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## Philosophy of mass culture and consumer society: worldview emphasis

### Filosofía de la cultura de masas y de la sociedad de consumo: énfasis en la cosmovisión

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Written by:

**Mykhailo Zhylin<sup>1</sup>**<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2898-4403>**Uliana Maraieva<sup>2</sup>**<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2600-8532>**Liudmyla Krymets<sup>3</sup>**<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7451-5208>

Scopus Author ID: 57218567700

ResearcherID: AAI-1170-2020

**Tetiana Humeniuk<sup>4</sup>**<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7740-0203>**Liudmyla Voronovska<sup>5</sup>**<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2815-2500>

#### Abstract

The formation of new realities of mass culture and consumer society led to a number of crisis phenomena of an ontological and worldview nature. The purpose of the article is to analyze the worldview accents of modernity from the philosophical point of view of mass culture and consumer society, to outline social transformations inherent in social categories of thinking. General scientific methods of analysis of synthesis, deduction, and induction were used to write the article. The results highlighted the main characteristics of mass culture, it was established that it has a specific influence on worldview aspects. Mass production replicated mass things, chimeras of characters, values, etc., which became obsessive in society. Consumer society has turned consumption into the meaning of life. Consumption received leading roles in creating a new type of relations in society, transforming them according to its own development scheme. Consumption has become the dominant socio-cultural aspect in people's consciousness, which has pushed the economic effect into the background. This has led to the

#### Resumen

La formación de las nuevas realidades de la cultura de masas y la sociedad de consumo condujo a una serie de fenómenos de crisis de carácter ontológico y de cosmovisión. El propósito del artículo es analizar los acentos de cosmovisión de la modernidad desde el punto de vista filosófico de la cultura de masas y la sociedad de consumo, esbozar las transformaciones sociales inherentes a las categorías sociales del pensamiento. Para redactar el artículo se utilizaron métodos científicos generales de análisis de síntesis, deducción e inducción. Los resultados pusieron de relieve las principales características de la cultura de masas, se estableció que tiene una influencia específica en los aspectos de la cosmovisión. La producción de masas replicó cosas de masas, quimeras de personajes, valores, etc., que se volvieron obsesivas en la sociedad. La sociedad de consumo ha convertido el consumo en el sentido de la vida. El consumo recibió protagonismo en la creación de un nuevo tipo de relaciones en la sociedad, transformándolas según su propio esquema de desarrollo. El consumo se ha convertido en el aspecto sociocultural dominante

<sup>1</sup> Senior lecturer Department of Practical Psychology, Odesa National Maritime University, Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor of Philosophy Department, Faculty of Social Sciences, Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine.

<sup>3</sup> Doctor of Science in Philosophy, Main researcher, Senior researcher Social Science Department, National Defence University of Ukraine named after Ivan Chernyakhovskiy, Kyiv, Ukraine.

<sup>4</sup> Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Professor of Department of Event Management and Leisure Industry Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts, Ukraine.

<sup>5</sup> Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor Department of Social Sciences Cherkasy Institute of Fire Safety named after Chernobyl Heroes of National University of Civil Defense of Ukraine.



formation of a crisis of identities throughout the world, as traditional national ways of demarcation are replaced by social. The conclusions suggest turning to the ideas of the Post-Enlightenment, which contain elements of consumerism.

**Keywords:** mass culture, consumer society, hedonism, modern technologies, worldview crisis.

## Introduction

Since the mid-1960s, European and American thinkers have paid attention to the problem of forming a new, qualitatively different stage of societal development. This stage was called post-industrial or information society, where the main criterion of measurement was the role of information technology, which penetrated into all spheres of human activity. While during the 1960s such considerations regarding the next stage of social development were considered futurological forecasts, the further development of technology and related industrial and domestic transformations later demonstrated the reality of the changes predicted by theorists. First of all, they touched the means of mass communication, the spread of television product, and later, computer technologies, the Internet, augmented and virtual reality technologies, other innovations in medicine, biology, robotics, etc. New developments have made fundamental changes in the traditional life of society, emphasizing the leading role of information activity, which has received strong links with production processes and the ways of transferring information.

