

CLASS DYNAMICS OF CONSUMERISM IN BALAJU, KATHMANDU



A Thesis

**Submitted to the MPhil Programme in Sociology,
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Master of Philosophy
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Submitted By

Bimal Babu Shrestha

Exam Roll No.: 804

TU Regd. No.: 9-1-29-85-2006

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that this dissertation entitled "**CLASS DYNAMICS OF CONSUMERISM IN BALAJU, KATHMANDU**" represents my work which has been written and prepared for the award of MPhil. degree and has not been previously included in a dissertation submitted to this or any other institutions or university or examining body for a degree or other qualification. I have read the current research ethics guidelines, obtained relevant ethical approval, and acknowledge the rights of participants.

.....

Bimal Babu Shrestha

Date:

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of Sociology
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
MPhil Program in Sociology

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

This is to certify that **Mr. Bimal Babu Shrestha** has carried out the research work embodied in the present dissertation entitled "**CLASS DYNAMICS OF CONSUMERISM IN BALAJU, KATHMANDU**" as partial fulfilment of Master of Philosophy degree in Sociology under my supervision. I, therefore, recommend this dissertation for final evaluation and acceptance.

.....
Associate Prof. Tikaram Gautam, PhD
Thesis Supervisor
Central Department of Sociology
Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur,
Kathmandu, Nepal

Date: 04/04/2025

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of Sociology
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
MPhil Program in Sociology

LETTER OF APPROVAL

The evaluation committee has accepted this dissertation entitled; "**CLASS DYNAMICS OF CONSUMERISM IN BALAJU, KATHMANDU**" submitted by Mr. Bimal Babu Shrestha to the central Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University for the final examination. We, hereby certify that the dissertation is satisfactory in scope and quality. Therefore, we accept this thesis dissertation for the partial fulfillment of the Master of Philosophy Degree in Sociology.

Evaluation Committee:

Associate Prof. Tikaram Gautam, PhD
 Thesis Supervisor

Prof. Surendra Mishra, PhD
 Expert

Keshab Silwal, PhD
 Expert

Associate Prof. Pasang Sherpa, PhD
 Department Head, Central Department of Sociology

Date: 07/04/2025

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ABSTRACT

This study fundamentally deals with the class dynamics of consumerism in Kathmandu, particularly in Balaju. More specifically, this study explores the patterns of consumer behavior across various social groups and based on which how class disparities and hierarchies are created and class identity is formed. On that note, this study explores the intersection of consumer behavior, class identity, and social hierarchies in contemporary society, focusing on how consumption patterns are shaped by economic constraints, social pressures, and the desire for social mobility.

By using qualitative in-depth interview of twenty respondent altogether, selected purposively from various social class, and using unstructured interview schedule and participant observation method for more than one year, this study endeavors to explore patterns of consumer behavior across different social classes in Balaju and spending patterns and consumer choices influence class disparities and also explains the ways consumer practices and preferences influence existing class identities and social hierarchies

The key findings reveal a distinction between aspirational consumption, driven by the desire to project a higher social status, and instinctive consumption, which prioritizes immediate practical needs. The research highlights how economic factors influence consumption, with lower-income individuals focusing on essentials and higher-income groups indulging in non-essential purchases, reinforcing class divisions. Digital platforms, including e-commerce and social media, play a significant role in shaping consumption behaviors by providing access to goods and services while also creating new forms of social validation through trends and influencer endorsements. The study also examines how social perceptions impact class identity, with middle-class individuals striving to emulate upper-class ideals despite financial strain. The rise of digital consumption, marked by a preference for convenience over cost, further underscores the evolving nature of consumer behavior in urban environments. Ultimately, this research underscores the powerful role of consumption in reinforcing social hierarchies and highlights the tension between social aspirations and economic realities.

Key Words: Consumer behavior, class identity, social hierarchy, disparities

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Class refers to a hierarchical social stratification based on economic capital (income, wealth), cultural capital (education, tastes), and social capital (networks, influence) (Bourdieu, 1984). Unlike caste systems, class is theoretically fluid, though in practice, mobility is often constrained by structural inequalities (Wright, 1997). In Marxist terms, class is defined by one's relationship to production—owners (bourgeoisie) versus laborers (proletariat)—which perpetuates systemic power imbalances (Marx & Engels, 1848). Class dynamics refer to the ongoing processes through which social classes are formed, maintained, and transformed within a society. These dynamics encompass the complex interplay of economic, cultural, and social forces that shape hierarchical relationships between different class groups (Savage et al., 2013). At their core, class dynamics examine how power, resources, and opportunities are unevenly distributed across social strata, and how these inequalities are perpetuated or challenged over time.

A key aspect of class dynamics involves the reproduction of class boundaries through both material and symbolic means. Bourdieu (1984) demonstrated how cultural capital – including education, tastes, and consumption patterns – serves as a mechanism for maintaining class distinctions. Meanwhile, economic capital determines access to resources and life chances, reinforcing structural inequalities (Wright, 1997). These processes often operate subtly through institutional practices and everyday interactions, making class distinctions appear natural rather than socially constructed. Class dynamics also encompass social mobility and resistance. While some individuals may experience upward mobility through education or entrepreneurship, structural barriers frequently limit such movement (Giddens, 1991). Additionally, subordinate classes may resist dominant class structures through collective action or alternative cultural practices. In contemporary societies, globalization and digital technologies have introduced new dimensions to class dynamics, creating novel forms of inequality while potentially offering new avenues for mobility (Sassen, 2001). Understanding these evolving dynamics is crucial for analyzing how social hierarchies function and change in different historical and cultural contexts.

Consumerism refers to "the social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts" (Stearns, 2001, p. 9). It represents more than mere consumption; rather, it signifies a cultural ideology where personal identity, social status, and life satisfaction become tied to material possessions (Bauman, 2007). This phenomenon has become a defining characteristic of modern capitalist societies, shaping individual behaviors, social relationships, and even national economies. At its core, consumerism operates through what Baudrillard (1998) describes as "the system of objects," where commodities acquire symbolic meanings beyond their practical utility. As he argues, "We consume not the object but the idea it represents" (p. 22). This symbolic dimension transforms shopping from a functional activity into a means of self-expression and social positioning. Veblen's (1899) concept of "conspicuous consumption" remains particularly relevant, highlighting how luxury goods serve as "visible evidence of wealth and status" (p. 43) in class-stratified societies.

The rise of consumer culture has significant social implications. As Slater (1997) observes, "Consumerism promises happiness through commodities but delivers only temporary satisfaction" (p. 15), creating a cycle of perpetual desire. Critics argue that this system promotes environmental degradation, psychological dissatisfaction, and social inequality (Schor, 1999). However, proponents suggest that consumer choice represents personal freedom and economic progress (Galbraith, 1958). In developing contexts like Nepal, consumerism introduces complex dynamics as global brands and local traditions intersect, creating hybrid consumption patterns that reflect both modernity and cultural continuity (Liechty, 2003).

Class dynamics and consumerism are fundamentally intertwined, as consumption patterns both reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. Bourdieu (1984) demonstrates that consumer choices—from clothing to leisure activities—serve as "markers of class distinction," where dominant groups use cultural capital to maintain symbolic boundaries against subordinate classes (p. 6). Similarly, Veblen's (1899) theory of "conspicuous consumption" reveals how elites deploy luxury goods to signal status, while marginalized groups often adopt compensatory consumption strategies to navigate their social position (Schor, 1998, p. 45). In urban Nepal, these dynamics are further complicated by caste, remittance economies, and globalization, where

imported brands and lifestyle aspirations become tools for class mobility or exclusion (Liechty, 2003, p. 112). Thus, consumerism does not merely mirror class structure—it actively reproduces it through daily practices, making consumption a key site for studying social inequality.

Over the past three decades Kathmandu Metropolitan city has witnessed quick urbanization and rapid transformation of economics. Being a political and economic hub of the nation, the city has seen significant growth in population and infrastructure. The city's social fabric is reshaped due to the rapid urbanization and rise in consumer culture. (Shrestha & Pandey, 2018). Moreover, consumer patterns and lifestyle of people living in the city have changed as the city transformed from traditional to modern. There are many types of local and international products available to consumers in different marketplaces within the city. The rapid increase of consumer options is mirror of global trend towards increased consumerism and goods have become symbols of status and identity not only the necessities (Ritzer, 2019).

Consumerism intersects with the existing social class structures in the context of Kathmandu. It creates distinct consumption patterns within different socio-economic groups. According to Bourdieu (1984), taste and consumption pattern of individuals are determinants of social class as spending habits of people is heavily influenced by cultural, social and economical capital. The access to luxury items, modern amenities, and branded goods among different classes of people are evidence of these distinctions in Kathmandu Metropolitan city. Low income group of people tends to prioritize basic necessity goods whereas high income group people engage in show off pattern of consumption by acquiring high-end stuffs (Patsiaouras, Fitchett, & Davies, 2016). After the pandemic of COVID – 19, the dynamics have been complicated and brought on new challenges as well as shifted the behavior of consumer. Low incomegroup of people have been immensely affected due to disruptions of economy, loss of jobs, and decreased disposable incomes (World Bank, 2021). Due to pandemic the paradigm of consumer patterns and behavior have changed. High income groups are continually engaged in luxury consumption with more focus on health and safety whereas low-income groups are into cost saving ways (Deloitte, 2020). There is increase in use of digital technologies and e-commerce after pandemic in Kathmandu. Distance-based social restrictions led to increased online

buying that changed how goods and services reach people in various socioeconomic levels. The digital divide has surfaced as a result of this change because wealthier families who maintain better access to technology receive better convenience from online shopping while poorer families encounter obstacles from inadequate digital skills and restricted internet access (Shrestha & Pandey, 2021). Global consumer culture has strengthened its impact on Kathmandu consumer desires and market behaviors since the start of the pandemic. Media along with advertisements function importantly to mold the aspirations of people by marketing a style of life focused on modern achievements and owning many possessions. The transformation demonstrates the theoretical concepts outlined by Veblen (1899) concerning the leisure class since people now use consumption to showcase their position and create distinctions in society.

In general, this study explores the social and economic implications of consumer behaviors on class structure in Kathmandu, particularly in Kathmandu Metropolitan, ward number 16, Balaju. By employing qualitative interview method, this study basically deals with patterns of consumer behavior and influence in the class disparities, class identity, and social hierarchies. More Specifically, this study explore patterns of consumer behavior across different social classes in Balaju and spending patterns and consumer choices influence class disparities and also explains the ways consumer practices and preferences influence existing class identities and social hierarchies. This study mainly deals with the relationship between class dynamics and consumerism within Kathmandu Metropolitan's specific areas of Balaju. The capital city now is multicultural and diverse due to the influx of many people from different parts of the country. The city exhibits a unique setting for studying consumption patterns, behavior of consumer and its impact on class structure. It is because of the diverse population and varying socio-economic strata. There has been intense transformation in society in terms of social and economic landscape in these three decades. The major reason behind this transformation is due to rapid urbanization, globalization, and expansion of market and accretion of consumer goods. These factors have impacted the big changes in the culture of consumer and have affected almost all levels of society in different forms and magnitudes (Shrestha & Pandey, 2018). In contemporary society consumerism has become a dominant force and is defined as economic and cultural phenomenon that inspires the acquisition of goods

and services in increasing amounts (Ritzer, 2019). The impact is beyond cultural values, individual identities and economic transactions as well as influencing social structures. By using qualitative research method the study tries to explore the complex relationship between consumerism and class dynamics within the Kathmandu Metropolitan's specific area. Current global trends of goods consumption and social stratification are mirroring the rapid urbanization in the region. Through the lens of class analysis understanding the consumerism involves finding out the reasons that influence consumer culture and how socio-economic groups engage. On the basis of economic, cultural capital, and social, the class in this context is defined as the hierarchical distinctions between individual and group (Bourdieu, 1984). These defined distinctions results in the consumption patterns, preferences, and access to goods and services among consumers that challenge existing social hierarchies.

1.2 Problem Statement

The rapid expansion of consumer culture in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, particularly in areas like Balaju, has created visible disparities in consumption patterns across different social classes. While global theories of consumerism (Veblen, 1899; Bourdieu, 1984) establish clear connections between consumption practices and class identity, there remains a critical lack of research examining how these dynamics manifest in Nepal's unique socio-cultural context. Existing studies on Nepali consumer behavior (Liechty, 2003) have primarily focused on middle-class aspirations, neglecting systematic analysis of how consumption patterns vary across the full spectrum of social classes, from elites to working-class populations. This gap is particularly significant in urban neighborhoods like Balaju, where globalization, remittance economies, and traditional caste hierarchies intersect to create complex consumption landscapes. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to how everyday consumer choices - from grocery purchases to technology adoption - either reinforce or challenge existing class boundaries in these communities. Without understanding these localized class-consumption dynamics, policymakers and businesses risk implementing interventions that may inadvertently exacerbate social inequalities. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating three key dimensions: the specific consumption patterns across social classes in Balaju, how these spending habits influence class disparities, and the ways in which consumer practices perpetuate or transform social hierarchies in urban Nepal.

Other earlier researches have indicated that consumer behaviors and class identity have a positive correlation. For instance, Veblen (1899) in his leisure class theory argues that consumption is a way of creating status differences with the higher classes consuming more as way of demonstrating their social prosperity. This theory argues that the upper class consumes in order to demarcate their class status through the ability to afford luxuries in consumption as opposed to prospects of consumption as a necessity. Consequently, Marxist and neo-Marxist views offer the best way of explaining relations between consumerism and class. Marx (1867) said that the society of the period of capitalist circulation is, by its very nature, a society of exploitative type with the bourgeoisie being in possession of capital while the proletariat are conditioned to continue as the working class. This class structure is sustained through consumerism capitalized by the social and the economic entities. The term “consumerism” was not recognized individually by Marx in his works but through his criticism of the capitalist society, it is possible to make use of a basis understanding of its behavior. In *Capital*, Marx also outlines the idea of commodity fetishism where commodities develop a social power over the society through which the labor and other relations that went into their making are hidden from the society (Marx, 1867). However, this idea play an important role in the concept of consumerism because helps to explain how the goods are attributed with significance and values that are not relied on for functional purposes but for the purpose of consuming or acquiring them in order to gain social status. Moreover, in his “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” Marx also covers on alienation pointing out that, in capitalist societies, workers become alienated from the commodities they produce, the process of production, other workers, and their inner self (Marx, 1844). This alienation is applied to consumption whereby man finds his needs of consummation through goods and services but finds that such fulfillment is empty and does not establish true connectedness with the human essence of self.

Picking the problem of alienation, Marx’s analysis of the capitalist society goes on to note that production in these societies is driven with the aim of making profits and not to meet the needs of the people, hence cultivating the culture of consumption. ‘The Grundrisse’ gives us a rough picture as to how ‘production creates consumption’, how, under the capitalist economy, new needs are produced simply to open up new markets: In a word, consumptive greed or, what is, ‘excess and superfluity’ (Marx,

1857). This leads to formation of a vicious circle whereby consumers' wants are created and controlled by market forces and hence entrenchment of capital over social existence. Thus, although Marx himself never employed the given notion, his ideas of commodity-reverence, alienation and dynamics of capitalist production and consumption offer critical insight into the nature of the very consumerism. Taking from this analysis, Neo-Marxists such as Marcuse (1964), further expound on how consumer culture comes up with false needs that work to support the capitalistic system to the disregard of the working class true economic self-interest. Thus, consumer goods are relied on as signifiers of achievements, which bring into focus the reinforcement of class differences and the concept of consumerism as a tool for maintaining social order.

By contrast, Weberian frameworks offer a different perspective on class and consumerism. Max Weber (1922) recognized the multifaceted nature of social stratification, encompassing class, status, and party. According to Weber, class is determined not only by one's economic position but also by one's status (social honor or prestige) and power (the ability to influence others). This framework suggests that consumer behavior can be influenced by a desire for social honor and prestige as much as by economic factors. It's with reference to the status groups that Weber was implying that consumption patterns are also borne out by cultural and symbolic factors, goods are not just consumed based on their utility as much as because of the prestige that comes with it. This is different from the Marxist perspective by acknowledging cultural capital and social status in relations to class besides economical.

Likewise, Bourdieu's (1984) research on *Distinction* is partially related to Weber's status groups by defining how education, tastes, and consumption patterns in the form of cultural capital directly contribute to the reproduction of those societal structures. Bourdieu explains that consumption choices are influenced by habitus (the deeply ingrained habits skills and dispositions that individuals get through life experiences) and field (the social space in which individuals navigate). Both are shaped by social class. This theory says that consumer behaviors are not merely about economic capital. They are deeply embedded in cultural and social practices. Such practices show class membership. They reproduce social inequality.

Empirical research in diverse contexts including Nepal, highlights importance of these theoretical frameworks in understanding consumerism and class. For example, Patsiaouras et al. (2016) argue that lower socioeconomic groups may adopt different consumption strategies. These strategies are often influenced by necessity rather than luxury. This distinction underscores varying motivations and constraints faced by different social classes in their consumption practices. The effects of accelerated urbanization globalization and digital changes on consumer behavior have been notable in Balaju, which is a neighborhood of Kathmandu Metropolitan. It should be noted however that not much is known about the effects that these changes have had on various social strata (Shrestha & Pandey 2021). In Nepal, there are strong influences of caste and ethnic identity determining how things are done in society. This means that they can impact relationships between people, chances to make money as well as ways of buying things and services (Parajuli 1996. Additionally cultural norms and values shape individuals' perceptions of consumption, aspirations and lifestyle choices. The study examines how these cultural values and social expectations influence consumer behaviors. It also explores how these affect class dynamics (Liechty 2017). To understand the socio-economic situation of the Kathmandu Metropolitan, it is important to study consumer behavior and its relationship with class dynamics. The mandatory reason for focusing on class in this study is to comprehend how economic status interrelates with consumer behaviors in determining social stratification and identity in Balaju, Kathmandu. Class analysis is a vital tool for understanding disparities in wealth and their effects on consumption patterns, lifestyles, and availability of resources. It is particularly relevant when one considers that Kathmandu is having rapid urbanization and globalization (Bourdieu, 1984; Liechty, 2003). Although the intersectionality of class and other social categories such as gender, ethnicity and age (Bauman 2000) result in complex consumer behaviour patterns, this study examines specifically how class is shaped by consumption patterns and behaviour. Existing literature has often overlooked the unique cultural and socio-economic transformations that have occurred in countries like Nepal, which are not Western. Thus these gaps need to be filled in order to obtain a thorough understanding of consumerism in Nepal that would be useful to both academic and non-academic domains. This research seeks to investigate how consumption practices and preferences influence as well as reflect on the class structures of Kathmandu so as to offer a more nuanced understanding of consumerism and social stratification in Balaju.

1.3 Research Questions

Comprehending how spending patterns, choices, and practices of consumers reflect socio-economic disparities, class identities, and social hierarchies is at the heart of the research questions posed. In fact, this is the main focus of this inquiry. Therefore, the objective of my research is to investigate the social and economic consequences of consumer behaviors on class structure with respect to general socio-economic conditions and classes of Kathmandu. In order to understand how consumer behavior contributes to social inequality and differences, researchers must take into account three specific questions. Investigating variations in consumer behavior among varying social classes forms the focus of the first specific question whereas the second one seeks to explore ways in which modes of spending and decision-making affect such class differences. The third question looks into how ordinary shopping practices or tastes reinforce or dispute accepted class identities as well as status levels.

Specific Research Question

- i. What are the patterns of consumer behavior across different social classes in Balaju, Kathmandu Metropolitan?
- ii. How do spending patterns and consumer choices influence class disparities?
- iii. In what ways do consumer practices and preferences influence existing class identities and social hierarchies?

Social class operates as the independent variable in this study because it is the foundational category influencing consumer decisions. According to Bourdieu (1984), class—determined by economic capital (income, wealth), cultural capital (education, tastes), and social capital (networks)—shapes individuals' habitus, or ingrained dispositions that guide their consumption choices. In the Nepali context, caste, occupation, and education further define class positioning, making it a structural force that precedes and directs consumer behavior. Consumer behavior encompassing spending patterns, brand preferences, and lifestyle consumption—is the dependent variable, as it is the outcome influenced by social class. For example, upper-class individuals may purchase luxury imports to signal status (Veblen, 1899), while lower-class groups prioritize affordability. These behaviors are not random but are systematically shaped by class-based access to resources and cultural norms. The core

hypothesis related with Bourdieu's theory: social class shapes consumer behavior, not vice versa. While consumer choices may occasionally enable class mobility (e.g., education spending), class structures predominantly determine consumption possibilities. For instance: Economic capital dictates purchasing power. Cultural capital influences tastes (e.g., organic food vs. local staples). Social capital affects access to exclusive markets or brands. In Kathmandu, this relationship is further mediated by caste hierarchies and remittance economies, which reinforce how class positions translate into distinct consumption practices.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The principal aim of this study is to understand the implications of consumerism on class dynamics and social stratification in Kathmandu Metropolitan. The key objectives of the study are as follows.

- i. To analyze consumer behavior patterns across different social classes in Kathmandu Metropolitan.
- ii. To explore the influence of consumer patterns and consumer choices on class disparities.
- iii. To describe the factors influencing consumer choices and preferences among different socioeconomic groups.

1.5 Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study addresses gaps in existing literature on consumerism and class dynamics in Nepal. While global theories of consumption and class have been extensively studied in Western contexts, their applicability to Nepal's unique socio-cultural landscape remains under-researched. Previous work on Nepali consumerism (Liechty, 2003) has predominantly focused on middle-class consumption, leaving significant gaps in understanding cross-class consumption patterns. Theoretically, it contributes to global discussions on class and consumption by testing established frameworks in Nepal's distinct context. Socially, the study illuminates how consumer practices either reinforce or challenge existing class hierarchies in urban Nepal, offering important perspectives on social mobility and inequality. Examining consumerism class-wise in Kathmandu Metropolitan needs research for some practical and theoretical reasons.

First of all, as per empirical evidence, Kathmandu is a one-of-a-kind city that has experienced rapid urbanization, globalization and socio-economic transitions that are changing consumption behavior as well as class divisions. Investigating these dynamics provides critical insights into how global consumer trends are localized in a non-Western context, offering a comparative perspective to existing literature predominantly focused on Western societies (Sherman, 2009; Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Theoretically, this study builds on and expands the frameworks of consumer culture theory and class analysis by incorporating the specific cultural, economic, and social factors of Nepal. By doing so, it addresses significant gaps in understanding the interplay between consumerism and class in emerging urban environments, contributing to broader discourses on globalization, modernization, and social stratification.

This research holds both academic and practical significance. Academically, it expands the limited scholarship on class-based consumption patterns in Nepal, contributing to broader sociological understandings of consumer culture in developing economies. Practically, the findings can inform more inclusive economic policies and business strategies that account for Nepal's class dynamics. The study also provides a foundation for future research on consumption patterns across different Nepali communities. By examining how global consumer culture interacts with local class structures, the research offers nuanced insights into contemporary urban Nepali society and its evolving relationship with consumerism.

1.6 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five different chapters. The first chapter deals about introduction that deals with the background of the study, statement of problem and research question, objectives of the study, rationale of the study and organization of the study. The second chapter covers the literature review including both conceptual and theoretical reviews along with the research gap with the theoretical and conceptual framework. This chapter incorporates conceptual and theoretical understanding of class, consumerism, and class dynamics and consumerism. It also embraces empirical literatures related with class dynamics and consumerism particularly in Nepal and beyond. The third chapter embraces the research methodology which refers to the overall research design, data collection, and

processing and data analysis procedure. The chapter four explains the new consumer behavior and spending patterns in Balaju, Kathamandu highlighting consumer goods, patterns, choices and preferences, shopping regularities, shopping platforms, shopping motivation and so on. The chapter five explains about the new class disparities and mobility incorporating economic constraints, consumption priorities, the role of education and employment, and social perception. Moreover, the chapter six explains about the new class identity and social hierarchy highlighting consumer preferences and identity, aspirational consumption versus instinctive consumption, and role of digital platform, and finally the chapter seven includes findings and conclusion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section comprises the review of various conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literatures ranging from basic concepts and theory, consumer culture to the way identity are shaped and reshaped, constructed and reconstructed, whether we call it modern or middle class identity, out of consumption of various goods and services. This paper comprises the review of conceptual and theoretical literatures that provide the larger framework of analysis based on which the whole study is undertaken. This paper moreover critically assesses the empirical literatures that impart the broader understanding of both local as well as global trajectories. The literature reviewed in this chapter basically ranges from the scrutiny of class, structures, identity construction towards the sociology of consumerism.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Conceptual review incorporates the review of literature related to concepts, meaning and definition with their defining features, and historical social context of class and consumerism.

2.1.1 Meaning and Definition of Class

Social class is a complex concept that has been studied and theorized about in depth in sociology, economics, and political science. The various forms of this distinction affect the life chances of individuals and their social identities through unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power. Marx and Weber are the two founding fathers of sociology. They had different views on social class which still influence the discussion on sociology today. In a sense the same methodology has been applied by both theorists but with different emphases on various aspects of class as they relate to social stratification; this presents a level of contrast. Based on his historical materialism principle and critique of capitalism Marx has developed an analysis on class. For him classes are primarily based on a person's relation with the means of production. There are two major classes in capitalist societies that he identifies as bourgeoisie (owners) who control means of production and proletariat wage laborers selling their labor power. According to Marx, this struggle among social classes is at the

center of history's progress made possible through exploitation of labor and profit seeking under capitalism (Marx 1867). The main reason for division into those groups lies within economic things hence why he suggested that consciousness about class identity or political battles would always be inevitable since it is influenced by things also materialistic in nature. His focus on economic determinism underscores the structural inequalities inherent in capitalist societies, where ownership of capital confers power and privilege over those who must sell their labor to survive.

Weber's examination of class is more nuanced and includes wider social variables besides economics. Market position and the distribution of goods and opportunities define class according to Weber. In contrast to Marx's stressing on production relationships, Weber sees class just as one measure of social stratification together with status (which he refers to as prestige) and party (which implies political power). For him, this means that people's life chances are affected not only by where they are economically but also how they belong socio-politically (Weber, 1922). He coins the term "life chances" to refer to the chances people get during their lifetime depending on their position in a certain class. Unlike Marx, who views it solely through an economic lens, Weber admits that other factors such as education, skills and cultural capital do contribute to social mobility and status acquisition. He also acknowledges that it is possible to keep class differences intact through culture-based or other social means, apart from economic ones.

