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**CONSUMPTION: SOCIOLOGICAL-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND  
CONCEPTUALIZATION**

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*У статті здійснюється аналіз соціологічного дискурсу проблем споживання. Акцентується увага на історико-соціологічному аналізі проблематики споживання. Представлені основні філософські та соціологічні теорії, в яких фокусується увага на проблематиці споживання: розглянуто положення щодо споживання і його зв'язку з виробництвом у теорії Карла Маркса, а також його концепцію «товарного фетишизму»; проаналізовано ідеї Торстейна Веблена про «дозвільний клас» і його спосіб споживання («дозвільне споживання»); теорію Георга Зіммеля про моду та її зв'язку з індивідом і класом; концепцію Еріха Фромма про «модус володіння» та «модус буття»; ідеї Жана Бодрійяра про суспільство споживання. Визначено евристичні можливості застосування проаналізованих теорій до аналізу українських соціокультурних реалій.*

**Ключові слова:** споживання, суспільство загального добробуту, Карл Маркс, Торстейн Веблен, Георг Зіммель, Еріх Фромм, Жан Бодрійяр

*В статье осуществляется анализ социологического дискурса проблем потребления. Акцентируется внимание на историко-социологическом анализе проблематики потребления. Представлены основные философские и социологические теории, в которых фокусируется внимание на проблематике потребления: рассмотрены положения о потреблении и его связи с производством в теории Карла Маркса, а также его концепция «товарного фетишизма»; проанализированы идеи Торстена Веблена о «праздном классе» и его способе потребления («праздное потребление»); теория Георга Зиммеля о моде и ее связи с индивидом и классом; концепция Эриха Фромма о «модусе владения» и «модусе бытия»; идеи Жана Бодрийяра об обществе потребления. Определены эвристические возможности применения проанализированных теорий к анализу украинских социокультурных реалий.*

**Ключевые слова:** потребление, общество всеобщего благосостояния, Карл Маркс, Торстейн Веблен, Георг Зиммель, Эрих Фромм, Жан Бодрийяр

*The article focuses on the analysis of consumption problems in the sociological discourse. The attention is focused on the historical and sociological analysis of the study of the problems of consumption. The basic theory, which focuses on consumer issues, sociologists and philosophers of different schools of thought. The paradigms are presented in the chronological order. The link between theoretical comprehension of consumption and contemporary situation in the current society is given.*

**Keywords:** consumption, welfare state, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel, Erich Fromm, Jean Baudrillard

Contemporary western societies praise consumption, viewing it not just as a simple act of satisfying one's needs, but as a way of exerting power (a good example here is the concept of so-called «ethical consumption»). We can observe this tendency in most of the countries influenced by Western Civilization. The prominence of consumption became possible because of establishment of Consumer Society. Many researchers think that Western countries are close to building the welfare state. It's imperative that this notion of ideal society implies a democratic free-market state, although with social-oriented economy that could eliminate the abyss between the access to resources of the rich and the poor. But only History can tell how close we were to establishing this society.

We can't overlook the fact that contemporary consumer society manifests similar values. The variety of goods and services rises exponentially and the ones that preach apologetics don't miss the opportunity to assert themselves saying that we are on the brink of reaching the ideal welfare state. Obviously, these statements imply

only developed countries, but seeing the overall trend in the developing countries and the countries of «the third world» of following the example of the West, we can safely claim about the global tendency of this idea. But do we really have the right to claim we are close to establishing this kind of society and adopt this model?

This difficult question is significant in the eyes of the social sciences of today. This is why analyzing consumption and consumerism in contemporary society is of an utmost importance in the sociological discourse. We can say that our goal is to analyze not just the phenomena itself, but also the ways to approach it (in our case we are talking about the problem of consumption).

Consumption as the social phenomenon went through series of transformations dictated by time and social system. That's why we need the historical and sociological analysis of consumption that will take place in this article. Only considering the main points of researching consumption we can find the required conceptual and methodological base that will allow us to further the analysis of contemporary mode of consumption to its ultimate degree.

The goal of this article is to conduct a historical and sociological analysis of consumption and reveal the main aspects of its research in the sociological discourse. In this article we aim to analyze consumption tendencies in the Ukrainian society and to dwell on researching it using classical theories.

One cannot truly analyze consumption and the way it manifests itself in the contemporary world without analyzing the insights made by Karl Marx. For Marx, consumption and production are connected by the inseparable dialectical bond: production is also consumption in the sense that while producing something you are also consuming. I.e., the production of a chair means consumption of wood, saw and time needed to produce a chair. On the other hand, for example, consumption of food is the production of one's body.

