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TITOLO

Underneath the appearance - The conspicuous consumption

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Introduction

Nowadays the material consumption of goods and services goes beyond the boundary of essentiality indispensability and fundamentals of goods consumption. Humans feel the necessity to incur in lavish wasteful expenditures just to establish prestige and to gain and maintain a good reputation in society. So, the priority in life does not only regard economic aspects, but also the competition for social status acquisition through material goods and luxury consumption, are relevant and important issue that consumers face.

The phenomena of ostentatious display of wealth, for the purpose of acquiring and maintaining status and prestige, namely the *conspicuous consumption*, was firstly introduced one century ago, by Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of Leisure Class* (1899). According to his theory, individuals tend to imitate top rated social class given their ambition to become part of it. The imitation behavior tends to change according to the continuous evolution of the economy.

Veblen classifies the conspicuous consumption as the most important factor that characterizes and explains consumers' behavior, not only regarding the upper class, but all the society as a whole.

As a matter of fact, in the past, the activity of conspicuous consumption in which humans are involved in, is still a contemporary issue to face. The desire to conspicuously consume dates back to tribal times when men possessed women and slaves as trophies of their status (Veblen 1912). Since that time, although the players and what is consumed have changed, the game of ostentatious ownership has remained essentially the same, with the winners being awarded status, prestige and honor.

Many critics considered Veblen's point of view out of date and inconsistent with the contemporary society, where the individual is seen as a consumer and no longer as a member of a community or as a part of specific social class. Moreover, critics found discordance and irrelevancy in Veblen's thought, but were superfluous and oversimplified, without recognizing the refinement and complexity that the conspicuous consumption theory was offering to the literature.

A contemporary development of the theory of conspicuous consumption built by Bourdieu, that could apparently be seen in discordance with Veblen's theory, can be considered, instead, as an additional value to the theory, a more realistic and deeper view that discloses subtle aspects of Veblen's framework. As a matter of fact, a deep understanding and examination of both Veblen and Bourdieu works, let develop a new framework that answer to criticisms arose during the years.

Therefore, in this analysis I will firstly introduce a brief history of the evolution of conspicuous consumption offered by Roger S Mason in 1981, that provides an overview of the evolution of this phenomena across decades given his division of society stages starting from the traditional society and ending with the affluent one. In the second chapter I will analyze the theories that characterized Veblen with a deep focus on his theory

of leisure class. To see how Bourdieu's thought differed from Veblen's one, I will shift to the French sociologist to have a clear understanding of his more realistic view over conspicuous consumption and social class division. Moreover, in chapter four, I will show an introductory example of the writing provided by Neil McKendrick in 1984, to better create a scenario of some of the critics arose in reference to Veblen's thoughts and works. Finally, in chapter five, I will compare the views of the two sociologists three main factors, which characterize Veblen's thought, that have been criticized due to their unrealistic point of view. I will then show how Bourdieu's theories have filled up the lacks in Veblen's concept with his trickle-round theory and his views over the postmodern lifestyles and the revelation of the Veblen's conspicuous consumption subtlety.

1. The evolution of conspicuous consumption by Mason

The overview of the evolution of conspicuous consumption across years was provided by the periodization scheme of Roger S Mason analysis (1981), exposed in the *Conspicuous Consumption: A Study of Exceptional Consumer Behavior*. The author analyzed three main stages of conspicuous consumption's evolution, starting from the time interval 1000-1700 with *traditional societies*, to turn then to the *achieving societies* during the second half of the seventeenth century, and ending with the post- World War *affluent societies* till the '70s.

1.1 Traditional societies

According to Mason, these societies 'were typified by hierarchical social structures, by marginal changes in population, and by a clear concentration of wealth at the top of the social pyramid' (p. 59). Social hierarchy position where the reason of social mobility impediment. Conspicuous consumption was related only to the part of the society who hold proprieties, power and higher social status, the elite. Wealth was concerned only for the restricted ruling class in order to maintain power, and was rarely and occasionally spread among other lower divisions (such as "feasts, ceremonies, gift exchange or alms giving" occurrence), to ensure loyalty in regards to the upper class. (Mason 1981, p50). The consumption ostentation was combined with political and military power disclosure. It can be considered as a Veblenian consumption, given the leader's aim to differentiate from the whole society and to showcase prowess. The Roman aristocracy, for example, used to spend significant amount of money on gladiator commemoration just for entertainment pleasure (Finlay 1973, p.130). As well as Ras cited, the case of the legend of the Cleopatra¹ as a symbol of wealth and vanity behavior (1905, p. 246).

According to Veblen, in the traditional societies, the main displayed consumption was referred to servants, clothing, foods and housing. McCracken (1995), states that the nobility of the Elizabethan Era turned into a 'riot of consumption' of these items so that to magnify one's being, even taking advantage of community resources or familiar one.

In point of facts, the excessive and extravagant waste in consumption with power and reputation, still reserved for the honored top hierarchy class. Despite the fact that this situation occurred in ancient societies, this way of life is observed even in today's primitive societies of Africa, Asia, Australia, and South America (Mason 1981).

¹ The legend tells that Cleopatra dropped in the vinegar one of the two largest pearls in the world that she owned and shallow it down.

1.2 Achieving societies

Achieving societies reflects the results of Industrial revolution era, where social mobility, job, and income opportunities emerged. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the emergence of the middle class, disrupted the boundaries surrounding the restricted areas of aristocracy, giving the new financial and political powerful class to conspicuously act and compete in the social field.

A competition that, in the US, took place during the Gilded Age (1860-1914), a period distinguished by the self-help doctrine, which compensated individual effort and merit with increased prestige and social position (Mason 1981). Hofstader (1962) defines this as the “era of the status revolution”

Society consumption in these years were definitely conspicuous: bath tubs were cut from solid marble; artificial waterfalls were installed in dining rooms for entertaining; garden trees were decorated with artificial fruit made of fourteen carat gold (Lord 1960). According to Mason, the main objective of individuals was that of gaining recognition, power and status, through conspicuous consumption. Consumption was seen as a sort of acquisition of status of the top hierarchy class.

Brogan (1941), realized that, given the unfavorable individuals' behavior, the United States did not have a clear out distinction in classes:

... In a truly class-conscious and caste-dominated society, the marks of difference are universally recognized even if resented. In America, they must be stressed or they might easily be forgotten, and they must be added to, as the old standards of distinction cease to serve their purpose. Apart from the simple economic criterion of conspicuous display, there are no generally accepted marks of social difference in America (p. 116-17).

The privation of American social structure, was the consequent result of the department stores, that given their impersonal atmosphere, allowed middle-class consumers to feel free to incur in luxury spending and status goods purchasing, neglecting the real social status of the consumer. (McCracken 1985, Rassuli and Hollander 1986). Veblen observed that women in that time, incurred in lavish expenditures on unproductive clothing, aiming at "putting into evidence their master's ability to pay' (Veblen 1912, p. 182).

Allowing the majority of individuals to be involved in the conspicuous consumption activity, the holdings of goods is directly associated to the status value ownership.

