**In Which Ways Does Cultural Consumption Actively Influence Social Stratification & Social Mobility and How Can Marketing Strategies Benefit from Understanding This Connection?**

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**Abstract**

*Social class, social stratification and social mobility are concepts which have been long conceptualized from the time of Karl Marx and Pierre Bourdieu to the more modern takes by Scholars like John Goldthorpe and Jordan Peterson. There has been consideration of social hierarchy and the principles of social stratification amongst social standings by way of many factors including socio-economic position, race, culture, sex, political position etc. There has however also been a fundamental lack of recognition of this concept as it relates to practical application in marketing campaigns and in the context of cultural consumers. The focus of the project is recognizing, identifying the ways in which those strategies manifest marketing directives geared toward specific social strata and positing ways in which recognition of those social strata's can be more practically applied for the company's benefit.*

**Problem Formulation**

Connectively, cultural consumption and social stratification and social mobility have a relationship which is fundamental given the impact that a person's social standing has on their consumer decisions especially in the realm of aesthetic goods as opposed to instrumental ones (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). By looking at the ways one influences the other, and how that information can be applied practically to marketing strategies, this project will aim to elucidate the relationship between the two as well as discuss the practical utility of that relationship for companies when creating marketing strategies. The value of a good in the aesthetic realm to a consumer has a direct bearing on social mobility and by extension social stratification (Katz-Gerro, 2004). This refers to the ability of a consumer decision to induce or at least facilitate social mobility, which awards even greater inherent value to a product as well as the consumer decision.

The problem which this project identifies and aims to solve is the lack of recognition of social stratification and mobility in marketing strategies. The way in which this problem can be elucidated is by outlining the connection between cultural consumption and social stratification in order to understand how aesthetic vs instrumental consumption may play a role in a consumer's ability to socially mobilize. The idea is that it may be possible for a marketing campaign to narrow their marketing objective while simultaneously expanding the scope and overall quantity of consumers being reached by their marketing strategy. This is an alternative to the attempt of marketing campaigns to narrow down their demographic as much as possible such as by age, sex, occupation etc. Seeing as the connection between cultural consumption, social stratification and marketing is infrequently made, this project aims to serve as a solution to the problem of a rarely discussed but practically useful topic. The theories must be very clearly delineated as well as the connection between those theories and classical marketing theory in order to establish a substantial and subsequently practical suggestion of utility. The problem that we can extract from this in a more operationalized form is:

*In which ways does cultural consumption actively influence social stratification & mobility and how can marketing strategies benefit from understanding this connection?*

**Introduction**

Typically, the idea of recognizing social class and hierarchy in the modern political climate poses some issues as there is a great deal of speculation about the dangers of distinguishing something as fundamental as differences amongst people in a social setting (Blau, 2016). This is partly due to the great deal of effort to 'equalize' outcomes for people regardless of their social strata (Blau, 2016). The relationship between social stratification, marketing campaigns and cultural consumers can be found in the recognition of a marketing directive to be geared toward a particular 'demographic'. Within any 'demographic' there will always be social stratification and it is this project's directive to find out how greater recognition of those stratums can serve as a benefit to the marketing directives of companies when creating campaigns.

The structure of the project is such that first the theoretical concepts will be properly outlined as they are the core focus. The concepts will be outlined and then explained in a way which demonstrates the relationship between them. Following that there will be a marketing section which will outline some basic marketing theory and aim to clarify the ways in which that theory may benefit from better acknowledging the previously outlined theoretical concepts. Before looking at these theories this introduction will look to explain those concepts in a basic way as to clarify for the reader the jargon which might otherwise be confusing.

There is some stigma attached to the type of discourse which typically surrounds this topic as the notion that people are in any way differentiated based on their social class is 'taboo' (Blau, 2016). This was likely due to the fact that the current modus operandi of social based disciplines is more inclined to give credence to the utility of viewing the world in a victim-based scope. This means that there is a focus on things like gender discourse or racist discourse, because of the predisposition these focuses have on equalizing the way these groups are viewed (Blau, 2016). This project is not a critique of the taboos involving people being separated based on stratums, however, it is valuable to recognize the basis of the arguments which are in the common parlance of the topic. This means that although there may be some taboo relating to the very core concepts it is not the focus of this project to conclude the legitimacy of those taboos, but to acknowledge them and move on having established the scope of the project.

Interestingly, in relationship to the concept of social stratum, gender and race account for a much smaller proportion of what it is that separates people in a social hierarchy and is more objective about the outcome of that separation (Blau, 2016). For example, the view of this topic is not that because one consumer is a man and the other is a woman, or one is white and the other black, one of those groups is somehow dispossessed and in need of equalizing outcomes. Instead, the lens of this project's focus assumes nothing more than that all people in a hierarchy are naturally dispossessed and unequal as that is the consequence of any hierarchy. There are no victims, instead the consumers are simply different and as such have different aspirations.

From a marketing perspective it's difficult to try and narrow down the general needs of consumers when looking at them as victims of a social system and assuming that they need equality of outcome. There are simply too many bases to cover. Instead, this project purports that by looking at the consumer in the aforementioned way, there may be a way to both narrow down the general needs of all consumers across the social stratum while still marketing in a way which appeals to a larger number of consumers. The benefit of this approach is that the possible benefit of the research is not limited to companies and their marketing strategies but is also beneficial to the consumer. The reason this stands to benefit the consumer is that by understanding the relationships between consumer decisions and their relative position in a social hierarchy, that means one can have a direct bearing on the other. As such, it is beneficial for a consumer to be marketed to in a way which encourages the opportunity for social mobility through consumption which we know can affect their positive emotion (Andrés, Cervera-Taulet & Garcia, 2016).

Consumerism and mass consumerism are subjects typically associated with negative connotations given the adverse effects they have on things like the environment (Shadymanova Wahlen & van der Horst, 2014). While this project is sympathetic to that notion, it will not be discussed as the focus is on the consumer and expanding the scope of marketing strategies. The general view of this project assumes a much less detrimental and negative view on the subject and aims to dig around to see what's going on in a more social and theoretical sense. The approach this project will take is more objective and less negative view on the subject of consumption, marketing, social stratification and social mobility.

A further motivation for the utility of finding a way for people to socially mobilize through consumption is the fact that social mobility rates are almost static (Waldfogel, 2004; Paxton and Dixon, 2004). There are two main questions which this project will be aiming to shed light on. Firstly, can a consumer socially mobilize because of their consumer decisions? This is important because its emphases that consumption is a series of decisions that people make, as such the consequence of that decision is what is normally criticized. However, if it is possible for a cultural consumer to achieve social mobility then arguably consumption has a positive facet which can be focused on. Secondly, is the relationship between consumption and social stratification & mobility practically applicable and if so, how would a marketing campaign possibly make use of this? On the point of a 'positive facet' resulting from consumption, that being the ability of the cultural consumer to socially mobilize as a result of their consumer decisions, there is something important to be explored from a social standpoint. There are many different theories which have emerged throughout the years regarding how social hierarchies are navigated and the effects of that. This is a topic which interests a plethora of disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and humanities. There are also a number of methodological approaches which are pertinent to the way the subject of social stratification is viewed, for example, the debate between the social constructivists vs cognitive constructivists.

This project's approach to this topic will of course be clearly outlined in the methodology section and the expansion of the aforementioned arguments between different schools of thought and disciplines will be expounded on in the theories section. Given the number of different approaches available to wrestle something which has been debated as much as social stratification, its important to clarify the lens through which this project will be dealing with the identified problem. This is especially true given that social stratification has a taboo attached to it, as some of the more left-wing opinions might suggest that social stratification is in part due to things like a patriarchy or power exertion (Vikram, 2019; Becker & Hadjar, 2005; Beck, 1992) by those of a higher social stratum over those of a lower social stratum. In fact, much of the taboo revolves around the standardized practices and general attitudes of the public as opposed to being supported by research. For example, beyond Michel Foucault's theoretical approach to hierarchies being predicated on power as opposed to competency (Foucault, 1975) there is not so much published literature which supports the claims of the alternative left activist groups who are the ones responsible for taboo relating to social hierarchy (Hirsh, De young, Xu & Peterson, 2010).

A simple way to determine what validates the functionality of a social hierarchy is a simple thought experiment which Jordan B. Peterson lays out. To surmise, Peterson argues that for a hierarchy to be predicated on power, the simple act of hiring a plumber would involve the use or threat of force from various plumbing companies. Instead, what really happens is that you have free choice to elect your desired plumber based on their qualifications. This amounts to your individual estimation of their competency which in turn determines their place in a social hierarchy (Peterson, 2018, p.8-40).

Although extremely simplified, this makes the general point that expressions of power in hierarchies aren't tenable ways for a social structure to function, as history has made evident over hundreds of years of attempted tyrannies and dictatorships. The way the world currently functions amongst the greater parts of Europe and the US, Canada, Russia, much of Africa and Asia is that there is a functional but unequal distribution of resources. Essentially this means that people are not treated entirely equally but rather are remunerated on the basis of their competency. Although straying into the domain of psychology, the biggest determining factor of success in a chosen field is personality (De Young, Quilty & Peterson, 2007). Furthermore, the alternative solution to this hierarchical structure is eminently less desirable. The alternative is equality of outcome, which is essentially communism. This means regardless of how qualified and competent you are, you will be remunerated the same as someone who is a great deal less experienced than you are. The great failure of all truly communist regimes over the past 100 years including Cuba, North Korea, and the U.S.S.R is a great representation of this alternative being disadvantageous to functional societies.

This is all to make the point that what follows in this project is an observation of the relationship which may exist between the value of aesthetic consumption vs instrumental (cultural consumption) and social stratification and mobility. Better understanding social stratification, social mobility and cultural consumption is one of the things that this project recognizes as worth looking at objectively by examining the pertinent literature and trying to understand how people's desires to socially mobilize can benefit both the consumer as well as marketing strategies of organizations. This project's view is that social hierarchy are a necessary evil predicated on competency and inequality and the taboos associated with that view are those views which assume that social hierarchies are instead predicated on power.

**Literature Review**

The core concepts of this project have been delt with at length in many different types of disciplines. We can see that there is a great deal of interest in social hierarchies in the psychology, sociology, history, and economics disciplines. The ways in which these fields all deal with the concept of social hierarchy and social stratification are fundamentally different given the starting point is so distinctive for each individual field of study. Psychology for example focuses on personality traits as a predictor of hierarchical placement, whereas sociological disciplines are focused on the ways in which the individual interacts with the social hierarchy from various standpoints including the classification of their strata. Given the plethora of literature in a variety of fields which all consider the question of how people interact with the social hierarchy, the narrowing of this topic begins with the literature which pertains to that core concept.

In the introduction of this project there was some fundamental discussion about the nature of social hierarchies, some misconceptions as well as some delineation about the direction of this project in regard to how social hierarchies are viewed. Although the concept of social hierarchy is not the sole focus of this project, it is a central view which needs to be outlined before further funneling the theories into a clear theoretical and analytical framework. The choice of literature is a key component of the efficacy of this project to do what is intended, namely, elucidate the relationship between social stratification, social mobility, and cultural consumption to see how further recognition of these concepts in a marketing campaign might serve to benefit both the consumer and the company.

Seeing as the nature of this project is mostly theoretical, it's important that the abstract concepts are explained both in a way which is technically proficient as well as interesting and coherent to a new reader as to not seem archaic and redundant. Moving on from the core concepts, the theory section of this project is where a vast majority of the literature is found. At the introduction of each section of theory, a clear definition of the theoretical concept is provided alongside a reference to the pertinent literature upon which the definition is based. This is the broader spectrum of operationalizing the theories of the project as the basic definition both serves as the basis of further understanding the project as well as facilitating the establishment of a connection between concepts.

Seeing as there is a large amount of literature which discusses all these theoretical concepts, it's worth acknowledging some of the debates which occur more frequently. As mentioned in the introduction of the project, there is a certain taboo relating to literature which discusses the social hierarchy particularly in the field of phycology it seems (De Young, Quilty & Peterson, 2007). In relationship to the humanities disciplines, this takes the form of a fundamental disagreement about what it is that social hierarchies are predicated on and is centered mostly around the postmodernism approach and the ideas propagated by Foucault (Foucault, 1975). To summarize this debate is about whether social hierarchies are predicated on power or competency. The former lends itself for people to make arguments about patriarchal structures whereas the latter is inclined to demonstrate the value of equality of opportunity and not outcome meaning people are rewarded on the basis of their expression of competence.