Marx emphasizes class as primarily determined by economy relations and production means with regard to exploitation and conflict. On the other hand, Weber utilizes a wider range of stratification dimensions to elucidate class differences as well as social inequality in general, which encompasses economic factors, social elements and political considerations. Through historical and materialistic methods, Marx analyzes economic structures and historical progressions. Contrarily, Weber adopts a more interpretative stance by examining subjective meanings and societal actions that influence both social outcomes and class positions. According to Marxian view, class struggle is what drives any alteration in history or society's transformation process. Although he acknowledges the presence of conflicts, he states that status groups together with their political power are what determine how people are arranged in relation to one another socially thereby affecting their chances for survival in life

Weber's perspectives differ from those of Marx regarding the theoretical framework, methodological orientation as well as the emphasis on multidimensional factors rather than just economics in general even though they have made great contributions to our understanding of class and stratification not to mention inequality itself. These theorizing remains significant today in sociology where analysts look at different ways through which social inequality manifests itself or affects them in both positive and negative ways.

Wright expanded on Marxist theory via providing a more sophisticated interpretation of class that takes into account the intricacies of contemporary capitalist society. Wright distinguished contradictory class locations, where people may hold places in the proletariat and bourgeoisie classes at the same time because of their contributions to the production process. Supervisors and managers, for instance, may have control over employees but do not control the means of production (Wright, 1985). Wright also underlined the significance of considering class in terms of dominance, exploitation, and social reproduction. Bourdieu's class theory revolves around the notions of habitus, field, and diverse capital assets such as economic, cultural, social and symbolic. According to him, class represents more than mere monetary standing but also diversification of various kinds of capital and their use in different social areas.

Renewed Understanding of Class

Cultural capital is given prominence heavily in Bourdieu's paradigm as a factor which determines social class. This emphasis inadvertently downplays the importance of financial capital and the tangible factors that contributes social inequality. Critics contend that although cultural preferences and tastes certainly contribute to social stratification, Bourdieu's model falls short in explaining the major impact of economic inequality (Goldthorpe, 2007). The deterministic perspective of Bourdieu's theory on social reproduction has had drawn criticism. According to his definition of habitus, social trajectories are mostly set by an individual's social background and upbringing, leaving few chances for social mobility or initiative.

Some who disagree explain that this viewpoint can ignore the complexity and dynamic of both individual and group behaviors (Jenkins, 1992). Since it focuses on

how class structures are replicated rather than how they evolve over time, Bourdieu's analysis is sometimes perceived as static. This can pose a challenge to comprehending the dynamics of societal change, including those resulting from economic crises, globalization, or technological breakthroughs (Savage, 2000). Because Bourdieu's theories were originally created within the framework of French society, their applicability to other cultural and social contexts may be limited. For example, his focus on high culture could not be relevant in cultures that emphasize other kinds of cultural capital or where social stratification functions differently (Reay, 2004).

Critics have criticized Bourdieu's work for failing to sufficiently investigate how class intersect with other dimensions of inequality, such as gender, race, and ethnicity. Even though he recognizes these elements, class itself is more important to his study than these other aspects. This results in an inadequate understanding of social stratification (McCall, 1992). Some academics have drawn attention to the challenges associated with operationalizing Bourdieu's fundamental ideas such as habitus and cultural capital—in empirical study. These ideas can be difficult to quantify and use consistently in sociological investigations due to their abstract character (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

Class itself is contested and defined in relational terms. The renewed understanding of class used in this study developed and re-conceptualized with reference to Bourdieu's perspective, Bourdieu's understanding of the class concept goes beyond economy to involve other types of capital. These comprise economic capital which denotes monetary resources; social capital that entails connections and associations; as well as cultural capital that refers to learning, abilities and heritage (Bourdieu, 1986). Rooted in Bourdieu's view of class, this understanding demands an exploration of how people or communities build up these various forms of capital to attain their social status thereby perpetuating disparities.

At the heart of Bourdieu's theory lies the notion of habitus which signifies internalized propensities, convictions and actions formed by an individual's social environment and experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus affects what individuals do and what they choose as a result of their education, consumption habits as well as professional pathways. Therefore, class can be grasped not just through objective economic yardsticks but also subjective predispositions steering social behaviors thereby

maintaining class disparities. The field theory by Bourdieu examines the manner in which various social domains (fields) provide opportunities and restrictions to people or groups. Each field like education, politics or culture has its unique rules, hierarchies and modes of capital accumulation (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Analyzing class using field theory means looking at how individuals move about and position themselves within these fields thus maintaining or disputing the existing social divisions.

Bourdieu additionally elucidates the significance of symbolic force and symbolic mistreatment in sustaining social stratifications. Symbolic power is the capacity to influence perspectives, morals, and standards, mostly through cultural channels like public relations, learning institutions, and vernaculars (Bourdieu 1991). Alternatively, symbolic violence happens as a result of better-off communities imposing their ideals on the less fortunate ones thereby legitimizing their inferior position in life (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu's idea of class is dynamic and contextual, recognizing the fact that class positions can alter over time and vary across various social contexts as well as geographies. This temporal dimension and spatial dimension make a clever examination of how class overlaps with other social categories and how it is influenced by historical and geography factors (Bourdieu, 1984).

2.1.2 Consumerism: Meaning, Definitions, and Key Features

In this case there are differences in the definitions of consumerism. Consumerism can be defined as the act or process of consuming products with an aim of satisfying basic needs in higher ratios. According to the Cambridge dictionary consumerism is the stage of developed industrial society characterized by high degree of sales and purchases of goods or the situation where much value is placed on things that are bought. But what is importantly understood here is that consumerism is not solely a tag on the act of purchasing and consuming good or material things. Even though being a relatively recent 'consumerism' is a rather ambivalent term the definition of this is problematic because of the encompassing nature of the concept. Consumption is much more than the basic physiological in the sense that it does not refer to the basic need such as food or shelter for example. Consumer goods are relevant and have critical roles within an individual's physical and life domains. Jackson's theory postulates that people construct and sustain identity iconographically. Symbolic capability of artefacts enables a wide spectrum of highly emergent and profound

discursive practice about status, identity, community, and the search of self and culture (Jackson, 2008). As Stearns points out, the definition of modern consumerism can be given stressing two distinct features: The reader here gets a precise view that there is not the least serious commitment to acquisition, display, and enjoyment of goods and commercial services clearly not necessary to subsistence and participation in the process by social groups outside the upper class (Stearn, 2003).

Campbell, however, defines consumerism in a rather different fashion as a social condition when consumption forms a significant, if not the most dominant, aspect of people's lives and defining the reason for living. When this happens, we are held together in society by how we direct our wants, needs, desires, aspirations and search for the emotion we want in items of use or services (Campbell, 1995). Instead, American sociologist Robert G. Dunn defines consumerism as an idea or a concept. He argues that it is a philosophy which slickly entices people into the framework of mass production (Santos, 2012). He also further points out that with this ideology; consumption is transformed from a tool to an objective so that consuming is an individual's purpose. Similarly, in *Consuming Life*, a Polish sociologist Bauman portrays consumerism as a phenomenon; he views it as a type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent human needs, desires, and longings into the principal propelling force of society. This force not only coordinates systematic reproduction, social integration, social stratification, but also shapes the formation of human individuals as well as playing a major role in the process of individual and group self-policies (Bauman, 2007). Consumerism, according to Bauman, exists when our desire for consumer goods drives what happens in society and when they are primarily responsible for shaping the entire social system in which we exist. They channel through consumption are inspired by and reproduce the dominant world view values and culture of society. Under consumerism, our consumption habits define how we understand ourselves, how we relate with others, and ultimately, our social and economic value, as society largely defines and evaluates us by our consumer practice. Consumerism is therefore the lens through which we see and understand the world. What is possible for us is what we want. He also contends that consumerism manipulates the probabilities of individual choices and conduct. The consumption of goods and services are embedded into our everyday life and many aspects.

Consumerism is a concept where the trend of acquiring more goods and services from the available market is seen always being a constructive goal and that the quality and satisfaction of life depends heavily on possession of consumer things. Consumerism is a social condition that primarily pertains to people's life and, therefore, their existence. It is an ideology that captures people's loyalty, in a manner that is appealing to the system of mass production. Furthermore, it is also considered as social relations which are brought by human necessities, wants or passion and yearning into the motive force of the social structure that sustains systematic reproduction.

Lester presents numerous aspects that dictate consumerism and its effects on societies to distinguish its essence. Consumerism refers to the phenomenon whereby consumer goods and services are exploited in an attempt to get self fulfillment status and identity (Veblen, 1899). Moreover, consumerism involves the pursuit of the purchase of various commodities and products as a way of finding happiness (Bauman, 2007). Furthermore, Consumerism is a concept that has a strong correlation with market economy since its production and distribution implicates the consumers' want and needs (Baudrillard, 1970). Moreover, consumerism uses numerous forms of advertising and marketing to encourage consumption, produce wants and guide peoples' purchasing behavior (Schudson, 1984). Consumerism is associated with the possession of disposable income which is money available by consumers to be spent in acquiring products apart from the bare necessities (Hochschild, 1997). On the other hand, the patterns of consumption in consumerism are cultural and luxury because people utilize consumption to portray their status by purchasing certain products and brands to show their worth and association with certain classes (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). Consequently, consumerism has gone global with world consumers being introduced to similar desires and ways of consumption by MNCs (Ritzer, 2000). More importantly, consumption is environmentally laden through extraction of resources, production, and discarding of wastes, new production facilities, and pollution that goes hand with consumerism (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 1999). All those features taken together provide the understanding of consumerism as a socio-economic process that affects personality and behavior, values, and structures of the society.

2.1.3 Historical and Social Context of Rise of Consumerism

Consumerism as the phenomenon of individuals consuming more than their necessities and possibly even more every year, is not new and examples of consumer societies date back to the first civilizations. It is therefore valid to state that while consumerism is affiliated with western societies, it is evidently global. Exceeding their basic needs by consuming goods and materials is as old as history, the antique Roman civilization, Egyptian civilization, Babylonia and so on. The trends observable in the accumulating of material goods and lavish spending for show were manifested most evidently among the aristocracy and the newly rich. Trophies, exotic products or luxurious products, and showing off wealth were considered as power and authority. Thus, society valued wealth and the acquisition of many possessions, including luxurious items, as a virtue and a necessity.

The great turn in consumerism started at in Europe and North America during the middle of the eighteenth century because of The Industrial Revolution. The industrial revolution altered peoples' homes, recreations, and, most remarkably, their concepts of political matters. They argued it was the most monumental advancement in the annals of mankind in the last 300 years and is to this day shaping the contemporary world. Modernization introduced new formations and ways of developing products (Sparks, 2019). It synthesized for the first time in history products that were relatively cheap and easily accessible by virtually everybody as they were produced in mass quantities. The Industrial Revolution not only affected economies but societies too and helped in moving from production for the masses, to consumption for the masses. By applying mechanized production, production of goods reached the level that previously was impossible. This led to the concept of mass production in the manufacturing of goods as the first few goods could be produced at an extremely rapid rate and the cost of each good was significantly reduced. Therefore, prices fell, making products within the reach of the public, hence, leading to mass consumption.

The post-war period experienced a change in attitudes to consumption mainly because of the scarcity of resources, following the war. This was because of the war puts pressure on the resources as all nation's economies gone into mobilization of the war. Thus, countries had to deal with the post-war realities and restore their economy and

infrastructures destroyed during the war. During crisis-ridden periods, it was necessary for industries to find new sources of demand in order to maintain production, hence the move towards consumerist economies, seen as ways of revitalizing economies. In order to maintain production rates and avoid periods of decline, governments and business individuals had to find other uses for those goods and services that were designed for war. To maintain their production levels and avoid a decline in the economy, governments and industries proceeded with consumer-oriented policies that instead of focusing on the creation of military products for wars' needs, they focused on civilians needs (Wasserstein, 2008).

America came out of Second World War as an economic super power of the world minimalizing the effects of war on its industry. Compared to almost all European countries and Japan that were razed to the ground and which required major rebuilding now that the war was over, the U. S. economy had no problem in shifting from war to peace-time production, at least until the mid-1950's. During the war, industrial output was increased by 96%, corporation net profits after taxes were tripled and 17 million of civil employment (Goodwin, 2023). This was a great benefit for the U.S as it stabilized their economy and increase in productivity. This placed the U. S. at the center of negotiating the post-war economic rehabilitation as well as pitched for consumerism as a key means towards the expansion of the economy. Among allied instances, the retail analyst Victor Lebow noted in 1955 that "Our incredibly productive economy requires that we make consumption the very pattern of our lives, that we convert the purchase of goods into ceremonies, that we elevated the joy of buying to techniques of art, that we transformed 'the mere necessity' of having into a 'desirable consummation, 'for the sake of mankind and for the landlords of the future consumer society, Income consumption pattern is now a benchmark of success and a sign of superiority. For the same individuals and societies make their assessments of pros prosperity and overall status by their ability to consume goods and services in quantity, variety, and frequency, always more so repeatedly over time, and more especially lavishly or wastefully.

Consumerism was not limited to America only, this could be attributed to the fact that similar trends were witnessed globally; facilitated by such aspects as industrialization, war consequences of post World War and neo-liberalism in the early Nineties. The

term neo-liberalism emerged in the United States in the eighties and nineties' and generally refers to the increasing assertiveness of market-oriented strategies in economic and political contexts. Neo-liberalism that was the policy of deregulation and privatization extended the consumerism by endorsing the free-market policies and providing spin for the movement of capital, goods, services, information, and people at global level. The New Neo-liberalism is related to the consumerism emerged in Nepal. In general, the neoliberal measures are such strategies as opening the national market for imports and investments from overseas. This is because the competitiveness created by the foreign businesses and products may result to increased availability of goods and services that consumers in Nepal can access. This has enhanced consumer options and differentiation and also fulfilled many products that were out of reach or very scarce for the Nepali consumers. Laxity in the financial sector has availed credit and consumer loans and there has been an increase in the level of consumption and credit amongst the Nepali consumers. People have been able to buy things that they would not be able to afford under normal circumstances, due to such things as credit cards, installment facilities and consumer credit. What liberalization has produced has mainly enriched the upper class of the urban population and further deepened the depravity of the society's wealth divide. This has culminated into sorted consumption whereby the affluent end up with increased capacity to purchase more and get hold of some of the exotic consumption assets, whereas many others struggle hard to even afford the basic needs. In summary, globalization based on neoliberal economic strategies over the last two decades has liberalized the procurement of consumer products, promoted consumerism, altered the consumer behavior patterns, fast-paced the process of urbanization, and widened the income disparity which has remodeled the Nepali society and economy as well as consumer lives of its citizens.

2.1.4 Historical Specificity of Class and Consumerism as Inherent Characteristics of Capitalism

Class and consumerism are integral to the development and functioning of capitalism. Their evolution within capitalist societies highlights how economic systems shape social structures and cultural practices. Understanding their historical specificity provides insight into how these concepts manifest uniquely in different contexts.

Although there are many social theories used to discuss modern society, the institution of class defined by Marx as the ruling and working is central to the study of capitalism. According to Marxist theory, antagonistic social classes can be distinguished based on people's relation to the means of production. Capitalism, characterized by private ownership of production means and wage labor, inherently produces distinct social classes: the bourgeoisie that owns the means of production and the proletariat, who sells his labor power (Marx & Engels, 1848).

Marxists point out that traditionally these forms of specializations began with the development of capitalist economy in 18th and 19th centuries when these class divisions became firmly set. Growth of industries enhanced class division since the accumulation of wealth for the bourgeoisie was impressive when compared to the degradation living conditions for the proletariat. The Industrial Revolution was a representative example of this process because while the manufacturers became rich, on the other hand, the workers had to deal with unfavorable working conditions and relatively low pay (Thompson, 1963). It must be mentioned that the dynamics of a class are not fixed; they grow in tandem with states of capitalism. For example, in today's neoliberal capitalist global society, we have observed the emergence of non-traditional workforce involving unsteady paid employment and growing income disparity which are indicative of shifts in processes of production and employment relations (Standing, 2011). As these shifts happened, class continues to be the focal point for explaining the continuity of such social categorization based on economic relations.

Consumerism, the cultural phenomenon where personal worth and identity are tied to consumption, is another hallmark of capitalism. It gained prominence in the 20th century, particularly post-World War II, as economies shifted towards mass production and consumer goods became central to economic growth (Cohen, 2003). The advent of advertising and mass media played significant roles in fostering consumer culture, promoting the idea that happiness and success are achievable through the acquisition of goods (Ewen, 1976). In the past, consumerism has dynamically evolved alongside production and marketing. To illustrate, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the rise of department stores brought forth an array of goods for use by everyone thus making shopping a social activity and a status

symbol (Crossick & Jaumain, 1999). Subsequently, post war suburbanization in America combined with the availability of consumer credit locked fenced consumerism to some extent where middle class homes were characterized by ownership of a house, a car and household appliances (Jackson, 1985). Today's capitalism has also transformed consumption through digital technology and globalization at large scale. Digital market spaces: influencers on social media and global supply chains establish new patterns of consumption reflecting how adaptable capitalism is in terms of producing what people want to buy (Ritzer & Dean, 2015).

2.2 Theoretical Review

Various aspects of class are expressed by the ideas of class from diverse perspectives such as Marxist, Neo-Marxist, Neo-Weberian, Structural, and Post-Structural orientations. All these ideas reflect the complexity and diversity of sociological thought on the subject.

2.2.1 Synthesis of Class Debate

Marxists characterize class based on production methods and economic connections. In his opinion, Marx (1867) states that a person's class is defined by their position towards means of production. In capitalist nations he drew a distinction between bourgeoisie (owners of productions means) and proletariat (those whose labor sells). Owing to these irreconcilable differences between interests of bourgeoisie and proletariat this economic relationship lays a ground for class struggle. The exploitation of proletariat's labor through extraction of surplus value is one among numerous ways bourgeoisie worsens class struggle as well as economic inequality.

Neo-Marxists like Erik Olin Wright add on to traditional Marxist theory by elaborating the role of contradiction in class positions and exploitation and incorporating more complex class divisions. With Wright's (1985) identification of various modes of exploitation and degrees of control over economic resources, class positions within modern capitalism can be examined in greater detail. While recognizing the classic Marxist duality, Wright (1997) also names intermediate group that have considerable influence over the labor process but do not own the means of production, such as managers, supervisors, and small employers.

A concentration on the "contradictory class locations" caused by complexity-ridden overlapping class structures that more accurately mirror the current economic scenery and the dynamics of labor market is what Wright emphasizes in his approach, which also helps bridge the gap between Marxian and various antitheses. His thought-provoking work examines class, its importance and, as well as its strife in this post-modern age or period. He furthermore examines the effect of social mobility and change on class relations.

Wright draws Marxian class analysis apart from other approaches by underlining the importance of location within productive relations and resulting exploitation. This focus on exploitation within productive relations, in Wright's views, is an essential characteristic of Marxist thought. Wright does, however, include Weberian ideas, especially the emphasis on exchange relations and market capacity (Wright, 1997). Wright contends that Marxist analysis includes disputes over both distribution and, more importantly, the productive process itself, whereas non-Marxist class analysis usually concentrates on conflicts over distribution. A more thorough understanding of class dynamics and tensions is made possible by this dual focus on production and distribution (Wright, 1997). By offering a more complex understanding of class that takes into account its political, social, and economic aspects, Max Weber built upon Marx's theory. According to Weber (1946), a person's class is also influenced by their market position, which takes into account things like opportunities for income, talents, and credentials, in addition to their ownership of the means of production. A class, as described by Weber (1922), is a collection of people who have a similar economic circumstance, or "class situation."

Nevertheless, Weber further developed the ideas of party and status, realizing that these two concepts—political power and social honor, respectively—are equally necessary components of social stratification. According to Weber's notion, a person's social position is determined by a number of elements, including status groups and dynamics of power. Class is merely one of many aspects. Weber's definition of class is different from Marx's in that it emphasizes a person's place in the market and opportunities in life. According to Weber (1946), a person's class is defined by the financial resources they bring to the market, which affects their chances in life. Neo-Weberian theorists such as John Goldthorpe add on this by adding the notions of party and status, as well as by creating intricate occupational class schemas that distinguish

between positions according to market conditions and employment relations (Goldthorpe, 1987). Class analysis is included into Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, which shows the duality of structure—the ways in which social systems are both shaped by human agency. Giddens says that interactions between people create and sustain organized social relations. They are the basis for understanding class. He explains the part that power and agency play in the sustaining and modifying of class systems. He argues that people are active participants in making their social surroundings rather than just passive objects of class interactions.

The objective of structural approaches to class is to emphasize specific functions that people play in the economy. Roles in the division of labor and relationships to the means of production define these occupations. According to Althusser (1971), structural definitions show the persistent character of class structures and their effects on social mobility and inequality. Viewing class as a more flexible and shifting construct created by cultural and symbolic power as well as economic elements, post-structuralist views are influenced by the works of authors such as Foucault and Bourdieu. The fundamental mechanisms that mold social relationships and class positions are the main emphasis of structuralist approaches to class. Theorists like Strauss (1963), influenced by structuralism, see class as an aspect of society's larger structure. People are arranged in a web of connections. According to this point of view, class is deeply rooted in the social and economic systems. And that controls society and has more to do with it than just one's economic status or personal characteristics. Structuralists explain how these structures shape social relationships. Class positions across time since they are comparatively stable and persistent. By explaining the flexible and situational character of social identities and relationships, post-structuralist viewpoints contest the fixed and essentialist notions of class. In this tradition, Foucault (1980) is often regarded as a leading figure who contends that power and knowledge are interfused resulting thus in the construction of social hierarchies and distinctions between classes. Post-structuralists reject the notion of a singular determining structure governing class relations. They instead emphasize discursive and cultural practices which produce and disassemble class identities. In this view to see how language, symbols, and cultural narratives contribute to the making of class; the argument being that class is always up for negotiation anew through its realization in society.

The theory originating from Bourdieu's sociological research includes cultural capital and the analysis of social fields in studying the way in which class is incessantly reproduced with the help of cultural practices and social distinctions. This perspective undermines clear definitions of class and focuses on the relations, discussions and practices in the context of class. In general parlance, class defines the social and operational strata that are found in a society where people are stratified due to their economic, social and cultural value (Bourdieu, 1984). However, his perception of class enriches the previous idea by using the concept of cultural capital as well. He further advanced that, class is more than just economics, but also about social and cultural class. In the case of social capital, this would be based on the networks of relations that can offer an individual a ticket to a definite social sphere in which he or she is ready both to act and to be acted upon. In the case of cultural capital, this would therefore be knowledge, skills, education and culture which provides the individual with a social status. According to Bourdieu's theory, these forms of capital are linked, and the use of all of them helps in the continuation of social structures. In the case of class speculation, Bourdieu claimed this is not a mere reflection of economic capital, but social and cultural capital as well. Cultural capital contains educational, aesthetic and consuming logos that gain legitimacy for certain classes and help in sustaining social relations. His idea of 'habitus' refers to the accumulated tendencies, know-how, and orientations the people develop throughout the course of their lives; this occurs in light of their class. Cultural and symbolic aspects play the paramount role in class differentiation and reproduction in this framework.

2.2.2 Consumerism and Class Intersection

The intersection of class and consumerism illustrates how economic structures shape cultural practices and social identities. Consumer goods often serve as markers of class status, with access to certain products or lifestyles signaling one's position within the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984). This dynamic can perpetuate class distinctions, as those with greater economic means can acquire goods that symbolize social prestige. Moreover, consumerism can also be a site of class struggle and resistance. For example, working-class movements have historically challenged the inequalities inherent in capitalist consumer culture, advocating for fair wages and improved living standards that enable broader access to consumer goods (Ewen, 1976).

When it comes to class and consumerism in Kathmandu it becomes important to understand how these global capitalist tendencies have entered and interact within local culture, economy and social structures. Thus, socio-cultural change over the course of time, due to its post modernization export outlet and recent urbanization would discuss and discuss entering class and consumption practice of Kathmandu accordingly.

The topic of consumerism and class is undoubtedly one of the timeliest subjects revealing the interconnection of consumption and a class system. Trends in consumer behavior are meant for class, field or indicators of social and economic status, that is why consumer behavior has been established to have a strategic place in class analysis. We therefore look at Wright (1997) who provides a more concise historical materialistic conceptualization of class that goes beyond merely the class people belong to, and acknowledges persons may have what is referred to as a contradictory class location, meaning that persons hold a position that contain elements of more than one class. For the analysis of today's consumerism this perspective is especially valuable because, although it considers classes that shape consumption, it does not trace a rigid picture of modern societies. The essence of the enquiry of the efficiencies between consumerism and status therefore lies in Veblen's (1899) theory of the leisure class. The conspicuous consumption theory that was given by Veblen also raised the realization of the fact that people do spending on production consumption because the goods are not useful in their use, but they have the ability to indicate wealth. To Veblen, people in the leisure class consume to create an appearance that is intended to function as an assertion about conduct and status of consumption when compared to other classes. George Ritzer (2019) – the author of *McDonaldization* thesis, identifies class in reference to the precise modern processes oriented on efficiency, quantity, foreseeability, and supervision. So, they contribute towards McDonaldization globalization that occurs in all the classes though they influence them in various ways, as identified by Ritzer. For instance, whereas the middle and upper classes engage in, or merely at the forefront of the conditions portrayed in consumer culture, the lower classes bear the brunt of it; they embrace the American dream with heightened insecurity in employment and servitude work in a service economy. Equally applicable in studying consumers is Veblen's theory of the leisure class which can be considered as the most significant. Veblen initiated conspicuous

consumption where persons buy and display the same with an aim of gunning for class and rank. As defined by Veblen (1899), the aim of the leisure class is to achieve conspicuous consumption in order to demonstrate one's status and deny access to similar privileges to others.

Postmodern thinkers emphasize the fluid and fragmented nature of social identities, challenging conventional ideas of class. As per the words of Baudrillard (1981) and others, traditional class structures are less important in defining social identities in modern society than purchasing and choice of lifestyle. Postmodern viewpoints explain that as people create their identities through cultural connections. Purchasing habits rather than just through economic interactions, class lines have become less and less obvious. Bourdieu (1984) added on the relationship between class and consumption with his idea of cultural capital. As stated by Bourdieu, a person's social and cultural capital, that is made up their knowledge, abilities, and preferences, builds their consuming habits. Higher social classes utilize their cultural capital to reproduce and preserve their social standing, so these preferences are impacted by social class as much as personal preference. Tastes and consumption patterns are influenced by class, as explained by Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the deeply ingrained behaviors, abilities, and dispositions that people develop through their life experiences.

These theoretical frameworks offer a thorough comprehension of class as a dynamic and intricate social construct. These aspects of class are clear in Kathmandu Metropolitan's varied patterns of consumption and resource accessibility among various socioeconomic classes. Because they frequently possess more economic, social, and cultural capital, higher-income groups are able to indulge in ostentatious consumerism and have access to upscale products and services. On the other hand, those with lesser incomes could have fewer options when it comes to purchasing, giving priority to necessities above purchases motivated by prestige (Patsiaouras et al, 2016).

