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# SOCY306 Introduction to Consumer Culture

## Fall 2020 Remote

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**This course will be offered via OnQ and MS Teams**

**Mondays 11.30 – 1.00pm (MS Teams Office Hours by TA Group)**

**Thursday 1.00 - 2.30pm (Optional MS Teams Q & A discussion with the Instructor and TAs)**

### **Instructor**

Dr. Martin Hand

[handm@queensu.ca](mailto:handm@queensu.ca)

**Additional Instructor Office Hours: Wednesdays 2.30-3.30pm, or email for an appointment**

### **TAs**

TBA

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## **Instructor Availability and Class Engagement**

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**This is a remote class.** This means that all the micro lectures, assigned readings, videos and other materials will be posted in **OnQ** at the start of each week for you to access remotely.

There is a **logical order** to follow in OnQ each week. Under 'Content' for each week, work your way through each **micro lecture** and **activity** in order.

Your **participation grade** is based on your weekly submissions to your group discussion forum in OnQ. You will be placed in one of three groups, each led by the instructor or a TA. A broad question will be posed each week, and you should offer your 250-word answer there, and respond to two of your colleagues' posts with at least two sentences. This will really help you to follow the content, engage in discussion, and get a sense of what your group colleagues think. **More details provided in OnQ under 'Assignments'.**

There is also an **optional class-wide Weekly Q and A** where you can drop-in to **MS Teams** and discuss the key question for the week and ask the instructor and TAs any other questions you have. **This is not required or assessed**, but simply an option for those students who wish to discuss the content further with the teaching team. **Guidelines for these Q & A sessions are provided in OnQ under 'Content' in the week of 10<sup>th</sup> September.**

For **person-to-person remote office hours with your TA or the instructor**, use the **Monday 11.30-1.00pm** time in **MS Teams**, **Wednesday 2.30-3.30pm**, or make an appointment on a platform of your choice.

## Course Description

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A comprehensive introduction to the major theories and empirical studies of consumer culture with emphasis upon the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural aspects of consumption in sociological context; substantive focus upon diverse topics such as food, tourism, the home, children, and marketing. The study of consumption is now central to many of the key debates within contemporary sociology – particularly around notions of markets, choice and inequality, individualization and collectively organized practices, identity and difference, discourse and materiality, and so on. This course will provide students with an introduction to this increasingly important area, allowing them to further pursue aspects of social theory in relation to a wide range of phenomena and practice.

## Aims

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This course will introduce students to the broad field of consumer culture. Students will engage with historical and theoretical perspectives on consumer culture and apply their knowledge to a critical examination of substantive topics in the sociology of consumer culture.

## Learning Outcomes

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Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- draw upon sociological literature to identify and explain the distinctions and differences between concepts of ‘consumerism’, ‘consumption’, ‘commodities’, ‘exchange’, and ‘markets’, articulate these accurately in written argument, and critically assess their explanatory power in relation to a range of contemporary issues.
- identify and articulate at least three explanations for the historical emergence of contemporary consumer culture in relation to modernity.
- identify and explain the similarities and differences between at least three sociological theories of choice in consumer culture, and identify the broader perspectives to which those theories belong.
- identify and explain the key features of sociological debates about advertising and branding in contemporary society, identify the issues of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ involved in these.
- identify, explain, and critically assess the similarities and differences among a plurality of theories and concepts in the sociology of consumer culture, and draw upon these to critically evaluate at least one substantive topic in written form.
- use abstract sociological concepts with confidence in a variety of written forms to explain contemporary sociological theories of consumption.
- demonstrate the ability to evaluate and synthesize information obtained from a variety of written sources, and communicate relevant information in different ways.

## Organization

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This remote course will be taught through a combination of recorded micro-lectures, OnQ group discussion forums, MS Teams Q & A sessions, and MS Teams drop-in office hours. There will be scholarly readings, reading guides, videos, podcasts, and other materials provided so that all assignments can be completed to a high standard.

