The Rise of Consumer Society in Morocco
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Abstract

At the turn of the twenty-first century, and against the backdrop of a rapid process of opening up to the world culturally, economically, technologically, and politically, Morocco started showing signs of intrusion into a consumer culture. From a historical point of view, this is quite recent, and it makes research in the consumption practices of Moroccans an interesting area of inquiry. This paper therefore serves to shed light on the culture and the sociology of consumption in Morocco. Since the discussion is about a society where complex acts of consumption are getting more prevalent, I would like to start by defining the term “consumer society” and identify its characteristics. This is going to be helpful to the discussion of the engines of consumerism and the manifestations of consumer culture in Morocco.

Keywords: Morocco, consumer society, dynamics of consumer culture, manifestations of consumer culture, advertising, malls.

0. Introduction

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Morocco has been involved in a process of modernization that has led to the accentuation of consumer culture in the country. The modernization process has been marked by advanced integration into the global market through the
liberalization of the economy, as evident in the number of the free trade agreements which have been signed with 55 nations since 1999 (The Report: Morocco 2018).

As a result of the country’s economic policies, consumption has become an increasingly visible aspect of the daily life of people in Morocco. This has occurred through the extension and creation of a wide range of consumer practices (shopping, eating out), consumer goods (cars, household appliances, communication devices) and consumer services (everything from property insurance and home delivery to package holidays) and also through the commodification of things which previously existed outside the capitalist relations of exchange like music, sport, and even emotions. This marks a new development in Moroccan society where consumption has taken precedence and has therefore acquired the features of a consumer society.

For convenience, I would like to start by elucidating the term “consumer society,” and then I will proceed to discuss the dynamics and manifestations of consumer culture in Morocco.

1. Consumer Society

In general terms, this is a society whose members are heavily involved in consumption. However, it would be interesting to introduce the insight of some key theorists in the field. Zygmunt Bauman (2005: 31), for instance, explains that “A consumer society is a society of credit cards, not savings books. It is a ‘now’ society. A wanting society, not a waiting society.”

Furthermore, Alan Durning (Goodwin, Ackerman, and Kiron, 1997: 13) believes that modern consumer society promotes consumption through “social pressures,” “advertising,” “shopping,” “government,” and “the mass market.” By social pressures, Durning refers to the extent to how consumption-based comparisons determine social status. Regarding advertising, its pervasiveness in society promotes ever-increasing consumption. About shopping, he believes that shopping culture encourages the acquisition of objects and that shopping in the modern consumer society is increasingly driven by malls. The fourth point is about the role the government plays in the
promotion of consumption. Finally, mass market products contribute
to convenient life, but to the detriment of the environment.

A consumer society shares a number of characteristics. At the core of
it is a rejection of saving and moderation, and a celebration of
spending and enjoyment. Heavy borrowing has therefore become
pretty much the norm. This is a society where individuals deactivate
the behavioral and emotional self-regulation mechanism which allows
the individual to feel one way but act another.

Spending money has become the main focus of leisure or non-work
time. Leisure activities could be active or passive, and these include
shopping or window-shopping, or even daydreaming about possessing
objects, and displaying possessions. A consumer society nurtures the
belief that the acquisition of things and activities that require spending
money—and interestingly the spending of money itself—are key to
feeling happy (Goodwin, Ackerman, & Kiron, 1997, p. XXX).

Equally important, a consumer society is one where the value system
of individuals has been shaken. A pertinent observation in this regard
is that people seem to have developed a materialistic attitude towards
life, and materialism has become a way for individuals to build a new
goal deriving energy from their capability to make purchases that boost
their self-image.

Further, individuals in a consumer society have a tendency to develop
forms of social competition through goods. Not only has this led to an
increase in the meaningfulness of these goods to express identity and
social belonging, but it has also signaled a widespread lack of moral
discipline, a glorification of greed and material accumulation.

A final attribute of a consumer society is the erosion of culinary
traditions and family meals as well as the diffusion of fast-food
industry. This is happening as a direct consequence of such factors as
advertising, gender equality, the redevelopment of workplaces, among
other possible factors.

2. The Dynamics of Consumer Culture in Morocco
Several factors drive consumer culture in Morocco, but I am particularly interested in the large impact of advertising, malls, and financial institutions.

2.1. Advertising
Present at home, along main roads, at work, on public transport, in restaurants, in the supermarket, and many other places, advertising has dominated the lives of Moroccans, particularly in urban areas where population density is high and consumer goods and services are readily available and, more importantly, the impact of mass media is greater. Different types of advertising channels and methods are used to reach consumers.

To begin with, a visit to any newsstand in major cities in Morocco, like Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakech, Agadir, Tangier, Fes, and others should give the visitor an idea of the large variety of magazines interestingly focusing on setting a modern lifestyle for Moroccans. To put it differently, magazines like *Famille Actuelle*, *L’Officiel Maroc*, *Santé Plus*, *ID Prestige*, *Version Homme* and several others serve as “counselors” to their readers on such matters as how to dress elegantly, entertain guests, arrange one’s home and make it an attractive living space, take care of one’s health through sport and healthy diet, what car to drive, and how to enhance one’s beauty. In fact what these magazines and other similar ones do goes beyond simply counseling; they shape taste and dictate ways of thinking about commodities and ways of living. They trigger a sort of a monologue in the individual’s inner self on the basis of which the individual starts negotiating a transition from a current familiar way of life to a new one that fits modern times. Modernity as depicted in the magazines targeting Moroccans looks more like a Western one, especially European, and having less to do with Moroccan identity.

