

# Cultural perspective to consumer behavior

## Consumer Culture



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# What is culture?

# What is culture?



1. **Excellence of taste** in the fine arts and humanities, also known as high culture?

2. An integrated **pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior** that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning?

3. The set of **shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices** that characterizes an institution, organization or group?

**Culture supplies us with knowledge we don't know we know, that operates invisibly to shape our understanding of the world.**

"Makes a compelling case that companies will reap rewards just by working toward more cultural sensitivity. Those inclined to try will get plenty of inspiration and insight from McCracken." —BUSINESSWEEK



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**There is no 'one' culture  
(like national culture)!  
Cultures are endlessly  
multiple!**

# What is consumer culture?

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# Reflections

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## Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research

ERIC J. ARNOULD  
CRAIG J. THOMPSON\*

This article provides a synthesizing overview of the past 20 yr. of consumer research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. Our aim is to provide a viable disciplinary brand for this research tradition that we call consumer culture theory (CCT). We propose that CCT has fulfilled recurrent calls for developing a distinctive body of theoretical knowledge about consumption and marketplace behaviors. In developing this argument, we redress three enduring misconceptions about the nature and analytic orientation of CCT. We then assess how CCT has contributed to consumer research by illuminating the cultural dimensions of the consumption cycle and by developing novel theorizations concerning four thematic domains of research interest.

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**Consumer culture** is a part of capitalism in which the economy is focused on the selling of **consumer** goods and the spending of **consumer** money. Most economists agree that the United States is a **consumer culture**.

What Is Consumer Culture? | Chron.com  
[smallbusiness.chron.com/consumer-culture-67666.html](https://smallbusiness.chron.com/consumer-culture-67666.html)





“Consumer culture denotes **a social arrangement** in which the relations between **lived culture and social resources**, and between **meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources** on which they depend, **are mediated through markets.**”

**(Arnould and Thompson 2005)**

# What is consumer culture theory?

Consumer culture theory (CCT) is not a unified, grand theory, nor does it aspire to such nomothetic claims.

Rather, it is **a family of theoretical perspectives** based on the study of **consumption choices and behaviors**, not from the traditional economic or psychological point of view, but on **the social and cultural side of things** which address the dynamic relationships between **consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings**. (Arnould and Thompson 2005)

**CCT conceptualizes culture as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action.  
It studies the contextual, symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption.**

The **desire** for marketing symbols and commodities

Commercially produced  
**images, texts, and  
objects**

The **reproduction** of symbols and meaning through consumption

The **consumption** of market-made commodities and marketing symbols

## Consumer Culture

**Free personal choice and creative adaptations**

- ✓ How are commodities and marketing symbols used, especially in the private sphere of everyday life?
  - ✓ For what purposes?

Using commodities and market-made symbols **to make collective sense** of consumers' environments, their experiences, lives and identities



# What is consumer culture



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# Consumer Culture is

- SLOW culture **and** FAST culture
- DISPERSIVE culture **and** CONVERGENT culture
- STATUS culture **and** COOL culture

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# FAST CULTURE

*“Fast culture gets the lion’s share of our attention”*



- Visible, vivid, obvious and observable
- Expresses what consumers regard as “fashionable”, “hip” and “trendy”
- Trends, technological disruptions, “signs of the times”

# SLOW CULTURE

*“Slow culture plays the country cousin, less interesting, less fashionable”*



- Deeper, solid foundations of culture
- Enduring, less visible and well-charted
- “What resides beneath the surface”



# Example of slow culture: HOMEYNESS

## What is homeyness?

- A set of rules that specify our choice of materials, colors, furniture, interior design
- It is the essence of what makes a house **a home**

*“It is the way we take an ordinary space and give it extraordinary powers”*



*“Homeyness will not make you look hipper to your friends, there is nothing you can drop into conversation at a party”*



# Deeply rooted meanings

- Homeyness is the secret the very code of domestic life
- Homeyness entails meanings of family life, what a “mother” and “wife “ is, what a “father” and a “husband” is, how the budget is apportioned
- Most importantly, it is often rooted in homeyness, why some brands and innovations resonate for the family and others bounce off
  - Business relevance of studying slow culture

