



CONSUMPTION, CONSUMER CULTURE AND CONSUMER SOCIETY

Aytekin FIRAT¹
Kemal Y. KUTUCUOĞLU²
Işıl ARIKAN SALTİK³
Özgür TUNÇEL⁴

Abstract. *This paper mainly deals with the concepts and issues surrounding the contemporary notion of consumption. Consumption is a complex social phenomenon in which people consume goods or services for reasons beyond their basic use-value. Conspicuous Consumption, Symbolic Consumption, Addictive Consumption, Compulsive Consumption and Sacred Consumption are five main categories defining distinctive consumption styles. Basic characteristics of consumer culture can be summarized in the transforming of needs to desires, utilitarian/bedonic needs-values, commodity fetishism, conspicuous leisure and consumption, cultural values, aestheticization, alienation, differentiation and speed. A consumer society is one in which the entire society is organized around the consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity, and standing. The paper explores the main factors fueling the engine of consumer society that has over the past few decades gained a global perspective.*

Keywords: *Consumption, Global Consumer Culture, Consumer Society, Consumerism*

1. Introduction

The concept of consumer society has recently gained a global perspective. This study domain attracts researchers from several disciplines such as marketing

¹ PhD, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Institute of Social Sciences, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey. E-mail: aytekinfirat@mu.edu.tr.

² PhD Candidate, Institute of Social Sciences, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey. E-mail: kemalyuce@mu.edu.tr

³ PhD Candidate, Institute of Social Sciences, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey. E-mail: isilas@mu.edu.tr

⁴ PhD Candidate, Institute of Social Sciences, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey. E-mail: ozgur.tuncel@hotmail.com

research and sociology. Understanding the ingredients and drivers of global consumer culture is key to gaining insight regarding consumer behavior, societal dynamics and relevant organizational aspects and revealing what makes consumers respond invariably to the forces driving the engine of consumption. Therefore, the implicit interrelationship between the concepts of consumption, consumer culture and consumer society merits further investigation. In doing so this paper aims to contribute to the relevant literature in the area by adding to the body of existing knowledge. The discussion in this paper is analytic in the sense that factors are discussed not only in relation to the big picture of global consumer culture but also keeping in mind the likely liaison among the factors. Firstly, the paper looks at the concept of consumption with perspectives from different consumption styles. Having reviewed the consumer culture, the paper then delves into the dynamics of consumer society and consumerism.

2. The Concept of Consumption

In the most general sense, consumption means satisfying needs. As it is, the concept of needs must be defined. A need seems compulsory for existence because when a need is fulfilled it provides pleasure, and otherwise it gives pain (Dolu, 1993:21). Consumption has social and economic associations also connected to time and space, depending on demands such as needs, wants and desires; goods, services and money or some value substituting money that are necessary for fulfilling demands (Orçan, 2008: 23).

Williams indicates that the very old-dated meaning of consumption is to destroy, spend and waste (Featherstone, 1996). The non-self-sufficient human being has various physiological, psychological, social and cultural needs. All activities towards meeting any of these needs could be stated as consumption. Apart from this definition, it is also possible to use the concept of consumption for some other values that are spent even without a real need. Consequently, consumption could be defined as spending tangible and intangible values that are ventured to meet some demand, whether real or fake (Torlak, 2000: 17).

According to another view, consumption, which is formed by the purchasing decision of consumers, is a process that combines behaviors in order to utilize economic goods. In order to define the concept of consumption, the final aim of economic activities, Ritzer (2003: 12 – 19) follows Marx's description classifying consumption goods as subsistence and luxury. Ritzer claims that consumption tools enable people to obtain goods and services and also exploits people by keeping them under control. In simple terms, consumption means to have a good or a service, to own it, to use or to dispose it in order to satisfy particular needs.

Consumption concept is also defined as the ideology of today's world and is criticized both negatively and positively like all ideologies. The ideology is based on a wealthier life as a consequence of more production and more consumption, and it is considered a factor that restricts people's freedom, makes people dependent on others, and alienates them (Odabaşı, 1999: 4).

Contrary to the views of economists that see consumption as an activity to meet a need and to gain benefits, Jean Baudrillard (1998: 95) regards consumption as a desire to any goods to remove usefulness and refers its as an indication system rather than meeting the needs. Consumption is an interpretation and communication process in addition to a tool for people to position themselves. When we consider consumption within the logic of an unequal spread of wealth instead of individuals owning goods and services for their use-value only we find:

- Interpretation and communication processes based on a code that records consumption activities and makes them meaningful.
- Social classification and differentiation processes in which objects are defined as not only sense-making differences but also values about status.

