

# **Analysis about the Concept of Taste's Formators. An Interpretation of Komlos' Vision**

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*Abstract: We see or hear around us more and more, direct or indirect, urges about what is good to consume so we ask ourselves: do we choose what and when we need something or act under the impulse of what is communicated to us through the mass media or on social media?*

*Do we communicate something to our fellow men by mere presence, by attitude or appearance? But conversely, do we rely on what a person looks like? Does a luxurious look that makes us think of wealth bring strength to a person? Does the power of the wealth corrupts? How do we deal with corrupt manipulation through contracts with asymmetric information? Is the taste of modern human formed as a communicative manipulation of television and social media?*

*These are some questions that I present my opinion for, as an answer to the challenge launched by Professor J Komlos in the paper "Taste's and Consumption's Formators". Who are the formators of taste? Do we need them? What place does communication through social media occupy in the category of taste formers? Without considering that I am exhausting the subject through this work, I invite you to reflect on it.*

*Keywords: taste's consumption's formators, consumption's formators, social media, contracts with asymmetric information.*

## **1. Television versus the internet - tools for taste's formation**

Aldous Huxley, an English writer and philosopher, foresaw in the book *Brave New World* the dangers of the media, passivity, and how even an intelligent population can be led to happily choose dictatorship instead of freedom. Although the book is largely a fantasy, the economic elements of 2021 have been relatively touched by Huxley since 1932.

Huxley's dystopia is particularly terrifying, because the enslaved population absolutely loves their state of slavery. Even characters who are smart enough to be aware of what is happening (and why they should be worried) are content with the actions they are witnessing. Perhaps more terrifying than other dystopian novels, there is really no hope of change in *Brave New World*. The similarities between today's world and the book world are many, even if our technology has not yet caught up. (Hendricks, 2018)

Television and the internet have a huge influence on the way we think. It influences our purchasing decisions, our lifestyle and shapes our personality. As a person who works online and has studied this field in detail, I can say that the internet has both positive and negative influences.

Television has a strong impact, but it has declined among young people who prefer the internet over television. Generations that have grown up with television still consider it to have a huge impact on viewers, and television stars are still the ones who can influence their viewers the most. Also, television offers exposure to public figures, and this can be felt online, as they have, by default, a large number of followers on social networks. At the moment, I believe that television still plays an important role in influencing our way of thinking, but it is possible that in the not-too-distant future, its place, further leading, will be taken over by the internet. Vlogs are already gaining momentum, TV shows are moving online, more and more TV stars are opening their podcasts, and their fans are following them online.

Influencers, or content creators, are people with a large community of people who follow them and follow their recommendations. Content creators can educate their followers and shape their preferences and influence their purchasing decision. However, some content creators are not advised to make recommendations, and

sometimes even come in front of followers with products that they promote just because they were paid. Therefore, we can discuss in this case both positive and negative influence.

Another negative aspect that the influence of the online environment has is body shaming, ie the lack of self-confidence that is generated by the false physical perfection with which it presents itself to influence. Many applications and filters are used that change and improve the physical appearance, they end up looking perfect in front of the followers, thus generating frustrations. The effect leads to many cosmetic surgeries, self-doubt, and possibly even more serious cases.

Speaking of social media, we cannot fail to mention the huge increase in popularity of the Tik Tok application in recent times. This is mainly due to the algorithm that allows users to reach organically a large number of people, potential followers, without already being celebrities or acquaintances. The catchphrase phrases on Tik Tok spread very quickly, the trends have a huge impact on the users of this application, the influence of Tik Tok on the way of thinking and acting, implicitly the purchasing decisions, modeling the taste of the followers being huge.

## **2. Advertisements - a tool for forming taste**

Advertisements are part of our lives, we run into them on TV, on social networks and anywhere online, in magazines, on the street in the form of posters and billboards, leaflets. Komlos' question is quite harsh, I do not think that advertisements affect our ability to live our lives the way we want, but, indeed, they impact our lives to a great extent.

Digital marketing experts estimate that most Americans are exposed to about 4,000 to 10,000 ads each day (Simpson, 2017). The advertising industry revolves around creating commercial messages that require the purchase of products or services. As consumers, we need and want to be informed, which is a positive feature of the advertising industry. However, some advertisements are meant to lead to the purchase of goods and services that we do not need. Some advertisements may only promote restricted features of the products or services, may mislead buyers and misinform them.

