

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Marketing Communication and Public Relations

**Bachelor's Thesis**

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Department of Marketing Communication and Public Relations

**Contribution of Frankfurt School to Critical  
Marketing Studies**

Bachelor's Thesis

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**Study programme: Media and Communication Studies**

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Year of the defence: 2018

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

Prague, May 11, 2018

Eliška Plíhalová

## **References**

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## **Title**

Contribution of Frankfurt School to Critical Marketing Studies

## **Abstract**

The objective of this thesis is to uncover the basics of the contribution of Frankfurt School to critical marketing scholarship. Three questions were set down to meet this objective: Do the critical marketing scholars refer to the work of Frankfurt School? How do they view their theory, do they take it as a basis for their work or do they contest it instead? And are they exploring similar topics? The method of this thesis is a literature review, employed not only as a mere data gathering tool detecting articles that have elaborated Frankfurt School's ideas, but also applied to provide the reader with meaning-making, analysing understanding, interpretation and comparison. Therefore, a convenience sampling was used. While the descriptive part concerns Frankfurt School and presents selected writings, the analytical part juxtaposes these ideas with articles of critical marketing scholars. The analytical portion was sorted into following thematic areas, based on keywords derived from Tadajewski (2010): adopting critical view, materialism, consumer culture, consumer sovereignty, hegemonic role of the market and research assumptions. Clear analogies between approaches, topics and overall ethos have been detected between both disciplines and are emphasised throughout the paper.

## **Keywords**

critical theory, Frankfurt School, critical marketing studies, materialism, consumer sovereignty, consumer culture

## **Název práce**

Odkaz Frankfurtské školy v současné kritice marketingové komunikace

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této práce je odhalit podstatu odkazu Frankfurtské školy v oboru kritiky marketingové komunikace. Za účelem dosažení tohoto cíle byly formulovány tři otázky: Citují autoři kritiky marketingové komunikace díla Frankfurtské školy? Jak se dívají na jejich teorii, staví na ní své výzkumy, nebo ji naopak zpochybňují? A zkoumají obdobná témata? Metodou této bakalářské práce je literární rešerše. Ta slouží nejen jako pouhá metoda sběru dat, jakožto článků rozpracovávajících myšlenky Frankfurtské školy, ale také jako nástroj analýzy. Ta čtenáři poskytne porozumění, interpretaci a srovnání. I z toho důvodu byl pro literární rešerši použit výběr vzorků dle vhodnosti. Zatímco deskriptivní část se zabývá Frankfurtskou školou a představí čtyři vybrané texty, analytická část postaví myšlenky z těchto i dalších textů do juxtapozice s vybranými články kritiků marketingové komunikace. Analytická část je dle shrnujícího článku Tadjewskiho (2010) na základě klíčových slov rozčleněna do následujících tematických okruhů: adaptace kritického přístupu, materialismus, konzumní kultura, spotřebitelská suverenita, hegemonie trhu a typologie výzkumů. V průběhu celé práce jsou ukázány jasné paralely v přístupu autorů, v metodologii výzkumů, v tématech i celkovém étosu těchto dvou disciplín.

## **Klíčová slova**

kritická teorie, Frankfurtská škola, kritika marketingové komunikace, materialismus, spotřebitelská suverenita, konzumní kultura

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# 1. Introduction

With the rhizomatic thicket of roots of market and consumption phenomena being spread globally, a call for scientific search for deconstructing conventional reality becomes an imperative. As Baruch Spinoza famously expressed: ‘Our aim in life is neither to laugh nor to cry, it is to understand’ (Spinoza, 1677, cf. Elwes, 1951).

In recent years, the argument commonly put forward that marketing lacks any underlying critical edge has been questioned, and significant progress has been made towards employing critical perspectives into marketing literature. In this line of thought, the objective of this bachelor thesis is to analyse the theoretical background of critical marketing studies presented by the philosophers of Frankfurt School.

Frankfurt School had a significant impact on the philosophical, social and economic assumptions (now considered as) inherent to the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s zeitgeist. Ramifications of their work are present in contemporary philosophy, social sciences, humanities, psychology and even some streams of economics. Be that as it may, the question that arises is: ‘Did the Frankfurt School influence the critical marketing studies as well?’ In an attempt to follow this question, the mere aim of this thesis is to uncover the basics of the contribution of Frankfurt School to critical marketing scholarship, considering the width and depth of both.

Although other influential writings of scholars affiliated with the Frankfurt School will be mentioned throughout this paper, four writings were selected for illustration of Frankfurt School’s brand of theory. These writings were chosen not only with regard to their insights into capitalism, consumer culture associated and perspectives on human nature, but furthermore, with regard to their conjoint influence on critical marketing scholarship. While my thesis proposal outlined exploring the work of three specific Frankfurt School’s authors, including Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer, the course of the literature review process has shown intellectually useful to step out of this frame. There is no doubt of the amplitude of thoughts and writings of each member, let alone the body produced as a whole. Consequently, the number of writings was reduced to four in order to generate a more coherent thesis.

While the descriptive part will introduce the selected writings of Frankfurt School with placing emphasis on Critical Theory, the analytical part will examine the interpretation of these theories by scholars of critical marketing studies. In the course of initial literature screening, a comprehensive article by Mark Tadajewski

*Towards a History of Critical Marketing Studies* (2010) has proved valuable. In this article, he researched a sizable amount of literature deriving both from within and outside the field. Moreover, he outlined central topics in critical marketing. This complex and systemic literature review serves as a footing for this thesis.

### 1.1. Methodology

The method of this thesis is a literature review, understood as a ‘systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesising the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars, and practitioners’ (Fink, 2010, pp. 3). Thus, it stands to reason that the literature review process may be viewed primarily as a data collection tool, that is, as a means of collecting a body of information pertinent to a topic. But furthermore, it may also be viewed as a tool for identifying, understanding and meaning-making of information germane to this topic (Booth *et al.*, 2016).

As indicated, an article by Tadajewski *Towards a History of Critical Marketing Studies* (2010) was taken as a basis for this literature review. The author not only describes certain genealogies of critical marketing studies, but furthermore provides central topics in critical marketing; naming the chapters as follows: Need, choice and choicelessness, Commodity fetishism and ‘den of deception’, Distorted communication and neoliberalism and lastly, Manipulation. A detailed reading of this article provided identification of following keywords: *consumer sovereignty*, and the problematics of need and *choice*; alienation and *commodity fetishism*; sustainment of status-quo, its *(de)naturalisation*, power relations in unequal postmodernised societies, and lastly the issues of *consumer* and *consumerism*. Excluding these topics, keywords such as *critical theory* and *Frankfurt School* were used to uncover the explicit links with critical marketing studies. Researching articles via these keywords has shaped several thematic areas that will be discussed in the analytical part, namely: adapting radical views, materialism, consumer culture and sovereignty, hegemonic role of the market and lastly, research assumptions.

This thesis does not aim at mere enumeration of read articles, but instead, it also attempts to compare ideas, analyse and search for the imprint of Frankfurt School in the writings. Do the critical marketing scholars refer to their work? How do they

view their theory, do they take it as a basis for their work or do they contest it instead? And are they exploring similar topics?

For the purpose of analysing understanding, interpretation and elaboration of seemingly dated topics within critical marketing studies a method of convenience sampling was used. This technique is usually used because it allows the researcher to obtain basic data and to detect relationship among different phenomena within the given sample. Consequently, contemporary and often cited articles were reviewed. Additionally, to assure a more comprehensive outcome, articles that have taken different or even contradictory perspectives on a given topic were reviewed.

As an afterthought, the borders determining what is and what is not considered to be in the realm of critical marketing studies are obscure. Many marketing scholars adopt a radical perspective without affiliating themselves to the discipline. For that reason, articles from contemporary and preceding academic journals were reviewed, to assure a more aggregate output sans more or less artificial distinction.

## 2. Descriptive part

As noted above, the descriptive part will provide a background of ideas from theorist of Frankfurt School, that will be thereupon utilised in the analytical part. Following a brief explanation of the difference between critical marketing studies and critics originating from outside the discipline, the chapter will concern Frankfurt School. What are the main ideas formulated by Frankfurt School that are related to consumerism? To answer this question, four writings of Frankfurt School were selected to provide the reader with a concise overview. A separate subsection was reserved for presentation of critical theory, its attributes and its method. Moreover, a contribution of their work to the discussion on the conduct of marketing practices exercised by critical marketing scholars will be suggested.

