Consumerism And The Three Effects

According to Scott (2017), “Consumerism can be defined as an economic and social ideology and order that encourages consumption or acquisition of goods/services in a never-ending cycle (par. 1). Because we live in a capitalist country, consumerism is increasing significantly in which it can potentially harm customers over the years. Consumerism lies in business companies that use advertisements for people so they can make profit off their money. Amadeo (2019) states, “Consumer spending was at a rate of $14.67 trillion as of the third quarter of 2019 (par. 1). They are very convincing ads by adding highly attractive thin women to showcase a product that can cause mental disorders or using other marketing techniques to attract customers to buy unhealthy foods that can cause obesity. Businesspeople who created social media like Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram use those platforms to demonstrate advertisements by using famous influencers to show a product in which people will spend large amounts of money that will leave them in debt. Now we need to ask ourselves; how can we make people understand that consumerism is a fundamental problem to their problems, and can we fight consumerism?

Literature Review

As specified by Stephens, Hanson, & Hill (1994), “Advertising has been vilified for upholding—perhaps even creating—the emaciated standard of beauty by which girls are taught from childhood to judge the worth of their own bodies.” This signifies that young girls are exposed to advertisements and they question their appearance and later resent themselves for not being beautiful enough. Business corporations do not care about people’s choices because they only care about making money off those poor choices that women are making. Living in a free market (capitalist) grants them to make products that are harmful and promising to young consumers. Questioning their appearance brings harms their state of mind by developing eating disorders or other mental illnesses.

Discussion

My research that focuses on the effects of consumerism will strictly be library research. To support my claim, I will be using online databases, scholarly articles, and website articles. The information that I am using is secondary research and my sources that I will use will also be conducting secondary research. In my research, articles will use data on how consumerism causes a rise in eating disorders, obesity, and a decrease in income. I will use two sociological concepts; conflict theory and functionalism and use examples (the effects of consumerism) and apply both for each example. I will apply both sociological perspectives for each example instead of one because both sociological perspectives can be used to explain the issue. My expected results are to have research that supports the claim of consumerism is the fundamental problem in society by hurting consumers physically and mentally. Comment by Jessi: Are they called website articles? Or what do I call them when they are regular websites from the internet?

Conflict theory is when society lives in competition over limited resources. Competition creates tension between groups over power or resources like housing, money, political representation

and access to services. Karl Marx was considered the father of Conflict theory in which signifies the inequality that is produced in society and creates change in social conflict and social change. Functionalism is where inequality is what makes society function. Conflict theory focuses on the issue of inequality, but functionalism focuses on the positive side of those inequalities. To understand functionalism, there is a known statement “without that, we wouldn’t have this.”

I will be using conflict theory to examine the connection between consumerism and physical health issues. Although there are many physical issues, I will just focus on obesity epidemic in the United States. First, I will introduce how businesses use marketing techniques in which causes consumerism. Currey (2016) argues, “The rationalization process involves four key systematic processes that maintain and promote productivity, output, control, etc. in a rationalized system. That is a rationalized process needs to be efficient, calculable, predictable, and have control over both the people involved and the system itself” (as cited in Ritzer, 2006). This process is called McDonaldization in which is used in fast food restaurants however, the four principles can be used as a marketing technique in our everyday lives from the drug care industry to education and consumer culture (Currey 2016, cited in Kemmesies, 2002, p.128). Efficiency allows the customer to get to destinations in an easy matter. A drive thru in a fast food restaurant uses the principle of efficiency because the customer does not have to get off their comfortable car (Curry, 2016, p.128). Calculability is when people desire quantity over quality therefore, consumer goods are produced at a fast rate. Predictability is the process (making goods) that has been repeated multiple times customers expect the same product in the same time. Control is the rules, regulations, punishments, and enforcement that employees need to follow. Control is also a system that people follow while waiting for their product which explains that people do not cut in line or walking up to drive thru windows (Curry, 2016, p.129). McDonaldization is the byproduct of consumerism and is the reason why Americans suffer physical health complications. Customers consume fast food because corporate industries instill these four principles. According to Seiders & Petty, “Grocery manufactures and restaurants companies are criticized for marketing both foods and entire meals that are unnecessarily high in fat and/or calories and sold in excessively large servings, a result of the “supersizing” trend… Supersizing is an efficient and profitable practice for grocery manufactures and restaurant companies because the incremental cost of size upgrading are low” (p.154). Supersizing is to be efficient for customers because the price between a regular and supersize is very minimal. Meaning that a 12 oz can of soda that cost fifty cents will be rejected when compared to a two-liter soda for a dollar. Marketing foods contains high levels of fat that are making consumers to be obese. According to Bhattacharya and Sood (2011), “64 % of adults in the United States are over-weight and more than 30% are obese…Higher body mass index, which was adopted as a standard by the National Institutes of Health in 1985, is a major risk factor for premature mortality, cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, hypertension, and certain types of cancer.” Chemicals that are used in our foods is to prevent the food from getting spoiled and use addictive chemicals to make the consumer wanting more. Now I will examine the relationship between consumerism and physical health issues in a functionalism perspective. In accordance with Bhattacharya and Sood (2011) states, “Obesity increases the lifetime medical care costs for 50-year-olds by about $15,000, while 65-year-old only experience a $5,000 increase in the medical care cost.” It seems spending money for treatment is also part of consumerism. The advertisements that are played on television or magazines attracts consumers to buy unhealthy foods from food industries and consumers spend money to treat what the food industries advertised. However, in a functionalism perspective, spending more money is profitable for everyone in society. According to the U.S. Department of Health &

Human Services (2017) “increased health care spending improves increases access to new technologies providing both new options of treatment (substitution) and treatment for a greater number of individuals (expansion)… health care spending growth is more likely to be viewed as beneficial. It creates health care jobs, increases wages for health care workers, expands local tax revenues, and increases demand for related goods and services” (par. 4 & 5). Even though obesity is a fatal problem, it seems that overspending in health care cost helps others by providing them jobs or creating new medicinal discoveries. There would be more treatment for those who have uncurable diseases or maybe one day they will discover a cure for an uncurable disease. People who are struggling physically offer opportunities for those who are healthy. A capitalist country often uses collateral damage. There will be an increase in medical doctors and nurses in which creates more jobs and security for society. Comment by Jessi: How do I cite in APA form. How do I cite when the author states another authors quote?