Sometimes we voluntarily choose to buy goods or services that we do not necessarily need, just because we have been influenced by advertisements. Sometimes we even buy things that have proven to be harmful to us, such as cigarettes and sugary drinks. Does advertising lead us to unnecessary purchases? By definition, advertising aims to persuade consumers to buy goods and services, many of which are absolutely dispensable. John Kenneth Galbraith, an award-winning economist at Harvard University, has addressed this issue directly since 1958. In what he described as the "addiction effect," Galbraith expressed his view of the power of corporations to leverage advertising strategies at the wide and marketing efforts to influence consumer purchasing decisions. (Galbraith, 1958)

John Kenneth Galbraith asked if it was possible for a large advertising campaign to create a demand for a product whose benefits are at least frivolous. If so, is there something inherently wrong with that? Or are informed consumers themselves responsible for resisting tempting - albeit misleading - advertising claims and exercising their own judgment about buying a product that could be successful, not because it deserves to be, but simply because of marketing? behind it? These questions remain fundamental to the manager's task of creating ethical advertising campaigns, in which truthful content is a priority instead of inducing wasteful consumption. Compulsive buying disorder (CBD) was first described clinically in the early twentieth century by Bleuler (Bleuler, 1930) and Kraepelin (Kraepelin, 1915). Bleuler described CBD as an example of "reactive impulse," or "impulsive insanity," which he grouped with kleptomania and pyromania. For people whose purchase is compulsive, it leads to "a meaningless contraction of debts, with continuous delay in payment until a catastrophe eliminates the situation a little - because they never recognize their debts."

Shopping addiction is primarily a women's issue. The typical compulsive shopper is an educated woman, 36 years old. The average age of onset is 30 years. Clinical studies suggest the onset of compulsive behavior as soon as people achieve financial independence or earn their first salary. (Lejoyeux, 2013)

We live in an advertising-driven society, driven by consumerism and the need for assertion, so I think many people around us who have medium and high incomes are compulsive shoppers.

From a psychological point of view, it seems that the need to buy anything can have a pathological origin. (Pacurar, 2010) Prolonged stress can be one of the causes that lead to exacerbation of addictions, such as shopping, which is considered a method of relaxation.

We have already discussed the impact of advertisements on us and how, more or less, they turn us into adults, into the citizens of the country, because our personality is influenced by the expressions of some advertisements, the way of life is also influenced by the advertisements that have surrounded, and purchasing

decisions are obviously driven by the ads we have seen, which have created awareness and, perhaps even without awareness, we opt for products and services that have remained in our cognitive level, thanks, or more correctly because of the ads I interacted with.

Children are particularly sensitive to the television commercials they come in contact with on a regular basis. In general, young children do not have a sufficiently developed judgment to know which promoted products are good for them and which of them have little benefit or maybe even harm. Research has shown that very young children have difficulty separating what is real on TV from what is not. Skilled marketers take advantage of the fact that they see advertising in the same way they receive information from trusted adults.

It is an interesting idea to ban advertisements for children under 12, but I think it is impossible to control, implicitly to achieve. Children's personalities would be natural, they would not become compulsive shoppers, and they could make decisions in life that they themselves consider necessary, not those that are subconsciously induced by advertisements.

And yet, this would be impossible to achieve. Children will come into contact with ads in the online environment, when they watch their favorite content creator, they will see the advertising posters on the street. Under the Broadcasting Act, Norway prohibits advertising to children under the age of 18 and advertising in connection with children's programs on TV, radio and teletext. The ban includes any product, including food and drink, but only applies to the media. Advertising is prohibited if the product or service being promoted is of special interest to children, if animations or other forms of presentation are used which attract children in particular, depending on the time the advertisement is broadcast and if children under 13 appear in advertisements. The use of persons or figures who have played an important role in radio and TV programs for children and young adults in Norway in the last 12 months may not be used for commercial advertising. (Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 2020)

The consumption of those around us impacts us strongly, probably most of the time unconsciously. If someone in our environment has bought a pair of designer shoes, we will feel pressure to make the same gesture, to stimulate our sense of belonging. In the online environment, we see how the content creators left and in a vacation, implicitly we will feel the need to take a vacation, not to install the feeling of FOMO - Fear of missing out.

