



THE GROWTH OF THE CONSUMER- ORIENTED SOCIETY AND SOCIAL CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW

Dr. Navneet Saini* Dr. Kajal Sharma**

Dr. Navneet Saini* - Assistant Professor, Guru Nanak College Sri Muktsar Sahib

Dr. Kajal Sharma** - Research Scholar, Panjab University Chandigarh

Abstract

Consumer society is an unquestionably complex social construct. Although after decades of continual dominance, there are signs emerging that it is starting to falter, both as a durable and rational system of social organization and as a strategy for societal advancement. This article reviews the growth of the consumer-oriented society along the social change. Bringing together leading theories on social change, the article identifies and analyzes the change that have occurred in the contemporary society.

Keywords: Social Change, Consumption, Consumer, Malls, Society.

Introduction

The process of globalization and urbanization has led to social change, though there are varieties of reasons for social change to occur. There are also some theories which explain and define social change. Many sociological theorists have also mentioned the process of social change as Emile Durkheim believed evolution from a low degree of specialization to a high degree of specialization, from homogeneity to heterogeneity. Robert Redfield's Folk society corresponds to Durkheim's Mechanical solidarity and his urban society corresponds to Durkheim's Organic solidarity. The theorists believed that the second type of society has a high degree of specialization and heterogeneous division of labour. A German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies elaborated by contrasting between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft explaining the same social types mentioned by Durkheim and Redfield. They believed that society moves from simple to more complex form of society, from homogeneous towards heterogeneity, from small technology to high technology. Herbert Spencer has also categorized the progress of humankind from simple to compound, from small to large group. This shows how society is growing and progressing from the traditional to the modern, from homogeneity towards heterogeneity. As the values and thoughts of the society are changing, so their behaviour changes, particularly

the consumer behaviour. With the changing patterns of society, people's patterns of consumption are also changing. The old traditional bazaars or the kirana stores are dwindling as people are attracted more towards the malls. The traditional bazaars are becoming out of fashion and the new mall culture is in. They enjoy being there not just for shopping but for all the activities that these malls provide like the gaming zones, the movie theatres, and many other such activities that basically attracts the consumers. People love to spend their time just being in the malls, clicking pictures and uploading to the social media, purchasing the costly products, or the costly movie tickets from the malls just to show off is what Veblen's concept of Conspicuous consumption says. People are more brands conscious and especially foreign brands attract many and they make purchases accordingly. For Example; the opening of the new eating point at the Elante Mall of Chandigarh "Starbucks brew" is the center of attraction for all, no matter it is expensive or the taste of food, but the point is that people just want to make a visit and post it on the social media.

With the increase in the consumptions, the classical theorists engaged themselves to study the concept. Among the various approaches, an alternative approach was found to be studies, that is, the notion of time. This approach explains the consumer's problem that they face while making a purchase, where time come as a major factor to make purchases. Thus, with the changing times there resulted in a widening of distance between the two predominant activities called production and consumption. However, there could be seen a significant rise in the time spent in consumption and a decline in the time spent in labour. While making purchases, the consumers are purely engaged in the product and get alienated in the world of products, detaching themselves to the process of production. Hence, the consumer fails to imagine the labour behind the product, and focuses only on the product and becomes alienated from the process of production of the goods. Consumption is often portrayed as private and individualistic and is also seen as the catalyst in production of social differentiation through taste (Bourdieu 1984 reprinted in 1996; Veblen 1970 reprinted in 1992).

To conclude it can be said that consumption is external and coercive to the individual. It is the consumption that is consumed, the advertisements influence the consumer, but the consumer consumes the message, thereby consuming the consumption.

The "Frankfurt School" alludes to German-American scholars who developed an intense analysis of the changes in Western capitalist societies that occurred since the established of Marx. The Frankfurt school developed critical approach towards the cultural studies, political economy and communication studies. They develop the concept of 'cultural industry' that focused on the critical Cultural studies.

Theodor W Adorno's theory of Culture Industry. Adorno talks of instrumental rationality, where individual only focus on the target and the means to achieve it. Irrespective of the means, the individual just focuses on the goals. Consumption is now a popular culture, where the individual is manipulated to make consumptions. For instance, as technology improves the individual turns to the next best product to be purchased; this gives rise to the monopoly capitalism, where one controls the entire market. The individual work whole day long just to make consumptions which is also not their real demand of consumption, they purchase just for what Veblen calls conspicuous consumption. The Frankfurt school was one of the first to examine the rise of the consumer society. They also examined how culture industry was stabilizing the capitalist system and was

leading to the political revolution. The school particularly focused on the culture and technology, that how they were becoming the means of social control.