The idea that social hierarchies are predicated on competency is more academically supported across the different disciplines which consider the question of social hierarchies at all like in psychology, sociology and even economics. In large part this is attributable to the fact that we have a very difficult time proving the suppositions made on the basis of Foucault's school of thought. An example of this was the assumption made by postmodernists about the inequalities in STEM fields being attributable to a patriarchal tyranny. This supposition was then tested and proved inaccurate and found that the relationship between egalitarian countries and choices between men and women was such that the more done to eliminate differences between men and women, the more different their choices became (Stoet & Geary, 2018).

This is a justification for this project relying on approaches to literary theories which are social in nature and support the notion of social hierarchies being built on competency. There are diverse approaches to this issue amongst several different disciplines. However, the approach of the following theories section, and the literature in general, is that the view that social hierarchies are successful when they are based on competency and not viewed as arbitrary expressions of power or dominance. The project recognizes the literary debates about this issue but sides with the arguments based on the most academically supported side of the debate. The section which follows this will be a clear delineation of all the theories which the problem formulation has briefly mentioned and a presentation of the literature which this project's understanding of the theories is based on.

**Philosophy of Science and Methodology**

To outline the methodological approach of the project, first it's worth discussing what type of data and generally what type of philosophy the project employs as a means of coming to a conclusion. This involves consideration of epistemological versus ontological approach and quantitative versus qualitative approach to name some key concepts. This project employs a deductive approach to the methodology as the theories will play a key role in understanding application to social research (Bryman, 2016). In deductive forms of research, theory comes first and is followed by the observation/findings of the analysis as opposed to the indictive method which in which the observations/findings guide the theories (Bryman, 2016). Distinguishing between inductive and deductive approaches should be thought of more as tendencies of a project as opposed to solidified distinctions (Bryman, 2016).

Epistemological considerations are generally a question of what should be or what is considered to be conventional knowledge in a particular discipline (Bryman, 2016, p. 27)**.** The eternal debate in this regard is represented in the different approaches to explaining social behaviors in humans. The positivist approach to social research would argue that there is *"importance of imitating the natural sciences"* (Bryman, 2016, p.28) in social research, whereas interpretivism rather *"is concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it."* (Bryman, 2016, p.28) and this project sympathizes with the views of the latter. These are very basic explanations of these epistemological approaches, but it outlines the distinctions between the two.

Interpretivism in essence *"subsumes the views of writers who have been critical of the application of the scientific model to the study of the social world and who have been influenced by different intellectual traditions"* (Bryman, 2016, p. 28). The view that approaching the social world from the perspective of the natural sciences is not applicable to the social sciences as people and institutions require a different approach to analysis then the natural sciences to emphasize the *"distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order."* (Bryman, 2016, p.28). Observing the inner working of the social hierarchy highlights the point that social research needs to distinguish between natural sciences and its tendencies toward empirical data as opposed to discussing theoretical explanations and their application to concepts like marketing.

The ways in which interpretivism plays a philosophical role in the research which follows will become more evident once the methodological approach of the project is outlined more clearly. First however, it's worth considering some ontological points. Unlike epistemology, ontology is more focused on *"the nature of social entities"* (Bryman, 2016, p.32). This unfolds in the debate between the objectivist approach and constructionist approach which is the argument about whether social entities should be thought of as *"objective entities that have a reality external to social actors,"* (Bryman, 2016, p.32) or whether they should be considered *"social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors"* (Bryman, 2016, p.32). The latter of these two being what is known as constructivism and the prior being objectivism (Bryman, 2016). An easier way to conceptualize this debate is the idea or organization versus culture the latter of which this project is much more focused on making it more supportive of the idea of constructivism. The idea of social class and social hierarchy/social stratification assumes that culture is a concept which is *"pre-given and therefore confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning."* (Bryman, 2016, p.33). This is true insofar as this project conceptualizes the idea of social hierarchy as something which can be navigated but not escaped and that cultural consumption/cultural capital can be built on but not avoided.

The scope of this project assumes that *"Instead of seeing culture as an external reality that acts on and constrains people, it can be taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction."* (Bryman, 2016, p.34). From a philosophy of science point of view, it is important to make these distinctions to understand how and why the following data and information has been chosen as well as to establish the view of the research on concepts as central as culture. This is especially true given that the goal of this particular project is heavily theoretical and aims to expound as much as possible on a topic which is largely unexplored. On a final note of ontology

*"Questions of social ontology cannot be divorced from issues concerning the conduct of social research. Ontological assumptions and commitments will feed into the ways in which research questions are formulated and research is carried out."*

(Bryman, 2016, p.34).

On to the discussion of qualitative versus quantitative data types, this project is entirely qualitative with its data. Qualitative data is data types which are

*"a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that predominantly emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories; has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world; and embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation."*

(Bryman, 2016, p.36)

There may be some statistical referencing to the case which is being described but the result of that is a qualitative assertion about the social meaning that can be derived from those statistics. Qualitative data is primarily thought of as being different from quantitative in relationship to indictive versus deductive approach insofar as qualitative is primarily inductive in its research methods (Bryman, 2016). However, in this project's focus has emphasis on discussing practical utility of theoretics to marketing strategy making it a deductive qualitative analysis of a case being described and used as an example. The approach of this project is qualitative but is not concerned with generating new theories, rather, discussing how already existing theories which are not commonly considered consciously in the realm of marketing might stand to benefit marketing strategies. For this reason, the approach is deductive and not inductive as is common for qualitative research types (Bryman, 2016).

To determine the quality of social research the concepts of reliability, replicability and validity are used as assessment. Reliability is primarily a consideration for quantitative research methods (Bryman, 2016) but generally refers to whether the results of research are replicable (Bryman, 2016). This project is mainly theoretical and doesn't deal with concluding data making this point harder to deal with. The methods of conducting the research will be clearly outlined in this section making it easy to replicate but seeing as there aren't concrete results or findings further argumentation about the reliability of the project it nullified.

On the point of replicability, the following research will be easy to replicate, but the validity does not lay in the validity of the findings are there aren't findings the way that they are commonly thought of. Instead, the replicability of the research will be easy, and the more important point is the validity of the research. Validity takes different forms, and for the qualitative research type most relevant to the research is the internal validity (Bryman, 2016).

*"internal validity is concerned with the question of whether a conclusion that incorporates a causal relationship between two or more variables holds water. If we suggest that x causes y, can we be sure that it is x that is responsible for variation in y and not something else that is producing an apparent causal relationship?"*

(Bryman, 2016, p.47).

The internal validity of this project is paramount in determining the validity of the research as the theoretical nature of it relies heavily on how well it can be argued, and at least to some extent proven, that the conclusion of a causal relationship is based in well-established theories and is applicable to the marketing research.

On to the point of research design. The data of this project is secondary and is not proprietarily collected which would indicate a case description method of designing the research as the application of the theories to an outlined description of already existing data on marketing strategy is what is taking place. This means that the methodology is centered around concretely outlining relevant theories of social stratification, social mobility, cultural consumption, and cultural capital. Then connecting those theories, outlining the marketing approach of the case, and seeing how that case might benefit from application and consideration of the theories to their existing marketing strategy. This entails a secondary analysis as the data being analyzed has already been collected but is being evaluated for the benefit it may have in considering previously overlooked theories. In my case, the benefit of secondary analysis is very clear as I am writing this project alone

*"In considering the various advantages of secondary analysis, I have in mind the particular needs of the lone student conducting a small research project as an undergraduate or a more substantial piece of work as a postgraduate."*

(Bryman, 2016, p. 312)

The advantages of this project's approach to research design are as follows

- Cost and time
- Access to high quality data
- Opportunity for longitudinal analysis
- More time for data analysis
- Reanalysis offers opportunity for new interpretations

These are a few of the benefits awarded to secondary research focused projects and are particularly applicable to students and lone students (Bryman, 2016, p.314-315). The down sides to this type of research design are that

- There is no control over the quality of the data
- Many key variables are uncontrollable
- There is a lack of familiarity with the data being analyzed

These are some of the natural limitations associated with conducting research in the method I have elected to (Bryman, 2016, p.314-315).

Lasty, the methodological approach of the project involves the following. Determining a case for analysis which means exploring the relevant data which is accessible and deciding which of those is most likely to benefit from the application of the social theories which will be outlined given their current approach. Following this, understanding the theory of marketing being used by the case being analyzed. This will be followed by a systematic run through of the marketing mix approach and examining how each of the Four P's of the case fail to acknowledge the social theories and discussing how they might go about applying those theories practically as well as how those theories relate to the methods of the case. This analysis is preceded by a detailed explanation of the social theories which will be structured in the same manner as the analysis to maximize coherency and maintain structure in the project which is consistent throughout. The order in which the theories are explained will be the same order in which the case is analyzed by those theories. Additionally, there will be sections after the vital theoretical parts of the project which explain the relationship between concepts to help the congruency and readability of the project by aiding the reader's understanding of key concepts and their inter-relational nature. The following section will outline those theories and begin to explain how they correlate.

**Theories**

*Social Stratification*

Having outlined the approach to the problem formulation and general project focus, this section will now outline the central concepts needed to clarify the topic at hand and explain their relevance in the context of marketing theory for the purpose of cohesion. On the topic of social stratification, there are three primary arguments for the explanation of its meaning. This theory section will contain all three arguments proposed by (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) to demonstrate the differences in theoretical approach.

THE HOMOLOGY ARGUMENT

Chan & Goldthorpe (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) explain three primary approaches for understanding the relationship between consumption and social stratification in modern sociological literature. The first of these arguments was that of homology. To surmise this argument, they explain:

*"this argument claims no more than that social stratification and cultural stratification map closely on to each other. Individuals in higher social strata are those who prefer and predominantly consume 'high' or 'elite' culture, and individuals in lower social strata are those who prefer and predominantly consume 'popular' or 'mass' culture"*

(Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.1)

This homology approach to understanding social structure comes from Pierre Bourdieu's reconstitutions of Max Weber works in Bourdieu's book *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1987). In essence, Bourdieu agreed with Weber's postulation that a person's position in a social hierarchy (whether that be a position of superiority or inferiority) is maintained by their expression of a *style of life* (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2). This is a fairly standard approach to hierarchies which will be important later in relationship to consumption. Bourdieu however did not accept Weber's claim that a person's status and class position in a hierarchy were empirically distinguishable, but instead Bourdieu believed that a person's *status* was a symbolic facet of the class structure and was thus not reducible to simply economic outlines.

This led Bourdieu to conclude that the relationship between class and status (which he did agree was expressed through lifestyle) was subject to chance as opposed to being fixed and rigid as Weber claimed (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2). This was where Bourdieu posited the idea of *habitus* in relationship to social class and status. Bourdieu claimed that *"habitus produces a 'semantic' unity in practices across all domains of consumption, cultural consumption included."* (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2). The manifestations of the status order are expressed then through distinctions in lifestyle wherein the emerging rivalries are seen as class struggles and conflicts. Put a little more simply, the idea is that a person's manner of living serves as an expression of their position in a social hierarchy which is determined by their choices not limited to consumption. This project however cares mainly about how those consumption decisions serve to legitimate that status order and reinforce the position of that consumer in their respective hierarchical position.

A part of Bourdieu's theory which this project is critical of however is the idea that:

*"…the status order is the field of symbolic struggle between classes, in which those involved seek to 'classify' themselves and others as same or different, included or excluded, and in which members of the dominant class use 'symbolic violence' in order to confirm the superiority of their own lifestyle…"*

(Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2).

The idea that somehow there is an exertion of power or dominance in the realm of establishing social order in a hierarchy is not one that this project is sympathetic with. Instead, the idea that competency is the primary establishment of hierarchical position (Peterson, 2018, p.8-40) is more agreeable to this project's directive. This part of Bourdieu's homology argument was also criticized by Weininger (Weininger, 2005, p.95) for attempting a little too much to connect class and status. The other part of the homology argument is one which much of the modern literature on consumption still uses. It has led to conclusions such as that to differentiate horizontally in a social hierarchy, consumers will often consume with the intention of marking their uniqueness from other consumers, which is an important way for consumers to establish their position in a hierarchy (Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001).