# Fast culture

*“We have to accept disruption and turmoil as the new order of the day”*

- Trend-watchers and cool-hunters
- What is currently regarded as stylish?
- Encompasses a variety of areas:
  - Food and wine
  - Technology, computers
  - Social interaction
  - Music
  - Design



# Trendsetters and trend followers

- Fast culture has many origins.
- New cultural developments can come from the worlds of cuisine, sports, music, fashion, movie making, web sites, social media...
- Influencers? Chefs, engineers, Hollywood producers, bloggers, vloggers...



# Nowadays: everybody can have an influence on fast culture



# The negative aspects of fast culture? Are we slaves of its rules?

**Kyläily on vähentynyt jo 40 vuotta, sanoo tutkija, ja syy voi olla kotihäpeässä: ”Ihmiset tunkevat Ikea-kassit täynnä tavaraa lauteiden alle piiloon”**

Siisti koti on pitkään ollut kansalaisen kunnollisuuden mitta, sanoo suomalaisten koteja tutkinut Ilana Aalto. Jos koti on sotkuinen, tulkitaan, että ihmisellä menee muutenkin huonosti.



**TÄSSÄ OVAT VAALIEN JULKKISEHDOKKAIDEN PAHIMMAT MUOTIMOKAT - KATSE PEILIIN, LOLA!**

01.04.2015 20:20

Muotipoliisi listasi eduskuntavaalien julkisehdokkaiden järkyttävimmät muotimokat.

Katso kuvat!

**'What Not To Wear' Star Stacy London Reveals Her 7 Style Rules Never To Break**



# How fast are things changing?

“How fast are things changing? Friendster was founded on 2002, a media darling by 2003, overtaken by MySpace in 2004, falling fast by 2005, and had completely vanished by 2007.

In technology nowadays, 5 years isn't even that fast

How fast are things changing? Growing up in Hawaii in the 1970's, young Barack Obama saw plenty of racism. And he was struck by how casual, confident, and deeply embedded in it was the world around him. Racist Hawaiians just knew Obama was inferior and untrustworthy. A mere forty years later, this “certain” knowledge is a minority opinion. Forty years later, Obama is the forty-fourth president of the United States.”

In terms of deeply held cultural values, 40 years is “fast”!

# DISPERSION CULTURE



- The sheer multiplicity of cultural expressions
- Endless number of different groups and identities to choose from, endless choice of hobbies, recreation, even identities

# CONVERGENT CULTURE

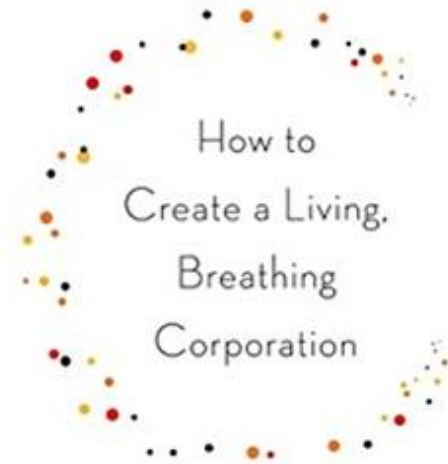


- The glue that holds these expressions together: the common threats across the society
- Described as trends that may last for a decade or so, after they change again
- E.g. Wellbeing, greener consumption

# Dispersive culture

“A couple of decades ago, our **culture seemed to lose its center of gravity and began to run in all directions. It became dispersive.** There were more ideas, more people creating ideas, more ways of living life, more points of view. The real diversity of contemporary culture was not race or gender. **It was this and everything else. The center would not hold.**”

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# Dispersive culture

“It’s hard to imagine that a single culture can produce Frank Gehry and Hannah Montana - -  
**They are so different hat they appear to come from mutually exclusive worlds.**

