

How Mass Media Promotes Consumer and Criminal Behavior: A Theoretical Perspective on Consumer Criminology

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Abstract: The nexus between consumerism and crime has become a primary concern in contemporary global societies. The aim of this article is to revisit modern theories of criminology and outline the theory of consumer criminology, with a specific analysis of the role of mass media programs. This article proposes a critical discussion of key criminological themes and theories. The findings illustrate that the consumer-culture paradigm has shifted from subculture to mainstream popular culture due to the expansion of modern technology-led communication and the globalization of mass media programs. Consumer culture, with its pervasive effects, has infiltrated all institutional sectors to such an extent that corruption now prevails, appearing as socially accepted, thereby forming a network of criminal activities. More importantly, the juggernaut of consumerism, coupled with the seductive influence of mass media programs, leads to the proliferation of unrestrained networked offenses. This monumental shift must be considered in policy-making for socio-cultural development.

Keywords: Criminology, consumer criminology, consumer behavior, mass-media culture, criminal network.

Introduction

Consumerism has been embraced as a contemporary doctrine of modern lifestyle, serving as a marker of dignified identity, social standing, and overwhelming prestige. The proliferation of mass media programs, driven by the advancement of mass media, establishes consumerism as the popular mode of life, ultimately being a byproduct of globalized capitalism. Consequently, a vast majority of people find themselves dominated

by the immense influence of TV advertising and popular cultural programs that explore the modern style of mass consumption, contributing to the stylization of social life and constructing a pervasive worldview (Hayward, 2007). Additionally, smartphones, incorporating various mass media programs, accelerate individuals' inclination toward a pervasive consumer culture, where achieving a variety of consumption becomes a prime target for all.

This cultural flow brings about a transformation in the values, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, intentions, and goal-setting of human life. The rapidly growing inclination towards this form of consumer life engulfs and absorbs all other distinctive beliefs, thoughts, and choices, rendering members of a one-dimensional culture, regardless of their economic capability, social standing, geographical location, gender, or race. As a result, the one-dimensional formation of culture represents a potent force in contemporary social structure, capable of easily constituting a consumer mindset. The common formation of the consumer mindset is closely associated with the reification of lifestyle, which is brought about by the commodification of every activity.

This cultural trend is driven by the core features of modernity, including individualism, reflexivity, a rational exchange system, hedonistic impulsivity, and instinctual liberty, all of which coexist within the atmosphere of consumer culture. However, the escalating trend in popular consumer culture has become so influential that individuals are socialized by the force of consumer culture, exerting pressure on them to violate constitutional laws and normative regulations, leading to the commission of various crimes. Furthermore, the predominant emphasis on the notions of needs and greed generates frustration and relative deprivation, establishing a nexus between consumerism and crime (Morrison, 1995; Hayward, 2007). Thus, it is perceived that consumer culture, with its features of late modernity and postmodernity, along with its instrumental tools of mass media, actively influences and induces people to engage in criminal behavior. In this process, criminal behavior overlaps with consumer behavior, leading to the consideration of criminalization as a process of normalization in contemporary consumer societies. This necessitates the development of theoretical constructs in the fields of sociology and criminology.

Crime, Criminal Behavior, and Criminalization

Generally, we understand crime as behavior that breaks the law. In other words, it involves rule-breaking that deviates from societal norms and goes against established social expectations (Thompson, 2020). From a political perspective, Newburn (2007) argues that crime is defined as a specific form of behavior that contravenes state laws and incurs legal penalties for such violations (Thompson, 2020). Specifically, an act is considered a crime when it constitutes a breach of punishable laws in a given context and is harmful to both society and the well-being of communal living. This implies

that when individuals exhibit inhibited behavior, it signifies criminal behavior. The classification of actors' behavior as either criminal or non-criminal is determined by how the behavior is labeled in terms of law violation or the neglect of social norms. It can also be argued that, to some extent, criminal behavior is synonymous with deviant behavior, as a violation of the law often corresponds to a breach of social norms.

On the contrary, in many respects, criminal behavior does not always align with deviant behavior, especially when deviating from social norms is not linked to punishable laws. However, criminal behavior is commonly understood through various forms of crime or criminal activities, with violent crime, economic crime, and victimless crime being prominent categories. Violent crimes, such as robbery, murder, rape, assault, or torture, are so alarming that victims perceive their lives and well-being as under threat. While each crime has specific objectives and patterns, every criminal activity varies in terms of behavior. For instance, distorted gender relations driven by instinctual drives may lead to rape; anger towards another person may result in assault; a vindictive attitude or a desire for political power can be the motivation for homicide or intentional killing, and the compelled act of seizing others' wealth may lead to robbery.