In early times when the concept of consumption was first put forward, consumption emerged among human beings as natural and simple; however, as time went by consumption moved away from the satisfaction of needs and gained a structure that defines social status. In fact, consumption is a must for social welfare, and competition is an efficient tool for maximization of social welfare. In this context, it is impossible to separate consumption and consumption society from competition process and competition culture. Therefore, the principle of consumption maximization corresponds with competition culture. However, these principles are based on the rational consumer, and exclude hedonism, conspicuous consumption, consumption of counterfeit goods, and word of mouth consumption. Moreover, modern approach emphasizes more frequently that creativity and productivity are connected with the consumption.. As a result of proliferations of hedonism, conspicuous consumption, consumption of counterfeit goods or word of mouth consumption, the phenomenon of consumption frenzy is occurred. Consumption increases, but there is no increase in satisfaction causing unlimited consumption. In a circumstance where consumption is unlimited, competition wakes consumption frenzy up (Rekabet Kurumu, March 2012, [Online] at <http://www.rekabet.gov.tr/index.php?Sayfa=sayfahtml&Id=765>, accessed March 31, 2012). Thusly the concept of consumption comprises of more than a sole style.

3. Styles of Consumption

The concepts of production and labor at work are of primary importance in the early phases of industrialization, and gradually the concepts of consumption, consumer, consumption society and leisure time have taken over. The social structure that is built around production and work has been replaced with a new capitalist social system largely based on consumption and leisure time. Since the mass consumption of mass production became a problem, the concept of leisure time occurred with a new meaning, namely consumption time. Previously leisure time meant freedom, naturalism, optional choice deepness of thought; however, after the above mentioned transformation it started to mean a new tool to reach consecrated and approved life purposes of capitalism such as consumerism, artificial excitement, abetted desire, competitiveness, pretentiousness etc. Leisure time industry became an important actor of capitalism by marketing the importance of itself and meanwhile agitating the depressive trauma of society. For example, shopping centers, casinos, solariums, fitness centers, sport clubs etc. don't have authenticity and permanent meaning even though consumers participate in them. Since they have been organized by a fictional and commercial logic they can't create sense of satisfaction. Even leisure time industry seems to serve many alternatives, and they create similar senses, emphasizing that the "good life" means "good consumption" (Aytaç, 2006: 118). Each consumer assigns a different meaning to any product or service. Five styles of consumption are outlined in following text.

Conspicuous Consumption:

People satisfy their basic physiological (food & beverage & housing) and security needs by consuming products and services. However, in any society there are some people who would like to impress others by consuming and splashing out. Sometimes the priority of splashing out may be more than basic physiological and security needs. This style of consumption is called as *conspicuous consumption* (Can Aktan, The Virtual Library on Social Sciences, [Online] at <http://www.canaktan.org/ekonomi/ekonomik-hastaliklar/hastaliklar/gosteris-tuketim.htm> accessed on March, 30, 2012). The concept of conspicuous consumption was firstly analyzed by American sociologist and economist Thorstein Veblen in his study "The Theory of Leisure Class" at the end of 19 century. According to Veblen, the first generation that became rich in the industrialization era kept on living a modest life while the second and third generations start to consume instead of produce. The most important issue in this concept is that consumerism shows financial power, status, and class in the society while making others jealous. People endeavor to make up differences in status by performing consumption

styles of groups of higher status. People also keep on conspicuously consuming in order to be at the forefront in their current group. Veblen also assumes that the motive behind the human behavior is imitating others and that wealth grants honour (Solomon, 2006: 474).

In societies, reputation is based on wealth, and the proof of power is to have a rich life. Conspicuous Consumption occurs not only among the upper classes but also among the lowest and the poorest classes (Çınar and Çubukcu, 2009: 284). In modern societies, the most common aim of Conspicuous Consumption is to ensure status and increase prestige (Şahin, 1992: 42)

Symbolic Consumption

The distinctive feature of humans that other species probably don't have is the primary need that prompts his/her objectives, ambitious fantasies, value awareness and absurd thrills, all of which are clearly unattached from biological basis. Symbolization needs and the function of symbol creation exist among primary human activities such as eating, looking, moving...etc. and are basic, human-specific needs. Symbolic Consumption comprises of evaluation of products based on their symbolic values, purchase and consumption. People would like to specify characteristics of their needs and desires or communicate via consumption. These are the symbolic aspects of products that are called extensive self or symbolic self-completion. Consumption has a symbolic aspect and consumers would like to convey something about themselves by benefitting from symbolic aspects of consumption. Products and services act as a symbolic objects and represent what the consumer can be and what the consumer cannot be without these objects (Odabaşı, 1999: 69). For example, through a sports car or casual clothes people may broadcast the message of the importance of their freedom and individualism.

Consumption of symbolic meanings of products is a social process that makes basic cultural classes visible and stable. In other words, luxury products are not consumed physically, and core products become of secondary importance; image is consumed instead. These kinds of products are viewed as a reflector of social class or life style. Thus, for the elite consumption choices become a reason for being. In fact, consumption is an important element to participate in social life and improve social relations. According to Veblen, there are two different motives in luxury consumption. One of them is to reflect one's own image to other members of elite, and the second is to differ from the others from low-classes.

