytic. By the end of the motivation approach, the *single-concepts* approach started emerging that concentrated on personality, cognitive dissonance, and perceived risk. The fourth approach started in the mid-1960s as well until the mid-70s and it was characterized by *grand theories* where scholars tried integrating all previous knowledge into grand and large schemata. The following line is characterized as the *information-processing* approach that dominated the 70s discussing the supply of information and consumer opinions. In the 80s, the *affective* approach concentrated on emotions. The 1990s mark the *experiential* approach that focuses on symbolic meanings of consumption, expressive value and hedonism. The postmodern approach and semiotics are recommended as qualitative methods. I argue that those qualitative methods help develop ethnography which may be utilized to study cultures.

Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) offer the marketing perspective -naturally being marketing professors- of the term. However, they do go into other aspects of consumer behaviour such as non-profit and social marketing, cultures, sub-cultures, social class, social groups, gender roles, personal experiences, and environmental concerns. Despite the fact that in the beginning the authors attempt to differentiate between the customer and the consumer, however, they do seem to only concentrate on consumers and consumption from the marketing outlook. For instance, when discussing non-profit and social marketing, they look into how the organisations may "sell" their services to obtain charitable donations. In their 'culture' chapter, they argue that marketers need to monitor and prepare to take advantage of shifts in cultures since people do not consume in a vacuum. Hence, the chapter still aims to directly benefit marketing literature. Nevertheless, The book is useful for basic understanding of consumer behaviour and consumption aspects within the fields of psychology, cultural studies, and sociology.

According to Hogg, Askegaard, Bamossy, and Solomon (2006) the 'consumer behaviour' field covers a lot of ground. They discuss that consumers take many forms such as according to demographic or psychographic, items can be anything from beans, democracy, to music, and needs and desires are virtually unlimited like hunger, status, and spiritual fulfillment. Those consumers may be influenced by many factors such as peers' opinions, values of cultures and subcultures, and reference groups. Therefore, the growing interest in consumer behaviour is not limited to marketing, but to all social sciences in general. This interest is due to the ever-increasing awareness with regards to the significance of consumption in everyday life, daily activities organization, identity formation, economic and political development, and flows of global culture.

The authors state that consumer behaviour as a field is very new and is growing while being influenced by different perspectives (Hogg et al., 2006). They argue that it is tough to come up with a field that is more interdisciplinary since similar consumer phenomena may be researched in various ways and at different levels depending on the researcher's interests and training. Hogg et al. (2006) discuss that, recently, many scholars have voiced that consumer behaviour should be researched for the sake of understanding it rather than the research being conducted to be used by marketers. Some scholars may disagree; however, the view has encouraged researchers to go beyond the traditional focus on the purchase of goods of the field leading to interesting debates. Hogg et al. (2006) argue further that non-strategic and non-marketing-oriented research produces better studies for business since they are not biased by strategic goals. Critically, this outlook of consumer research recognises that marketing activity and/or consumer behaviour is not necessarily beneficial to society or individuals. Many studies look into the 'dark side' of it like homelessness, addiction, and environmental waste building on earlier works of consumer issues related to ethics, consumerism and public policy. Hence, as the Figure 1 below shows, consumer behaviour can be researched with individual and social focus in numerous fields.