### 2.1. Critical marketing studies and/or critique of marketing

It is useful and intellectually central (not only for this paper) to differentiate between critical marketing studies emerging from within the marketing scholarship and the critics from outside the field (most firmly presented by D. Zwick, cf. Schroeder, 2007, pp. 22). Scholars from a wide range of disciplines aim to take the society apart and try

to find out how it works. With marketing communications being a driving element of a capitalist society, topics attached to it, such as production and consumption, consequently also tend to be examined by a variety of scholars. This thesis then will seek to understand how controversies and debates that were not from the field have in fact shaped it.

Marketing activities have arisen as an inherent part of the market economy. As the technologies of production were advanced and the new media like radio emerged, the studies on how does marketing work and why, have begun to form. Even Marx criticised marketing; it just was not defined as such at that time. For instance, he indicated it is a consequence of increased productivity caused by relative surplus value (1867/1909). Similarly, the Frankfurt School has dealt with mass production and consumerism. Nevertheless, their theory was meant to reflect the society as a whole and was not designated only for marketing studies and therefore was not termed as such.

Marketing as a subject has proved to be on one hand globally popular to study, but it has also shown to be almost impossible to pin down since there is a little consensus about what it means to study *marketing* (Ellis, 2011). Similarly, the meaning of the term ‘critical marketing studies’ is still evolving. Even so, the definition by Tadjewski (2011, pp. 83) may serve as a tool in understanding the bottom-line:

‘Critical Marketing Studies is concerned with challenging marketing concepts, ideas and ways of reflection that present themselves as ideologically neutral or that otherwise have assumed a taken-for-granted status.’

The emergence of the critical marketing studies as a discipline begun in the 1970s, when the academics in the US<sup>1</sup> affiliated with the Association for Consumer Research, most notably, wished to distance themselves from the managerialist orientation of the marketing discipline (ibid.).

Today, the line between studies that originated from the field and the ones made by philosophers or social scientists is blurred. Not to mention that marketing scholars themselves have questioned the tendency towards its separation and have been calling for interdisciplinarity. As Dholakia argues in his review of research spaces and epistemic barriers, an elevated macro-level perspective is imperative for conducting critical studies in the fields of marketing and consumer research (Dholakia, 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> Even though the field has started to form in the United States, work of scholars from other countries will be mentioned throughout the paper as well.

To close this chapter, a remark on the overall state of the discipline (or its ethos) follows. It becomes clear that critical marketing is ‘alive and well’ and is developing into an established tradition with its heritage; from edited books setting the agenda and journals investigating the impact of marketing upon society to critical work regularly appearing in teaching practice (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 31).<sup>2</sup>

## **2.2. Frankfurt School**

Frankfurt School was a circle of social theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research at the Goethe University Frankfurt. The School was founded in 1923 and mainly consisted of neo-Marxist dissidents, who believed that prevalent theory could not adequately explain the turbulent and unforeseen development of capitalist societies in the twentieth century. This chapter will introduce its leading members and address the historical and social context of its foundation and development.

The uniqueness of their theory lied in its extent. Not only they contested the communistic state system and the fascist ideology as anticipated, but furthermore, they brought into question the inherent benefit of the omnipresent capitalistic system. While being critical of this system, their writings often published via their platform *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* aimed to create a path of social development as an alternative to current possibilities.

Even though these philosophers were sometimes only loosely connected, they spoke with a common paradigm in mind; they shared the Marxist Hegelian premises and tried to fill in the gaps, which were ascribed to Marxism of that time, by using insights from other schools of thought: psychoanalysis, existential philosophy, antipositivist sociology and other disciplines. However, the Frankfurt School is mostly known for a particular brand of culturally focused neo-Marxist theory – a rethinking of classical Marxism to update it to their socio-historical period – which proved seminal for the fields of sociology, media studies, cultural studies and others (Harvey, 1990).

Which theorist to include to Frankfurt School differs from scholar to scholar. The reasoning behind that also may lie in the fact, that the term ‘school’ here does not refer to a specific institution, but merely serves as an informal title. Only a few of those

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<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it is necessary to note that what is understood to be critical is worthy of reflection.

theorists have used the name themselves, and additionally, their projects were not always tightly woven. Some of the most commonly mentioned are Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal. Since the 1970s, a second generation began with Jürgen Habermas, who, among other merits, helped in turning Frankfurt School global, influencing methodological approaches in other European academic contexts and disciplines (Markusová, 1996, pp. 1266). Habermas (1992, pp. 48–49), when discussing the term ‘Frankfurt School’ has asserted that it is a retrospective label which erroneously suggests a higher homogeneity of outlook and interest than in fact existed among the first generation.

### **2.2.1. Social and political context of interwar period**

Political events that have occurred in Germany’s troubled interwar years have considerably affected the School’s development. Among these events is the disillusionment deriving from the failure of the communist revolution in Western Europe that has proved Marx’s prediction false. This led many of the members to take up the task of choosing what parts of Marx’s thought might serve to clarify contemporary social conditions that Marx himself had never seen (for more on the circumstances of the creation of Institute, see Jay, 1996, pp. 3–40)

Another one of these events is the zeitgeist of Nazism in the economically weak Weimar Republic, which has already been facing numerous problems. Except for the rise of political extremism, there was hyperinflation, and the relationships with the victors of the First World War remained contentious. Many of the Frankfurt School’s, e.g. Horkheimer, Fromm or Benjamin, were born into Jewish families and they have been significantly affected by the growing power of nationalism in pre-war Germany (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 35).

Given the political context of pre-war Germany, Horkheimer, who was the director of the Institute at that time, chose to move the Institute for the safety of its members. Initially, they moved to Geneva in 1933, and then to New York in 1935, where they affiliated with the Columbia University. The migration to the US was another event that has considerably influenced these theorists. Besides the pervading consumer lifestyle that had been an ever more manifested norm there, a firm anti-communistic ethos, that has permeated the mentality in the post-war USA (Markusová, 1996, pp. 1266–1268).

### 2.2.2. Selected writings of Frankfurt School

‘When standing behind our conceptions of reality and understanding of our place in the world, there is a form of the *unconscious*’, Paul Fry, a literary critic, noted in his lecture at Yale University (Fry, 2009). He linked this quote to the most devastating critique of the state of affairs that has meandered along without too much self-consciousness, the Marxist one. Frankfurt Schools’ work seriously re-examined Marxist theory, but at the same time aimed at exposing the structures that construct reality. For the reader to grasp the main ideas of Frankfurt School’s critique, four often cited and renowned works will be presented. They were selected not only based on their influence, but also for their insight into topics derived from Tadjewski (2010), such as materialism, perspectives on the independence of human nature, consumer culture, sustainment of status quo, etc. Specifically, this chapter will briefly introduce four writings and suggest their possible legacy within critical marketing studies. Firstly, Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, secondly Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*, and lastly, two works by Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* and *Escape from Freedom* will be described.

*Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a core text of Critical Theory, was first published in 1944, and it has had a major effect on 20th-century philosophy, sociology, culture, and politics, inspiring especially the New Left of the 1960s (Jay, 1996, pp. xii). Max Horkheimer has collaborated with Theodor Adorno on several books, and this one is not an exception. While Adorno’s field of study included philosophy, sociology and music, Horkheimer can be considered as a less vibrant but perhaps more solid critical theorist (Magee, Berlin, 1979). In this book, they argue that mass culture has become a new form of social dominance and that the traditional theories have failed to explain its impacts and ramifications. In the modern world, Adorno and Horkheimer bemoaned, leisure time has fallen into the hands of an omnipresent and profoundly malevolent entertainment machine, which they called the culture industry. It keeps human beings distracted, unable to understand the open prison within which they exist and without the will to alter political reality (1944/2002, pp. 94–136). Apart from that, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, that the entertainment apparatus does not make life more worthy. ‘The idea of fully utilising the capacities for aesthetic mass consumption is a part of an economic system which refuses to utilise capacities when it is a question of abolishing hunger’ (ibid, pp. 111).

The term culture industry, which they presented as critical vocabulary as opposed to popular culture, may be linked to coeval consumer culture. Although Horkheimer and Adorno referred primarily to a factory producing standardised cultural goods; its application on researching consumerism will be further discussed in the analytical part.

