

COURSE SYLLABUS



SOCIOLOGY OF CONSUMERISM

IFSA Rome

US semester credit hours: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Course Code: SO386-09 / MK386-09

Course Length: Semester

Delivery Method: Face to face

Language of Instruction: English

Suggested Cross-listings: Sociology, Marketing

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the ways in which modern societies place significance on money and material possessions and the undeniable reality of the “consumer society.” Through a sociological and interdisciplinary approach, consumerism will be studied, drawing upon academic research from various theoretical and applied perspectives. The ubiquitous presence of consumerism and its influences on individual behaviors, social welfare, culture, environmental quality, economic performance, and public policy, will be examined. We will learn to critically engage with the consumer culture that we are steeped in. The Made in Italy governmental and social movement, which labels goods manufactured in-country as such and promotes their high quality, is a vibrant case study for the investigative topics of this course.

COURSE DELIVERY

Students are expected to read or view assigned resources in advance and be prepared to actively discuss them in class. In most meetings, the instructor will overview the topic and then facilitate a group discussion, drawing out relevant themes, following up on specific lines of inquiry, and prompting students’ thoughtful engagement with the topic.

Students are encouraged to bring their prior learning experiences into class discussions (based on experiential learning theory) and to make cognitive connections between this course and others in IFSA Rome whenever possible (based on the philosophy of integrative learning).

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Understand many of the effects of consumerism on our well-being, culture, the environment, and economies from the local to global level
- Explore the impact of advertising and marketing on personal behavior and culture
- Gain facility with ethnographic interviewing and critically engaging with tourist sites
- Be conversant in the language of semiotics

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- Strengthen written communication skills
- Identify resources available for sociology of consumerism research
- Make cognitive connections between learning in this course and other learning experiences in IFSA Rome

COURSE OUTLINE

Week	Topics	Activities	Readings / Viewings
1A	Expectations for the class, including syllabus, grading, etc.	Review syllabus, expectations, projects Class Discussion: What is consumerism? What are some of the benefits and drawbacks?	Video Clip: History of Consumerism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-Unq3R--M0
1B	Capitalism: Reading it Critically		Reading: Faulks, "Capitalism" in <i>Marx and Other Four Letter Words</i> . Pluto Press. 2005 McGuigan, "The Spirits of Capitalism" in <i>Cool Capitalism</i> . Pluto Press, 2009
1B	What is Consumerism?		Reading: Norris – "The Origins and Nature of Consumerism" in <i>Consuming Schools</i> . University of Toronto Press. 2011 Video: Consumerism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I5fRI-YnG0&t=5s Made in Italy.com https://www.made-in-italy.com/
2A	The Birth of Consumerism		Reading: Ewen – <i>Captains of Consciousness</i> , pp. 1-48
2B	Becoming Consumers, Internalizing the Logic of the Market		Reading: Ewen – <i>Captains of Consciousness</i> , pp. 51-102 Video Clip: A Very Short Introduction to Semiotics https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LO9xl5n9aYI (this is a boringly presented video, but the information it contains is invaluable and will help make your semiotic paper clearer.)

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3A	Semiotics: The Study of Signs and Symbols	In class Activity: Instructor will bring in Italian ads for the class to conduct semiotic analyses.	<p>Reading – Hall - <i>Representation and Signifying Practices</i> – Chapter 1</p> <p>Video: Jhally, Sut, director. “Advertising and the End of the World.” Documentary.</p>
3B	Semiotics: The Study of Signs and Symbols		<p>Reading: Hall – <i>Representation and Signifying Practices</i> - Chapter 2</p>
4A	Audience Reception	<p>Class Discussion: As audiences are we dupes to the messages we are given? Are we free to interpret images and messages as we wish?</p> <p>Activity: Look at Italian ads try to find ways in which they could be differently interpreted.</p>	<p>Reading: Hall – “Encoding/Decoding” in Ryan, Ed. <i>Cultural Studies: An Anthology</i>, Blackwell Press. 2008</p> <p>Semiotic Analysis due.</p>
4B	Creating Racial Identity Through the Market	<p>Class Discussion: Based on the readings, how are race and power connected.</p>	<p>Reading: Dyer – “The Matter of Whiteness” in <i>White: Essays on Race and Culture</i>, Routledge. 1997</p> <p>Dyer – “Colored White” in <i>White: Essays on Race and Culture</i>, Routledge. 1997</p> <p>“Benetton’s Most Controversial Adverts” <i>The Guardian: Fashion</i>, November 17, 2011 https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/gallery/2011/nov/17/benettions-most-controversial-adverts</p>
5A	LatinX Identity	<p>Class Discussion: How was the Latinx community “created” by Latinx television programs? Who was included and who left out?</p>	<p>Reading: Davila – “Images, Producing Culture” in <i>Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People</i>, University of California Press. 2001</p>