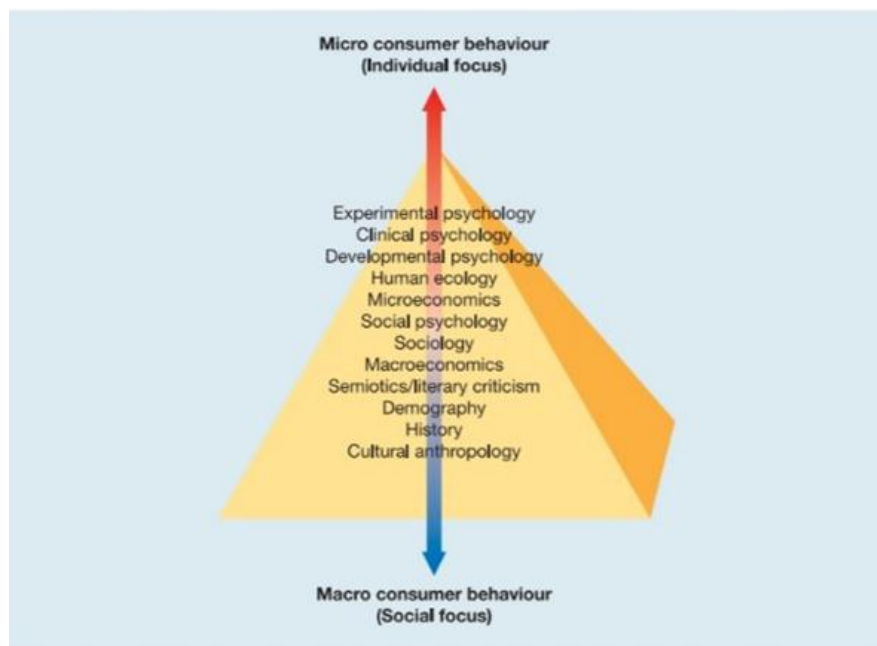


Figure-1. The pyramid of consumer behaviour.

Hogg et al. (2006) offer two perspectives on consumer research based on central assumptions of the researcher regarding what they are studying and how to study it. The first paradigm being *positivism* stressing that human rationale is supreme and there is only one objective truth to be discovered by science. The second and newer paradigm is *interpretivism* which challenges the first one for denying the complexity of the social and cultural world. Interpretivism emphasizes the significance of subjective experience, symbolism, and the concept of the meaning is in the mind. An individual constructs own meanings founded on unique and share cultural experiences giving it the

characteristics of subjectivity and context-dependency. Interpretivism fits the postmodern sociology and culture research which suits qualitative methods.

This section has shown the developments in consumer behaviour research from being restricted to the marketing field to being -arguably- one of the most interdisciplinary fields in social sciences. In the next section, I will show the connection between consumer behaviour and sociology.

3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIOLOGY

When it comes to consumption and sociology, early researchers concentrate on consumption in the context of social stratification and a person's position within the social order. Social stratification can be constructed and reaffirmed through consumption (Berelson & Steiner, 1964); which has been recognized within the Sociology of Consumption. I use this section to show selected and relevant research conducted using this connection and the developments through it.

From a sociological point of view, consumption analysis may be traced back to Marx's, Durkheim's, and Weber's works, however, the first sustained account is Veblen (1973)¹ work where he looks at goods as symbolic markers of social status. Veblen argues that the leisure class consciously engage in boastful consumption to mark their status from the middle and working classes. This behaviour provides solidarity to the leisure class, leaving the lower classes induced to imitate the lifestyle despite the struggle to even survive. He is first to coin the term 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1973) to refer to the desire of people to show prominent visible evidence of their capacity to afford luxurious lifestyle and goods.

When you mention the notion of consumption to sociologists, one of the main scholars that crosses their mind is Pierre Bourdieu with his most widely recognised works *Habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977) and *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984)². 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, 1984) he argues that through the act of choosing as consumers, we classify ourselves via our tastes; consequently, creating our unfreedom. The bourgeoisie use their power to hide their knowledge as they are "born with it naturally" which gives them the sense of superiority of personal character over the rest of society. While Veblen mentions that social inferiors will attempt to emulate their 'better', Bourdieu argues with the opposite effect where the lower classes develop distaste towards the behaviour of the powerful.

Bourdieu (2017) suggests that tastes in various fields like the food eaten, holiday destinations, and even religious affiliations are often homologous meanings that have underlying similarities. Despite avoiding stereotyping is recommended, however, he argues that people's lifestyles have certain coherence; giving them the characteristics of being structured rather than random. Hence, he defines the *habitus* as the set of dispositions of intellect and emotions that are usually acquired during a person's formative years through family and education system from which the reproduction of class structure from a generation to the next occurs. *Habitus* has been criticized for being too deterministic and ignores the exercise of people's free will. Bourdieu denies the claim with the argument that social change is not as easily accomplished as his critics would like. He refers to 'habitus' as the structured system learnt and then applied in life being structured set of dispositions. Mackay (1997) mentions three main criticism to Bourdieu's work by scholars. One is that he limits his work to class with no regards to other divisions like gender or 'race'. Two, he disregards the variety of uses and meanings of artefacts. Three, he treats social class as set-in stone. Nevertheless, I find the work of Bourdieu as a proof that consumer behaviour can be and has been utilized to study sociological concepts and issues such as social stratification.

Paterson (2017) argue that tastes have broadened and status distinction is in decline as people learn to appreciate big variety of cultural forms negating the fact that people define their identity according to fixed

¹Originally published in 1899.