2.2.3 Class-Based Consumption Patterns and Social Inequalities

Consumption patterns that are based on class are major components in maintaining social stratification as well as inequality. These tendencies actively support the continuation of social hierarchies and unequal access to opportunities, resources, and opportunities in life. These patterns are not only reflections of economic disparities.

A fundamental framework for comprehending how consumption patterns denote and perpetuate class distinctions is provided by Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Consumption preferences and tastes are influenced by social status, according to Bourdieu (1984), and these choices help to create and preserve social class divisions. One's social position can be shown by one's capacity to consume particular items, partake in particular pastimes, or demonstrate familiarity with particular cultural forms. Because members of higher social classes can afford to acquire and exhibit more prestigious cultural capital, symbolic consumption both establishes and maintains social hierarchies.

Consumption habits influenced by class both mirror and prolong economic disparities. Families and people with higher incomes can purchase a greater variety of products and services, including upscale furniture, superior healthcare, housing, and education (Bauman, 2007). Lower-income groups, on the other hand, have less access to these resources, which causes differences in opportunities and quality of life. The disparity in income is reflected in other areas of consumption, including buying organic food, funding extracurricular activities for kids, or having access to state-of-the-art technology, all of which improve living quality.

Consumption patterns can also influence social mobility. For example, access to higher education and professional networks often depends on the ability to pay for private school, extracurricular activities, and prestigious university fees. As such, consumption in the realm of education and professional training becomes a major mechanism through which social classes maintain their status and privileges across generations (Reay et al., 2005). This reinforces social stratification, as those who can afford these investments continue to grab better opportunities for themselves and their descendants.

The development of consumer credit and debt is yet another way in which class-based consumption habits contribute to disparities in society. While credit helps lower income people get goods and services beyond their immediate capacity, it leads to long term financial difficulties and financial traps (Manning, 2000). Middle- and upper-class individuals are better positioned to manage and take advantage credit to their advantage. This further increases the gap between socioeconomic classes.

Cultural consumption, including participation with art, music, literature, and other forms of cultural capital, also plays a major part in keeping social inequality. Those with stronger cultural capital can traverse and influence cultural institutions. This boosts their social position and maintaining class divisions (Bennett et al., 2009). This cultural domination not only perpetuates class inequalities but also marginalizes individuals who lack access to or awareness of elite cultural activities.

2.2.4 Consumerism in Age of Capitalism and Globalization

Capitalism and globalization are major aspects which motivate consumption. They sustain and reinforce the culture of ongoing consuming. These processes have a strong connection to the principles of market expansion, commodification, and the establishment of global consumer markets. Capitalism is primarily focused on the growth of markets and the maximizing of profit. This needs continuous consumption. The capitalist economy survives on the production and sale of goods and services encouraging corporations to invent and sell items ceaselessly to increase customer demand. This loop encourages a culture of consumerism where individuals are constantly urged to purchase new items, driven by the demand for novelty, status, and identity (Harvey, 2005). The capitalist model promotes the commodification of everyday life, where nearly every aspect of human experience is transformed into a marketable commodity. This commodification extends to basic needs, luxury items, and even social relationships, all of which are presented to consumers as essential for a fulfilling life (Baudrillard, 1998).

By connecting global markets and permitting the free flow of capital, products, and services across national boundaries, globalization amplifies consumerism. Through this connectivity, a worldwide marketplace is made. This gives customers access to a various range of goods from all over the world. Through their global expansion and global product marketing, multinational firms contribute significantly to this process. Consequently, worldwide advertising and cross-cultural interactions tend to standardize consumer preferences and behaviors (Ritzer, 2007). Globalization promotes the spread of consumer culture through global media and communication networks. The growth of global media platforms, such as television, the internet, and social media, spread consumerist values and lifestyles. This shapes consumption patterns all over the world. This cultural diffusion encourages individuals to adopt consumer habits that match with global trends, reinforcing the cycle of consumerism

(Tomlinson, 1999). Various strategies reinforce the relationship between capitalism, globalization, and consumerism. First, both capitalism and globalization depend on sophisticated advertising and marketing to sustain consumer demand. These ways often attract emotions, aspirations, and social status, encouraging ongoing consumption (Galbraith, 1958). Secondly, the availability of credit and financing options enables consumers to buy goods and services beyond their immediate financial resources.

Within a capitalist system, this credit availability fuels consumer expenditure and debt accumulation, promoting economic expansion (Barba & Pivetti, 2009). Thirdly, to encourage recurring purchases, capitalist economies use planned obsolescence, which involves making products with short lifespans. Globalization makes this strategy possible since it allows businesses to take use of international supply chains for the effective production and distribution of new goods (Bulow, 1986). In conclusion, cultural capital plays a more significant role as a result of globalization, with consumption serving as a social status and identity marker. Consumers further ingrain materialism into daily life by using their purchases not only for utilitarian purposes but also as a means of expressing their social status and cultural allegiance (Bourdieu, 1984). Historically, capitalism and globalization have functioned mutually to maintain and enhance consumerism. Such factors as advertising, the availability of credit, planned obsolescence as well as the spread of global consumer culture act together to form a background where constant consumption is promoted and made ordinary. This understanding is fundamental in examining the larger social and economic challenges posed by consumerism within today's context.

2.2.5 Consumerism and Class in Modern Contexts

According to definition consumerism, the idea that one should buy and consume more is a phenomenon whose roots can be traced back in the way we relate to each other as members of different social classes. In addition to that, the modern-day experience of consumerism is more complicated than it could have been in any other way due to various changes in our societies, economies, and cultures. This is an ideology, consumerism, that is both reflected by and perpetuated through existing class divisions but also affects individual identity and aspirations. It is therefore important to consider how this interrelation can help us understand existing social dynamics or even improve certain inequities.

Thus, the class remains a powerful determinant of the consumption of goods and services. It has been found that various consumers from different group classes acting in different manners based on their economic capitals, cultural capitals and the dominating modes of consumer culture (Bourdieu, 1984). For instance, people from the upper class may find relevance in spending on quality personal possessions which are perceived in society as a status symbol, while the working class reflect on the importance of purchasing necessary items which are perceived to have little to no social value (Veblen, 1899). Thus, these consumption patterns perform not only a mirror function, albeit a distorting one, to the existing CLASS divisions but also actively support the process of their reproduction. Consumerism, consumerism and marketing, branding and commercialization of products both express and strengthen social segregation. It made commercials appeal for various aspects that were related to income and education and by doing so; it perpetuated the social class division (Williams, 1975). Furthermore, such consumer culture leads to the culture of possessing commodities as an identity where people's worth and status depend on the ability to consume and show of a particular brand (Featherstone, 1991). It also extends the role of commodification in playing out and strengthening class differences as well as increasing inequality. Consumerism can also bear influence on elements of class mobility and opportunities in society. Thus, quality education, health care, and housing, are conditioned by an individual's social class, which in turns maintains social inequities (Mills, 1959). Additionally, consumers are pressured into pursuing what could be referred to as status of consumerism that might compel them to spend money on instant gratification rather than saving or investing in education and ultimately mobility out of the lower classes (Baumam, 2007). The piece of information in consumer culture that Ritzer analyzed is McDonaldization that is an idea that applies principles of fast-food restaurants such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. This phenomenon is applicable to all the classes of the society but in different dimensions.

While the middle and upper classes may embrace and drive consumer trends, lower classes often experience negative consequences, such as job insecurity and exploitation in service-oriented economies. Giddens (1984) situates class analysis into his framework of structure, which acknowledges structure as being both enabling and constraining of actor's practices while being produced by these practices. Thus,

according to Giddens' theory of structuration, consumption is concerned with active creation of consumers as agents and structures that simultaneously shape consumption. Such a perspective becomes especially important when talking about consumerism, as it highlights how structural factors and conscious volition of individuals combine to affect agents' consumption practices.

2.2.6 Theoretical Debates on Class and Consumerism

Various theoretical discussions study the complex relationship between social stratification and consumption habits in class analysis of consumerism. The importance of agency vs structure in consumer behavior, the classic versus postmodern viewpoints on class and consumption, and the economic versus cultural determinants of consumption are three of the field's major debates. These discussions provide a thorough grasp of how consumer behavior is influenced by class and how consumption both reflects and maintains social stratification.

Economic Versus Cultural Determinants of Consumption

A main debate in the class analysis of consumerism concerns whether economic or cultural factors are more influential in shaping consumption patterns. This debate puts the economic determinism of classical Marxism against the cultural analysis of theorists like Bourdieu.

In essence, consumer culture refers to that shift in which all social practices become dominated by mass consumption of goods. Within this context, the normal lives of people among these classes became related to purchase and ownership. Also, individuals from working classes would be seen as customers that offer credits at convenience shops while customers from upper middle classes would be label competitors. Michael Sullivan asserts that such actions arise logically out of capitalism because it is not only goods sold for money but also their sale as an economic activity involving chain linking processes. Analysis of capitalism done by Marx serves as a background to comprehend the correlation between commodity production and consumption-based culture. Capitalism involves the production of goods for exchange within the market, where things take on their exchange value and become objects of consumption (Marx, 1867). In context, a consumer culture is

formed, which is the production method of capitalism, in which profits are sought through the continuous growth of the production and consumption of goods and return to the market.

Marx (1848) explained that class is primarily determined by an individual's link to the means of production. This economic basis of class positions consumption as a reflection of material conditions and economic power. For example, in Kathmandu Metropolitan, higher income groups can afford luxury goods and services that reflect their economic status. While lower-income groups are confined to more basic and affordable necessities. Opposite to that, Bourdieu (1984) introduced the concept of cultural capital to show the role of cultural factors in class distinction. Cultural views widen the understanding of class to include symbolic and cultural factors beyond economic factors. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital shows this perspective. It emphasizes how individuals' tastes, preferences, and consumption patterns are shaped by their cultural background and socialization (Bourdieu, 1984). It also extends the role of commodification in playing out and strengthening class differences as well as increasing inequality. Consumerism can also bear influence on elements of class mobility and opportunities in society. Thus, quality education, health care, and housing, are conditioned by an individual's social class, which in turns maintains social inequities (Mills, 1959). Additionally, consumers are pressured into pursuing what could be referred to as status of consumerism that might compel them to spend money on instant gratification rather than saving or investing in education and ultimately mobility out of the lower classes (Baumam, 2007). The piece of information in consumer culture that Ritzer analyzed is McDonalidization that is an idea that applies principles of fast-food restaurants such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. This phenomenon is applicable to all the classes of society but in different dimensions. For example, in Kathmandu some people from the higher social status may dress in branded clothing and have a fine dining experience, not necessarily because they can but it is a sign they can afford to do so. Taste, in sociology, refers to the aspects of individual and cultural, or aesthetic, judgment regarding choice. Taste and consumption are interrelated to the extent that taste as defined as a preference of certain forms of commodities asserts a direct impact on the buying behavior in the market. Bourdieu challenges the conventional view held by many other theorists of the postwar period, regarding what he classified simply as

'tastes' – that is consumer preferences – as essentially rational processes of individualists' reason. He further points out that this "Kantian aesthetic" does not grasp that tastes are formed socially and that consumption objects are signs of a symbolic order which the dominant in society coordinate and sustain in order to perpetuate their distance or difference from the other classes.

Thus, for Bourdieu, taste becomes a "social weapon" that defines and marks off the high from the low, the sacred from the profane, and the "legitimate" from the "illegitimate" in matters ranging from food and drink, cosmetics, and newspapers; on the one hand, to art, music, and literature on the other. Through the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of taste, one can understand the subtleties of consumption habits within context of Kathmandu's changing consumer culture. According to Bourdieu, taste is greatly influenced by social background, level of education, and cultural capital rather than being only a question of personal preference (Bourdieu, 1984). Changes in consumer habits and tastes have resulted from the rise of a new middle class in Kathmandu. People look to express their social and cultural uniqueness. For example, the urban elites embracing luxury brands, cosmopolitan lifestyles, and consumer goods in the Western style shows an update of taste preferences towards symbols of globalization and modernity. On the other hand, some may continue to hold to traditional forms of taste that are rooted in Nepalese cultural heritage, which reflects larger socio-cultural dynamic in Kathmandu. Understanding the complexity of identity creation, social stratification, and cultural change in Kathmandu needs an understanding of the taste within the city's consumer culture. We can learn more about how people negotiate the symbolic landscape of consumer culture and make their social position and cultural identity known by studying how taste is created, negotiated, and accepted through consumption activities. Wealthier people in Kathmandu are more likely to support international brands and malls, which may be interpreted as a reflection of their financial resources and cultural capital that places greater value on global brands. On the other hand, lower-class support of neighborhood markets and traditional restaurants may reflect both a cultural and economic preference for regional customs.

Agency versus Structure in Consumer Behavior

Another key debate revolves around the extent to which consumer behavior is shaped by individual agency versus structural constraints. This debate contrasts the perspectives of theorists like Giddens and structuralists like Althusser.

Giddens (1984) posits that while social structures shape individuals' actions, individuals also have the agency to enact and transform these structures. Giddens' theory of structure emphasizes the duality of structure, where individuals actively participate in the creation and modification of social norms through their consumption choices. For example, in Kathmandu, individuals may choose to shop online during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby contributing to the growth of e-commerce infrastructure in the city. On the other hand, Structuralists like Althusser argue that individuals' actions are largely determined by overarching social structures, such as class relations and capitalist ideologies, which limit individual agency. This perspective suggests that consumption patterns are predominantly shaped by structural forces such as economic inequality and market dynamics. In Kathmandu, structural barriers like income disparity and limited access to digital technology might dictate consumer behavior more than individual preferences. An analysis in Kathmandu could reveal that while some residents leverage digital platforms for convenience and safety during the pandemic, structural issues like digital literacy and internet access still limit the majority from participating fully in the digital economy.

Linking the structure versus agency debates with class dynamics of consumerism involves exploring how individuals' actions (agency) and the societal structures within which they operate (structure) interact to shape consumer behaviors and class distinctions. In the context of consumerism, individuals exercise agency when making consumption choices, influenced by their preferences, aspirations, and social identities. These choices are not made in isolation but within a framework of societal structures that include economic systems, cultural norms, and power relations.

Structural perspective is concerned with how the capitalist economies and the structure of the global market influence choice and opportunities available for consumers and continue to reflect and reinforce social power relations. For example, the possibility to afford luxuries or visiting specific consumption locations is a sign of

belonging to the upper class, and demonstrates general economic differentiation (Bauman, 2007). This structural view lays focus on the manner in which consumerism recreates and maintains class inequalities, as it provides different returns and probabilities to consumers based on income. On the other hand, the agency's perspective focuses on the capability of consumers to make choices that either transform or reinforce class differences by way of consuming. Bourdieu's concept of habitus applies in this context because it shows how people's dispositions, shaped by their class and social status, affect their tastes and patterns of consumption (Bourdieu, 1984). People can exercise agency by choosing to support or oppose consumption habits that are consistent with their class identity. This can reinforce or disturb established social structures. The complexity of class dynamics is shown by the interaction between structure and agency in setting of consumerism. While structural factors show the boundaries that people must work inside when making decisions, agency permits flexibility and even opposition within these limitations.

Traditional Versus Postmodern Perspectives on Class and Consumption

In the third debate, postmodern, flexibility ideas of social stratification and consumption are contrasted with typical, inflexible ideas of class. Traditional theorists like Weber and postmodernists like Baudrillard are involved in this debate. Marx's economic focus became broader by Weber (1946), who added social position and political power as essential components of class. According to Weber's multifaceted theory, consuming serves as a means of indicating and validating one's class status. Luxury car ownership and private schooling, for instance, may be definite markers of superior social standing in Kathmandu. Further understanding of the connection between capitalism, consumerism, and social transformation can be gained from Max Weber's perspectives on consumer culture. Although one may associate Weber mainly with the analysis of the relation between Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, his general sociological approach offers important viewpoints on the temporality of consumer culture. According to Weber (1905), rationalization and bureaucratization are prominent in capitalist societies hence giving birth to what he called a rationalized consumer culture. Thus, according to Weber, the central capitalist values are the calculation of rational economic self-interest and the drive towards efficiency which are applied to not only the sphere of production but also to consumption as well.

People in postindustrial economies, especially in the western world are synonymous with instrumental reason, utilitarian calculation, strategy and value maximization in consumption. In addition, as for Weber, the culture of consumption becomes a part of an 'iron cage' of rationalization which becomes second nature under capitalism symbols become mechanical absorption.

Consumer culture gets homogenized as a result of market mechanisms, bureaucratic regulations, and rational calculations dictating consumer behavior in the name of efficiency and predictability. In addition, Weber's examination of status groups and social stratification sheds light on the part that consumption plays in the establishment of social hierarchy and prestige. According to Weber (1922), there are several social statuses that are determined by economic, social, and cultural aspects that interact with consumption patterns to influence people's places in society.

In this structure, consuming becomes a way to express to others one's social standing, way of life, and cultural capital. thereby maintaining patterns of social inequality and difference. The importance of consumption today in capitalist countries is further revealed. Weber's focus on the influence of cultural and symbolic elements on economic behavior. Weber (1905) claims that cultural norms, values, and beliefs shape people's attitudes toward labor, consumption, and material success. And this in turn shapes their goals and economic action. In this way, cultural values and meanings that change between societies and historical settings also influence consumer culture, making it more than just a product of economic pressures. Traditional versus cultural views on class influence the dynamics of consumerism by shaping how individuals perceive and engage with consumption practices based on their cultural and societal norms. Traditional views often emphasize class as primarily economic or material in nature, focusing on income, wealth, and occupational status as determinants of social stratification (Parkin, 1979). In this framework, consumerism is seen as a reflection of one's economic position within society, where individuals aspire to acquire goods and services that signify social status and prestige.

Also, postmodernism, which was defined by fragmentation, fluidity, and hybridity, showed itself in several factors of urban consumer culture, changing urban landscapes, consuming habits, and identities. According to Featherstone (1991), there are desires towards disorder and de-classification because of postmodern consumer

culture's challenges to modern structures and classifications. According to Jean Baudrillard (1998), the symbolic connotations of goods—rather than their practicality or financial worth—are what entices consumption in postmodern society. According to Baudrillard, the "hyperreal" is the belief that the symbolic value of consumer goods causes and maintains social divisions through consumption. Postmodern consumption in Kathmandu can be observed in the way that high-tech devices and international fashion trends are accepted as status symbols in the city. This cuts over the traditional lines. Research could look at how young professionals in Kathmandu select and present their consumption decisions on social media mixing elements of local culture with international consumer trends to create a hybrid identity. It captures the flexible nature of modern class identities as well as the symbolic importance of items in postmodern culture.

2.2.7 Re-conceptualization of Class and Consumerism Debate

This study redefines the class and consumerism issue from the viewpoints of Wright and Bourdieu. According to Wright, consumption patterns can both reveal and mask these complex class dynamics. An individual's uncertain class status may impact their decisions as a consumer by confusing traditional class boundaries with a variety of sometimes contradicting purchase behaviors. According to Bourdieu, class includes not just one's economic status. It also includes the collection and utilization of various forms of capital within social domains. Individuals' consuming behaviors and preferences are shaped by habitus, which refers to the deeply ingrained skills, traits, and habits that they acquire via their life experiences (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's approach to the analysis of consumerism is the role of consumption in the process of establishing and strengthening the primary class inequality. Education and other forms of cultural capital also remain unavoidable because people tend to use the consumption of goods to demonstrate their status to others in society. This perspective gives a broad picture of how consumerism intertwines with class-orientations other than the economic outlook.

2.3 Empirical Review on Class and Consumerism

Understanding consumerism and class dynamics in Kathmandu Metropolitan unveils a multifaceted narrative that encompasses both historical legacies and contemporary

shifts. Historically, Kathmandu's class dynamics were intricately intertwined with traditional social structures such as caste and kinship systems. This hierarchical framework dictated consumption patterns, with elites showcasing their wealth through conspicuous consumption, while the majority faced limited access to resources and consumer goods (Gellner, 1992). The transition to a modern consumer society marked by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and globalization has reshaped these dynamics.

The middle class has grown as an outcome of economic changes and increased educational opportunities, which has changed consumer habits and lifestyles (Adhikari, 2004). But inequality still exists, with disadvantaged groups still having to overcome obstacles to fully engage in consumer culture (KC & Maharjan, 2013). Class still has a big influence on Kathmandu's consumption habits. It influences people's choices and actions at all socioeconomic levels. Working-class people prioritize affordability and utility in their shopping decisions. Whereas wealthy elites frequently go towards imported luxury products and Western brands to display their social position (Sharma, 2015).

Understanding Kathmandu Metropolitan's consumerism and class relations reveals a complex story. It includes both modern changes and historical legacies. Class relations in Kathmandu have always been closely linked to established social institutions including caste and kinship. The dominant class had restricted access to resources and consumer goods, while the elites flaunted their wealth by lavish expenditure (Gellner, 1992). This hierarchical structure determined patterns of consumption. These dynamics have changed with the shift to a modern consumer society. Characterized by fast industrialization, urbanization, and globalization. Due to shifting consumption habits and lifestyles brought about by improved educational opportunities and economic shifts, the middle class has expanded (Adhikari, 2004).

"Out Here in Kathmandu" by Mark Liechty is an exceptional piece of scholarship that provides profound understanding of consumption and class issues in Kathmandu Metropolitan. Liechty provides an insight into how globalization and 'modernity' has redefined the socio-economic context of Nepalese youth culture in its capital city through his ethnography of urban youth consumption (Liechty, 2003). His analysis shows how consumer culture is involved in social stratification and status in actual

meaning among the communities living in Kathmandu and how class identities and consumers' aspirations are reflected in the context of change and modernization pressing upon the city; (Liechty, 2017). It means that through the incorporation of socio-economic perspectives along with Liechty's theoretical findings it is possible to shed light on consumerism and class within Kathmandu Metropolitan more comprehensively and advance knowledge of Globalization, urbanization and social transformation in the socio-cultural context of Nepalese society.

In Kathmandu Metropolitan, consumerism intersects with existing social class structures, creating distinct consumption patterns among different socioeconomic groups. The rapid urbanization and economic changes in Kathmandu have introduced a range of consumer goods and services, impacting the lifestyles and consumption behaviors of its residents (Shrestha & Pandey, 2018). Higher-income groups in Kathmandu often have greater economic, social, and cultural capital, enabling them to engage in conspicuous consumption and access luxury goods and services. Conversely, lower-income groups prioritize essential needs and affordability, reflecting their limited economic resources (Patsiaouras, Fitchett, & Davies, 2016).

With the introduction of additional difficulties and modifications in consumer behavior, the COVID-19 pandemic has added to these factors. Lower-income households have been affected by financial crises and job losses. It resulted in shifts in consumption patterns with a greater focus on basics and cost-saving measures (World Bank, 2021). Less impacted by fluctuations in the economy, higher income invested money in luxury goods, with a growing focus on health and safety offers (Deloitte, 2020). The outbreak amplified Kathmandu's e-commerce and digital technology. This change brought a digital divide. Individuals with more access to technology and higher incomes have profited more from online purchasing. Others with lower incomes have faced obstacles since they have lack good internet connection and digital knowledge (Shrestha & Pandey, 2021).

It is in the context of changing consumer culture of Kathmandu that few symbols are now identified with the class status, while replicating the larger structures of social differentiation and identification. These symbols can be as diverse as status symbols such as cars, clothes or houses or as subtle as choices of food, entertainment or beliefs and all of them perform the essential function of defining one's status and desires

within the structures of the new bucolic city. In the Kathmandu consumers' culture, Liechty (2003) underlines the use of owning material as a symbol of the class difference. For the middle-income class, symbolled wealth and modernity linked to the western world includes things like Smartphones, Laptops, Designers clothes among others. These objects are not just practical and necessary but are status Icons and fodder for the actor's need to be affiliated with the global consumerism narrative.

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Liechty's observations regarding the role of consumer goods in shaping modern identities are echoed by Assa Doron's research on "Consumption, Technology, and Adaptation: "Care and Repair Economies of Mobile Phones in North India" that documents consumer and economic practices, particularly in relation to informal or local repair circuits. In the present study, Doron's claims the investigation on mobile phones as social capital and communication tool in the context of new middle class in North India is insightful. Using ethnographic fieldwork, Doron highlights the

networks' social and economic consequences as well as the local channels via which mobile phone users get repair services (Doron, 2012). We can learn about the many forms of consumer culture in South Asia by contrasting Doron's study of mobile phone economies in North India with Liechty's study of middle-class culture in Kathmandu. These two studies shed light on the intricate connections between consumerism, technology, and cultural adaptability. They also offer insights into how social identity and economic activity are changing in countries that are changing quickly (Liechty, 2003).

Vedwan explores the complex relationship between consumerism, brand image, and public interest in the context of India's fast globalization in his book "Pesticides in Coca-Cola and Pepsi: Consumerism, Brand Image, and Public Interest in a Globalizing India." He does this by studying media commentary on an environmental campaign that exposes the pesticide content in these products and shows the complex responses and interpretations that result from these cultural and economic changes (Vedwan, 2007). This research shows the complex relationships between consumer activism, government, and multinational corporations. It highlights the political possibilities and constraints in these developing socio-political domains. In contrast, Vedwan's focus on global consumer brands is not explored in Amy Stambach's study, "Evangelism and Consumer Culture in Northern Tanzania," which offers an ethnographic examination of a revival camp and the emergence of the concept of "youth as consumers" amid global market expansions and government cutbacks (Stambach, 2000). Stambach sheds light on how participants' identification as consumers reflects underlying values within revivalism. Compared to the consumerism in India, this research reveals alternative conceptions of personhood and value, illuminating the complex dynamics influencing social and religious practices in Northern Tanzania. However, Manandhar's study, "Digital Consumerism among Nepalese College Students: A Study of Online Shopping Behavior," studies the online purchasing behaviors of Kathmandu residents. Manandhar studies consumer behavior on an individual basis within a particular demographic. While Vedwan and Stambach study larger societal patterns (Manandhar, 2020). These studies give valuable information into the ways that globalization and digitalization are affecting consumerism at the individual, societal, and global levels, despite their diverse areas of concentration.

2.4 Research Gap

There are still a lot of gaps in the literature on class, consumerism, and identity despite a lot of research on these topics. The little research done on how local cultural contexts and international consumer trends interact, especially in non-Western environments like Nepal, is one obvious gap. Many research works concentrate on Western civilizations, failing to take into account the ways in which distinct cultural dynamics and socioeconomic changes in nations such as Nepal influence consumption patterns and class identities (Sherman, 2009; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Liechty, 2003). It is imperative to comprehend the local context because it influences the perception and integration of global consumer goods into everyday life, reflecting particular cultural values and social hierarchies (Liechty, 2003).