Addictive Consumption

Consumption addiction means to be addicted to products or services as psychological or physiological dependence, such as alcohol, drug, nicotine...etc. Even though addiction generally associates to drugs, in fact it includes any kind of products or services that are consumed in order to overcome problems or satisfy a need with extreme value. Another important issue in this topic is internet addiction which is increasingly widespread. Since some internet addicted people give importance to their virtual lives more than their real lives, this type of addiction becomes increasingly harmful (Solomon, 2006: 29).

Compulsive Consumption

There are some consumers who were born for shopping and they feel compelled to do shopping. Compulsive consumption points out a kind of repeating and over-consumption that occurs due to anxiety, depression and boredom of consumers. Shopaholics lean on overconsumption in the same way that addicted people lean to alcohol or drugs. For example, a woman who has forcing consumption disorder may buy 2000 hairgrips but will never use any of them. According to reports of therapists, four times more women than men are diagnosed with forcing consumption. While men trend towards buying equipment, vehicles or guns in order to get the sense of power, women prefer to buy cosmetics and clothes in order to improve interpersonal relations. Both women and men may not control themselves when they are over-consuming like other addicted people. These people find it especially difficult to control their consumption of products such as alcohol, cigarettes, chocolate and diet coke. Three main elements of negative consumer behavior are as follows: 1) behavior is not by choice, 2) pleasure occurs due to shortness of behavior duration, 3) people experience sense of regret or culpableness after consuming (Solomon, 2006: 30).

Sacred Consumption

Generally consumer activities tend to create binary opposition such as good-bad, woman-man. One of the important binary opposition in consumer activities is sacred and non-sacred consumption. The distinctive feature of sacred consumption is to contain products and services which are served with some degree of respect and awe. Sacred consumption may be related to religious beliefs or not, but most probably people tend to respect holy elements and events as sacred. Sacred consumption has mixed with consumer experience. Sacred places, sacred people and sacred events are created from the non-sacred world and are filled with sanctity. For example, theme parks are a new style of mass produced fantasy that assume sanctity in all respects. Disneyland especially is a pilgrimage

destination for consumers all over the world. Many consumption activities are presented in a spirit of sanctity in order to sanctify the consumption. Thus, sacralization normalizes the activity of spending money and helps to complete the process of consecration (Solomon, 2006: 558 – 559).

4. Consumer Culture

Culture, as Williams pointed out in 1958, “is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language”. The complications arise because the concept has evolved differently in different European languages and in different disciplines. The word derives from the Latin “*colere*”, which had various meanings, including to cultivate, protect, inhabit and honor with worship. Williams noted that some of these meanings dropped away although they remain linked through derived nouns such as cult, for honor with worship and colony for inhabit. The Latin noun *cultura* evolved and its main meaning was cultivation in the sense of husbandry. Much later after it passed into English early in 15th century, it came also to include cultivation of the mind. Williams argued that the noun culture began, in the mid-19th century, to develop as an abstract concept, away from the specific cultivation of something, and this is where the complications were compounded. In French, culture started to become linked with civilization, and in German *Kultur* (which evolved from *Cultur* in the 19th century) was a synonym for civilization (Harvey and Stensaker, 2008: 427).

Culture is a complex and abstract construct that consists of various implicit and explicit elements (Groeschl and Doherty, 2000), that makes it difficult for academics across disciplines to agree on a common description. Over 200 descriptions of culture have been found; however, the most broadly known and used definition in marketing literature is the one specified systematically by Taylor in 1881, who defined culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals and law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Lindridge and Dibb, 2003). Furthermore, culture has been defined as the collective mental programming of the people in an environment by Hofstede. Hofstede uses the term “software to mind” based on an analogy to computers that are programmed by software. Since this mind software is rooted in a person’s social environment, obviously this software varies from one environment to another. He clearly expresses his point by saying that: “cultures are to society what personality is to individuals” Consequently, some common aspects of “culture” found among the list of descriptions include that culture is learnt through social interactions, that culture is not genetic, that culture is shared by members of a specific society, and that culture is transmitted from generation to generation, (Hofstede, 1991).

Cultural influences on consumer behavior and consumption can be summarized in propensity to change (Sheth and Sethi, 1977), purchase behavior; post purchase behavior (Samli, 1995), why people buy products — function; form and meaning, specific products people buy, the structure of consumption, individual decision making and communication, (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1995) product acquisition and consumption behavior, adoption/diffusion of innovations, complaining/complimenting behavior, responses to advertising/marketing communication, responses to distributional aspects, responses to pricing aspects (Manrai and Manrai, 1996), and consumption characteristics: product versus service consumption in culture, cultural orientation, social class/ reference group influences, urban versus rural sector consumption patterns and disposal (Raju, 1995). Cultural factors (values and belief systems, communication and language systems, rituals, artifacts, symbols etc.) influence people's decision. In this way, it is understandable that culture has a strong impact on consumer behavior. (Craig and Douglas, 2005). There are many examples in regards to cultural impact on consumption. For instance, Americans like big and convenient cars, Japanese rather small and fuel efficient vehicles. In France, McDonalds adapted their famous menu to the French appetite by introducing smaller burgers.