## Assessment & Feedback

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Weekly submissions to OnQ TA group discussion forums. 250-word submission by Thursdays by 11.55pm, 2 responses to other submissions by Fridays 11.55pm. 24% (2% pass per week)

**Paper 1: Pre- and Post-COVID consumption reflection: (5 pages). Due 4<sup>th</sup> October. 20%**

**Paper 2: Critical paper on the sociology of consumer preferences (5 pages). Due 1<sup>st</sup> November. 20%**

**Take-Home Examination: Answer 3 out of 5 Questions (8 pages). Due 6<sup>th</sup> December. 36%**

**For Papers 1 and 2, written feedback will be provided in OnQ within 2 weeks of submission.**

**More details on all assignments in OnQ under 'Assignments' and in Micro Lecture 1.**

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## Grading

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All components of this course will receive numerical percentage marks. The final grade you receive for the course will be derived by converting your numerical course average to a letter grade according to Queen's Official Grade Conversion Scale:

Grade	Numerical Course Average (Range)
A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
C+	67-69
C	63-66
C-	60-62
D+	57-59
D	53-56
D-	50-52
F	49 and below

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## Submission

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250-word submissions to OnQ discussion boards by Thursdays 11.55pm; 2 responses to colleagues' submissions by Fridays 11.55pm, graded as follows:

0% - no 250-word submission. If you do not submit this, you cannot submit responses to others.

1% - only 250-word submission.

2% - 250-word submission and 2 responses.

**Paper assignments are to be submitted in OnQ by the deadlines.**

**There will be a penalty of 5% per day for Papers 1, 2, and the take-home examination where the following do not apply:**

Queen's University is committed to achieving full accessibility for people with disabilities. Part of this commitment includes arranging academic accommodations for students with disabilities to ensure they have an equitable opportunity to participate in all of their academic activities. The Senate Policy for Accommodations for Students with Disabilities was approved at Senate in November 2016 (see <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslcwww/files/files/policies/senate-andtrustees/ACADACCOMMPOLICY2016.pdf>). If you are a student with a disability and think you may need academic accommodations, you are strongly encouraged to contact the **Queen's Student Accessibility Services (QSAS)** and register as early as possible. For more information, including important deadlines, please visit the QSAS website at: <http://www.queensu.ca/studentwellness/accessibility-services/>

Queen's University is committed to providing academic consideration to students experiencing extenuating circumstances that are beyond their control and are interfering with their ability to complete academic requirements related to a course for a short period of time. The Senate Policy on Academic Consideration for Students in Extenuating Circumstances is available at <http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.uslcwww/files/files/policies/senateandtrustees/Academic%20Considerations%20for%20Extenuating%20Circumstances%20Policy%20Final.pdf>

Each Faculty has developed a protocol to provide a consistent and equitable approach in dealing with re-quests for academic consideration for students facing extenuating circumstances. Arts and Science undergraduate students can find the Faculty of Arts and Science protocol and the portal where a request can be submitted at: <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/accommodations>. Students in other Faculties and Schools who are enrolled in this course should refer to the protocol for their home Faculty. If you need to request academic consideration for this course, you will be required to provide the name and email address of the instructor/coordinator. Please use the following:

**Instructor/Coordinator Name: Dr. Martin Hand**

**Instructor/Coordinator email address: [handm@queensu.ca](mailto:handm@queensu.ca)**

## Academic Integrity

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Queen's students, faculty, administrators and staff all have responsibilities for upholding the fundamental values of academic integrity; honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and courage (see [www.academicintegrity.org](http://www.academicintegrity.org)). These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the

"freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University (see the Senate Report on Principles and Priorities <http://www.queensu.ca/sec-retariat/policies/senate/report-principles-and-priorities>).

Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the regulations concerning academic integrity and for ensuring that their assignments and their behaviour conform to the principles of academic integrity. Information on academic integrity is available in the Arts and Science Calendar (see Academic Regulation 1 <http://www.queensu.ca/artsci/academic-calendars/regulations/academic-regulations/regulation-1>), on the Arts and Science website (see <https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/students-at-queens/academic-integrity>), and from the instructor of this course. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community at Queen's. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

## Readings

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**This course uses OnQ to provide all the required resources, including course outline, micro-lectures, videos, all readings, assignment details and submission, and TA information.** *The material on the website is copyrighted and is for the sole use of students registered in SOCY306. The material on this website may be downloaded for a registered student's personal use, but shall not be distributed or disseminated to anyone other than students registered in SOCY306. Failure to abide by these conditions is a breach of copyright, and may also constitute a breach of academic integrity under the University Senate's Academic Integrity Policy Statement.*

## Course Structure Overview

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[1]	10 <sup>th</sup> September	<i>Welcome to Sociology of Consumer Culture 2020!</i>
[2]	14 <sup>th</sup> September 17 <sup>th</sup> September	<i>Capitalism, Consumerism, and Consumers</i> <i>How and why did consumer culture develop?</i>
[3]	21 <sup>st</sup> September 24 <sup>th</sup> September	<i>Manipulation, Advertising, and Marketing</i> <i>What is branding and (how) does it work?</i>
[4]	28 <sup>th</sup> September 1 <sup>st</sup> October	<i>Consumption, Status, and Class</i> <i>What shapes consumption preferences?</i>
[5]	5 <sup>th</sup> October 8 <sup>th</sup> October	<i>Consuming Place</i> <i>What do images consume?</i>
[6]	12 <sup>th</sup> October 15 <sup>th</sup> October	<i>No class: Thanksgiving</i> <i>Consuming Social Media: looking for likes?</i>
[7]	19 <sup>th</sup> October 22 <sup>nd</sup> October	<i>Consuming Energy, Organizing Normality</i> <i>Workshop: how to succeed in your next assignment</i>
[8]	26 <sup>th</sup> October 29 <sup>th</sup> October	<i>Fall Term Break</i> <i>Fall Term Break</i>
[9]	2 <sup>th</sup> November 5 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>Food, Diet, and the Body</i> <i>What shapes practices of eating?</i>
[10]	9 <sup>th</sup> November 12 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>Consumption &amp; the Life Course</i> <i>Are children consumers?</i>
[11]	16 <sup>th</sup> November 19 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>Consuming Race</i> <i>Can consumption ever be 'authentic'?</i>
[12]	18 <sup>th</sup> November 20 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>Consuming Celebrity</i> <i>Do celebrities influence consumption patterns?</i>
[13]	25 <sup>th</sup> November 27 <sup>th</sup> November	<i>Consumer Citizenship, Ethics, and Social Change</i> <i>How to write a take-home exam for this class</i>





<b>[6]</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>No class: Thanksgiving</b>
	<b>15<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Consuming Social Media: looking for likes?</b>
	<i>2-minute Intro:</i>	<i>What are we doing this week?</i>
	<i>Micro Lecture 1:</i>	<i>Social media demographics</i>
	<i>Micro Lecture 2:</i>	<i>The attention economy and influencer marketing</i>
	<i>Weekly Q &amp; A:</i>	<i>Are you commodifying your 'self'?</i>
	<i>Activity 1:</i>	<i>Read Carah &amp; Shaul (2015) 'Brands and Instagram: point, tap, swipe, glance'. And Tiidenberg &amp; Baym (2017) 'Learn It, Buy It, Work It: intensive pregnancy on Instagram'</i>
	<i>Activity 2:</i>	<i>Post to group discussion forum</i>

<b>[7]</b>	<b>19<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Consuming Energy, Organizing Normality</b>
	<i>2-minute Intro:</i>	<i>What are we doing this week?</i>
	<i>Micro Lecture 1:</i>	<i>Escalating consumption: comfort</i>
	<i>Micro Lecture 2:</i>	<i>Escalating consumption: cleanliness</i>
	<i>Micro Lecture 3:</i>	<i>Escalating consumption: convenience</i>
	<i>Activity 1:</i>	<i>Read Shove (2003) Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience. Chapter 6. And Rinkinen et. Al. (2019) 'Cold chains in Hanoi and Bangkok: changing systems of provision and practice'.</i>
	<i>Activity 2:</i>	<i>Post to group discussion forum</i>
	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> October</b>	<b>Workshop</b>
	<i>Activity 1:</i>	<i>How to succeed in your next assignment!</i>