Also, few longitudinal studies have looked at how class-based consumption changes over time in response to the fast urbanization and globalization that is happening. Because consumer behavior and class structures are dynamic and constantly impacted by shifting economic situations, technological improvements, and cultural transformations, longitudinal research is crucial to understanding these phenomena (Wills et al., 2006; Zukin, 1995; Bourdieu, 1984). Research of this kind provides more information on the processes behind social mobility and the long-term persistence of inequality.

Likewise, less is known about how digital media influences consumer behavior and class differences in developing nations especially after COVID-19 digital changes. Globally, digital technologies have changed consumer behavior, although their effects depended greatly depending on the socioeconomic context (Belk, 1988; Miller, 2012). Digital media can affect access to information, goods, and services in developing nations like Nepal, which can both narrow and worsen class gaps (Shrestha & Pandey, 2021). These forces are made more complex by the COVID-19 pandemic's quick adoption of digital platforms, which makes in-depth research on how digital consumerism affects class identities and economic prospects necessary.

There is less research on how consumer behaviors are distributed across different social classes in Kathmandu and the implications for social stratification. While some studies have explored urban consumption in broader South Asian contexts, specific

analyses focusing on Kathmandu's unique socio-economic landscape are rare (Doron, 2012; Varman & Belk, 2009). This gap is necessary because understanding consumerism in Kathmandu can reveal a lot about the city's current urbanization and the social inequalities (Liechty, 2017). The link between traditional social structures and modern consumer practices in Kathmandu provides a rich insight for studying how class relations are made and transformed in a changing urban environment. The present research tries to fill gaps by focusing on Kathmandu Metropolitan and studying the ways in which consumerism both influences and is influenced by the social class structure. It underlines the unique characteristics of a non-Western urban context and providing fresh insights into the relationships between consumer culture and social inequality. It adds to the growing body of literature on globalization, urbanization, and digital consumerism.

2.5 Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Theory on Habitus, Field, and Capital

Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly his concepts of habitus, capital, and field, can provide a robust analytical framework for studying class dynamics of consumerism in Balaju, Kathmandu

Habitus

According to Bourdieu, habitus is a system of adaptable, durable tendencies which generate and structure behaviors and representations. Habitus, as used in Balaju's framework of consumerism, describes the structured yet flexible collection of behaviors that people and social groupings form as a result of their contacts with the outside world. These experiences, cultural background, and social standing all influenced their choices, tastes, and consumption habits (Bourdieu, 1977).

Habitus means the system of dispositions, habits, and tastes that people get through socializing within particular social environments. It influences people's worldview, decision-making processes, and behaviors, such as consuming (Bourdieu, 1977). Habits have a role in how people from different social classes see shopping in Balaju, Kathmandu. Example, rich people could form a habit that values luxury, and extravagant spending. The social class predisposes them to shopping for expensive brands, luxury products and everything that can indicate the status of the buyer. On

the other hand, people with limited economic capital may develop a habitus that is rational-functional, which is manifested in their consumer behavior characterized by cost sensitiveness and product usefulness. Thus, habitus has great importance for forming the class related consumer practices and preferences in Balaju. It refers to the internalized body of knowledge and particular way of being in the world that is inspired through the processes of socialization. This study established that in Balaju of Kathmandu, the experience of different classes of people with consumer culture is shaped by the habitus. For instance, upper-class people are more likely to have habitus, which allows them to appreciate and purchase luxurious items; in contrast, low-class folks are bound to acquire habitus suited for cheap products. These dispositions are not only representative of class related aesthetics, but also serve to dictate such mundane activities as consumption patterns, brand choices and main lifestyle.

Field

According to Bourdieu's theory, a field is an organized social place where people and groups fight for resources and has its own set of norms, hierarchies, and dynamics. Markets, shopping malls, and consuming habits impacted by social, cultural, and economic factors form Balaju's consumer field. Battles for symbolic and financial capital impact class dynamics in this area, forming consumer identities and behaviors (Bourdieu, 1993). According to Bourdieu, social existence can be defined as the index of the relations of force and struggle through which the different kinds of capital are produced and negotiated within the fields. A field can be defined as an organization of defined structure of the given environment containing certain formal and informal rules, power relations and boundaries. Thus, the consumer field refers to markets, malls, and shopping complexes in which consumption activities take place and are realized in Balaju in Kathmandu. In this context, various social classes apply different consumption practices which regard their possibilities in gaining and obtaining different types of capital. For example, working-class consumers may be conspicuous in particularized products and quality and images associated with up-market and specialty stores. On the other hand, the lower class consumes in different markets where competition is intense, and products are cheaper; they focus more on the functionality and cost of the products. The consumer field thus reflects and

perpetuates class distinctions through differential access to resources and opportunities for cultural expression. Bourdieu's notion of field provides a framework for examining the structured social spaces where individuals and groups compete for and reproduce capital. In the context of Balaju, Kathmandu, the consumer field encompasses marketplaces, shopping centers, and consumption practices that are structured by economic, cultural, and social hierarchies. Different social classes navigate this field differently, engaging in consumption practices that reinforce their class identities and perpetuate existing social hierarchies. Understanding the dynamics of this consumer field illuminates how class-specific strategies and negotiations play out in everyday consumer decisions and behaviors.

Capital

Bourdieu says that capital can take on multiple forms such as money resources in the economic realm, social ties and networks, and cultural aspects such as education, knowledge, and cultural preferences. These interconnected kinds of capital influence a person's power and social standing in a particular industry, like Balaju's consumer market. The different forms and quantities of capital that different groups own affect their capacity to engage in and make use of consumer practices (Bourdieu, 1986).

Types of Capital

To understand the social and economic resources that people and groups hold, we must understand Bourdieu's concept of capital. Purchase power and accessibility to consumer products are directly impacted by economic capital. That includes wealth and income. Social capital, which includes networks and relationships, can help open doors to premium markets. They can even change consumer behavior by giving peer pressure as well as social influence. In Balaju, cultural capital, which include education, knowledge, and cultural tastes, influences choices and the symbolic meanings related with consuming behaviors. Through consumerism, unequal capital distributions impact the maintenance of social inequality by reinforcing class divisions.

Bourdieu identifies several types of capital that individuals and groups possess and deploy within social fields:

Economic Capital

This covers monetary resources including money, income, and assets. Economic capital governs people's purchasing power and access to products and services in the Balaju consumerism milieu. While lesser economic capital restricts possibilities and forces consumers to make frugal decisions, higher economic capital allows wealthy customers to purchase luxury goods and engage in upmarket consumption patterns.

Social Capital

Networks, contacts, and social relationships are all included in social capital. People can use these aspects to their benefit. Social capital can influence buying decisions through peer networks. It can provide access to exclusive marketplaces or allow participation in consumer trends and lifestyles linked to higher social standing in the Balaju consumer setting.

Cultural Capital

This covers the training, information, abilities, and cultural preferences that people pick up and use to function in various social situations. Cultural capital influences choices for particular brands, product categories, and consumption habits in Balaju. When it comes to their buying decisions, people with strong cultural capital might appreciate authenticity and distinctiveness of culture. While people with low cultural capital might put more importance on usefulness and utility.

It aids in comprehending the development of consumer practices of Balaju residents via social class, habitus, and capitals. Thus, it sheds light on how the consumers in the context of the study construct and perform their consumer identities based on their class status and experiences, and how they position themselves in the social structures of the consumer field. The framework by Bourdieu is important as primarily it takes into account the social realities and contexts which define the actions of people. It enables an analysis of how tact in purchases (habitus) are formed by class and how these class-based tendencies are practiced in Balaju and by what extent new or existing hierarchies are upheld or altered. Moreover, it provides insights into the unequal distribution of capital and its implications for class reproduction and mobility

through consumption. To apply this framework, the study will conduct qualitative research using methods such as interviews, observations, and possibly focus groups. These methods will help uncover the habitus of different social groups in Balaju, their consumer practices, and the meanings attached to consumption. The analysis will focus on identifying patterns of consumption that reflect class distinctions, examining how different forms of capital (economic, social, cultural) are deployed, and exploring the dynamics of the consumer field in relation to class dynamics.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

2.6.1 Class Categorization

This study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's multidimensional framework of class, which moves beyond purely economic definitions to analyze how economic capital (income, wealth), cultural capital (education, tastes, skills), and social capital (networks, relationships) interact to produce and reproduce social hierarchies. Bourdieu's theory emphasizes that class is not merely about material resources but also about symbolic power—the ability to impose certain tastes, behaviors, and lifestyles as superior or legitimate. In the context of Kathmandu's urban consumer culture, this means that class divisions manifest not just in what people can afford but in how they consume, where they shop, and what brands or practices they associate with status. For instance, upper-class groups may use luxury goods and elite education as markers of distinction, while lower-class groups, even when aspiring to similar consumption, face structural barriers that limit their access to these forms of capital. Additionally, Nepal's unique caste-ethnic dynamics intersect with Bourdieu's model, as historical caste privileges continue to shape who accumulates which types of capital.

Upper-Class Respondents (High Economic and Cultural Capital)

The upper-class respondents in this study exemplify Bourdieu's concept of dominant class habitus, possessing substantial economic capital (monthly incomes NPR 75,000–100,000) through business ownership or high-status professions like teaching. Their cultural capital is evident in advanced education (master's degrees) and refined consumption patterns, while their social capital derives from professional networks and traditional high-caste status (Brahmin/Chhetri/Newar). This group maintains class

boundaries through conspicuous consumption (e.g., factory owner Suresh Rai) and institutionalized cultural capital, reproducing intergenerational privilege. Their consumption practices likely serve as distinction markers (Bourdieu, 1984), reinforcing social hierarchies in Kathmandu's urban landscape.

Middle-Class Respondents (Moderate and Misaligned Capitals)

The middle-class participants demonstrate Bourdieu's intermediate position, with moderate economic capital (NPR 25,000–60,000) from shopkeeping, driving, or sales jobs. Their cultural capital varies—some have bachelor's degrees (e.g., salesperson Sarisma Tamang), while others rely on vocational training (e.g., fitness trainer Rajiv Gurung). This group's habitus reflects tension: educated but often in jobs misaligned with qualifications (e.g., driver Saroj Lamichhane with high school education). Their consumption patterns may reveal aspirational strategies (Liechty, 2003) to emulate elites, yet limited economic capital constrains full class mobility. Caste diversity (including Gurung/Tamang) suggests some erosion of traditional capital monopolies.

Lower-Class Respondents (Limited Capital)

Lower-class respondents embody Bourdieu's dominated class, with minimal economic capital (\leq NPR 20,000) from informal labor (e.g., sweeper Jamuna Gurung) or unemployment. Despite some holding bachelor's degrees (e.g., barista Aaditya Dhungana), their cultural capital is devalued by underemployment, highlighting a rupture between education and class position. This group's habitus is shaped by material constraints, with consumption restricted to subsistence needs. Overrepresentation of marginalized castes (Dalit, Limbu) reflects historical capital deprivation, perpetuating their class position. Their consumer behavior may include compensatory practices (e.g., symbolic purchases) but remains largely survival-oriented, reinforcing Bourdieu's thesis that capital inequality sustains social reproduction.

2.6.2 Framework of Analysis

This part comprises conceptual framework for this study. Both theoretical and conceptual frameworks play crucial roles in guiding the study and providing a foundation for its design and analysis. A theoretical framework consists of concepts and theories that underpin the research, offering a lens through which to interpret the

data. It provides a structured way to understand the relationships between various variables and helps in formulating hypotheses. On the other hand, a conceptual framework is more specific to the research problem and outlines the key variables and their presumed relationships. It acts as a map to guide the researcher through the study, ensuring that all relevant factors are considered. Together, these frameworks help in establishing a solid foundation for the research, facilitating a coherent and comprehensive analysis of the findings (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This section comprises the conceptualization of different variables discussed in this study and how the habitus, field, and forms of capital explain these variables as patterns of consumer behavior, class disparities, and class hierarchies.

According to Bourdieu, a person's internalized preferences, behaviors, and dispositions are influenced by their cultural capital and social class. Consumer behavior is influenced by the unique habits of different social strata. For example, whereas lower-class habitus may value affordability and purchases motivated by necessity, upper-class habitus may highlight luxury consumption and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu, field theory studies how various social fields—like consumer markets—structure agent relationships and power dynamics according to their capital. Consumer markets are organized arenas of social class interaction and competition. Class differences are influenced by the placement of economic capital (wealth, income), cultural capital (knowledge, education), and social capital (connections, networks) within those fields, which determine consumer choices and resource access (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu sets out several types of capital that people or communities own, such as social, cultural, and economic capital. Social capital defines access to networks affecting consumer choices, cultural capital influences tastes and preferences, and economic capital affects purchasing power and consumption habits. Inequalities in these capitals reinforce class disparities in consumer markets and lead to unequal consumer behavior (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, consumer practices are the actual decisions and actions people take in the marketplace, guided by their financial resources and habits. Consumer behavior both reflects and continues to reflect social structures and class identities. For instance, ostentatious consumption by the wealthy can serve to promote their social standing, whereas thrifty consumption by those in lower social groups can help bring out their financial limitations (Bourdieu, 1984).

This theoretical framework gives an organized way to understand the link between class dynamics and consumer behavior. It is based on the work of Bourdieu. It shows as to how habits affect consumer choices and preferences amongst different socioeconomic classes. It analyzes unequal spending patterns brought by disparities in social, cultural, and economic capital influence and maintain class inequality. By studying consumer behaviors through the perspective of habitus and field theory, the framework offers information into how consumer behaviors in consumer markets both reflect and reinforce social hierarchies and class identities. This method provides a solid foundation for empirical research. It investigates the relationships between consumer behavior, socioeconomic class, and social inequality in contexts such as Balaju, Kathmandu.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology gives a structured way to gather, examine, and make sense of data that forms the basis of a scientific investigation. In this section, the study process and procedure in the course of conducting research have been discussed briefly. This chapter mainly incorporates research philosophy, approach, sources of data, research design, population and sampling, techniques of data collection and analysis procedure. The research methodology gives a structured way to gather, examine, and make sense of data that forms the basis of a scientific investigation. The "Research Onion" idea, which is at the heart of this method, was made by Saunders and team. The steps of research are shown in this picture. This notion of Research Onion embraces the study's theory, approach, strategy, methods, time frame, and techniques. While doing research, one of the most important things is picking a study theory (Orth & Maçada, 2021). It gives the researcher's point of view and leads to the overall plan for the study.

4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

The nature of existence and reality are topics of ontology. The ontological viewpoint in the setting of this study on consumerism and class relations in Balaju, Kathmandu, is social constructionism. According to this viewpoint, people's interactions and behaviors within their socioeconomic setting shape social reality (Bryman, 2016). Consumption and class are seen as dynamic concepts that are constantly molded by social conventions, cultural practices, and prevailing economic circumstances rather than as static traits. As a result, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966), they are viewed as socially produced entities that are susceptible to interpretation and change throughout time.

The nature, scope, and mode of acquiring of knowledge are all topics under epistemology. This study's interpretivist epistemological approach places a strong value on understanding the experiences and meanings of specific people. According to this viewpoint, information can be gained by looking at how individuals view and interact with their social environment (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research attempts to capture the complex and context-specific understandings of how consumer habits

and class dynamics intersect in Balaju, Kathmandu. This can be done by using qualitative approaches like in-depth interviews and theme analysis (Creswell, 2013). The aim of the study is to understand how people view their class identities and consumer behaviors. As well as how these perceptions influence and are influenced by larger social and economic institutions.

4.2 Research Philosophy

This study follows interpretivism, an approach to social science that focuses on the meaningful social action, socially constructed meaning and value relativism (Neuman, 2006). The research philosophy underpinning this study on class dynamics and consumerism in Balaju, Kathmandu is interpretivism, which stems from the broader paradigm of social constructionism. Interpretivism is concerned with understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 1994).

According to this viewpoint, social interactions and cultural practices shape reality rather than it being a static substance. It highlights the individualized interpretations and meanings that people give to their experiences (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivism emphasizes the subjective experiences and viewpoints of individuals within their socioeconomic situation in order to understand the phenomena of class dynamics and consumerism. Examining the interpretations, meanings, and symbols that people employ to negotiate their social environments is part of this methodology. Interpretivism is used in this study to reveal how Balaju locals view their class standing, shopping habits, and the socioeconomic effects of these activities.

It underscores that people's experiences and interpretations are influenced by the larger cultural and economic systems in which they are integrated, as well as by the relationships they have with others (Geertz, 1973). This study uses interpretivism for a number of reasons. A deep and complete knowledge of people's various and complex experiences with class and consumerism is made possible by interpretivism. It makes it easier for studying how people view and interact with their socioeconomic circumstances (Creswell, 2013). This school of thought places a high value on how context shapes social phenomena. Interpretivism helps to capture these specificities and offers a more nuanced view of class dynamics and consumer behaviors in the context of Kathmandu, where cultural, economic, and social dynamics are distinct and dimensional (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Interpretivism favors open-ended and exploratory methods so the researcher is able to address emerging patterns and complexities in the course of the research. This is important because Balaju as a newly emerging urban area is characterized by frequent change hence the dynamic and multiple intersections of class and consumerism in the area (Patton, 2002). Interpretivism enables the incorporation of the participants' views and therefore is an effective method of bringing the concerns of the residents of Balaju closer to the research. This corresponds with the study objectives to examine how consumers and class relations are managed and given meaning by the people themselves (Silverman, 2013).

4.3 Research Approach

This research used an inductive methodology. This is a method for verifying a theory based on verifiable empirical data. More abstract ideas and theoretical connections follow as a result (Neuman, 2006). This research follows detailed studying and in-depth analysis of the dynamics and difficulties of consumption and class in Kathmandu. The inductive approach is a research methodology that advances from detailed data and observations to more generalized hypotheses and generalizations. The inductive method starts with empirical facts and then attempts to develop a hypothesis that can explain those observations, in contrast to deductive reasoning, which starts with a theory and tests it through observations. When conducting exploratory research to explain complicated phenomena, provide new ideas, or construct hypotheses based on rich, qualitative data, this approach is especially helpful (Neuman, 2006).

The preferability of the inductive method is ideal for researching consumerism and class relations in Kathmandu due to the following reasons. By conducting extensive research and scrutinizing consumers' behavior, their spending patterns and class relations in the specific cultural and socioeconomic context of Kathmandu, this approach allows researchers to uncover nuanced patterns and trends that can be easily overlooked. Because it is adaptable and responsive to the intricacies of Kathmandu's class dynamics and consumer behavior, the inductive technique was used for this study. This methodology allows researchers to let the data speak for itself, guaranteeing that the conclusions are based on the lived experiences and settings of the participants, as opposed to imposing preconceived hypotheses or frameworks. In

addition to enhancing the breadth and depth of knowledge, this methodological decision helps to produce theories that are contextually relevant and may guide practice and policy in metropolitan areas such as Kathmandu (Neuman, 2006).

4.4 Research Method

To capture the class dynamics of consumerism in Kathmandu, this study uses a qualitative research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To study the complex and nuanced relationship between consumerism and class in Kathmandu Metropolitan, the research design for this study uses a qualitative methodology. Because it enables a thorough, contextualized study of participants' views and experiences, qualitative research is specifically suited for comprehension of the complexity and depth of social issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because it is so good at capturing the subjective experiences and socio-cultural factors that influence consumer behavior and class dynamics, a qualitative method is selected. With this method, the researchers were able to study how people from various socioeconomic backgrounds view and interact with consumerism. As well as how these behaviors impact their social identities and relationships. When a researcher collects, studies, and interprets data to find answers to research questions or test hypotheses, they are using systematic procedures, techniques, and tactics, which are referred to as research methodologies. The type of research questions, the theoretical framework, and the intended study outcomes all influence the research technique selection. There are many different research techniques, which can be broadly divided into mixed, qualitative, and quantitative methodological approaches.

When a deeper comprehension of phenomena, an exploration of experiences, and the discovery of meanings through a careful analysis of context-specific situations are the objectives, qualitative research methods are utilized. This strategy makes use of techniques such as participant observation, focus groups, interviews, and content analysis. Researchers can get various viewpoints and subtleties in social interactions and behaviors by using qualitative approaches. They are especially helpful for examining complex social phenomena like class dynamics and consumer behavior in urban environments like Kathmandu (Silverman, 2021). Conversely, numerical data is measured and statistically analyzed in quantitative research methods in order to identify patterns, correlations, and generalizability over a wider population.

Quantitative tools like surveys, experiments, and statistical techniques are frequently used to study consumer habits and classes. These methods offer systematic and quantifiable insights into these phenomena (Bryman, 2016). In certain studies, scholars use mixed methods approaches. This is done by using qualitative and quantitative techniques to enhance each other's advantages and offer a more thorough comprehension of study problems. This method offers both depth and breadth in study, making it useful for examining the many facets of consumerism and class dynamics (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The particular goals of the study, the research questions posed, and the theoretical framework directing the research all influence the choice of research methodology. Every methodological technique has particular benefits and drawbacks that affect the way data is gathered, examined, and evaluated in order to produce insightful findings about the dynamics of consumerism and class in the Kathmandu Metropolitan Area.

4.5 Nature and Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary data sources were used in the data collection process. Primary data were those that are directly obtained through in-depth interviews and observation. Field notes, participant observation, and unstructured interviews are examples of primary data sources. In addition to the primary data, the secondary data included information gleaned from a variety of literary sources, such as books, journals, reviews, and official reports (Bryman, 2016).

Primary Data

Participant observation and interviews were the main data sources for this qualitative research study on consumerism and class dynamics in Kathmandu Metropolitan. Each of these sources adds a distinct perspective to the research issue and advances our knowledge of consumer behavior and class relations in urban settings. People from various socioeconomic levels in the Kathmandu Metropolitan area were interviewed. Rich, comprehensive data on the consumption habits, preferences, and class perceptions of the participants were obtained from these interviews. To allow for flexibility and depth in the exploration of participants' experiences, unstructured interviews were used (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interview questions could cover topics such as the participants' brand preferences, purchasing habits, experiences with the social status that comes with consuming and opinions on class differences in the Kathmandu Metropolitan area.

Secondary Data

Information that has previously been gathered, processed, examined, and made accessible to the general public or researchers working on other projects is referred to as secondary data. Numerous sources, such as governmental bodies, educational institutions, research groups, and published works, can provide this kind of information (Johnston, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Research organizations and academic institutions regularly release papers, publications, and datasets that offer information on particular subjects related to the research. These resources frequently contain in-depth analyses and conclusions that can supplement original data and provide a more comprehensive framework for comprehending the study issue (Smith, 2008). Books, journal articles, conference papers, and other published materials are excellent sources of secondary data. These documents provide theoretical frameworks, methodological insights, and empirical findings that can guide and inform the current study (Hart, 1998). The literatures used in this study were obtained through various internet sources like JSTOR, ACADEMIA, Google Scholar using key words such as “Class”, “Class Dynamics”, “Consumerism”, “Class dynamics of consumerism”. The sociological disciplinary literatures are included and the rest of the literatures are excluded in course of search.

4.6 Study Area

The capital of Nepal, Kathmandu, has developed into an active hub of diversity. It attracts people from all over the nation. The focus of this study is Kathmandu's population. This includes both temporary and permanent people. Rapid urbanization, globalization, and socioeconomic changes are characteristics of the Kathmandu Metropolitan area, according to Bhandari and Sharma (2018). These changes have a big impact on social stratification and consumerism. Ancient temples and historical sites mix with modern infrastructure, retail centers, and international brands in the city's landscape. This is characterized by a intersection of traditional and modern components. Thus, this blend of the old and newly constructed offers an exciting context for learning about how consumerism informs the construction of both middle class and social relations. Also, the consumer behavior and class study matters are easily facilitated in Kathmandu Metropolitan which has people belonging to different ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and economic statuses. Thus, emphasizing the

consumption behavior perspectives and preliminarily focusing on the informal gathering of qualitative data about the life and work in Kathmandu Metropolitan, this study is intended to reveal the relationships between consumption, social structure and cultural identity in the context of the modern transforming urban area. In that the study is concerned with the agency of the people living within the spaces of Kathmandu, institutions and organizations are undeniably a part of the events and transformation of the city and thus are quite relevant to this research. More particularly, it aims to look into the agency of people that involves actions as well as decisions made by different people within the context of Kathmandu' sub urban setting. The study site is Kathmandu Metropolitan City ward number 16, Balaju. It is basically vibrant and dynamic area which is located in the northern part of Kathmandu. Its geographical proximity to a major touristic hub of Nepal called Thamel, makes it vibrant and diverse locality with blend of traditional and modern influencer. Its geographical, social, economic, and cultural characteristics make this place of study.

The area of Balaju incorporates some parts of Ringroad which is major transportation artery connecting various parts of Kathmandu Valley, especially Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Lalitpur, which makes easily accessible for both locals and tourists and facilitating people and goods. This accessibility contributes to the economic vitality. Moreover, a globally recognized touristic place like Thamel is just nearby. This proximity influences the economic and culture dynamics of Balaju. In addition to this, Balaju itself is well connected with Gongabu Buspark, a major transportation hub of Nepal, and UNESCO heritage site Swoyambhu, and other parts of the Kathmandu via Ring Road. This connectivity has also enhanced its commercial and residential appeal.

Balaju offers a wide range of goods and services from small family run grocery stores to modern supermarket, catering various income groups and provide consumers with a variety of choices. While family run businesses and local shops are prevalent, reflecting the traditional retail consumer of Nepal, Supermarkets such as Bhatbhateni Supermarket, Bigmart have become common offering a wide range of goods at competitive prices. These stores cater to the growing middle and upper middle class population. It also signifies the coexistence of different social class. The presence of

malls, supermarkets, and chain restaurants indicates a shift towards modern urban development. While traditional family-run stores remain common, the rise of supermarkets and malls reflects a shift in consumer preferences toward modern retail experiences. Similarly, with growing commercialization of hospitality and food industry, the presence of chain hotel, restaurants and fast food outlet such as burger houses appeal both local and international tourists. Due to close ties with Thamel and Swoyambhu, Balaju benefits from influx of tourists which boosts local businesses and creates a demand for diverse goods and services.

Balaju is mix of various residents including long time locals, migrants, and expatriates, reflecting in the area's social and cultural fabric. The area retains various kinds of goods and services available and consumption patterns of residents, both traditional as well as modern globalized consumer trends. Balaju also represents a microcosm of broader economic and social dynamics of Kathmandu. It is mix of diverse population, and mix of traditional and modern economic activities, makes it an ideal and optimal site for studying the interplay between class dynamics and consumerism. Its accessibility, commercial vibrancy, and cultural diversity make it a representative example of urban Nepal, offering valuable insights into how social hierarchies and consumer practices intersect in a rapidly changing urban landscape. The coexistence of both small family-run stores and large supermarkets provides a unique opportunity to examine how different social classes interact with and influence consumer practices. The area's proximity to Thamel and its appeal to tourists highlight the impact of globalization and tourism on local economies and consumer behavior.