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5B	Sex Sells: The Sexualization of Culture	<p>Class Discussion: The Pornographication of Culture – How has pornography impacted society, peoples’ ideas of sex, gender, race, etc.?</p>	<p>Reading: Attwood- “Sexualization of Culture” in <i>Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture</i>. 2009</p> <p>Bauer – “The Sexualization of American Culture” in <i>Sex Expression and American Women Writers, 1860-1940</i> University of North Carolina Press. 2009</p>
6A	Controlling Sex	<p>Class Discussion: How can we control the way sex is represented? Should we? Why or Why Not?</p>	<p>Reading: Boddewyn – “The Control of ‘Sex in Advertising’ in France”</p> <p>Valkenberg – “Media and Sex” in <i>Plugged in: How The Media Attract and Affect Youth</i>, Yale University Press. 2017</p> <p>“Il Corpodelledonne”/“Women’s Bodies.” Documentary. Italian with English subtitles, 2009 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y42hqlTmM00</p>
6B	Branding Oneself: Turning the Self Into a Commodity	<p>Class Discussion: What does it mean to sell oneself? How does social media and the market affect how we see ourselves and others?</p>	<p>Reading: Garrett – “The Personalized Market and the Marketized Self” in Hochschild (Ed.) <i>So How’s The Family? And Other Essays</i>. University of California Press. 2013</p> <p>Duffy – “Branding the Authentic Self” in <i>(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work</i>, Yale University Press. 2017</p>
7A	The Tourist	<p>Class Discussion: What is a tourist? How can one learn to sightsee and engage with other cultures without stereotyping, and with an open mind? What ideological ideas about Italy did you bring with you?</p>	<p>Reading: Toomey – “Humanitarians of Tinder: Constructing Whiteness and Consuming the Other” in <i>Critical Ethnic Studies</i>, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 2017), pp. 151-172</p> <p>MacCannell – “Tourist/Other and the Unconscious” in <i>The Ethics of Sightseeing</i>. University of California Press. 2011</p>
7B	Historical Tourism: Consuming History and Nationalism	<p>Class Discussion: How is history <i>made</i>? What do we seek when we</p>	<p>Reading: Handler – “After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site,” <i>American Anthropologist</i>, New Series, Vol. 98, No. 3 (Sep., 1996), pp. 568-578</p>

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		“consume” history?	Gundle - “Visions of Prosperity: Consumerism and Popular Culture in Italy from the 1920s to the 1950s,” <i>Three Postwar Eras in Comparison</i> , 151-172 (selected excerpts)
8A	Creating History and Heritage		<p>Reading: MacCannell – “Staged Authenticity Today” in <i>The Ethics of Sightseeing</i>. University of California Press. 2011</p> <p>Zhang – “From a Symbol of Imperialistic Penetration to a Site of Cultural Heritage The ‘Italian-Style Exotic District’ in Tianjin” in Maags, Ed. <i>Chinese Cultural Heritage in the Making: Experiences, Negotiations and Contestations</i>. Amsterdam University Press. 2018</p>
8B	Politics At The Checkout Line		<p>Reading: Newman – “Politics at the Checkout Line: Explaining Political Consumerism in the United States” in <i>Political Research Quarterly</i>, Vol. 64, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 803-817</p> <p>Gottlieb – “From Concerned Shopper to Dutiful Citizen: Implications of Individual and Collective Orientations toward Political Consumerism” in <i>The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i>, Vol. 644, Communication, Consumers, and Citizens: Revisiting the Politics of Consumption (November 2012), pp. 207-219</p> <p>Historical Tourism Paper Due</p>
9A			<p>Reading: Roberts – “Schumpeter’s Paradox” in <i>The End of Protest: How Free-Market Capitalism Learned to Control Dissent</i>. Cornell University Press, Cornell Selects. (2013)</p> <p>Video: Alain de Botton – Status Anxiety https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1MqJPHxy6g</p>
9B	Shopping Tourism		<p>Reading: Chiara Rabbiosi “The Invention of Shopping Tourism: The Discursive Repositioning of Landscape in an Italian Retail-led Case” in <i>Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change</i>, 9:2, pp. 70-86 (2011)</p>
10A	Ethnographic Interviewing	Class Discussion: Answering questions about doing an ethnography	<p>Video: Gabe and Kristy: Getting People to Talk: An Ethnography & Interviewing Primer https://vimeo.com/1269848</p> <p>This was made for designers but has a lot of useful information for sociologists as well.</p>