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## THE INDIVIDUALIZATION ARGUMENT

This argument is a diametrically opposing view to that of homology. If we think of the homology argument as one which over all else believes there is a distinct separation of the social strata as a result of economic or other empirically provable factors, then the individualization argument holds the opposite position. In some ways the individualization argument exists to restrict the homology argument and contradict its tenets (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). This argument has a different take on the concept of social stratification and posits that given the prevalence of economically proficient societies, factors like socio-economic, age, sex and lifestyle play a significantly smaller role in understanding social stratification (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

*"In weaker versions of the argument, the suggestion is that other structural bases, such as age, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality, are now at least as important as class or status in conditioning lifestyles, and that individuals are in this way given a much greater range of choice as regards the collectivities, real or imagined, with which they will subjectively align themselves…"*

(Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2)

This argument holds in essence that a person has a considerably larger possibility for the reformation and establishment of their personal identity and lifestyle as opposed to being subject to the 'powers' of social stratification (Giddens, 1991). This is the basis of assumption for the 'weaker' versions of the individualization argument. The more advanced versions of the argument have been developed under the influences of postmodernism which assumes that a person's lifestyle is absent of *"…structural grounding or indeed inherent unity"* (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.2). The absence of structure to guide this lifestyle and identity formation means that there is freedom for consumers to form their own habit and lifestyle decisions (or *habitus* as Bourdieu would have referred to it) independent of the pressure of the social stratums. This is done when consumers establish their patterns of consumption in a set of validations of their taste in order to conceptualize their *self* (Bauman, 1988). This argument gives much more conceptual independence to the consumer and awards more inherent meaning to their individual choices as a way of theorizing their position in the social hierarchy as opposed to trying to look at it as empirically driven.

The individualization theory has not been used in abundance over the past 20 years or so but has been used successfully to test theories in foreign countries like Japan and the Slovakia (Buncak, Hrabovska & Sopoci, 2019; Shirahase, 2004). We have seen the use of individualization theory for the purpose of establishing a basis for culture as the primary medium of class reconstruction given that it focuses heavily on the power the individual has to institute their proprietary hierarchical position (Gillies, 2005). However, the individualization argument also bases much of its foundational focus on the reproductions of inequality as the natural assumption of the theory is that culture is what reproduces disparities and assimilates discrimination in a hierarchy *"...systems of distinction and discrimination have evolved they continue to underpin and reproduce inequality, dramatically shaping the lives and opportunities of those they position"* (Gillies, 2005, p.836). This view also assumes primarily that people in a hierarchy are victims of systems they both have individual control over, but also are subjugated by, which is an inconsistent position to take when trying to establish benefits of social mobility and social stratification.

In many ways individualization is seen as the death of social stratification as it renders social class obsolete and assumes that there are adapted cultures which expand beyond traditional views of stratums and social classes (Becker & Hadjar, 2005). The theorists who support individualization as a theory of understanding societal phenomenon's, also tend to believe that traditional hierarchies are declining in prominence and devalue the utility of viewing the world in this conventional way (Becker & Hadjar, 2005). This is part and parcel of the belief that hierarchies breed disproportionate and discriminatory inequality. Although this belief is not one which this project sympathizes with, individualization is not an entirely contemptible way of viewing the social world.

One of the benefits of the theory is that it recognizes the power of individual behavior which is something this project aims to achieve in the sense of giving back power to the consumer to socially mobilize through their individual consumer decisions. Typically, those who criticize the assumption that class and individualization are dead, are demonized as blasé and careless given the aversion to emerging inequality (Becker & Hadjar, 2005). However, Ulrich Beck who wrote great works on the individualization approach recognized that one of the reasons that the notion of class still serves utility is that there is no *suitable* alternative (Beck, 1992).

OMNIVORE/UNIVORE ARGUMENT

This argument related more directly to the concept of cultural consumption then it does to the principle of social stratification and lifestyles (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). One of the origins of the concept of omnivores and univores in consumer culture was in 1964 when a published study found that highly educated individuals in America had no substantial aversion to consuming mass culture (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). However, in a more modernized sense, the theory is more generally associated with Peterson & Simkus (Peterson & Simkus, 1992) which essentially concluded that the homology argument was outdated already back in the early 90's. Peterson and Simkus came to the conclusion that the homology approach was an obsolete theoretical approach by observing a new connection between cultural consumption and social stratification as opposed to assuming that one was losing grounding in the other (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

One of the more obvious assumptions about how the social and cultural stratification of consumers may manifest itself is the more classical (and certainly homological) assumption that there exists a 'snob vs slob' relationship between the social strata of consumers. This also assumes a competition between the *classes* so to speak. The omnivore-univore argument is considered more of a middle ground in this regard as it views the consumption of consumers as in a hierarchy as something that has a 'middle-brow' as well as 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' culture (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007; Peterson & Simkus, 1992; Peterson and Kern, 1996).

One of the strong foundations of the omnivore-univore argument if it were to be summarized, is that instead of seeing consumption relating to social stratification as a linear or binary social occurrence where a consumer is only consuming either high-brow or low-brow culture, this approach favors the idea that the consumer habits are much wider and less isolated to a person's social strata. Many people view the omnivore-univore argument as a middle ground between the individualization argument and the homology argument (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) as it possesses parts of both arguments to form its own approach to viewing consumers in a social stratum. This is because there are two interpretations of the omnivore-univore argument which grant it substantial disparities from the other two arguments.

The first of these differences is that:

*"omnivores may be seen as essentially tolerant individuals (because, say, of their relatively high levels of education and/or social mobility) who have a general openness to other cultural styles than that into which they were initially socialized and further, perhaps, a desire to experiment with different kinds of cultural consumption."*

(Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.3).

By viewing cultural omnivores this way, there is an obvious comparison to the theory of individualization as the focus of the theory shifts to the power the individual has to establish their proprietary social position through the means of consumption of a variety of things typical of a variation of social strata. This concern with the *self-realization* (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007) of the consumer contrasts with viewing consumer decisions as a way for consumers to set something approximating a delineated marker of their social position (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). This difference separates the theory of cultural omnivorousness from that of homology the same way that the theory of individualization separates itself from the homology argument.

The second of these differences is that:

*"...omnivores may be seen as expressing a new aesthetic which, even if more inclusive and 'cosmopolitan' than that of earlier cultural elites, is no less directed towards the demonstration of cultural and social superiority… And, in turn, omnivores may still show discrimination, either in the uses that they make of mass or popular culture—e.g. often 'ironic' or otherwise condescending uses—or in still rejecting some of its particular forms, such as ones with an especially close association with low-status groups"*

(Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007, p.3).

This is the second of the views taken in respect to cultural omnivores which sympathizes instead with the homology argument. Although the concept of social stratification is seen in a much more detailed and erudite way then in homology, the glaring similarities are clear. There is a recognition of the symbolic and central part that consumption, motivated by aesthetics, plays in the competition for status and the rivalry within. This recognition is also true for the first of these differences, however, in this case the connection between the instrumental value of consumption and the aesthetic power of cultural consumption is articulated clearer.

To represent a little clearer the relationship between the arguments presented above, this figure will outline their relationship:



The Theoretical Concept of Social Stratification

Homology      Individualization      Omnivore/Univore

The homology argument in essence is the belief that people who are of a high social status consume high or elite types of cultural materials whereas people who are of a lower social status predominantly consume forms of mass or popular culture (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007)

The individualization argument essentially believes the opposite of the homology argument an posits that people consume independently of the 'powers' of social stratification and instead form their own individual identity which they then align their decisions to consume with (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007)

The omnivore/univore argument posits that people are either omnivores meaning they consume many different forms of culture and the theory homology approach is obsolete, or they are univores which consume types of culture more fitting to their social stratum (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007)

These arguments are diametrically opposing views of the same theoretical concept
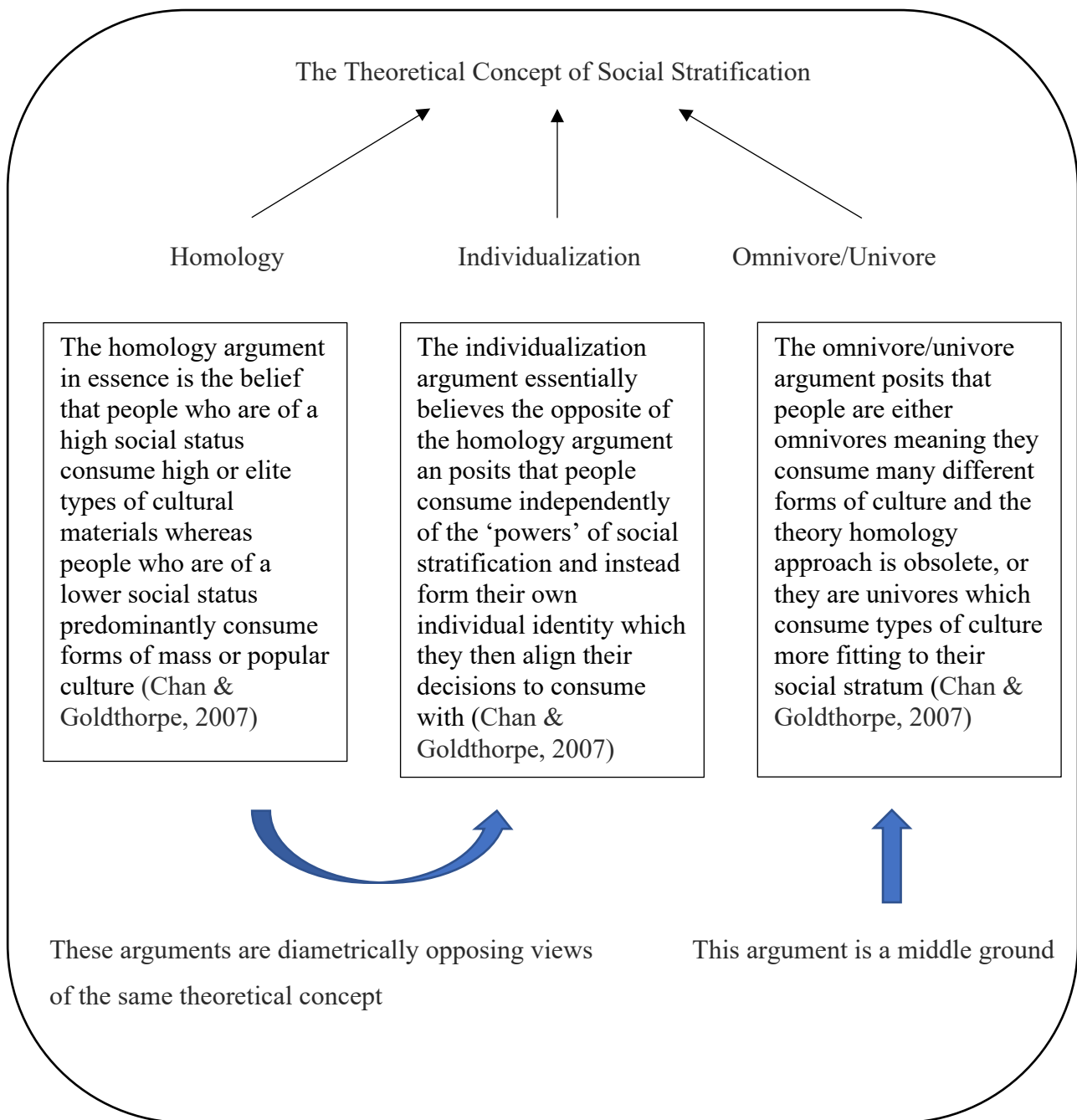
This argument is a middle ground

Fig. A

All the arguments presented above are different explanations for the inner working of a concept known as social stratification. All the arguments have either slightly or very different views on the ways in which individuals consume culture in correlation to their relative social strata.

To surmise, the concept of social stratification is that which details the different social traits of a person which contribute to their position in a social hierarchy like, sex, age, gender, race etc (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). All these factors play a part in determining the type of culture which that person consumes according to the homology argument which is contradicted by the individualization argument which posits that consumption of cultural materials is entirely a consequence of free will and identity formation (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). The idea that people consume culture differently and do not conform to the notion of simply being highbrow or lowbrow cultural consumers is referred to as the omnivore/univore argument which is considered the middle-ground of theories outlining the concept of social stratification (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

The concept of social stratification will play a fundamental theoretical part in this project's approach to elucidating the problem statement: *"In which ways does cultural consumption actively influence social stratification & mobility and how can marketing strategies benefit from understanding this connection?".* To shed more light on the nature of this relationship and the utility it may serve to marketing strategies, first we must understand as much as we can from a theoretical standpoint about all the relevant research which explains the identified theories. Therefore, all the apposite arguments relating to the concept of social stratification have been outlined above. This does not mean that this project is sympathetic to one of these arguments in particular but rather that outlining all of them is of fundamental importance to facilitate the exposition of the problem statement and its tenets.

The following section will explore a different theoretical concept known as social mobility which relates to the idea of social stratification, insofar as it outlines the ways in which individuals move across the social stratums over time. This includes the ways in which they achieve this as well as the resistances they inevitably meet in consequence of the natural barrier of entry to higher social positions in a social hierarchy (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). The relationship between these two concepts will be further outlined in the section below to create a more coherent theoretical section of this project and link the core concepts to the problem formulation.