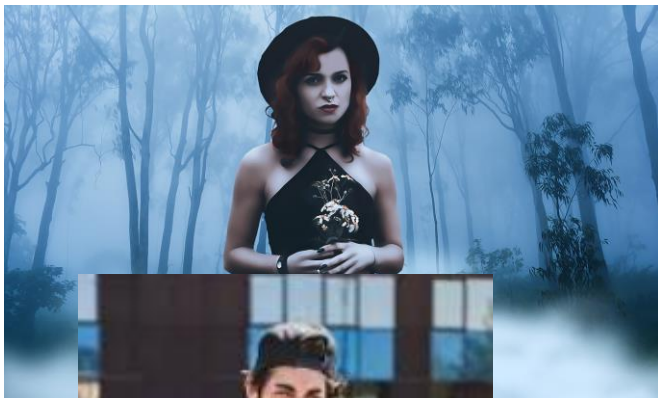
Or here’s a simpler example. Chances are – you use e-mail and the Internet daily. But one in five Americans has never sent an e-mail. **We can’t imagine their lives. They can’t imagine our lives. Ours is a dispersive culture.**”

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NONE OF THIS AND ALL OF THIS?



# What is a teen?



# Multiple memberships, multiple identities

- Social and lifestyle typologies are breaking down
- Inflation of categories
- From mass markets to many little ones
- This can also create identity conflicts and tensions

# Convergent culture

“For all this variety, there are still moments when a magical consensus will emerge. We decide that for all our differences, we share a way of seeing the world and defining ourselves. A characteristic style of clothing, language, music, art and prose springs up. These convergences don’t last long but they are interesting when they do.”

**“Out of the noise and commotion something comes. Our culture suddenly snaps into a new configuration.”**

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# Convergent culture as megatrends

***Five Megatrends***  
And Their Implications  
for Global Defense  
& Security

 pwc

These will impact our  
lives, whether we want it  
or not!

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Megatrends are macroeconomic and geostrategic forces that are shaping the world. They are factual and often backed by verifiable data. By definition, they are big and include some of society's biggest challenges— and opportunities.

The concept of megatrends is not new. Companies, governments, and non-governmental organizations may call megatrends by different names, but the most effective ones have organized their strategy in some way, shape, or form around them.

Megatrend one - Shift in global economic power

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Megatrend two - Demographic shifts

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Megatrend three - Accelerating urbanization

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Megatrend four - Rise of technology

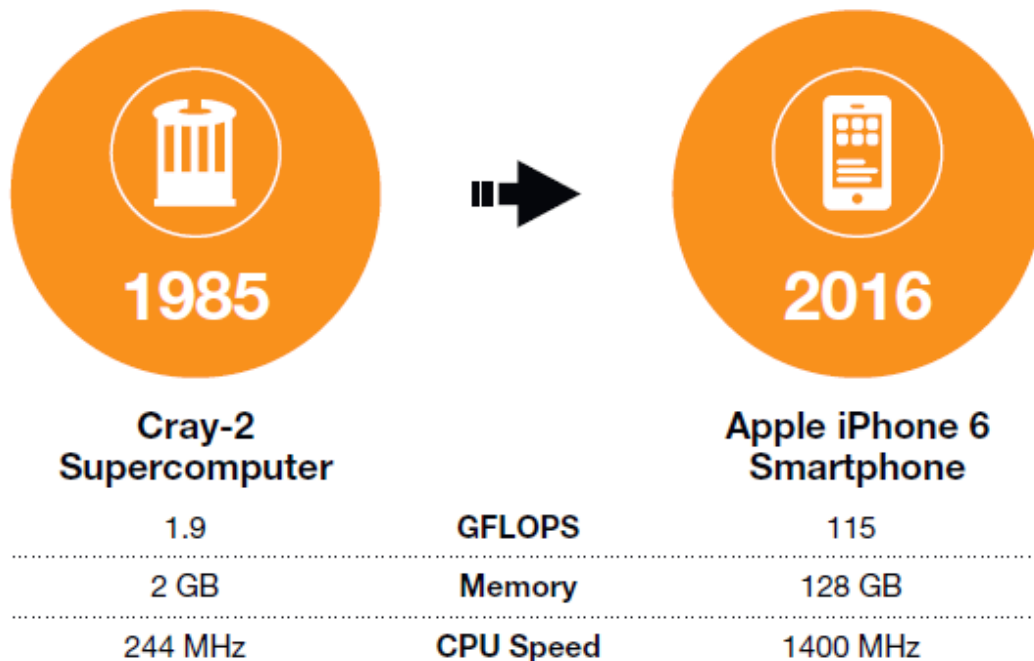
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Megatrend five - Climate change and resource scarcity