²Published in French in 1979 and translated to English in 1984.

allegiances to particular genres. Consequently, this causes the rise of cultural omnivorousness which [Warde, Martens, and Olsen \(1999\)](#) mention that it is a move within the field of consumption. However, this cultural omnivorousness is associated with 'cosmopolitan' identity. Bourdieu argues back that cultural omnivorousness strictly belongs to the cultural elite where intellectuals roam freely while not allowing it to self-taught knowledge seekers.

[Bourdieu \(2013\)](#) considers culture as a challenged battleground in which subgroups and social classes contest to obtain 'social capital' through exploiting 'distinction' or cultural capital. He does not only discuss the object that is consumed to determine social class, but also how it is consumed and the knowledge surrounding it. The "elite" defend this status by asserting exclusivity. Hence, consumption does not occur in a vacuum, but within the context of continuing interplay between social groups to establish social identity and status. [Bourdieu \(1977\)](#) debates that taste is socially structured and is not a matter of individual notion. He classifies structures of taste into three levels that implies hierarchy. Moreover, he details how taste is in close correlation with social divisions. On the whole, Bourdieu's contributions to using the connection between consumption and sociology pave the way for this paper's conclusions.

[Miller and Miller \(2005\)](#) builds on Bourdieu's ideas where he looks into clothing as a marker of identity and religious or political affiliations with different religious and subcultural groups. He argues that subcultures continue their innovation and production despite the fact that their styles are inevitably commodified.

One cannot discuss consumption in sociology in the age of modernity without going through the works of [Bauman \(1994\)](#); [Bauman \(2001\)](#); [Bauman \(2004\)](#); [Bauman \(2013\)](#); [Bauman and May \(2019\)](#). He discusses social exclusion from consumer society where the poor are being prevented from participating in what a society defines as a normal and happy life. According to him, this brings boredom and depression to the poor and the cure is money to participate in consumption ([Bauman, 2004](#)). Consumer society ensures that the poor and repressed remain excluded through sophisticated mechanisms which increases the distance between "winners and losers". [Douglas and Isherwood \(1979\)](#) argue that all and any consumption is a ritual that constructs and maintains social order which classifies people. Consequently, it can be used to discriminate ranks despite the fact that she refuses to treat them as sheer competitive signs.

Developments in anthropology can be mirrored in sociology especially within ethnographic research due to similarities in methodology. [McCracken \(1990\)](#) lists the series of developments that are seen in the anthropology field with its connection to consumer behaviour. Firstly, interest was renewed in material culture. Secondly, there was a shift away from almost the refusal to study own and "mainstream" cultures. Thirdly, in order to understand consumer behaviour's properties of being cultural and communicative, anthropology developed the needed theories of culture, meaning and symbolism. Fourthly, the development of theories of process and context in order to comprehend the dynamic character of consumption. Fifthly, members of the field are starting to move away from the ideological suspicion that studying consumer goods is equivalent to participating in the free enterprise system. Lastly, anthropologists began to move beyond the idea that consumption can be dismissed as a horrid activity that does not need or deserve studying. It is safe to say that those developments have influenced other fields as well such as sociology.

[Aldridge \(2003\)](#) divides the literature on consumption into two polarized camps with a "war" between them. The first camp consists of scholars of economics and the second is group of sociologists, social and cultural anthropologists and theorists. Many sociologists are troubled with the concept of consumption seeing it as trivial distraction from what is more important in life like [Rojek and Turner \(2000\)](#) calling it 'decorative sociology'. However, [Aldridge \(2003\)](#) argues that they misrepresent its power in society and missing the coherent notion of social structure. Due to that, some authors attempt to distance themselves from 'decorative' practices such as [Edwards \(2000\)](#) who prefers using the notion of 'consumer society' over 'consumer culture' to show his interest in consumption within the political context besides the economic and social contexts like class and race. I agree with

Aldridge as I believe that Rojek and Turner isolate and underestimate the impact of consumption and cultures to social settings.

This paper is based on the argument that consumption and sociology are connected while the former is not exclusive to the marketing field. Aldridge (2003) proposes three main reasons to why consumption as a concept matters in sociology. Firstly, the utopian accounts reflecting liberal democracy has delivered consumer paradise and the dystopian accounts reflecting the deterioration of civil society, commodity fetishism, and extreme inequality. Secondly, the concept in sociological literature offers three camps with the first seeing consumption devoid of moral worth, the second seeing consumers as rational and pursuing their interest freely and liberated from restrictions, and the third being in the middle seeing the society as liberating and oppressive in the same time. He offers the example of cultural reconstruction of Margaret Thatcher moving the society into a consumer one that is part of the vision of a “good society” to deliberate on the role of culture. Moreover, he reveals that most works until recently still saw consumption in a manner that would fit within the economic definition despite the attempts to relate it to sociological issues such as work, careers, and capitalism as a system.