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10B	Fashion		<p>Reading: Ewen – “Fashion and Democracy” in <i>Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness</i>, University of Minnesota Press. (1992)</p> <p>Massey – “What Not To Wear” in <i>The World Today</i>, Vol. 63, No. 11 (Nov., 2007), pp. 14-16</p> <p>Video: Killing Us Softly 4, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnAY6S4_m5I</p>
11A		Class Discussion: Discuss the Film “Killing Us Softly”. What role does fashion play in the subjugation of women?	<p>Reading: Panarese – “An Apparent Freedom: Micromachismo in The Resexualization Of Female Bodies in Italian Fashion Advertising” in <i>Villegas (ed.) La Desigualdad De Género Invisibilizada En La Comunicación. Aportaciones Al III Congreso Internacional De Comunicación Y Género Y Al I Congreso Internacional De Micromachismo En La Comunicación.</i> Dykinson, S.L. (2017)</p>
11B	Sweatshops Abroad and at “Home”		<p>Reading: Kinetz – “Deadly inferno exposes true cost of illicit economy in Italy’s illegal Chinese sweatshops” in <i>The Japan Times</i>, Oct. 19, 2014</p> <p>Reuters – “Big Trouble In Italy’s ‘Little China’ As Authorities Crack Down On Sweatshop Factories And Vigilantes” in <i>South China Morning Post</i>. Sunday, 03 July, 2016</p> <p>Max – “The Chinese Workers Who Assemble Designer Bags in Tuscany” in <i>The New Yorker</i>, April 16, 2018</p> <p>Video: BBC Series “Blood, Sweat and T Shirts” any episode. *Instructor will provide a Youtube link.</p>
12A	Environmental Impacts of Fashion	Class Discussion: How has globalization led to increased disparity between the rich and the poor? Why are we seeing the increase of sweatshops now?	<p>Reading: Brooks – “Fashion, Sustainability, and the Anthropocene” in <i>Utopian Studies</i>, Vol. 28, No. 3, Special Issue: Utopia and Fashion, Penn State University Press (2017), pp. 482-504</p> <p>Claudio – “Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry” in <i>Environmental Health Perspectives</i>, Vol. 115, No. 9, The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, (Sep., 2007), pp. A448-A454</p>

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12B			<p>Reading: Mannes-Abbott – “The Emergent Wave of Artworld Activism” in Ross (Ed.)<i>The Gulf: High Culture/Hard Labor</i>. OR Books. (2015)</p> <p>Fashion and Consumerism Ethnography Due</p>
13A	“High Culture” – Museums and Art Galleries	Class Discussion:	<p>Reading: Reading: Couch – “Museums, Galleries, Tourism and Regeneration: Some Experiences from Liverpool” in <i>Built Environment</i> (1978-), Vol. 26, No. 2, Urban Tourism (2000), pp. 152-163</p> <p>Angeloni – “Cultural Tourism and Well-Being of the Local Population in Italy” in <i>Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management</i>, Vol. 8, No. 3 (August 2013), pp. 17-31</p>
13B			<p>Video: Wasteland https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L35R-GQOL9E</p>
14A	Art in the Global South	Class Discussion: Wasteland. Can art be used as an engine for social change? Why or Why not? How so?	<p>Reading: Grabski – “Market Space and Urban Space: The Business of Selling Art in the City” in <i>Art World City: The Creative Economy of Artists and Urban Life in Dakar</i>. Indiana University Press. (2017)</p>
14B		Class Discussion: How does the selling of art change according to location? Does art mean different things in the global south vs. in the north and one of the worlds’ “greatest art centers” such as Italy? What can we learn from this literature that is applicable to your upcoming papers?	<p>Reading: Schneebaum – “Tourism and Art” in <i>Pacific Arts</i>, No. 3 (January 1991), pp. 27-28</p>
15A		Class Discussion: What have you learned during this course? How did course	Art and Culture Paper Due

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		material effect your understanding of study abroad? What did you learn?	
15B	Class Wrap- Up	Review. Discussion of consumerism in study abroad.	Reflection Journal Due

RESOURCES

The following are required texts. All other readings are available in pdf format.