The second influential book to be mentioned is *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse, a political theorist, philosopher and sociologist. It was first published in 1964, and it embraces a wide-ranging critique of both contemporary capitalism and the Communist social order of the Soviet Union. For Marcuse, a one-dimensional society is a concept which describes a state of affairs without critical thinking, alternatives, and potentialities that transcend the established technological society. He further notes that ‘there seems to be no reason why the production and distribution of goods and services should proceed through the competitive concurrence of individual liberties’ (1964/2002, pp. 4).

While the book might be considered as somewhat passé, Rastovic (2013) spots reasons to revisit its comprehension of technological domination in ‘advanced industrial society’ in which we live today, mainly because of the ‘crises of capitalism’ that has occurred in 2008. Furthermore, he asserts, there are new forms of control exercised by application of impersonal rules by the social hierarchy that create the one-dimensional society (Rastovic, 2013, pp. 111). Marcuse’s informal moniker - ‘professor behind the 1960s protests’ - epitomises the emancipatory character of his brand of theory, which aims at facilitating social awareness and change. The topic of domination and its consequences will be further elaborated in an upcoming chapter, more specifically in the form of hegemonic role of the market economy.

Another two well-known works to be described were created by a social psychologist, psychoanalyst and humanistic philosopher, Erich Fromm. The first book, *Escape from Freedom*, was first published in 1941, even before the end of second world war. Fromm asks why Hitler was democratically elected as a leader and why the Nazi movement was successful overall. He based the discussion stemming from these questions on a hypothesis that a person is afraid to be free. The so-called freedom gives one an enormous responsibility and a demand for commitment to being proactive and continuously able to think critically and act rationally. Psychologically, sometimes a person relies on someone to make those decisions for them and Fromm shows that on examples of tendencies towards authoritarianism and even sadomasochism.

With the transition from redistribution to a market economy, people were suddenly taken out from structured society, where they occupied a particular position and comprehended the social level they belonged to (see Polanyi, 1944/1962). In capitalism, a consuming citizen is expected to aim actively at establishing *zirsself*<sup>3</sup> in different spots in the socio-economic ladder of the societal hierarchy (Fromm, 1941/2013). Paradoxically, autonomous consumer action is an argumentative foundation for the market economy itself. In following chapters, research of critical marketing scholars and their stands on the topic of an independent *homo economicus* will be elaborated.

The last book to be mentioned is Fromm's later work *To Have or To Be*, in which he examines two basic modes of existence – *a mode of having* and *a mode of being*. By referring to the crises of society, unlimited and spiralling consumerism emerging since the industrial revolution, he offers a vision of the mode of existence depending on inner qualities rather than on material external world. 'For the first time in history, the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart.' (Fromm, 1967/1976, pp. 8) In the first chapter, Fromm identifies four areas where the industrial age has failed to fulfil its Great Promise of Unlimited Progress. Firstly, human beings are *not* independent masters of their own lives but have become a mere cog in the bureaucratic machine with its manipulation tools represented by the government, industry and mass communication. Secondly, an unrestricted satisfaction of one's longing does *not* lead to well-being. Thirdly, the economic progress under market economy is *not* universal but remains restricted to wealthy nations ever widening the scissors between rich and poor. Last promise is the omnipresent benefit brought by technological progress. Fromm claims that it has led to ecological disaster and the danger of nuclear war – with both of these causes being undeniably able to destroy the human race.

These promises of modern industrialisation were developed to fulfil needs and increase possessions, but with the failure of meeting them, another consequence has emerged. A consequence of deviation of human nature towards a more materialistic one. There is a debate among critical marketing scholars on whether to follow this dogma or if challenging its argumentation is in place. In following chapters, some of

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<sup>3</sup> A gender neutral pronoun *ze*, flexed as *ze/zir/zirs/zirself*, is used throughout this paper to describe any individual, regardless of sex or gender.

these debates together with some studies on materialism and consumerism will be presented.

A conclusion of this rather voluminous chapter follows. When revisiting Marx's devastating critique, the Frankfurt School denaturalised many areas of social reality that have been constructed in advanced industrial society, such as culture, ideologies, economy, the human nature and many more. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* the instrument preconditioning humans and creating a political, cultural and economic unconsciousness, is considered to be the culture industry. In *One-Dimensional Man* the cultural and societal decline is connected to technological domination hindering individuals from critical thinking. For Fromm, the omnipresence of advanced industrial society significantly affected the human nature. Firstly, it has brought freedom, which bears the burden of commitments and responsibilities, and secondly, it has brought the respective predominance of *the mode of having* which determines the materialistic totality of a person's thinking.

Regardless of this reductionist summary, this chapter does not attempt to categorise Frankfurt School's scholars into fields. As was noted above, they shared a common paradigm, and their topics were interconnected.

### **2.2.3. Critical Theory**

While the writings described above may provide a review of the 'what', let this chapter focus on the 'how'. Critical Theory<sup>4</sup> is a term describing the neo-Marxist philosophy of Frankfurt School and is denominated in such manner simply because of its emphasis on the "critical" component of theory. At its very heart is an aversion to closed philosophical systems (Jay, 1996, pp. 41). Through contrapuntal interactions with other theories and schools, it sought to bring to the light the ideologies operating as the principal obstacles to human liberation. Even though the Institute has conjointly developed the design of critical theory, the philosopher and sociologist that has laid the foundations is considered to be Max Horkheimer - more specifically his magnum opus *Eclipse of Reason* (1947/2004). This chapter will illustrate the essence of critical theory on its five attributes.

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<sup>4</sup> When addressing explicitly the Critical Theory of Frankfurt School, a proper noun capitalisation is required. However, with growing diffusion of this immanent critique into other

Despite classical critical theory's subsequent evolution, Harvey (1990, pp. 1–10) has identified five attributes that can be suggested for its working definition. Firstly, critical theory is rooted in the Western Marxist tradition. In the time of World War I, its philosophy sought to shape the consciousness of the working class and to an extent contribute to the revolutionary movement. Secondly, critical theory strives to prevail its reflexive character, seeking to understand both the social and material processes which formed the theory. Thirdly, the sociological program of critical theory is anti-positivist<sup>5</sup> and approaches every phenomenon as a complex dialectically mediated and historically grounded whole. Even every immediate world fact or supposedly objective scientific finding should not be treated as an ahistorical and autonomous entity. Fourthly, critical theory adheres to reason, and despite the Frankfurt School theorists' acquaintance with existentialist and phenomenological movements, it stayed (and stays) epistemologically anti-irrationalist. Lastly, critical theory is inherently open on an epistemological and ontological level, in other words, it is essentially open-ended, probing and anticipates an *unfinished quality*.

Omitting the utility of the concerns mentioned above in understanding critical theory, it would be misleading not to point out its another crucial component – its method. As an immanent critique, it enters an 'interior dialogue' with a traditional theory to reify orthodoxies of an age (Horkheimer, 1972, pp. 188–243). When Martin Jay provided a comprehensive review of the history of the Institute of Social Research, he also reflected the continuing relevance of the work of the Frankfurt School, and additionally, he accented its method.

Its development was through dialogue, its genesis as dialectical as the methods it purported to apply to social phenomena. Only by confronting it in its own terms, as a gadfly of other systems, can it be fully understood (Jay, 1996, pp. 41).

In sum, critical theory interfered with status quo by potently upsetting questions. Today this expanding paradigm seems to have found a place in contemporary sociological discourse (Harvey, 1990, pp. 1). This chapter has presented these five

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fields of sociology and philosophy, the term has accustomed, and thus, a general noun 'critical theory' will be used throughout this paper.

<sup>5</sup> There was a political-philosophical dispute, the *Positivism dispute*, between the Frankfurt School and the critical rationalists, represented by Karl Popper. (Markusová, 1996, pp. 1267)

attributes: its rootedness in the Western Marxist tradition, its reflexive character, its anti-positivistic approach in exploring the world, its epistemological anti-irrationality, and lastly, its urge for an ontologically open world. Moreover, these methodological, epistemological and ontological assumptions of critical theory have influenced many areas of sociological research. The analytical part of this thesis will further elaborate the debates on how critical theory is rooted in interpretative consumer research and to an extent in Consumer Culture Theory.