Above all, aggressive and impulsive responses are evident in the behavior of violent criminals. Conversely, a criminal may employ a compulsive response, such as killing a rape victim to eliminate a witness and evade lawful punishment. Furthermore, a terrorist attack appears to be an outburst of complex behavioral responses, where neither personal aggression nor impulsive motives dominate; instead, a distorted ideology may generate a hostile attitude in their behavior. While some view terrorism as premeditated and politically motivated violence, others see it as the dramatization of prescribed violence (Brown *et al.*, 1991).

Economic crime shapes criminal behavior differently due to its distinctive features. Rational choice theory, concerning economic crime, suggests that individuals act to maximize their material benefits and utility for individual and social well-being, relying on cost-benefit calculations (Henry & Lukas, 2009). This reductionist attitude can lead actors to overlook the distinction between legal and illegal means of achieving benefits. In such situations, actors calculate the cost-benefit ratio after violating legal rules and compare it with the ratio of costs associated with following legal means. Economic crime occurs when actors perceive better economic outcomes from violating laws and have an opportunity to commit crimes. Moreover, the increasing inability or lack of opportunity to obtain economic facilities may drive individuals to adopt criminal behavior, a phenomenon referred to by criminologists as economic crime (Brown *et al.*, 1991).

Commonly known as economic crimes, stealing, burglary, robbery, marketing fraud, and white-collar economic offenses each have specific behavioral patterns depending on the nature of the crime and the techniques employed. The occurrence of crimes such as stealing, robbery, hijacking, and burglary is closely associated with

situations of unemployment, poverty, and famine. The criminal behavior related to these crimes is influenced not only by the nature of the crime itself but also by the role of law enforcement agencies. Another form of crime associated with the process of modernization is known as white-collar crimes, committed by educated professionals, businessmen, and affluent individuals. Those involved in white-collar crimes are typically characterized by traits such as greed, irresponsibility in their official work, engagement in fraudulent economic transactions, corruption through false or undocumented means, and expertise in cybercrime using their technical skills.

The criminal behavior of white-collar criminals is so distinct that these individuals are not socially recognized as criminals until they receive a judicial verdict of punishment. This implies that white-collar criminals often maintain higher levels of material lifestyle, leading luxurious lives. Their behavior is oriented towards economic success, gaining higher social status, and obtaining honorable political positions. Consequently, in many societies, the criminal behavior of white-collar criminals is not perceived as normless behavior; instead, it is often seen as conforming to social norms under the guise of consumer behavior.

In this context, consumer culture has embraced the most acceptable and admirable culture, becoming a powerful cultural force to the extent that white-collar criminals are welcomed as a high-ranked consumer social group. This manifestation of consumer culture consistently motivates individuals across all classes and social groups to emulate the values of white-collar criminals under the shadow of an elitist culture. This modern process is known as the criminalization of lifestyle, as well as the consumerization of the life course. An explanation of how this process emerged is needed.

Factors Affecting Criminal Behavior: A Theoretical Debate

The pervasive pattern of anti-social personality disorders is primarily identified as a factor shaping criminal behavior, involving repeated violations of the law, repeated deception of others for personal profit, repeated failure to adopt consistent work behavior, repeated physical force, impulsivity, and lack of remorse (Vold *et al.*, 1998). These features are specified by the official Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-4) of the American Psychiatric Association. Most of these features are not causes of crimes but rather attributes of criminal behavior. The causes of criminal behavior are explored in different theories such as psychodynamic theory, learning theory, labeling theory, strain theory, control theory, conflict theory, and so on.

