

Opponent's report

For the bachelor thesis of Ella Rozman

Social Markers of Consumption in the 21st Century

Ing. Inna Čábelková, Ph.D.

In her thesis, the author studies the problems of social markers as sources of patterns and trends in consumption in modern society. The author relies primarily on two sources: "Darwin economy" by Robert Frank and "The Theory of the Leisure Class" by Thorstein Veblen. Specifically, the author interested in consumption patterns as a reflection of inequality in society and the position of individuals in the social system.

The thesis is divide into 6 parts. After an introductory chapter, the author provides the description of existing theory about the source of status difference and the reasons for their existence. The second chapter is devoted to the current status markers regarding consumption patterns. Here the author provides insights of Veblen and Frank. The third chapter is devoted to the psychological explanation of why higher status is preferred and how it affects the motivation of consumption. The fourth chapter is devoted to the future of consumerism. In the fifth part, the author describes a debate on the subject. The sixth part of the work concludes.

Positive aspects of the thesis

- Current and interesting topic
- The methodology assumes comparison of the two authors' theories, but this comparison is very fragmentary and inconclusive (see comments below)
- List of literature is extensive, although the author of the text refers to only a part of the papers listed

Comments and questions

- It would be appropriate to move name of subsection 1.2 (p. 8), about half a page up, where the author starts to describe the concept of Robert Frank
- Chapters lack the usual structure: introduction, main part, conclusion (see e.g. Sec. 1.2, p. 8)
- The concepts of externalities, the environment protection and following up taxation does not belong to the mainstream of the work and should be defined as a separate chapter (see p. 10).
- The author failed to distinguish the ideas of the authors mentioned above that are essential for her work from a less significant for the topic studied. This leads to the fact that ideas are thrown in the order as the author read the papers without adequate structuring (p. 10, 11, 12).
- The comparison of the ideas of the authors is relatively short and weak (see p. 13) with respect to the topic of work. The author writes about the inefficiencies that result from the status based consumption patterns instead of the patterns themselves.
- For the defense it would be advisable to stick to the theme and select the structure: social markers of consumption according to Franke theory, social markers of consumption, according to Veblen theory, comparison, discussion, and conclusion.
- The thesis lacks critical analysis, and gives the impression of simple reproduction of argumentation from two sources.
- Link in Table 3 (p. 20) on p. 35 is unclear. Is it p.35 of the original book or the bachelor thesis?
- Are there positive aspects of consumption by status?
- Are there rational economic reasons for CEOs to buy the most expensive watches or a cars?

- What is the difference between consumerism as itself and purchasing status symbols in particular?
- „Analysis has shown that contemporary leaders in society are also leaders in financial means; this means that those who occupy the highest social rankings are often accompanied by highest pecuniary incomes and as a consequence set standards of fashion, house size, cars and generally on expenditures.“ (P.54). Does this mean that the president of Czech Republic, ministers, the government office members set trends in fashion, home styles, the size of the cars? Do commercials play a role here? Does it mean that the President, the administration of President or the Government controls more money than CEOs of multinational corporations which no one has ever heard of?
- Please specify of the author's own contribution to existing literature.
- Some sources listed in the bibliography are not referenced in the text, for example. Sinha, P. (2012). Stanwyck, R. (2011), Gabriel, Y. and Lang, T. ed., (2006)
- Indices Geert Hofstede described in appendix 3 (p. 54) are reproduced from <http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html> without mentioning the source and without quotation marks. Compare: the definition of Power Distance from the web states that „This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.“ compare with “This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.” The issue of plagiarism needs to be dealt with.

The same holds for other dimensions listed on page 54.

I recommend the thesis for defense with maximum grade of three in case of a successful defense.

Prague, August 31st, 2015

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