<b>[8]</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Fall Term Break</b>
	<b>29<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Fall Term Break</b>

**[9] 2<sup>th</sup> November Food, Diet, and the Body**

*2-minute Intro: What are we doing this week?*  
*Micro Lecture 1: Food, consumption & society*  
*Micro Lecture 2: Sociological approaches to food consumption*  
*Micro Lecture 3: Changing dimensions of food production and consumption*

*Activity 1: Read MacGregor et. al. (2018) 'Promoting a healthier, younger you: the media marketing of anti-ageing superfoods'.*

*Activity 2: Watch Video*

**5<sup>th</sup> November What shapes practices of eating?**

*Micro Lecture 1: Cultural repertoires and symbolic boundaries*  
*Weekly Q & A: What counts as 'ethical eating'?*

*Activity 1: Read Johnston et. al. (2011) 'Good food, good people: understanding the repertoire of ethical eating''*

*Activity 2: Post to group discussion forum*

**[10] 9<sup>th</sup> November Consumption & the Life Course**

*2-minute Intro: What are we doing this week?*  
*Micro Lecture 1: What is the life-course?*  
*Micro Lecture 2: Commodification of childhood*  
*Micro Lecture 3: Adolescent, adult, and older-age consumption*

*Activity 1: Read Cook & Kaiser (2004) 'Betwixt and Between'.*

*Activity 2: Watch Consuming Kids Excerpt*

**12<sup>th</sup> November Are children consumers?**

*Micro Lecture 1: Children's consumption practices*  
*Weekly Q & A: Why is children's consumption a public concern?*

*Activity 1: Read Ruckenstein (2010) 'Time scales of consumption: children, money, and transactional orders'.*

*Activity 2: Post to group discussion forum*

**[11] 16<sup>th</sup> November Consuming Race**

*2-minute Intro: What are we doing this week?*

*Micro Lecture 1: Social construction of race, ethnicity, and nationality*

*Micro Lecture 2: Theorizing racial consumption*

*Micro Lecture 3: Whiteness and consumption*

*Activity 1: Read Crockett (2008) 'Marketing Blackness: how advertisers use race to sell products'.*

*Activity 2: Watch Video*

**19<sup>th</sup> November Can consumption ever be 'authentic'?**

*Micro Lecture 1: Racial discrimination in retail and marketing*

*Weekly Q & A: What is 'authenticity' in consumption?*

*Activity 1: Read Pittman (2017) 'Shopping while Black: black consumers' management of racial stigma and racial profiling in retail settings'.*

*Activity 2: Post to group discussion forum*

**[12] 18<sup>th</sup> November Consuming Celebrity**

*Micro Lecture 1: What is a celebrity?*

*Micro Lecture 2: The spread of celebrity culture*

*Micro Lecture 3: Celebrity and consumer culture*

*Activity 1: Read Turner (2014) Understanding Celebrity. Chapter 3. And Marwick (2015) 'Instafame: luxury selfies in the attention economy'.*

*Activity 2: Watch Video*

**20<sup>th</sup> November Do celebrities influence consumption patterns?**

*Micro Lecture 1: Micro-celebrities and nano-influencers*

*Weekly Q & A: Has COVID killed the celebrity?*

*Activity 1: Read Fresco (2017) 'In LeBron James' promotional skin: self-branded athletes and fans' immaterial labour'.*

*Activity 2: Post to group discussion forum*

**[13] 25<sup>th</sup> November      *Consumer Citizenship, Ethics, and Social Change***

*Micro Lecture 1:      The consequences of contemporary consumerism*

*Micro Lecture 2:      Is consumption an ethical or moral issue?*

*Activity 1:              Read Soper (2007) 'Rethinking the Good Life: the citizenship dimension of consumer disaffection with consumerism'. And Bossy (2014) 'The Utopias of Political Consumerism: the search for alternatives to mass consumption'.*

*Activity 2:              Post to group discussion forum*

**27<sup>th</sup> November      *How to write a take-home exam for this class***

*Micro Lecture 1:      Best practices and good habits for take-home success!*

*Weekly Q & A:        How can I do well in this final assignment?*