### 3. Analytical part

Undeterred by the claim that critical theory is one of many strands in critical marketing, it is considered to be far from important within that mix, leading several scholars to note that despite the contention that critical theory has much to contribute to marketing, it is still unutilized by general marketing scholarship (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 37; Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008a, pp. 15).<sup>6</sup>

As implied, this analytical part will attempt to consider the understanding, interpretation and elaboration of Frankfurt School's theories by critical marketing scholarship. A process of researching articles via keywords listed in methodology chapter made several topics apparent. While admitting a detectable overlap, assorting topics into chapters merely reifies a useful instrument for structuring ideas. A subsequent discussion will aim at putting those detached topics back into a coherent aggregate.

Granted that, the analytical part will discuss these topics: being critical and adopting radical views, materialism, consumer culture, consumer sovereignty, the inconsistency between an individual's belief system and values of the market economy, and lastly, research assumptions.

#### **3.1. Being critical from within**

As revealed, critical theory has emerged mainly as means to tackle the issues of exuberantly evolving society that the traditional theory has failed to solve. In a similar vein, the overriding goal of critical marketing studies is understood as

employment of an unmasking critique, stepping out of the boundaries of marketing theory and interact with the problematics of marketing from a detached perspective. This chapter will serve as an introduction, showing the ideological bases of both critical theory and critical marketing studies and aiming at unfolding connections between the two.

The current dominant social paradigm is formed by the reconstructionists, in the form of Kotler and Levy (1969) that put a positivist emphasis on predicting and controlling consumer behaviour. The denomination of *reconstruction* suggests that they aim to rethink marketing activities and core marketing values, so they reflect social concerns, such as justice, social welfare, ecological consequences of consumption, the unequal distribution of goods, etc. However, this moral appeal is premised on the definition of marketing as a mere technology that is inaccurately blamed for causing social ills (Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008a, pp. 12–13; Dholakia, 2012, pp. 224). At the same time, there is a body of knowledge criticising this positivistic accent in predicting and managing consumer behaviour and attempting to move beyond this discursive default (e.g. Firat, 1977; Dholakia, 1982; Bradshaw, Firat, 2007; Gould, 2008).

For instance, Dholakia (1982) has been calling for the end of neglecting the radical aspects of consumption. By taking the initiative to build awareness, he hoped to end the apathy and to engender debate. He adds that in contrast to conventional theories, radical theories do not have a narrow and linear view of causation as traditional theories often do. In a similar manner as critical theory (Horkheimer, 1972), radical approach (as comprehended by Dholakia) also recognises that social and behavioural processes are often dialectic; understands the market hegemony and strives for its subversion and lastly, asserts the interplay between production and consumption.

In his text, Dholakia calls for radical stands and uses some ideas that are in line with critical theory, but furthermore, he refers them to Frankfurt School's work. Correspondingly, Bradshaw and Firat (2007) submit that it is timely to remember the potential benefits of the previously overlooked critical theory for critical marketing:

We call for an undiluted critical theory approach to critically understand marketing which could explore marketing's history, its role in a certain social

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<sup>6</sup> Yet the absence of employing critical stances in the marketing scholarship is even more vivid in the Czech Republic.

order, its practises and theories based in ideologies that emanate from a specific class structure enabling the political and economic necessities of a market system that has commodification as one of its core phenomena (pp. 37).

On one hand, some scholars have made clear, that they do not regard themselves as primarily grounded within a critical theory framework. On the other hand, there have been papers calling for critical theory grounded approach, specifically in research. For example, Murray and Ozanne (1991), according to who, research stems from an understanding of consumer issues should be derived from the work of Frankfurt School.

Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008a, pp. 9) propose three commitments to otherwise methodologically and theoretically plural field: ontological denaturalisation, epistemological reflexivity and non-performative stance. Firstly, the assumption of an inherently open world is a central moment for both critical theory (Horkheimer, 1972, pp. 188–243) and critical marketing studies (e.g. Schroeder, 2007; Brownlie, Hewer, 2007; Dholakia, 2012). For critical theorists, this involved demonstrating that there was inherent *unfinished quality* enduring in the very structure of social existence (Harvey, 1990); for critical marketing scholars it implies questioning the very existence of marketing, ergo, questioning the market economy within which it exists. Thus, critical marketing studies engage with the premise that the industrial production does not serve the interests of the majority and problematize inequality of exchange relationships that form the ideological basis of the capitalist system.

Similarly, the second commitment, epistemological reflexivity, was a central point for critical theorists and critical marketing scholars, as well. Critical and radical theories are about change, its possibilities, the obstructions to it, and thinking about how knowledge has been generated, is considered to be salutary (Dholakia, 2012).

Third commitment, the non-performative stance, signals that critical marketing research is not meant to be ‘put at the service to marketing managers’ (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 31). Albeit the discussion whether critical marketing can and should influence practise and policy (see Wensley, 2007), an idea of undertaking the critical marketing research with the sole interest of developing knowledge that enables marketing

managers and their corporate clientele to maximise their profits while minimising the input levels, is generally deprecated.<sup>7</sup>

One of Frankfurt School's legacies exercised in critical marketing scholarship is the concept of an unmasking critique. The idea of unmasking the otherwise hidden links and processes and moving beyond the mainstream understanding to comprehend problem with a new mind-set, aiming at 'freeing ourselves from the culture we are embedded in' (Gould, 2008, pp. 312). Moreover, three assumptions are to an extent shared with the theory put forward by Frankfurt School, with the parallel being most evident in expectation of an epistemologically and ontologically open world.

### **3.2. Materialism**

Attempting to satisfy false needs is so satisfying. (Marcuse,1964/2002)

With this quote, Marcuse perspicaciously sizes up the spiral that an individual integrated into an existing system of production and consumption is caught up in. Materialism<sup>8</sup> has become an easy target of many critical narratives today. Not to mention that it is also a concept densely criticised by Frankfurt School (e.g. Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944/2002; Marcuse,1964/2002; Fromm, 1967/1976; Horkheimer, 1972) and is still criticised by today's sociologists and anthropologists, it is criticised by theorists of critical marketing studies as well. This chapter will explore some of the topics and debates concerning materialism among critical marketing theorists. After introducing the discussion on the potency of marketing in creating a materialistic society, other collateral damages related to materialism, such as environmental damage or social inequality, will be suggested. Lastly, ideas on the roots of anti-materialistic tendencies will be provided.

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<sup>7</sup> Other times considerably idiosyncratic Frankfurt School does not take a homogenous stance towards praxis-based outcome of critical theory; Marcusean brand of critical theory is opposed to more Adornian and Horkheimerian rejection of praxis. (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 37)

<sup>8</sup> Here understood as a tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values. In philosophy, materialism is defined as a theory, that nothing exists except matter and its movements. Dialectical materialism is a philosophy of science, which examines the subjects of the world in relation to each other within a dynamic, evolutionary environment. Marx perceived dialectical materialism as a synonym to historical materialism, which is the methodological approach of Marxist historiography. (Ransdorf, 1996, pp. 597–598)

Materialism is an idea that possessions are likely to provide us with happiness or general fulfilment. The meaning of life is discovered through acquisition, and the hedonistic experience of material accumulation is the core object of existence on Earth (Belk, 1985, pp. 265). According to some scholars (see O'Shaughnessy, O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Bauman, 2007; Schudson, 2007) it is relatively easy to problematize consumerism these days. Schudson adds a funny example of the ambiguous attitude towards consumption taken up by many in Western society: 'Something like *a citizen of the world* would be nice on a gravestone, would it not? Compare that to *he shopped till he dropped*' (2007, pp. 237).

Nonetheless, are modern day marketing practices the reason behind today's consumer society? Is the causation that simple? O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy (2002) challenge the idea of the interpretation of every intentional action as driven by self-interest defined as pleasure seeking/pain avoiding concept. After assessing this view as extremely reductionist, they follow by challenging the Marxist dogma, which 'regards marketing-directed hedonism as having been created by power structures to maintain dominance, with the mass media responsible for creating a *false consciousness*' (O'Shaughnessy, O'Shaughnessy, 2002, pp. 529).

False consciousness is a term describing the way in which material, ideological, and institutional processes in capitalist society mislead consumers. Some scholars of Frankfurt School have also engaged with this concept, especially Herbert Marcuse. He argued that modern capitalism had created false needs and false consciousness geared to consumption of commodities: it locked a one-dimensional man into a one-dimensional society (Marcuse, 1964/2002).