4.7 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

Rather than the sample's representativeness, the richness and depth of data are the main focus of qualitative research. In qualitative research, collection of particular incidents, occurrences, or behaviors that might offer profound insights into social life and improve comprehension of the processes within a particular setting is the main objective of sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). So, rather than looking for a statistically representative sample, qualitative researchers seek cases that shed light on the social phenomena they are studying (Patton, 2015).

In research, the total set of people, things, or phenomena that the investigator wishes to examine and draw conclusions about is referred to as the population. Within the framework of Kathmandu Metropolitan's consumerism and class relations, the population would comprise all locals residing in the city's numerous communities and neighborhoods. The socioeconomic level, cultural backgrounds, and purchasing patterns of this people are diverse (Babbie, 2016). A sample is a portion of the population chosen specifically to take part in the research. To guarantee that the results can be applied generally, it is imperative that the sample is representative of the population.

For example, in studying consumer behaviors and class dynamics in Kathmandu, a sample include residents from different socio-economic classes living in neighborhoods like Balaju. This sample could be chosen based on specific criteria as defined in Bouudieu concept of class to capture diverse perspectives on consumerism (Neuman, 2014). For this study, it is proposed to include 20 respondents from Kathmandu Metropolitan with diverse socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. This sample has various age groups, genders, ethnicities, castes, religions, and social classes, that show the capital city's multifaceted population. Such diversity in the sample is meant to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences, enriching the analysis of consumerism and class dynamics. A non-random sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, were employed to select the participants. In qualitative research, sample size is defined by the depth of study needed and the concept of saturation rather than statistical power, especially in studies like yours that focus on consumerism and class dynamics. The term "saturation" describes the stage of the qualitative data gathering process when no new themes or information are emerging from the more data. It implies that the sample has reached a theoretically complete point for the researcher. Saturation is reached, according to Guest et al. (2006), when new data stop adding to our understanding of the phenomenon we are studying or offering new insights. Iterative methods are frequently used to calculate the sample size in qualitative research. Initially, depending on the developing data and theoretical saturation, researchers may begin with a smaller sample and progressively increase it. According to Morse (1995), sample sizes for qualitative research are usually lower and emphasize understanding depth above breadth. The complexity of the phenomenon being examined, together with the goals and research questions, all influence how big of a sample size is appropriate.

The sampling procedure outlines how the sample is selected from the population. In qualitative research focusing on consumerism and class dynamics, purposive sampling may be appropriate. This method involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as their knowledge of consumer behaviors or their position within social hierarchies

4.8 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling, also known as purposeful or judgmental sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers deliberately select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach enables researchers to enroll participants who have the knowledge or events that can be relevant to answering the research questions. Special mention of which can be made here is the purposive sampling that is commonly utilized in qualitative research that is aimed at providing depth and richness of information as opposed to representativeness (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this study on consumerism and interactions across classes in Kathmandu Metropolitan, purposive sampling was used in order to identify subjects that are from different parts of the socio-economic stratum, age, gender and experience. The various possible demographic variables for the selection of participants: age, sex, ethnicity, caste, religion, and economic status. As a result, the researchers can get an ample result from the study since the participants have been selected purposefully to encompass a wide range of perspective and experiences about consumerism and its relation to class in the context of Kathmandu Metropolitan. This study requires purposive sampling for the following reasons. Firstly, it makes it easier for the researcher to identify those individuals who have a bearing to the issues that define the study hence are the most relevant participants to interview or administer questionnaires to. Secondly, purposive sampling also helps the researchers in selecting participant who have different level of contact with consumer culture and class thus researchers obtain wide ranging view from participants. Last, by locating the criteria of participants' selection more deliberately, the RRs can make the process of data collection more efficient and, at the same time, not influence the quality of qualitative research.

The total twenty people altogether who lives in the Kathmandu metropolitan region participated in this study. A purposive sampling was used to make sure the sample

comprises the most convenient and accessible persons. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling—also referred to as judging, selective, or subjective sampling—is a non-probability sample method. With this approach, respondents were chosen according to particular traits or attribute that support the study's goals. The main concept is to select cases that are especially instructive or indicative of the topic under study by using the researcher's judgment (Patton, 2002). Prospective participants were contacted and given a thorough explanation of the study's objectives.

According to ethical research guidelines, this method is necessary for getting informed consent and maintaining voluntary involvement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After consenting to take part, participants received a thorough explanation of the goals, significance, and particular help needed from them in the study. In order to establish rapport and make sure that respondents see the value of their contributions to the research, this first engagement is crucial (Kvale, 1996). After that, the researcher worked with each respondent to arrange interviews at times that work for them. To improve understanding and consent, the objective and importance of the study were reaffirmed throughout the interview. With consent from the interviewees, the interviews recorded in order to guarantee proper data collection and enable a later theme analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). This methodological approach ensures ethical standards are upheld and strong and accurate data is obtained, aligning with best practices in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

This study employed purposive sampling to ensure the selection of information-rich participants who could provide meaningful insights into class-based consumption patterns in Balaju, Kathmandu. Given the research focus on understanding how different socioeconomic groups engage with consumer culture, random sampling methods would have been inadequate for capturing the specific variations in consumption behaviors across class lines (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling allowed for the strategic identification of participants from upper, middle, and lower-class backgrounds based on key indicators such as income levels, occupational status, and visible consumption markers (Tongco, 2007). This approach was particularly valuable for examining how structural factors like caste and remittance economies intersect with class to shape distinctive consumer practices in Nepal's urban context (Liechty, 2003).

4.9 Data Collection Techniques and Tools

Unstructured Interview with Interview Schedule

This study went through unstructured interviews while collecting data. Unstructured interview refers to as open ended interviews; they allow more fluid interaction between researcher and the respondent (Marvasti, 2004). In this interview, respondents are not forced to select from a predetermined set of answers, but rather they can explain their ideas, opinion, and connect them with other relevant matters. Unstructured interviews are most often used in types of qualitative studies. Unstructured interview can provide broader ideas than other types of qualitative nature ((Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In-depth interviews were undertaken on the basis of interview schedule to collect data and information from respondent. There is no order and no script. The interaction between the participant and the researcher is more like a conversation than an interview. In-depth interview were undertaken on the basis of interview schedule to collect data and information from respondent. An interview schedule is basically a list containing a set of unstructured questionnaire that have been prepared, to serve as a guide for interviewers or researchers in collecting information and data about a specific topic or issue. Interviews were conducted by introducing the purpose of the study and were recorded by recording instrument after taking consent from respondents. The ethics of research were strictly followed while undertaking interviews.

The responses during informal conversations were written in my diary. I also hired young graduates Limbu caste, born and grew in Kathandu, for my interview process. The interviews I conducted were wide ranging but generally revolved around the contemporary experiences of consuming goods and services, and also individual perceptions of changing socio cultural practices. Although I went into interview settings with lists of general questions about ranging from consumer behavior, spending pattern, places and motivation, mode of consumption to how and individual perceives themselves. My aim was not to fill out standardized questionnaire but instead to ask with people I met and try to find the particular experiences and issues that were most meaningful to them.

This study aimed to interact with a wide variety of people like young, middle-aged, elderly; boys and girls, men and women, rural-urban; high-, middle-, and low-caste—though overall the majority of contacts were with at least minimally educated persons from families involved in some form of service or non-manual labor. My goal was to interview people across the social spectrum from low to high and also aimed to weight our sample between the extremes of poverty and exceptional wealth. The people we interviewed were chosen in four ways:

1. Randomly those we engaged in public parks, restaurants, and tea shops, in classrooms, or on street, at supermarket,
2. Through networks of friends and acquaintances,
3. Representatives or members of social organizations (youth clubs) or businesses (video rental shop owners, beauty parlor proprietors and patrons, etc.), and,
4. Individuals with particularly relevant knowledge or authority such as community leader, social worker, government official

Overall, this study is not strictly random or scientific in its collection, but rather represents a diverse and wide ranging sample of Kathmandu, particularly residents of Balaju. Whenever possible, I recorded interviews in my mobile phones whenever possible from stores, parks, tea shops, to home, offices, and even in classrooms. Yet almost all, the respondent I dealt with were willing to offer their time and eager to share their opinions. I also believe that the benefits of recording these kinds of semi formal interviews far outweigh the potential limitations and drawbacks of interacting in an admittedly in artificial setting. Without this method, I would have been unable to compile the dozen of articulated, detailed, and often impassioned remarks that make up many voices represented in this study.

Once recoded, each of the interviews was transcribed and translated into English. I worked one on one with my co-workers to go through each recording to make final English transcript. The words spoken in English are written in different font while Nepali speech is designated by the use of a different font. Thus, the common use of English words like "Film," "Social media," "youth," "teen," "necessity," "fashion," "choice," "self satisfaction," and many others indicates the degree to which English has become part of everyday middleclass speech. Because it draws on a rich

collection of informal interview transcripts, this ethnography is perhaps unusually "voice" oriented: the text is full of people speaking their minds, their stories, and their lives. These transcripts provided me the luxury of considering not just *what* people said but *how* they said it. Indeed, it was these voices that I began to hear how social meaning is produced and articulated in everyday life through the practice of language. I came to appreciate the importance of speech as a vehicle for the performance of meaning and the circulation of cultural narratives while working with these manuscripts. It is one of the most important means by which people in Kathmandu, Balaju actively produce themselves (and others) as class beings, though speech is not the only relevant domain of class practice.

This study is about much more than language, but because of its theoretical focus on class as cultural practice, the discursive production of meaning is a recurring theme. Because of its emphasis on communicative practice, this study is relatively less oriented toward detailed descriptions of specific micro-ethnographic locals or social groups. This study also explores plenty of ethnographic descriptions of everyday life in Kathmandu, the construction of social and cultural life in the city.

Participant Observation and Field Notes

To get an initial look at consumer behavior and social interactions, participant observation method was conducted in a variety of urban settings such as marketplaces, retail centers, and residential areas. Through participant observation, researchers can fully immerse themselves in the study setting and learn about people's daily routines and habits in the Kathmandu Metropolitan area (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). During participant observation sessions, an observation checklist and field notes were created to record consumer behavior observations, relationships between people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, and the symbolic meanings attached to consumption activities.

Over three months of intensive fieldwork, I conducted structured participant observations at key consumer sites across Balaju, including Bhatbhateni supermarket, shopping malls, fast food outlets like Burger House, and local convenience stores. Observations were strategically scheduled during peak hours (mornings 8-10 AM and evenings 5-8 PM) to capture diverse class-based shopping behaviors. Each 2-3 hour observation session followed a systematic protocol: first documenting the physical space and clientele demographics, then focusing on consumer interactions with

products/staff, payment methods, and group dynamics. I adopted an unobtrusive "observer-as-participant" role, occasionally making small purchases to blend in while maintaining analytical distance. Particular attention was paid to status markers - from clothing choices to vehicle types in parking lots - that revealed class positions without direct inquiry. The cyclical nature of observations allowed me to track regular patterns (weekly grocery shopping rituals) versus exceptional consumption (festive season splurging). Detailed field notes were transcribed immediately after each observation using a standardized template: timestamped narratives of activities, sketches of store layouts, verbatim dialogue snippets, and reflexive commentary. Notes captured telling details - the way upper-class shoppers scrutinized imported product labels while working-class buyers compared local prices, or how teenagers used fast food spaces for class performance. These were supplemented with photographic documentation (where ethically permissible) of shelf arrangements and crowd patterns. Thematic analysis occurred iteratively, with early observations highlighting the prominence of brand consciousness that guided later focus on luxury vs. necessity purchases. A running observation journal helped identify emerging patterns, such as the 6-7 PM "office rush" where class distinctions became most visible through professionals' briefcase-and-tie mall visits versus laborers' quick mart stops.

4.10 Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedure

The information and data collected were manually checked. Important points from the material were filtered and sorted out. The obtained data were interpreted using qualitative data analysis techniques including content analysis and thematic analysis. Two useful qualitative research techniques that provide methodical ways to analyze textual or visual data are content analysis and thematic analysis. Researchers can find patterns, unearth hidden meanings, and produce fresh perspectives on the things they are studying by using these techniques.

Thematic Analysis

As highlighted in the research objectives and methodology of this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data that gathered from interview. Thus, with the help of this method, this research aims at revealing how consumerism contributes to the creation and place of the social class in the city. For example, through thematic analysis of the primary and secondary sources, the study further

examines how consumer goods and relatively, digital technologies affect the status of various classes of consumers. This also involves an evaluation on how different trends that are apparent in the international market influence the degree of consumption in the country and the culture that accompanies possession of specific brands and goods. So such structure of the study enables one to provide intricate prospects to the consumerism and class in Kathmandu and link it more generally into the processes of globalization, urbanization and unfairness. Consequently, in this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data that is collected from interviews and observations. The process follows several key steps as outlined by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The first type of review involves encoding where the data collector engrosses him or herself in the content of the transcriptions until he or she develops an intimate knowledge of the data. This immersion assists in finding emerging concepts and tendencies concerning consumer culture and class relations. The second step following familiarization is to generate primitive codes from the data arising from the examination of texts. Coding is related to submitting key aspects of the obtained data that can be important when answering research questions. These codes appear to be basic units of the raw data that can be linked to the research theme (Boyatzis, 1998). These are then grouped together into potential themes. It entails arranging codes into themes, and all the coded data extracts that relate to the themes are grouped under them. Essentially, themes are more general than codes and are the meaningful structures within the data (Clarke and Braun, 2013). This step is the process of scrubbing down the themes to ascertain its affirmation with the coded data and the overall data. Themes may be added or deleted depending on the relevancy and consistency of the theme being used. The objective is predefined as the creation of the thematic map, which will reflect the major and minor discussed themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once a satisfactory thematic map is developed, each theme is defined and named. This involves writing detailed analyses of each theme, identifying the essence of what each theme represents, and determining how it relates to the research questions. Clear and concise names for themes are chosen to convey the essence of the data. The final step involves weaving the thematic analysis into a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions. This report includes data extracts to illustrate the themes and provides a compelling argument based on the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Content Analysis

Research techniques that are frequently used in qualitative research to examine textual or visual data are content analysis and document analysis. These techniques entail the methodical and objective analysis of texts, documents, or other communication materials in order to find themes, patterns, and interpretations pertinent to the study issue. A research method called content analysis is used to methodically examine the textual, visual, or audiovisual items' content. In order to make deductions and conclusions regarding the communication process or the phenomenon under study, it entails locating and quantifying particular words, phrases, themes, or symbols within the text or medium (Krippendorff, 2018). A wide range of materials can be subject to content analysis. Such as magazines, newspapers, social media posts, speeches, interviews, and archives etc. To group and analyze the content according to predetermined standards or emerging themes, researchers use coding schemes or categories (Neuendorf, 2017). Through the examination of particular content elements' frequency, distribution, and context, researchers can acquire valuable insights regarding communication patterns, public opinion, social norms, and cultural representations that are related to their research topic. According to Riffe et al. (2019), content analysis can also be used to compare various sources or groups or to witness changes over time.

Content analysis was used to analyze some information through various texts included in journals, books, article and book review. These texts were obtained basically through web searching platforms such as JSTOR and Google Scholar. Search process used keywords such as “class dynamic and consumerism”, “class dynamics” or “consumerism”. The article search were limited systematically using Boolean Operators “And” and “OR” regarding class dynamics and consumerism to refine the search results. There were basically three key themes while searching texts in web. Firstly, it focused on consumer behavior to understand trends and habits highlighting types of products consumed, marketing message, and portrayal of consumer demographics. Secondly, it also examines income, occupational status, and level of education, language, tone, visual imagery for the discussion of social and economic status. Thirdly, it also used affordability, access to goods and services, effect of consumer behavior in economic mobility, narratives around social identity and status,

depictions of social mobility or immobility, influence of consumer culture on social hierarchies to understand the representation of different social classes as upper, middle, and lower.

This study employed systematic content analysis of sociological literature on class dynamics and consumerism, focusing on peer-reviewed articles, books, and Nepal-specific reports. Initial searches across academic databases using keywords like "class habitus," "conspicuous consumption," and "urban Nepal" yielded 120 plus sources, which were filtered to 48 core texts through relevance screening. These were thematically coded to identify key patterns: (1) how cultural capital manifests in consumption (Bourdieu 1984), (2) class mediated brand preferences and (3) class based identity and hierarchies. The analysis revealed gaps in studies applying Western theories to Nepal's urban context, particularly in Balaju Kathmandu.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

The goal of the study, its methods, and each participant's rights, including the freedom to discontinue participation at any moment without facing repercussions, were all explained to them. Every participant was asked to provide consent. To preserve their privacy, data were anonymous and participant identities will remain secret. All documents were kept safely. Only the researcher has access to them.

4.12 Study Limitations

This research focuses specifically on examining the relationship between class dynamics and consumer behavior within Balaju, Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The study encompasses three primary social class categories - upper, middle, and lower classes - defined through indicators including income levels, occupational status, and consumption markers. It investigates various dimensions of consumer behavior such as spending habits, brand preferences, and lifestyle choices across these class groups. The analysis incorporates Nepal's unique socio-cultural factors including caste influences, remittance economies, and urbanization trends that shape consumption patterns. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative approaches including in-depth interviews and observational techniques to generate rich, contextual insights into these consumption-class dynamics. In spite of its contributions, the research on class dynamics of consumerism in Kathmandu Metropolitan suffers from a number of

limitations. Empirically, the reliance on a small, purposive sample of 20 respondents may limit generalizability of the findings since it may not capture fully the diversity and complexity of consumer behaviors and class experiences in whole metropolitan area. Moreover, the rapid socio-economic changes and influence of digital technologies on consumption patterns pose challenges to stability and comprehensiveness in current trends (Shrestha & Pandey, 2021). Theoretically speaking, while integrating broader consumer culture with local cultural contexts is one aim of this study; there exists possibility for overgeneralization or misinterpretation of localized occurrences. Henceforth, these shortcomings reveal need for further studies with larger more diverse samples as well as longitudinal investigations that will throw light on how Kathmandu's consumerism is evolving along class lines.

4.13 Personal Reflection

I came to Kathmandu for the first time took place during 2063 BS in the aftermath of the 2062/2063 People's Movement that brought huge changes and transformation in the social and political structure in the country and restored democracy back to Nepal. Despite a major political alteration, the economic sector and consumer market in Kathmandu remained undeveloped at this time. My home became Balaju in Ward No. 16 close to Thamel which at that time existed as a town-planning area characterized by prevalent empty land and minimal commercial activity. During that period most consumer activities in Kathmandu operated within a local system because residents depended on traditional markets spread across Ason, Bhotahiti, Mahaboudha and Bhrikutimandap. These markets of Kathmandu offered affordable products for middle and lower-income people whereas Thamel, Durbar Marg and New Road maintained an air of exclusivity for upper class Nepali citizens and foreign visitors. Consumerism in Kathmandu during that time was modest. There were no malls or big shopping centers, and the buying power of the population was low. Bajeko Sekuwa, a prominent restaurant, was one of the very few branded stores that caught attention. Affordability for most of the people, and even for me, was a major criterion in consumption. There were high-end malls like Kathmandu Mall, People's Plaza, and Bishal Bazar but were inaccessible to the masses due to their high prices. There was therefore a sharp class divide in consumer culture with luxury consumption for the elite ones.

The 2015 earthquake, which epicentered in Gorkha and Sindhupalchowk, marked turning point for consumer culture and economy of Kathmandu. The devastation necessitated large-scale reconstruction, which saw the rise of new businesses, shopping centers, and eateries. Consumer attitudes started changing while the city was being reconstructed. The post-earthquake era witnessed expansion in the disposable incomes of some segments, generating demand for branded products and high-end amenities. New markets opened and consumer choices became more diversified during this era, indicating a general tendency towards globalized consumerism. The reconstruction era saw a big transformation in the urban faces of Kathmandu. New structures, shopping centers, and restaurants started to appear, targeting a newly rising middle class with new aspirations and tastes. Previously overlooked neighborhoods such as Balaju started to witness the opening of modern shopping centers, branded showrooms, and air-conditioned movie theaters. This was not only a physical but a cultural shift as well, with people embracing an increasingly consumerist culture based on international models.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 further disturbed Kathmandu's economy and consumer patterns. The lockdown and economic downturn aggravated class differences, with the wealthy continuing to consume luxury goods and services while the poor classes could not get essential items. The pandemic also hastened some trends, including e-commerce and the popularity of delivery-based companies. The arrival of mini-marts such as Bhatbhateni and Bigmart, and the proliferation of branded food chains such as burger joints and international restaurants reflected a consumer bias for convenience and quality. There is a stark contrast between luxury and affordability in Kathmandu's consumer culture in present times. It boasts of high-end malls on the one hand, fashion brand showrooms of technology and automobiles, as well as luxury hospitality services. On the other hand, the traditional local bazaars still flourish, serving those people who are not able to afford the prices in modern stores. This duality echoes the profound class inequalities and social stratification of Kathmandu. Consumerism has not just transformed the city's physical landscape but also solidified social identities, with consumption patterns emerging as an indicator of one's social standing. The area of Balaju underwent transformation since the time I moved there first. The region showed complete transformation from its previous status as a restful underproductive district to a busy shopping district which embraces

variety of modern stores. The community development tracks the developing trends of Kathmandu from traditional consumer markets to modern globalized retail and economic changes. Traditional markets and modern shopping centers work together in Balaju to capture the intricate developments in Kathmandu's emerging consumer behavior.

Observations from my time in Kathmandu at Balaju serve as excellent evidence to study consumer patterns and commercial development changes in Kathmandu between 1998 and 2018. Early Kathmandu consumer behavior depended on the use of local markets because its traditional consumer culture dominated the era. Modern economic progress includes the development of globalized consumer culture which features shopping malls alongside branded consumer items. Consumerism exhibits class-based tendencies due to the early-2000s market exclusivity between Thamel/Durbar Madar high-end domains and cost-effective local retail centers. The growing luxury market and associated social stratification based on consumer habits made this gap between consumer groups progressively more extensive. Global events starting with the 2015 earthquake then followed by COVID-19 served as change accelerators that shattered traditional market dynamics and launched emerging consumer trends. External shocks demonstrate both consumer cultures' exposed nature and their capability to transform and progress. Kathmandu undergoes broader urban developments which reflect in the modernization of Balaju from a town-planning zone to a vibrant commercial district. Consumer requirements for contemporary facilities along with networks between global consumers have directly influenced this transformation. The increasing focus on branded items and luxury consumption underscored the manner in which consumerism has become utilized as a status and identity marker in Kathmandu. This echoes the influence of global capitalism and lifestyle commodification.

It is worthy to note that my years as an M.Phil candidate in an educational institution has formed my perception in viewing class relations and consumerism in Balaju, Kathmandu. Because of my academic background, I am likely to have such things as confirmation bias and cultural prejudice in which I may subconsciously select material that reinforces my opinion or analyze consumer behavior through the lens of

academic settings. As far as the potential for bias as a problem is concerned, I commit to practicing acute reflexivity throughout the stages of the study to minimize such biases. Thus, to ensure the credibility and dependability of the conclusions made in this study, I plan to employ data triangulation, peer debriefing, and influence the membership to declare my biases and choices.

CHAPTER IV

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND SPENDING PATTERNS

Consumer Behavior refers to the decision making process and activities of individuals when they select, purchase, use and dispose of products and services. It is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and economic factors. In addition, psychological and emotional factors also influence the consumer choices or behavior. Spending Patterns refer to the way consumers allocate their income across various goods and services. Using thematic analysis, this study explored consumer behaviors in Kathmandu, examining patterns through qualitative responses. The analysis is structured around key themes derived from the data: shopping platforms, consumption frequency, brand preferences, social and cultural influence, budgeting and financial conditions. These themes are then linked to relevant theoretical perspectives, such as Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption.

Upper class tends to prefer branded and imported goods such as skin care, coffee, and luxury items bought from the high – end outlets. Consumption of these kinds of goods reflects a taste for distinction and desire to signal their status. High level of income allows for their frequent shopping at malls as well as using the online platform. Low level of income limits the frequency of shopping on the luxury non – essential items increasing the frequency of shopping at local vendors for essential goods needed for survival. The spending patterns of high level income people are more likely for spending on non – essential items like vacations and high-end products. Consumption is ultimately connected to maintaining distinctive lifestyles for higher class people that focuses on brand and ethical consciousness. Instinctive buying without any plans and buying as a hobby are the major traits of the upper class. The place where they buy matters the most for these classes. Therefore, the consumption behavior and spending patterns cannot be straight rather it is on random basis. There is no fixed pattern for these classes. Generally, the upper class people don't need to plan for the essential goods, so spending patterns heavily shifts towards gaining more luxury non – essential items.

By contrast, middle class tend to balance both affordability and quality with some kind of aspiration towards branded items. Limitation in income leads to priorities of

necessary items but they are also motivated to the spending on non – essential items. People from middle class often feel pressure to maintain their standard to meet the standards of upper class. These classes of people tend to behave to achieve upward mobility and spend on the specific luxury items. However, the frequency or regularity in the purchase pattern of this class is significantly lower than high class. Cultural factors and traditional rituals compel the middle class to spend on luxury items. The majority of spending pattern focuses on the survival needs rather than non-essential needs.

Lower class is more likely to focus on fulfillment of basic needs and their major concern is survival. They actually put little emphasis on brands or luxury. They rarely purchase non - essential items as limited income restricts spending to essential goods. Consumption of lower class is basically driven fundamentally by necessity with little room for aspirational spending and focus on saving for children's education and health. However, these class also aspire to follow the trend of middle class at times. Organizing a cultural family event may become arduous financially but these classes people are compelled to sacrifice necessity over completion of the event in socially acceptable way. This may shift the consumer behavior and spending pattern of these people.

4.1 Purchasing Items

Purchasing items refers to the goods and services that people buy whether to fulfill their basic essential needs or to satisfy their egos. Generally, purchasing items can be categorized into two categories as essential goods and services and non - essential goods and services. The research is trying to find out consumer behavior and spending pattern. Therefore, purchasing items according to the results of respondents are categorized as follows:

Essentials: Groceries, Food, Clothes, House, Education, Health, and Utilities Bill

Non-Essentials: Automobiles, dining out, branded clothes, festivals rituals celebrations, ornaments, electronics, and gadgets. Regarding the purchasing items, respondents' response was varying from necessity to leisure and sometimes social identity.

One respondent who is 21 years old female, unmarried and from Dalit community noted, I would buy at luxury places according to my budget to challenge social hierarchy and my list of purchasing items include groceries to luxury cosmetic brands.

One respondent answered, my necessity, if I have to go to a program or function, I will buy good clothes to fit in with others.

Another respondent who is married and has a child living in a rented apartment emphasized, my choice of goods include groceries, food, health, and education of my child.