Leafing through these lifestyle magazines from cover to cover, the individual is bombarded with content related to fashion, beauty products, luxury cars, healthy and gourmet food, luxury homes, exotic travel destinations, home decor items, banking and insurance services, and so on. People in the magazines are shown happy, dreamy, elegant, beautiful, successful, and fit into modern society, the message being that “in order to be like those in the magazines, the individual has to
adopt their lifestyle.” In that way, people are given dreams to climb to and are directed towards self-actualization.

Billboards are another form of advertising that increases the volume of consumption. Strategically placed at carefully targeted locations, billboards capture the attention of a multitude of motorists and pedestrians. In big cities in Morocco, people spend a fairly large amount of time driving or riding public transport every day. Marketers have a principle called “Rule of 7” which claims that a consumer must hear or see an advertising message at least seven times before it starts attracting his attention and hopefully encouraging him to take action. I am always flabbergasted by the sheer number of billboards that line up El Jadida road in Casablanca, leading up to the strategic Ghandi intersection, which is well known for its large volume of traffic. The eye-catching design and sometimes the quirkiness of the billboards as well as the powerful message and the language used to reach the target audience together with a good amount of humour, at times, and the use of celebrities largely increase chances for generating consumer demand for goods and services.

Billboard advertising tries to provoke potential consumers in a way that they act according to a cherished or an aspired value system, as illustrated in the following billboards:

The advert reads:
“New BMW X4. Stand out from the crowd.”
(seen in Kenitra in February 2019)

This advert seems to call for social distinction. It is also an allusion to the attainability of social mobility.
The advert reads:
“New Hyundai i20. Cherish your life passionately!”
(see in Kenitra in March 2019)

Again, this ad is a sort of a celebration of Hyundai i20. The happy mood in the ad gives the potential consumer the impression that hedonism is the ultimate goal of good living which people can achieve.
The advert reads:
“Liberty prepaid plan”
(see in Kenitra in March 2019)

Freedom is another value that is reinforced in billboard advertising as illustrated by the following advertisement. This is suggested by the curly hair and the young age of the subject.

To conclude, billboard advertising together with other forms of outdoor advertising, like transit advertising, contribute to the development and metamorphosis, perhaps, of the value system in Morocco. Jean Baudrillard tells us that everyone “must ‘recycle themselves’”—their
clothes, their belongings, their cars—on a yearly basis. If they do not, they are not true citizens of the consumer society” (Jean Baudrillard, 1998, p. 100).

A third and probably the most powerful apparatus of consumerism in Morocco is the Internet. According to statistics provided by Hootsuite (Hootsuite, Digital 2019 Morocco), of a total population of 36.41 million, 63% of which live in urban areas, 22.75 million people in Morocco had used the Internet by January 2019, and 16 million people had been mobile social media users. Following the same source, 86% of the 22.56 million Internet users had accessed the Internet every day for personal reasons. What these statistics suggest is that the Internet has a sure potential to generate huge consumer demand as more than half of the Moroccan population is present in the virtual world on a daily basis. In addition to that, the impact of social media is great indeed. If we take the example of Facebook, for instance, many Moroccans join different groups that offer advice and information about shopping, travel, gadgetry, cooking, and entertainment. In fact, what starts as group members seeking advice or information about the services of a travel company, a health care provider, a beauty salon, or a product from other members often proves to be a promotional campaign run again by other group members. There are many Facebook groups where Moroccans are active on a daily basis, but I would like to mention the following ones: j’ai testé, je vous le recommande! (more than 457,000 members) and Allo Testeurs (more than 70,000 members). Both groups are interesting in the sense that they are both very active and they update their members with the latest in Casabalanca (the first group) and Kenitra (the second group)—updates on new restaurants and coffee shops, boutiques, technology, services, etc. However, Allo Testeurs seems to take a giant step towards driving the people of Kenitra into being more consumerist. Today, the Facebook group has got a website (www.allo-testeurs.com) with a business model similar to Amazon’s or Rakuten’s. Allo Testeurs has even started selling to its members a 149-dirham-per-year subscription discount card that they can use to obtain discounts when they shop or use the services of their partners.

Consumer society in Morocco is gathering momentum with the Internet and also efficient delivery services. Working away from home
or busy, a growing number of people in Casablanca, Rabat, Kenitra and Marrakech use the delivery service of Glovo and other home delivery companies. In this age of intense connectivity, we should expect services like these to spread to other places and people’s consumption practices to further develop, especially with the viral effect of people’s interaction online.

For more impact on Moroccans’ consumer behavior, radio stations are also used to get people’s attention. While listening to the radio on the road or at home, people are exposed to a myriad of media messages that pique their curiosity.

Yet more impact comes from flyers. These are usually distributed in high footfall areas, like in high streets in Maârif district in Casablanca, Agdal in Rabat, or Gueliz in Marrakech. Similarly, in the absence of direct mail advertising, supermarkets in Morocco often distribute their catalogues straight to people’s homes. What is interesting about this is that the distribution is done at the end of the month—just a day or two before people get their salaries. In so doing, retailers make sure that people have received information about their products in time, which could lead people’s curiosity about the products in the catalogues into a real shopping experience.

In a nutshell, the power of advertising lies in its ability to enchant audiences to consume. Art directors and copywriters are creative magicians that shape their thoughts into creative ideas to manipulate consumers and make products and services look magical. Marketing, branding, community management, and public relations are examples of professions that have contributed to the enormous power of advertising.