1.3 Affluent Societies

As considered by Rostow (1971), the affluent society is related to the “age of high mass consumption” characterized by technologically advanced system, global market competition and

sophisticated communication system. This society put much more emphasis on educational field to better improve job capabilities and consequential income availability of resources. (Mason 1981) The 1950's has been recognized as the first affluent society decade in the United States (Mason 1981). Converse (1959) nick-named the buying trends during this decade as the "gadget economy". After the World War 1, an increase in disposable income and wealth of individuals, gave them the possibility to acquire important goods such as automobiles, houses, refrigerators, airplanes, etc. (p. 83). The gadget economy still alive, characterized by an even more significant number of conspicuous consumers, without leaving space to the distinctive aspects that richer could obtain through such luxury consumption. As Galbraith (1984) denotes, this consumption tends to be 'vulgar' and higher class need to search for other distinctive consumption goods in order to maintain their social status. The obtainment of outrageously expensive goods grants the unique and inaccessible position of the upper class. Consequently, given the limited accessibility to these resources, vulgarity consideration vanishes. In regard, the snob effect arises, meaning that the upper class individualizes itself from the other class, acquiring only exclusive and limited goods, neglecting the mass consumption.

Nevertheless, as mass becomes more educated, a transition into tasteful and expenditure competition occurs.

As Sartre (1956) stated, the possessions are comprehensive instruments that lead identity and recognition of individual behavior patterns.

In conclusion, as Mason stated, the evolution in societies is also associated to the translation from inner-directed influences to the other-directed influences. The first two mentioned societies were inner-directed, where individual lifestyle were primarily influenced by family and friends' factors. On the other hand, the latter society was mainly other-directed, given the additional influence exerted by media personalities and the mass public in general, a direct result of highly advanced communications that introduce both cultural values, new ideas and an effectively cut across class boundaries.

The manifestation of such influences in this 'socialized' society, are evidenced in the horizontal and vertical emulation behavior of people consuming in accordance with the values of their desired reference group, euphemistically called 'keeping up with the Joneses', or the bandwagon effect.

2 Thorstein Veblen

With his Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), Thorstein Veblen has become the founding father of the original institutional economics. He offered an alternative to already spoken theories/factors of intellectual environment driven by rational decision-making, tastes, preferences, and teleological and individualistic analysis already built in statistics terms.

In his theory, Veblen spoke about a consumer whose decisions is driven by the emulation of higher social classes, in which habits play an important role. Veblen dealt with psychological, social, anthropological, and economic issues.

2.1 Intellectual Influences

Veblen's thoughts are affected by economists and thinkers such as Karl Marx, Adam Smith and the evolutionary Herbert Spencer. With Marx he shared a materialist perspective in accordance to the social livelihood procurement issue. Contrary to Marx, Veblen ideas about creative forces in society concern industrial arts development rather than labor.

Moreover, in Veblen's work there is the evidence of the Darwinian view. He sees the society as a field characterized by individuals in continuous competition for existence, given adapted social institutions and habits of surviving.

Nevertheless, the success of selective adaptation given the evolution, does not always run with the same speed as the change in social circumstances. Veblen identifies two main model of stages of social evolution. He starts with primitive society based on peace and cooperation characteristics and ends with predatory barbarism characterized by competitiveness and belligerency. The development process he analyzes, puts in evidence the displacement from a primitive society with free workmanship, to the command of industry by pecuniary interests under barbarism

Veblen's work was mainly based on institutional and cultural issues rather than only theoretical deductions.

2.2 Basic Ideas

Vicarious observation² refers to the ability of an individual to recognize and interpret the surrounding area of individuals, identifying them as a model of behavior and self-positioning him or her in a model as a way to learn by interpretation. Those are seen as the central elements of Veblen's conspicuous consumers.

² This idea was introduced by the psychological researcher Albert Bandura in the early 70s, who was the one who broke from behavioristic approaches. (behavior was seen by Skinner as a simple stimulus-response relationship, given the interaction between individuals and the external environment). Contrary, Bandura stated

Veblen's approach relies on habits and institutions, factors that characterize a conspicuous consumer, and on leisure class as the predominant institution affecting the conspicuous consumption

The human nature and the impact in the social life, are for Veblen a key point for his analysis. The most important instinct for Veblen, is the instinct of workmanship that involve the appropriate use and management of available resources and means that humans acquire across lifetime.

Veblen sees institutions as a mediation of the evolution of individual thoughts in the social field, a cumulative modification, that impact significantly on individual's behavior. Accordingly, a social organization means a scheme of institutions (Veblen 1899). For Veblen institutions are outgrowths of habits³ that are not personal, but contain a social dimension.

Taking his view on conspicuous consumer into account, the central point is an evolutionary perspective of how a habitual understanding of goods' meanings and their emulated acquisition take place in a social environment.

Habits and "their" institutions are shared among consumers and they serve as the basis for the social evolution of their decision-making (Veblen, 1899). Consumer's behaviors and thoughts arise as a consequence of manifestation of habits, such as institutions. (an example of such institutions are food, clothes, cars, entertainments etc.).

Moreover, Veblen takes into consideration another relevant concept, the instinct. He defined tropisms, all the inner impulses⁴ to action occurring without considering proper backgrounds. The author also considered inner impulses that are linked to the cultural and learning process. He thought that habits and institutions could be strictly attached and connected to decision making process, that becomes integral part of the decision-maker. Veblen (1914). Indeed, when Veblen talked about tropism he referred to the reaction of external impulses in

that behavior complex issues that needs a decision-making framework in order to come up with a deeper analysis in relation to it. According to him, given the surrounding environment, individuals acquire knowledge that reflects recognition and interpretation key competences. Observation and cognition are central in Bandura's approach, that go in the same direction of Veblen's approach.

³ Geoffrey Hodgson (1998) defines what can be understood as the Veblenian concept of habit as a largely non-deliberative and self-actuating propensity to engage in a previously adopted pattern. A habit is a propensity to think or behave in particular way in specific situations. Hence, habits can remain unused for a long time since they may exist even if they are not manifested. A habit is a form of self-sustaining, non-reflective thought or behavior that arises in repetitive situations, but habit is not a repetition per se (Hodgson 2004). Habits are formed through repetition, they are influenced by prior activity, and have durable or self-sustaining qualities (Hodgson 2002). Habits do not mean thoughts or behaviors. Habits are potential thoughts or behaviors which can be triggered by an appropriate stimulus or context (Hodgson 2002, 2004).

⁴ it is a personal internal force to behave that lead the individual to satisfaction established by the good acquired, that stops such force.

which socialization process is not engaged, an inner impulse in which habits and institutions are not considered a mediation factor.

“The hedonistic conception of man is that of a lightning calculator of pleasures and pains, who oscillates like a homogeneous globule of desire of happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area, but leave him intact. He has neither antecedent nor consequent. He is an isolated, definitive human datum, in stable equilibrium except for the buffets of the impinging forces that displace him in one direction or another ...”

It is important to assess that Veblen rejected the utilitarian pleasure-pain decision-making logic. Veblen believed that an individualistic pleasure-pain reading of human behavior is not enough. From his perspective, the socialization process gives other layers to decision-making.