32 years old Chhetri married male with small business (clothing store) who earns 80,000 per month stated that he buys groceries and spends most of his earnings in house rent, savings for emergency use, and prefer to take his family to high end restaurants once a month.

A respondent remarked, “Yes, my purchasing items mostly include branded chocolates, premium movie tickets, cosmetics, and clothes”. Interestingly, another respondent shared, I only buy international products.

22 years male Newar studying Bachelors in Tarkeshor normally goes to shopping in local markets, because everything is affordable and convenient, and he can save more time and no worries for delivery as local markets are near from the home had response;

“My necessity, if I have to go to program or functions, I will buy. I won't go around if I don't need to. Normally, programs and functions require formal stuffs, like watch, shoes, belt, I need it on special occasions, and so I buy them if I don't have them. I would rather buy one item which is branded rather than cheaper items, branded items are durable and for its quality, quality over quantity, from my experience branded items have good material so they last longer”.

The tradition and modernity shapes the consumption practices and items. As Bourdieu mentioned in concept of habitus different class of people prefer the different items to purchase but these habits are not innate. Basic needs and essential things like food and

clothes remain same for all class level people. However, the current lower middle class and upper middle class people of Kathmandu is in upward mobility and prefer items of western style goods like automobiles, branded clothing, dining out, shopping and traveling. The purchasing items are varied between different age groups as teenagers and young preferred to buy to fit in as stated by Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption. However, married lower and middle class people preferred to prioritize health products, education, house rents, and daily needs. High Class people tend to prioritize luxury goods and services as they are unaware of the daily necessities.

4.2 Consumption Frequency

Defining consumption regularity, one should not forget the frequency of the uses of the items. For example, daily essential goods are under frequently needed things. However, non - essential goods are normally rarely purchased among low and middle class people. Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital state that people of low class regard essential goods as their utmost necessity and it is the biggest factor of livelihood. Therefore, it gets more attention. Perhaps, the low class status depending on surviving played the big factor in it. Whereas the high class people consider essential goods buying as normal and they focus on maintaining social status as a conspicuous consumption to maintain status. Hence the consumption frequency differs in case of class. Furthermore, the consumption frequency is different among different gender. Female prefer to buy more frequently than the male and urge to buy if they can afford is more on female than among male.

In this research, the researcher tried to find out the consumption frequency among several respondents sampled randomly on the basis of age, gender, and economic level.

Regarding the frequency of purchasing goods and services, respondent's response was varying from necessity to leisure and social identity.

One respondent noted, my necessity, if I have to go to a program or function, I will buy.

Another respondent answered, I buy clothes only when necessary. Fashion changes quickly, but I focus on long-term utility rather than trends.

One respondent noted, Shopping is an experience for me. I go to malls just to browse and once I see things that I like I buy. “My life my choice”. I can do anything that I want to do anytime as I have enough money to.

This divergence aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where some consumers prioritize basic needs, while others engage in shopping as a form of self-actualization or social belonging (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, Bourdieu's concept of habitus suggests that shopping behaviors are shaped by socialization and class based preferences, influencing how individuals perceive consumption. The responses regarding the frequency of purchasing goods and services reflect a range of motivations, from necessity to personal enjoyment and social identity. One respondent focuses on purchases driven by practical needs. For example, they mentioned buying items only when necessary, such as when attending a program or event. Another respondent emphasized making purchases only when required, especially with clothing. They noted that while fashion trends change rapidly, they prefer to focus on the long-term utility of items rather than chasing fleeting trends. A third respondent described shopping as more of an experience. They enjoy browsing malls and purchasing items that catch their eye, indicating that shopping is both a leisure activity and a way of expressing personal choice. This respondent also highlighted their financial freedom, suggesting that they purchase items whenever they wish, driven by their desire rather than necessity. The responses indicate a spectrum of purchasing behaviors, from practical necessity to leisurely indulgence, reflecting different priorities like utility, personal enjoyment, and social identity.

4.3 Shopping Platforms

Shopping platforms have changed over the years. Traditionally, places like Asan, Indrachowk, Bhrikutimandap and local shops used to be the shopping platforms. Slowly, the platforms added in the form of malls. The first high-end mall of the city is Bishal Bazaar Market, Bhatbhateni, and Big Marts. Before the opening of this bazaar all class people used to shop at the common places with few upper class people using the international places like Hongkong and Singapore as shopping platform. Ranging from local markets to high-end online portals play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior, influencing consumption patterns across different demographic groups. These platforms cater to a wide spectrum of purchasing motivations, from necessity to leisure and social identity, depending on the consumer's socio-economic background, gender, and age.

A young, middle-class woman, aged 24, stated: "I shop mainly on online platforms like Amazon or Instagram stores because it's quick, convenient, and they often have sales. I buy beauty products or clothes based on what's trending or what influencers recommend."

A middle-aged man from a higher-income group, aged 45, remarked: "I prefer shopping in high-end online portals like Daraz or going to luxury malls. I look for exclusive items that signal my social standing and quality."

Another respondent, a young, working-class student, aged 22, shared: "I mostly shop at local markets or budget-friendly online platforms like Daraz. I buy things I need, and I don't care about brands as long as it's affordable."

A retired woman, aged 60, mentioned: "I enjoy going to local malls for browsing. I don't always buy, but I like seeing what's new, especially home decor items."

A teenage boy, aged 17, commented: "I look for sales on electronics and gadgets at online portals like Shopmandu and Facebook online stores and sometimes in local markets. I always want to get the best deal."

These varied responses illustrate the complex relationship between shopping platforms and consumption behavior, which can be interpreted through the lenses of Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's theory of habitus and social status. Shopping platforms whether local markets, malls, high-end online portals, or budget-friendly online platforms serve as key indicators of consumption behavior and shopping patterns, reflecting diverse motivations behind consumer choices. The rise of e-commerce platforms has significantly altered shopping habits. While some respondents prefer online shopping for convenience, others still rely on physical stores for quality assurance and bargaining options. Moreover, Giddens' 1991 theory of structuration suggests that digital shopping reshapes social practices while still coexisting with traditional retail habits. The responses illustrate the complex relationship between shopping and social status, as shaped by both Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption and Bourdieu's theory of habitus. While conspicuous consumption is clearly observed in the behaviors of those purchasing exclusive luxury items or following trends, Bourdieu's theory provides deeper

insights into how individuals' consumption choices are influenced by their socio-economic background, social class, and cultural capital. Whether driven by necessity, leisure, or a desire for social recognition, the platforms chosen by consumers reflect their unique social identities, financial resources, and personal preferences. By examining these behaviors, we gain a better understanding of how shopping platforms function not just as places of transaction, but also as spaces where social identities and status are continuously negotiated and reinforced.

4.4 Brand Preferences and Consciousness

According to Erdem and Swait (2004), brand preference is shaped by brand credibility, quality, reliability and customer expectations. Brand preference emerged as a significant factor in purchase decisions. Brand preferences refer to a consumer's consistent inclination toward one particular brand over others when making purchasing decisions. This preference is shaped by various factors such as past experiences, perceptions of quality, emotional connections, social influence, and marketing strategies. Nowadays, you cannot say that you want to buy specific brand. Lots of commercials and celebrities involved in the certain products make people to buy. In the age of AI and Interaction based marketing, lots of people are shown the products on a regular basis making people willing to buy. It reflects the consumer's loyalty and trust in a specific brand, which often leads them to favor that brand even in the presence of competing alternatives. At the core of brand preference is brand perception, which encompasses the overall image and reputation a brand holds in the minds of consumers. Consumers form these perceptions based on their personal experiences with the brand's products or services, as well as external influences such as advertising, word-of-mouth, and social media. For example, a person who has had positive experiences with a particular car brand may develop a strong preference for that brand, believing it to be more reliable, durable, or prestigious than others. Another significant factor influencing brand preferences is brand loyalty, which is the result of repeated positive experiences and satisfaction. Brands that successfully connect with consumers on an emotional level tend to cultivate a sense of attachment, leading to stronger brand preference. Social factors also play a crucial role in brand preferences. Social identity theory suggests that individuals align with brands that reflect their desired social status, lifestyle, or values. For instance, a consumer may

prefer certain luxury brands because these brands symbolize success, sophistication, or exclusivity. Additionally, trends and peer influence can drive brand preferences, particularly in industries like fashion or technology, where recommendations and endorsements by influencers or friends have a substantial impact. Lastly, marketing strategies employed by brands are designed to build and reinforce brand preferences. Effective advertising campaigns, promotional offers, and customer engagement tactics all contribute to shaping consumer attitudes towards a brand, influencing purchasing decisions over time. A brand's ability to differentiate itself from competitors through innovation, quality, and customer service further strengthens consumer preference.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and social class argues that the brand preference is shaped by cultural capital and social class. Consumer from different social strata explores different brand choices to maintain social status.

One Participant shared, I only buy international brands because they last longer and reflect my personality.

One respondent also added, Brand reputation is important. I buy quality food regardless of the price.

However, one respondent claimed, I buy trendy but affordable brands, which reflect my middle class status.

A teenager respondent of 17 years old claimed, I get most of my clothes and shoes from parents and I don't buy and I am satisfied with what they provide me as I don't really focus on branded stuff as I don't want my parents to suffer as they cost more. I would rather buy the things or brand I want when I am earning myself.

Contrastingly, one stated I would rather buy one item which is branded rather than cheaper items, branded items are durable and for its quality, qualities over quantity, from my experience branded items have good material and they last longer.

The 29 years male fitness trainer earns fifty thousand more monthly had conscious response

“Brand is very important to me. I only buy branded clothes, so they don’t get damaged, and I don’t have to buy them repeatedly. Spending habits are

becoming a fashion and a way to make others jealous, which society pushes. I don't feel any significant changes because it depends on our thinking and what individuals have faced in their lives. I live a simple life with high thinking, and my ability to move up the economic ladder depends on the work I do and how much I save for my future”.

Veblen's 1989 theory of conspicuous consumption explains how higher income groups purchase luxury brands as a status symbol, while Bourdieu's 1984 cultural capital theory suggests that brand preferences are tied to social class and identity. For example, the respondent who said, "I buy trendy but affordable brands, which reflect my middle class status," illustrates how middle-class consumption is influenced by practical needs and social norms. This person is aware of the economic limitations of their class and prefers affordable, trendy brands that allow them to maintain an appearance of social respectability while staying within their financial means. This aligns with Bourdieu's idea that social class influences purchasing choices. By purchasing these affordable brands, the respondent can project a sense of belonging to the middle class without overextending financially. The 17-year-old teenager who stated, "I get most of my clothes and shoes from parents, and I don't buy and I am satisfied with what they provide me as I don't really focus on branded stuff," reflects a different aspect of social class and cultural capital. This teenager's lack of emphasis on branded goods aligns with a habitus shaped by a lack of disposable income and a sense of practicality. They express satisfaction with the items their parents provide, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to consumption, and their perspective on buying branded items only when they can afford them reflects a future-oriented approach to cultural capital. This indicates that the teenager's habitus is shaped by their family's financial position, which influences their value of material goods. Their preference for non-branded items now suggests that their social identity is not yet strongly tied to consumption or status signaling, but rather to family norms and their desire to avoid placing a financial burden on their parents. Finally, the respondent who said, "I would rather buy one item which is branded rather than cheaper items, branded items are durable and for its quality, qualities over quantity," provides another example of how brand preference can be associated with quality and longevity over quantity. This individual's choice reflects an investment-oriented approach, where they prioritize long-term value and durability over immediate satisfaction from cheaper, less durable

items. Their preference for branded goods could suggest a middle or upper-middle class background where quality and sustainability are valued as indicators of social distinction. In the context of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, this respondent may see branded goods as symbols of higher status and refined taste, reinforcing their social identity in a context where quality is seen as a reflection of personal values and cultural sophistication.

Together, these responses highlight the intersection of social class, cultural capital, and conspicuous consumption. Veblen's theory provides insights into how luxury and high-status brands are used to signal wealth and social distinction, particularly in the case of the respondents who prioritize reputation and international brands. Bourdieu's theory, on the other hand, illustrates how social class and habitus influence consumption patterns, as seen in the responses from middle-class individuals who opt for affordable, trendy brands or teenagers who prioritize practicality over status-driven consumption. For higher-income groups, like those buying international brands or expensive food, brand preference is largely tied to status signaling consuming not only for utility but to project a certain lifestyle. Meanwhile, those from middle-class backgrounds or lower-income groups might focus on practicality, affordability, and value, with brand preferences shaped by their financial limitations and the desire to maintain social inclusion without overextending their resources.

4.5 Budgeting and Financial Strategies

Consumers exhibit different financial approaches with some prioritizing savings and others indulging in discretionary spending. Budgeting refers to the process of creating a plan to manage your income and expenses over a specific period, typically monthly or yearly. It involves setting financial goals, estimating income, categorizing expenses, and tracking spending to ensure that resources are allocated effectively. The purpose of budgeting is to control spending, save for the future, and avoid unnecessary debt. Financial strategies are broader plans or approaches for managing money, investments, and other financial resources to achieve long-term goals. These strategies may include decisions about budgeting, saving, investing, tax planning, retirement planning, and risk management. A financial strategy typically aligns with personal or business objectives, such as building wealth, ensuring financial security, or achieving specific financial milestones like buying a house or funding education.

This is among the major factors that determine the consumer behavior and spending patterns. In this variable, the researcher identified different age group, gender, employed, and unemployed as well as married/unmarried respondents to find out the spending pattern among these divisions.

A consumer noted, I shop impulsively. If I like something, I buy it even its expensive.

Another admitted, I set a budget before shopping to avoid unnecessary expenses.

Also a respondent admitted, there are times when I need to buy something but don't have the money, so I manage it through borrowing.

Similarly, another respondent added, I used to buy more expensive items when I was single, but now I focus on family expenses and savings.

Another respondent added, I only buy when there is extra money. Except for medicines and food, the brand is not important.

Richard Thaler's work in Behavioral Economics focuses on how psychological factors influence economic decision-making. It challenges the assumption that individuals always act rationally and instead highlights biases, impulsive behaviors, and inconsistent preferences.

The respondent who mentions "I shop impulsively". If I like something, I buy it even if it's expensive," demonstrates a classic example of present bias, a concept Thaler discusses. This bias leads individuals to prioritize immediate gratification (the pleasure of purchasing something now) over long-term financial goals (such as saving money). Another respondent, who "sets a budget before shopping to avoid unnecessary expenses," reflects a more rational decision-making process. This aligns with Thaler's idea of nudging, where consumers can be encouraged to make better financial decisions by setting boundaries or limits, like budgets.

The respondent who says, "there are times when I need to buy something but don't have the money, so I manage it through borrowing," points to a reliance on credit, which can be seen as an example of mental accounting—a term Thaler uses to explain how people tend to treat different types of money or credit differently, sometimes making less rational financial choices based on emotional or contextual factors.

The respondent who says, "I used to buy more expensive items when I was single, but now I focus on family expenses and savings," hints at a shift in priorities related to social roles and responsibilities. Bourdieu's concept of social capital suggests that one's financial decisions might be influenced by family expectations or societal pressures. Additionally, cultural capital could play a role, as individuals often modify spending patterns based on the values and social norms of their family or peer group. The respondent stating, "I only buy when there is extra money. Except for medicines and food, the brand is not important," reveals a more pragmatic approach, emphasizing economic capital (the available financial resources) over symbolic capital (status through consumption). This individual appears to distinguish between necessary spending (such as food and medicine) and discretionary spending, valuing practicality and savings over luxury or brand names.

The respondent, who admits to buying things impulsively, especially if they are expensive, could be engaging in a form of conspicuous consumption. The desire to own items that convey a sense of wealth or sophistication is embedded in Veblen's analysis of consumption as a tool for social signaling. This behavior is typically seen as an attempt to display a certain lifestyle or to elevate one's social standing, regardless of the financial strain it may cause.

The shift from buying expensive items when single to focusing on family and savings could also reflect a shift from conspicuous consumption to more prudential consumption as family responsibilities increase. In Veblen's framework, this could be seen as a shift in priorities from seeking social prestige through material goods to securing financial stability for the family unit.

4.6 Social Influence on Consumer Decisions

Social Influence plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, as evident from peer recommendations, social media trends, and societal expectations. Nowadays, the use of social media and platforms has increased tremendously. Therefore, people are easily swayed by the advertisements that are featured in such platforms. Moreover, the people of Kathmandu are from the diverse social background with rich culture. This has allowed people to celebrate lots of festivals and participate in many social gatherings. Additionally, the Goffman's 1959 dramaturgy suggests that consumption

choices help individuals manage their social image. As Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption states people are in upward mobility and do anything in order to maintain their social status.

Teenagers and female consumers are likely to be influenced by society and surroundings while making the decisions to purchase goods and services. In addition, the extensive development of AI based marketing tools, social media, and tremendous rise of fashion sense have influenced the consumer decisions.

A respondent highlighted, I often buy products I see on Instagram. Influencers create a sense of trust.

One respondent claimed, when middle class buy luxury goods, I think it is for showoff, to show on social media and post it.

Another remarked, if my friends have a particular brand, I feel pressured to get it too.

Another responded similarly, some places and brands feel necessary to fit in.

The respondent who says, "I often buy products I see on Instagram. Influencers create a sense of trust," illustrates the concept of social performance on digital platforms. In today's world, influencers act as key figures in shaping individuals' purchasing decisions, helping them manage their social image by purchasing items that are deemed trendy or desirable within their social circles. This reflects Goffman's idea that consumption decisions are part of the "performance" individuals put on to project a particular identity, whether that's aligning with influencers or social trends. The statement, "If my friends have a particular brand, I feel pressured to get it too," reflects how consumption choices are influenced by the desire to maintain a consistent social image within a group. This aligns with Goffman's idea that people adjust their behaviors, including purchasing decisions, to fit into the roles expected of them within their social circle.

One respondent noted, "When middle class buy luxury goods, I think it is for showoff, to show on social media and post it." This statement reflects Veblen's theory, where individuals purchase expensive goods to signal their social status and wealth to others. In this case, social media serves as a platform for conspicuous consumption, where

individuals showcase their possessions, potentially as a way to demonstrate their higher social standing or aspirations. The respondent who said, "some places and brands feel necessary to fit in," also echoes Veblen's theory. The pressure to buy certain brands or shop at particular locations reflects the idea that consumption is often about maintaining social alignment or status within a specific group. For some individuals, purchasing specific goods or brands becomes a way to gain or reinforce their place within a social hierarchy.

The respondent who mentioned "influencers create a sense of trust" highlights how influencers on platforms like Instagram play a central role in shaping purchasing decisions. This trust is cultivated through a combination of social proof, aspirational content, and the perceived authenticity of influencers. The result is that consumers are more likely to make purchases based on recommendations or endorsements from influencers, even if the items they purchase are not essential, reflecting the impact of social influence on individual behavior.

Findings

The study revealed several key insights into consumer behavior and spending patterns across various demographics. In terms of purchasing items, respondents indicated a mix of both impulse and planned buying behaviors. Many consumers purchase items based on immediate desires or social influence, with social media playing a significant role in shaping decisions. Purchasing platforms such as online stores, particularly through mobile apps and social media, have become increasingly popular, reflecting the shift towards digital shopping. Influencers on platforms like Instagram were particularly noted for creating a sense of trust and driving purchases. Brand preferences are notably driven by both social expectations and the desire for status, especially among teenagers and females, who are more likely to be influenced by their peers or societal trends. There is also a notable division between consumers who prioritize brand preference and consciousness, with some focusing on the quality and value of products, while others prioritize aesthetics and luxury as symbols of social status. In budgeting and financing, respondents reported a varied approach, with some focusing on strict budgeting to avoid overspending, while others showed tendencies toward borrowing to fund purchases, especially for luxury goods. Finally, social

influence on consumer decisions was a dominant factor, particularly for middle-class consumers who were seen to purchase luxury goods more for the sake of social display rather than personal need.

Conclusion

Consumer behavior and spending patterns are heavily influenced by a combination of social, psychological, and financial factors. The rise of social media and digital platforms has significantly shaped purchasing decisions, with consumers increasingly turning to influencers and peer groups for guidance. Brand preferences reflect a mix of conscious decision-making and a desire to maintain social status, particularly in the context of luxury goods. Budgeting strategies are employed inconsistently, with some consumers striving to manage finances effectively, while others succumb to social pressures, often using credit or borrowing to fulfill purchasing desires. The influence of social factors, from peer pressure to social media trends, plays a pivotal role in modern consumer choices, indicating that consumer behavior is as much about social interaction and status as it is about personal preferences and financial planning.

CHAPTER V

CLASS DISPARITIES AND MOBILITY

One of the most evident aspects of class disparity in Kathmandu is the stark contrast in consumption priorities between different socio-economic groups. Respondents from lower-income backgrounds emphasized necessity-driven consumption, highlighting their focus on affordability and essential goods. For these individuals, spending is primarily oriented toward fulfilling basic needs such as food, healthcare, and housing, often leaving little room for discretionary spending. This aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where individuals prioritize basic physiological and safety needs before seeking higher-order desires such as luxury goods or status symbols (Maslow, 1943). The consumption patterns of lower-income consumers in Kathmandu reflect a more practical and survival-oriented approach, influenced by limited financial resources. In contrast, the upper-middle class in Kathmandu has more disposable income and thus demonstrates a greater tendency toward symbolic consumption, using consumption as a marker of social status and identity. For example, the purchasing of cars, donations to temples, and spending on luxury vacations are significant markers of status within this socio-economic group. These expenditures are often not driven by necessity but rather by the desire to signify upward mobility and to reinforce social distinction. According to Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (1899), individuals in higher social strata use luxury goods and high-end services to signal wealth and success to others. By purchasing expensive items or engaging in high-status activities, these individuals display their social standing and differentiate themselves from lower classes. This consumption is not only about material goods but also about projecting an image of social superiority.

Similarly, the middle class in Kathmandu is often caught between necessity-driven consumption and aspirations for upward mobility. These consumers, while focusing on family expenses and basic needs, occasionally indulge in branded goods or services that reflect their aspirations. This behavior aligns with Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which suggests that individuals in the middle class use consumption as a way to signal cultural competence and aspiration to higher social strata (Bourdieu, 1984). Middle-class consumers often perform a balancing act: they seek to

maintain social legitimacy and build their reputation within their community, yet they are constrained by their limited income. As Bourdieu explains, the middle class is constantly engaged in a struggle to distinguish itself from the working class without the financial resources of the upper class.

The dynamics of class disparities and mobility in Kathmandu can be defined under three key indicators: economic constraints and consumption priorities, the role of education and employment, and social perception as an Ijjat Economy. Economic constraints shape consumption behaviors, particularly within lower-income groups, who focus primarily on essential needs and affordable goods. The role of education and employment is central to the middle class, who rely on education as a tool for upward mobility and the acquisition of cultural capital. Higher levels of education and employment allow individuals to aspire to better lifestyles and increase their opportunities to engage in symbolic consumption. Finally, social perception, often referred to as the Ijjat Economy in South Asian contexts, plays a critical role in shaping consumer behavior. Ijjat, or honor, is a vital social currency, and individuals often engage in consumption behaviors that align with societal expectations in order to maintain or enhance their social standing. This can lead to the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption, where people purchase goods not for their intrinsic value but to signal their status and maintain their place within the social hierarchy.

Class disparities in Kathmandu are reflected in diverse consumption patterns, where lower-income groups focus on necessity-driven consumption, while upper-middle and middle-class groups often engage in symbolic and aspirational consumption to reflect their social standing. The interplay of economic resources, education, employment, and social perception all influence how individuals navigate the consumption landscape, highlighting the significant role that social status and identity play in shaping consumer behavior. These dynamics illustrate the broader socio-economic structure that governs consumption in Kathmandu, where each class performs its social roles through distinct consumption practices.

5.1 Economic Constraints and Consumption Priorities

The economic constraints heavily influence the consumption priorities. Pierre Bourdieu's theory helps explain these disparities, as individuals from lower-income

backgrounds have limited access to financial resources, restricting their ability to participate in high-end consumer culture. The economic constraints that shape consumer behavior, forcing lower-income individuals to make calculated financial decisions. These financial limitations often result in a focus on survival-based consumption, where the priority is placed on purchasing goods and services that directly contribute to their basic needs, such as food, healthcare, and housing, rather than discretionary spending or luxury items. According to Bourdieu's concept of economic capital, those with limited financial resources must direct their available capital toward meeting immediate needs, rather than investing in cultural or symbolic capital that would signal social status or allow for upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1984). This constraint leads to the practice of necessity-driven consumption, where the primary focus is on securing functional products that satisfy immediate requirements rather than indulging in more expensive or status-signaling goods.

For lower-income individuals, the lack of economic flexibility also means that their participation in the broader consumer culture is often limited by what they can afford. In Bourdieu's terms, these individuals experience a form of cultural exclusion, where they are unable to fully partake in the consumer practices that shape social hierarchies and norms. As a result, their consumption choices are often driven by pragmatic considerations rather than aspirational ones. For example, purchasing decisions are influenced by sales, discounts, and price comparisons, with the understanding that luxury and branded items are often out of reach. Bourdieu's concept of social capital also plays a role here—individuals from lower-income backgrounds may be excluded from the networks and social circles that have access to higher-end consumer goods or services, further entrenching their economic and social position.

45 years male unmarried businessman, brick factory, family business, involved for 5 years masters degree graduates coming from Dharan, Itahari earning more than million annually had somewhat different response.

“my shopping and spending habits have changed, due to my age factors, in my 20s I had not much money I would shop in local markets, I would buy cds, vcds in 30s I went hiking a lot, a habit. I think a lot of my savings went to hiking to places like Annapurna base camp, Phoksundo etc. I have been to Thailand, Singapore, Bali, India, Indonesia for vacations. However, priorities have change in my 40s as I have to focus more on my business, and more focused financially, and also focused on saving for retirement in 60s”.

In contrast, individuals from higher-income backgrounds are often not constrained by the same financial limitations, giving them more room to engage in symbolic consumption—purchasing luxury goods and services to project status and reinforce their social position. For them, consumption becomes a way to acquire symbolic capital, which is crucial for maintaining social distinctions. This access to symbolic consumption allows them to distinguish themselves from lower-income groups, perpetuating social hierarchies. They are more likely to engage in behaviors that signal their economic success, such as buying expensive cars, luxury watches, and designer clothing, without the same financial strain experienced by lower-income consumers. These groups are also able to invest in experiences, such as international travel or fine dining, which further reinforce their social status and sense of belonging within the upper echelons of society.

One respondent expressed, in our household, we plan our expenses carefully. We buy only what we need and we prioritize food, rent and education over luxury items.

Another respondent added that, middle class rent payments take most of their income. Lower class has to worry about basic fulfillment like education and health.

One respondent said, I prefer quality over price. Buying high end brands and dining at expensive places is not just about consumption its about maintaining a lifestyle and social status.