Featherstone entitles three perspectives on consumer culture: The first one emphasizes the expansion of capitalist commodity production leading to the deployment of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary western societies. This situation is welcomed as enabling individual freedom and equality by some, while criticized by others as increasing the capacity for ideological manipulation. The second perspective underlines the satisfaction derived from goods related to their socially constructed meanings. Consumption functions as a source of status differentiation as people use goods and experiences to “create social bonds or distinctions”. The third perspective considers consumption as a source of fantasy and pleasure “celebrated in consumer cultural imagery and particular sites of consumption such as malls which generate direct physical excitement and aesthetic pleasure” (Featherstone, 1991; 1996).

Basic characteristics of consumer culture can be summarized in the transformation of needs to desires, utilitarian/hedonic needs-values, commodity fetishism, conspicuous leisure and consumption, cultural values, aestheticization, alienation, differentiation and speed.

Since the consumer does not give money for just any product or service, the consumer reflects some needs and desires in his/her purchase decision. Individual “needs” are influenced by both culture and personality. These needs are translated into “wants”, which coupled with purchasing power, become “demands” (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007). For Barthes “there is always a dual aspect to

consumption – that it fulfilled a need, as with food or clothing, but also conveyed and was embedded within, social, cultural symbols and structures.” One does not need to buy and own dresses, furniture items, any objects, but by thinking about them, dreaming about them, experiencing the spectacle presented with the display of images, shortly through the “idea of that practice”, one can get pleasure. Accordingly, the ideology of consumerism is not limited to those who can actually afford goods, but surrounds those who can dream about them, who can have access to that dream-world. Bocoock defines consumerism as: an active ideology in which the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences that spread through modern capitalism. This ideology of consumerism serves both to legitimate capitalism in the daily lives and everyday practices of many people in global world and motivate people to become consumers in fantasy as well as in reality. (Bocoock, 2005).

In hedonism, Epicurus theorizes that the most important human pursuit is pleasure. He claims that humans at a congenital level focus on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. Accordingly, value lies in the pursuit of pleasure (Ueda, Takenaka, Vancza and Monostori, 2009). According to Solomon’s model of “Motivation Process”, the consumer recognizes a need. This need may be utilitarian or it may be hedonic. Utilitarian needs imply that product utility having a useful function, quality and minimum cost for consumers. Hedonic needs are subjective and experiential; that is, consumers may rely on a product to meet their needs for excitement, aesthetic impression, the symbolic associations, self confidence, fantasy, and so on. Consequently, product may have two types of benefit at the same time for consumers (Solomon, 1996).

Mental connection of objects with meaning beyond their use-value that Marx conceptualized as commodity fetishism lies at the physical foundation of consumer culture. We purchase the meanings of objects rather than the objects themselves. Symbolic dimension of consumption has expanded to lower classes with the availability of mass-produced goods in which pursuit of pleasure is not limited to the upper classes. However, consumption does not bring equality since privileged groups find new ways for distinction, and stylistic distinction has become important. Therefore, the aestheticization of everyday life operates as a new distinction tool mostly in the form of cultivation of the self. On the consumer side, cultivation of the self means consuming cultural products as an artist’s experiencing himself. The claim of the artist for freedom to create without limitations brought a consequence on the modern consumer side as a claim for freedom to experience all artistically mediated experience (Marx, 2004).

Veblen had observed the American nouveau riches in the late nineteenth century as a new class imitating the aristocratic life-styles of the European upper classes.

These groups used consumption to differentiate themselves from other groups and constitute an identity. For Veblen, people used two ways to demonstrate their wealth: conspicuous leisure that is also part of lifestyle construction (such as wining and dining, jewelry design, driving an expensive car, adventure holidays) and conspicuous consumption. Furthermore, both conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure are indicators of social status and prestige. With the rise of the capitalist society the upper classes began to set the standards to which the rest of the society aspired. In this way, consumption patterns in society became more and more imitations of upper-class behavior. Veblen assumed that all classes want to emulate higher classes, rather than they might live according to different and competing principles (Veblen, 1994).