In Marx's view, the product can actualize only through consumption. It means, for example, that a pillow becomes a pillow only if one sleeps on it. On the other hand, the particular character of production influences consumption. «Hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of bands, nails and teeth» [1] - Marx concludes. Even the need itself is produced by production. Different commodities are consumed by different people and require a particular type of character, taste, etc. of the subject of consumption, which are too produced by a particular way of production.

Understanding the Marxian view of consumption means the need to understand the concept of commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is a particular form of ideology which function is to obscure any objective relations of labour and exploitation behind the production of any particular commodity. It hides these relations under the quasi-religious notions of commodity acting in the human or even god-like manner (hence, fetishism). For example, notions such as «gold is expensive», etc. do not have any basis in objective reality but are accepted at face value. Therefore, the Marx writes: «[T]he existence of the things qua commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things» [1]. And there are a lot of glaring examples of this phenomenon in the contemporary world. As a matter of fact, we can recall occasions when Chinese factories owned by Apple were producing both official iPhones and «fake» iPhones. And while objectively they were the same, they still managed to cost differently, which can be explained by commodity fetishism.

While Marx examined this problem through the lens of political economy, Thorstein Veblen was one of the first theoreticians to conduct the deep analysis of consumption (although like Marx in the context of wider problematics). In «The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions» (1899) he analyses historical development of what he calls «leisure class» and claims that the leisure class emerges along with private property. The transition between emergence of property in the hands of groups and individuals from the mode of seizure to the mode of organization of production leads to appearance of the leisure class. Its members completely leave the sphere of productive activity, which becomes marginalized and viewed as a task of the lower strata, when the leisure class completely focuses on what Veblen calls «conspicuous consumption». Conspicuous consumption is needed to increase symbolic distance between lower classes and the leisure class, which is manifested through consumption of unjustifiably expensive commodities [2]. Veblen's theory reveals the essence of all of processes connected with the leisure class, but we need to clarify another important aspect. It was Veblen who was one of the first sociologists to research the social nature of consumption and brought this problem as one of big importance for sociology.

Veblen agreed with Marx about the problem of allocation of the means of production (which are completely under the ruling class' control), but he rejected the idea about proletariat being the moving force of the revolution. He evaluates that the workers can only imitate the ruling class, which he accessed during the conceptualization of the «leisure class» theory. It's interesting to note similar concept in Baudrillard's work, who while referencing Foucault, says that proletariat needs to struggle to be included in society.

Another important figure in the discussion of consumption is Georg Simmel. Unlike Veblen, he viewed consumption not as something deriving from envy, but as a process that possesses a dual nature: on the one hand consumption shapes one's personality, on the other it's an instrument to emphasize it. In the context of analyzing consumption the most important of Simmel's insights were provided by his theory of fashion. He saw the fashion as a phenomenon that provides a person with a taste for novelty, but also as something that «embod[ies] our capacity and necessity of bringing' us closer to things by placing them at a distance from us»[3].

For Simmel, fashion is inherently based on the hierarchical structure of society. In it fashion fulfills its two main symbolic functions: union and segregation. Union signifies solidarity within the same class and segregation means exclusion of the undesirable groups. So fashion is instituted by the elite and when the lower classes try to imitate it in an effort of getting rid of the class divisions, the elite abandon it for the newer mode of fashion. Therefore, according to Simmel the very nature of fashion is immanently exclusive and fast-paced. And this idea still holds true even in our contemporary world. The cheapest smartphones look a lot like much more popular and expensive iPhones, poorly made clothes imitate the patterns of expensive ones (fur, skin, etc).

It's important to note, that the problem of consumption and exchange is heavily examined by Simmel in his «The Philosophy of Money», which is one of his most important works. Simmel tries to critically access to problem of money and money relations, although in the end, he arrives to debatable conclusions. On the one hand, he continues Marx's logic and talks about the problem of the cultural crisis. On the other hand, he sees money as a tool to equalize people, tearing him off from the social objectivity. Money allows everyone to break away from the surroundings [4].

We can include his first conclusion to the line of thought of Marx, Fromm and Baudrillard, but his second conclusion contradicts their ideas. Marx, Fromm and Baudrillard saw money (and consumption) as something destructive in relation to man.

Then we offer to dwell on the examination of consumption in the Erich Fromm's theory. Fromm was a native of Frankfurt school, which was built upon the ideas of critical comprehension of industrial society. Teaching of this school exerted a great influence upon his later science researches. In Fromm's judgement consumption contains contradiction, which is its main point. In this way consumption makes anxiety and uneasiness disappear, because no one has the power to take away things he or she possesses, but at the same time a person doesn't get pleasure anymore, so he or she has to return to the process of consumption.