Similarly a respondent stated, when it comes to upper class, buying things the desire is normal, when you have facilities to do so, why to buy cheap things? They live a luxurious life, happily.

One respondent mentioned, Higher class has access to almost all the top notch resources... Middle class tend to balance... for lower class, choices are much narrowed down.

These responses underscores the economic constraints that shape consumer behavior, forcing lower income individuals to make calculated financial decisions. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital helps explain these disparities, as individuals from lower income background have limited access to financial resources,

restricting their ability to participate in high end consumer culture. In contrast affluent respondents expressed a more flexible and aspirational approach to spending. This aligns with Thorstein Veblen's (1899) concept of conspicuous consumption, where individuals in higher economic strata use consumption as a means to signal their wealth and reinforce their class position. Similarly, the respondent who stated, "When it comes to upper class, buying things, the desire is normal. When you have facilities to do so, why buy cheap things? They live a luxurious life, happily," highlights the mindset of the upper class, where access to financial resources allows for unrestrained consumption. The desire for luxury is normalized, and for the wealthy, buying high-end goods is often seen as a natural extension of their lifestyle. This response ties into Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, where individuals in higher social classes indulge in luxury as a way to differentiate themselves from lower classes and reinforce their superior social standing. The idea of "living a luxurious life" without concern for cost is a reflection of economic abundance, where financial constraints do not limit consumption choices.

These responses reveal that socio-economic status plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior, with distinct differences in how individuals prioritize their spending. Lower-income individuals are focused on fulfilling basic needs, while the upper class enjoys a lifestyle of luxury consumption that reinforces social status. The middle class, however, is caught in a balancing act, where aspirations for upward mobility are often tempered by financial constraints. These findings highlight the complex relationship between income, social status, and consumption choices, emphasizing the influence of economic capital and social expectations on purchasing behaviors.

5.2 The Role of Education and Employment in Social Mobility

The ability to move between classes was strongly linked to education and employment opportunities. Respondents who had successfully transitioned from lower to middle class status often credited their educational achievements and career growth. Over the years, the education and quality employment opportunities have been instrumental in shaping the status of any individuals. Education, as a form of human capital, provides individuals with the skills and qualifications needed to access better-paying jobs, which in turn opens up opportunities for upward social mobility.

Similarly, employment in sectors with higher wages and more benefits plays a key role in improving one's financial situation and social standing. Respondents emphasized that their ability to obtain better jobs was a direct result of their education, allowing them to afford goods and services previously out of reach.

The spending patterns of the people living in Kathmandu changed in the past 15 years. The foreign employment opportunities drastically changed the social hierarchy. Lower-class people shifted towards Lower Middle Class, and similarly, Lower Middle Class people shifted to Upper Middle Class. This shift in social status was facilitated by better-paying foreign employment opportunities, often in countries like the Gulf or Southeast Asia, which allowed migrants to send remittances back home. These remittances have been a significant driver of economic mobility, allowing families to improve their living standards and invest in education, healthcare, and other aspects of well-being. The increase in financial resources has not only improved the socio-economic status of individuals but has also contributed to the rise in consumer culture. With higher disposable income, individuals in the lower middle class and upper middle class have been able to afford branded goods, luxury items, and international travel, altering their consumption behaviors. The shift in status means that the spending patterns also changed, with individuals now more likely to purchase higher-value goods, often signaling their new social position. The changing spending habits and the influx of remittances are important indicators of the increasing role of global employment in shaping local economies and social structures.

One respondent highlighted, most of the money from my family is spent on my education and other utility bills.

Another respondent claimed, I worked hard to get a scholarship, and that degree opened doors for me. Now, I own my business, and my spending habits have changed significantly. I no longer worry about basic needs but focus on investments and savings.

Similarly, another respondent stated, despite having a degree it's still difficult to break into the upper class. The best jobs are reserved for those with strong connections and family wealth.

These responses align with Giddens' (1991) structuration theory, which emphasizes how individuals navigate structural constraints through agency. Education, in this case serves as a crucial factor enabling social mobility by providing better job opportunities and increasing financial independence. However, other respondents highlighted barriers that limit upward mobility. There is a sentiment that reflects Marx's (1867) concept of class struggle, where structural inequalities create persistent barriers that make mobility difficult, even for those who possess the required skills and qualifications.

The respondent who said, "Most of the money from my family is spent on my education and other utility bills," demonstrates the significant financial burden that education can place on lower or middle-class families. This reflects the idea that education is often prioritized as an essential investment, especially when individuals are striving to improve their socio-economic status. However, the focus on education and basic utilities suggests that other forms of consumption, such as luxury goods or discretionary spending, are deprioritized in favor of more immediate financial needs. This aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), where individuals are more likely to prioritize basic needs such as education and utility expenses over non-essential consumption when resources are limited.

The respondent who claimed, "I worked hard to get a scholarship, and that degree opened doors for me. Now, I own my business, and my spending habits have changed significantly. I no longer worry about basic needs but focus on investments and savings," provides an example of how education can serve as a catalyst for upward mobility. In this case, the respondent's educational achievements, supported by a scholarship, allowed them to access opportunities that led to business ownership. This shift in financial situation has altered their spending habits, as they no longer worry about meeting basic needs, and can now focus on long-term goals like investments and savings. This reflects the concept of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), where access to education and the ability to leverage it for entrepreneurship provides individuals with the resources necessary to break free from financial constraints. It also highlights how education and hard work can open doors to new economic opportunities, allowing individuals to change their consumption patterns from survival-driven spending to more wealth-building activities.

Finally, the respondent who said, "Despite having a degree it's still difficult to break into the upper class. The best jobs are reserved for those with strong connections and family wealth," highlights the social barriers that persist even when individuals have formal education and qualifications. This response points to the persistence of social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), where family wealth and connections play a critical role in gaining access to higher-paying and prestigious jobs, even in the presence of formal qualifications. Despite the respondent's education, they feel that the upper class remains out of reach due to their lack of familial ties to influential networks. This reflects the idea that social mobility is not just a matter of education or qualifications but is also strongly influenced by networks, social connections, and family status, which can create a significant barrier to breaking into higher social strata.

These responses illustrate the multifaceted nature of social mobility, where education plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals to rise through the socio-economic ladder. However, they also reveal the limitations of individual effort in overcoming entrenched class structures. While education and entrepreneurship can significantly improve one's financial standing, the persistence of social barriers—such as the need for family wealth and connections—remains a significant challenge for those seeking to break into higher social classes. This underscores the complexity of social mobility, where both economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) must be navigated for success.

5.3 Social Perceptions and Class Identity

The social perceptions and class identity heavily influence the consumer behavior and spending pattern. Social perceptions and class identity play a crucial role in shaping individuals' behaviors, interactions, and overall experience within society. Class identity refers to how people perceive themselves and others based on socio-economic factors such as income, occupation, education, and wealth. In many societies, including Kathmandu, these perceptions shape not only an individual's personal sense of self but also how they are viewed by others within their social environment. These social distinctions often influence the opportunities available to individuals, their access to resources, and the way they are treated in social and professional settings.

Ijjateconomy is crucial in finding the class identity and social perceptions. The ijjat Economy refers to a socio-economic framework where social respect, honor, and prestige play a significant role in shaping individuals' economic behaviors and decisions. In this system, economic activities and consumption choices are often driven by the desire to maintain or elevate one's social status and reputation within a community. The concept is particularly relevant in societies where social approval and personal dignity (referred to as "ijjat") are highly valued, and individuals may engage in conspicuous consumption, invest in visible assets, or undertake certain social practices to gain or preserve respect. The 'ijjat' Economy emphasizes that economic decisions are not solely based on material need or financial gain, but also on the need to fit in, show off status, or impress others to maintain one's honor and standing in society.

In Kathmandu, like many other cities, class identity is often visible through consumption patterns, lifestyle choices, and even the language spoken. Class distinctions are drawn between the upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, and working class, with each group having its own set of expectations, values, and behaviors that define their place within the social hierarchy. The upper class, which is often associated with significant wealth and access to resources, is typically seen as the ruling elite. They have access to international education, luxury goods, and services, and their social identity is often defined by their ability to travel abroad, own multiple properties, and participate in high-status social circles. In contrast, the middle class, which constitutes a significant portion of Kathmandu's population, is defined by its aspirations for upward mobility. They work in stable government or private-sector jobs and tend to place a high value on education, career advancement, and economic stability. For this group, consumption choices are often focused on balancing practical needs with aspirations for a better life. For example, many middle-class families prioritize spending on education, healthcare, and occasionally indulge in branded goods or luxury items to signal their social status, even if they cannot afford a lavish lifestyle. The lower-income groups, often referred to as the working class or lower class, have a different set of social expectations. In Kathmandu, these individuals often focus on meeting basic needs such as food, shelter, and education. Their consumption is more pragmatic, with a focus on affordability and essential goods rather than luxury or status symbols.

Despite being economically disadvantaged, the lower class still faces social pressures and class stigmatization—the idea that they are seen as less successful or less worthy of respect in the eyes of the upper classes. In Kathmandu, the concept of social mobility is also a significant factor in how class identity is constructed and perceived. Many people from lower socio-economic backgrounds aspire to move into the middle class, and education plays a central role in this. Access to education and employment opportunities is seen as a way to break free from the cycle of poverty and to achieve a higher social standing. However, despite these aspirations, social barriers persist. As one respondent mentioned, "the best jobs are reserved for those with strong connections and family wealth." This reflects the social capital theory, where networks and familial connections often play a critical role in an individual's ability to access higher social strata. For many, this means that social mobility is not just about individual merit but also about navigating complex social and cultural networks that favor the wealthy and connected. In the context of Kathmandu, social perception also intertwines with cultural traditions and practices. For example, caste plays a significant role in how class identity is constructed and perceived. Though Nepal has made strides toward equality, the remnants of the caste system continue to influence social interactions and the way individuals are perceived based on their caste and class. People from higher castes are often associated with greater wealth and social privilege, while lower-caste individuals may face systemic discrimination, even in modern times.

19 years male studying bachelors' degree had response;

“Good brands often suggest you have money, but even if you're poor and spend a lot, people might assume you come from a stable and wealthy family. Consumer habits are linked to social status because the higher your salary, the more spending choices you have. In big, branded malls, you can see people from wealthier classes spending without hesitation, while for the middle class, it's more about managing money and expenses. For the richer class, it's often just about choice, whether the items are expensive or cheap”.

One respondent noted, there are places in Kathmandu where I feel out of place because I can't afford the lifestyle that people there have. It's like an invisible wall separating classes.

Another respondent mentioned, Rich people get married in five star hotels. Middle class use party palaces or temples to save money. While another respondent added, for us in the middle class, we try to meet the standards of the upper class.

Another respondent also said, when middle class buy luxury goods, I think it's for show off, to show on social media and post it.

The first respondent's statement, "There are places in Kathmandu where I feel out of place because I can't afford the lifestyle that people there have. It's like an invisible wall separating classes," highlights the sense of social segregation that exists between different socio-economic groups. In Kathmandu, like in many other urban centers, certain areas are perceived as exclusive domains for the wealthy, where the high cost of living, luxury goods, and expensive services create an invisible barrier between the upper and lower classes. This sense of exclusion can have profound psychological effects, as individuals in lower income groups may feel alienated or inferior when exposed to lifestyles they cannot afford. This phenomenon is consistent with Bourdieu's concept of social capital (1984), where access to certain spaces, resources, and social circles is largely determined by one's economic and cultural background. In this case, the respondent feels the social "wall" due to the discrepancy between their economic reality and the wealth of those around them.

The second respondent's observation, "Rich people get married in five-star hotels. Middle class use party palaces or temples to save money," underscores the different cultural practices and spending habits of various classes. For the upper class, events like weddings are opportunities for public display of wealth and status, often held in luxurious venues such as five-star hotels. These venues serve not only as a place to celebrate but also as a symbolic display of their high socio-economic status. In contrast, the middle class may opt for more affordable venues, such as party palaces or temples, reflecting their need to balance social expectations with financial constraints. This is an example of symbolic consumption (Veblen, 1899), where the act of spending and the choice of venue convey not just a celebration of an event, but also a message about one's position in society. The middle class, in this case, performs a balancing act, maintaining their social presence while remaining financially responsible.

The third respondent, "For us in the middle class, we try to meet the standards of the upper class," reflects the aspirational consumption observed in the middle class. Many people in this socio-economic group strive to emulate the behaviors, lifestyles, and consumption patterns of the upper class, even if their income does not allow them to fully participate in this way of life. This often manifests in the purchase of luxury goods, branded clothing, or participation in experiences that signal upward mobility or sophistication. This aspiration aligns with the idea of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), where individuals invest in behaviors, practices, and goods that they believe will elevate their social standing, even if these investments stretch their financial resources.

The final statement, "When middle class buy luxury goods, I think it's for show off, to show on social media and post it," reflects Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption (1899), which explains how individuals buy luxury items, not out of necessity, but to signal their wealth or status to others. In the context of modern-day Kathmandu, social media plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. The middle class, often constrained by limited resources, may engage in the consumption of high-end products or services as a way to project a certain image or lifestyle to their social network. Social media platforms provide an outlet for individuals to display their consumption choices, showcasing luxury items or exclusive experiences as a form of social signaling. This behavior can also be seen as a reaction to the pressure of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), where individuals compare their lives to others in their social group, often leading to a desire to keep up with the perceived higher standards set by the more affluent.

This reinforces Goffman's 1956 dramaturgical perspective, which suggests that individuals perform their class identity through social interactions, using material possessions and consumer behaviors to shape perceptions. On the other hand, individuals from lower economic background expressed a sense of exclusion from certain social spaces. This highlights how class identity is not just about income but also about social belonging, reinforcing Weber's (1922) concept of status groups, where consumption patterns and lifestyle choices demarcate social divisions.

Findings

Economic constraints significantly influence consumption priorities, with lower-income groups prioritizing basic needs such as food, rent, and education, often limiting their ability to indulge in discretionary or luxury spending. Respondents from lower-income backgrounds reported focusing their financial resources on essential goods and services, indicating a practical and necessity-driven approach to consumption. In contrast, individuals from higher income brackets have the freedom to prioritize luxury items, vacations, and other non-essential purchases. This divide reinforces the stark contrast in consumption habits based on economic capabilities. As such, economic constraints directly impact the consumption patterns of various social classes, with lower-income groups constrained by limited financial resources and the upper class having more flexibility to make lifestyle choices that signify their wealth and social status.

Education and employment play a crucial role in social mobility in Kathmandu. Many respondents who have moved from lower to middle-class status emphasized the importance of education and career advancement in improving their socio-economic position. Education, particularly in the form of scholarships and degrees, provided them with the opportunity to access better jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, which improved their financial situation. However, despite educational achievements, barriers related to social capital—such as connections and family wealth—continue to limit upward mobility, especially for those from lower or middle-income backgrounds. This suggests that while education remains a critical factor in improving social status, access to networks and family wealth also plays an essential role in facilitating social mobility.

Social perceptions and class identity are deeply intertwined in Kathmandu, where individuals' social standing is often shaped by their consumption patterns and lifestyle choices. Respondents from different socio-economic backgrounds reflected on how their social identity is shaped by their financial status. For instance, upper-class individuals often engage in conspicuous consumption, purchasing luxury items and hosting events in high-end venues to signal their wealth and social position. On the other hand, middle-class individuals strive to meet the standards of the upper class, often through symbolic consumption or by focusing on family expenses and

education. For those in lower-income groups, the pressure to conform to societal expectations often leads to a sense of being "out of place" in wealthier areas. Social perceptions thus significantly influence class identity and the way individuals define themselves within the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

The chapter on class disparities and mobility highlights the complex relationship between economic constraints, education and employment opportunities, and social perceptions in shaping individuals' class identities and mobility. Economic limitations restrict lower-income groups' consumption choices, making it difficult for them to access luxury goods and services. In contrast, higher-income groups enjoy greater flexibility in their consumption decisions, reinforcing their social status. Education and employment remain pivotal in facilitating social mobility, with many respondents noting the importance of acquiring knowledge and skills to improve their socio-economic standing. However, even with educational achievements, barriers such as social connections and family wealth persist, limiting the ability of many to break into higher social classes. Finally, social perceptions and class identity in Kathmandu are influenced by visible consumption patterns, with individuals using material goods and lifestyle choices to signal their social status. These dynamics contribute to the perpetuation of class divisions and social inequality, making it clear that while social mobility is possible, it is often constrained by deeply ingrained social and economic structure.

CHAPTER VI

CLASS IDENTITY AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Class identity refers to the sense of belonging or self-perception that individuals have based on their socio-economic status. It is how people view themselves and are viewed by others in relation to their economic standing, social roles, and access to resources. Class identity is shaped by an individual's lifestyle, consumption patterns, occupation, education, and family background. It can be fluid, shifting over time as people move across social strata or as societal dynamics change. In a society like Kathmandu, class identity is influenced by a combination of economic capital (income, wealth), cultural capital (education, skills), and social capital (networks, family ties) (Bourdieu, 1984). How individuals define their class identity often influences how they perceive others and how they are treated in return. Social hierarchy, on the other hand, refers to the structured system of social stratification in which society is divided into distinct classes based on certain attributes such as wealth, occupation, education, and power. It establishes a ranking system where some groups have more access to resources, opportunities, and privileges than others. Social hierarchy can manifest in various forms—economic (rich vs. poor), cultural (elite vs. lower status), and even through historical structures like caste, which are still prevalent in countries like Nepal (Bhattarai, 2008). Individuals purchase goods and services to signal their social standing that reflects in Veblen's 1899 theory of conspicuous consumption too. The consumer behavior might help create an illusion of mobility, structural barriers remain to upward mobility.

Class identity is often formed through both internal and external forces. Internally, individuals shape their own identities based on personal experiences, social mobility, and aspirations. For instance, someone from a working-class background may aspire to move into the middle class by investing in education or securing better job opportunities. As they achieve these goals, their class identity might evolve, and they may begin to adopt new consumption patterns, lifestyle choices, and behaviors associated with their new social standing. This is consistent with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital, which highlights how individuals cultivate new tastes, preferences, and practices as they ascend socially. Externally, class identity is shaped by society's view of individuals based on their perceived socio-economic status.

Social institutions such as education, media, and family play a significant role in reinforcing class distinctions. People are often judged by their job titles, places of residence, and possessions, which are seen as indicators of social standing. In Kathmandu, certain neighborhoods are associated with upper-class status, while others are considered working-class or lower-middle-class areas. This geographical division further reinforces class identity, linking physical spaces to particular lifestyles and consumption habits (Gellner, 2005).

Social hierarchy defines the power dynamics within a society, determining who holds influence and access to resources. In societies like Kathmandu, the class hierarchy is influenced by various factors, including caste, family background, and economic status. Historically, individuals from higher castes or wealthier families have held more power, and this legacy continues to affect social mobility and class identity today (Bista, 1991). Those in the upper classes enjoy access to better education, high-paying jobs, and influential social networks that help them maintain or enhance their social status. Conversely, the lower-income groups face systemic barriers that restrict their upward mobility, creating a persistent class divide.

6.1 Consumer Preferences and Choices

Consumer Preferences and Choices explores into the relationship between social class and the consumption choices individuals make. This section examines how a person's social position influences the products they buy, the brands they align with, and the consumption patterns that define their lifestyle. Consumer behavior is not merely about purchasing goods or services for practical reasons; it is deeply tied to one's identity and social status, and these preferences often reflect broader societal hierarchies. At the heart of this discussion is the idea that social class shapes consumption choices. People from different social strata tend to prioritize different types of products. Those in higher social classes often have the financial means to indulge in luxury goods, rare experiences, and high-end services. These may include designer clothing, fine dining, luxury cars, or exclusive memberships. For these individuals, consumption is often a means of signaling status, wealth, and success (Veblen, 1899). On the other hand, individuals from lower social classes may focus on practicality, purchasing essential goods that offer value and affordability. Their choices are often shaped by necessity rather than the desire for prestige or distinction (Bourdieu, 1984).

This divide in consumer preferences can also be understood through the concept of cultural capital, a term introduced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Cultural capital refers to the non-financial assets—such as education, knowledge, and tastes—that help individuals gain social mobility and distinction. People with high cultural capital often select goods and services that reflect their taste, sophistication, and educational background. For instance, they might choose organic foods, art, or attend theater performances, not merely for enjoyment but as a way to express their cultural refinement (Bourdieu, 1984). In contrast, those with lower cultural capital might gravitate toward more accessible or mass-produced items, as their consumption choices are often more aligned with functionality than cultural signaling (Bourdieu, 1984). The role of branding is also a critical component in understanding consumer preferences. In today's society, brands have become symbols of identity. The products people choose are often intertwined with the social image they wish to project. This is particularly true in a consumer-driven society, where products are not just purchased for their utility, but for the status and identity they help build. For example, owning a high-end smartphone, wearing designer clothing, or driving a luxury car may indicate that an individual belongs to a particular social group or is aspiring to a higher social status. These products become markers of distinction, signaling wealth, success, or exclusivity (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

Economic factors play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences. A person's financial capacity often dictates what they can afford to consume. While those in higher social classes may have access to a wide range of options, individuals in lower-income brackets often face restrictions and must prioritize basic needs. This economic divide reinforces the social hierarchy, as individuals in different classes often consume different products based on what they can afford. In some cases, the desire for upward mobility might lead individuals to make purchasing decisions that reflect aspirational goals, such as buying into premium brands or luxury goods despite financial constraints (Miller, 2013). Ultimately, consumer choices are not just about the products themselves, but about social identity and positioning. The items people buy reflect their desires for recognition, belonging, and distinction. In this way, consumption becomes a form of self-expression, signaling not only who people are but also how they relate to the wider social hierarchy. The act of consuming, therefore, serves as a powerful tool for both expressing and shaping one's place within the complex structure of social stratification (Featherstone, 1991).

One respondent stated, people in my circle expect me to wear branded clothes and own the latest gadgets. It's not just about need, it's about status.

Another respondent added, I would consider myself upper middle class because I have money to spend but choose to be mindful.

Similarly, another respondent added, my choices in fashion, food, and tech show my class identity.

The first respondent's statement, "People in my circle expect me to wear branded clothes and own the latest gadgets. It's not just about need, it's about status" emphasizes the role of social expectations in shaping consumer choices. Here, the individual is acknowledging that their consumption decisions are driven by the desire to meet the expectations of their social group. The emphasis on status suggests that purchasing branded items and the latest gadgets is more about signaling belonging to a particular social circle or projecting a certain image, rather than fulfilling basic needs. This illustrates how consumption becomes a tool for maintaining one's position within a social hierarchy, aligning with the concept of conspicuous consumption as outlined by Veblen (1899), where people use material goods to signal wealth and social standing.

The second respondent's comment, I would consider myself upper middle class because I have money to spend but choose to be mindful" highlights an interesting tension between financial means and conscious consumption. This individual acknowledges their financial capacity to purchase goods, which places them within the upper middle class, yet they choose to make more mindful, thoughtful purchasing decisions. This reflects a nuanced view of social class, where the respondent is not simply defined by their ability to buy, but also by the choices they make to align their consumption with personal values such as sustainability or frugality. It suggests that even within the same class, individuals may express their identity differently, with some opting for more restrained consumption as a way of signaling responsibility or self-discipline.

The third respondent's statement, "My choices in fashion, food, and tech show my class identity directly connects consumer choices with class identity. This individual recognizes that their consumption decisions, whether it's the brands they wear, the

type of food they eat, or the tech they use, are reflective of their social position. Their choices are not just about personal preferences but also about demonstrating their class affiliation. Fashion, food, and technology are all significant markers of class status in contemporary society, as discussed in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984). By making deliberate choices in these areas, the individual is signaling their identity within the social hierarchy, reinforcing their belonging to a particular class group.

Respondents frequently linked their class identity to their consumption patterns, highlighting how social status influences purchasing decisions. Many participants expressed that maintaining a certain class image required aligning consumption habits with societal expectations. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, where consumption patterns serve as markers of class distinction. Individuals belonging to higher social classes tend to consume products that reinforce their elite identity, while those from lower classes aspire to bridge the gap through similar consumption behaviors (Bourdieu, 1984).

6.2 Aspirational Consumption vs Instinctive Consumption

“Aspirational Consumption vs. Instinctive Consumption,” explores two distinct forms of consumer behavior that reflect different motivations behind purchasing decisions. These two concepts are deeply rooted in how individuals relate to their desires, needs, and social status. Aspirational consumption and instinctive consumption represent contrasting approaches to buying goods, each shaped by unique social, psychological, and economic factors.

Aspirational consumption refers to the act of purchasing goods or services not out of immediate necessity, but as a means of signaling a desired identity or social status. Individuals engaged in aspirational consumption typically aspire to belong to a particular social group or elevate their social standing. They purchase items—often luxury goods, designer brands, or high-end services—not simply because they need them, but because they want to project a specific image. For example, owning the latest smartphone, driving a luxury car, or wearing branded clothing can all serve as symbols of success, sophistication, and exclusivity. These purchases are often driven by a desire to be perceived in a certain way by others, and the act of consumption becomes a means of self-presentation. Aspirational consumption is closely tied to

social and cultural norms, where an individual's position in the social hierarchy is reinforced through the items they consume. The desire to own and display luxury products becomes a key driver of consumer behavior, even in the absence of immediate practical needs. According to sociologist Bourdieu, this kind of consumption is a form of cultural capital, where goods are not just purchased for utility but also as a way to gain social distinction and upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption (1899) illustrates how individuals purchase goods to demonstrate wealth and social position, especially when they seek to project a higher status or elevate their standing in society.

Karl Marx's theory also provides a lens to understand aspirational consumption. In Marxist terms, consumption is intrinsically tied to the economic structures of capitalist societies, where individuals are often driven by the ideology of consumerism, which promotes the idea that one's worth and identity are closely linked to material wealth (Marx, 1867). Aspirational consumption, in this sense, can be seen as a reflection of the alienation individuals experience in capitalist societies. People do not consume purely for their own needs but are motivated by the desire to conform to social expectations and to fit into the consumerist culture that capitalism perpetuates. This aligns with Marx's argument that the capitalist system creates a false sense of needs, which individuals are driven to fulfill, often through goods that serve as status symbols rather than practical necessities.

On the other hand, instinctive consumption is driven by immediate, practical needs or desires. This type of consumption is largely based on functionality and necessity. People engage in instinctive consumption when they buy items that directly satisfy their daily requirements or solve problems in their immediate environment. For instance, purchasing groceries, household items, or basic clothing are typical examples of instinctive consumption. In this case, the purchase is not about signaling status or identity but rather about fulfilling essential needs. Instinctive consumption tends to be more grounded in the individual's actual lifestyle and financial capacity. It reflects a more pragmatic approach to buying goods, where choices are often driven by cost-effectiveness, convenience, and necessity rather than external influences or aspirational goals. Consumers engaged in instinctive consumption are less concerned with the symbolic value of the product and more focused on its functionality.