Veblen also used the term instinct in a different sense than the usual. According to Veblen, cognitive abilities, particular perceptions, and even intelligence are part of instincts (Cordes 2005). Hence, common sense and apprehension are far away from the Veblenian perspective of instincts which relates to the result the relationship of decision-makers and the surrounding environment influences produced.

Veblen named the instinct as an “inner impulse” of the individual, different from William James idea (1890) “instinct [inner impulse] is usually defined as the faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance.”

In Veblen’s theory, the appropriation process is seen as an integral part of instincts that are a collection of habits and practices. Veblen assessed that habit could inhibit inner impulse, given that the connection of impulses on goods rely on that social issue. Indeed, satisfaction, in Veblen’s analysis, is seen as a social matter, meaning that satisfaction does not rely on the act of consuming, but the reason behind such activity.

According to Veblen, as subsistence still alive in societies, consumption will be much more a result of social demand instead of physical. Satisfaction, seen in a social prospective, can be gained either directly or indirectly, given the presence of the external environment and the existence of antecedent individuals who collect and then transmit their habitus. It is mainly a consequence of subsistence necessity for latent societies, while a matter of quality in advanced societies. For Veblen (1899), current generations modify past generations’ habits because of incapacity to replicate them. Yesterday’s habits motivate today’s behaviors just as today’s behaviors assist the building of tomorrow’s habits. Habits carry the history of a society, and they are a key element of societal evolution. Societal evolution is not just a matter of institutionalized habits, but it also relies on the capacity of decision-makers to deal with those habits as there is a cumulative causation process.

According to Veblen, institutions are expressed in habits and habits are perceived in the behaviors of those who put those habits into practice, so perceiving behaviors is central to the transmission of institutionalized

procedures and institutional evolution. From this perspective, by observing the behavior of others, consumers can actually perceive a representation of an institution and perhaps understand what this institution means. Veblen's theory demands a conspicuous consumer who learns how to behave by observing and interpreting what occurs around him/her.

Moreover, with human nature, also the common stock of skills, techniques and knowledge, in relation industrial arts (such as technology), create a consistent and relevant influence on the shape of the society. The cultural field, in which Veblen operates, faces incoming development of science and technology that outruns changes in the system regarding legal and custom aspects. Some cultural artifacts, such as the right of ownership, are seen by the author as an obstacle to the development of the industrial arts. From his point of view, the self-development of industrial arts and the borrowing activity among other cultures, are sign of utility acquisition because enhance the possibility of free sharing and acquisition of resources without being conditional to traditional constraints. A faster creation of new version of innovation can be achieved, through such borrowing activity, in order to preempt the innovation in culture.

2.4 The Theory of Leisure Class

In Veblen's theory, habits and institutions play a major role than inner impulses regarding the decision-making mechanism. The leisure class is the superior institution who drives the conspicuous consumer appropriation. As Veblen (1899) stressed, the leisure class can be found in its best development in modern societies, because distinctions between classes are clearly observed based on employment differences. Upper classes are by custom exempt or excluded from industrial occupations and associated with certain employments that contain a degree of honor (Veblen, 1899).

A consequence of availability of consumer's resources to act and the facing of same or similar context in the social field, is the recognized and typified characteristics attached to his or her behavior. Thus, when repetition occurs, a habit may emerge (Berger and Luckman 1966; Hodgson 2002, 2003). Any behavior that is repeated frequently becomes (part of) a pattern. Consumers who possess such a habits, are familiar with the type that generated and established this habit, and with the environment where the habit is manifested. This familiarity is the result of observation of the same behavior and its reinforcement and, consequently, a snowball effect occurs. A habit strongly relies on cognitive consonance and the ability of a consumer in theorizing what had been vicariously learned. A habit is based on a type, so habits express models continually and powerfully reinforced, as with Veblen's leisure class.

Following Veblen's perspective, institutions regard the representation of cognitive consonances of the typification of envisioned regularities, part of consumers' behaviors in a society. The so called typification is embedded on behaviors accentuated by the leisure class. Accordingly, it is possible to argue that, in Veblen's conspicuous consumer approach, institutions come from the abilities of individual to observe, understand, and

learn in society over time. Observation, interpretation, and theorization result in a collective approval and reinforcement. The institution's allowed anticipation, implies the assessment of a path of what is, or what is likely to be, consumed and observed by individuals. So, vicarious learning is indeed related to knowledge acquisition from observing how institutions act in the social field.

The collocation of individuals in upper class is signal of high social status and consequently the whole properties and goods consumed by the upper class acquire symbolic high value reputation.

The presence of the leisure class, put in evidence that the connection of inner impulses and the good acquisition is also ceremonial other than instrumental, and the relevant impact that such class have on it. Veblen (1899).

Veblen pointed out that in a society, characterized by private properties as main holdings, the necessity of earning a livelihood is a powerful and constant incentive for people to consume. Again, as soon as a society is characterized by the presence subsistence, the emulation will be a key driver of individual's behavior.

Consequently, for Veblen there is social selection in society based on one's capacity to emulate behaviors of the leisure class. The conspicuous consumption is then driven by the emulation of superior class to which a consumer aspires to belong to. The emulation process is about acquisition, collection and selection of goods and the way of proceeding

In Veblen's words, "the penalties for failure to apprehend facts in dispassionate terms fall surer and swifter" (1898, 380).

Moreover, in Veblenian approach to the lifecycle, a misunderstanding about how to consume can generate "pain of disesteem and ostracism". Dissatisfaction is a result of a failure in emulative logic, in which case a consumer can understand the institutionally evolved impulses-goods connection, but he/she is not able to achieve satisfaction (because of lack of financial resources, for example).

In his theory Veblen explains the role of leisure class contribution to the production of the working class, considering it as a surplus and a contribution to it. This surplus leads to an increase in the importance of the relation between private properties and status. "it becomes indispensable to accumulate, to acquire property, in order to retain one's good name" (Veblen 1899, 29).

A hierarchy is a segmentation of social class which distinguishes individuals who own propriety and consequently recognized, esteemed and honored by the social mass, to them who devoid in possess.

In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen explains that under ravaging barbarism, honorability and respectability are reached by demonstrating tangible evidence of prowess and aggression. Under this system, estimation is associated with private property holdings, that stimulate the emulation process in regard to the

upper class. Firstly, wealth was seen as evidence of the instinct of workmanship, then, understood to be of deserving praise.

The leisure class ostentation was based on the dearth of necessity to work. The productive work was seen as unworthy, while the waste in time and the unproductivity activities as signal of wealth and value. As industrial society emerged, the unproductive activities as status of honor and wealth, were replaced by the conspicuous consumption. The leisure class is expected to consume the best in food, drink, narcotics, shelter, services, ornaments, apparel, amusements, and so on. Given the top rated position of leisure class, the whole related consumption was subject to emulation from the rest of the society belonging to lower position in the social hierarchy.

Veblen stated that “not every single consumer directly emulates the leisure class. In a stratified society, and according to an emulative logic, people try to follow the consumption standard that fits in with the social class, into which they belong or would like to belong.” As the leisure class is the higher social class the most aspired every consumer emulates the leisure class both directly and indirectly.