Ewen, Stuart (2001). *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*, 25th Anniversary Edition. 25 edition. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Hall, Stuart, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon, eds. (2013). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Second edition. Los Angeles: Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.

EVALUATION METHODS

The course instructor will provide specific requirements and grading rubrics for individual assignments for the course. Your final grade in the course will be comprised of the following course requirements:

Reflection Journal: 15%

This should be comprised of at least 12 entries (of at least 250 words each) over the course of the semester. These entries should show how you to think critically about your experience as an exchange student in Italy and reflect upon and integrate course materials into your experiences.

Short Semiotic Analysis: 15%

For this paper, you will choose one ad campaign (of at least 3 ads) and do a semiotic analysis of it. You are expected to use the tools of semiotics (signifier/signified, connotation/denotation, icons, etc.) to explore who these ads are marketed to (rich/poor, men/women, gay/straight, black/white/Asian, etc.)? How do they appeal to that group of people or segment of society? But most importantly, what are they saying about them? What values, mores or characteristics do the ads ascribe to them? 4-6 pages

Historical Tourism Paper: 20%

Drawing on the course materials as a foundation, visit a historical tourist site and do a critical analysis of the experience and how it was framed for you. Guiding questions to consider include – what are you shown (and what remains unseen)? Are you allowed access to back regions? If so, what are these and what work does it do to see them? How does the site create authenticity?

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Does the site tell a story of Italian nationalism? If so, what story does it tell and how does it do so?
7-10 pages

Fashion and Consumerism Ethnography: 20%

For this paper, you will be asked to do some ethnographic interviewing. I would like you to interview Italians (at least 5 people from the same demographic group – middle aged women, teenaged boys, etc). You will be asking them about their relationship to things, shopping, status, etc. Be creative. The questions should come from you and reflect your interests and concerns. You are seeking to understand if Italians experience consumer society in the same way that you do. Do things (perhaps a specific thing – Air Jordans', for instance) have the same meanings in Italy. What things are most valued? Do they have concerns about consumerism?

Then you will write a paper of 7-10 pages in length that illustrates the commonalities and disagreements that you find between your respondents. Use quotes from your interviews to illustrate your argument. Your thesis should say something clear about Italian cultural perspectives and how it may coincide or diverge from American consumerism.

Art and Culture Paper 20%

For this paper, you are asked to attend an art exhibit of a contemporary artist (either a painter, installation artist, ceramicist or sculptor). Choose one coherent exhibit or the works of one artist for specificity. Look for an art exhibit that you think is speaking to contemporary power and culture. You are looking for artists that are not simply trying to make something pretty, but are undergirded by a concept. Nearly all artists are grappling with wider issues.

Take photos of the exhibit (if permitted) and use the gallery prompt (available via pdf) to take notes on the exhibit or pieces you will focus on. Then go home and research the artist to find out what *they* think their art pieces mean. Do NOT do research ahead of time or you will undermine your own ability to learn more about the work. What issues are they exploring through their art?

Then write a 7-10 page paper describing the artist and their work. You should make a clear argument about how the artist either reflects or contests elements of contemporary culture. Be sure to take account of any differences or commonalities between how you interpreted the artwork versus how the artist themselves think about their work.

Attendance and Participation 10%

This is a participatory class and therefore your attendance and engagement is integral to its working smoothly. In order to receive full grades on this you must be in class having read the readings in preparation for a vibrant discussion. You are also expected to participate in the class discussions by making comments that are directly relevant to the course materials. While your thoughts and feelings are indeed very relevant to the class and your integration of the readings, they should be clearly related. In other words, it is not enough to share what you feel about –for instance- shopping, you must also be able to engage critically with it and tie your feelings to the academic arguments made in the literature. You must be present and participatory for full grades.

Note: All written assignments should be completed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced.

Timely Submissions

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Assignments submitted after the deadline will be accepted at the discretion of the course instructor and generally only in the event of a documented illness or emergency.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any academic endeavor must be based upon a foundation of honesty and integrity. Students are expected to abide by principles of academic integrity and must be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work while studying abroad. Any academic work (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill an academic requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic misconduct, such as cheating, fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty, will subject a student to disciplinary action.

IFSA takes academic integrity very seriously. Students must not accept outside assistance without permission from the instructor. Additionally, students must document all sources according to the instructions of the professor. Should your instructor suspect you of plagiarism, cheating, or other forms of academic dishonesty, you may receive a failing grade for the course and disciplinary action may result. The incident will be reported to the IFSA resident director as well as your home institution.

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