These changes have complicated and transformed culture - it has become very difficult to comprehend it in terms of traditional philosophical approaches. Thanks to this, the concepts of mass culture and consumer society have appeared, which have become the main features of modernity and require further research from a philosophical standpoint.

The newest configurations in modern culture have become more tangible due to the actions of informatization of all spheres of life. At the same time, we should also note the transformation in the worldview and aesthetic understanding of the world, the change of approaches in science and culture, the revision of socio-political orientations and political practices. Therefore, the definition of society solely as "information"

en la conciencia de las personas, lo que ha relegado a un segundo plano el efecto económico. Esto ha llevado a la formación de una crisis de identidades en todo el mundo, ya que las formas tradicionales de demarcación nacional son sustituidas por las sociales. Las conclusiones sugieren recurrir a las ideas de la Post-Ilustración, que contienen elementos de consumismo.

**Palabras clave:** cultura de masas, sociedad de consumo, hedonismo, tecnologías modernas, crisis de la cosmovisión.

or also "post-industrial" demonstrates the limited understanding of the depth of the existing social reality, which is primarily related to the impact of the latest technologies on human life, the formation of consumption. Such an understanding may be sufficient from the point of view of sociology, but not enough to form philosophical generalizations of the entire list of changes. For this reason, it is an urgent task to compare postmodernist trends in culture with the consequences of the spread of the latest technologies, definitely characterizing the information society and indicating its differences from previous stages of social development. The article aims to analyze the worldview accents of modernity from the philosophical points of view of mass culture and consumer society, to identify the profound social transformations that are inherent in the new social categories of thinking. Accordingly, the main objectives of the study are to characterize the phenomenon of mass culture through the prism of worldview changes. Therefore, the main research questions are:

1. Analysis of mass culture in the context of globalization, determination of its impact on the modern world
2. Study of the peculiarities of the society of consumption and consumerism through the prism of worldview aspects of modernity
3. Analysis the concept of "Protean Identity" as a Product of Mass Culture and Consumer Society.

## Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The emergence of the concept of mass culture occurred at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, after which it became a hallmark of the massification of life. The significance of the human masses in different cultural spheres was analyzed by a number of philosophers of the XX century, who laid the foundation for the interpretation of this phenomenon. In particular,

Pell, Gasset & Cleugh (1933) derive the very concept of “mass” from its cultural content. The researchers note that “society has always been a fluid unity of minority and mass. The minority is the aggregate of persons particularly marked out, the mass is unmarked by anything. The mass is the average person...the quantitative definition” (Pell et al., 1933, p. 120). At the same time, the American philosopher Stanton (1962) characterized the relationship of mass culture and mass communication and communication.

The American sociologist Bell (1965) in *The End of Ideology* believed that the characteristics of society are determined by the emergence of mass production and mass consumption. The key principles of consumer ideology are reflected in the research of Killbourne (1991).

Clearly, the mass has been significantly transformed: it has become educated, digital, and informed. At the same time, the subjects of mass culture are now not just the mass, but individuals united by different ties. According to Iorgulescu & Marcu (2020) the concept of “mass culture” characterizes the peculiarities of the production of cultural values in modern industrial society, designed for the mass consumption of this culture. Also, these researchers note that mass culture leads to the emergence of products of globalization that transcend cultural spaces. Ishaya (2020) characterized the key features of the spread of mass culture. Boström (2021) analyzed how social relations influence the reproduction of consumer culture as well as its decline. The researcher emphasized the intersection of consumer culture and the social integration of everyday rituals. At the same time, Cohen (2020) highlighted how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the spread of consumer culture. Feder et al., (2022) based on the Taking Participation survey and COVID-19 Cultural Participation Monitor found a relationship between cultural consumption and Covid-19. In the results of the study, the author notes that the majority of the population, characterized by a lack of participation in formal cultural forms, did not notice a change in their consumption behavior. However, there are still very few synthetic works that integrate the analysis of mass culture and consumer culture through the lens of philosophical science. The problems of defining precise terminology and analyzing the axiological dimension of mass culture and consumer culture are also marginal.