2.2. Malls
In addition to advertising, malls are considered another engine of consumer culture in Morocco. Although the history of mall culture is very recent in the country, we are seeing a growing interest among Moroccans in going to malls for shopping and other recreational activities. Mega Mall in Rabat, which opened in 2005, is the first mall in Morocco. Five years later, Al Mazar opened in Marrakech. From that time on, there has been an acceleration in the building of malls. In 2011, Casablanca had its own first mall—Morocco Mall, and two
years later Anfaplace was added to the city’s retail and leisure infrastructure. Heading to the northeast of the country, Fes had its Borj Fés in 2013. A year later, Marrakech had one more mall—Carré Eden. In 2016, Tanger City Mall opened in Tangier. As the economic hub of Morocco and one of the important financial centers in Africa, Casablanca saw the opening of the new Marina Shopping Center in April 2019 for those in pursuit of luxury and a special shopping experience. The city of Rabat also saw the opening of Arribat Center in November 2019.

The opening of malls in Morocco is an implementation of Rawaj Vision 2020 Program as developed by the Ministry of Industry in 2007.¹ The program aims to modernize the retail sector and boost its contribution to the GDP from 11% to 15%. To this end, 600 supermarkets and hypermarkets as well as 15 malls and 15 outlets will have been developed by the end of 2020.

Figures speak volumes for the success story of malls in Morocco. To take the example of Morocco Mall, from 2011 to 2016, 80 million people had visited this cathedral of consumption.² Similarly, millions of people also annually visit Mega Mall, Almazar, Anfaplace, Borj Fes and Tanger City Mall.

The popularity of malls in Morocco perhaps boils down to seven main factors. First of all is the idea that the mall is a novel culture in the country that needs to be explored. That is, curiosity accounts for people’s interest in these shopping centers. Second, the modern designs of malls are associated with comfort; the decorations, the colors, the fragrances emanating from fashionable boutiques, the elevators, the escalators, the centralized air-conditioning system, coffee shops, and so on, all contribute to the creation of a relaxing atmosphere that promises a nice shopping experience. Of equal importance, the diversity of foreign brands makes malls popular

destinations. According to some statistics, today there are more than 716 foreign brands in Morocco, and the number is likely to go up. Moreover, there is plenty of parking space for visitors. Besides, the availability of ATMs and POS machines makes payment easier, though it encourages people to spend more money. What is more, entertainment in malls saves kids from boredom and therefore gives adults more time to enjoy shopping. In addition, food courts are in place for the hungry or those with refined taste. Even shopping for food is possible in malls since the latter have such food retail spaces as Marjane and Carrefour.

Everything looks beautiful in malls—from the window displays and the arrangement of goods in stores to the cleanliness of the place. People also feel free from any pressure to buy anything. In fact, many of them go there just for a pleasurable walk. Many people consider going to malls as a feast for the senses where they see what pleases the eyes, smell fragrant scents, touch luxurious items for a feel, hear beautiful pieces of music, and, best of all, delve into a world of dreams. In end-of-season sales, malls become sites for some sort of a festival during which consumerism and sales reach a peak and where shoppers see rationality in madness.

It is interesting to see some real estate developers with limited financial resources construct small shopping centers and still call them malls without them bearing the features of a mall. Examples of such shopping centers are Kenitra Mall, Tanagra Mall, and Camelia Mall in Kenitra. These are located in an area in the city center where there is a high footfall. The choice of “mall” to feature in the name seems to testify to the wide popularity that malls have been gaining in recent years. It also shows that people feel the need for such places because of the positive connotations they attach to them. Many Moroccans would associate malls with economic growth, comfort, well-being, and modernity.

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3 https://libreentreprise.ma/entreprises/franchise-le-maroc-compte-plus-de-716-marques/
2.3. Financial Institutions

Banks and consumer finance companies contribute a great deal to the rise of consumer society in Morocco. Buying a new car, going on a vacation, sending children to study abroad, getting married, or celebrating Eid Al-Adha have never been as accessible as they are today. Customers get a loan approval within 48 hours, or less sometimes. What is more, with the availability of online services, banks are now a click away from their customers. Furthermore, an individual who has obtained a loan hitting the 50 % threshold required by law can get more loans from consumer finance companies like Eqdom, Wafasalaf, and Salafin. The practices of the latter have driven many Moroccans into over-indebtedness as they never respect the threshold stipulated by law.

Resorting to financial institutions for personal loans reflects a transformation in Moroccans’ consumption practices and attitude towards credits. While people in the past (roughly from the 60s to the mid-90s) were more into “saving for the rainy day” and used to worry about envy, or the evil eye, today people uphold a new philosophy that finds more sense in “keeping up with the Joneses.” This is reflected in the size of personal loans that Moroccans have been taking out in recent years.

In Morocco, the personal loans market is booming as figures released by Bank Al Maghrib (BAM) show. In its end-of-year report for 2016, BAM declared that personal loans reached MAD 48.77 billion. By the end of 2017, the figure rose to MAD 50.85 billion. Personal loans continued to grow in 2018 and they jumped to MAD 54.04 billion by the end of the year.

There are various ways to account for the rise in personal loans in Morocco. In the first place, the decrease in interest rates has encouraged spending. According to BAM, interest rates dropped from 7.42% in the last quarter of 2012 to 7.34% in the same period of 2013, and the trend continued into 2014 (7.17%), 2015 (7.12%), 2016 (6.64%), and 2017 (6.56%). Strong competition between lenders in terms of offering low interest rates is another reason. Furthermore, different ministries and companies have signed conventions with various Moroccan banks whereby their employees benefit from
preferential interest rates on personal loans. Of equal importance, the fact that Moroccans today are largely exposed to a great deal of manipulative advertising and the influence of Western culture, or rather the Western way of life, as disseminated mainly through satellite TV, social media, and tourism has to a large extent made Moroccans enmeshed in consumerism.