Herbert Marcuse in his “One dimensional man” argues that the ‘advanced industrial society’ made false needs, which incorporated people into the current arrangement of generation and utilization by means of advertisement, mass media, and contemporary methods of thought. Marcuse emphatically condemns consumerism, contending that it is a type of social control. The consumers at the malls purchases products which are not needed, the malls provide the discounts, sales which attract the consumers to buy that which they are not in a need. People work hard to purchase branded products or the new technology arrived in the market. These malls control their consumers by the glamorous discounts, forces them to make false need just to show off (especially through social media) and publicizing their new schemes to attract customers.

Erich Fromm, a German psychoanalyst says that an anxious person compensates his anxiety and depression by compulsive consumption. In an interview Fromm said, “It is a dreadfully dull form of non-existence. Boredom comes from the fact that man has become purely an instrument, that he cultivates no initiative, that he feels not responsible, that he feels like a cog in a machine that someone could replace with another at any time...he tries to compensate for it - through consumption” (theoreticalmusings, 2012).

The machines help individual to save their time but the time they save, they do not know what to do with it, which ultimately leads to depression and anxiety. The more anxious and depressed a person becomes, the more he consumes. The economy wants people to consume and purchase more and more products so that their economy is never ended and proliferate. The consumers, consume more to tackle their boredom and gets temporarily relief from their anxiety.

Pierre Bourdieu accentuates the predominance of social capital at an early stage by expressing that distinction in social capital marks the contrasts between the classes. The obtaining of social capital depends intensely on the learning, performed inside the family from the long periods of life. Like Weber, Bourdieu also felt that class and status to be related to the dimensions of life. He tried to relate culture and consumption, that is, how culture and consumption contribute to the proliferation of class system in the modern society. He contends that, in the primary, individuals acknowledge definitions that their elder offers and acquires them in their attitude. He took both education and occupation as criteria to make a difference in taste of the classes as upper, middle and the working class. He explains how education became a discriminating factor, as it helps in translation of high culture through knowledge. These two factors create a high social hierarchy. According to Bourdieu, tastes in food, are indicators of class since patterns in their utilization apparently relate with a person's fit in society. Bourdieu feels that food represents the flaunting way of life. These indicate the symbols that explain the social classes in the society. The thought is that their preferences should reflect those of their related class divisions. He was against the economic factor predominant for social order and change. He believed that these social and cultural capital transfers from generation to generation. Symbols and practices help individual to learn the attitudes they acquire and consume accordingly. To illustrate a class of an individual decides what type of food they will eat, lower class will eat the cheap food which is not even good for health,

but the higher class will order according to their learned attitudes of ordering food that makes them fit in the society.

Findings and Conclusion

The aim of the capitalist society has changed from production to consumption. Earlier the main focus were the forces of production and the relation of production, but with the frequent changes in the society and the emergence of advanced capitalist society, the focus has shifted from production towards more of consumption. Just as previously means of production were necessary, the same is with the means of consumption now. No matter they are sometimes detriment for the consumer, the means of consumption are necessary. They are a detriment in the sense that as fast food is not good for health, but for making consumption people are given more and more discounts and choices. Malls are made in a way that the aura of the malls attracts people to shop and make consumptions. The capitalists want the consumers to consume more that will make their economy stronger. For that many new discounts and schemes are also provided. As Baudrillard considers consumption as a kind of labor. Capitalists come up with the new ideas for the consumers to make consumptions, even for the product they do not want. Capitalists glorify and advertise the products in a way that the customers do not resist buying them. The process of consumption has also led to the simulated interaction, where the people just make the consumption, no authentic interaction takes place. These malls provide not the goods, as the goods could also be purchased from the local markets as well. These malls provide the aura, the environment which attracts people to come to the malls and make purchases, it adds up to their social media that they have been to such a mall which adds up in their media feed. The food courts, the movie theatres, the clubs are the most populated area of the mall. The new means of consumption in the postmodern society is the media and the new technology. The credit cards provide us to buy as many products as we wish, leading to impulsive purchases. These all provide the capitalist to add up in their economy (Ritzer. 1998).

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