Veblen conceives such distinctive behavior as an intentional waste of time and economic resources, for the only purpose to conform to leisure class’ selected canon of decency.

Waste, futility and ferocity are features associated with the leisure class, discordant with the industrial society needs that rely on efficiency of goods distribution.

3. Bourdieu’s contribution, an alternative view.

3.1 The dimension of cultural change

The concept of culture as a market competition was introduced by Weber, who described the cultural realm as a separate realm of competition for the scarce resources of status and honor.

Culture sociologists tend to assert radical autonomy of the cultural field from other institutional factors, like economic and politics. Randall Collins (1998) states that intellectual world is an autonomous game in line with its related strategies resources and rewards, focusing on the scarcity of owned/possessed resources that

characterizes and create conflicts among individuals. “Economic and political macrostructures do not explain much about abstract ideas because such ideas exist only where there is a network of intellectuals focused on their own arguments and accumulating their own conceptual baggage train. It is the inner structure of these intellectual networks which shape ideas” (Collins 1998:2). Collins focused more on internal factors that explain the philosophical change, dismissing the influence of political and economic aspects related to the intellectual network.

Stanley Lieberman’s (2000) *A Matter of Taste*, contribute as well to the analysis of cultural changes focusing entirely on the aspects on cultural changes in the market field. Mechanisms as the class imitation, the ratchet effect and the incremental replacement, are perfect examples analysed by the socialist. He also recognised the presence of influential external factors, but considered them as arbitrarily inputs into the internal taste mechanism, of lowest importance.

Nevertheless, the impact of external factors such as economic and political must be incorporated in the framework with the internal one in order to have a broader overview of the cultural change phenomenon.

Moreover, Lieberman thought that demand directly creates its own supply, without considering that the two market faces, regarding the cultural goods, have different and separate dynamics. An example is the automobile industry, where producers are different from the consumer they serve given that they have to take into account factors such as cost of productions and other constraints that have an impact on the product despite the demand of the consumers.

It is a culture perspective of production, through which it can be denoted the change in the production phase. It mostly depends on the size of the market and on the degree of competition. In presence of high competition in the market we observe pretty goods innovation and homogeneity are required in order to avoid the exit from the market and to satisfy consumer’s demand of variety and novelty, while in the oligopoly and even more in monopoly markets, the exclusivity and uniqueness are the key success of their value proposition.

A more sophisticated and theoretical theory, that embraces all cultural market dimensions, is provided by Pierre Bourdieu. He denoted that internal mechanisms, even if autonomous, are interconnected and influenced by society’s external factors impacting both sizes of the market.

3.2 Bourdieu’s cultural distinction

Bourdieu in his theory explains his vision about the cultural field. He compared it to the economic world, where individuals aim to collect and accumulate resources and rewards, in terms of cultural goods, to beat competition, and gain distinction, preponderance and predominance over social status. This distinction, according to Bourdieu, is achieved given the strict connection to economic distribution of material goods, that emulates and brings value.

Given an individual's economic capital, and the disposition of material conditions, and a range of dispositions and habitus related to his or her status, generates cultural tastes, that, if "right", positively impact the cultural capital and the degree of uniqueness. This necessity justifies the implication of economic capital involvement to acquire and establish such position.

Bourdieu assumes society to be a social space constituted by a balance of the cultural and economic ground. Through this social ground, the existence of different social classes is identified. Each class is defined by its corresponding composition of economic and cultural capital and its whole weight of the two kinds of capital combined (Bourdieu 1984:169-75).

The first input, the cultural capital relates to the cultural goods accumulated by individuals in order to achieve superior and consistent distinction. All individual's demand is perfectly matched with the supply of goods, given the availability of a spacious variety of cultural resources at disposal from which individual can choose from, according to their tastes.

The cultural ground is split in two restricted sub-groups, the small-scale or restricted production and the large-scale or mass production.

The former (small-scale) includes all the major important interests of the art area. Rather than economic profits, the consideration of the art, provides a symbolic profit in relation to the recognition of artists on the internal autonomous standards of the art. The requirements for this category are more concerned with a massive collection of knowledge, tastes and culture backgrounds, rather than economic rewards. In this field, producers match in particular the demand of the social culture field. Bourdieu nominates this subgroup, the intellectual bourgeoisie, the dominated class of the dominant class, including all professions that own a significant cultural background. Contrary to the economic bourgeoisie, individuals recognised part of the intellectual bourgeoisie prefer to deal with cerebral and austere culture, without taking care about objective impression and expensiveness ostentation. Only the avant-garde artists are incentivised to produce for a such restricted field. The restricted subfield, then, embodies the distinction between successful artists in accumulation of symbolic profits and those who have yet to engage in this process. Successful high artists, called also the consecrated avant-garde, acquire estimation and recognition feedbacks also beyond boundary of the restricted subfield, cashing in some of their symbolic profits for the economic kind. The bohemian avant-garde, is then stimulated to vehemently reject the consecrated artists as "sell-outs" and to favour production with no relation to monetary taint in order to distinguish themselves.

The latter cultural field are mainly driven by economic purposes. In this case the economic capital prevails on the cultural one, so producers focus on social field who meet the same characteristics, individuals with opulent resources. The priority of the economic bourgeoisie is on the accumulation of economic profits rather than on the collection of knowledge and education. Large-scale producers, focused on economic capital, perfectly match the necessity of displaying conspicuousness, extravagance and luxuriousness of tastes required by

individuals belonging to the economic capital field. The cultural field, in turn, is divided in two categories.

The first one, the bourgeois art, relates to production of goods that meet cultural requirements and economic requirements as well. Producers targets a market segment that dispose of high economic capital but also outline the possession of significant cultural capital. Along with the conspicuous display, also the knowledge necessitates to be underlined/emphasized. The high economic bourgeoisie pretend to be distinguished also through cultural capital to consolidate its economic position. Second, the commercial art, refers to that slice of the market in which cultural capital is distant with respect to the economic one, that is the petty bourgeoisie and the working class, defined by Bourdieu as "culturally deprived". Their goods are mass-produced "kitsch," profitable but crass, catering to unmitigated self-indulgence and simple hedonism (Bourdieu 1984; 1996).

3.3 Bourdieu's class imitation

Bourdieu, as Veblen (1934) and Simmel (1957), provided also an explanation for the class imitation. He stated that the Bourgeoisie tend to legitimate its economic capital, through the demonstration of an area of interest not considered by the rest of the society, the art. An aura of superiority is achieved and let them to distinguish by the materialistic petty bourgeoisie. Petty bourgeoisie, in turn, necessitate to separate from the working class, imitating the bourgeoisie, even though its cultural capital is not so substantial. The working class instead, does not seek to imitate any other social class, since their consumption is related to basic material necessities and functions. Notwithstanding, the imitation of the high bourgeoisie by the petty bourgeoisie, is enough relevant to prove the influence of the role played by the class imitation phenomenon. Consequently, the dominant class, continuously research distinctive cultural goods, to attain and maintain its prior and distinctive social position. Thus, Bourdieu writes (1984:251-52), imitation "helps to maintain constant tension in the symbolic goods market, forcing the possessors of distinctive properties threatened with popularization to engage in an endless pursuit of new properties through which to assert their rarity. The demand which is generated by this dialectic is by definition inexhaustible since the dominated needs which constitute it must endlessly redefine themselves in terms of a distinction which always defines itself negatively in relation to them."