Holbrook defines consumer value as an “interactive relativistic preference experience”. The typology of consumer value framework categorizes eight obvious types of consumer value against three dimensions. Each cell correlates with an obvious type of consumption value: efficiency (input/output, convenience), excellence (quality), status (success, impression management), esteem (reputation, materialism, possessions), play (fun), aesthetics (beauty), ethics (virtue, justice, morality) and spirituality (faith, ecstasy, rapture, sacredness, magic). The three key dimensions of consumer value include: extrinsic versus intrinsic value; self-oriented versus other-oriented value and active versus reactive value. An example of a single product fulfilling multiple types of value is perhaps the purchase of a cashmere sweater. The sweater may be valued for its efficiency because it keeps the individuals warm. The sweater provides excellence value because it is made out of a high quality material, such as cashmere. The sweater may be valued for its status because the individual shows to others they are able to afford such a luxurious material. The sweater is valued for its aesthetics because it looks beautiful. Additionally, the sweater may be valued for its ethics because the individual believes they are supporting the economy by purchasing the sweater (Holbrook, 1999).

Featherstone divides the aestheticization of everyday life into three categories (Featherstone, 1991: 66-68): These are: the attempt to break the boundary between art and everyday life, the avant-garde and the surrealist movements. Thus, the boundaries between art and commodity are blurred. The realization of Featherstone’s blurry boundaries can be seen in advertising and popular media within consumer culture. The project of turning life into a work-of-art is the dandyism movement. This approach emphasizes personal affections, aesthetic enjoyment in life and new sensations. It is appropriated by postmodern theory, where ‘the criteria for the good life revolve around the desire to enlarge one’s self, the quest for new tastes and sensations.’ The concept of lifestyle is developed

through this approach; constructing one's life with the 'achievement of originality and superiority in dress, demeanor, personal habits and even furnishing', saturate everyday life with a rapid flow of signs and images in contemporary society. Featherstone cites from Haug: "Commercial manipulation of images through advertising, displays performances and spectacles of urban life which entails a constant reworking of desires through images. Thus consumerism confronts people with dream-images which speak to desires and aestheticize and de-realize reality".

Estrangement in the labor activity, writes Marx (2000) in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844, involves first "The relation of the worker to the product of labor as an alien object exercising power over him" The product that the worker creates is not his but is appropriated by the capitalist. This product stands opposed to him as capital. Second, 'labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; in his work, therefore he does not affirm himself but denies himself'. Man's powers and 'nature' are transformed into objects, into material creations. Labor, too, is transformed into a commodity because now it has exchange-value (wages) and becomes an abstraction measured by money (Thompson, 1979: 25). Consequently in the light of alienation, consumption increases the dependency to others, limits freedom and changes the meaning of happiness- prosperity.

The World's consumers are to be served by the same few global associations, the same fast-food restaurants, hotel chains, and clothing chains, wear the same jeans and shoes, drive similar cars, receive the same films, music and television exhibitions, live in the same kind of urban landscape and engage in the same kind of agriculture and industrial development schemes, while carrying the same personal, cultural, and spiritual values - a global monoculture (Cavanagh and Mander, 2002). The rise of a global culture doesn't mean that consumers share the same tastes or values. Rather, people in different nations, often with conflicting viewpoints, participate in a shared conversation, drawing upon shared symbols. One of the key symbols, in that conversation is the global brand (Holt, Quelch and Taylor, 2004: 70).

The culture construct is continuously evolving and the identification of the core of any specific culture is increasingly challenging. Furthermore, the boundaries between cultures are blurring and people are more than ever exposed to a variety of prominent cultural elements through human mobility and mass media. As a consequence, there is an appearance of new hybrid cultures integrating elements of different origins (Craig and Douglas, 2005). These changes in cultural comprehension are started by five global flows (Appadurai, 1990): (1) mediascapes, i.e. flows of images and communication, (2) ideoscapes, ie. Flows of political ideas

and ideologies, (3) ethnoscaples, ie. flows of tourists, migrants, students and delegated workers carrying with them their cultural heritage, (4) technoscaples, ie. flows of technology, (5) finanscaples, ie. flows of capital and money. These flows allow individuals from around the globe to input similar symbols and meanings into their daily lives. Mediascaples and ethnoscaples have been described as the fastest, the most far-reaching and the most influential global forces affecting today's societies and eliminating the barriers between them (Craig and Douglas, 2005).

Conventionally, culture has been characterized by its geographic properties; however, previously mentioned global flows have blurred culture's territorial boundaries. Consequently, cultural patterns and consumer behavior are no longer bound to a specific territory, but rather they interconnect across vast geographic areas. Craig and Douglas identified five outcomes (cultural interpenetration, de-territorialization, cultural contamination, cultural pluralism and cultural hybridization) that result from the abovementioned global flows (Craig and Douglas, 2005). For an example of cultural interpenetration, a large number of Turkish immigrants, who moved to Germany and the Netherlands, retained a strong ethnic identity, produced a significant demand for their ethnic food, opened restaurants, and exposed the mainstream population to the "doner kebab", which quickly became incorporated into the German and Dutch eating habits.

