## **Consumption and Consumers Ethics and Models**

## Prof. Paolo Monti; Prof. Eleonora Noia

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

*Course aims*

The course aims to provide students with the necessary knowledge to understand the complexity of the cultural dynamics of consumer action and to provide the basis for a reflective understanding of the ethical issues related to consumer practices.

To this purpose, the course examines ethical theories, and theories of consumption and consumer culture, in the context of everyday life, with a focus on fashion and food. The course will highlight the important relationships of consumer and communication practices with ethical issues such as dignity of work, access to goods and resources, inclusion of cultural minorities, environmental sustainability, and social justice, in particular related to food and fashion industries.

As individuals, in fact, we spend our lives being at the same time consumers and citizens. As such we hold interests, and responsibilities toward earth, society, other people, and ourselves, that have become a global matter, including the “climate change emergency”. Fashion and food systems play a relevant role in facing these challenges. Thus, the course will present cases of companies, products and consumption practices that provide harm to the environment and to people. It will also present cases of fashion and food industries that are in the middle of the sustainable transition. Moreover, cases of NGOs and associations that promote critical and ethical forms of consumption will be presented.

*Intended learning outcomes*

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

At the end of the course, students will know the core elements of the contemporary debates on the moral limits of markets and on the tension between consumerism and democratic citizenship. They will understand the basic concepts underlying the most influential ethical models and they will be able to distinguish between deontological and consequentialist evaluations, and between ethical and legal dimensions. They will also be able to appreciate the ethical relevance of the concepts of social practice, social justice, interculturalism and sustainability.

By the end of the course, students will also be able to recognize the main elements of the sustainability debate as applied to consumption.

ABILITY TO APPLY KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

At the end of the course, students will be able to analyse ethical issues emerging within cases drawn from professional experience in the field of marketing and communication. They will also be able to make decisions, individually and in groups, about the course of action to be adopted in the face of ethically challenging and dilemmatic situations.

Students will also be able to use the specific lexicon of the sociology of consumption; identify the cultural and social characteristics of consumer action with particular attention to the phenomenon of critical consumption.

Through the analysis of specific case studies, students will have acquired the ability to critically discuss and recognize production and consumption practices in relation to environmental, social, and economic sustainability in the textile-clothing and food sectors.

INDEPENDENT JUDGEMENT

At the end of the course, students will be able to offer ethical justifications for their conduct in the professional field and to reflexively evaluate communication practices in the area of food and fashion in the light of a plurality of ideals and ethical values. They will also be able to acknowledge and articulate processes that can promote the sustainable transition of industries, cities, social organizations: students will be able to recognize and communicate the major processes of change that are affecting businesses and consumers to promote more sustainable production and consumption practices.

***COURSE CONTENT***

This course focuses on the values, identities, and practices that compose consumption and consumers ethics today; particular attention will be given to ethical consumption practices in the fashion and food sectors.

The course aims to address the following topics:

* The debate on the moral limits of markets and the relationship between consumerism and citizenship;
* Ethical decision-making: deontological, consequentialist and virtue-based models;
* Social practices and consumer behaviours: philosophical and sociological accounts;
* The intercultural complexity of fashion and food practices: ethical conundrums and case studies;
* Sustainability as a central ethical concern: debates and practices in the agri-food chain and in the fashion industry;
* The sociological study of consumption: classical and contemporary approaches;
* The theoretical perspectives about ethical issues in fashion and food: preserving the planet and its resources for the next generations plus don’t harm nature’s spaces and times;
* Critical consumption: history, characteristics and peculiarities;
* Critical consumption in the textile-clothing sector and in the food sector. Individual and associated experiences.

***READING LIST[[1]](#footnote-1)***

A reading list for the preparation of the exam will be provided during the course and collected by the professors in a lecture note; the latter will be made available on the Blackboard page of the course itself. The slides of the lessons and any additional didactic material used will also be available on Blackboard.

***TEACHING METHOD***

The course includes lectures, case study discussions, seminars/talks with experts from the fashion and food sectors. The course also envisages practical individual and group assignments.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The final grade will be obtained in one of these two ways:

1. The learning outcomes acquired by the students are verified through ongoing assessment. During the semester, students will participate in a practical group assignment making 50% of the final evaluation; students will then take a written exam at the end of the course for the other 50% of the final grade. The written exam will consist of open questions on the topics covered during the course, with a focus on both the main ideas and the case studies presented in class.

2. Through an oral exam in the official calls of the winter and summer sessions. Students who will not have participated in the group work will be allowed to take an oral exam during the official calls (Winter and Summer sessions). The questions of the oral exam will cover the entire program of the course and will aim to assess the students’ ability to express themselves dialectically with correct and appropriate language as well as to demonstrate their knowledge of the main theories in the field of consumer behavior and ethics. Assessment will take into consideration: relevance of answers, appropriate use of specific terminology, argumentative and coherent structure of the students’ expositions, and their ability to link concepts and identify open issues.

Further information or clarifications in this regard will be provided by the professors during the course; the answers to the most frequently asked questions will be available in the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) section on the Blackboard page of the course itself.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

No prior knowledge is required; however, intellectual curiosity for the study of consumer behavior and ethics and a minimum knowledge of sociological terminology are desirable.

Students are encouraged to regularly consult the Blackboard platform for alerts and updates. In the event that the sanitary emergency relating to the Covid-19 pandemic will not allow face-to-face teaching, distant learning will be guaranteed.

*Place and time of consultation hours*

Prof. Monti and prof. Noia receive the students after each lesson and by appointment.

1. I testi indicati nella bibliografia sono acquistabili presso le librerie di Ateneo; è possibile acquistarli anche presso altri rivenditori. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)