The ease with which Moroccans take out consumer loans has contributed to the rise of a society that believes more in spending than saving money, and if people save money, the odds are that they would someday use it in ways that would categorize them as consumerists.

The attitude of Moroccans towards loans in general is regulated by Islam’s stance that interest-generating credit is forbidden. Perhaps, Morocco’s central bank’s approval of the request to open five “participative” banks in 2017 (Umnia Bank, Bank Assafa, BTI Bank, Bank Al Yousr, Al Akhdar Bank), which are deemed to operate according to Shari’a law, would encourage more Moroccans, especially those reluctant to deal with conventional banks, to use their services. A consideration of the slogans used in the advertising of some banks emphasizes the Islamic character of the banks’ services. For example, Bank Assafa/e is a “straight line”, and Umnia Bank is on the market “to calm my anxious heart.” Obviously, the message is that these banks are riba-free.

A final note to make is that as we begin minimizing dependence on cash and we introduce more frictionless methods of payment, we will likely start seeing the intensification of consumer culture in Morocco.

3. The Manifestations of Consumer Culture in Morocco

Today, manifestations of consumer culture in Morocco are not hard to spot. Social activities like shopping, travelling, eating out, and gaming have come to dominate the social system of Moroccans. Fitness and the culture associated with it is another interesting area of inquiry where one notes the encroachment of consumerism. Even religious celebrations like Eid Al-Adha have become largely commodified. Also of note is Moroccans’ relentless pursuit of luxurious life and projecting affluence and comfort. I would like to consider these manifestations one by one.
3.1. Leisure Pursuits

Leisure as Thorstein Veblen (*Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899) defines it as “the non-productive consumption of time.” In a market economy, we note the introduction of leisure into the commercial realm. As a country with an economy well integrated into the global market, perhaps the end of the 1990s saw the birth of the leisure industry in Morocco. Ever since then, the industry of leisure has been booming and consumption practices, whether related to services, products, or time, have been changing. Thus, leisure has become a commodity produced for a multitude of people with a focus on profit.

In the Moroccan social system, capitalism is securing its institutional structure through various leisure pursuits. Among these shopping stands out. The introduction of malls in the first decade of the century, as modern shopping centers offering a wide array of products and services that had never existed before, marks a turning point in the retail industry. Furthermore, the promise of finding new collections of products combined with high quality and regular discounts makes the bond between consumers and shopping outlets strong. Similarly, the improved customer service usually found in malls has contributed to making shoppers make frequent visits. A good example of a customer loyalty service usually offered at large stores in malls is the money-back guarantee. This reinforces the feeling in the individual that shopping is a free act of consumption where the pleasure associated with it is well taken care of. To put it differently, what matters to the retailer in the first place is the satisfaction of the customer, and if the latter is satisfied, profit is made.

Shopping seems to be an addiction for a number of people in Morocco. Some people shop at local stores in the cities where they live, while others even travel to other cities for a more pleasurable shopping experience. This is the case of some inhabitants of Kenitra and Rabat who make the journey to Casablanca for weekend shopping.

Moving away from brick-and-mortar stores, the internet has opened a new window on international markets for Moroccan shoppers seeking new products which they cannot find in local markets, or because the price is very competitive, or simply because the product comes from a foreign country. The latter idea is quite interesting as people tend to
believe that whatever is bought from another country is of a better quality and makes the user feel unique.

With a 62% Internet penetration rate (Hootsuit, Digital 2019 Morocco), Moroccans are quickly taking to shopping online. It is more convenient, secure, and very often cheaper. Retail websites affiliated with the Moroccan Electronic Interbanking Centre registered US$ 211 million income in the first nine months of 2017, an increase of 51.4% on the previous year.\(^4\) AliExpress, Amazon, Jumia, Hmizate, Citymall, and Lavieclaire are among the retail websites on which urbanites, in particular, shop. Items like clothes, footwear, books, gadgetry, and beauty and bio products are among the popular purchases.

Travel, both at home and abroad, is another leisure pursuit that Moroccans have been keen on in recent years. At home, many Moroccans in their 20s and up to the 50s in particular go on group tours to various places in Morocco. Errachidia and Ouarzazate in the east, Dakhla and Mirleft in the south, Beni Mellal and Ouzoud Waterfalls in the Atlas Mountains, and Chefchaouen in the northwest of the country are among the most popular destinations. Pleasure is guaranteed with the peaceful life of Chefchaouen and the beauty of Marzouga nights and the desert’s amazing dunes and camel rides, as well as the joyful experience of hiking or flying in a hot air balloon in Beni Mellal.

As for international travel, it has recently become a favorite for many Moroccans, especially those who have already travelled widely in the country. Destinations differ depending on such things as the travel budget, visa requirements, the attractiveness of the destination and the information available about it. Among the popular destinations of Moroccans are European countries like Spain, France, and Italy as well as countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

There are a couple of things that are encouraging more and more Moroccans to travel abroad. For one thing, Moroccans do not require

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\(^4\) More on this can be found at [https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/morocco/e-commerce](https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/morocco/e-commerce)
a visa to travel to 55 countries.\(^5\) Second, tourist endowment can go as far as MAD 45,000.\(^6\) Moreover, access to the Internet and mobile information technology has made information about foreign destinations readily available. Today, many Moroccans research their destinations online prior to their departures. YouTube and Facebook groups, like “Travel for yourself”, are two important tools Moroccans use for their travel preparation. Other factors that could contribute to the increase in the number of Moroccan travelers are the availability of budget flights, like the ones offered by Ryanair, Air Arabia, and easyJet, and the use of innovative ways of cheap accommodation, like homestays, volunteering while travelling, or home exchange.