As a consequence, the globalization phenomenon is today creating a global culture that consists of many "subcultures". Worldwide consumers are familiar with many international brand names nowadays in different industries such as McDonald's, Hugo Boss, Nike, Ikea, and so on; however, each consumer behaves differently from another because of different acculturation levels of the individuals belonging to each "subculture". Acculturation to the global consumer culture (GCC) relates to "how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviors that are characteristic of a nascent and de-territorialized global consumer culture" It is a multifaceted construct composed of the following seven dimensions (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007): (1) exposure to and use of the English language (for instance; reading many of the books in English, watching English language TV, carrying on conversations in the English language) (2) exposure to global and foreign mass media (for example watching American/European/Asian films, favorite actors/actresses are from the America, listening American music) (3) exposure to marketing activities of multinational corporations (for instance many of the TV commercials are placed by international or foreign companies; there are many billboards and advertising signs for foreign and global products) (4) social interactions (travel, migration, and contact with foreigners), (5) cosmopolitanism (for example exchanging ideas with people from other cultures

or countries) (6) openness to a desire to participate in the GCC (a person's lifestyle is almost the same as that of people of this person's age group and social class in other countries) and (7) self-identification with the GCC (Advertising by foreign or global brands has a strong influence on people's clothing choices).

5. Consumer Society and Consumerism

The first section of this article has attempted to explain what the concept of consumption has become to mean to people who currently consume goods or services for reasons beyond their basic utilization value. Clearly the global consuming culture, elements of which have been examined in the previous section, is a driving factor behind such a transformation. Societies are groups of people who share identical cultures or cultural elements. Global consumer culture implies a society that transcends national borders and that has certain behavioral patterns. The similarity of the patterns is due to the members' inclination to respond invariably to the forces driving the engine of consumption.

In its simplest form, a consumer society is one in which for Baudrillard (1998) the entire society is organized around the consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity, and standing. Similar to the Veblen's notion of "conspicuous consumption" (1994), Baudrillard (1998) claims commodities are not merely characterized by use-value and exchange value, as in Marx's theory of the commodity, but also in sign-value - the expression and mark of style, prestige, luxury, power, and so on - that becomes an increasingly important part of the commodity and consumption. Just like words take meaning in a system of language, consumer society uses a system of signs to signify prestige and status.

Within consumer society, objects are used fast and disposed wastefully. Recently this rapid use and disposal has been largely associated with the corruption of values and thus often carries a negative meaning. (Penpece, 2006).

Baudrillard (1998) argues that the consumer society needs its objects in order to exist, and in a way, consumer society needs to destroy its objects. The difference between abundance and absence is the connection to wealth. Thus, it is in destruction that consumption gains its meaning. Baudrillard (1998) believes consumption is merely an intermediate term between production and destruction.

Goodwin, Nelson, Ackerman and Weisskopf (2008), explains how consumer society can only make sense in its social context:

*"The modern consumer is not an isolated individual making purchases in a vacuum. Rather, we are all participants in a contemporary phenomenon that has been variously called a **consumerist***

culture and a consumer society. To say that some people have consumerist values or attitudes means that they always want to consume more, and that they find meaning and satisfaction in life, to a large extent, through the purchase of new consumer goods. Consumerism has emerged as part of a historical process that has created mass markets, industrialization, and cultural attitudes that ensure that rising incomes are used to purchase an ever-growing output."

It is clear from the above account that the origins of the consumer society are related to the historical evolution of society around the concept of production and the resulting form of society. The next section deals with the origins of the consumer society.

The Evolution of Consumer Society: From Mass Production to Mass Consumption

Just a few centuries ago before the Industrial Revolution consumption patterns were very different from those that exist today. People had limited time and other sources to spare for shopping for goods, particularly those produced far from home with the exception of a few elite who had long enjoyed higher consumption standards. Most clothing items and household possessions were expected to last a life time with repairs if needed, and there was neither social pressure nor another forcing mechanism driving people constantly to make new purchases. Then the Industrial Revolution drastically transformed production. Production levels in England soared significantly. In the early 19th century about two-thirds of the increased output was sold to other countries around the world. However, growth through expansion into foreign markets had its limits that required the rise in the domestic consumption. English patterns of consumption were changing and leading to a growing middle class and working class, allowing these classes to become consuming classes. Workers would no longer prefer to work just to earn their traditional weekly income and stop to enjoy more leisure; rather they would prefer longer hours to earn and spend more. The former attitude was not compatible with **mass production and mass consumption** (Goodwin, Nelson, Ackerman and Weisskopf, 2008).

As Akbulut (2006) puts it, consumption society came to the scene with the development of a capitalist economic system. Similar developments were taking place in the United States of America, and the epitome of these developments can be found in the 'Fordist' mass production and the policies trying convert **workers into consumers** by trying to make it easy for them to buy a car.

The period just after World War II saw a crisis when factories previously producing war-related goods started to produce consumer goods. Americans were made to believe that consumption was the solution for poverty and it would

generate a more equal society. Saving - the opposite of consumption- became associated with anti-patriotic behaviour. Americans were urged to spend, to buy, to consume and also to pay on credit. Mass consumption took off (<http://leaparis10.free.fr/l3s2/anglais/civilisation/civiusp2c1.pdf>).