Such imitation can be seen also as a disruption of the so far mentioned differentiation between economic and intellectual fractions of the dominant class. Both of them struggle to defend their principal form of resource pretending to assess it as the "principle of hierarchization" (Bourdieu 1993:37-43) the fundamentals for wealth and power distribution.

High arts, differently from the unrefined marketplace logic, help to reveal the pure and massive accomplishment of culture of the intellectual bourgeoisie. The result of avant-garde researches and intensive work, then, is imitated by the economic bourgeoisie, shifting from a restricted to a mass production. The economic bourgeoisie must then research for forms of high art more sophisticated and impressive from those solely consumed by the intellectual class. Consequently, the intellectual class is compelled to explore new cultural resources from bohemian avant-garde artists redeem them from the actual outrageous bourgeois art.

3.3.1 The inverted 'U-curve'

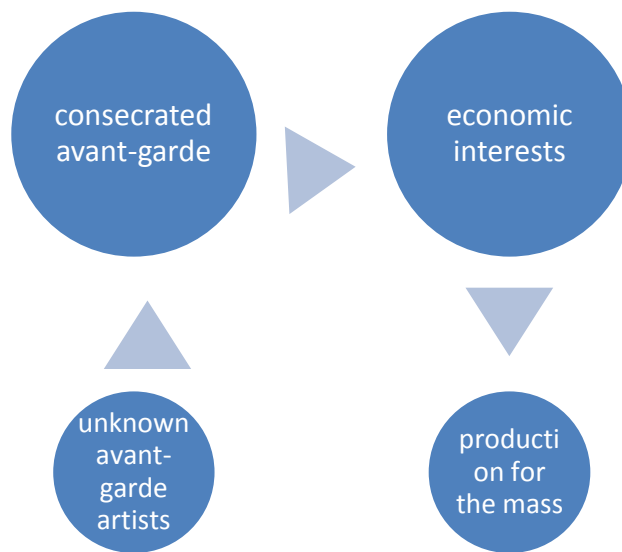


Figure 1 Bourdieu's theory of cultural change and the 'inverted U-curve' (figure inspired by Gartman, 2002, p. 259).

Cultural innovation adoption and research process follows the line of an inverted U-curve.

As Gartman (2002) shown that Bourdieu's field theory implies that cultural innovations 'follow the path of an inverted U-curve to explain his theory on cultural change.

They start at the bottom of the restricted subfield among unknown avant-garde artists, rise to the top of this subfield as works of the consecrated avant-garde, and then migrate laterally to the top of the large-scale subfield as bourgeois art, until imitation by the petty bourgeoisie lowers them to the status of commercial art (Bourdieu 1996:121-28, 146-61, 253-56).

By this explanation/analysis, Bourdieu aimed at underline the role producers on the demand and supply. He assessed that, rather than a consumer struggling for distinction, it is the continuous competition in new cultural goods production that drive producers to constantly generate new cultural resources in their own subfield, creating a supply for its corresponding demand.

For Bourdieu, however, what generates the innovation for cultural goods is not given by consumer struggling behaviour, rather from producers struggle for distinction in the production of the restricted subfield. Indeed, supply creates demand.

Starting from the bottom, we find the avant-garde artist production. Those who belong to this autonomous subfield aim at producing pure products, only recognisable by artists of the same subfield, and reach an aura of superiority and exclusiveness so as so distinguish from the upper subfield of

consecrated avant-garde production.

Firstly, introduced by the avant-garde artists, limited to a restricted field, embracing all cultural fields (literary, scientific, art fields), production of such goods, is then shifted to the subfield of the works of consecrated avant-garde.

As soon as symbolic recognition of their product arises, we assist to a shifting from avant-garde to consecrated on (considering production and artists themselves).

Lately a 'selling out' process arises, heteronomous interests arise, shifting from a consecrated field to the economic one.

Consequently, economic interests, move the production from a small-scale to a mass-scale, engaging a 'massification' process.

Nevertheless, the use and characteristics of the products are modified and reinterpreted, in meaning and form terms, according to the cultural change and its position-stage along the inverted U-curve, in order to meet requirement and the logic of that specific field.

The first two fields met in the U-curve shape, produce for a restricted audience according to internal rules of the corresponding field, providing specific characteristics required.

The meaning, conditions and purposes of fabrication change when the production collocates to the downward part of the inverted U-curve. In this case, rather than internal, external interests condition the meaning and the form of production.

Continuous creation of different cultural products is the consequent result of a competition for symbolic profits between the consecrated artists and bohemian artists in the restricted subfield of production. New entrants' aim is to be distinguished and recognised against those who already belong to the subfield and already recognized. This is possible by producing innovations that are pure and disinterested, and that stand out among the older forms focused on commercial profits of the subfield of large-scale production. Inevitably then, the consecrated are overthrown by the upstarts, creating a cycle of innovation that generates the new products to meet the demand for distinction of the battling fractions of the dominant class (Bourdieu 1996:146-61, 253-56). However, as Bourdieu pointed out, innovation in the cultural field do not produce deep and lasting changes in its structure unless they draw upon and incorporate external changes in the larger social field. The growth in educated population is one of the most important external change, that increases the number of both cultural producers and cultural consumers, which, in turn, reflects the increases in the number of producers in the cultural field, thus increasing the competition between them and stimulating additional subsequent innovation in order to excel in a crowded field. Similarly, the increment in the education level also

provide more consumers for cultural goods, since the ability of recognition increases with the increase in cultural capital. (Bourdieu 1996:127, 225).

So, thanks to this innovative process, the quantity of distinctive innovations and qualitative directions of the changes are stimulated and improved. The newcomers, coming to different class positions, bring with them habitus that are new to the field and thus provide them new cultural forms.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural dynamics is more sophisticated and multidimensional than that of sociologists who recognize competition on only one side of cultural markets. It reveals that cultural change results from the struggle for distinction by both cultural producers and consumers. And the theory also conceptualizes the external social forces that intervene through these internal competitive struggles to fundamentally transform the cultural field.

4. Some critiques arose across years

The theory of conspicuous consumption was also used by historians to explain the reason of the evolution of consumers' behavior in relation with the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century when the consumer society started to arise.

A perfect representation of the social status during these years is provided by *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* by Neil McKendrick (1984).

The potter Josiah Wedgwood was capable to influence European aristocracy consumption, driving them to use his product. "By appealing to the fashionable cry for antiquities, by pandering to their requirements, by asking their advice and accepting their smallest orders, by flattery and attention, Wedgwood hoped to monopolize the aristocratic market, and thus win for his wares a special distinction, a social cachet which would filter through all classes of society" (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982, 110).