Hence, personality is determined by what he or she consumes. Consumption is a key form of having in the industrial society, while the nature of such possession comes out of nature of private property. That's what «having» is made up (one of the key terms in the Fromm's theory, which he had deduced at the end of his science career in his work «To Have or to Be?»). This prevails in the industrial society.

Individual has to accumulate property, constantly buy and consume, so «having» displaces any other one, but the most important thing is that it ousts the «being», which ought to be the basis of human's life.

According to Erich Fromm, being as distinct from having is based upon solidarity, love, empathy and other significant and positive characteristics.

When talking about contemporary Ukrainian society, we can tell that Fromm's ideas are more then applicable. A Ukrainian still identifies via consumer society. Consumption of various political parties (it manifests in binary oppositions like patriot – separatist/european – soviet), cultural products (the elite - rednecks («bydlo»), brands, etc. Ukrainian society isn't unique in this regard.

So, if we want to understand Fromm's theory in fullest, we ought to realize that its pillar was Karl Marx's theory. It's not just the critical lense that he borrows from Marx, but a lot of important concepts. Despite Fromm's departure from ideas of Frankfurt school, he retains the loyalty to Marxism. The importance of Marxism to him manifests in his trials to clear the name of Marxism of various negative connotations and fallacious myths, which were intrinsic to academic, media and other discourses of his time. In 1961, he wrote «Marx's Concept of Man», in which he attacked contemporary myths about Marx and Marxism.

It's important to note that Fromm included psychoanalytical aspect into the examination of the problem of consumption (even in spite of the controversial nature of revisionist tendency of which he was a part) and gave us a possibility to see the influence of structural problem over a personality.

Another important figure in the history of analyzing consumption is Jean Baudrillard. In his book «Consumer society: Myths and structure» (1970) he criticizes the possibility of building welfare state. Baudrillard devotes a lot of attention to the problem of consumption, which makes it impossible to capture the range of all his ideas on the topic, but we can distinguish main points that he discovers in the process of analyzing consumer society of 60s-80s of XX century, which still hold up to this day.

First point that Baudrillard emphasizes in the course of his analysis is the problem of apparent abundance (which is the base of the welfare state) in the West. Contemporary society (despite having plenty of goods and services on the market) lives in a state of constant fear of realizing the limitation of natural resources. Apparent abundance creates a system built on the binary opposition: squander-poverty, in which squander (which is somewhat close to the concept of «conspicuous consumption» of Veblen) is the structural part of society and contrasts structural poverty. Although we can see gradual equalization of consumption of mass-produced goods, in cultural, informational and other aspects of consumption there is no equalization. One of the most apparent examples of this situation is the emergence of educational web-sites with provocative slogans like «Education for everybody». People that make such statements need to look up in the Internet (what an irony!), just how much of Earth's populace have access to the World Wide Web and think about their words and slogans.

Also Baudrillard confirms a prominent sociological idea about the differentiation of society through consumer practices. Though consumption people come closer (or move away) to certain social groups and therefore reproduce its hierarchical structure. In its turn, the social system encourages only that kind of needs that correlates with it. [3]

Jean Baudrillard was heavily influenced by Marx, but tried to critically access not just the society itself, but different concept used to describe it. In the same time, he even critically accessed the Marxist theory itself. The radical turn of «classical» Marxist questions that he makes in his «Symbolic exchange and death» is very important in his theory. In the book Baudrillard states that we firstly need to talk about the worker not in the terms of exploitation, but in terms of excommunication. According to Baudrillard, every struggle of every oppressed group in history was a struggle of subhumans against their position and the code of normality that legitimizes their situation.[7]

Baudrillard's works allow us to analyze both modern society, dazzled by antagonisms, and our conceptual tools that we use to look at it. His assessment of Marx, Freud, Foucault and others are still important and actual for the modern sociological and philosophical thought.

In the conclusion, we can say that our «desk research» can't be considered full. We examined only the main points of the theoretical frameworks of afforested sociologists and philosophers. It's apparent that they weren't the only ones who researched consumption as a social phenomenon. The ideas of the sociologists and philosophers we touched upon are still useful in analyzing contemporary mode of consumption. We can see the overall tendencies of a globalized consumer society manifesting itself in the context of contemporary Ukraine too. The importance of further research in the topic of consumption (especially in Ukraine) is self-evident, but if we aspire for a truly effective analysis it's imperative we consider all of existing theories of consumption to make a conceptual model that can answer unanswered questions.

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