Ekin (2010) argues this post-war crisis also marked the eradication of **Fordism**. The new era was called the **post-fordism** stage of capitalism or, as the prominent cultural theorist Frederick Jameson puts it, “**late capitalism**”. Consumption was replacing production as the dominant factor in the society. With new technology transforming the production methods and factories getting smaller, labour lost its primary production element.

There was only one minor obstacle in the way of these changing roles: western society was largely based on a Protestant work ethic that previously shaped the society around production and work. Bauman (1999) explains how the protestant ethic gave in to the aesthetics of consumption. Bauman (1999) discusses how the societal norms and certain roles within society have changed:

“The reason for calling that older type of modern society a ‘producer’ society was that it engaged its members primarily as producers; the way in which that society shaped up its members was dictated by the need to play this role and the norm society held up to its members was the ability and the willingness to play it. In its present late-modern, second-modern or post-modern stage, society engages its members –again primarily- in their capacity as consumers. The way present-day society shapes up its members is dictated first and foremost by the need to play the role of the consumer, and the norm our society holds up to its members is that of the ability and willingness to play it.”

Consumer society has recently gained a global perspective. Ger and Belk (1996) examine how the consumption patterns of the western society – or as they called ‘More Affluent Societies’ spread to the rest of the world – ‘to the Less Affluent Societies’. Ger and Belk (1996) find that rising consumer expectations and desires are fueled by global mass media, tourism, immigration, the export of popular culture, and the marketing activities of transnational firms. They also talk of four distinct but interrelated ways in which **global consumer culture has been conceptualized**. The first is in terms of the proliferation of transnational corporations producing and marketing consumer goods. The second one is the proliferation of global capitalism. The third perspective is that of global consumerism, or a globalized consumption ethic. Shopping and consumption desires infiltrate daily life such that the meaning of life is pursued, identity is formed, and relationships are shaped and maintained more and more in and by consumption. Individuals interpret happiness more and more exclusively in terms of their relative success in gaining access to high levels of consumption. The fourth perspective on global consumer culture is an extension of global consumerism to global consumption homogenization. Increasingly consumers

throughout the entire globe eat the same foods, listen to the same music, wear the same fashions, watch the same television programs and films, drive the same cars, dine in the same restaurants, and stay in the same hotels.

The Features of Consumer Society

The paper already touched on certain attributes of consumer society (CS). Following is a more comprehensive list of these features which was a blend of the views of McGregor Consulting Group (www.consultmcgregor.com), Ekin (2010), Çınar and Çubukçu (2009) and Baudrillard (1998):

- CS builds identities largely out of things
- Obey the 'consume now', do not postpone the desire.
- Economic growth depends on the consumption
- the key issues of enjoying life are consumption of goods and services
- to consume is the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success
- you are what you own and the more you own, the happier you will be
- in a consumer society, people use spending and materialism as a way to build a new ego or become a new person by buying products which support their self-image
- to keep the economic machine moving, people have to be dissatisfied with what they have; hence, who they are
- in a consumer society, consumption must be organized so production can continue
- the demand for consumer goods has to be sustained and accelerated or the consumer society cannot survive
- widespread lack of moral discipline; glorification of greed and material accumulation
- everybody is a walking advertisement
- things have symbolic meanings
- social space is reorganized around leisure and consumption as central social pursuits and as bases for social relationships

- mainstream economics believes that marketplaces are abstract, stripped of culture (except the culture of consumption), of social relations and of any social-historical context
- a tension exists because the isolated, personal, private moment of consumption (purchase, use and enjoy), work within the home and cultural endeavours are seen by those engaged in them as private when they are actually inherently tied to global economic and political processes
- commercialization of leisure and mechanization of the home (free up time and energy to shop and provide more things to buy)
- consumer choices (taste and style) are seen to be indicators of who they are as a person and of their moves within the games of class, prestige, status, hierarchy, fashionability
- consumer culture at worst as an entity that manipulates its citizens (mass deception) or at best as a resource for their creativity and needs
- CS is the religion of the market (a system of beliefs) co-opts aspects of our humanity and spirituality
- in CS, people eventually begin to think that things are in disorder, priorities are mixed up, moral center is being lost - so they spend more to cover up the fear
- loss of cultural diversity via cultural homogenization
- a consumer society is based on round the clock in CS,
- all problems have a material or money solution

It appears that altogether the very spirit of consumer society dictates that consumers are beings living in a material world. Consumers are encouraged to use their purchasing power to exercise their freedom and choose from a variety of goods to make their life more meaningful. Consumers' sovereignty is presupposed. This freedom is not attributed to their civil rights but comes from the ability to make personal choices in the market that let them identify themselves. At this point the sovereignty of the king or queen becomes irrelevant in comparison to that of the consumer in the market (Gay, 1996: 76).