*Social Mobility*

Put in its simplest form, social mobility can be seen as the movement of an individual/s into or through different social positions in a hierarchy over a period of time (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). This definition of social mobility, and quite frankly the concept in its entirety, has an inherent recognition of the existence of some form of social class and/or hierarchy. It would be impossible for anyone to socially mobilize if a society was flat and inexorably equal across all social domains (like the proposed communist solutions to class inequality). Social mobility cannot exist if there is no recognition or presence of disparity and inequity of social positions. This means there is an assumption that some positions are more advantaged than others which would at face value make them more desirable. The phycological literature suggests that the simple nature of an advantaged position does not make it more innately desirable to all people of a hierarchy.  Instead, the desirability of a social position of greater value is determined by a person's personality traits (DeYoung, Quilty & Peterson, 2007). Although this is anecdotal considering the discipline of this project is centered in humanitarian and sociological perspectives, it's interesting that psychological literature has made the predispositions of individuals and social mobility clear for many years, since modern sociological literature tends to not recognize that position (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018).

The perspective of social mobility is largely characterized by the scope of the researcher as a sociologist would tend toward social strata and class as a defining point, an economist would consider income and a psychologist, character traits. Regardless of the scope however, social mobility is unilaterally agreed to have an 'upward or downward' movement for individuals moving to or from an advantaged social position (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). The question of this project arises in trying to illustrate how a product may be marketed to individuals with this in mind in order to increase the level of appeal a marketing campaign may have for both the benefit of the consumer and the company. When talking about an advantaged or disadvantaged social position, as mentioned, there is inherently a discussion about the nature of inequality as it functions as a necessary evil for an effective hierarchy seeing as it is not grossly disproportionate or the result of overt power (Peterson, 2018). There are two types of inequality which will be outlined in the following section to clarify the relationship between social stratification and social mobility.

The two predominant forms of inequality are attributional and relational. Bukodi and Goldthorpe outlined the definitions of these forms of inequality very nicely:

_"Attributional inequality arises simply ... as individuals have, as an attribute, more or less of something that is socially valued. Inequality in income or in wealth would be prime examples. Relational inequality, in contrast, arises where the positions of a more or less advantaged kind that individuals hold derive from certain social relations in which they are involved. Class inequality, as we would understand it, is relational."_

<div align="right">(Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018, p.14)</div>

Both forms of inequality serve a functional purpose to separating the positions of a hierarchy. As an example, if person A studies for years to become a very capable engineer and person B does not study very hard. It would be reasonable to assume that person A would hold a more advantaged position in a social hierarchy as a result of their capability which is rewarded to them in the form of attributional inequality. The differences between person A and person B in the eyes of others (their perceived success manifesting as status for example) would constitute relational inequality which grants them other advantages like job security or income stability (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). Observing inequality through the perspective of social class (which to clarify is synonymous with social stratums) provides a clearer and more useful perspective then the economic perspective which also gives credence to the use of a theory which does not focus on economy as a defining factor of social mobility or stratification. To further illustrate the benefit of social mobility as opposed to economics:

_"...it is sometimes held that treating mobility in terms of income is preferable to treating it in terms of class because 'everybody knows' what income is, whereas the concept of social class is vague or contested. In response, we would observe that in the study of income mobility major problems in conceptualisation and making concepts operational are in fact encountered. For example, there are many forms of income, but the work on income mobility that has been carried out by economists has for the most part been limited to just one form: that is, to 'labour income' or earnings."_

<div align="right">(Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018, p.15)</div>

The concept of inequality is far from something which is unrecognized and that alone is largely responsible for the taboo related to this topic as there are many nonacademic explanations which account for the causes of inequality. As mentioned however this inequality (both attributional and relational) are necessary evils of hierarchies as well as being something which is imminently more desirable than the alternative which is equal outcomes regardless of social position. There is some discussion about whether the gap between the extremes should be allowed to be so wide. Social movements like 'tax-the-rich' stem from this school of thought and even currently in the face of climate summits the world turns to the excess wealth of billionaires like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos as a form of ubiquitous resolution of global inequality (Shead, 2021). Despite the topic being taboo and very charged it is incredibly difficult to find a study which supports the claims of the radical leftists about the nature of income or class inequality in the form a published peer reviewed study. It has become socially offensive to suggest something like the gender pay gap is not a consequence of discriminatory inequality or that racism in the employment process is no longer a substantial issue despite both of those claims being supported by modern published academic literature (Smith, 2015; Jagani & Bandookwala, 2021; Robertson, 2021).

This poses a problem for researchers to begin to investigate the basis of practical utility of social class given that the starting point of the topic is already subject to that level of scrutiny in the context of the discourse surrounding inequality especially, it seems, in universities (van de Werfhorst, 2020). It is important to understand the basis of the inequality in the context of a social hierarchy even if it means challenging recurrent ideological utterances to clarify the theoretical understanding of social stratification and mobility which as we know from the aforementioned theories are concepts synonymously considered. In summary, the manifestations of inequality in the context of social mobility is an inescapable relationship, as inequality is a necessary facet of a social system which functions largely on the basis of discrepancies in economic and social factors. However, the belief that that inequality spawns as the result of power expressions or arbitrary prejudice is a claim which is not made commonly in the larger span of modern literature.

*"...most people, even evil capitalists, are also motivated by the desire to mentor promising young people and help develop their careers, and to participate in something truly useful so that their lives are meaningful, and to participate in processes that have clearly positive social outcomes"* (Peterson, 2019)

Social mobility is a fairly easy concept to grasp once there is a general understanding of social stratification and hierarchies. This is because once there is recognition that people exist somewhere in a structure with a bottom, middle and top. This means it is rather simple to recognize the idea that moving up or down this structure is a possibility. A social hierarchy is often represented in the form illustrated below:
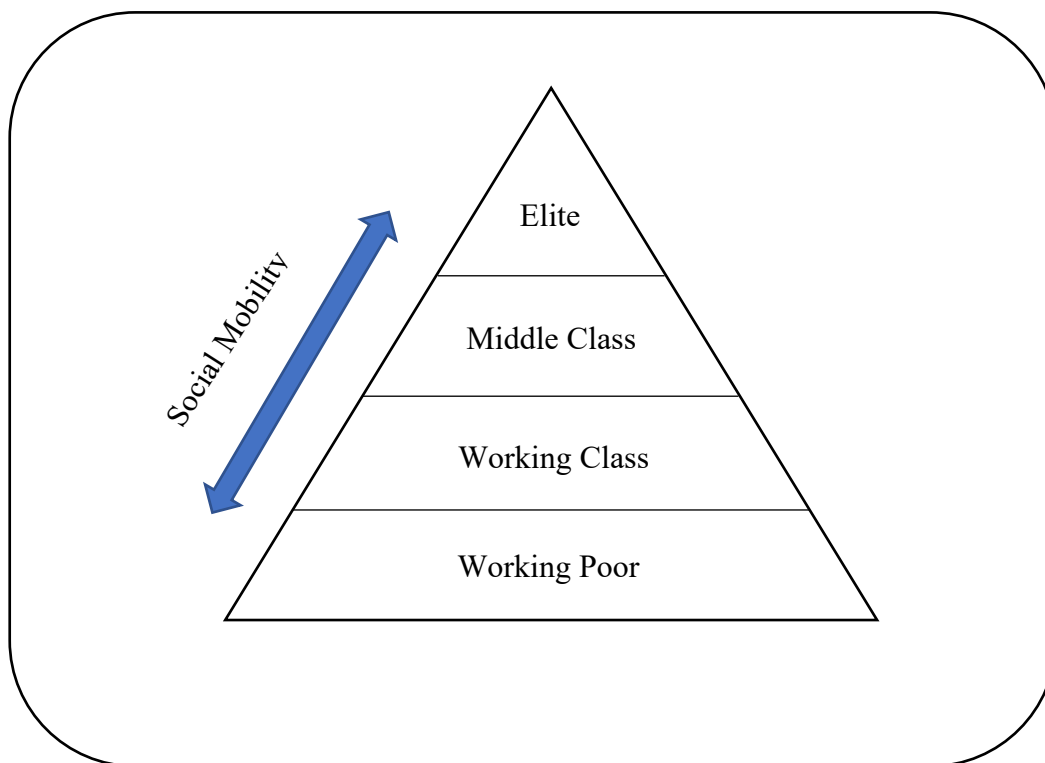


<div align="right">Fig. B</div>

Although the content of this illustration is very simplified, the visualization helps to exhibit the fact that moving across the subsect of classes is predicated on a person's ability to socially mobilize (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). All the concepts which dictate the position of a person's social status/class directly affect the efficacy of their social mobility. Without the possibility of social climbing or general social establishing, all agents of a social system would be stagnated in a center class with no real differentiation of their social positioning as that the factors which dictate those things would have been stripped away. The next section on cultural consumption will discuss this concept as well as outline the relationship that all three of these concepts have in a relational sense to illustrate the cyclical connection that these theories share with one another.

_Cultural Consumption_

Having explored the relevant theories surrounding the concepts of social mobility and stratification, this section will do the same for the concept of cultural consumption. The sociological dimension of cultural consumption is a flourishing field which explores consumption habits of consumers on the basis of aesthetically motivated consumption versus more instrumental motivations (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017). This is a most rudimentary and distilled explanation of the concept of cultural consumption but is also the definition which is accepted across a wide array of research disciplines (Warde, 2013). The aesthetic value of a product is typically considered its primary function and its secondary function is considered the instrumental use of that product (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017). The relative significance of those two functions unsurprisingly varies depending on the property of what is being consumed i.e. a good or a service. The aesthetic nature of a product or service like art, music, theater etc. relates to the cultural value of the consumer and their consumption choice.

One of the most important aspects in the dimension of cultural consumption is the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017) which was explored in the omnivore/univore section, as it gives more meaning to the aesthetic value of a particular consumer decision. Originally however the concept was posited by Bourdieu in his book _Distinction_ where he also propagated the homology argument (Bourdieu, 1984). This distinction between the highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture and their consumption is best described here:

   _"This is an aesthetic dimension associated with the distinction between form and substance, that is, between the formal configuration and refinement of cultural practices (e.g. classical music, art films, haute cuisine, etc.) and their function in terms of content and material significance (e.g. folk music, romantic comedies, convenience food, etc.). This highbrow–lowbrow dimension is, as argued by Bourdieu, directly related to a society's social (class) structure and thus socially meaningful (homology thesis)."_

                                                    (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017, p.2)

To put this a little more simply with an example, the aesthetic value of something refers to how it relates to the overarching concept of cultural practices, meaning that it has inherent value depending on its particular quality. Music would be considered something which is culturally consumed in the process of cultural consumption, however, there are many types of music and it was Bourdieu's supposition that some forms of music have different cultural values then others making them either highbrow or lowbrow. If person A listened to pop music and person B listened exclusively to classical composers like Mozart or Wagner, the assumption of cultural consumption would be that person B is consuming highbrow culture while person A is consuming lowbrow culture (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

It is imperative to recognize the implied consequence of highbrow or lowbrow culture in relationship to social stratification as highbrow culture would suggest a greater status in the social hierarchy. The consequence of this suggestion is a level of legitimacy which is absent from the lowbrow counterpart of the relative product being consumed. This legitimacy serves to further sperate and solidify the class distinctions or stratification of the social hierarchy as a result of the consumption of a particular person (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017). These are the notions posited by Bourdieu which would superficially seems rather outdated, however as (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017) mention, these suggestions are backed by modern empirical research such as (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016; Gerhards, 2008; van Hek and Kraaykamp, 2013). These studies demonstrated a significant relationship between the consumption of what Bourdieu would consider to be highbrow culture and social strata like socio-economic position, education & occupational class (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017, p.2-3)

Interestingly, education has been shown repeatedly to be the most significant predictor of highbrow consumption, and although it is difficult to draw a conclusion about the relationship between the conscious recognition of social stratification and whether or not that facilitates person's ability to socially mobilize, it is a central relationship in the context of social mobility and class. *"We think, however, that the mechanisms that render the connection between social position and cultural consumption intelligible should be explicated more precisely and developed in a direction that makes them applicable in systematic explanatory endeavors"* (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017, p.5).

Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner describe the relationship between social status establishment and cultural consumption as one which is '*casual*' (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017, p.7). It is also a general contention that Bourdieu's theories on cultural capital are critical to understanding the substratum of class reproduction across generations. In respect to this project, cultural consumption is the primary theory of interest in relationship to social stratification. There is however an inexorable link between the concept of cultural capital and cultural consumption as the prior is contributed to by the latter. A general and brief explanation of cultural capital is the familiarity a social agent has with the relative dominant culture (and by extension the legitimate one) which is typically defined as highbrow culture (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). To better understand the ways in which cultural consumption manifest, understanding the origins of cultural reproduction is critical, which has also been empirically proven to some extent. In summary, a person's parents naturally possess a level of cultural capital which they will bequeath to their children through their schooling for example, as well as the ways in which they will expose their child/children to certain cultural artifacts at home like books and music. This is all part of a cost-benefit assessment that the parents make to invest in their children and ultimately reproduce a level of cultural capital (Jæger & Breen, 2016).