A third leisure pursuit that has been of great appeal to Moroccans in recent years is eating out. It is interesting to see food consumption shifting from being a domestic activity, usually done to fulfill a basic human need, to an outdoor activity developed from things other than simply physiological motivation. Reasons for this may include among others experiencing something different from the everyday, getting a break from cooking, having a treat, celebrating, socializing, enjoying the ambience of the place (as enhanced by architecture, design, music played, service, etc.), and seeing and being seen. So, eating in a food outlet is not always motivated by hunger, but rather by a particular psychology involved. What one eats and where they eat tends to be as important as meeting the basic need for food and drink. One can safely say that there is some social meaning attached to eating out.

The current economic growth in Morocco is resulting in the establishment of many Western-style restaurants and cafés alongside food and drink franchises in large and mid-sized cities. Eating places are becoming accessible to a wider clientele, but it is important to note that fine dining restaurants in fashionable areas of a city require adherence to certain dining rules, of which wearing proper attire is one. Eating out has become a way to mark social differentiation.

Very often, when a Moroccan asks about a lucrative business idea, the quick answer they get is “food.” This is enough proof that Moroccans’ eating habits are undergoing deep changes: more and more people are

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\(^6\) [https://www.challenge.ma/le-plafond-de-la-dotation-touristique-porte-a-200-000-dirhams-127125/](https://www.challenge.ma/le-plafond-de-la-dotation-touristique-porte-a-200-000-dirhams-127125/)
eating out, trying new dishes from different cultures, going to different restaurants hoping they finally settle on the one that offers their culinary delights and meets their psychological needs. Moroccan society seems to have truly developed a passion for food consumption, and this again signals its transition to a consumer society.

Gaming is another leisure pursuit that has been gaining more and more popularity among Moroccan teenagers and young adults in particular in recent years. According to the World Gaming Federation, which is an organizing body of worldwide gaming events and competitions, the number of Moroccan gaming enthusiasts has gone beyond 1 million members.\(^7\)

With the gaming community in Morocco growing bigger and bigger, we are witnessing a new mode of consumption characterized by virtuality. Gamers spend considerable amounts of time playing such games as GTA (Grand Theft Auto), Fortnite, and FIFA, to name but a few, and the pleasure becomes more accentuated when the gamers play online and spend real money on virtual goods like clothes for their characters and weapons for their fighters.

The pervasiveness of gaming, aka e-sport, in Morocco in recent years could be attributed to a couple of key factors. First of all, over the last 5 years or so, telecom companies, especially Inwi and Orange, have shown particular interest in supporting a gaming culture in the country. On 16 December 2018, Inwi organized Africa Gaming Fest in Casablanca—a gaming event that turned out to be the first of its kind in Africa according to the organizers with a cash prize of $15,000.\(^8\) A year earlier, Orange launched e-gaming weekends during which participants played such popular games as NBA 2K17, Street Fighter V, King of Fighters XIV, FIFA 17, and others. In the same year, the World Gaming Federation Maroc in partnership with Orange organized Africa Game Show with the best e-players coming from more than 13 African countries, including Morocco.\(^9\)

French NRJ radio station also joined the effort of setting up a gaming culture in Morocco. In the summer of 2017 and the spring of 2018, NRJ sponsored the gaming events Gaming Zone (2017) and Gaming Arena (2018) in Mohamed V Stadium and Morocco Mall respectively. The attendees experienced virtual reality (VR), retro and motion gaming, culture making, manga drawing, and other related activities.

Moreover, the culture of gaming in Morocco has flourished due to the establishment of a number of gaming studios since the turn of the twenty-first century. The most important of these is definitely the leading French multinational video-game developer Ubisoft. In 1998, Ubisoft started its business operations in Morocco, and that was the first gaming studio in North Africa at large. In 2008, and in collaboration with the Moroccan government, Ubisoft opened Campus Ubisoft, its specialized school for game development, and ever since then the campus had contributed a great deal to the evolution of the gaming industry in Morocco before it shut down in 2016 as the company “didn’t find a sustainable formula for the studio within our broader network,” explains Jean-Michel Detoc, Ubisoft Mobile Executive Director.

Today, Morocco has some home-born video-game studios that are contributing a great deal to the evolution of the gaming industry. Altplay, Rym Games, Lorem, Ezelia and Funsoft together with the organization of Moroccan Game Developers and with the backing of corporations like Inwi, Orange, and Fnac are taking the industry in the country to the next level.

The gaming industry is further developing with the opening of several modern gaming centers in large cities like Casablanca, Rabat, Tanger, and Marrakech. State-of-the-art gaming lounges like Moroccan Gaming Evolution (MGE) in Casablanca, for instance, provide gaming adepts with what it takes to hone their skills and, more importantly, get them hooked on gaming, and at that stage, it is not

12 Ibid.
hard to imagine the huge amount of money that gamers could put into their addiction.

Gaming offers players immediate gratification and a heightened sense of freedom, independence, escapism, and competition. In addition, the interactive and realistic nature of digital games enhances their attractiveness to a wider audience, especially teenagers and young adults.