## Methodology

The study is theoretical in nature, so to write the main text, the implementation of the goals and objectives used general and special research methods. Given the importance of the philosophical component in the study, among the general scientific methods, the following take the leading place: comparison, analysis, synthesis, deduction, and induction. In particular, based on the use of the method of comparison it is demonstrated that there is a scientific discussion about different understandings of the essence of consumerism, consumer society, and mass culture.

On the basis of synthesis, it is possible to pass from an understanding of separate facts, definitions, phenomena, and categories to the formation of a holistic picture of ideas about the main problematic of the research. Thanks to deduction there was also the reverse process - the splitting of the collective concept into separate details or the definition of the main features of this concept. Thanks to this it was possible to summarize the interpretations available in the professional literature and to identify individual elements of complex phenomena.

Among special methods of scientific cognition, the method of building abstractions was used first of all for writing the article. Based on abstraction it was possible to move from a general interpretation of consumer society and mass culture to the study of the individual components of these concepts, the definition of important aspects, and the formation of generalizations. The use of the systematic method allowed to form the structure of the research and consistently disclose all the important issues related to the topic. Let us also note that the article was written based on the principles of consistency, impartiality, and comprehensiveness. In particular, thanks to this, the worldview features of modern post-industrial consumer society, consisting of many manifestations and elementary parts, which are in constant renewal and transformation, were considered.

Based on the proposed methodology, the study was carried out in several stages. On the first characterized the novelty and relevance of the study, considered the main theoretical concepts in modern scientific literature. The next stage of the study is the analysis of the influence of consumer society and mass culture on the attitudes of modern society. The last stage - the

formation of the final conclusions, identifying the prospects for further research.

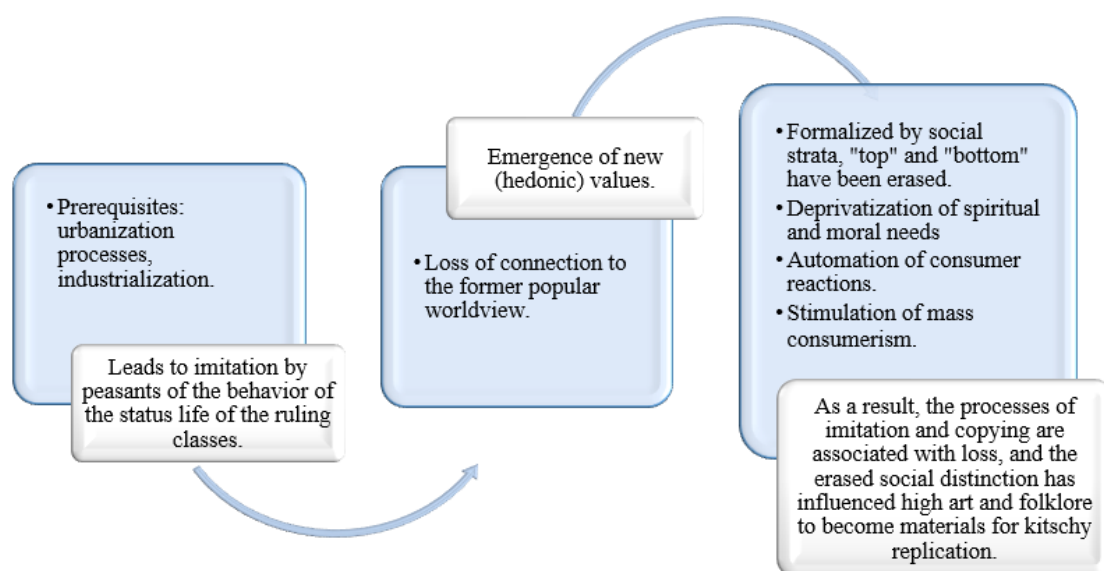
## Results and Discussion

### Mass culture - the culture of the masses, the culture designed for the consumption of the people, carrying out the standardization of human spiritual activity