In 1986 Lorna Weatherhill contested this idea sustaining that Wedgwood was not the reason that guided the other pottery manufacturers, but the model used to of distribution network autonomous from their business. "Producers began to rely on a distribution network, and gradually came to rely less on their own London warehouses" (212).

In addition, according to Ellen Leopold (1993) the strategy of Wedgwood of charging higher prices, focusing firstly on a niche and luxury market, and then lowering it targeting the lower class, impeded the extension to the mass market. "It is at least as plausible to see the luxury market of the eighteenth century as an obstacle to the development of mass production of the lower classes in the nineteenth century, as it is as a stimulus to emulation from below" (79).

Moreover, Fine and Leopold pointed out that for some goods such as the domestic consumption of coal, there is no opportunity of emulation at all, since the increase in consumption is given and influenced by income levels, cost of production and rate of population growth. "Yet it would be far-fetched to view the rise in coal consumption as originating out of the emulative behavior of lower classes (with fashion emanating from London as major domestic market)."

Rather than a "trickle down" effect, as seen by Veblen, the phenomena of consumption for certain type of good, is seen in the reverse way named by George Field (1970) as the "status float" phenomenon: "the tendency of fashionable practices to percolate upward from lower to higher status groups". Recognized also by Fine and Leopold (1993), who reasoned about the jeans consumption, that can be connected to status of prestigious and wealth given its American origin, but that was associated to working class consumption.

In addition, Campbell (1987) debated on was it possible the overturn and emulation of the capitalist over the aristocratic class during the industrial revolution, and the same was for Jackson Lears (1993, 28) who stated:

“Veblen’s assumption that cultural influences flow only from the top down is not borne out by historical record”.

Contrary to Veblen’s thought, the trickle up effect was defined by critics as important as the trickle- down effect. Their pointed out that the trickle-down effect was mainly focus on conveyance of preferences and tastes and underestimates/miss some other important aspects that connect theory assumption to luxury consumption.

In the following year, especially during the Great depression in the 1930s, Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption lost relevancy.

As reported by Roger Mason “The long- established, very rich, whose money was not ‘old’ rather than ‘new’ and who had been more circumspect in the ways in which they chose to spend their money through the depression and the New Deal, continued to adopt a more reserved lifestyle as the 1950s arrived” (1998, 107). So the upper class’ consumption became less intensive and excessive, given the crisis. The activity of conspicuous consumption to display wealth, was then replaced charity related activities.

During the decade from 1940s to 1950s, the relation between luxury consumption and social classes hierarchy, became even less relevant given the rising of middle classes. As John Kenneth Galbraith (1958, 72-3) stated “lush expenditure could be afforded by so many that it ceased to be useful as a mark of distinction”.

In line with his thought also Ray Canterbury (1998, 148), “the middle class could now emulate the rich in dress and even in automobiles, especially as the rich downsized to Volvos”. As years passed, middle classes wealth increased and the luxury consumption became more affordable for them, elite class vaunting decreased, the theory of Veblen became less and less affinitive.

In postmodern society we observe the evanescence of the relevant relation between social structure and consumption. Mason (1998, 130) asserted that “‘lifestyle’ grew in importance as an indicator of social group membership, and these group entities, freed from old restrictions imposed by social class and fixed status groups, were secured by adopting appropriate patterns of consumption.” A “disaggregation of social structure into lifestyles”, is the definition of Slater (1997, 193) regarding the individual’s freedom to choose how to manage his personal image and social status. And the independence of self-expression.

Veblen’s point of view was considered by many critics out of date and inconsistent with the contemporary society, where the individual is seen as a consumer and no longer as a member of a community or as a part of specific social class.

5. A counter-argument to critiques

Critics found discordance and irrelevancy in Veblen's thought, but were superfluous and oversimplified, without recognizing the refinement and complexity that the conspicuous consumption theory was offering to the literature.

Bourdieu plays an important role. His theory is could be seen as a reinforcement of the understated aspects of Veblen's framework, providing a more contemporary and reliable theory of conspicuous consumption.

A deep understanding and examination of both Veblen and Bourdieu explanations, let develop a new framework that answer to criticisms arose during the years.

5.1 The trickle-down effect

Veblen did not consider the other side of the effect, the so called trickle-up effect, the influence of lower social class to the higher one. The so far mentioned authors theories were explored to find a defend corresponding to various critiques.

Veblen categorizes social classes and differentiate them according to the degree of culture accumulation. Upper classes are distinguished, then, form the "new money" classes through accumulated culture. A related example could be *The Great Gatsby* (1925) of Fitzgerald that explains through the story of Gatsby the difficulty to over the educated and cultured Daisy married with a member of the most privileged class, given his lack of refinement and cultivation. Culture is depicted as a barrier to entry in the leisure class.

According to Bourdieu, the cultural capital accumulation is achieved during the process of progression in the social hierarchy.

Social upbringing, first of all, and the accumulation of experiences and learning about artistic and intellectual traditions products, are the key factor to determine the social status acquired by an individual across his or her lifecycle. the addition cultural capital gained apart from education is considered by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as a signal of superior ability characteristics of a children provided by favored training and grounding.

Bourdieu assessed that the acquisition of culture capital is "inscribed, as an objective demand, in membership of the bourgeoisie and in the qualifications giving access to its right and duties." *Distinction* (1984, 23). The appreciative upper class taste, and its ability to recognize uniqueness, gives to individuals, of that specific social class, to distinguish themselves from the mass, gaining a superior culture capital. "Taste is an acquired disposition of 'differentiate' and 'appreciate'... to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction... (ensuring) recognition (in the ordinary sense)" (466).

“The naïve exhibitionism of ‘conspicuous consumption’, which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury, is nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed in ‘persons’” (31). Even if conspicuous consumption is a relevant factor, the importance of the ability of individual to make the distinction, so the behavior of self-exclusion, plays a major role.

At the first sight, Veblen’s theory seems to be too much focused only on consumption of goods and services, while instead going deeply through it, it can be noticed that he also considered the aesthetic tastes in a general way. “this cultivation of the aesthetic faculty requires time and application, and the demands made upon the gentleman in this direction therefore tend to change his life of leisure into a more or less arduous application to the business of learning how to live a life of ostensible leisure in a becoming way” (75).

Bourdieu sees the distinction process as a negative aspect of individual’s behavior mainly driven by criticism. “It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes” (1984, 56).

Although upper class tend to differentiate from the lower one, Bourdieu clarify that even individuals belonging to the lower social status level, have their own preferences, tastes and values.

The working class, contrary to the aristocracy, deal more with essential and beneficial consumption. The evidence led Bourdieu to build a theory on different popular cultures and preservation of working class culture with respect to upper culture. Taken the difference in food consumption among classes as an example that perfectly fits with his idea, Bourdieu highlighted the fulfillment of necessary needs of lower class different from that of the leisure class, where the food consumption was the representation of an art and the possibility to better disclose their interests. Working class consumption is more practical, contrary to that of higher class which is seen as more abstract and superfluous, obsessed with classicism and conventional formalities. And on what concerns the apparels and fashion, he reiterates his observations results/conclusions sustaining that the *Haute couture* is not a relevant issue for the working class households to be considered.