What is more, if we consider the type of some mobile games that are popular among young girls in Morocco, it is easy to see the focus of such games on personal achievement, status, civility and the modern look. Shopping Mall Rich Girl Dress up, High Fashion Shopping Girl, and Kim Kardashian: Hollywood are three excellent examples of mobile games that feed the need of many young girls for their dream of mirroring the successful modern girl. This is done through the act of consuming—be it shopping for fashionable clothes, having a stylish hairdo, or any other related consumerist practice. In these games and other similar ones girls are engaged in virtual consumption, but the potential for real shopping and taking care of one’s look and thus creating one’s own star is real.

The values of happiness, freedom, achievement, and competition, to name but a few, as embedded in digital games serve as strong foundations for gamers’ entry into yet another facet of the consumer society. In this regard, the insight of the Frankfurt School into cultural goods is quite pertinent to the analysis of digital games as contemporary cultural goods whose production aims at generating profit. Theodor Adorno (Rutter and Bryce, 2006: 150), for example, argues that “what dominates and dictates the production of cultural goods (of which digital games are a contemporary example) is the production of economic capital (profit). What primarily drives and shapes popular cultural industries is not artistic freedom and creativity, but rather profit margins and exploiting the market.”

The Frankfurt School also maintains that cultural goods (of which digital games are an example) reflect a high degree of standardization as the gaming industry continues to produce copies of previously made games which have proven sales success, but involve minimal innovation (Rutter and Bryce, 2006: 150). This is quite evident in EA Sports FIFA which receives minimal updates and is repackaged every
year before it is placed on the market, and, to a lesser degree, we note
the same concept applied in Grand Theft Auto, whose penultimate
series (Grand Theft Auto: The Ballad of Gay Tony) was released in
2009 and in 2013 Grand Theft Auto V (the latest series) was launched.
This concept of planned obsolescence dominates the capitalist system
of production since it generates profit in a planned way.

Apart from the thriving leisure industry in Morocco, there has been a
keen interest in the human body and the culture of fitness and well-
being since roughly the turn of this century.

3.2. The Body in the Nascent Consumer Society in Morocco

In the modern consumer culture, the body takes center stage. People
take care of their bodies not only to prevent disease but also to feel
good about how their bodies appear to themselves and to others as
well. As Chris Shilling explains, “The young, slim and sexual body is
highly prized in contemporary consumer culture, whereas ageing
bodies tend to be sequestered from public attention” (Shilling, 2003:
31). Therefore, as Shilling (2003: 32) notes, the body is “to be finely
tuned, cared for, reconstructed and carefully presented through such
measures as regular physical exercise, personal health programmes,
high-fibre diets and colour-coded dressing.”

In today’s modern consumer societies, the body image matters,
because it is assumed that “status and social acceptability depend on
how a person looks.”¹⁴ Mike Featherstone takes the matter further
when he bases this view on physiognomic insights; Featherstone
maintains that “the body, especially the face, is a reflection of the self:
that a person’s inner character or personality will shine through the
outer appearance.”

With the sizeable impact of the media industry and the openness of
people to be affected, becoming fat, or not attending to one’s
appearance, or looking old before one’s time tends to be a sign of
laziness and “having a flawed self,” to borrow Mike Featherstone.
Hence, body transformation techniques like dieting, exercising,

¹⁴ Mike Featherstone, “Body, Image and Affect in Consumer Culture”
http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1023.7887&rep=r
ep1&type=pdf
cosmetic surgery, and massage using essential oils are a blessing for those who aspire to an ideal body, just as the media set the standards for the ideal body.

In Morocco, it appears that people have taken to the culture of body maintenance and fitness. This is quite perceptible in the ubiquitous health and fitness clubs as well as the yoga retreats in large cities, in particular. What is more, the impact of the media on people’s perception of their selves is quite enormous. To illustrate, a number of Moroccans, especially urbanites, watch various foreign films and TV series and have access to a variety of lifestyle magazines, both national and foreign; what Moroccans watch and read tends to influence the way they see themselves in terms of status, social acceptability, and perhaps even their careers. The focus of the media on appearance, nutrition, body shape, and youthfulness is quite evident. The inevitable corollary of this media pressure is that people become enmeshed in the trap of adorning their bodies in ways that could make them look like their favorite celebrities. So, a consumer would dress a certain way with a certain watch on the hand and wear a certain perfume and sunglasses just to look like a star. Today, having a toned body and youthful looks that match up with modern times is eagerly sought.

Apart from media influence, the impact of the cosmetics industry, which also uses different media channels to reach out to the consumer, cannot be underestimated. Beauty enhancement for Moroccan women is no longer limited to the use of such natural beauty products as ghassoul, kohl, argan oil, henna, swak, and rouge, which are obviously of less monetary value to the capitalist system. Today, with a wider access to the job market, many women allocate whole budgets for beauty and personal care products. A visit to a personal hygiene and beauty products store in cities like Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakech should give us an idea of how much the body matters to women in Morocco.

In addition to bricks-and-mortar retailing, online shopping platforms are pushing Moroccan consumers, especially women, into more spending on the body. For example, Citymall (more than 47,000 Facebook fans), Beauty Mall (more than 10,000 fans), and Mapara (more than 109,000 fans) are growing in popularity among shoppers.
for beauty products, and they are becoming strong competitors to well-established physical stores—a reason that may have motivated L’Oreal Maroc, the market leader in the industry,\textsuperscript{15} to sign partnerships with Jumia, Beauty Mall, and Citymall.\textsuperscript{16}

Increased spending on beauty and hygiene products is also encouraged through the effort made by professionals in the industry. Cosmetista Expo, the first of its kind in Morocco, is an international exhibition of beauty, hygiene and wellness products that was organized for the first time in October 2016 in Casablanca, and since then it has been held annually. The exhibition is a special event for exhibitors to explore business opportunities and practitioners to keep up with the latest in the field and try to broaden their customer base. Today Cosmetista Expo has got more than 62,000 Facebook fans, which must be encouraging to the organizers.