The genesis of the spread of mass culture stems from the processes of urbanization caused by industrializing changes. Former peasants, becoming residents of cities, lost touch with the former and the worldview. Such a phenomenon begins with the 19th century in Europe (Bushanskyi, 2012). Consequently, the key

factor of cultural development becomes not the reproduction and dissemination of popular culture, but the imitation of the status lifestyle of the ruling strata.

The reason why modern society has become a mass society is that it has absorbed unified trends, despite the large-scale wars of the population (Boström, 2020). The term consumer society emerged on par with the concept of mass society, which, in turn, is characterized by: the spread of mass communication and mass culture, the standardization of production, the depersonalization of relationships, etc. As a result of these processes, central institutions and accepted systems of values have expanded their scope (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** A Model of Mass Culture Development through the Prism of Worldview Transformation Authors' development

Mass culture is a key phenomenon of postmodern trends. "People tend to eat the same food, dress the same clothes, listen to the same music, have the same eating habits, and believe in the same values and rules" (Iorgulescu & Marcu, 2020, p. 304). Thus, mass consumption leads to products of global culture that transcend cultural spaces (Morska & Davydova, 2021).

The modern concept of the social clearly correlates with the idea of J. Baudrillard in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majority or the End of the Social* (Baudrillard, 1994). He endows the mass with the following typical features of the postmodern world: chaotic, unstructured. The mass has no quality, no attributes, no predicates. It acts as a silent majority, literally absorbing the social (Baudrillard, 1994).

The key directions and manifestations of modern mass culture are the stimulation of mass consumer demand, the development of the industry of image formation and "improvement" of physical qualities of individuals, the transformation of the leisure industry containing mass artistic culture, mass staged and spectacular phenomena, mass resort and cultural and tourist services, where technical techniques of "high" art are used in order to convey a simplified sense infantilized content, that is adapted to unhappy. The role of mass culture from a sociological point of view is conditioned not just by the set of various products that are actively distributed, but also by the degree of their influence on people's consciousness and behavior (Cohen, 2020). Contemporary researchers note that by transforming itself into a special institution, contemporary mass culture has become a

powerful mechanism of psychological control (Iorgulescu & Marcu, 2020). In addition, the elements of repetition, uniformity of this culture lead to the emergence of the so-called automation of consumer reactions. At the same time, copying or imitating “popular” people leads to imitation of their reactions, this leads to the fact that people copy certain behaviors, emotions, imposing a certain taboo on other emotions. Such rejections of certain “stereotypical” emotions and active use of “compulsive” behavioral stamps leads to a low level of emotional intelligence - the ability to deal with one's own and others' emotions, that is, to properly understand, assess, and express them. Today emotional intelligence is an important worldview of the modern developing person.

Mass consumerism is also about mass production (Ishaya, 2020). It is not only a matter of replicating not only certain things, but also imitations of characters, behavior, thoughts, feelings, or cultural values.

A characteristic phenomenon of mass culture is that in it formalized by social strata “top” and “bottom” are erased (Bushanskyi, 2012). If previously a representative of the aristocracy had the opportunity (and should) lead an appropriate way of life and had every opportunity to use objects and artifacts corresponding to his position, in the current conditions all social strata have the same conditions for consumption.