Until lately, Mackay (1997) mentions that the dominant focus was on production when it comes to studying consumption, if addressed at all, was due to it being conceived – in the Protestant practice – as frivolous among sociologists. However, in the book *Consumption and Everyday Life* which was edited by Mackay (1997), the authors look into consumption from a ‘positive’ point of view with consumers having creative roles that marks the move away from the previous passive role which portrays them as manipulated by the “capitalist system”. Consumption is now viewed as an active process and in many times celebrated as pleasure. In postmodern literature, the cultural consumption is regarded as being the materials we use to construct our individual identities. I believe that it is important to see consumption as positive and consumers as active since they utilize the marketplace - which is not necessarily material - to construct and express their identities.

Miller (1997) argues that consumption is about constructing identities and not just about utilitarian goods. In his research, he maintains that culture is constructed through ‘creative’ work. This comes via appropriation, transformation, customisation, and investment in the meaning of goods as they are being consumed and domesticated. Miller uses ‘to appropriate’ to describe the process of which North Londoners turn their council estates into ‘homes’. He challenges the theories of Mauss (2002); Carrier (2005) and Gregory (1982) who all argue that commodities do not construct social relationship anymore in this “globalised” world governed by “capitalism” and run in the context of secularization. He shows the desire of consumers to repeatedly reconstruct small moral worlds which tame these enormous forces by reducing global commodities to instruments that connect closely to questions of identity. Similarly, I believe that ethnographical accounts would reveal particularism in consumption behaviours within the same sociocultural contexts and reflect the individual identity constructions.

Slater (1997) makes the case of ritual consumption in relation to Christmas. Having a Christmas turkey on the table is an expression of a Christian identity or being within a society that identifies as such, marks the time of festivities season, shows kinship and ties by looking at the people around the table, the society roles, and offers the opportunity to display social knowledge and preferences.

Much of the recent works in sociology of consumption revolve around the ecological and environmental issues related to consumption. Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) discuss the increase in environment activism such the ‘green’ movement and the rise in public awareness about environmental and ecological issues. O'Brien (1999) addresses the lack of sociological theory and research in terms of the waste left due to production and consumption and argues that researching it will contribute to mankind’s understanding of the relationships between social and environmental change. Lury (2011) dedicates a chapter in her book to discuss consuming ethics and moral consumption where she outlines the progress of literature regarding waste management, environmental and ecological aspect to consumption, and consumer activism that impact animals and the environment.

This section of the paper showed the development of the literature that connects consumer behaviour with sociological issues. Veblen, Bourdieu, Bauman, Miller and Aldridge are classical scholars who have studied consumption in relation to sociology. The trend is moving towards the environmental issues that arise from consumption with notable works such as Warde (2016) and Paterson (2017). Similar to this segment, the next one will investigate the development of the literature that connect consumer behaviour with cultures.

4. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND CULTURES

In order to understand the connection between consumption and cultures, it is important to note which definition of culture authors choose for their work and to acknowledge that there is no universal definition for the term. Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) refer to Tylor (1871) and Kluckhohn (1951) definitions for “culture” to represent their studies. To expand on them, the authors lie the characteristics of culture being invented, learned, socially shared, similar but different, gratifying and persistent, adaptive, organised and integrated, and is prescriptive. The authors argue that understanding ritualised, expressive and symbolic activities that tend to be repeated over time and happen in fixed episodic sequences would assist marketers recognize the goods which have significant abilities to hold and communicate cultural meanings. Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) refer to the sociological perspective of Broom and Selznick (1970) to define cultural values alongside Rokeach (1973) psychological definition. They develop on those definitions through stating that values are culturally determined since they serve as standards to behaviour, wants, and attitudes and may be used as tools to compare with others. Hence, values significantly impact consumer behaviour. Since much of values stem from religions, the writers show the significant correlation between the level of religious commitment and consumption behaviour. Despite the author’s efforts to make the connection between consumer behaviour and cultures, however, the aim of the book does seem is to benefit marketers instead of utilizing consumer behaviour for the sake of understanding cultures.