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a social anxiety that stems from the belief that others might have fun while the person experiencing the anxiety is not present. It is characterized by the desire to remain continuously connected to what others do (Fear of missing out). FOMO is also defined as a fear of regret, which can lead to concern that an opportunity for social interaction, a new experience or a profitable investment may be lost. It seems that FOMO negatively influences health and psychological well-being. (Wortham, 2011) FOMO is therefore a strong factor in being influenced by the consumption of others.

Jonah Berger, a professor of marketing at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, discusses how our behavior is shaped by others and examines our constant struggle to be optimally distinct - not too different or too similar. (Berger, 2016) We certainly have this notion of being influenced and there are cases where being influenced is bad, but there are just as many cases where being influenced is helpful. In some situations, such as choosing a restaurant, it is helpful to use online reviews or ask friends.

To the same extent, we are influenced by the consumption of social and cultural norms. There are elements that define us as a citizen of a country, they give us the feeling of belonging to a social group. We want to be part of a community and we need to have behavioral similarities, and that involves the level of consumption.

### **3. The power of wealth - myth or reality**

My favorite childhood writer was Anton Pann and his collections of parables "The Story of Speech" as well as "Nastratin Hoge's Mischief." I remember one of his stories in which he introduced the teacher Nastratin Hoge, "Clothes are more viewed than the honest person", in which the author describes how Nastratin Hoge was treated at a wedding at which he dressed poorly and how the behavior of the bride and groom changed after the teacher borrowed precious clothes for the wedding. As a result of the respect he received when he came dressed in precious clothes, Nastratin Hoge spoke to the clothes urging them to eat. Puzzled, the bride and groom asked him why he was doing this and the wise teacher's answer followed:

"Because," he replied, "when I first came," / With bad clothes, no one honored me, / And when I greeted them, they barely said, "Thank you!" / And when I came with these, they all said to me, "Here we go, here we go!" / Because I see everyone looking at clothes, and they don't honor the person."

It seems, therefore, that even in ancient times the proverb "no clothes make man" was not very true.

A post on a famous social media account debates the topic of wealth and happiness. The post says that rich people think that money does not bring happiness and are intrigued by the fact that those who are not as wealthy do not agree, considering that they are bored to claim that money does not bring them happiness. A quantitative study conducted following this post shows that most respondents believe that indeed - money brings happiness. The topic addressed by Komlos is one of the possible answers to this dilemma.

Of course, the most quarrelsome will say that it is not money that brings happiness, but experiences that are responsible for this feeling. But what background do the experiences have? Holidays are paid for with money, a special dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant is also paid for with money. The reason why money does not bring happiness to the rich is obviously more philosophical than that.

"Wealth turns directly into power, and power is the ability to control the actions and even the thinking of others" (Komlos, 2019, p. 182). Out of the excessive need for power, I believe that people become slaves to money, which implicitly provides an answer to the dilemma addressed by the famous social media account. The more money you have, the more you want, and the more.

Perhaps the theory is not coherent for those who are not as wealthy, not to call them poor because I do not consider it a similar and necessarily appropriate term, but we could just as well exemplify by another hypothesis. A stupid person does not know that he is stupid because he is not aware of the amount of information he lacks, it is a concrete fact, researched by specialists and approved by many people. A smart person will always be eager for knowledge and knows that the information he has will never be complete and that he can always find out and learn more. The same goes for a rich person, the more money he has, the more he needs and wants. And it does not necessarily need money, in itself, but the power they offer.

The idea of society in a world driven by consumerism only accentuates the needs, maybe even the desperation of an individual to consume more and more, especially to be able to be part of society and align with a standard of the people around him. John Komlos emphasizes the psychology of this behavior through a trivial example, to which we have each been subjected at least once in our lives "We order differently in a restaurant when we are alone or when we are accompanied" (Komlos, 2019, p. 146-148). Indeed, the entourage easily influences us to have another drink, when we actually wanted to leave the party or order more under the influence of the pride of showing those around us a greater financial power than thinking of ordering what we really want (or what we really allow).