A market research report published in June 2019 by Euromonitor International indicates that the beauty and personal care market in Morocco registered strong growth in 2018.\textsuperscript{17} According to the report, this is attributed mainly to a growing concern among Moroccan consumers for their looks and image as well as the influence of foreign films and series. Similarly, in a report\textsuperscript{18} published in May 2018 about Morocco cosmetics market size, share and trends, Grand View Research estimated the market size at US $ 1.09 billion in 2017. The report forecasts more growth in the cosmetics market between 2018 and 2025. It also reveals that the demand for cosmetics in Morocco is fuelled by changing consumer lifestyles, increasing awareness regarding skin care products, and growing disposable income of the middle class. In addition, investments in R&D and advances in technology are supporting growth in the market.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17}https://www.euromonitor.com/beauty-and-personal-care-in-morocco/report
\textsuperscript{18}https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/morocco-cosmetics-market
At the state policy level, it has been noted that the body has even been an object of concern for national governments over the past two decades, which have been marked by rapid social change in Morocco. Across the country, more sport facilities have opened and many public gardens have been fit with sports equipment. Furthermore, Morocco has already set the budget of €54 million for the construction of 800 proximity sports fields between 2018 and 2020. The health and fitness of the nation appear to be a national issue now.

3.3. Celebrations: Cultural Transformation

Celebrations are another area where consumer culture has made its intrusion into Moroccan society. Eid al-Adha offers a good case in point. In the run-up to the feast, Moroccans become busy indeed preparing for the celebration; apart from home cleaning, people show the tendency of going on a shopping spree where their shopping practices often veer toward soothing the ego in terms of the quantity of food and the items they buy and sometimes the purpose for which some items are bought, like home textiles and furniture. Consequently, many Moroccan families incur debts that take them months to pay off. Contributing factors leading to such a situation boil down to a lack of personal finance knowledge and the ease of getting loans. Added to that is a little bit of psychology involved where families do their best to fit into the social fabric they belong or aspire to. For example, the size of the ram the neighbors buy could lead to the purchase of a similar one next door, though the purchasing power of the family is limited.

While Eid al-Adha is meant to be an occasion for Muslims to commemorate the willingness of Prophet Abraham to sacrifice his son Ismail as an act of obedience to God, many Moroccans do not seem to heed the proper religious purpose of it, as clear in the rituals. In fact, in their preparation for Eid, a multitude of people tend to focus more on pleasing the senses and less on practicing religion. The outcome is that Eid becomes a real bonanza time for financial institutions,

advertising agencies, food and fashion retailers, and companies in the transportation industry.

When it comes to celebrations, Moroccans do not limit themselves to the observance of Muslim celebrations only, but many of them are open to foreign celebrations of which Christmas is a good example to consider. Interest in the celebration in Morocco appears to be driven by the workings of advertising creatives, and, obviously, the impact of western culture should not be ignored as well.

In the collective consciousness of Moroccans, Christmas time is gradually becoming associated with festivity and shopping. In public squares Santa Claus dressed in red and white walks and greets people, and kids seize the moment for pictures. People wishing to celebrate at home with family and/or friends can easily buy Christmas home decorations at retailers like Marjane, Carrefour, YATOUT, and others. There are even Christmas markets in cities like Rabat, Marrakech, Casablanca and Tangier.

Christmas is also a celebration of sweet taste. Retailers like Marjane and Carrefour, especially in major cities, display a large variety of chocolate for customers’ sweet tooth at the entrance to the retail floor. Chocolate, which is basically an ordinary product, has been turned into a highly regarded symbol of love, desire, and happiness. The growing popularity of it at this time of year implies that an important section of Moroccan society has reached a stage where feelings have become aligned with the symbols suggested by chocolate—quite of a change in the value system of Moroccan culture.

Likewise, the period between Christmas and New Year’s Day registers a dramatic increase in alcohol consumption. Pubs, licensed restaurants, nightclubs, public gardens, or simply the seaside are common places frequented for fun drinking during this festive time of year. What begins as a celebration involving alcohol sometimes degenerates into violence. Thus, the increased demand for alcoholic beverages at the end of the year becomes a security issue in the country. As a result, more police patrols are carried out.

Shopping is another aspect of consumerism in Morocco which is associated with the end of the year. In recent years, many people have started showing keen interest in Black Friday (though the deals
available are not representative of the shopping event in any way as in the West) and the beginning of the new year for sales. Some Moroccans even schedule end-of-year shopping trips to neighboring Spain or France, and interestingly they post their purchases on social media for others to see. These are people who live a life of ease, comfort, and luxury.

3.4. Moroccans and the Pursuit of Luxury

The term “luxury” is often used by people to refer to a person’s quality of life as reflecting superiority, uniqueness, exclusiveness, rarity, and indulgence. The Cambridge Dictionary details the term by describing luxury as “Great comfort, esp. as provided by expensive and beautiful possessions, surroundings, or food, or something enjoyable and often expensive but not necessary.” However, the term remains elusive, as there is a certain degree of subjectivity in people’s perception of the concept. It should not be always understood in terms of monetary value since factors like people’s sentiments often get involved.