Values are integral elements of cultures. Hogg et al. (2006) use Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) definition of a value to argue that values do not only apply to specific situations but also play an important role in consumption activities to achieve value-related goals since two people may believe in the same behaviour, however, their underlying belief system can differ. They offer the example of vegetarianism for the sake of health concerns versus animal activism. Hogg et al. (2006) argue that values differ across cultures, however, there are often set of underlying goals that the members of the same culture agree to their significance. Those set of core values which every culture has and conveys to its members. Still, some values are universal and many change over time. Value systems work as a ranking model for universal values and the way a culture defines a value may differ to other cultures. The set of values dictate the consumption behaviour of members of a culture. This view may be seen as in contrast with the postmodern outlook as people revert to an amalgamation of values and cultures.

Hogg et al. (2006) affirm that without cultural context, consumption choices cannot be understood. Despite the fact that they make this statement with the assumption that consumption entails products consumption in a commercial sense, yet it is important to reflect on the significance of culture in this field. They use the “collective memory of society” definition of culture as an accumulation of shared rituals, meanings, traditions and norms within a society or an organization. Through this definition, the authors connect it to the abstract ideas like values and ethics and then to material goods and services. They argue that this outlook is a relatively new perspective. Du Gay et al. (2013) see culture as an interpretation system that is used to comprehend the daily or the extraordinary “signifying practices”. This perspective argues that every consumption behaviour is cultural by nature since it is the context it operates in. Hence, it sees culture constructing consumption. However, it does not explicitly state that consumption can construct cultures themselves and identities as I argue in this paper.

Douglas and Isherwood (1979) confirm that consumption is not only an economic phenomenon, but also a cultural one with a crucial function of having the capacity to make sense since the utility of goods is framed by cultural context. Hence, utility of goods act as meaningful markers of social relations with them being a

communication system. The authors use rituals as examples since rituals shape, give substance, and fix social relationships while making sense of events that contain meaning which are central constituent to any society. Therefore, consumption reveals meanings associated with a culture. Similarly, [Goodman and Cohen \(2004\)](#) define consumption as “the set of practices through which commodities become a part of a particular individual” which makes consumption about meaning. This symbolic meaning may differ across cultures or even between individuals within the same culture.

[McCracken \(1990\)](#) sees consumption as a cultural phenomenon that social sciences have been slow to explore the significance of the relationship between consumption and culture. That is mainly due to it being attributed to materialism which is connected with negative meaning. His book *Culture and Consumption* is a collection of essays which aim to demonstrate that cultural considerations shape, drive, and constrain every point of consumption. Similarly, I believe it is only when we escape from the negative and materialistic suggestion that the term consumption is often associated with; that we can study how it plays an active role in (re)constructing cultures and vis-versa.

He continues to argue that the meaning of goods resides in a ‘culturally constituted world’ where every-day experiences are felt, shaped and constituted by the peoples own beliefs and assumptions of their culture. He describes culture as the ‘lens’ through which all happenings are seen, apprehended and assimilated. Moreover, he called it as the ‘blueprint’ of human activity where it decides the co-ordinates of actions socially. Hence, cultures supply the world with meaning and constitutes it by determining how it is seen and how it will be formed by human effort. He characterises this meaning into two concepts. The first being cultural categories which are the basic distinctions a culture uses to divide up the world such as time, the sacred and profane, class, gender, and age which may differ from a culture to another. The second concept is cultural principles where the meaning consists in the ideas and values to which cultural phenomena are arranged, assessed, and construed. In this point of view, consumption is a marker of identity and culture while working as a tool to communicate values and ideas.

[Slater \(1997\)](#) argues that all consumption is cultural since it always involves meanings which are shared, articulated in a context of specific meaningful ways of life, and it produces and reproduces culture. For instance, when food is eaten, the need is interpreted and undergoes a cultural examination. The examination of what is acceptable to eat and what is not, the individual preference is still formed within cultures, it is not only ‘food’ but involves culturally defined specific meals and utensils, and it is a ‘way of life’ instead of just to survive. As [Waters \(1995\)](#) mentions that once the “basic need” to eating is satisfied, our decision is culturally shaped and symbolic that reflects status. Consequently, this creates the ‘needs’ that shape an identity. A counter-argument to this is saying that all consumption is cultural to a starving homeless person is ridiculous. However, [Slater \(1997\)](#) argues back that this only applies to the rare horrific extremes such as wars or economic catastrophe, and even then, it is highly unlikely that people are ‘reduced to animals’ with only ‘basic’ needs emerging. I believe that this perspective maintains the point that consumption is an active element in constructing culture rather than just a material obsession with a passive role.