Imitation, repetition, which is characteristic of mass culture, is a loss-making process. The process of imitation has outwardly-formal signs, but the imitator cannot grasp the content and essence of the example he or she is oriented to. Imitation is associated with simplification, and at the same time, to the creation of a copy (Bushanskyi, 2012). Consequently, the spread of hedonistic values in mass society is accompanied by the phenomenon of deprivation of the spiritual and moral needs of man. We are talking about when the process of “mass” affects the person completely and becomes the center of his life. A phenomenon is emerging that is associated with a one-sided dependence on mass trends, things, etc. (Boström, 2020). This, in turn, affects the emergence of several psychological effects. First of all, there is the effect of constant dissatisfaction with one's standard of living, which is maintained through the constant arousal by the culture of mechanisms of social comparison. Television and the Internet, where an exaggerated, rather than real, the standard of living is demonstrated, may be of key importance in this system (Ishaya, 2020). At the same time, this dissatisfaction is accompanied by an increase

in social isolation: individuals are less and less likely to reach the level of personal relationships, preferring to replace them with formal role relations of the exchange type. This is observed not only between employees, neighbors but even between relatives. Thus, a new tendency is emerging - the consumer isolation of family members from one another. At the same time, such things lead to a decrease in emotional intelligence, since emotions are most intensely involved when people communicate with others.

Among such processes that lead to so-called psychological malaise, the main one stands out - the loss of the true meaning of existence since the phenomena of dissatisfaction and isolation are mere manifestations of the mental emptiness that haunts mass society.

At the same time, with the spread of mass culture, there is no social distinction between social strata, which has defined the specific limits of the existence of high culture (classical art) and folklore. They have become mostly materials for kitschy replication. At best, they have become materials for interpretation.

### **Consumer Society and Consumerism: Worldview Features of Modernity**

Consumerism and consumer society are often synonymous. At the same time, there can be a difference between the two. Consumerism is a specific way of life associated with an exclusive desire to buy and consume goods (Boström, 2020). Among its characteristic features is shopping, understood as the direct implementation of spontaneous purchases, and as a form of sensual consumption, associated with the consideration of store windows and goods, but without the motivation to purchase them. From this point of view, consumerism can be seen as a certain component of consumer society, connected directly with the process of purchase itself.

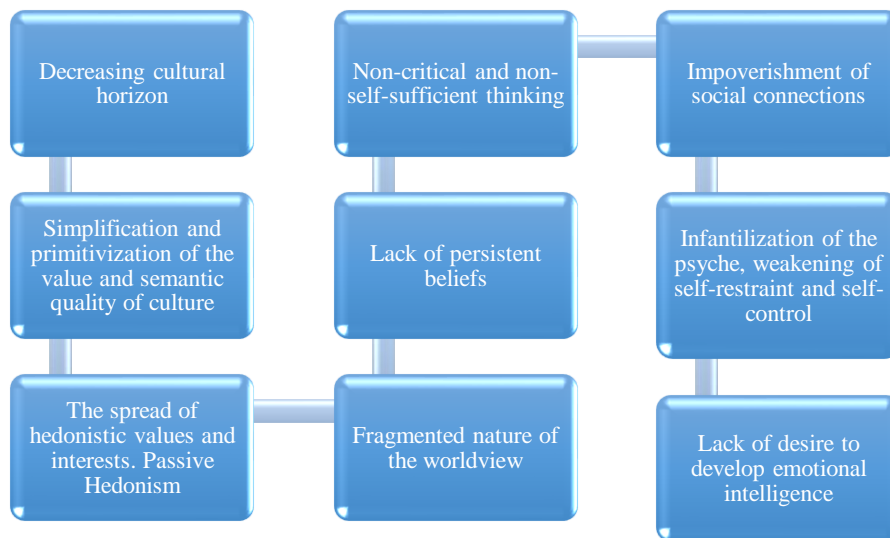
Instead, consumer society is understood as a form of social relations based on the mass consumption of goods and services, which forms the corresponding worldviews and behavior in society (Lorenzen, 2017). At the same time, such practices evolve and, as of today, the purpose of buying things is not so much to satisfy certain natural needs of an individual as to demonstrate an individual's belonging to a particular social stratum (whose representative can buy such a thing). Popular among philosophers and sociologists is the definition of “demonstrative consumption”, which is also called “prestigious”,