Psychological State, Differential Reinforcement, and Criminal Behavior

The psychodynamic theory developed by Freud suggests that mental disorders can lead individuals to commit crimes, manifesting as behavioral problems such as aggression and

cruelty. In other words, crime is viewed as the outcome of personality defects influenced by the conflict between the id, ego, and superego, as well as disruptions in the progress of childhood development stages (UKEssays, 2018). Freud (1975) identified the id or pleasure principle as the primary source of intention for satisfying instinctual needs or sexual desires, while the superego, as the opposing nature, demands contributions to people, sacrifices for brotherhood, and work for the destitute. According to Freud, when the id of an individual feels highly restricted by the rules and regulations of the superego, another conscious nature, the 'ego,' mediates between the id and superego. However, according to Freud, when the superego fails, individuals find opportunities to exploit others' possessions, engage in sexual acts without consent (rape), humiliate, torture, and even commit murder. Freud's (1975) psychoanalysis also suggests that individuals are heavily repressed by powerful figures maintaining patriarchal roles, which may permit aggressive behaviors such as sexual assault and rape under the guise of sadism.

This implies that crimes result from unconsciously motivated actions arising from growing repression and aggression, as well as the allowance of instinctual and gratifying drives. However, Freud's idea of the crime-inducing factors exposes only a limited portion of the reality of criminal behavior, as it fails to acknowledge how society may influence adolescents or juveniles to commit crimes. In the differential association theory, Sutherland views criminal behavior as learned behavior acquired through interaction and communication, involving associations with criminals from whom individuals learn various techniques, skills, and motivations for committing crimes (Sutherland *et al.*, 1992). Unlike the Freudian notion of the role of civilization, this theory suggests that individuals are not entirely controlled by humanitarian aspects; instead, most people navigate through life with different interests and purposes that prompt them to engage in normative conflicts, forming differential associations.

Therefore, according to Sutherland, factors influencing criminal behavior include ideas of the violation of law, crime-inhibiting conditions, and differential reinforcement, which encompasses both social and nonsocial associational reinforcement (Brawn *et al.*, 1991). For instance, cultural transmission from the community, cultural conflict stemming from social disorganization, interactions with family and friends, and media influence are potential factors contributing to the creation of differential associations and the development of a mindset for committing crimes (Sutherland *et al.*, 1992). Sutherland proposes that the process of social learning establishes a stimulus-response mechanism, where social interaction and intimate relationships in social settings are influenced by the norms and values developed by offenders (Henry & Lukas, 2009).

In this social setting, offenders learn skills, knowledge, norms, techniques, motives, and behaviors that favor committing crimes, contrasting with the norms, values, attitudes, and cognitive behavior of conventional societies (Henry & Lukas, 2009). These factors

suggest that, through the learning process rather than the process of repression, the cultural practice of fulfilling extensive material desires and gratifications drives people to establish a consumer network that influences the criminal environment.

Social Ecology, Social Structure and Criminal Behavior

In addition to the learning process, environmental factors contribute to different social ecologies that are responsible for accelerating crime and criminal behavior. Value-oriented social bonds and social controls established in a community may not be crime-oriented, thanks to well-organized schooling, the shared and communicative roles of community members, a coordinated health care system, and proper economic exchange. On the contrary, societies that accept the presence of gangs, illegal drug businesses, and land grabbing, as well as experience increases in school dropouts, disorganized and frustrated families, rising poverty, and declining employment opportunities, are more likely to be offensive than others (Elliott, 1997).

That means societies characterized by higher ethnic and racial divisions, a higher ratio of poverty and inequality, high population density, lower wage rates, poor schooling opportunities, and weak forms of social capital have experienced high crime rates (Henry & Lukas, 2009). In short, a disorganized economy, mal-integration in social networks, deregulation in family and schooling, and lower socioeconomic status in the social community trigger an increase in crime and offensive behaviors, disrupting social functioning (Jose, 2021). Extensively, the macro social structure in both modern and pre-modern societies shapes different criminal attitudes with varying degrees. Both Durkheim and Merton explained differently the nature of social structure as a major cause and source of criminal behavior.

The increasing practice of violating social norms as well as social expectations is directly linked to the increasing ratio of crime, while different social structures vary. Social structure stimulates strain tradition for the cause of distorted aspirations, materialistic drive, and increasing desires to fulfill higher expectations (Brown *et al.*, 1991). Strain arises from material, social, and psychological deprivation produced by cultural and social expectations, interpersonal relations, the application of control and regulations, and the perception of failure or loss, eventually leading to crime and deviant behavior (Tittle, 2000). Durkheim's idea of anomie, in connection with strain and criminal behavior, requires explanation. According to Durkheim, in mechanical societies, criminals are identified in terms of the violation of the collective conscience, and harsh punishment is maintained to secure mechanical solidarity. This implies that crime is the result of resisting the constraints of the collective conscience (Vold *et al.*, 1998).