Interestingly, it was also found that a child's ability to perform proficiently in their academics is attributable to their understanding of the dominant culture (cultural capital), and this wasn't because of some direct benefit of their cultural capital. Instead, it is an indirect benefit as teachers will misperceive cultural capital for academic excellence and place more focus on those children with higher cultural capital thus further legitimating the value of high cultural capital (Jæger & Breen, 2016). On the flip side *"...there is much less evidence for the conversion of educational credentials and cultural capital to occupational success and class destinations."* (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017, p.8). Understanding cultural reproduction is a concept which has also been used to understand a broad range of topics such as attitudes toward homosexuality to general life satisfaction (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). Additionally, it is the general consensus that the most important function of cultural capital is the formation of networks and social relationships where people with higher cultural capital form better networks. This means that according to the omnivore/univore argument omnivores will form the most beneficial mix of social relationships (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017).

Having discussed cultural capital, how does it relate to cultural consumption and what exactly is cultural consumption worth in a modern society? Research has showed us repeatedly that there are significant social consequences beyond hedonic pleasure that amass as a result of cultural consumption. In a general sense cultural consumption plays a major part in social status establishment and the formation of networks which benefit the consumer (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). This is one of the stronger links between social stratification and social mobility to the concept of cultural consumption.

*How does cultural consumption influence social stratification and social mobility?*

The relationship between the concepts can be thought of like this:



Social Hierarchy & Social Stratification

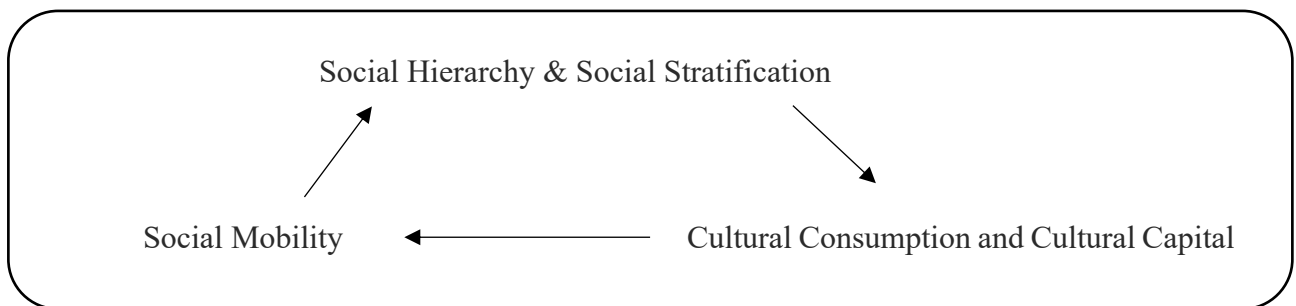Social Mobility          Cultural Consumption and Cultural Capital

Fig. C

The connection between them is cyclical and does not depend entirely on one of the concepts, however removing one would cause significant changes in the frequency of manifestation and benefit of the others. As an example, imagine there was a man named Joe who was in a middle-class position. He worked as an averagely successful carpenter who makes a mediocre salary which is reflected in his consumption habits. He buys average priced food and clothes but lives in a reasonably nice apartment. He does not consume in any way which might indicate he is interested in highbrow culture nor does he consciously wish to associate with the upper echelon of the social hierarchy. His peers are much like him and they help to reconcile his cultural capital and consumption habits. It is possible from a theoretical standpoint that if Joe were to wake up one day and desire above anything else to become an established high-class individual that it would be a difficult but accomplishable task for him to do so. He might begin by educating himself and by consuming art and literature as well as socializing with people who do the same thereby creating a network to facilitate his goal. This is where cultural consumption and cultural capital play their part in changing the ways in which an individual exists in a social hierarchy.

To further facilitate his movement up the social hierarchy Joe must also demonstrate more occupational competency to increase his socio-economic position and consume goods and services which would be more in line with those of someone who is in the upper-class (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). This means luxury brands, high-brow art and mu etc. In doing this cultural consumption and cultural capital now have a direct bearing on Joe's social mobility. In turn, Joe's position in a social hierarchy will increase thereby further reinforcing the benefit to him of consuming for aesthetic value as opposed to instrumental values. This is the cyclical relationship of the social concepts of stratification and cultural consumption. If one of these concepts were to somehow collapse, Joe would not only struggle to maintain his climb amongst the social ranks but would find it very difficult to orientate himself as the aesthetic value of things begin to erode. It is a reasonable argument that cultural capital is the link between social stratification and cultural consumption, however the concepts are so co-dependent that separating them theoretically in this case only serves to obfuscate rather than elucidate.

Social hierarchy and social stratification are the starting point which mostly decide a person's consumption habits (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). Once a person has a social position their consumption habits and cultural capital are largely dictated by this social position and those consumption habits in turn help to decide how likely they are to socially mobilize (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). The proficiency of this social mobility then once again either supports a person's position in a social hierarchy or helps to legitimize and establish a new improved or lowered social position.

In summary, cultural consumption can be thought of as the consumption of products by people based on that product's aesthetic value, meaning its value in the symbolic sense of highbrow vs lowbrow (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). The value of that to a consumer is that it helps to increase or decrease their cultural capital which can be thought of as how familiar a person is with the value of aesthetic things in a society (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). The relationship between these concepts and the concept of social stratification and social mobility can be seen in the figure outlined above (Fig. C). There is an inherent relationship between the concepts of cultural capital, cultural consumption, social stratification, and social mobility as one cyclically influences the prominence and effect of the others and vice versa. The following section will begin to look at how these concepts and their understanding can theoretically assist in the benefit of marketing strategies.

The question of which different types of marketing strategies exist is one which would merit an arduously long explanation. However, to condense the explanation there are two main approaches which are commonly used to market which are, B2B and B2C. There are abbreviations of 'business to business' and 'business to customer' (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). B2B marketing is essentially the marketing of a product or service of one business to another one for reselling, and B2C is the marketing of products or services from businesses to the customer for consumption (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010).

In the realm of marketing there are a considerable number of things which need to be specified to understand how one might go about utilizing the theories which have been discussed, in a practical way. Firstly, it makes the most sense to look at a marketing strategy which is oriented around the business to customer model (B2C) seeing as it is this projects contention that a business and a customer can benefit from making use of the concepts of social hierarchy navigation and cultural consumption. Business to customer oriented strategies are in some ways less beneficial in an overall sense when talking about social marketing showing less return in many different areas of proficiency including things like maintaining company accounts on social media, social media presence, marketeer's frustration levels with executives, and perceived irrelevance to the field (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). This outlines that there are differences and limitations associated with B2C based marketing strategies which this project recognizes, however given the focus on the customer it would be counterproductive to look at the ways businesses market to one another. Additionally:

> *"Businesses with a rigid top-down management style may be incompatible with the free flow of information that social marketing involves. This doesn't mean they can't benefit from using the tools, but the payoff will be modest because the real potential of social marketing is realized when a company trusts its people to communicate with external audiences without strict oversight."*

<div align="right">(Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010 p.32)</div>

This shapes the emphasis that B2C has on the interaction with the customer which means there is more potential for the application of theories which are centered around the principle of businesses marketing communicatively with their customers.

Naturally, the level of domain expertise required for B2B is higher than its B2C counterpart given the smaller number of clients which it can market to and unsurprisingly B2B relationships are easier to maintain and strengthen as its easier to talk to 10 companies then it is to talk to 10,000 customers (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). It is expected that there are numerous benefits to B2B marketing which are not present in B2C marketing, however this demonstrates that B2C marketing has more room for theoretical expansion and inclusion, given its proclivity to fall short of benefiting is customers unlike B2B (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). Additionally, B2C and B2B marketing don't always succeed on the same platforms, like Twitter for example (70% B2B, 46% B2C), although their goals are theoretically similar, their success depends on variations of the same strategic concepts (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). Put more simply, you cannot market to a business the same way you market to a customer base. It is however unanimously agreed that the most important thing for attracting new business from a digitalized marketing perspective is driving customers to a web site which can showcase products and establish more meaningful customer conversations (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010).

B2C can be seen in the context of the marketing framework of this project as the broader approach to marketing theory within which a more specific marketing strategy is used. By looking at the strategies which are used within the context of B2C, the next section will begin to try and outline a clear analytical framework within which the theories of social stratification, social mobility and cultural consumption can begin to be applied to an example of the chosen marketing strategy. This is to see how those social theories on hierarchy might benefit the already existing approach if they are properly factored in.

Most of the information presented in this introduction to the concept of marketing theory has explained the well supported evidence that using B2B marketing strategies has a very wide variety of benefits not shared by B2C (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). This is to establish the commonly recognized shortcomings of B2C marketing strategies to make clear that B2C is both the most relevant strategy type of this project given the focus on the customer as well as to show that it stands to possibly gain more from applying the social theories which have been outlined in the sections above. The following section will look at the specific B2C strategy and begin to establish the framework through which the hypothesis of this paper will be discussed to demonstrate how it may be applied.

*Marketing Strategy*

It should be acknowledged that to a layperson, the concept of marketing is likely tantamount to advertising, however marketing is a much more multifaceted practice (Wangler, 2009). Marketing has a variety of different approaches to its definition but can generally be considered to be the *"…activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."* (Wangler, 2009, p.97). Given that the practice of marketing is oriented around the consumer, looking at a marketing strategy to apply the theoretical concepts which have already been outlined is part and parcel of the process of forming an analytical framework.

The strategy which will be looked at in this project will be that of the "Four P's of Marketing". This is a concept which is fairly basic and introductory but still of vital importance to marketing in a B2C fashion (Wangler, 2009). To further justify this decision Wangler (2009) says:

*"While there are countless ways to approach this complex process, many introductory studies begin with the "4 P's of Marketing: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion." By looking at the implications of each of these aspects of creating an exchange opportunity, we can glean a better understanding of what a company is offering and how it is making it attractive to potential customers."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.98)

The value in understanding the concept before building an analytical framework to apply is that it allows for a better substratum upon which to build the argument that the practical applications of theories like social stratification, social mobility and cultural consumption stands to potentially benefit this strategy. Although marketing maybe looks at these concepts, it may be in a too isolated sense and those theories serve to provide a new and broader understanding of buyer's motives, which then serves to theoretically benefit both the producer/retailer and the consumer. The following will provide a basic understanding of the concept of the Four P's of marketing upon which the analysis of how that strategy might benefit from further reconciliation of the way the social hierarchy is navigated by consumers.

There are four concepts which this marketing strategy holds above all else which is; Product, Place, Price and Promotion (Wangler, 2009). Each of these concepts are fairly self-explanatory and evident in their utility but need some clarification for the purpose of establishing the foundation of the strategy. The following is a brief explanation of the Four P's and after that will be a concise section to establish the connection that the aforementioned social theories have to the four P's.

**Product**

Firstly, the product, this is what is being marketed to the consumer. It is the essence of what it is that is generally being marketed and can include both products and services. In the case of B2B and B2C the nature of a product is identical in the way that you cannot differentiate what type of marketing is being used simply by what the product is (Manthei, 2017).

**Price**

Price is what is being requested in exchange for the product by the consumer. This is the facet of the Four P's which deal with economy mostly, but also has a link to the social hierarchy as many times the price of a product determines is accessibility to different consumers in various social strata as well as being a reflection of the aesthetic value (Manthei, 2017).

**Place**

This is where the product is being promoted by the company. Naturally, this can take many forms such as websites, billboards, posters etc. This was of course something which was for a very long time based entirely on location before the internet became essential as a tool for marketing to consumers which changed the landscape of marketing. The internet has opened countless possibilities for companies to manage and market to their target audience (Manthei, 2017).

**Promotion**

This is how customers become aware of a particular company. For the most part advertising plays a large role in the implementation of promotion of a product to a consumer but so does publicity and sales promotions. Without this, a company naturally limits its brand awareness and circumvents its ability to produce sales and turn a profit (Manthei, 2017).

*The Relationship Between the Four P's and Theories Connected to Social Hierarchies*

**Product –** The product which is being marketed has a precarious relationship to the theoretical concepts as its consumption is what is so unalterably connected to the ways that consumers exist in a social hierarchy. We know this from theories on social mobility (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018), the homology argument about social stratification (Bourdieu, 1984) and we also know it well from cultural capital (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). The product, whether it be a good or a service, is the way in which consumption connects a social agent to their social class/strata. In the eyes of the univore/omnivore argument and the homology argument this is especially true for music which will be relevant to remember for the upcoming analysis.