## Megatrend four

### Rise in Technology

Figure 11: Dramatic increase in handheld computing power





# 10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition & Health 2020



## 4 Mega Trends





# STATUS CULTURE



- Status used to dominate society and consumption, now it is just ONE of our “concerns” of self-expression
- Arenas where status still reigns: celebrity culture, sports, education...
- Basis of status has remained the same through time: exclusiveness and prestige

# COOL CULTURE



- An attack on status
- In the heart of cool: self-assembly, intelligent choice, freedom to choose oneself
- Showing one’s autonomy and distance from the group
- What is cool can change FAST

# A short history of status

- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century everything was about status
- “Status was a capital more precious than capital”
- Extra income was turned into status objects
- Status was a code that specified how people should speak, who to marry, where to live



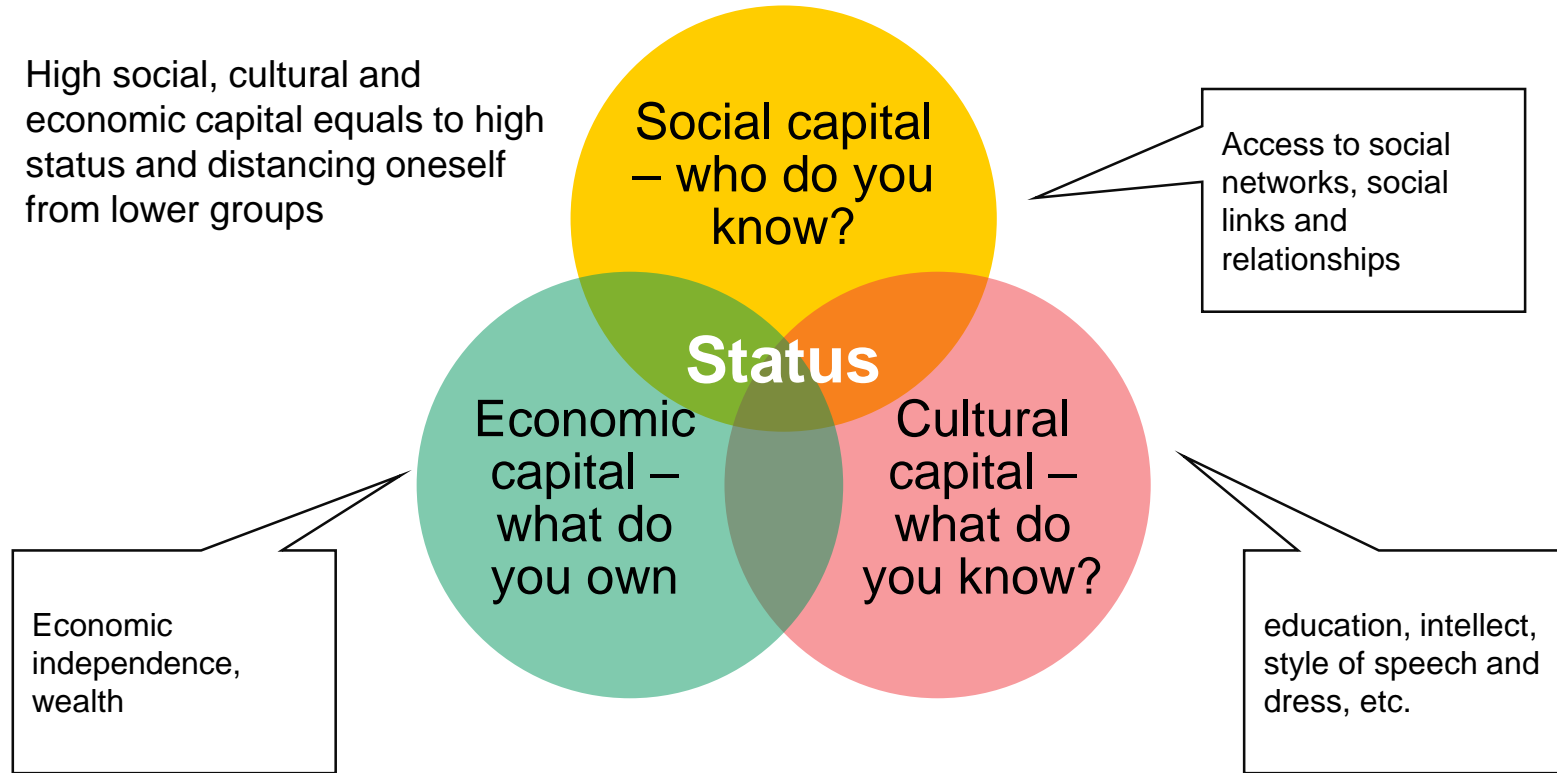
# 1950 → the rise of consumer society brought new resources for status consumption