[Slater \(1997\)](#) looks at culture as lived experience moving away from the view of expressive forms. According to him, this started with the works of [Thompson \(1993\)](#) which coincided with another strand of works like [Willis \(1975\)](#) and [Hebdige \(1995\)](#) that revolve around subcultural groups. Then come the postmodernists who base their analysis on the idea that culture is becoming progressively fragmented whereas the symbolic is increasingly more significant. For instance, [Baudrillard \(1988\)](#) states that we become what we buy since we consume signs that have no fixed referent, rejecting the idea that consumption is what we need and consumers are manipulated. However, Baudrillard’s point of view is facing criticism. One main disagreement is that his studies has often concentrated on ‘youth’ and lifestyle when researched with identity. Yet, identity is less flexible and cannot be easily altered by just purchasing goods that also have materiality. A counter-argument to that is even material objects may be looked at differently by people since individuals have their own interpretations and associate meanings to material objects.

Those meanings may change, evolve, become less or more important. Therefore, I argue that describing the lived experiences of individuals would reveal the meanings and values they construct as part of their identity,

In an attempt to define 'everyday life', Mackay (1997) states that it is a complex term and it may mean different things. However, he argues that it can lie at the heart of cultural studies as a concept with culture conceived as ordinary since it is what we all do and take part in regardless of "status". Ordinary as in the processes that we undertake in order to make meaning and sense of the world especially concerning the unpredictable, the improvised, and the routine actions in daily lives. Fiske (2010) argues that 'popular culture' is not made by the culture industry, but by the people themselves. Within this perspective, "ordinary" people construct their culture through consumption in order to communicate their identities in everyday life. I see that 'ordinary' people construct their identities through relatively routinized consumption rituals that their meanings need to be explored.

To serve the purpose of his book, Miller and Miller (2005) refers to 'consumer culture' as the cultural habits of interpretation which are consequence of the consumption of commodified cultural objects. He distinguishes it from two terms. 'Consumer society' which refers to societies that consumption plays a significant role in setting social solidarity and identity, and 'consumerism' which he sees as the most general term that denotes to high level of consumption in developed capitalist societies. Miller continues to mention that consumer culture comes alongside an explosion in literacy, and aided by advancement in technologies. Masses are not only involved in consuming culture but also in producing and sharing it. However, according to him, this consumer culture inspires shallow dealings with religious traditions and their elements. He argues that this is due to masses being trained to engage symbols, practices, and beliefs as abstract commodities which are readily detachable from their original or traditional contexts. That is, not necessarily because the popular culture production or objects are shallow, but because the members treat them as such due to commodification. His argument reflects the postmodern perspective where people consume different element from various cultures which assumes the 'cosmopolitan' identity similar to

4.1. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)

The link between consumption and culture is emphasized by Arnould and Thompson (2005) following their investigation of numerous papers regarding the matter. They coin the interdisciplinary research tradition as CCT to analyse the ever-changing relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings. CCT researchers commonly study cultural complexity. This theory views culture as the diverse spreading of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that are located within the wider socio-historic frame of globalization. It entails that markets mediate between the lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which social arrangement depend on; as opposes to the traditional view which entails a fairly similar system of shared meaning, morals and values, and way of life shared by members of a society. Arnould and Thompson (2005) CCT takes culture as 'the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action' similar to Geertz (1973) outlook. Consumer culture puts consumers within a frame of possible actions, feelings, and thoughts making specific behaviour more probable over others that are shaped by historical forces like narratives and myths.

Arnould and Thompson start their paper stating that CCT theorists (1) do *not* study particular contexts as ends in themselves, however, they study in consumption contexts in order to produce new constructs making the field essential, (2) embrace methodological pluralism, and (3) their theories would be relevant in many fields such as social science, managerial, and public policy debunking the 'myth' of irrelevance.

CCT looks into the ways that consumers transform symbolic meanings in commerce to manifest their personal and social settings and further their identity and lifestyle. Kozinets (2001) argues that societies attempt to make collective sense of the environment and guide its members with commercially produced objects, texts and images.