Consumer lifestyle together with mass consumption is said to control the lives of ordinary citizens by creating these false needs. Nevertheless, O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy claim, that these wants were existent, although latent, and promotion has only activated them (2002, pp. 534). Another example of a marketing theorist that has been questioning the paradigm of (rather homogenous) repudiation of materialism coined by Marxian critical theorists is Russel W. Belk. His research (1985, pp. 266) conjectures: Is materialism good or bad or is it neither? Is materialism inherently egoistic and thus opposed to altruism? What is the impact of materialism on interpersonal relationships? And does materialism facilitate the enhancement and maintenance of a positive self-identity? Belk realises that this list of the fundamental questions concerning materialism has to wait to be answered, mainly for the

problematics of addressing them empirically. As a consequence, he conducted separate studies to establish the reliability and validity of a materialism scale that is based on the possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy subscales (pp. 270). Even though Belk admits that his method needs refinements, he hopes for it to serve as an instrument for exploring important macro issues of consumer behaviour (pp. 276).

The debate on the omnipotence of marketing aside, there are marketing scholars whose research is in line with Frankfurt School's notion of materialism and they raise questions about several related topics. Together with long-standing criticisms of consumerism and more recent objections on the grounds of social inequality, exploitative labour practices and environmental damage, contemporary consumption remains a contentious domain, one permeated with questions of morality.

One of the topics – environmental damage – has been connected to consumerism by Fromm, who has interpreted it as a source of environmental pollution (1967/1976, pp. 135–136). Admitting that the topic is more complex, there are studies following up on that idea (see Van Dam, Apeldoorn, 1996; Witkowski, 2005; Nixon, Gabriel, 2015). What is the use of a house if you do not have a planet to put it on?<sup>9</sup>

The second body of casualties affiliated to materialism is the question of social inequality and exploitative labour practices. The work of Frankfurt School has raised those topics (e.g. Fromm, 1967/1976; Horkheimer, 1972; Marcuse, 1964/2002) and they are still brought to attention by today's marketing scholarship (see Witkowski, 2005; Jack, 2008; Hamilton *et al.*, 2014). Possibly also due to the focus of critical marketers on consumption behaviour rather than on the production side of things, the papers the author came across in the process of the literature review mainly referred to topics such as social inequality or exploitative labour as a consequence worth mentioning instead of taking it as a central point. An example of this practice is a paper by Hamilton (2007) exploring consumer disadvantage. She identifies disadvantage consumers as those with low-income, consumers that are low literate, disabled or consumers from minorities. Additionally, the paper encourages further research into this area, because of its 'potential to offer benefits to the consumers under study perhaps by affecting public policy' (pp. 188). In this fashion, she diagnoses social inequality and its connection to consumptive social order but preterms the correlation between consumer disadvantage and disadvantage in labour processes. Sociologists have also researched these issues, for

example, Zygmunt Bauman (2007) has been in one of the chapters of his book *Consuming Life* tackling the question of the collateral casualties and victims of consumerism.

Another topic that can be found both in the work of Frankfurt School and in the work of critical marketing scholarship is the interrelation of materialism and religion. In a similar vein as Fromm (1967/1976, pp. 109–136), marketing scholars also consider the roots of anti-materialism to lie in many religions (Belk, 1985; O’Shaughnessy, O’Shaughnessy, 2002; Arnould, 2007; Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b). One of the most extreme examples is Jainism, which has had the strongest austerity-driven ascetic tradition of all the major Indian religions. This ascetic life may include nakedness, fasting, body mortification, penance, and other austerities. The objective of these practices is to burn away past karma and stop producing new karma, both of which are believed in Jainism to be essential for reaching liberation from rebirths and salvation. Even though these practices may be in an ethnocentric manner viewed as somewhat extreme, a tradition of glorification of a lifestyle characterised by abstinence of pleasures in pursuit of spiritual goals may be found in Christianity as well (Fromm, 1967/1976, pp. 89). On the other side of an imaginary scale may lie ethical hedonism<sup>10</sup> which is an ideology claiming that pleasure is what humans ought to pursue.

To summarize, some critics argue that narrow hedonism and indirectly connected materialism are hallmarks of today’s consumer society. The critique of materialism as an ideology formulated by Frankfurt School has been influential both within the critics of marketing and within the discipline of critical marketing studies. In the latter, critical theorists’ comprehension of materialism has generated a debate on the capability of marketing to cause consumer society and, furthermore, research on the connection between marketing-driven materialism and detrimental consequences has been carried out, following Frankfurt School’s imaginary footsteps.

### **3.3. Consumer culture**

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<sup>9</sup> A question posed by Henry David Thoreau, a nineteenth century critic of materialism. (cf. Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b)

<sup>10</sup> One brand of hedonism concerns sexual pleasures. In addition, Freud views consumption as a substantive form of gratification, sexualisation and anesthetisation of every-day objects (cf. Fromm, 1967/1976, pp. 68).

‘The ability to consume has been treated as a proxy for social progress’ (Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b, pp. 245). Is the GNP of a country and the ability of its people to consume an indicator of the development of this country? Regardless the often opinionated answers, consumption and culture within which it thrives, have been issues brought into a spotlight amid critique of present-day society. This chapter seeks to enlighten the reader on how has consumer culture come about, if today’s marketing scholars employ the theory of culture industry and how do they tackle studying consumer culture.

How has the consumer culture risen? According to Weber (1905/2013) the Protestant mentality – especially in its Calvinist form – promoted a calculating attitude, which favoured capitalist accumulation, forming through frugality and hard work, the financial capital necessary for the development of the capitalist enterprise. Along with a specific type of asceticism, a hedonistic mentality which saw the meaning in pleasure-seeking and consequent consumption was a determining force of development.

Still, there are differences between contemporary Western society and the one described by Weber, with the former being stigmatised as one adopting consumerism in an unprecedented manner. Nowadays, consumer culture may be defined as a set of norms within a society in which the satisfaction of daily needs is realised through the acquisition and use of commodities, goods that are produced with the objective to be exchanged on the market (Sojka, 1996, pp. 532). At the same time, as Sassatelli (2010, pp. 2) notes, it is often understood as a culture, in which a continuous and unremitting search for new, fashionable but superfluous things is the core value and which social critics have branded as causing personal discontent and public disengagement in advance capitalism.

The theorists of Frankfurt School too may be pigeonholed as critics of consumerism, considering that critical theory took capitalism as one of the ideologies to uncover (mainly Fromm, 1941/2013; Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944/2002; Marcuse, 1964/2002). As an example of this critique may serve a term coined by Fromm (1965), *homo consumens*. Which, as he explained, is a person manipulated by advertisement to buy things that ze doesn’t need with money that ze doesn’t have (Večerník, 1996, pp. 380).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> While this may sound as an exaggeration, it is an inconsistency which is a part of inherent contradictions of capitalism, that *Das Kapital* considers as the beginning of an end of an era of materialism.

Alongside some sociologists, a critical marketing scholar, Fuan Firat, also theorised an intrinsic impetus to consume. He notes that an individual is typically presented in mainstream marketing texts as *homo consumicus*, as someone whose needs are depicted as innate to human nature, someone who is unpredictable and insatiable (1985). The question arising then is: If those needs are innate to human nature, why do we need marketing? Firat sees ‘needs’ not as latent and innate human requirements, on the contrary, he sees them as a result of ‘ecological, cultural and historical development’ (in a similar way Dholakia, 1982). His perspective represents the social constructivist stream in the debate indicated in the chapter above, on marketing being a mere facilitator of consumerism on one hand (e.g. O’Shaughnessy, O’Shaughnessy, 2002), and being a creator on the other. As a deduction, he shares critical theory’s understanding of the perception of a phenomenon – existing in a historical totality.

Another influential body of knowledge produced by Frankfurt School that concerns consumerism is the question of culture in the Western capitalist society that has emerged and developed from the 20th century under the influence of mass media. The term ‘mass media’ alludes to the overall impact and intellectual guidance exerted by the media (primarily TV, the press, radio, cinema),<sup>12</sup> not only on public opinion but tastes and values too. Hannah Arendt, a political theorist, who also affiliated herself with Frankfurt School, is often cited when it comes to criticising culture. She asserted that market-driven media would lead to the displacement of culture by the dictates of entertainment (Arendt, 1961/1977).