In contrast, Durkheim observed a significant level of crime in industrial societies where individualism and anomic states are prevalent. Common features include the

lack of social norms and regulations, a sense of rootlessness, isolation or loneliness, and anonymity (Jeffery, 1958). In short, Durkheim's theory of anomie specifically explains crime and deviant behavior in modern societies. According to Durkheim, the transition from collective conscience to individualism, driven by individuals' higher material expectations, an increased degree of tolerance towards criminal behavior, and the approval of less violent punishments for criminal activities in the expansion of functional law, induces more crime and deviant behavior (Clinard, 1964).

As a whole, Durkheim viewed crime as the outcome of modernization, wherein industrialization and urbanization create more opportunities for committing crimes or engaging in anomie. Anomic behavior is the result of a disjunction between people's aspirations and their ability to achieve these goals (Brown *et al.*, 1991). Durkheim speculated that industrial society is directly associated with drastic economic growth, and this economic expansion increases the insatiable level of desire and aspirations, primarily affecting the middle and upper classes, which in turn accelerates property crime or white-collar crime (Durkheim, 1897/1951).

Structural Contradictions, Anomie, and Criminal Behavior

Unlike Durkheim, Merton posited that people are not naturally inclined to higher material expectations; rather, the social structure itself puts pressure on individuals to achieve material success. In this context, Merton (1968) defines anomie or deviant behavior as the result of mal-integration between cultural goals and institutional means. When society emphasizes achieving culturally determined goals but does not provide sufficiently institutionalized means, people are more likely to engage in criminal behavior. This implies that crime or anomie is the result of pursuing illegitimate means in response to the pressure of attaining culturally prescribed goals, while staying far away from institutionalized means (Merton, 1968). Merton argues that people follow the American culture of achieving more wealth as a socially established goal, from which self-gratification and social rewards of prestige seem to be derived.

Specifically, Merton (1938) suggested four modes of adaptation: innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion, which are associated with the inconsistencies between cultural goals and institutional means, implying patterns of criminal behavior. In the analysis of those modes, Merton found that when a proportion of people are unable to adapt to the distribution of legitimate means, and thus fail to reach success, it becomes a prime cause of committing crimes. Highlighting this fact, Merton assumes that lower-class people are mostly inclined to commit crimes to increase their adaptation to the social structure, as they lack educational qualifications, while middle and upper-class people mostly follow the mode of conformity, reducing the propensity to be deviant (Vold *et al.*, 1998). This suggests that in terms of having opportunities for

institutional means, lower-class or working-class people tend to be deviant to a large extent, the middle class stands in the middle ratio, but the wealthy class receives a non-deviant identity.

Influenced by Merton's anomie theory, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) assess that the criminal subculture is constituted by the criminal, retreatist, and conflict groups. Drawing upon the limitations of Merton, Cloward, and Ohlin (1960) point out that criminal activities arise when a particular gang or juvenile gets illegitimate opportunities to occupy an abundance of wealth, and they find their community organized which is considered another social opportunity to commit crimes. When the youths are orientated to the conspicuous consumption of middle-class and upper-class values but lack legitimate opportunities, they form 'criminal' gangs for seizing wealth using illegitimate opportunities (Vold *et al.*, 1998). When illegitimate ways are blocked, and the community is disorganized, those gangs engage themselves in committing violent crimes that form a conflict subculture (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960). Furthermore, the retreatist group (e.g., drug addicts) is the group that experiences double frustration because of having neither legitimate nor illegitimate means to achieve consumer demands resulting in social dropouts (Brown *et al.*, 1991).

In conclusion, views from Merton, Cloward, and Ohlin indicate that the social prescription of success goals, particularly in terms of economic and consumer prosperity, creates significant strain on those who are unable to reach it. Consequently, crime and deviance increase in proportion to the inconsistencies with legitimized means. In this sense, it is true that the deprivation of consumer identity and the violation of legitimate means are to be considered the main reasons for crime and deviance. In contemporary societies, consumer culture has become so pervasive that this culture largely reinforces all individuals to hold a consumer identity. Therefore, behaviors and motives are newly shaped.