- Consumers rotated towards clothing, cars, homes, memberships, hobbies that brought them status and prestige
- Competitive spending with the aim of **changing social standing**
- Advertising and media industry enforced this



# Pierre Bourdieu: Status is about taste!

- High social, cultural and economic capital equals to high status and distancing oneself from lower groups



# Important research streams in studying consumer culture



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Socio-Historical  
Patterning of  
Consumption

Social structures  
(class, ethnicity,  
gender)

Marketplace  
Cultures

Subcultures,  
communities,  
tribes etc.

Consumer Identity  
Projects

How consumers  
form a sense of  
self through  
consumption and  
marketplace  
resources

Mass-Mediated  
Marketplace  
ideologies

Representation, cultural  
production, systems of  
meaning, dominant  
ideologies

These are **not clear-cut categories!**

They are **always interconnected, and not mutually exclusive, perspectives,** from which we can examine a phenomenon

# Methods used in Consumer Culture Theory

“CCT neither necessitates fidelity to **any one methodological orientation** nor does it canonize a qualitative-quantitative divide. Consumer culture theory researchers embrace **methodological pluralism** whenever quantitative measures and analytic techniques can advance the operative theoretical agenda.”

**(Arnould & Thompson 2005, 870)**

Having said that..

it's almost always  
**qualitative**



## Consumer Identity Projects

Consumers use marketplace resources to construct their identities.

- Fragmented selves and multiple selves
- Identity transformations and identity play
- Possessions and the extended self
- Identity conflicts
- Body image, gender performativity, meaningful symbolic distinctions



**REFLECT ON CONSUMER IDENTITY PROJECTS  
AND MARKETPLACE RESOURCES.**

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**ARE THERE ANY CONCERNS WITH THIS VIEW?**

# Marketplace Cultures

Consumers as  
culture producers.  
The marketplace  
as a mediator of  
social linkages  
and social  
relationships  
/communities.

- Key question: how do consumption activities foster **collective identifications** grounded in shared beliefs, meanings, mythologies, rituals, social practices, and status systems?
- Consumption communities (brand communities, fan communities, weekend tribes) and their social dynamics
- Sub-cultures (e.g. youth subcultures)



## Mass-Mediated Marketplace ideologies

Important and pervasive ideas or beliefs, expressed in mainstream media and/or the marketplace.

Consumers as interpretive agents and meaning-makers.

- What normative messages do commercial media transmit about consumption? How do consumers make sense of these messages and formulate critical responses?
- **Macro level:** e.g. the influences of economic and cultural globalization on consumer identity projects
- **Meso level:** e.g. how the fashion industry rotates consumers towards certain kinds of identity projects)



# Socio-Historical Patterning of Consumption

The institutional and social structures that influence consumption. Consumers as enactors of social roles and positions.

- Key question: what is consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained?
- Influence of social class, gender, ethnicity, education, families, households, and other formal groups on consumption choices and behavior