**Price –** The pricing of the product or a service will be a big indication to the consumer about both the quality of the product (especially in relationship to the pricing of similar products on the market) as well as what it says about the person who consumes that product. One of the social strata which have been mentioned is socio-economic (p.11) in relationship to the individualization argument. In essence, the socio-economic standing of a person largely reflects their consumption habits and gives them access or limitation to certain types of products and helps to fortify their position in a social hierarchy (Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007).

**Place –** Place refers to methods of distribution, for the most part, in relationship to marketing (Manthei, 2017). In relationship to the theories relating to social hierarchy position, place of promotion and distribution is responsible for the types of people the product is reaching depending on, for example, the exclusivity of the location. More exclusive/expensive locations normally imply a customer base of a higher social position and vice versa.

**Promotion –** Promotion in the context of relating to social hierarchy is a little more difficult to accurately outline without describing the other three P's of the marketing mix. Promotion is mostly advertising based, and without a price, product, or clear distribution to establish promotion it is unreasonable to promote. In that way promotion is different from the other P's in that it is the most reliant on the others. Its relationship to the concept of social hierarchy is much the same as 'place' in that promotion is mostly dictated by the choice of product and price.

**Analysis**

*Naxos, a Case Description*

As outlined in the methodology, the analysis of this project will revolve around a case description of secondary data, and the case in question is that of Naxos, particularly a publication outlining the four P's in relationship to the company's marketing strategy. Before analyzing the ways in which further recognition of this project's theoretical approach to mixing marketing and theories on social hierarchy establishment for consumers, it is appropriate to outline what exactly the case being used to apply the theories to is all about. Naxos is a strange company in the sense that they have vested interests in many different markets but all revolving around the founder's primary interest, namely, classical music (Wangler, 2009).

>*"Klaus Heymann, an international entrepreneur—born in Germany and based in Hong Kong—is the founder and owner (for over twenty years) of Naxos. Heymann began his career as an advertising and pro- motion manager for Max Braun AG and entered the music industry as a distributor of Bose and Revox equipment in Hong Kong and China. His interest in classical music and background in marketing led him to organize concerts to showcase the equipment he was selling…Through them he learned from his audience that many people were interested in buying classical recordings, but they were not available in Hong Kong at that time. Perceiving this need, he began dis- tributing several classical labels of the era."*
>
><div align="right">(Wangler, 2009, p.95).</div>

For many years Naxos has been at the forefront of distributing one of the more difficult music genres to retail in modern times which is classical (Wangler, 2009). Classical music from a theoretically relevant perspective also has a strong standing in the cultural capital/social stratification sense even being recognized by Bourdieu in his homology argument pertaining to the idea of the high/elite cultural types (Bourdieu, 1987) as well as Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner in their descriptions of cultural consumption in the 'snob vs slob' approach (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017). Naxos is a company which when first conceived had a fairly easy directive/ethos a *"…plain and simple: no frills budget classical CDs."* (Wangler, 2009, p.98). They undercut the pricing of similar competitive products in lateral or identical markets they have been able to maintain the same directive for over 20 years (Wangler, 2009).

It is fair to say that with a music repertoire of artists like Franz Liszt, Vivaldi, Pierre Boulez, Mozart and Bach, Naxos is a label which must take a distinctly different approach to marketing and distribution in comparison to more contemporary labels representing modern musicians which are still alive (Wangler, 2009). A big shift for the company in respect to the marketing initiative was the switch (which countless other companies have made at the turn of the 21st century) to embrace the seemingly unlimited potential provided by the internet (Wangler, 2009). Something which has really separated Naxos from other music labels is their approach to circumvent profitability in leu of maintaining low prices.

*"Naxos has remained frugal over the years and has adhered to a strict policy of keeping recording costs low and offering upfront payments to artists (with no royalties paid as the product sells). Because of this, and because it has found so many ancillary uses for its products, Naxos, unlike many labels in the classical or pop music industry, have been able to recoup costs within two to three years on ninety percent of its products. As for the other ten percent, Heymann states that those projects are undertaken because they are important to the company or to the classical music world, and he is not worried about their profitability."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.101)

The company's strict adherence to the policies it established at its conception has no doubt aided their goal to in growth and sales, as the reliability of a company for the consumer plays a part in their decision to consume (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2010). If you visit Naxos's website today you will find what appears to be a time capsule of design in comparison to any other modern website. The UI is clunky and slow, and the navigability and presentation of information is spiritic and inefficient. Although this is speculative, presumably their consumer base is not one which adapts too well with digital modernization in comparison to other modern companies with young and more technologically competent consumers like TikTok or Twitter. This is just a suggestion for the reasoning behind the unoptimized design of the website but is not a statement of fact, simply notional. Of course, the market for medieval 20th century classical music is considerably less pronounced then say Hip-Hop which accounted for 21% of all music consumed in 2018 whereas classical music accounted for 1% (Statista, 2019). However classical music constitutes an interesting niche in the market of music consumption because of the smaller consumer base. This is because it speaks more to the type of consumer, as they will be less varied.

*Social Stratification & It's Theoretical Application to The Four P's*

The structure of the analysis will be to present the three main theoretical approaches presented in this project's theory section in the same order, starting with social stratification, and to then see how further recognition of these concepts might serve to benefit the approach to Naxos's marketing strategy as defined by (Wangler, 2009).

Product

The first of the four P's to discuss in relationship to the concept of social stratification is the product which is being retailed for consumption by Naxos. As outlined in the introduction to the company and its ethos, the primary transactions of the record label are classical music (Wangler, 2009). In the theories section of this project, the concept of social stratification was outlined with recognition of three main approaches to the ways in which consumers navigate the social hierarchy with respect to consumption. The first of these was the homology argument. To summarize this is the view that people who consume fit into the category of either a highbrow consumer who exclusively consumes forms of elite culture versus lowbrow consumers which primarily consume mass or popular culture (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). This more classical approach to the concept of consumption applies very easily to Naxos's product as it would be this arguments contention that all consumers of classical music fit very nicely into the category of highbrow consumers (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). Having understood the theory surrounding this, that statement seems almost basic, however, there is a question of conscious recognition of this concept in the marketing approach that the company takes to the product it sells.

Much of the company's focus on product from a marketing perspective is centered around the rerecording of composers to expand the availability of rare or uncommon classical music (Wangler, 2009). The approach to the product and its profitability seems to be found by the company's recognition that the shelf-life of a product has a peak selling point after its release which subsequently declines pushing the company to establish initiatives to prolong the profitability of the product (Wangler, 2009). *"…each recording will eventually decline from its peak selling point, he works to increase the profit potential for his recorded music by licensing it for other uses"* (Wangler, 2009, p.99).

Objectively this is a smart approach equitable to say a chef using the days leftovers for a stew as to maximize the efficacy of the purchased produce and repackage the product in order to turn a profit and minimize the financial loss associated with its decay. Naxos's version of this is to license the use of the music to other companies to be used in movies which constitutes a form of B2B marketing. However, in respect to the idea of B2C the product has what the company identifies as a natural life cycle after its initial release, peak selling point and then decay of consumption. A possible application of the social stratification approach in this case lays in the recognition that the highbrow culture consumers are interested in the exclusivity associated with the product. According to homology (as well as cultural consumption and the omnivore/univore argument) there is a symbolic and aesthetic value in the product which those of a higher social stratum find desirable. There is no mention of the company's approach to appealing to this desire the unconscious thought seems to be that people consume classical music because they want to but the market it small

*"Given the small market for classical music CDs (estimated at three to four per- cent of CDs sold) it has proven wise for this company to have expanded its product lines, and to have capitalized on the licensing potential for the recorded music that originated with the CDs."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.100)

This is not to say that this approach must be substituted by recognizing the social stratification of consumers, but rather that adding that dimension into the company's approach would serve to benefit both the company as well as the consumer. For example, if Naxos were to lean a little more into the idea of highbrow vs lowbrow consumer types, their product approach might be to identify products which are in the decaying phase of their life cycle and publish an article about the rarity and origin of the music. This article might discuss things like the places in which the music was once performed, or the echelon of society in which it was previously associated. This would help to reinforce the notion that the product is elite thereby validating its consumption to consumers which are, in the eyes of social stratification theory, highbrow consumers. To reiterate, this approach serves as an additional element of the company's marketing strategy to benefit the company and the consumer as it has been shown that it would elevate their positive emotion (Andrés, Cervera-Taulet & Garcia, 2016).

Price

The next of the four P's to look at in relationship to the concept of social stratification is that of price. As has already been briefly mentioned, Naxos has an affinity for the concept of undercutting the prices of competition which is a risky approach in any business (Wangler, 2009). This is especially true in relationship to new businesses it seems as it gives the competition the opportunity to mount marketing campaigns in competition of that pricing and put Naxos out of business (Wangler, 2009).

*"Heymann readily admits that if the major labels had seen him as a threat early on and had mounted a competing campaign, they could have put him out of business long before the company would have seen any profits. As it was, his label was simply not taken seriously by others in the industry until it had enough of a stronghold and brand loyalty to withstand budget pricing on re-releases by other labels."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.101)

So, what is Naxos's pricing strategy in relationship to their marketing strategy? The concept of price elasticity seems to be of some fundamental importance to the company *"One of the marketing principles Klaus Heymann must have understood is price elasticity. This basic economic concept tells us that there is a relationship…between price and the quantity that will be sold"* (Wangler, 2009, p.101). This approach means that there are certain things which are easily presumable about Naxos's expectations for their product's success.

*"By pricing at the low end of the spectrum, a company is signaling that it is hoping to sell a large number of units, and in fact, will need to in order to make up the profit that could be made by selling at a higher cost. There is no question that Naxos needs to depend on market penetration—gaining a large share of the potential customers—and the development of a larger customer base to turn a profit."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.101)

In summary, the current mode of thinking that the company has about its pricing strategy is purely based in competitive economic rationalizations with pricing elasticity and low-end pricing being their primary way of conceptualizing the relationship between the product and the predicted number of units which will reasonably be sold.

This is not to suggest that anything about Naxos's current marketing strategy in relationship to price is in anyway wrong. It is a reasonable assumption that as the price of a product goes down the quantity of that product which will be sold goes up and vice versa (Wangler, 2009). From a standpoint of social stratification, it is difficult to contend with this basic economic principle, you may be able to say that perhaps if the consumer base is one of highbrow elite cultural consumers, then higher pricing would signal a more exclusive product value but this is somewhat speculative. An idea in the realm of this pricing elasticity, however, might be to sell occasional recordings of some music for a limited time with an inflated price while maintaining the bulk of the products at the low end of the pricing spectrum to increase profitability.

A more interesting facet of the pricing approach of Naxos comes when looking at their choice in the phycological pricing-based model. Naxos, unlike their competition has decided to keep the pricing of their products consistent instead of selling some versions of the same product at a higher price where some companies price Beethoven's Fifth anywhere between $8,99 and $17,99 (Wangler, 2009). Naxos has a much more streamlined approach to their pricing models and simplifies this as to, in their mind, *"…make it easy for customers by not forcing them to compare value as they might between various major record label(s)"* (Wangler, 2009, p.102). Something which Wangler interestingly recognizes is that this lack of choice may only frustrate the classical music elitists (Wangler, 2009).

> *"The lack of choices might frustrate classical music elitists, but for the larger population the simplicity has obvious appeal (and in reality, in many cases their ears may not be trained to appreciate the difference between the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic)."*
>
> (Wangler, 2009, p.102)

This is a fair point to make, however, if the pricing model was more clearly based on the recognition of the consumer base instead of speculatively assuming what exact social strata the bulk of their consumer base is, then applying theories of homology or omnivore/univore would be more founded. For example, if the company knew for sure that their consumer base were elite highbrow consumers, then the lack of variability in products reflected in pricing might limit their ability to maximize their profit and lengthen the time of peak sales a product has. As with the previous section on product, this is not a suggestion to replace the current pricing model but instead recognizing the addition of this theoretical dimension could benefit Naxos.

Place

The four P's involve recognition of place in which the product and price is being marketed, and in the case of Naxos this means looking at their distribution channels. Naxos's ability to sell large quantities of their product is mostly attributable to their well established and expensive distribution systems (Wangler, 2009).