Mass Media-Consumer Culture Nexus and Cultural Reinforcement

The framing of modern culture is derived from the development of mass media, which is situated within the process of modernization. The production and circulation of cultural discourse are shaped by mass media programs (Thompson, 1995; Yar, 2012). In the middle stage of the twentieth century, the cultural revolution evolved in a manner where technological communication and entertainment were intertwined through the collective application of improved print technologies, TV broadcasting, and computer services (Fang, 1997).

Most significantly, Gerbner (1998) views television as the source of cultural reproduction, noting that television is the symbol of a common symbolic environment that permeates the integration of the dominant pattern of images and messages into

everyday life. TV programs, including news, dramas, movies, advertisements, music, and occasional cultural programs, are highly enjoyed by family members in every society. This cultivates beliefs, attitudes, values, and consciousness toward all kinds of people in every society, resulting in the generation of common perspectives, common culture, and cultural homogeneity (Gerbner, 1998). Furthermore, advertisements in TV programs stimulate viewers to accept the products and commodities of multinational companies, such as Unilever products. As a result, mass media-led culture has become mainstream culture, remaining the culture of homogeneity adopted by heterogeneous social groups.

More critically, Baudrillard develops the idea of consumer culture in relation to the role of mass media in postmodern societies. Baudrillard (1998) argues that the contents of mass media provide a totalitarian message to consumer society, highlighting images of the world and images of life in terms of consumer culture. According to Baudrillard (1998), mass media represents commodities as signs, revealing the consumption of commodity signs as a marker of social differentiation and a new form of social affiliation that determines social prestige as well as the social order system. For this reason, branding commodities are regarded as seductive, and also, a source of extraordinary power that can uplift the human position. This commodification process determines and regulates most individuals in consumer society.

Likewise, being the most influential mass media as well as polymedia, the smartphone engulfs every individual's choice, preference, interest, and perception by constructing digital culture as the mainstream culture in our age. The prevalent use of smartphone applications (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Messenger, and many commercial apps) forms a relationship between consumers and between the market and consumers in terms of sharing information and content about brand items. With its effect, the culture of self-presentation, self-image exploration, and self-glorification has been commonly portrayed (Kohli *et al.*, 2015). In this way, smartphone apps like Facebook and YouTube cultivate common and dominant views, consumer norms, consumer lifestyles, elusive attitudes toward shopping, and ephemeral romantic culture that can constitute a media-based one-dimensional culture.

More specifically, Bauman (2000) points out that online-based virtual dating and virtual relationships are closely associated with consumerism, in which amusement and entertainment through romantic and sexual affiliations have become core values of consumer culture. Thus, Bauman (2008) stresses the role of social media platforms and social networking sites that enhance the practices of self-branding, self-stylization, and commodification of the self as distinctive values of consumer culture. In this regard, it is conceivable that contemporary consumer culture has become a powerful force not only for socialization but also for creating pressure upon each individual holding a consumer identity. This pressure and process normalize the way of reaching the higher

status of consumer identity, whether lawful or unlawful. Therefore, the new trends and techniques followed in consumer culture are transformed into cultural reinforcement that may generate consumer behavior or criminal behavior through normalized or abnormalized ways.

Consumerism and Consumer Criminology

The contemporary societies of late modernity are societies of consumer culture following both top-down and down-top approaches. According to the top-down approach, global capitalism and the international market mechanism are expanding the space of the consumer atmosphere in which commodity consumption and the consumption of overemphasized lifestyles are regarded as core values of modernity. In early modernity, consumer culture was the culture of the leisure class or wealthy class. At that time, livelihood culture was the culture of the working class and lower-middle class. Therefore, living with conspicuous consumption was class-bound, which was glorified as an honorific and status-prone culture. Veblen (1934: 69-74) denotes that

Consumption of the better grades of goods.... pertains normally to the leisure class....it becomes honorific, and conversely, the failure to consume ...becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit.

This form of consumer subculture was the culture of a minority, although the feelings of deprivation of this subcultural identity led to psychological discontent. Merton viewed that deprived people had a sharp distance from the established goal of economic success and also from the institutional or legitimized means. For those who felt severe deprivation and exclusion from the institutional system, a number of them tried to search for illegitimate ways by which they would be able to lead a consumer life. Thereby, criminal behavior became the manifest means of achieving the economic goal, by which criminal groups and consumer groups were recognized according to the role of class characteristics. Legitimate wealthy and illegitimate wealthy, thus, constituted separate subcultural entities, for which the consumer cultural group was the beholder of social status, and the criminal group was considered socially deviant if they had specific geographical boundaries.