Bounded by the two main classes, Bourdieu considered the middle class, whose aim was to emulate upper social class’ tastes despite the lack of abundance in cultural capital, and in opposition of that of the working class. The behavior of middle class induces the upper class to renovate own tastes and somewhere to the reemergence of working class tastes as the trickle-up phenomenon aims to explain, but that could better be called trickle-round. Consequently, the so called ‘pretentiousness’ of the middle class create perplexity and confusion, (given the adoption of popular tastes) “The artists agree with the ‘bourgeois’ in one respect: he prefers naivety to ‘pretentiousness’. The essentialist merit of the ‘common people’ Is that they have note of the pretentions to art (or power) which inspire the ambitions of the ‘petit bourgeois’. Their indifference tacitly acknowledges the monopoly. That is why, in the

mythology of artists and intellectuals, whose outflanking and double-negating strategies sometimes lead them back to 'popular' tastes and opinions, the 'people' so often play a role not unlike that of the peasantry in the conservative ideologies of the declining aristocracy.' (Bourdieu 1984, 62)

Additionally, Bourdieu reported some examples of dishes, sports and folk music of working class, that were resumed and revaluated by the upper class.

The following graph let better understand and compare the different point of view of the two economists.

5.1.1 Veblen's trickle-down model

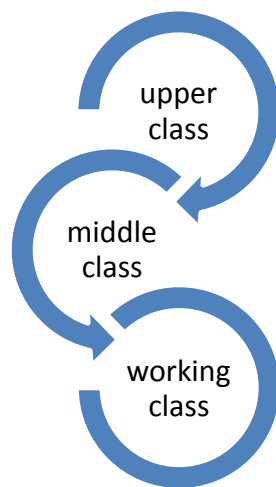


Figure 2 Andrew B. Trigg. "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption." *Journal of Economic Issues* 35.1 (2001): 99-115. Web.

The graph is the representation of the transmission of tastes according to Veblenian thought. The working class emulate the middle that in turn impersonate in the upper class. It can be depicted as a one-directional flow of preferences, a sequence of transmission of tastes (toward and end / from the upper class to the lower classes).

5.1.2 Bourdieu's trickle-round effect

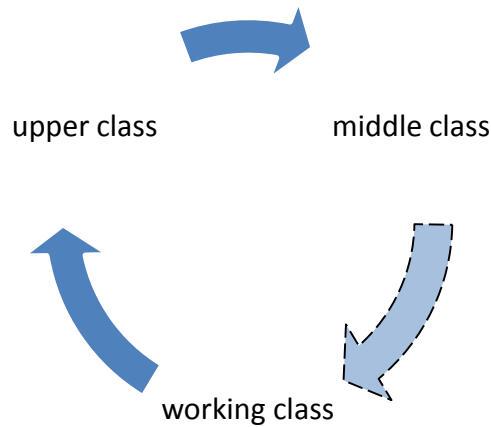


Figure 3 The tricle-round effect

SOURCE: Andrew B. Trigg. "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption." *Journal of Economic Issues* 35.1 (2001): 99-115. Web.

Better reflection of today's society, fashion and life style, old-fashion is proposed again after many times has passed. It's a renewal process rather than an ending process that incorporates trickledown effect but also the reverse phenomena. The dashed arrow connecting the middle class to the working class emphasizes the idea that Bourdieu had regarding the opposition and resistance of the latter to the upper classes' influences in tastes, but it is also a signal of openness to the possibility to expand the model of tastes in a more flexible way including both the trickle-down and the trickle-round effects.

5.2 The Subtlety of Conspicuous Consumption

"For the great body of the people in any modern community, the proximate ground of expenditure in excess of what is required for physical comfort is not a conscious effort to excel in the expensiveness of their visible consumption, so much as it is a desire to live up to the conventional standard of decency in the amount of grade of goods consumed." (Veblen 1899, 103)

The conspicuous consumption behavior, stated by Veblen, is not necessarily an intentional process, concerning the whole social class in general, even for the pretentious middle class. Confirmed also by Bourdieu when mentioned the innate vantage and superiority of children with favored backgrounds in cultural capital, "only recognized as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing 'academic', 'scholastic', 'bookish', 'affected' or 'studied' about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that through culture is nature – a new mystery of immaculate conception" (68).

Moreover, Bourdieu added value to his theory through the theoretical concept of habitus, denoted as a system of “principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 1990, 53). The situations in which the individual is involved condition his or her behavior depending on the constraints and uncertainties that arise and influence it. There are no rules for individuals to act, it is instead an unconscious process influenced by culture forces that drives their behavior.

Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau (1988, 158) interpreted the two economists’ thoughts highlighting the difference between them. They stated that Veblen is more focused on the conscious act that characterizes the conspicuous consumption, contrary to Bourdieu, that believed in a more unconscious behavior, driven by habitus and involuntary results of the cultural capital influence.

Going deeply through the analysis, that initially/apparently could seem/deliver two opposite ideas, Bourdieu assessment can be interpreted as a formalization of the refined Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption, and as an explication on human agency that was insufficiently explained by the author.

Anne Mayhew (1998) argues that the debate with neoclassical economics has pushed the evolutionary approach away from a flexible consideration of human agency. By allowing individuals to develop their strategies over time, subject to structural constraints, the concept of habitus could potentially make an important contribution to developing a “revitalized evolutionary approach” (456)

5.3 Postmodern Lifestyles

Even if the *Theory of Leisure Class* (1899) was written hundred years ago, did not dismiss to consider the presence of different lifestyles in the society even though the ‘lifestyle’ was not actually mentioned already. Veblen talked about ‘changing styles’ (174), ‘scheme of life’ (84) and ‘branches of knowledge’: “So, for instance, in our time there is the knowledge of the dead language and occult sciences; of correct spelling, of syntax and prosody; of the various forms of domestic music and other household art; of the latest prosperities of dress, furniture, and equipage; of games, sports, and fancy-bred animals, such as dogs and race-courses”. Prevailing tastes and fashions that occur in different period of time are considered “conventional accomplishments of the leisure class” (Veblen 1899, 45).

Bourdieu was served by the concept of habitus and cultural capital to develop his framework in which he related the different social lifestyles to the social hierarchy. The individual’s behavior is influenced by a set of distinctive elements that belong to each single category of lifestyle, such as/namely the economic and cultural capital.

rather than a vertical connection along class hierarchy, as viewed by Veblen, Bourdieu considered the horizontal interactions across social classes. Consumption is not based on social structure anymore, but/rather reflects the multiple collection agglomeration of lifestyles.

Bridget Fowler (1997,70) agreed that “Bourdieu’s work is best understood as a sociological rebuttal of the history of much crude postmodernist thought.”

Competition among classes confers authority to different category of lifestyles, thanks to the adaptability of the theoretical framework of the author.

For Bourdieu the possession of the economic capital and the influence that employment, property and monetary rewards have on it, plays a major role with respect to the cultural capital.

Individual who owns high cultural capital stock tend mainly to possess intellectual tastes and consequently to better recognize modern art and classical music. Instead, those low cultural capital and high economic capital tend to exercise uncultured and unsophisticated tastes.