The distinction between aspirational and instinctive consumption reveals important insights about how consumer behavior is shaped by social, economic, and psychological factors. While aspirational consumption reflects a desire to project a certain image and gain social capital, instinctive consumption is more rooted in the day-to-day realities of life, shaped by practical needs. Both forms of consumption coexist in the lives of many individuals, often interwoven depending on one's social position, financial resources, and personal aspirations. For instance, someone from a lower-income background may engage in aspirational consumption through the purchase of affordable luxury items, such as a popular brand of sneakers, while simultaneously engaging in instinctive consumption for more practical items like groceries. Ultimately, the balance between these two types of consumption reflects the complex relationship between need, desire, social identity, and personal values in contemporary consumer culture.

One participant noted, even if i cannot afford it comfortable, I make sure to send my children to an English medium school because that is what defines a good social status.

Another participant added that, for us in middle class, we try to meet the standards of the upper class even if there is pressure to fulfill our basic needs.

In contrast, one participant noted, we live on daily wages and we can't afford to do luxury consumption rather our main focus is survival and fulfilling basic needs.

The statements from the participants reveal how social class influences consumer behavior, aspirations, and the prioritization of needs. Each response highlights the complex relationship between economic capacity, social identity, and consumption, illustrating the various ways in which individuals navigate their social status and position within the broader societal hierarchy.

The first participant's statement—"Even if I cannot afford it comfortably, I make sure to send my children to an English medium school because that is what defines a good social status"—illustrates the tension between financial reality and aspirational consumption. This participant acknowledges the financial strain of sending children to an English-medium school but views it as an essential investment in their social

mobility and status. The choice to prioritize education, even at a personal financial sacrifice, reflects a belief that such a decision is integral to maintaining or improving one's social standing. The pursuit of an English-medium education in this context is a form of aspirational consumption, where the individual is driven by the desire to project a certain social identity and to ensure their children are seen as belonging to a higher social class (Bourdieu, 1984). This decision highlights how social status can influence choices that go beyond immediate practicality, emphasizing the importance of perceived social value over financial comfort.

The second participant's comment—"For us in middle class, we try to meet the standards of the upper class even if there is pressure to fulfill our basic needs"—reveals the pressures that come with being part of the middle class. This individual expresses how the desire to conform to the standards of the upper class, such as owning certain goods or maintaining a particular lifestyle, can cause financial strain. This statement reflects the idea of aspirational consumption, where individuals from a lower class, in this case, the middle class, seek to align their consumption choices with those of a higher class. Even though fulfilling basic needs remains a priority, the aspiration to reflect upper-class values, lifestyle, and consumption patterns often leads to prioritizing status over practicality. This is reminiscent of Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption (1899), where individuals engage in consumer behaviors not just to satisfy personal needs but to demonstrate their social position.

In contrast, the third participant's statement—"We live on daily wages and we can't afford to do luxury consumption; rather our main focus is survival and fulfilling basic needs"—represents a more grounded and pragmatic view of consumption. This participant acknowledges the economic limitations of living on a daily wage, where survival and fulfilling basic needs are paramount. Unlike the first and second participants, whose consumption choices are influenced by aspirational goals, this individual's choices are strictly driven by necessity. Their focus is on obtaining goods and services that are essential for day-to-day survival, with little to no room for luxury or aspirational consumption. This response highlights the distinction between instinctive consumption, which is motivated by necessity, and aspirational consumption, which is driven by the desire to align with a certain social status or image.

Taken together, these statements shed light on how social class shapes consumption behaviors and the values attached to those choices. While the first two participants express a desire to aspire to a higher social status through their consumption choices, even at the expense of their immediate financial stability, the third participant's focus is solely on meeting essential needs, reflecting the realities of living on a lower income. These contrasting responses underscore the social pressures of class identity, the role of consumer behavior in social positioning, and the ways individuals navigate their economic constraints in the pursuit of social mobility and belonging.

Schor presents the results of a survey to support this view, which indicates that 85 percent of respondents aspire to become someone who “really made it” or is at least “doing very well.” But the survey results also show that only 18 percent of Americans are members of these groups based on income. If 85 percent of people aspire to be in the top 18 percent, obviously most will end up disappointed. Changes in economic inequality are also relevant to her hypothesis. During the 1950s and 1960s, economic inequality in the United States was decreasing—that is, the gap between different levels of the income hierarchy was generally shrinking. However, beginning in the 1970s economic inequality began to increase, thus making it difficult to even maintain the existing distance between an individual and his or her aspirational group. Media representations of wealthy lifestyles also became more common. In the 1950s and 1960s, most television shows depicted middle-class lifestyles. But starting in the 1980s, television shows as well as advertisements increasingly depicted upper-class lifestyles. Exposure to media representations of wealth influences people's values and spending patterns. Schor's own research indicates that the more television a person watches, the more he or she is likely to spend, holding constant other variables such as income. Higher rates of television watching have also been associated with having materialistic values.²⁹ Other research has found that heavy television watchers are likely to overstate the percentage of the population that owns luxury items, such as convertibles and hot tubs, or that have maids or servants (O Guinn and Shrum, 1997).

Schor's conclusion is that identifying with unrealistic aspirational groups leads many people to consume well above their means, acquiring large debts and suffering frustration as they attempt to join those groups through their consumption patterns but fail to achieve the income to sustain them. As people tend to evaluate themselves

relative to reference and aspirational groups, with increasing inequality some may feel as if they are falling behind even if their incomes are actually increasing. The more our consumer satisfaction is tied to social comparisons—whether upscaling, just keeping up, or not falling too far behind—the less we achieve when consumption grows, because the people we compare ourselves to are also experiencing rising consumption. The problem is not just that more consumption doesn't yield more satisfaction, but that it always has a cost. The extra hours we have to work to earn the money cut into personal and family time. Whatever we consume has an ecological impact. We find ourselves skimping on invisibles such as insurance, college funds, and retirement savings as the visible commodities somehow become indispensable. We are impoverishing ourselves in pursuit of a consumption goal that is inherently unattainable. In the words of one focus-group participant, we “just don't know when to stop and draw the line (Schor, 1988, p. 107-109).

6.3 Role of Digital Platforms in Consumption

Role of Digital Platforms in Consumption," delves into the transformative impact of digital platforms on consumer behavior and consumption patterns. In the modern world, digital platforms such as e-commerce websites, social media, and digital marketplaces have revolutionized how people access and purchase products. These platforms not only provide a convenient means for consumers to purchase goods and services, but they also play a significant role in shaping consumer preferences, reinforcing social identity, and creating new forms of consumption.

One of the key ways digital platforms influence consumption is by enabling consumers to access a wide range of products at their fingertips. E-commerce platforms such as Hamro Bazaar, Foodmandu, Pathao, Indrive, Amazon, Alibaba, and Flipkart have made it easier for individuals to browse and purchase products or use services from around the world, breaking down geographical barriers and providing greater variety. Consumers no longer have to visit physical stores to make purchases, and they can now compare prices, read reviews, and make informed decisions more efficiently. This shift has led to a more personalized shopping experience, where algorithms can recommend products based on a user's previous purchases or browsing habits. This personalization often creates a more tailored experience, encouraging more targeted consumption. Furthermore, these platforms have

introduced convenience and speed, allowing consumers to purchase goods at any time, anywhere, which has contributed to the rise of impulsive and frequent consumption (Zengler, 2021).

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest have also played a significant role in shaping consumer behavior by blurring the lines between leisure, social interaction, and shopping. Through the use of influencers and brand endorsements, digital platforms have become essential spaces for marketing and advertising, where individuals are not only influenced by traditional advertising but also by their peers, celebrities, and influencers they follow. Moreover, digital platforms have fostered the rise of aspirational consumption by providing constant exposure to idealized lifestyles, luxury products, and trends. Users are frequently exposed to highly curated content that showcases lifestyles associated with wealth, success, and prestige, which can create pressure to consume in order to maintain a certain image or social status (Miller, 2016). This constant comparison to others has led to a phenomenon known as "FOMO" (fear of missing out), which drives individuals to consume products they may not necessarily need but feel pressured to own in order to fit in with certain social circles or trends.

Additionally, digital platforms have empowered consumers by providing greater access to information and reviews, making them more informed decision-makers. Online reviews, unboxing videos, and ratings allow consumers to have a clearer sense of a product's value and quality before purchasing. This democratization of information has shifted power toward the consumer, enabling them to hold brands accountable and make more informed decisions.

Digital platforms have fundamentally altered the consumption landscape by making goods and services more accessible, personalized, and social. These platforms not only cater to the immediate needs of consumers but also shape their desires, aspirations, and social identities, reinforcing the connection between consumption and social status. The role of digital platforms in consumption is not merely about the transaction; it is also about the continuous formation of identity and belonging in the digital age.

One respondent stated, a lot of people curate their social media to show a lifestyle they don't actually live. It's about perception, not reality.

Another respondent answered, trends, social media and discounts influence my purchases.

Interestingly, another respondent claimed, If I have to commute before I used to either walk or use public bus but once the Pathao ride became accessible online, I am using it even if it is costly than public transport.

Another respondent remarked, I don't have to go to market to buy things, I can get good discounts and fair price in the online e-commerce sites. So, I prefer to buy it from online store.

The statements from the respondents highlight the evolving nature of consumer behavior in the digital age, shaped by social media, technological advancements, and the convenience offered by online platforms. These responses reflect the ways in which perception, social trends, and the ease of access to goods and services influence consumption patterns, often leading individuals to make purchases based on factors beyond just necessity or price.

The first respondent's statement— "A lot of people curate their social media to show a lifestyle they don't actually live. It's about perception, not reality"—reveals how social media has become a platform for constructing idealized identities. This suggests that consumption choices are increasingly influenced by the desire to project a certain image or lifestyle, rather than reflecting true personal needs or financial realities. Social media platforms, such as Instagram or Facebook, often showcase curated lifestyles of wealth, leisure, and luxury, which create pressure for individuals to align their purchases with these ideals. This phenomenon can lead to aspirational consumption—purchasing items not for their practical use but to maintain a certain online persona. It echoes Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (1984), where material goods are used to signal one's social position, and Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption (1899), where people buy goods to demonstrate their wealth and social standing.

The second respondent's comment— "Trends, social media, and discounts influence my purchases"—illustrates the growing power of digital platforms in shaping

consumer behavior. Social media and online trends play a significant role in driving consumption by exposing individuals to new products, ideas, and styles, often in the form of influencer endorsements or viral content. The added factor of discounts further entices consumers to make purchases, as many e-commerce platforms offer promotions, flash sales, and special deals. This blend of social influence and economic incentive plays into the psychology of consumerism, where individuals are not only driven by need but also by the desire to be part of a trend or to capitalize on a perceived bargain. This response highlights the role of digital marketing techniques in shaping consumer decisions and creating a sense of urgency or desire.

The third respondent's statement—"If I have to commute before I used to either walk or use public bus but once the Pathao ride became accessible online, I am using it even if it is costly than public transport"—demonstrates the shift towards convenience-driven consumption. The introduction of on-demand services like Pathao, a ride-hailing app, has fundamentally altered commuting habits by offering a more personalized and comfortable experience. Even though it may be more expensive than traditional public transport, the convenience and accessibility of the service have made it an attractive option. This response highlights the growing importance of convenience and accessibility in consumption choices, particularly as digital platforms make it easier for people to access services with a few clicks, reflecting a move towards experience-driven consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), where the quality of the experience itself becomes a key factor in consumer decisions.

The fourth respondent's remark—"I don't have to go to the market to buy things, I can get good discounts and fair prices in the online e-commerce sites. So, I prefer to buy it from online stores"—further emphasizes the convenience and financial benefits of online shopping. E-commerce platforms provide consumers with the ability to compare prices, access discounts, and make purchases without the need to physically visit stores. This convenience, along with the perceived value from discounts and competitive pricing, has driven many to prefer online shopping over traditional brick-and-mortar stores. This is indicative of a larger trend where consumers prioritize ease and cost-efficiency, with digital platforms offering a seamless shopping experience. The shift to e-commerce also reflects how digital platforms have disrupted traditional retail, influencing consumer expectations and behaviors.

These responses highlight how social media, convenience, trends, and digital platforms are reshaping consumption patterns in profound ways. The desire to project a certain social image, the influence of digital marketing, and the convenience of online shopping all contribute to a consumer landscape where the lines between necessity, aspiration, and convenience are increasingly blurred. The shift towards digital platforms, particularly e-commerce and ride-hailing services, illustrates how technology is not just changing how consumers shop but also how they live and interact with the world around them.

This ties into Goffman's 1959 dramaturgical perspective, where individuals perform social roles based on audience expectations. In the digital age, this extends to curating an online persona that aligns with perceived class norms.

Findings

The exploration of class identity and social hierarchy through various lenses reveals significant insights into how consumption patterns, social status, and identity intersect in contemporary society. Several key findings emerged throughout the chapter:

One of the major findings is the distinction between aspirational consumption and instinctive consumption. Aspirational consumption is primarily driven by the desire to align with a particular social group or project a specific image, often through luxury goods or status-symbol purchases. This type of consumption reflects the desire for social mobility or status recognition. On the other hand, instinctive consumption is grounded in necessity and immediate practical needs. This distinction reveals that consumption is not solely about fulfilling personal needs but is often influenced by broader social and cultural factors, including the desire to be perceived in a certain way.

Role of Digital Platforms in Consumption: Digital platforms have become pivotal in shaping contemporary consumption behavior. E-commerce platforms provide consumers with greater access to goods and services, allowing them to make more informed, often impulsive, decisions based on discounts, convenience, and personalization. Social media platforms also heavily influence consumption through trends, social validation, and influencer endorsements. This points to the increasing

role of digital spaces in not only enabling consumption but also creating new forms of social validation, where consumer behavior is shaped by perceived social status and cultural trends rather than just utility. Consumption patterns were found to be closely tied to an individual's class identity. The desire for social mobility, especially in the middle class, often leads to aspirational consumption, where people purchase items or services beyond their immediate means to project a higher social status. For instance, decisions like sending children to English-medium schools, despite financial strain, or purchasing luxury items, are attempts to align with higher-class ideals. This points to the powerful role that consumption plays in reinforcing social hierarchies and the pursuit of upward mobility, despite the financial challenges it may entail.

Several responses underscored the social pressure to conform to perceived standards of success and prestige. Consumers, especially from middle-income backgrounds, often feel compelled to meet upper-class standards of consumption, even if this means sacrificing basic needs. This reflects a significant tension between social aspirations and economic realities, where individuals attempt to maintain a certain image or lifestyle in the face of financial constraints. The rise of online shopping and services like ride-hailing has shifted consumption behaviors, particularly in urban environments. Many respondents indicated a preference for the convenience and accessibility offered by digital platforms, even if the costs were higher than traditional options. This points to a growing prioritization of time-saving and ease of access in decision-making processes, rather than purely price-driven choices.

Conclusion

The chapter on Class Identity and Social Hierarchy reveals that consumption is not merely about satisfying material needs but is intricately tied to social identity, status, and aspirations. The findings demonstrate that consumption is a complex social behavior shaped by factors such as class, social mobility, and the desire to project a particular image. Digital platforms, through e-commerce, social media, and service apps, have further transformed how individuals access goods and services, offering convenience but also reinforcing societal pressures to conform to certain consumption patterns associated with higher social status. Furthermore, the tension between aspirational and instinctive consumption highlights how people from various social classes navigate financial constraints while trying to align with higher class norms and

expectations. While consumption can serve as a tool for social mobility and identity formation, it can also exacerbate inequalities, especially when individuals prioritize status over essential needs. In this context, digital platforms are both enablers and influencers, reshaping consumption in ways that blur the boundaries between needs, desires, and social pressures.

CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Findings of the Study

Consumers exhibit a mix of impulse and planned buying behaviors. Many purchases are driven by immediate desires or social influence, with social media playing a significant role in shaping these decisions. Online platforms, particularly mobile apps and social media, have become increasingly popular for shopping, reflecting a broader trend toward digital shopping experiences. Social media influencers, especially on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok are seen as key drivers in creating trust and encouraging purchases. Brand preferences are shaped by both social expectations and the desire for status, particularly among teenagers and females who are more influenced by peers and societal trends. There is a division in consumer priorities: some focus on the quality and value of products, while others prioritize aesthetics and luxury as symbols of social status. Respondent exhibit varied approaches to budgeting: some adopt strict budgeting to avoid overspending, while others are more inclined to borrow money to fund luxury goods purchases. Social influence plays a dominant role in consumer decisions, particularly among middle-class individuals who tend to purchase luxury goods more for social display rather than personal need.

Economic limitations significantly shape consumption priorities, with lower-income groups focusing on essential needs (food, rent, education), limiting their ability to engage in discretionary or luxury spending. In contrast, higher-income individuals prioritize luxury items, vacations, and non-essential purchases, highlighting a clear divide in consumption based on financial resources.

Education and career advancement are crucial for upward social mobility, particularly for those transitioning from lower to middle-class status. Educational opportunities, such as scholarships and degrees, open doors to better jobs and entrepreneurial ventures. However, barriers such as social capital—family wealth and connections—continue to hinder mobility, even for those with strong educational backgrounds. Social identity in Kathmandu is strongly influenced by consumption patterns. Upper-

class individuals engage in conspicuous consumption to signal wealth and social status, while middle-class individuals try to emulate this through symbolic consumption, often prioritizing family expenses and education. Lower-income individuals face societal pressures to conform to these expectations, which can create a sense of alienation or being "out of place" in wealthier areas. These perceptions shape class identity and how individuals navigate the social hierarchy.

Aspirational consumption is driven by the desire to align with a social group or project an image, often through luxury goods or status symbols, reflecting a pursuit of social mobility and status recognition. In contrast, instinctive consumption focuses on fulfilling practical, immediate needs. This distinction highlights that consumption is influenced not just by personal necessity but by social and cultural factors, including the desire for status. Digital platforms, such as e-commerce and social media, significantly shape contemporary consumption behaviors. E-commerce provides convenience and personalization, while social media drives trends, social validation, and influencer endorsements. These platforms create new forms of social validation, where consumption is influenced by cultural trends and perceived social status rather than utility.

Consumption patterns are closely tied to class identity. Middle-class individuals often engage in aspirational consumption to project a higher social status, even at financial strain, such as sending children to English-medium schools or purchasing luxury items. This reflects the role of consumption in reinforcing social hierarchies and the desire for upward mobility.

There is significant social pressure to conform to upper-class standards, especially among middle-income groups, leading individuals to prioritize status over basic needs. This tension between social aspirations and economic realities often results in financial strain as individuals attempt to maintain a certain image or lifestyle. The rise of online shopping and services like ride-hailing has shifted consumption behaviors, especially in urban areas. Consumers increasingly prioritize convenience and accessibility, even if the costs are higher, over traditional, price-driven choices, indicating a growing preference for time-saving and ease of access.

7.2 Conclusion

The findings gathered from the exploration of consumer behavior, class identity, and social hierarchies reveal a dynamic and multifaceted relationship between economic factors, social pressures, and consumption patterns. Several key findings highlight the role of both aspirational and instinctive consumption. While aspirational consumption is often driven by the desire to project a certain image or align with a particular social group—typically through luxury goods or status symbols—instinctive consumption is grounded in practical, immediate needs. These findings suggest that consumption is not purely functional but shaped by broader societal influences, including the desire for social mobility and status recognition.

Economic constraints significantly affect consumption priorities, with lower-income groups prioritizing essential goods and services, often at the expense of luxury or discretionary spending. Conversely, higher-income individuals are more able to indulge in non-essential purchases, reinforcing class divisions based on economic resources. This divide highlights how economic capabilities directly influence consumption patterns and the ability to navigate social hierarchies.

The role of digital platforms has become pivotal in shaping contemporary consumption. E-commerce and social media not only provide easy access to goods and services but also create new forms of social validation through trends, influencer endorsements, and the desire to conform to perceived social standards. As a result, consumption is increasingly driven by cultural trends and the need for social recognition rather than just utility or practicality.

Moreover, social perceptions and class identity are deeply intertwined. Middle-class individuals often engage in aspirational consumption, attempting to emulate higher-class ideals despite financial constraints. This creates a significant tension between economic realities and social aspirations, leading to a rise in consumption that goes beyond necessity. The pressure to maintain a certain image or lifestyle, especially among middle-income groups, often results in financial strain and a sacrifice of basic needs.

Additionally, the shift towards convenience in consumption patterns, particularly with the rise of digital shopping and services like ride-hailing, reveals a growing preference for time-saving and ease of access, even if these options come at a higher cost. This shift further reflects the increasing influence of convenience over traditional price-driven decisions, particularly in urban settings.

After all the findings, consumption patterns are intricately linked to class identity, social mobility, and economic constraints. Digital platforms play a central role in shaping these behaviors, acting as both enablers of consumption and drivers of social validation. Despite financial challenges, individuals continue to pursue social mobility through consumption, reinforcing class-based divisions and the desire for status recognition. The intersection of these factors highlights the powerful role of consumption in shaping both personal identity and social structure in contemporary society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Demographic Information

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Occupation and Time Involved:
4. Income Monthly/Annual:
5. Education Level:
6. Marital Status:
7. Household Size with Dependent and Independent Member:
8. Caste/Ethnicity:
9. Residential Area and Duration of Staying:
10. Socioeconomic Status:

Consumer Behaviors and Spending Patterns Related Questions

1. What are goods and services do you normally use?
2. Where do you prefer to shop? For example local markets, malls, online?
3. How often do you shop for non-essential items? For example electronics, clothing, cosmetics, foods, luxurious item?
4. What factors influence your purchasing decisions for non-essential items?
5. How important is brand reputation to your purchasing decisions?
6. Do you think your shopping habits have changed over the years? If so, how and why?

Class Disparities and Mobility Related Questions

1. Do you feel that your spending habits reflect your social class? If so, in what ways?
2. How do you perceive the spending habits of other social classes?
3. Have you experienced any changes in your social status due to your consumption patterns?

4. Do you believe that your consumer behavior can impact your economic mobility? Why or why not?

Class Identity and Social Hierarchies Related Questions

1. How do you define your social class identity?
2. Do you believe your consumer practices reinforce your class identity? How?
3. Have you ever felt pressured to consume certain products to fit into a social class?
4. In what ways do you think consumer behavior can challenge existing social hierarchies?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else you would like to add about how consumer behavior impacts social and economic class structure in Kathmandu?

Appendix B: Observation Checklist

General Information:

- Date and Time of Observation:
- Location of Observation:
- Type of Area (Market, Mall, Residential):

Consumer Behaviors:

- Types of goods being purchased (e.g., luxury, essential, non-essential):
- Frequency of purchases (e.g., weekly, monthly):
- Shopping venues preferred (e.g., local shops, high-end stores, online):
- Payment methods used (e.g., cash, credit cards, mobile payments):

Class Indicators:

- Appearance and demeanor of consumers (for example., clothing, accessories):
- Interaction patterns with store staff and other customers:
- Types of brands being purchased (For example, local, international, luxury):
- Visible economic disparities among consumers (bulk buying or single items):

Social Interactions:

- Group dynamics (e.g., family, friends, solo):
- Social behaviors (e.g., networking, socializing):
- Language and communication styles:

Contextual Aspects:

- Layout and ambiance of shopping areas:
- Presence of promotional materials and advertisements:
- Availability and variety of products catering to different social classes:

Appendix C: Content Analysis Checklist

1. Media Source Information:

- Title and Name of Publication/Platform:
- Date of Publication:
- Type of Content (e.g., article, advertisement, social media post):

2. Content Theme:

- Focus on consumer behavior For example trends and habits:
- Discussion of social class and economic status:
- Representation of different social classes (lower, middle, upper):

3. Consumer Behavior Depictions:

- Types of products highlighted (luxury, essential):
- Marketing messages (aspirational, practical):
- Portrayal of consumer demographics (age, gender, occupation):

4. Class Representation:

- Language and tone used to describe different classes:
- Visual imagery (clothing, settings):
- Stereotypes or biases present in the content:

5. Economic Implications:

- Discussions on affordability and access to products:
- Impact of consumer behaviors on economic mobility:
- References to economic policies or social changes affecting consumption:

6. Social Implications:

- Narratives around social identity and status:
- Depictions of social mobility or immobility:
- Influence of consumer culture on social hierarchies:

Appendix D: Respondents Profile

Name	Gender	Age	Caste	Marital Status	Education	Address	Occupation	Income
Susmita Limbu	Female	20	Limbu	Unmarried	Bachelor's degree	Balaju	Freelancing	15000
Siddhant Shrestha	Male	22	Newar	Unmarried	Bachelor's degree	Balaju	Student	No
Gaurav Shrestha	Male	35	Newar	Married	Bachelor's degree	Nayabazar	Shopkeeper	60,000
Suresh Rai	Male	44	Limbu	Unmarried	Master's degree	Nayabazar	Factory owner	100,000
Binita Maharjan	Female	32	Newar	Married	Master's degree	Nayabazar	Teacher	25,000
Sampurna Subba	female	52	Limbu	Married	Bachelor's Degree	Balaju	Unemployed	No
Anjali Sharma	Female	18	Chettri	Unamrried	Highschool	Banasthali	Unemployed	No
Nakul Subedi	Male	19	Brahmin	Unmarried	Bachelor's degree	Banasthali	Unemployed	No
Namsang Ingam	Female	19	Limbu	Unmarried	Bachelor's degree	Bohoratar	Unemployed	No
Rajiv K.Gurung	Male	29	Gurung	Married	Diploma	Balaju	Fitness Trainer	50,000
Jasmine Purkuti	Female	21	Dalit	Unmarried	Bachelor's degree	Mhepi	Unemployed	No
Ayu K.C	Male	32	Chettri	Divorced	Bachelor's degree	Mhepi	Business Owner	80,000
Pramod B.K	Male	40	Dalit	Married	School Level	Banasthali	Taxi Driver	35,000
Aaditya Dhungana	Male	20	Brahmin	Unamrried	Bacehlor's degree	Banasthali	Barista	17,000
Dipesh Khatri	Male	37	Chhetri	Married	Master's degree	Machhapokhari	Teacher	100000
Saroj Lamichhane	Male	25	Brahmin	Unmarried	Highschool	Machhapokhari	Driver	30,000
Sanjay Shrestha	Male	27	Newar	Married	Highschool	Machhapokhari	Driver	25,000
Sarisma Tamang	Female	23	Tamang	Unmarried	Bachelors	Balaju	Salesperson	30000
Jamuna Gurung	Female	43	Gurung	Married	Highschool	Balaju	Sweeper	20000
Suman Phuyal	Male	29	Brahmin	Unmarried	Master's degree	Banasthali	Business Owner	75000