In Morocco, buying a tract of land in the country and building a villa and surrounding it with a garden could be understood by some as a sign of luxurious life while to others it is simply an escape from the hustle and bustle of the city life, especially on retirement. Another example about people’s perception of luxury is the trips across the country that some people often have. What appears to be an elitist pursuit could be a normal thing for others. Hence, people measure “luxury” differently.

Scholars may agree about the elusiveness of the term, but for consumers in Morocco luxury could be anything of quality that costs a lot and therefore gives status and prestige. It should be noted that in recent years Moroccans’ appetite for luxury items and life of comfort has been rising due, most probably, to continuous economic development in the country and a rapid growth of the middle class and its income level. This could also be corroborated statistically through the rise in wealth per capita in Morocco from US $ 3,300 in 2016 to

20 https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/measuring-middle-class-world-and-morocco
US $ 3,700 in 2017\textsuperscript{22} and the positive economic prospects in the country.

Luxury pursuit in Morocco has been reflected in different ways. While a large section of society has started devoting resources to such things as physical exercise in a medium-scale standard or top-class fitness center and frequent dining in restaurants, a higher social class adds to the list fun weekend trips to destinations in Morocco or neighboring Europe. For some, they have become real gallivanders, largely fuelled by the high income they earn and the attractive modern lifestyle they embrace.

Apart from sport and travel, the pursuit of luxury in Morocco is also manifest in the acquisition of artworks. According to a specialist in the Moroccan art market, “To a rich Moroccon, owning an artwork by Jilali Gharbaoui or Hassan El Glaoui at home or in the office has become like owning an artwork by Picasso or Van Gogh.”\textsuperscript{23} Artwork ownership is truly a sort of a mechanism whereby the rich in Morocco have started demonstrating wealth and social differentiation.

Further, over the second decade of the century, there has been a high increase in the number of spas and well-being centers targeting mainly high-income earning individuals. The same category of people seeking such pleasures have developed interest in possessing luxury cars like Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Maserati, Audi, Land Rover, Jaguar, Porsche, and Ferrari, especially in Casablanca, Rabat, and Marrakech, where the car market is booming. They also compete to own secondary residences in various parts of Morocco and even in Europe.

4. Conclusion
The considerable appeal of western cultures has led to the gravitation of the rest of world cultures towards some sort of cultural convergence or the emulation of aspects of western ways of living. Thus, the emergence of consumer societies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa has become a reality.

\textsuperscript{22} https://www.afrasiabank.com/media/3205/africa-wealth-report-2018.pdf
\textsuperscript{23} http://economie-entreprises.com/2013/12/01/pas-de-crise-pour-nos-riches/
In the case of Morocco, around the turn of the century, we started noting significant socio-cultural changes sweeping Moroccan society. For example, youth began adopting new lifestyles similar to western ones like eating out, travelling, shopping, and pet keeping. In addition, more than any time before, people started showing a growing interest in home makeovers, the improvement of appearance, and healthy living. Even at the level of family planning, Moroccan families started opting for smaller families. On the one hand, these changes are largely attributable to the impact of Western cultures; on the other hand, they would not be possible without modern communication technologies, mass media, opening up to the world, and economic growth.

Economic growth is believed to boost consumer confidence and therefore leads to increased consumption. The latter should no longer be thought of as an economic phenomenon, but more importantly as a cultural and sociological phenomenon. Whether we like it or not, culture defines our consumption patterns and justifies social practices associated with them.

Consumer culture is gaining more momentum in Morocco as the country is continuing doing well economically, interaction between Moroccan culture and western ones is deepening, and the importance of consumption to the Moroccan psyche and identity is gathering more strength. Similarly, I believe that the absence of consumer education in our schools and the widespread financial illiteracy are taking a toll on Moroccans’ lives. In other words, in the pursuit of happiness or gaining status or even differentiating one’s self from the rest, many Moroccans end up resorting to financial institutions for personal loans, which instead of helping them make dreams come true, they get them entangled in debt repayment for years to come.

In the light of the intensification of consumer culture in Morocco, consumption will continue taking center stage. Recently, people have started going beyond necessary consumption to satisfy desires. What is needed then is clearly some mechanism to tame the impulse of buying shoddy or unnecessary items and curb consumerist practices. Over the medium term, this seems unattainable for good reasons. In the first place, consumer culture in Moroccan society is recent and there seems to be a desire within Moroccans to experience it inside
out. Further, the capitalist system is predicated on consumption beyond necessity, which makes it a matter of life or death for the economy. In fact, one can go as far as to say that it is also a social security, if not a national security, issue since consumption creates job opportunities and eases social tension.

The intensification of consumer culture in Morocco will also benefit from growing urbanization and the desire to rub shoulders with upper social classes, for aspiring to higher things is a natural human tendency. In this respect, the trickle-down effect of consumption can only be a foregone conclusion.

The emergence of consumer society in Morocco should raise important questions about the sustainability of consumption and the environment. Any day-to-day consumption practice of Moroccans should reflect a deep understanding of what the promises and stakes are, whether that relates to our material situation, the environment, personal relations, or social morality. I would like to emphasize that in the long run frugality and rationality are two vital qualities which should govern our consumption practices for the good of our society.

Perhaps one reminder to issue in this regard is that consumer society with all its underpinnings will definitely run its course to saturation. At that point, one might predict some willingness among Moroccans to reconsider consumer culture and ponder alternatives. One serious option seems to be the adoption of a minimalist approach to consumption. The expected outcome is that the consumer will be in a better position to break his fetters and regain his agency.

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