Regarding the classical music, for example, the scarcity of cultural resources is seen as an obstacle in the ability of appreciating it. Bourdieu (1984,75) detected that “when the child is introduced at an early age to a ‘noble’ instrument-especially the piano- the effect is at least to produce a more familiar relationship to music, which differs from the always somewhat distant contemplative and often verbose relation to those who have come to music through concerts or even only through records.”

An alternative to classical music, is the film area background/culture, that Bourdieu defines a “not yet fully legitimate” art (1984, 87).

also the appreciation of jazz music, photography, books and collection of contemporary consumer goods available, are alternative additional value for the individuals to be distinctive.

Bourdieu provided a classification for different lifestyles categories according to the degree of economic and cultural capital acquired by individuals during his or her life.

the following table let better understand the economist’s idea.

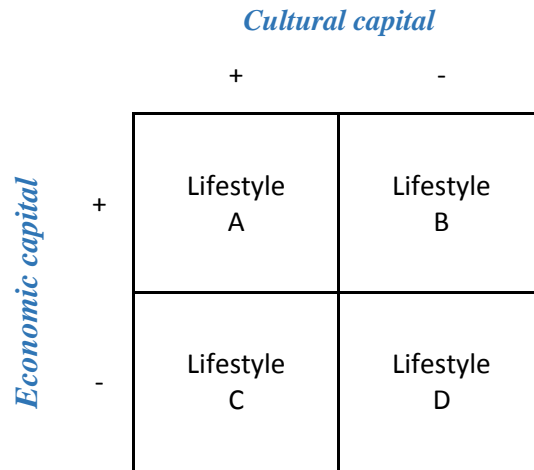


Figure 4 Bourdieu's Classification of Lifestyles,

SOURCE Andrew B. Trigg. "Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption." Journal of Economic Issues 35.1 (2001): 99-115. Web.

Four possible categories of lifestyles come out as a result of combination of the two inputs the economic and cultural capital.

The top-left bloc represents a mixture of a positive input of both types of capital. Professionals such as lawyers, doctors and architects have the perfect knowledge background to appreciate legitimate culture and enough economic capital to recognize and afford luxury consumption.

The opposite block (bottom-right) relates to the working class, a social class who lack of both inputs. For Bourdieu the missed inputs impede the class so far mentioned to soar up the social hierarchy.

On the other side, we find two blocks that are characterized by one positive and one negative input; the left side represents all individuals who do not have such prosperous economic capital but provide relevant background in terms of art culture. on the other hand, the block B represents that category of individuals who are characterized by a significant amount of economic resources but lack of benefits from cultural knowledge.

For Bourdieu, as time passes, there might be a (position) migration of individuals from one lifestyle to the other. For example, a family belonging to category B might easily move to category A, investing in education for their children.

The "New middle class" is an additional example of social mobility provided by Bourdieu.

Moreover, according to Slater (1987, 160), at the first stage a lowbrow capital "gives them an uncomfortable relation to existing taste hierarchies, yet at the same time prompts them to advocate, or

at least to be comfortable with, a new and disruptive scheme of cultural distinctions and legitimations (postmodernism), which they can use to further their interests in the economic, social and cultural fields, and which correspondingly enters into the restructuring of the class structure itself”.

Nevertheless, this graph miss to consider the three- dimensional nature of the model, the continuously and dynamic changing of both the inputs of the model over time (Bourdieu 1984,114).

The social mobility is much more horizontal structured, rather than vertical as seen in Veblen’s theory. The category related to the middle class, for example, embodies both the evolving new middle class, more innovative and future oriented, and the declining farmers class, more conservative that oppose to the cultural change. It is not considered “accidental that the oldest classes or class fractions are also the classes in decline, such as farmers and industrials and commercial proprietors” (Bourdieu 1984, 108).

The Veblenian vertical structure, instead, is characterized by class rules that define each point of such status-structure.

Men belonging to lower-middle class are supposed to work and “the middle-class wife still carries on the business of vicarious leisure, for the good name of the household and its master” (Veblen 1899, 81).

Contrary, for Bourdieu, women, especially these belonging to privileged classes, are not forced by norms, but are self-driven toward working activities (Bourdieu 1984, 178). From his point of view, there is no generalization of norms that determines the existence of class fractions.

Bourdieu with his framework is able to incorporate the dynamic change of lifestyles nature into an analysis of the economic and cultural forces related to the class structure. Chuck Dyke (1999,194) sees the analysis of Bourdieu as a “well-considered decision with respect to a grouping of the cause of social movement”. Bounded by habitus principles, individuals have authority on modeling their lifestyle as a part of their attempt for social mobility. Nevertheless, a postmodern influence on lifestyle structure, does not necessarily means the desertion of social hierarchy and social class categories.

Conclusion

This work has attempted to trace and analyze the various theoretical explanations of the motives, driving such overt displays of wealth, provided by many sociologists and economists in the last decades. Given the historical analysis provided by Veblen, I have introduced the topic with an overview of the depicted scenario of the conspicuous consumption evolution and the consequential recognition of different social categories emerged across years, showing that the game of conspicuous ownership has not disappeared, but rather has been modified to allow for the entrance of more players. Moreover, over time, it can be argued that the primary motivation to behave ostentatiously has remained the same, status and prestige.

Addressing this topic issue, I have faced the main relevant concept of two main related authors, such as Veblen as the pioneer of the conspicuous consumption theory, and Bourdieu as the contemporary contributor of such issue, putting in evidence their correspondent distinctive attributes.

In addition, I have considered three main issues raised by critics regarding the theory of conspicuous consumption, that found inconsistency and obsolescence in Veblen's work. Starting from the original conception of the Veblen's theory, I have discussed each cited issue, observing them from a more contemporary view of Bourdieu, as a contribution to them.

First, it has been argued that Veblen's theory was too restrictive given his one-directional trickle-down approach, from the top to the bottom of the social ladder. Veblen confirmed his assessment on culture as a barrier to social mobility. On the other hand, Bourdieu suggested a general trickle-round model, from the bottom to the top of the social hierarchy, taking into consideration the approach to taste formation, and introducing the concept of cultural capital. As well, in relation to the lack of subtlety and sophistication, another analysis has been faced. Even if, in the post-war time, were observed the dissipation of the consumer's tendency to display wealth, Veblen acknowledged that the upper class section of the ruling class still consumes in a sophisticated manner. Given the development of concept of habitus, Bourdieu provided a contribution to the evolutionary approach showing that, rather than a conscious act, the conspicuous consumption activity is a standard for decency that exerts social pressure on individual's behavior. In conclusion, about contemporary capitalism' lifestyles, I compare the vertical scheme of life of Veblen, based only on class hierarchy, with the contemporary horizontal model of Bourdieu, with the consideration of the habitus concept and the distinction between the economic and cultural capital held by individuals.

The theory of conspicuous consumption, provided by Veblen more than a century ago, become more reliable, consistent to the contemporary scenario and developed thanks to the fusion with the advanced and modern reasoning and thoughts of Bourdieu. considered a potential development of such theory.

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