Komlos quotes Whyte and states that "we adhere to group thinking in order to avoid conflict and assimilate group norms," our individuality being subject, as Whyte pointed out, to group ideology. We humans are beings who need to be influenced. Mega corporations aim to lead the population like a herd of cows and it succeeds through the ease of influencing the common man. It is interesting to emphasize that we are born neutral and our needs "are acquired, they do not appear spontaneously in us". We become adults with a character influenced by the advertising industry. Corporations rely on celebrities, content creators on social media - influencing this era to make us "assimilate the dominant culture." Komlos strongly expressed this phenomenon, saying that we are learning to become adults in the terms set by the advertising industry.

The wealth means power, and as we began this work - the more money you have, the more you want, obviously this principle also applies to the need for power. In most cases, power corrupts. Power corrupts, power destroys ethics and responsibility in an organization, power greatly weakens its level of integrity.

People need to learn to feel in order to understand the moments when they are overpowered with those around them, they need to be educated to understand what overpowering means (in the family, at work, among friends, in public, in social media etc). The same goes for responsibility. It's the starting point. The world is not linear: if you do this, this will happen. The world, society, organizations do not work that way. We are part of an ecosystem and all its elements have a contribution to the next moment that happens. (Panaite, 2019)

Power corrupts even honest people, according to a study by researchers at the University of Lausanne. (Cîmpeanu, 2014) A group of volunteers was set up who underwent a series of psychometric tests, designed to measure various individual differences, including honesty. After that, the participants played the "dictator's game", where they had complete control over the decisions about compensation for themselves and their descendants.

In the role of leaders, they had the opportunity to make pro-social or anti-social decisions, the last of which led to a total reduction of the so-called "pay-out" (in technical jargon, the distribution of net profit in the form of dividends ) to the members of the group, but, on the contrary, to an increase of their own income. As expected, the results showed that those who were classified as less honest presented the most corrupt behavior. But the surprise was that even those who initially achieved high scores on honesty, over time, did not escape untouched by the corrupting nature of power.

But what can we say about the connection between wealth and education? Education starts at home, the parent is the first example for the child, he teaches him to speak, to behave in society and develops his personality. The parent also gives him access to certain information that will create him as an adult. When asked by Komlos about a teacher's salary, if he should earn as much as a principal, I start by saying that I consider the education system to be a snowball. As I have already said, I believe that education starts at home and the role of a teacher is to polish.

But does it serve its purpose? Does the teacher grind a child correctly? To a large extent, no. There are few teachers who master the information taught very well, in which they have an interest in passing it on or psychological knowledge to reach the student in an appropriate way. Theoretically, if we stop at this conclusion, it is easy to say that, indeed, a teacher should not have a general manager's salary. But now comes the snowball effect and we wonder if teachers' salaries are too low and so those who could be deserving teachers choose a more lucrative job, or teachers cannot sculpt the minds of young students to a high level and therefore not is it worth a director's salary? The truth is probably somewhere in the middle, probably the salaries are too low for a teacher who would be really involved in educating a generation. John Kennedy stated, "Children are the most valuable resource in the world and the best hope for the future," which means that we must invest in this resource, and that means, in my view, that we must invest in teachers, including wages that would be attractive to fit teachers.

#### **4. Handling by contracts with asymmetric information**

Asymmetric information is defined by George Akerlof as information that occurs when one party knows more about a good, service or contract than the other. (Akerlof, 1970) We can talk about opportunism, even deception, in some cases. Komlos claims that millions of contracts with asymmetric information have been signed by the parties.

I believe that an important contract should always be checked by an experienced lawyer in that field. To the question asked by Komlos about people who were unpleasantly surprised by a contract, I will answer with a personal example.

In 2016, we organized the first show at Romexpo, and their contract hid a small detail. We organized the show in December, the period when the hall needs heating. I asked them to start the heating system, at which point I was confronted with asymmetrical information: the contract stipulated "Romexpo Hall provides heating systems". All good and beautiful, but when it was necessary to heat the room, a huge room, high costs, we were drawn to the fact that we only benefit from the heating systems, the fuel is at our expense, it is not available to us in the agreed price in contract.