*"According to Randall Foster, Licensing and Business Development Manager for Naxos of America, the fall of Tower Records, a major client of the company, created the impetus for the company to explore new venues for distribution. This led to the company's music reaching more people than ever. Naxos physical product (mainly CDs, but also DVDs and books) can be found in retail stores across the country ranging in size and scope from mom-and-pop music stores to Best Buy and Barnes & Noble….Klaus Heymann also furthered the development of the company by correctly predicting the potential of the internet; he was an early adopter of the web as a means to reach his potential customers"*

(Wangler, 2009, p.103-104)

An important plane of distribution for companies at the turn of the 21st century was the inclusion of properly estimating the value of the internet, which for a company that started out selling CD's, Naxos certainly did. The focus of the company from a distribution point is primarily maximizing exposure of the product in order to gain the most possible sales (Wangler, 2009) which is a goal most companies share. Additionally, the goal of the organization is expanding to areas where exposure of their product will reach customers which aren't "traditional" classical music buyers *"Heymann states that the next opportunity for the company will be to broaden product placement into lifestyle stores to gain further access to the nontraditional classical music buyer."* (Wangler, 2009, p.105). This is a point which the theories on social stratification would suggest is suboptimal given that putting the same amount of resources into the exposure of the products aimed at the higher social classes would yield more profit. For example, instead of 'lifestyle stores' Naxos might look at placing their products in stores located closely to high arts centers like opera houses, music halls, auditoriums for the fine arts or galleries where the consumers would fit their profile in the eyes of social stratification (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). This might also involve looking at ways to promote their product inside of these places during an event to establish a direct distribution system.

<u>Promotion</u>

Lastly on the topic of social stratification is the point of promotion. In the case of Naxos, this takes the form of *"…a well- honed strategy that employs promotion, publicity, and advertising techniques."* (Wangler, 2009, p.105). Promotion from a marketing standpoint as has been mentioned, is difficult to separate from advertising because promoting a product mostly is a form of advertisement. However, the strategy for promotion at Naxos is quite clearly outlined as

> *"…seeking radio airplay, is a marketing technique that Naxos depends on. Naxos recordings are put in the hands of all major and many smaller classical radio stations. Through this means, people can actually hear the quality of the music recorded and are exposed—at least at some of the more adventuresome stations—to music that is not recorded by any other company."*

> (Wangler, 2009, p.105-106)

Naxos looks to promote the product that they are marketing through exposure in radio plays by tapping into the niche clientele they have (Wangler, 2009). This is clearly a benefit to them given that the consumers who will tune into those radio stations are very likely the same consumers who will enjoy the product that Naxos is marketing. This means that although Naxos is part of a small segment of the music industry, the benefit of their marketing is maximized by promoting their product through channels which reach the same consumers as they intend to reach. This contrasts with attempting to promote their product on major radio stations which may have many more consumers, but very likely a smaller percentage of consumers interested in Naxos's product.

In many ways this unconsciously applies the theories of social stratification given that recognizing the consumer as highbrow means that the company would benefit most from taking advantage of promotion in a way which reaches that same consumer base. Although this is a recognition of theory which is mostly absent from their marketing strategy, the outcome of their decision lines up nicely with the theories which have been discussed. Additionally, Naxos might gain some benefit from marketing on the radio to these clients in a way which outlines the exclusivity of their platform and its classical music recordings, but since there is no mention of their exact method of marketing in this respect it's difficult to suggest how this might exactly benefit them.

In summary, the four P's of Naxos's marketing strategy are very clearly outlined by (Wangler, 2009) and is done so in a way which recognizes the primarily economic advantages of the company's strategy. However, by adding the dimension of social stratification to this strategy provides a slightly more defined outline of the reasoning behind the benefit of their strategic approach. For example, Naxos recognizes that their consumer base is a small percentage of the total number of music consumers, however, they seem to contradict themselves in the eyes of social stratification theory by inconsistently taking advantage of this. They promote their product quite intelligently and in line with the theories of social stratification but when it comes to the concept of place Naxos has a less productive marketing approach. Their website (although existent) does not line up with the concept of the highbrow consumer as it is inundated with technical inefficiency and poor presentation. This facet of the company could very well be improved on by acknowledging the concept of social stratification and redesigning the website with a greater sense of luxury and accessibility. By doing this, Naxos would theoretically be more appealing to the highbrow consumer based on the social theories.

Additionally, Naxos would recognize that there is some untapped potential in the pricing facet of their marketing strategy. The company has a very consistent approach to undercutting the competition in their pricing strategy which was done to separate them when the company was first started (Wangler, 2009). However, since the company has a lack of variability in their product, the low price reflects this and may very well be circumventing their appeal to their highbrow consumers (Wangler, 2009). By recognizing that they have grown and by modifying the pricing of the product slightly, but still being lower than the competition (which is sometimes double the price of Naxos (Wangler, 2009)), they could be reaping some benefit by adding a social stratification dimension to their marketing strategy. This coupled with a redesign of their website would give them an updated appearance and theoretically make the company more appealing to their highbrow consumers. Naxos is a company which has long prided itself on the low pricing and given its success this seems to resonate with the market, however, a modification in pricing which might simply mean occasionally pricing more exclusive recordings higher, would very likely mean that they legitimize the exclusivity of their product while maintaining their current brand of being one of the largest and cheapest classical music retailers on the market.

*Social Mobility & It's Theoretical Application to The Four P's*

To quickly summarize, social mobility can be seen as the movement of an individual/s through different positions of a social hierarchy over time (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). Social mobility plays a role not only in the movement of an individual through the social hierarchy but also in the maintenance of their position in that hierarchy (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018).

Product

Naxos has a product which appeals to a small group of consumers and they recognize that as something which is both a benefit to them as well as a limitation in the sense that the market for their product is smaller than most (Wangler, 2009). What this means for Naxos is that they have made some decisions about their product which does not represent a maximization of profitability in order to best line up their product with the company's ethos *"Heymann has fearlessly recorded the likes of Lutoslawski, Penderecki, and Ligeti. He does not claim to make a profit on every new composer recorded, but he does proudly tout his sales in this category"* (Wangler, 2009, p.98-99).

The concept of social mobility in the case of Naxos's product is very theoretically interesting as highbrow culture consumption is a concept which is very frequently applied to social mobility literature (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). Conceptually marketing to consumers in a way which suggests they will be better positioned to climb the social hierarchy on the basis of consuming a product is a complicated message to convey. Naxos knows quite well that they have a limited consumer type because of the product that they sell, however in the category of product, perhaps marketing with social mobility in mind is best done in a way which makes the consumer feel as though they are a highbrow consumer either to maintain their position as a social elite or to entice consumers to feel as though they are even if they are not. This might take the form of marketing focusing on the types of people associated with the product (i.e. the social elite) in order to express and legitimize the idea that consumption of the product promotes social recognition by this stratum of consumer. This both expresses the possibility of social mobility through consumption which appeals to new consumers as well as appealing to the existing consumers by justifying the consumption of the product to maintain their position in a social hierarchy (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018).

<u>Price</u>

The pricing of Naxos's product is one of the places in their marketing strategy which is most counterintuitive to the theories which this project is focused on. In theory, highbrow consumers are more likely to spend more money on products which would fit the description of highbrow culture. Naxos however has decided to undercut their competition with great success which begs the question about whether or not their consumers fit the traditional theoretical models relating to social hierarchy. The answer to this question is fairly simple given that simply being in a higher social does not somehow mean that you are disinterested in getting the best deal available for the thing you are consuming. Regardless of the pricing the fact is that classical music is considered highbrow culture which when consumed ameliorates one's status (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). A counter point might be that the higher the pricing model of a product is, the more exclusivity and elitism there is to orbit the consumption of that product. Although this may very well be true, there are still consumers which do spend large amounts of money on classical music, but this doesn't negate the value to Naxos of pricing their product lower than the competition.

Social mobility plays a part in this as pricing is a suggestion of a company's estimation of its product's value. In the case of social mobility, a marketing strategy which Naxos is not making use of could be to recognize this fact and market to the consumer the idea that consuming their product, regardless of the price, still grants them the benefits of consuming highbrow consumption like being viewed as a part of a greater social status order. Something to acknowledge too is that the lower pricing model of Naxos will make their product more accessible to people who might otherwise not consider consuming classical music. Assuming those consumers might normally be consumers of pop or mass culture they would be in the lowbrow consumer category. These are the consumers that Naxos would theoretically get the most value from marketing to in a way which social mobility is inferred. To do this in the pricing model alone is difficult, however keeping the product at its lower price range does no doubt grant Naxos access to a slightly bigger consumer base in the social hierarchy. The suggestion here would be to maintain the pricing strategy as it best lines up with the aim to maximize the potential profitability of a product by reaching consumers lower in the social hierarchy and offering the potential for social mobility through the consumption of the product.

<u>Place</u>

The idea of social mobility is one which tracks very similarly through the marketing strategy of Naxos. When it comes to the place of their marketing, Naxos's distribution chains are their primary resource in terms of marketing. As has been discussed, the switch which Naxos made to the internet was a huge turning point in their marketing strategy as it embraced the coming of newer technology and allowed them to distribute digitally instead of being tied to physical copies in the forms of CD's (Wangler, 2009). A noteworthy point which is made on Naxos's marketing strategy in relationship to their placement of their product is

*"It is interesting to note that when Naxos CDs first hit the shelves, many retailers were reluctant to put them in the bins with their high-priced counterparts, reserving a separate section of shelf space for them. The un- intended consequence of this product placement was that Naxos, with its distinctive labeling, was set apart and became easy for customers to see"*

(Wangler, 2009, p.103)

This demonstrates that the unforeseen benefit their pricing model was that it separated them so far from the competition that their two stepped distributional systems ended up having a choice between separating them physically from the more expensive counterparts of the competition. On this point, if Naxos were to more consciously recognize and understand the concept of relational inequality in a hierarchy, they may be able to apply it to the marketing and choice of distribution chain. Relational inequality tells us that the perceived separations between people in a hierarchy constitute forms of relational inequality and there are ways in which Naxos could incorporate this. For example, if Naxos were research brick and mortar locations which have poorly stocked classical music sections and decided to distribute their music to these places and pay to have them very clearly displayed, the apparentness of relational inequality to the consumer would be maximized. What this would theoretically accomplish is demonstration of highbrow culture to consumers who are in a lower brow of the consumption bracket and use the theoretical efficacy of social mobility to market to consumers. However, it isn't as simple as paying for well-placed physical products in a digital age, the alternative to this would be to market on the internet and invest in search engine optimization (SEO) to use the same concept. The hope would be that it would entice consumers who are lowbrow to consume a product which facilitates their social mobility.

<u>Promotion</u>

When looking at promotion, as discussed, it is very closely tied to the concept of advertising. However, from a marketing perspective, Naxos makes some promotional decisions to expand its consumer base.

*"Naxos sends out tens of thousands of e-cards every week to potential customers and has an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. The company also has a weekly podcast offered through iTunes and Amazon that boasts a listenership of over 90,000 people per week."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.107)

The goal of the company is naturally to expand its reach as much as possible which of course costs them money. This seems somewhat inefficient in the sense that they have recognized that the market for their product is rather small and the consumers are quite particular about where and what the consume in that domain (Wangler, 2009). Naxos has seemingly been eschewing of the idea of precisely identifying their consumer base and have focused their efforts on creating a demand for their product *"Now more than ever, we focus almost entirely on the demand side of the equation."* (Wangler, 2009, p.107). Contradictorily, Naxos has acknowledged that it is uneconomical to market their product to lowbrow consumers which is especially evident in their decision to sell classical music established by their founder's tutting's with the highbrow sect of society (Wangler, 2009). There is a gap in Naxos's justification for some of their decisions beyond the solid foundations of marketing, and recognition of the social theories which have been explored in this project could add a dimension to that approach by providing some explanation to why some of their decisions might work as well as assisting in the guidance of future strategies.

For example, social mobility could be utilized in in their promotional strategy not because it disagrees entirely with their prospect of creating demand for their product, on the contrary, marketing to the appeal of social agent's desire for social mobility involves creating demand (Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2018). Instead recognizing that demand for a product would likely have to be created differently based on the hierarchical position of their targeted consumer group could create a more direct aim to their efforts at promoting their product.

*Cultural Consumption & It's Theoretical Application to The Four P's*

Product

Much like in the case of social stratification, the concept of cultural consumption in respect to Naxos's marketing strategy is applicable in the sense that establishing a position in the social hierarchy has a connection to the type of consumer that a person is. The idea of cultural consumption takes the concept a little more away from the theoretical in as identifying a consumer as highbrow or lowbrow is not the focus of the theory. Instead, cultural consumption looks at what the value of a product is to a consumer i.e., aesthetic versus instrumental value (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner, 2017). Different types of product's are very clearly defined as being highbrow or lowbrow by cultural consumption theory and the concept of music is so essential from a cultural perspective that even Bourdieu recognized that some types of music are highbrow, and some are lowbrow (Bourdieu, 1987). Aesthetic and symbolic value of music is difficult to define, however, classical music is very clearly delineated as a product of highbrow cultural consumption because of the cultural capital it provides its consumer.