“demonstrative”, “status”. The content of this concept is revealed as spending wastefully on the purchase of goods and services that are important primarily to show off one's own wealth, rather than intended to meet immediate needs (Mohr, 2021). Given the above aspects, it is not only said that certain social, economic, and cultural categories are formed, but also that constant anthropological concepts are formed. In a sense, these categories become axiological, moral, aesthetic, and pedagogical, define the standards of characterization of the quality of human life, internal orientations, spiritual and cultural outlook, etc.

Certain cultures of modern consumer culture are based on technological innovations and gadgetization. Life cycles of goods are becoming shorter, new and improved models quickly replace the old ones within a very short period of time. This leads to the notion that durable

consumer goods do not exist at all - things are not adapted to serve people for long periods of time (Boström, 2020). The components of the consumer society are several worldview elements. First of all, consumption gets leading roles in shaping social relations, transforming them in its own way (Yates, 2022). Second, it is not the economic but the social and cultural aspect that has become dominant in consumer consciousness. In this way, consumption is taken beyond economic life and becomes a key part of the social and cultural behavior of individuals. Due to this, consumers create corresponding programs of behavior, various products, and things, facts, other people are characterized due to this.

Thus, actively spreading on a global scale, consumer culture leads to the formation of the following attitudes (See Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Worldview attitudes of a representative of consumer culture  
*Authors' development*

Consequently, the above attitudes lead to the infantilization of the psyche, the suppression of the will in favor of the emotional, and then the lack of desire to develop emotional intelligence. The latter is important in today's worldview processes because a high level of emotional intelligence forms a greater degree of satisfaction with one's life. The above factors characterize a special anthropological type – “human-consumer”, brought up in the system of meanings and values of mass consumer culture.

**“Protean Identity” as a Product of Mass Culture and Consumer Society: Axiological Dimension**

Modern people permanently trying on different social roles, following various ideological trends and fashionable brands, find themselves in a “labyrinth of identities”. Researchers use the concept of “protean identity” proposed by the American psychiatrist R. Lifton to explain this condition. Its essence is that a person's identity in modern conditions cannot be in a static state and is constantly transforming, so people become similar to the ancient god Proteus, who was permanently changing his own appearance (Lifton, 2017).

There are a number of reasons for this tendency to change identity. Among them, globalization - the interaction and interpenetration of cultures, as a result of which modern people feel like "citizens of the world" and lose their traditional sense of their roots, their connection to familiar social environments and social institutions that functioned as powerful mechanisms of identification and self-identification - is one of them. The challenge in the globalized context was the spread of mass culture, which, in turn, provoked the emergence of mass man. The mass man in terms of identification is in a difficult situation of axiological choice (Boström, 2020). In particular, if being a special individual in today's circumstances means remaining the same as everyone else, then the traits of personal individuality can only be obtained when one refuses to be an individual. This gives rise to the rather strange but true notion that not wanting to be an individual at a time when everyone wants to be one allows one's individuality to emerge.

In modern circumstances it is difficult for people to form a well-established image of their own self: its structure, consisting of a certain number of diverse images, becomes significantly more complicated, turning into a multi-level structure, in which there are almost no connections, unified belonging, etc. The formation of identity according to the traditional scheme creates a balanced system of views and images, perceived as natural and indicating a part of the individual's consciousness. Mass culture through the mechanisms of globalization has caused the emergence of crisis identity, which is manifested in the violation of certain connections and the unity of the whole structure. For this reason, the problems of personal identity are currently among the extremely relevant parts of philosophical discourse.

Consumption in modern conditions is considered one of the key phenomena, a certain category, which is extremely important for the characterization of reality and allows us to assess the state of society and individuals (Feder et al., 2022).