An unspeakable detail for the beneficiary of the contract, the asymmetric information consisting in a misleading expression "provides heating systems". Komlos categorizes this as an exploitation, because one party consciously took advantage of the other party to obtain gain benefits. (Komlos, 2019, p. 174).

#### **5. Can we equate perfect life with the American dream?**

Also from the category of influences on the way or place of living, Komlos challenges the reader with the question: Can we put the equal sign between the perfect life and the American dream?

The American dream is the belief that anyone, no matter where they were born or from what social class they were born, can get their own version of success in a society where upward mobility is possible for everyone. (Baron, 2021). At the same time, it is believed that the American dream is realized through sacrifice, risk-taking and hard work, rather than by chance, so although it is accessible to everyone, it is a lot of work and not many can achieve it.

Today, owning a home is often cited as an example of achieving the American dream. It is a symbol of financial success and independence and means the ability to control one's own home instead of being subjected to the whims of an owner. Owning a business and being your own boss is also the fulfillment of the American dream. In addition, access to education and health care were cited as elements of the American Dream. (Baron, 2021)

The American dream is outlined annually for as many citizens as possible. The number of homeowners has steadily increased over time in the United States, reflecting a key aspect of achieving the American Dream. For example, the property rate at the end of 2020 was 65.8%, which reflects a 0.7% increase over the previous year. Entrepreneurship, another criterion of the American dream, has always been important to the US economy. In 2019, small businesses created 1.6 million jobs. (Baron, 2021)

There are certain situations in which I think it is moral to take advantage of people's ignorance. As long as customers are "naively willing", I can even say that it is worth taking advantage of them. As long as companies do not resort to verifiable lies, we can also resort to consumer naivety as a marketing strategy.

An example that I consider pleasant is the one that targets Carmen Harra (KFetele, 2017). She made fortunes based on the naivety of the Americans and built a business through which she practically took advantage of the ignorance of the customers. She made a jewelry brand with various stones, which bring good luck to those who wear them.

Americans bought these stones to attract money, love and other personal needs. I consider that the business is not necessarily a lie, because it can induce the placebo sensation and thus, the jewelry could even give some yield through self-suggestion. The business is not based on something we can consider to be 100% false, because those stones are considered in astrology to be truly lucky.

We can keep in the same industry the negative example of profiting from customer ignorance and talk about witches who cast spells and apply black magic.

Another negative example of profiting from people's ignorance is presented by (Ciocan, 2016), who talks about the situation in which some traders use the ignorance of buyers to take advantage of the fact that in the public consciousness there is the idea that the difference between raised chickens Naturally, the so-called "chickens", and those who are raised on a poultry farm is given, visually speaking, color. "Several food chain networks are taking advantage of this prejudice and selling so-called chickens."

The only argument for the origin of the birds is their yellow color. In reality, the yellow color of the skin and flesh is obtained by mixing the fodder with which the birds are fed with various chemicals, which lead to a change in the color of the skin and flesh. Experts say that these chemically synthesized substances not only change the color of chickens, but are assimilated into meat and can produce unwanted effects on consumers' health in the long run. Some chicken producers put chemically synthesized feed additives in their feed to change the color of the chickens.

Basically, it's a marketing thing, because manufacturers use chemical dyes to sell the product better, because they can be confused with chickens. The whole process is like this: the dyes dissolve in fat, after which they accumulate in body fat. Where there is more fat under the skin, the chicks are more colorful."

## 6. Conclusions

As Hobbs said, wealth means power, and we, driven by the need for power, have created a corrupt society. Wealth provides irresistible incentives for politicians and creates the need for companies to exist in markets that are not perfectly competitive. Corporations have extended their harsh control of society beyond the military-industrial complex, encompassing the financial sector.

We have reached a time similar to that described by Aldous Huxley in which passivity and how even an intelligent population can be led to happily choose dictatorship instead of freedom. They leave us consciously manipulated by the advertising industry, but, nevertheless, they are not aware of how much our mentality, will, unconsciousness is affected.

Komlos proposes to replace the adult economy with one that begins at birth and recognizes that tastes are endogenous. These measures are beginning to be taken gradually, with steps being taken in Norway, Canada, England, Mexico and Ireland. The power of the advertising industry to promote an unrealistic image should be limited.

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