Another defining characteristic of consumer society is that consumption became the ultimate goal rather than being a means to fulfilling of the needs. Aslan (1996: 14) notes that nowadays people spend their weekends and holidays at shopping malls instead of going for picnic or walking leisurely in a park. They purchase regardless of their need. People go to shopping malls as a family to spend their leisurely time and relax.

In consumer society, there appears to be organized mechanisms manipulating peoples' desires and needs. In line with this Bauman (1999) believes in consumer society nothing should be embraced firmly and in terms of people and their relation to consumption objects there is no lasting commitment, no ultimate desires and no needs can be fully satisfied either. Any commitment or pledge for loyalty is only valid 'until further notice'. This is how new desires for future objects are assured.

Consumer society also has other helping mechanisms and institutions assuring its continued existence. Advertising, consumer credit (Goodwin, Nelson, Ackerman and Weisskopf, 2008) and mass-media culture (Baudrillard, 1998) are the main drivers in nurturing consumer society. The concept of fashion (Çınar and Çubukçu, 2009) and planned obsolescence strategies and perhaps the hyper reality created in 'shopping cathedrals' are also some of the elements that propel consumer society.

6. Conclusions

Consumption is a social and cultural process involving cultural signs and symbols beyond an economic, utilitarian process (Bocock, 2005). Culture defined as a "learned, transmitted, and shared phenomenon" is one of the most important factors affecting consumers' attitudes, behaviours and lifestyles. Each individual gets exposed a large number of thoughts, values, norms, and cultures and thus learns to differentiate between the good and the bad ones, thereby choosing a certain belief system that keeps on changing with more and more experience (Kim, Lee, Kim and Hunter 2004).

In the light of globalization consumers in almost every corner of the globe are increasingly able to eat the same foods, listen to same music, wear the same fashions, watch the same television programs and films, drive the same cars, dine in the same restaurants and stay in the same hotels (Ger and Belk, 1996). The rise of a global culture doesn't mean that consumers share the same tastes or values. Rather, people in different nations, often with conflicting viewpoints, participate in a shared conversation, drawing upon shared symbols. One of the key symbols, in that conversation is the global brand (Holt, Quelch and Taylor, 2004: 70).

Global culture, is eclectic, timeless, technical, universal and cut-off from the past; unlike national cultures which were particular and time bound (Smith, 1990). In this context, basic characteristics of consumer culture can be summarized in the transforming of needs to desires, utilitarian/hedonic needs-values, commodity fetishism, conspicuous leisure and consumption, cultural values, aestheticization, alienation, differentiation and speed.

Acculturation to the global consumer culture (GCC) relates to ‘how individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours that are characteristic of a nascent and deterritorialized global consumer culture’. Major dimensions of GCC can be portrayed in exposure to and use of the English language, exposure to global and foreign mass media, exposure to marketing activities of multinational corporations, social interactions, cosmopolitanism, openness to a desire to participate in the GCC and self-identification with the GCC (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007).

Alternative outcomes or strategies of global consumer culture can be summarized in integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization and creolization. The integration strategy represents adopting some specific characteristics of the new culture while maintaining other aspects of the original culture. The assimilation strategy consists of a complete acculturation to the new culture while rejecting all aspects of original culture. The separation/segregation strategy is about rejecting all aspects of the new culture while maintaining all traditional values and beliefs. The marginalization strategy is when an individual rejects or shows little interest in both his/her traditional/original culture and the new culture. Creolization describes the creation of an entirely new behaviour or object, via the transmutation of local and foreign or global influences. Each of these strategies strongly affects consumer behaviour and consumption.

From the center-periphery, culture flow perspective, Appadurai (1990), has declared that as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies, they tend to become indigenized in one way or another. This fragmentation wrought by globalization is portrayed by Firat (1995: 115): Yet what seems to be occurring is a globalization of fragmentation. All images, products, brand names and lifestyles that create excitement, sensation, attraction and interest can and do find their markets. The consumers, regardless of their nationalities and countries are willing to experience and sample the different styles and cultural artifacts, if at different times and for different purposes. Globalization, therefore, does not seem to be an event in which one form or style dominates and eliminates all others. Rather, globalization is the diffusion of all different forms and styles all around the world. Because postmodern consumer experience is not one of committing to a single way of being or a single form of experience, the same consumers are willing to sample the different, fragmented artifacts. The consumer is ready to have Italian for lunch and Chinese for dinner, to wear Levi’s blue jeans for an outdoor party in the afternoon and to try the Gucci suit at night changing not only diets and clothes but also the personas and selves that are to be represented at each function.

Consequently, ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening today, but two constitutive trends of global reality. The cultural and by implication intellectual fragmentation of the world has undermined any attempt at a single interpretation of the current situation.

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Acronymes

GCC: Global Consumer Culture