Such a phenomenon influences the formation of the current social reality, and in many respects determines the identity of individuals and the way they perceive the world around them because every individual is also a consumer. From this perspective, consumption is much more than just the possession and use of things for personal purposes. Consumption becomes the identity of the world of goods around us.

Consumption itself is interpreted in many contemporary scholarly texts as one of the main values, primarily through its role and significance in economic life and in the functioning system of social axiology. Consumption has been transformed from a means of obtaining a perceived goal into a peculiar kind of human activity (Ostropolska, 2021). Consumption has transformed from an ordinary operation into an activity through which a person creates his or her own image, achieves his or her goals, and realizes his or her own values through specific behavior. In fact, consumer activity (and professional activity) has become the main expression of self-realization, identity. So, the culture of mass consumption society also presents a challenge to identity formation. In today's world, many new cultural symbols have emerged, which, using the mechanisms of global dissemination, the Internet, and mass media, transcend national borders, allowing individuals a new sense of connection between loved ones, but also with others (Verganti, Vendraminelli & Iansiti, 2020). Under such conditions, individuals gradually lose their sense of autonomy and insularity, but the autonomization of society is also characteristic, where a sense of community does not contribute to mental or moral rapprochement. The crisis of identities is therefore conditioned by a reassessment of values, which have always been the basis for any identification.

An important tool for overcoming the state of uncertainty can be the philosophy of the "New Enlightenment", the essence of which consists in global transformations in the system of thought. As a consequence, the human worldview will remain humanistic, integral, but free of egoistic anthropocentrism. It will be open to development, but moderately conservative (to ensure stability and peace). On this basis, there will be a need to inhibit excessive consumerism, but to appeal to ideas of environmental protection, the search for balance, and moderation in the use of technology, gadgets, etc. Through this, a global cosmopolitan identity is possible, taking the best achievements of the past and adding new refinements to them. Although such considerations are only suggested in research, they are worthy of attention as a specific form of countering the negative effects of mass culture and egalitarianism.

## Conclusions

Thus, modern post-industrial society has given rise to the development of mass culture and

consumer society. Considering the globalization processes, the development of the latter categories has gained a worldwide character and is important from the point of view of philosophical research. In the realities of the spread of mass culture, the social distinction between social strata has been erased, that is, in the present conditions, all social strata have the same conditions for consumption. This phenomenon has also defined the specific limits of the development of high culture and folklore: they have become mainly materials for kitschy replication. As we have been able to establish the importance of mass culture is conditioned not only by the totality of a variety of products that are actively distributed but also by the degree of their influence on the consciousness of people. The peculiarities of the worldview inherent in modern mass culture are the formation of global consumer markets, the influence of image improvement industries, the transformation of the leisure industry, which have transformed artistic culture, simplifying it to tourism and entertainment services, the infantilization of art, egalitarian trends of society.

Consumerism and consumer society, as demonstrated, are different concepts. Consumerism as a part of consumer philosophy constitutes an integral part of consumer society, which has formed certain worldview guidelines of its own: the primitivizing of sociological-semantic qualities of culture, the spread of hedonistic moods and egoism, the infantilization of psychological processes, the non-acceptance of criticism and the lack of critical thought. Man, a representative of consumer and mass culture in general is characterized by a lack of desire to develop emotional intelligence, which ultimately leads to a decrease in life satisfaction.

The formation of mass culture, which created the mass man, led to the emergence of the "Protean identity," which shows the crisis of contemporary identities in the world. In the same way, consumption has changed its meaning from a means to an end to an activity. The emergence of worldwide new cultural symbols and their dissemination through global channels of information transmission have changed the worldview motives of identification, which has become more social than national. This crisis requires a solution, and a possible solution could be an appeal to the ideas of post-enlightenment, the main theses of which are related to the restriction of consumer activity and the appeal to spiritual reference points.

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