Top-Down Approach and Seductive Reinforcing

The consumer-culture paradigm shifted from subculture to mainstream popular culture with the expansion of modern technology-led communication, globalization of mass media programs, huge production through automation, a large extent of commodification, and the translation of every kind of lifestyle into consumer culture, constituting another modernity called late modernity. Another cause of this change is

that consumption has become a dominant force in social relationships instead of the mode of production. Relating to this concept, Baudrillard argues that the reproduction of the act of consumption and the expansion of consumption are shaping the nature of the mode of production, instating a new epoch in capitalism (Poster, 2001).

Even the consumption of luxurious commodities is perceived as so miraculous that modern daily life is governed by the primitive mentality of consuming more, increasing distinctions with others, and glorious consumption is embraced as a gift from heaven (Baudrillard, 1998). The fundamental character of contemporary consumption, according to Baudrillard, is that it increases pressure on demand to reach salvation by consumption as the consensus of the majority. This type of consumer society newly socializes all individuals through the learning process, interpersonal communication, social training in consumption, and the signification process. Therefore, consumption is considered a strong element of social control and a prime factor of socialization (Baudrillard, 1998). Specifically, the social logic of the contemporary culture of consumption, according to Baudrillard (1998), reveals power and status through the consumption of commodity signs, in which need and necessity get less value, and the denial of enjoyment persists while the need for social difference and the desire for getting an abundance of social meaning are considered of larger importance in social life. Thereby, consumption has become institutionalized, and consumption culture is being accepted as compulsive and imposed cultural behavior. As stated,

“One of the strongest proof that the principle and finality of consumption is not enjoyment or pleasure is that is now something which is forced upon us, something institutionalized, not as a right or a pleasure, but as the duty of the citizen”. (Baudrillard, 1998: 80)

As a consequence, the level of consumption determines social merit, and consumers are celebrated, glorified, and praised everywhere; they feel like sovereign entities since their consumer culture receives democratic support (Baudrillard, 1998). Furthermore, for Bauman (2000), ‘life organized around consumption’ denotes that life is guided by seduction with increasing desires and derivative wishes where luxury has little sense, and the sky is the only limit. Therefore, consumer activity has become compulsive as well as addictive in consumer society. This addictive nature of consumer behavior is shaped by the continuous role of mass media programs such as TV advertising, entertaining programs, and also by the role of smartphone apps. The language of TV advertisements seems to be so prophetic and hypnotizing in a sense that their messages and images follow technical manipulation, gigantic mystification, persuasive statements, languages of fantasies, sexual vibration with commodities, and a triumphal paean to consumption. This is aimed at imposing consensus among the people of societies (Baudrillard,

1998). With this consensus and signification process of TV ads, people are ordered by the sign value of commodities because they think branding commodities are highly desirable, exciting, and capable of fulfilling needs, though their needs are influenced by the hyperreal presentation of commodity signs. In line with this idea, Vaughan (2002) assesses that the valuation of desire and social difference declines collective orientation in social relationships, rather it accelerates a more individualist nature and attitudes, rendering societies more unstable, imbalanced, and dysfunctional, making harmonious social living more difficult.

As a result, all classes in every consumer society are affected by total manipulation, leading to the exploitation of consumers by multinational companies through fixed-price techniques. For example, Unilever has established its global market and achieved surplus profit by manipulating consumers in all countries, where consumers are dominated not by use value or exchange value, but by sign value—generating an expanding nature of double exploitation. This form of globally organized capitalistic exploitation is seductively managed. The seductive reinforcement in consumer culture is globally organized, perpetuated, and systematically managed, with the global circuit of capital being dominant. Additionally, to expand the consumer market, mass media programs are instrumentally used, thereby achieving an acceleration of conformity to the manipulative system.

Juggernaut of Consumerism and Integrated Criminal Activities

Different sociological perspectives provide varying explanations for criminal behavior. Durkheim attributes criminal behavior to the lack of regulation, normative control, and the rise of individualism, with industrialization and its promotion of higher expectations for material success playing a crucial role in committing crimes. In this context, productive reinforcement is directly related to criminal activities. On the other hand, Sutherland emphasizes differential associations and associational reinforcement as the primary factors influencing criminal activities. In contrast, Mertonian views suggest that structural reinforcement is a major cause of different forms of crimes, leading to the creation of subcultural spaces as a reaction to the consumer lifestyle of the leisure or wealthy class. However, these factors of reinforcement become less significant in the realm of contemporary consumer culture, where consumerism has become the central ideal for people across various societies, both developing and developed.