In CCT, four research programs of sociocultural processes and structures are identified: A) *consumer identity projects* entailing that people use marketplace as a source for mythic and symbolic resources to construct narratives

of identity; B) *marketplace cultures* which sees consumers as culture producers. This was built on Maffesoli (1995) ideas on neotribalism to counter the isolation of individualism; C) *the sociohistoric patterning of consumption* that looks into the institutional and social structures and belief systems which influence consumption. This makes consumers as enactors of social roles and positions as seen in Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim (1993) research. Arnould and Thompson offer the example of postassimilationist consumer research suggesting hypercultural. It is where original culture is socially reconstructed as a consumable such as food or costume to assert identity in the era of fluidity e.g. Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard (2005) and Oswald (1999) or post-modernity e.g. Harvey (1989) and D) *mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies* suggesting that CCT discusses the systems of meaning, thoughts and actions of consumers' that defend dominant interest in society. Consumer ideology is influenced by media messages e.g. Hirschman (1993) which makes consumers to be seen as interpretive agents.

CCT research studies the impact of economic and cultural globalization on the macro level while they explore cultural production systems on the meso level. It offers a constant reminder that consumption is historically formed mode of sociocultural practice within a context of ideological and structures of dynamic marketplaces. It mainly studies cultural meanings, social dynamics, and sociohistoric influences on consumers' lives.

Joy and Li (2012) offer a review of the literature that CCT encompasses. The authors show how consumption has been more recently studied in various cultural contexts and in numerous disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, critical studies, media studies, and feminist studies. CCT basically bridges the gap between consumer behaviour and cultures.

5. CONCLUSION: APPLICATION TO SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

In this paper, I have shown that consumer behaviour is no longer exclusive to marketing. The interdisciplinary nature of the concept has been applied to various social sciences. Moreover, I have reviewed the developments in literature that connect consumer behaviour with the fields of sociology and cultures. In this section, I will discuss the prospects of utilizing consumer behaviour theory to the field of sociology of culture specifically.

Bauman (2013) develops the argument that culture is the process of identification and differentiation produced through distinction which makes consuming is to articulate a sense of identity that indicates one's membership to a particular culture. Previous literature proves that consumer behaviour constructs identities and cultures. Hence, one can draw the ways members of a culture may express their identities and values through their consumption behaviour. There is a lacuna in the scholarship of cultural expression and construction using consumer behaviour and CCT. One of the most prominent works is Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) paper that discusses the consumption rituals during Thanksgiving as Americans express their cultural values through abundant consumption and I believe that more similar research may be conducted using the theory.

Cultures and sociological topics could be studied using similar methodology to Wallendorf and Arnould (1991) work of qualitative methods to develop ethnography. Hence, ethnographers would offer descriptions of different cultures. This allows the discovery and investigation of sociological issues within a culture and cross-cultural analysis as well. Through studying the consumer behaviour within a given culture, a researcher may discover the general practices and traditions of it, its rituals, its holidays and celebrations, the interaction between its members and kinship, its relationship with other cultures, the meanings and symbolism within it, its values that consumption constructs, the extent to which religion influences it, the experiences and perceptions of its members, the ways its members construct their identities and mark differences, the patterns of organization with social institutions, the cultural change throughout time, its artefact and arts, and explain a social phenomenon through cultural sociology within.

This opens the door for comparative studies as well. De Mooij and Hofstede (2010) argues that the integration of culture into consumer behaviour theories is a must and ideally for the theories to be developed within each culture and nation. She uses the definitions of Geertz (1973) and Hofstede (2009) in order to outline and analyse

cultures and values. She argues that comparing sub-groups within a nation can develop different results than when comparing nations. Despite the fact that her work is more marketing oriented, however, I believe that this concept is suitable for research within the sociology of culture and cultural sociology. Different sub-groups and even online and virtual communities' cultures and values can be researched through looking at their consumption behaviour.

Comparative studies can be conducted between two different nations and/or cultures using consumer behaviour. Similar research can be performed between two cultures within the same nation, and even between members of the same culture. This applies to researching minorities within societies. The consumption behaviour of a minority group in a society can reveal the type of interaction with the majority. Additionally, a hot topic within sociology nowadays is immigration. Consumer behaviour and CCT can be the base to study the acculturation strategies of different immigrants. This paper does not deny the existing of such literature e.g. [Penaloza \(1989\)](#), however, it argues that the possibilities are virtually infinite when it comes to research within sociology of culture and/or cultural sociology using consumption behaviour theories.

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