This cultural capital is at the center of what it is that might intrigue new consumers to explore the classical music scene. Ideally it would be as simple as explaining to parents of a child that by exposing them to classical music, it has been empirically shown that it rases their cultural capital and makes them more successful in the educational system and subsequently better positioned in a hierarchy partly because of the function of relational inequality and class reproduction (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017).  However, this knowledge might serve the company well given that *"Naxos also expends energy and resources on educational materials"* (Wangler, 2009, p.106). This understanding could help Naxos perhaps to target the educational system to collaborate with school or universities to help expose younger children to classical music because of the benefits it may serve them in life. The advantage of this to Naxos is that because they are already focused on being the cheapest competitor in the market, making the case that a collaborative program with schools would be lucrative as well as cost efficient for both parties. The essence of cultural consumption and cultural capital have been mostly associated in education regarding class reproduction by parents, however Naxos could very well tap into this by partnering with educational programs to sell their product.

<u>Price</u>

The basis of the Naxos's pricing model is to undercut the competition which places them in a unique position in relationship to the cultural consumption and cultural capital aspect of theoretical application. This is because of two things

1. The general assumption about price is that the higher the price the more it suggests about a product and its exclusivity and thereby raises the cultural capital of the consumer upon consumption. By having such a low-price Naxos suggests that perhaps in comparison to their counterparts, there is not as much to be gained from consuming their product from a theoretical standpoint.

2. The accessibility of the pricing means that their products are more available for entrance into the classical music market for consumers. This in part negates the downside to their pricing in terms of cultural consumption as the cultural capital of a consumer is not as reliant on their awareness of the concept and social hierarchy. Instead, accessibility of a product which raises cultural capital of consumers is more beneficial from a marketing perspective. This is less the case with marketing strategies which would incorporate the other social theories, as social stratification and social mobility partly require some recognition from the consumer to sense the value of those things which would be achieved in the marketing of the product.

*"Whether intentional or not, this pricing scheme pushed Naxos to a different target demographic than was typical for classical music at the time. The low price was, and continues to be, attractive to students and to adult amateurs. Fortunately for Naxos, this is a much larger population than the trained professional musician and studied aficionados. By reaching this broader audience, Naxos has been able to sell the necessary quantity of recordings to remain profitable."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.102)

Although unintended, this shows that something which appeals to groups of people comparatively is likely to value the increase in their cultural capital through consumption. The appeal of the product was to amature classical adult listeners and students. On the point of pricing there is little that the concept of cultural consumption and cultural capital can offer in the sense of expanding marketing strategy but can help provide an explanation of the success.

<u>Place</u>

Regarding place of marketing, as has been mentioned, the use of the internet is the most significant of all the decisions that Naxos has made in recent years to stay modernized and relevant (Wangler, 2009). The number of consumers which are reachable by the decision to be part of the digital era of marketing has changed Naxos's overall sales data as well as increasing their presence on the classical music market.

*"And, while some tracks sell only to classical music fanatics, overall revenue from digital downloads has grown to encompass 25% of the company's revenue. If one adds in physical products sold over the internet, Heymann states that these sales provide 75% of total sales revenue."*

(Wangler, 2009, p.105)

In 2009, Naxos's online sales accounted for 25% of their profits from all sales and they recognized that a small number of those sales were attributable to classical music fanatics (Wangler, 2009). What this tells us about the consumer base of Naxos is that a larger proportion of their sales are not at the hands of classical music fanatics, but instead, a more general group of consumers. Classical music has been shown repeatedly in theoretical approaches to social hierarchy to be of an aesthetic value which is valuable to the highbrow consumer. In relationship to place, there isn't a great deal of information about how different distributional chains are affected by the efficacy of cultural consumption and its application in marketing strategy. This makes and inference about how this concept can be applied to the distribution of Naxos's products as speculative as the other social theories. However, from the perspective of cultural consumption it could be argued through the theories which have been outlined (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017) that introduction to educational systems might logically see benefit. This is due the empirical evidence that the cultural capital and hierarchical positioning of a person can be improved through the consumption of classical music and other highbrow forms of art (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017). Since networking and social circle has a big part to play in this, marketing through highbrow distributional channels would be theoretically beneficial. For example, organizing educational excursions to places like an opera house or auditorium might benefit Naxos's given the theoretical applicability of cultural consumption (Rössel, Schenk & Weingartner 2017).

<u>Promotion</u>

Finally, this section deals with how cultural consumption and cultural capital relates to Naxos's promotional facet of their marketing mix marketing strategy. As with the other areas, promotion in the case of Naxos is a primarily an issue of distributional systems which the company has been very efficient at properly setting up themselves (Wangler, 2009). So, the question is, can Naxos apply the concept of cultural consumption and capital to their marketing strategy regarding their distribution? To explore whether this is possible it should first be acknowledged that Naxos has two primary forms of distribution which have been mentioned in the previous sections. The first of these is the one-step distribution system which is the sales that Naxos makes directly to the consumer which is primarily in the form of physical copies of their product (Wangler, 2009). The other is a two-step distribution system where Naxos sells their products through a third party like iTunes, Sony, or Napster to mention a few (Wangler, 2009).

Essentially promotion for the company is emulsified through the distribution and subsequent consumer awareness of their product and brand. What this means is that in order to incorporate the concept of cultural consumption or cultural capital, Naxos would need to conduct some more market research about who their consumers are and why they buy the products that they do. By doing this Naxos would be able to make some general theorizations about the value of including cultural consumption and cultural capital theories in their marketing strategy. For example, if Naxos were to discover that the larger part of their consumer base was composed of people who are mostly in the middle class as opposed to the higher class of the social hierarchy then communicating to them that consumption of their product would involve them in the history of the traditional classical music listener, thereby raising their cultural capital and making socialization with the higher echelon of society more tenable, that could theoretically yield some decent results. However, if their consumer base was primarily high-class individuals, then encouraging them to consume their product on the basis that it solidifies their position in the social hierarchy might be more advantageous. The ways in which they could do this would be to distribute their products on a more exclusive platform which advertises the places in which the music has historically been played. Alternatively, Naxos could advertise famous high-class individuals which have historically been avid listeners of the music which they are promoting.

**Discussion & Reflection**

There are natural limitations of undertaking a project which is theoretical in its practical application as it makes answering the problem formulation of the project as speculative as the analysis is. This limitation is worsened by the lack of empirical data which Naxos has on its consumers given that the application of social theories about class rely quite heavily on information about the consumer demographic to infer the utility of the theories and conceptualize ways in which they might effectively be applied to the already existing marketing strategy. This is the fundamental shortcoming of the problem formulation and project topic. To overcome this, recognizing throughout that there is a speculative element to the application of these theories reaffirms that, although there is not empirical support for the efficacy of recognizing these theories in a marketing strategy, there are many suggestions about how this might be done. This is hopefully achieved through thorough explanation of the theories themselves as well as simplifying them in the analysis as to elucidate as much as possible the idea that applying theoretical thinking to marketing might yield benefit to both consumer and company and using examples and suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

Naxos does have a good amount of information on its marketing approach which is why it was chosen as a case description of the topic through which the theories could be applied to the existing strategy of the company. This information is primarily based on marketing theories which tend to not consciously recognize social hierarchy on a profound level, which was the problem that this project aimed to elucidate, which does make inference of practical application of the theories very apparently speculative. This was something which was not appropriately anticipated at the time of the topic's inception where it was later found that the more analysis which was done based on the information provided by the company about its marketing strategy, the clearer it was that application of the theories was absent in their thinking. This made it glaringly obvious that the analysis was theoretical as opposed to empirical thereby making the analysis seen more notional. To deal with this issue, talking about the current ways in which Naxos was dealing with their marketing strategy which were closest to the theories of the project made connecting the two things as closely as possible a more manageable task. Ultimately, there is a great deal of explanation required given the complexity of the theories which was also dealt with by using examples and figures to clarify to the reader as much as possible the point of the concepts and connect them to one another.

Over the course of this project's completion, re-evaluation of the theories presented an issue of bias approach to the idea of social hierarchy meaning many of them had to be reformulated. It seemed less clear at the time that bias was present in the writing, but after the conclusion of the project, it was clearer that there was phrasing and justification which were either present or not, that should or shouldn't have been. To rectify this, the introduction as well as the theories section of the project had to be closely looked at for any bias which strayed from the normative values of the parlance typical of academic writing in this context. There was an absence of ethical considerations from the methodology of the project as there was no proprietary data being collected, the analysis is based entirely on secondary data. Ethical considerations of research design arise from issues like maintaining participant anonymity as well as ethics in method of conducting interviews. However secondary data makes ethical points in the research a redundant concern.

**Conclusion**

We can conceptualize the concepts of social stratification, social mobility, and cultural consumption in an accurate and clearly delineated way. This makes understanding the relationship between the concepts a very accomplishable task. The way we can see the relationship between these concepts is one of a cyclical nature where they all contribute to one another thereby establishing a status order for individuals in a social hierarchy. Social stratification involves the classification of things like sex, age, socio-economic position and is defined in a way which explains the motivation for consumption by separating consumers into classes of highbrow and lowbrow. The concept of social mobility then defines the ways in which people will move up or down a social hierarchy because of the decisions that they make to consume. This is attributed to by the social strata within which the consumer is a part of. Then the concept of cultural consumption explains why people consume the things that they do, is it for the purpose of utility and practicality (instrumental) or is it symbolic and representative (aesthetic). Their familiarity with what is considered highbrow or lowbrow consumption (their ability to estimate aesthetic value) defines their cultural capital which is largely decided by their parents and things like exposure to highbrow culture and education. These concepts connect in the way that they all work together to contribute to where a person stands in a social hierarchy.

The marketing mix theory (Four P's of marketing) involve product, price, place and promotion. To best discuss how the theories might be applied to the concept of marketing strategy, a case description was used to evaluate. There are various approaches to this concept in terms of how the Four P's are applied in practice and a strategic approach to this is outlined very clearly by (Wangler, 2009) in relationship to a company named Naxos which sells classical music. The different ways in which Naxos deals with each of the Four P's is clearly demarcated and the absence of recognition by the company of the social concepts which this project has outlined was pronounced. The approach of Naxos is very economically driven which is a very reasonable motivation for forming a marketing strategy. However, this project purports that by including the dimension of the social theories to guide the marketing strategy of Naxos further benefit might be seen by both the company in the form of profit and the consumer in the form of social mobility and reinforcement of positive emotion. Some of the ways in which the application of these theories might be applied to Naxos's marketing strategy are as follows.

- The concepts of social stratification, social mobility, and cultural consumption all heavily support the idea that consumer is highbrow or lowbrow. This is a drastic simplification but is the fundamental agreement of all the concepts. Naxos does not know with much certainty which of these classifications that their consumers fit into. The theories tell us that classical music is a highbrow form of culture which is consumed by elite higher socially positioned individuals. Naxos is marketing strategy involved a highbrow cultural product, marketed at a lowbrow price, placed in systems which encourage primarily highbrow consumers and promoted in a mix of both highbrow and lowbrow consumer demographics. The suggestion is that by recognizing the theories outlined in this project, clearly defining their current consumer demographic in terms of highbrow/lowbrow through social stratification would serve to benefit them in terms of further clarifying their marketing strategy.

- The theoretical arguments would also suggest that redesigning their website UI which is their primary method system of distribution, would benefit their appeal to consumers in terms of promoting the ideas of social mobility and establishing greater aesthetic value to highbrow consumers as the appearance of exclusivity and luxury is attractive to consumers who value highbrow culture.

- By incorporating the knowledge, which is empirically proven in cultural consumption methods, involving educational systems in their marketing strategy could very well benefit them greatly as there is great value in educating students on classical music in terms of positioning them better in a social hierarchy. This is both lucrative for the company as well as beneficial from a social perspective for the consumer.

- By strategically placing their physical product's which accounted for 25% of their sales in 2009, they could make an effort to market to the highbrow consumer in places like classical music auditoriums, art galleries, opera houses etc. which the social theory tells us would appeal best to the consumer demographics of classical music consumers.

In conclusion, the research question was "In Which Ways Does Cultural Consumption Actively Influence Social Stratification & Social Mobility and How Can Marketing Strategies Benefit From Understanding This Connection?". The relationship between cultural consumption and social stratification and social mobility is an actively cyclical one as those concepts are key in establishing social hierarchy positions for consumers. The benefits of involving these theories in a marketing strategy are that by consciously recognizing these theories they can theoretically guide a company to strategize how to identify and appeal to their consumers. This is because by understanding what things different stratums of consumers are interested in, knowing where, who and how to market a product becomes clearer and more beneficial to a company and the consumer. This is a theoretical dimension which can be added to their already existing marketing strategy like in the case of Naxos to further operationalize their marketing approach.

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