In this context, consumer culture, guided by the globalizing influence of multinational companies, is universally embraced and accepted by people of all classes. It has become an integral part of life for everyone, with only differential idealists dissenting from this prevailing trend. The practice of rational choice, seen as the fundamental aspect of consumer culture, can lead to criminal behavior when opportunities are readily available,

and there is a lack of social control, perpetuating market positivism and eroding state sovereignty—a phenomenon known as the criminology of neo-liberalism (Hayward & Young, 2004). According to the rational choice theory, actors strategically navigate through the net of social control, searching for opportunities to achieve their structured economic targets. However, the commodification of culture transforms rule-breaking into an appealing mode of transgression. It is not driven solely by a positivistic idea of relieving deprivation or seeking rational opportunities to acquire more goods (Hayward & Young, 2004). Instead, the cultural criminological perspective highlights rule-breaking behavior as a means of securing a modern identity, expressing individualism, fulfilling immediate needs, and asserting freedom of expression.

However, contemporary consumerism rejects both the rational choice perspective and the cultural perspective of criminology, recognizing their limitations in predicting the actual causes of modern criminal behaviors. Ferrell (1999) frames cultural criminology in the context of mass media's role, suggesting that a wide array of criminal activities and deviant behaviors are constructed through the mass media, leading to new forms of social and legal control. The emergence of new media is intricately linked to criminal behaviors, driven by a two-way process of socialization. The term 'new media' encompasses information communication technologies and computerization in the generation, reproduction, and dissemination of digitized content (smartphones and smartphone apps), widely accessible to the general population (Jenkins, 2008; Yar, 2012).

Examining the role of mass media, Gerbner (1998) illustrates that most TV programs are strategically designed to reach a broad audience and diverse social groups for commercial purposes. These programs, in turn, generate diverse demands and encourage viewers to embrace products and commodities, often from multinational companies like Unilever, thus promoting consumer culture as the mainstream culture. According to Baudrillard (1998), mass media exposes the consumption of commodity signs as a symbol of social differentiation and a novel form of social affiliation that dictates social prestige and the overall social order system. This system is further expanded by smartphones, as these devices, along with their popular apps (such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Movies, Music, and TikTok), foster shared views on lifestyle, entertainment-driven culture, and the culture of self-presentation, emotional gratification, and fleeting romantic connections.

In this context, Bauman (2000) contends that smartphones have given rise to a culture of computer dating, expanding virtual relationships and providing increased opportunities to satisfy a growing hunger for love and sexual partnerships. However, the modernity of virtual dating and messaging, according to Bauman, introduces challenges as the rising culture of 'liquid love' leads to criminalizing behaviors such as

grooming, possession of indecent photographs, sexual assault, exposure, and voyeurism (Best, 2019: 1096). This implies that criminalizing sexual relationships results from the abuse of trust and manipulation of intimate connections on virtual platforms (Best, 2019). Additionally, Bauman observes that the unrestrained engagement in eroticism in virtual spaces has become so seductive that detached sexual activity, divorced from morality, becomes perilous, punitive, and threatens to instigate an 'impatience complex,' undermining social relationships (Bauman, 2010; Best, 2019).

As a consequence, new mass media facilitates the acceptance of various forms of consumer culture, encompassing the commodification of consumption, consumption of sign-based commodities, the commodification of conjugal and romantic relationships, and the enculturation of pornography as core values of contemporary consumer culture. Consequently, today's consumer culture is so intricate that multifaceted consumer activities appear as the juggernaut of consumerism. The juggernaut of modernity falters as Giddens' dream of unlimited progress slows down (Lusardi & Tomelleri, 2020). The potent sociocultural force of consumerism, or the juggernaut of consumerism, is closely intertwined with a wide array of criminal activities that, in turn, diminish the broader dream of social progress. An analysis is needed to understand how this intricate consumerism is associated with different types of integrated criminal activities. In the consumer world, the tautological representation of commodity signs through mass media and communication systems is so simulative that consumers feel mesmerized and hypnotized, rendering their lives commodified. This trend has become so widespread that all classes are driven to pursue wealth, regardless of the legitimacy of the means to achieve their goals.