This critical theorist’s comprehension of media suggests that the function of ideology is reflected in the socially necessary illusions, which sustain the status quo and ensure that people fail to register their uncritical adherence to tradition (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944/2002; Tadajewski, 2010, pp. 799, Murray, Ozanne, 1995, pp. 522). Since the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, the global influence of the marketing concept has increased, which itself serves to elide organisational power and strengthen the extreme unevenness of postmodernisation of the world (Tadajewski, 2010, pp. 800; also see Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 2005).

Although Frankfurt School’s work on the topic of culture industry is very influential in cultural and media studies (see McQuail, 2009, pp. 121–123), the review of literature, that was part of the process of producing this thesis, found that the topic of culture

industry is unutilized in marketing research. Leaving that aside, there are some examples of marketing scholars exploring consumer culture.

For instance, Hill (2002) has been researching the potential role marketing plays in the lives of the poor. He gathered ethnographic data from six distinct subpopulations of impoverished people. In the analysis of these stories, an interpretation emerged that emphasised five inter-related thematic categories: meagre possessions, consumer restrictions, consumer reactions, survival strategies and role of the media. In other words, his analysis implies both direct and indirect impact of media coverage on demand. Hamilton *et al.* (2014, pp. 1836) further elaborate on that idea and note that media became ‘the primary educational force in regulating meanings, values, and tastes that justify particular positions [of the poor].’ This quote suggests a shared assumption with the critical theorists; that is, a shared assumption of the role media play in reinforcing power structures.<sup>13</sup>

Another example of marketing scholars studying consumer culture and connected topics is Nixon and Gabriel’s (2015) qualitative sociological study exploring the ideological and psychological reasoning behind the choice *not* to buy. There is a growing recognition that if one wishes to deepen their understanding of contemporary consumer culture, it might be appropriate to begin to develop a sensitivity to the ‘shadow’ realm of non-consumption. Nixon and Gabriel have interviewed informants, that have described themselves as disinclined to consuming activities such as shopping, buying and owning. The informants constructed salient features of consumer culture as powerful sources of physiological ill health and spiritual pollution. One of their informants, Kay, has told them: ‘You’re buying into a value system that you don’t really believe in but it’s so necessary for your existence, but you hate yourself for doing it’ (pp. 47).<sup>14</sup>

The result of their analysis is that consumerism appears as a profoundly confusing and ambiguous entity. In the eyes of their informants, consumerism is a site of personal temptation and of condemnation, and it is emancipatory and manipulative. Nixon and

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<sup>12</sup> In the socio-historical context of 21<sup>st</sup> century, new (digital) media and their imprint onto habitual activities have come into the spotlight (McQuail, 2009, pp. 41).

<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that Hamilton *et al.* share this assumption with the Frankfurt School, they do not proactively refer to their work.

<sup>14</sup> Ironically, anticonsumerism has become a lifestyle heavily advertised and profitable in the progressive and liberal 21<sup>st</sup> century (Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b, 248) and counter-culture and anti-market rebellions became ‘reified and re-routed towards a *hip consumerism*’ (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 38).

Gabriel argue, that the *aporias* of the market problematise the neat social classification; they interpret non-consumption as an attempt to restore order in social experience, to put the matter of the market – both physical and moral – into its proper place (pp. 53).

Other critical marketing scholars also identify these defence mechanisms in their work - understood as forms of obsessive-compulsive protection from the dirt of consumerism in the study described above. Parker (2007, pp. 183, cf. Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b, pp. 249) notes that while a person might feel heavyhearted of consuming a certain good that has brought harm to another human, non-human being or the environment, senses of proximity shape the guilt into an abstract and impersonal form. No matter what is the causation behind these senses of proximity - physical, national, racial, etc. In addition, the modern technologies facilitate unprecedented alienation and consequently, the commodity fetishism is growing. An upcoming chapter will further explore the topic of the hegemony of the market and its implication on individual belief systems.

This chapter covered the issue of consumer culture, which has attracted criticism from a variety of disciplines, critical theory and critical marketing studies being no exception. One of the findings of this paper might be considered to be the unutilisation of the ideological basis behind culture industry by dominant critical marketing scholarship. However, some topics related to consumer culture are present in marketing journals adapting analytical viewpoint. This chapter also presented two issues that marketing scholars research. One about poverty and the role of the media in maintaining the existing state of affairs, the other about the idea of non-consumption that arises as a reaction to the dubious impressions that the market principle has on an individual.

### **3.4. Consumer sovereignty**

The ideology of the sovereign consumer independently deploying choices is the core principle of prevalent social organisation. It has provided the moral legitimation of unrestricted markets, and it has also silenced more democratic and humane alternatives to current capitalist regimes (Schwarzkopf, 2011, pp. 124). Frankfurt School has been considered a significant critic of the concept of consumer sovereignty and has influenced many debates on that topic within critical marketing scholarship (e.g. Murray, Ozanne, 1995; O'Shaughnessy, O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Arnould, 2007, Bradshaw, Firat, 2007; Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b; Carrington *et al.*, 2015). While

accepting that fact, it is appropriate to note that revisiting the original texts reveals that their original statements are far more complex (Tadajewski, personal communication, March 6, 2018). After delineation of what sovereign consumer is understood to be, some debates on Frankfurt School's thought on this topic will be introduced. The second half of this chapter will present two theories that partly emerged as reactions to critical theorists' perception of the independent consumer, and lastly, it will address some reactions of the economic system to this contested concept.

The neoclassical economics define the sovereign consumer as an individual who acts on the basis of full and relevant information with the aim to maximise utility and minimise cost (Hutt, 1940). Alongside this action, rational preferences of this individual that are associated with his values may be identified and, consequently, the demand is formed. Nonetheless, the science of economics has encountered some significant difficulties in its attempt to model consumption as a purely instrumental and rational decision. The neoclassic consumer is conceived of as a kind of black box whose preferences and tastes are not studied independently, but they are examined as if realised only in purchases. As if 'preferences and choices were synonymous' (Sassatelli, 2007, pp. 58). Not taking into account that the emergence of specific consumption patterns is a social phenomenon in which political and economic factors play key roles (Dholakia, 1982, pp. 298).

In addition, Stefan Schwarzkopf (2011), a marketing theorist, notes that if consumer society shares the essentials of liberal constitutionalism and the rational, processual nature of democratic representation, then its ontology needs to be investigated for the same reason and in the same manner as legal and political philosophy dissects the legitimacy and validity of the parliamentary institutions of present-day democracy. Following this claim, he argues that despite appraisal of the modern liberal thought, it was, in fact, a medieval political theology that provided for ontologisation of the consumer.

So, what is the critical theorists' take on consumer agency? The Institute made major contributions in areas relating to the possibility of human subjects to be rational, and could judiciously take charge of their own society. Their studies saw a common concern in the ability of capitalism to destroy the precondition of critical revolutionary political consciousness. This meant arriving at a sophisticated awareness of the scale, in which social oppression sustains itself.

To illustrate this point, here are some claims of Frankfurt School scholars that dispute the autonomous and ‘greedy’ consumer-citizen and suggest that it is an intrinsically self-contradictory concept. Horkheimer (1947/2013, pp. 21) stated that corporate decision-making is driven by ‘the majority principle’; majority decisions shape marketplace offerings and define the parameters within which people tend to conform. Adorno described the ‘ego-weakness’ of individuals in contemporary society (Adorno, 1989, pp. 135, cf. Tadjewski, Brownlie, 2008b, pp. 246), suggesting that people are not the monarchs of the marketplace (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944/2002), nor do they embody the characteristics of economic ‘man’ (Fromm, 1965). Both concepts are ‘fabrications’ that help to strengthen the status quo by making it appear that the economic system reflects human nature and accommodates our real needs (Fromm, 1955/2013, pp. 74). Marx expected the working class to realise their position in unequal power relations, whereas the critical theorists offered an explanation for the fact that the working class did often not revolt.

Overall, their writings make it seem like the consumer is relatively powerless compared to marketing managers. Fromm (1941/2013, p. 111), for instance, has stressed that marketing and sales promotion can ‘smother and kill critical capacities of the customer like an opiate.’ Suggesting that an individual cannot or does not want to resist them.

Despite these indications, Tadjewski alerts to the precipitate conclusion, that Frankfurt School refuses consumption altogether and sees the consumer as a dupe (2018, pp. 7). Critical theorists do not make the case of leading an ascetic life, for them, the real problem revolves around the fact that much of what we consume is superfluous and that we are driven to consume not by our personal needs, but rather because of the cultural and economic systems. For the capitalist system to be constantly developing, one’s capacity to consume cannot be a barrier, ergo the system must induce ever-new needs in the human spirit (Marx, 1867/1909, pp. 103–115).