Next, I will use conflict theory to correlate between mental disorders and the effect that consumerism constructed called the beauty myth. First, I will examine data of eating disorders and I will explain beauty myth. Based on Averett & Korenman (1996), “the prevalence of anorexia nervosa range from 1 to 4 percent of the female population…bulimia nervosa runs as high as 20 percent of college and high school females.” Eating disorders are a huge social problem in the united states. Businesses use famous influencers to advertise products that can potentially harm women. Eating disorders are instilled by society to have a perfect appearance. The beauty myth was constructed by a woman named Naomi Wolf as she saw that women feel pressured to change their physical appearance for an unrealistic beauty standard. Based on Stephens, Hill, & Hanson (1994) “…advertising involving thin/attractive endorsers is linked with chronic dieting, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders in American females (as cited in Peterson 1987; Richardson 1991; Richins 1991; Soloman 1992, par. 3)… exposure to ads with highly attractive models can indeed increase a women’s dissatisfaction…females with high levels of body dissatisfaction may respond more positively to products in ads featuring physically attractive female endorsers” (as cited in Richins 1991, p. 81). Advertisements influences customers to be dissatisfied with their appearance by using attractive women to sell their products. Female consumers will spend a large amount of money to enhance their beauty. Eating disorders comes with a variety of other mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. According to Mclintok (2017), “the average woman spends about $313 per month on her appearance. This adds up to $3756 per year or $225,360 over the course of a lifetime” (par. 3). That’s a significant amount of money that is spent per year and every cent contributes to make more products and advertisements. It seems that the cosmetic industry is worth “an estimated $532 billion” (Biron 2019). The fact that people spend 532 billion dollars on cosmetic products signifies that advertisements are strong to compel female consumers in which leads them to be dissatisfied with their bodies and leads them to develop mental disorders. Although people develop mental disorders over perfecting their image (beauty myth), we will need to examine it in a functionalism perspective. As claimed by Happy.com, “the industry added nearly $237 billion to the US gross domestic product (GDP), and supported 3.6 million domestic jobs that earned $144 billion in wages and incomes through its direct, indirect and induced contributions” (para. 3). The beauty industry helps our economy significantly and provides many jobs to people. Small business owners who are interested in creating products will have the opportunity to thrive and someday become a big corporation that can give many jobs to others. There will be many women from diverse backgrounds to be part of the industry and create social change. As for people who are struggling with mental disorders, there are opportunities for professionals such as psychologist, therapist, or psychiatrist to obtain jobs to help remedy these disorders.

Lastly, I will use conflict theory to find whether consumerism decreases household income and put people into debt. I will first provide data on why people do not save money and the effects of not saving money. As reported by King (2014), “According to a study of published by CNN, people younger than 35 years old are not saving money. According to Moody’s Analytics, the saving rate among those 35 and younger has dropped to a negative two per cent, making them the only demographic that currently has a negative saving rating” (as cited in CNN, Moody Analytics, para. 4). This signifies that people are spending their time buying wants instead of needs. Influencers who showcase a product via social media is a contributor as to why people are in debt. It seems that status or prestige may be involved why people buy things that are out of their budget. King (2014) states, “Millennials are spending more money than they are making in total, thus continuing to go further into debt (para. 4). People are not saving money and in debt by “getting and spending.” According to Stolba (2019), “Since the second quarter of 2014, millennial debt grew from $8,201 to its current level of $11,819” (para. 5). The amount of debt in personal loans are contributing to useless products. For example, a 21-year-old who works at a minimum wage job will likely to lease a Lexus than buying a cheap old car or even a lower brand name like Nissan. People put themselves in debt to hold that status that influencers have or to be on their level. They feel pressured into buying expensive products to be part of a materialist society. As reported by DeAngelis, “when people organize their lives around extrinsic goals such as product acquisition, they report greater unhappiness in relationships, poorer moods and more psychological problems” (as cited in Kasser, 2002, para. 10). It seems that materialist is a byproduct of consumerism and it causes unhealthy relationship with others and thyself. Materialism is instilled in people when they see other people who are preferably rich buy products. It raises anxiety to feel accepted and creates a need to buy a specific good to make themselves happy, however they will want more and as a result, it will leave them in debt.

Conclusion

Consumerism brings serious consequences to people in which can harm them physically, mentally, and economically. Society is so involved in consumerism that they do not realize that it can be the foundation of their problems. People should be questioning their motives when they are buying products and limit themselves when it comes to products. People should spend less time on social media or less time watching tv because those are the two biggest factors that compel people into buying products. They should keep track of their spending and make list of their needs instead of their wants. People should start cooking food at home then buying fast food and should stop relying on convenience. People need to realize that their problems can go away unless they find the problem and solve it. Consumerism is a mental disease that exists in society that needs to be diminished by effort of the people.

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