In this situation, crime becomes an alternative means of appropriating resources, providing access to material possessions, fantasized positions, and social respect (Hall *et al.*, 2013). To achieve 'stardom' in consumer culture and maintain a consumer identity with vast wealth, the institutionalization of corruption has become a central value among professionals. This implies that the more occupational positions are commodified, the more likely corruption is institutionalized, and white-collar offenses are recognized as behaviors of conformity. Additionally, the mass media-led desire for self-presentation of consumer identity and the yearning for social recognition play a core role in motivating offensive and compulsive behavior to gain economic possessions, often disregarding legal constraints (Yar, 2012).

The culture of offenses is transmitted from the upper layer of professionals to the lower layer, as institutional prevention of corruption proves ineffective. This inefficacy is rooted in the commodification of the institution dedicated to corruption prevention, where consumer culture has permeated all institutional sectors to such an extent that corruption prevails as legalized and socially accepted. The horizontal spread of consumer

culture is evident through interpersonal communication, inter-family and community interaction, and vertically from administrative structures to informal social settings. This is a social fact that highlights the pervasive influence of consumer culture.

The most alarming situation is that the rapid transmission of consumer culture creates a conducive environment for criminal activities, forming a network of illicit behaviors. Within this network, white-collar crimes stand out as central criminal activities, exerting significant influence on peripheral crimes like land disputes, juvenile delinquency, rape, robbery, smuggling, and even cybercrime. Administratively and legally, those responsible for preventing crime often find themselves protecting criminals in exchange for substantial bribes, contributing to the rise of subcultural crimes and offenses linked to differential associations. Furthermore, white-collar criminals play a role in the escalation of cybercrimes. This interconnected web of criminal activities poses significant challenges for law enforcement and crime prevention efforts.

Conclusions

With a critical review of major theoretical approaches to criminology, the paper aims to construct a new theoretical framework due to identified limitations in understanding the etiology of crime. The dynamics of mass media and its global impact on the attitudes and behaviors of audiences have become so influential that other factors seem insignificant and weak. The globalization of mass media programs is so powerful that people across nation-states are highly hypnotized into becoming consumer objects, effectively succumbing to market fundamentalism. Consequently, consumer culture emerges as a potent socializing force that weakens political and institutional control, leading to a proliferation of offensive activities.

The conclusive idea is that the juggernaut of consumerism is the prime cause of the emergence of networked offenses, wherein mass media consistently fosters a seductive mentality for achieving consumer identity. The socio-democratic nature of growing competitiveness for seductive consumption, and seductive consumerism itself, reinforces all people to overthrow the legal way of earning and accept the market determinism of consumer culture. Findings portray that the consumer-culture paradigm shifted from subculture to mainstream popular culture with the expansion of modern technology-led communication, globalization of mass media programs, and a large extent of commodification.

With its effects, consumer culture has permeated all institutional sectors to such an extent that corruption prevails as legalized and socially accepted, constituting a network of criminal activities. Within this network, white-collar crimes centrally exist as core criminal activities, and as a consequence, they patronize peripheral crimes or primordial crimes. The juggernaut nature of seductive consumerism mainly causes networked

offenses and an integrated framework of criminal activities. Consequently, primordial crimes (e.g., property crime and violent crime), juvenile delinquency, organized crimes, professional crimes, and cyber-crimes increase with the effects of consumer reinforcement and rising conformity, as well as the integration between consumer culture and offensive behavior.

Thereby, in consumer culture, conformity does not label mainstream criminals as deviant; rather, their criminal behavior is recognized as a socially accepted norm. Those who occupy higher positions in consumer culture see their criminal identity submerged under the influence of consumer culture. This power structure of consumer culture reshapes the social learning process, the process of social control, and the ecological structure, leading to the evolution of criminal behavior from a simplistic to a complex nature. In short, the globalizing reinforcement of consumer culture ultimately fosters the cultural establishment of criminal networks as powerful means of achieving sociocultural goals. This monumental shift must be considered in policymaking for socio-cultural development. Future studies should focus on explaining the linkage between the historical background of criminal behavior and its relationship with consumer culture. Moreover, several studies on consumer criminology should be empirical and analytical, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies.

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