A further example of this phenomenon, a critical marketing study that uses this assumption as a premise, is a research conducted by Carrington *et al.* (2015). They investigated the concept of ‘ethical’ consumer and its promotion of erroneous notions of consumer sovereignty and responsabilisation. They add that ‘from critical theory’s perspective, capitalism’s destructiveness is sustained by creating an excess of demand that is never satisfied by the system, despite expanding production capacity and efficiencies’ (pp. 22).

There are other bodies of critical marketing scholarship that are influenced by critical theorists' notion of sovereign consumer. Two examples of theories that are influenced by Frankfurt School follow, though, as the reader might detect, they have taken somewhat antipodal stances towards this issue.

#### 3.4.1. Uses and gratification theory

This theory may be defined as an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. Even though it is an approach primarily exercised by media scholars, it has found its application among marketing scholars as well. Tadajewski (personal communication, March 7, 2018) has implied that this theory is 'explicitly positioned as a response to the incorrect assumption that the critical theorists saw the consumer as a dupe.' Neither advertising thinkers, though the debates are far more complex, nor critical theorists think in these kinds of terms (see Tadajewski, 2018, pp. 6–10).

One of the marketing scholars, who provides the basis for understanding uses and gratification theory, is Stephanie O'Donohoe (1994). She presents findings from a qualitative study which identifies many marketing and non-marketing uses of advertising and argues that this supports a view of audiences as active, selective and sophisticated consumers of advertising. For this reason, she calls for implications of such approach for the theory and practice of advertising.

#### 3.4.2. Reflexively defiant consumer

In the last twenty years, a small number of consumer researchers have taken critical theory as their paradigm, using it to flesh out an alternative concept of the consumer (Tadajewski, 2018, pp. 10). A study of Murray and Ozanne (1995) may epitomise this body of marketing scholarship. They outline an alternative vision of the critical consumer, one that is 'reflexively defiant'. They position this within the context of the capitalist system and, furthermore, argue for the role of public policy to help consumers become of their power to define and fulfil their own needs.

The premise of their theory is an information-rich environment, in which people struggle to establish their identity and interpersonal relations, mainly due to the mediation of radio, newspapers, TV, digital media, etc. This *hyperreality* then creates

new cultural spaces that shape comprehension of oneself, zir communities and the surrounding environment. Besides that, this new reality may require different adaptive skills (pp. 516). Between the lines of their text, one may identify the rooting in Frankfurt School's work. It is no coincidence that it may remind one of critical theory's debates on mediascape, its influence on an individual and the choices ze makes. Murray and Ozanne not only cite their work throughout their text but further to this, they juxtapose critical theory to one of public policy analysts' and claim that both of them share a common goal; both attempt to improve the quality of people's lives that are shaped by social structures. Since the two traditions do emphasise different elements of the same theory-practice equation (or what would the critical theorists refer to as *praxis*), they each have something to offer to one another.

Keeping this interconnection between critical theory and public policy in mind, Murray and Ozanne continue by discussing the dispositions of consuming. According to them, consumption does not arise from the realm of *nature* and primordial satisfaction of needs, but for the consumer to be rational, it requires socialisation, education and effort, and therefore it stems from the realm of *culture*. Thus, consumption is a cultural code that expresses the logic of differentiation and creates a social structure, within which satisfaction of needs reproduces social domination (e.g. Fromm, 1967/1976; Baudrillard, 1981; Sassatelli, 2007).<sup>15</sup> In consequence, Murray and Ozanne (1995), similarly as critical theory, encourage reflections of the social totality as in only one of the possibilities.

Questioning the hegemonic control of the groups in power is a different form of being critical that is consistent with Habermas's suggestion to explore taken-for-granted assumption in order to reconstruct communicative competence (pp. 522).

The reflexively defiant consumer chooses consciously to disassociate zirsself from the market and consumption patterns, which facilitates empowerment through removing dependence on the code and the asymmetric power relations between buyer and seller. Regardless of that fact, the reflexively defiant consumer may still acquire goods, ze

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<sup>15</sup> For further demonstration of that phenomenon see Guy Debord's influential book *The Spectacle Society* (1967/1983), in which he tackles degradation of human life, the role mass media play in commodity fetishism, or, for example, compares marketing with religion.

does so mainly in the usage of signifying antagonism (ibid.). They appeal on the consumers to go behind reflecting on the nature of their own choice behaviours based on what the market offers, as not doing so effectively supports the status quo (Tadajewski, 2010, pp. 799).

### 3.4.3. The limits of economic rationality

Following the notions above, the prevailing Friedmanian economic paradigm and its attempt to portray consumption as a voluntary, autonomous and rational action has been confronted with some urgent arguments. In spite of that fact, it would be lax and even faulty to claim that there were not any reactions to the limits of economic rationality originating from the system itself. Here, some of these responses to an inaccurate assumption will be laid out.

The wave of consumerism, beginning in the 1960s and reappearing after the crises, ever stronger due to the neoliberal turn, brought enlightenment to many governments around the globe who attempted to improve the buyer-seller misbalance by reinforcing policies on consumer protection. With products being increasingly complex, new forms of retailing and services growing, protection of consumers through legislation emerged (Murray, Ozanne, 1995, pp. 518).

Equivalently, there has been an increasing endeavour to overcome the conception of the actor as an isolated utility maximiser in the realm of economic academia (Sassatelli, 2007, pp. 59). Thus, an extension of connecting economics to other disciplines has been proved not only essential to tackle these problematics but growing in popularity as well. A prominent work of Daniel Kahneman might epitomise this paradigm shift. This psychologist notable for his work on judgement and decision-making has conjointly supplied foundations of a discipline known today as behavioural economics that studies the effects of cognitive, social and psychological factors on the economic decisions. The fact that he, as a psychologist, was awarded the 2002 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, might be an example of this shift towards broadening the narrow economic rationality.

When discussing this call for interdisciplinarity within the Czech environment, a book by an economist Tomáš Sedláček, *Economics of Good and Evil* (2011), is often mentioned. He describes economics as a cultural phenomenon; as a product of our civilisation closely tied to philosophy, myth, religion, anthropology, and the arts.

To conclude, this chapter has looked into portraying consumption as an autonomous propensity, in which economics has occupied a predominant role. The theorists of the Frankfurt Circle have made significant contributions in areas relating to the possibility of human subjects to be *homo economicus*. While admitting the underscoring theme of their writings on that topic, there is an urge not to make precipitate conclusions and not to reduce critical theorists' comprehension of the consumer only as an easily manipulated individual. For further demonstration of the Institute's ramifications into contemporary critical marketing scholarship, the chapter has proposed two examples of theories. Firstly, a uses and gratification theory, that was constructed as an antithesis to the false assumption of critical theorists' notion of 'dependent' consumer. On the contrary, the second theory by Murray and Ozanne on the 'reflexively defiant consumer' takes Frankfurt School's approach to sovereignty as a premise. They appeal to the consumer to broaden the reflection the nature of zirs economic behaviour in order not to effectively supports the existing social structure. In the end, the chapter pointed out some reactions of the economic system to the contestation of the concept of consumer agency, such as inclination towards involvement with other disciplines.

### **3.5. Hegemonic role of the market**

'In the advanced Westernized societies, consumption is increasingly used as a means of ideological social control' (Dholakia, 1982, pp. 299). Unregulated commodity exchange has overruled other forms of economy activities, such as reciprocity or redistribution (see Polanyi, 1962/1944), and has brought reproduction of the appropriate mental abilities and attitudes in order to reinforce itself. The denaturalisation of market economy's predominance in our society has thus also become a focal point for some disciplines and for Frankfurt School as well.

Though some critical marketers are proposing to pay more attention to critical theory, Bradshaw and Firat (2007, pp. 37) further advise to pay more attention to the interlocking phenomena that may be valuable in investigating the dominating role consumption holds in society, such as fetishisation, commodification and alienation. Following some notions of Frankfurt School on the topic of market hegemony, some examples of employing these Marxian ideas on production and consumption by marketing scholars will be given. Lastly, this chapter will refer to an ethnography

illustrating the influence of hegemonic role of the market on the mentality of individuals.

What did the theorist of Frankfurt Circle think about the hegemonic role of the market and connected topics? Following up on the descriptive part of this thesis, the Marxist theory is one of the intellectual influences on and the theoretical focus of the first generation of Frankfurt School scholars. Among those topics derived from Marx was a critique of alienated labour, historical materialism and class struggle in different modes of production, crises theory or socialist democracy. A pattern of elaborating on these issues may be identified throughout their writings (e.g. Adorno, 1938/2004; Fromm, 1955/2013; Marcuse, 1964/2002) and for illustration few quotes from their work will follow.

For example, Fromm (1967/1976) addressed an issue he termed ‘the marketing character,’ that describes ‘experiencing oneself as a commodity, and one’s value not as *use value* but as *exchange value*’ (pp. 120). In this sense, commodification is understood as the transformation of goods, services, ideas and people into an object having *exchange value*. Commodities then are pragmatic, time-bound, impersonalised, and originating from alienated labour - labour characterised by the disembeddedness of the worker from the process of production as well as the product (see Appadurai, 1986). For Fromm, the process of commodification of one’s own personhood was executed through exchanging living being as a commodity on the ‘personality market’ (Fromm, 1967/1976, pp. 121).

Adorno on the other hand, found commodification in the realm of culture and media. He claimed that the culture industry produced and circulated cultural commodities through mass media, manipulated the population and consequently turned people passive (Adorno, Horkheimer, 1944/2002). Thereupon, consumption becomes a pseudo-activity as the consumer seeks emancipation through commodity fetishisation and becomes more deeply integrated into a reified and dominated capitalist mould (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 37).

Following these illustrations of Frankfurt School’s take on commodification, a question arises: Do critical marketing scholars also elaborate on topics like commodity fetishism, alienation or commodification? Excluding aforementioned Nixon and Gabriel’s study on non-consumption (2015), there are other critical marketing papers following this Marxian narrative (e.g. Dholakia, 1982; Witkowski, 2005; Arnould, 2007; Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b; Cluley, Dunne, 2012). As an example

may serve the study by Carrington *et al.* (2016), who refer both to individual writings of Frankfurt School's scholars and to classic critical theory in general. While there is an existing body of research into ethical consumerism and the rationale behind everyday consumption practises being enlisted for broader projects of social change, the study of Carrington *et al.* focuses on the ideology gap. Specifically, why the enlightened consumers cannot 'walk their talk.' When this perplexing discrepancy between a person's intentions and the economic choices ze makes are studied, the significant structural elements in shaping and constraining choices, such as the role of powerful retailers, producers, and brands, are often neglected. Conversely, Carrington *et al.* ask why are marketers continuing to discuss the persistence of the ethical consumption attitude-behavior gap in terms of internal moral shortcomings of a consumer when it is more plausible to consider this gap as the precise expression of the systemic contradictions of contemporary consumer capitalism (pp. 23)? They further conclude, that the gap is a fetishistic disavowal. This Freudian concept refers to the ability of the fetishist to believe in zir fantasy and at the very same time to recognize that it is nothing but a fantasy. The ethical consumption then is a mere 'embodiment of the fantasy which enables individuals to sustain the unbearable truth [behind the conditions a good was produced]' (pp. 32; similarly Cluley, Dunne, 2012).

Corresponding findings can be seen in the work of Dolan (2008), who studied the clash between the market values and individual belief system in relation to Fairtrade production of roses in Kenya. According to Dolan, Fairtrade label is a way to re-embed the lost social relations into the object and thanks to this reconnection, bringing peace to a supposedly more responsible consumer, that does not need to fear the object's origin anymore.

Admitting the contribution of approaches from other disciplines like sociology or psychology to the study of contemporary consumption and social life (Dholakia, 2012, pp. 222), the anthropological methodologies have also proven themselves valuable when examining the dominant role of the market economy (Nixon, Gabriel, 2015, pp. 39). Even though the issue of global capitalism influencing local lives has been examined by many scholars (see Witkowski, 2005, pp. 220–223) for purpose of this chapter an ethnography by Birgit Meyer (2002) on the consumption patterns of pentecostalists in Ghana will be presented.

With neoliberalisation, that was executed through widespread deregulation of the market, privatisation of public services, monetisation, etc., the opportunity for

expansion of capitalism into different parts of the world has occurred (see Harvey, 2005, pp. 5–37). The globalisation has brought many changes to local communities around the world, including the introduction of extensive wage labour and consumption.

How do the pentecostalists in Ghana deal with the new type of economy? To introduce the topic, Meyer (2002) in her article starts with a story of a young priest. He bought a piece of underwear on a market, and they caused him to have sexual dreams about women. He believed that a devil had cursed the object and that the only way for him to wear his underwear freely is to enchant them with the power of prayer. This activity epitomises the term commodity fetishism, a process of reinscribing social relations into an object. Thus, the morality of pentecostalists allows them to consume local products somewhat freely, but the commodities imported from other parts of the globalised world are fetishised. Similar conclusions can be found in Taussig's magnum opus, where the proletarianised peasants in South America fetishise products of (their) alienated labour with the spirit of devil (Taussig, 1980).

As was suggested in the first paragraph of this chapter, the market has established a dominant role in present society. The scholars of Frankfurt School have also questioned its position and elaborated on some Marxian ideas, such as commodification, commodity fetishism, alienation and others. Such topics remain essential to some critical marketing papers. For example, a study by Carrington *et al.* (2016) investigated ethical consumer as a sovereign and responsible entity and related their findings not only to particular writings of Frankfurt School scholars but to critical theory in general as well. At the end, an ethnography from Ghana was presented to illustrate fetishisation of commodities as a result of introducing the market principle to local communities. The alienated character of commodity production encourages a consumer to re-embed social context into an object. An example from a Western society may be the discussed ethical consumption. The consumer proclaims attitudes towards environmental degradation, exploitative labour conditions or social and economic inequity, mainly to distance zirsself from the unbearable truth, but on the other hand, ze fails to exercise these attitudes in zir consumption choices.

### **3.6. Research assumptions**

Following the footsteps of critical theory, which insisted upon an epistemologically open world, this chapter will seek to learn about how the knowledge of marketing

scholarship is produced. How is the consumer researched and how do scholars study his wants and needs? Along these lines, this chapter will attempt to uncover the inheritance of Frankfurt School in the way marketing knowledge is generated, mainly concerning its methods, validity, scope and the distinction between objective rationality and subjective perception. Hence, a realization of the reflexive and de-naturalizing goals of critical marketing becomes salutary, when theorizing social contexts of marketing knowledge production (Brownlie, Hewer, 2008, pp. 45).

Dholakia (2012) suggests a rough categorisation<sup>16</sup> of research in marketing into three ‘researchscapes’: a broad mainstream positivist research from noncritical perspectives, a minor - but growing - substream of research using interpretivist approaches, and yet smaller space of critical studies.<sup>17</sup> A further elaboration of these three research paradigms follows. Aside from this categorization, Consumer Culture Theory and its interconnection with critical theory will be described. See an appendix attached to this thesis that summarises the differences and links between positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and motivation research employing the criteria of nature of reality, of social being, and axiological and epistemological assumptions.

First ‘researchscape’ to be described is positivism. Despite its dominant position, it has been contested by many (Tadajewski, 2008, pp. 93). Positivism may be defined as a philosophical system recognising only that which can be scientifically verified or which is capable of logical or mathematical proof (Sedláček, 1996, pp. 671). Positivism may be executed by examining specific cases that showed how the market worked and then using this information to generalise about the operation of the marketplace (Ellis, 2011, pp. 18). As if the nature of reality was not only objective but also fragmentable and ahistorical.

Positivism has been blamed for a focus on revealing underlying regularities and lack of questioning of social reality (Murray, Ozanne, 1991, pp. 134). Or for its overly structured approach which generates ‘managerially useable insights that would enable better control over the marketplace’ (Tadajewski, 2016, pp. 333). Frankfurt School represents a renowned and determined critic of positivism. It can be illustrated

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<sup>16</sup> Dholakia (2012, pp. 221) further notes that this categorization also occurs in other research fields.

<sup>17</sup> This categorization is simplifying, but serves well for purposes of showing the Frankfurt School’s imprint in research assumptions. For a paper challenging this classification see, for example, Lowe *et al.* (2005), who posit a relativist position and argue ‘the case for considering marketing’s potential as *a moral art* rather than the amoral science it has become.’

on the proactive participation in the *Positivism dispute* or on the work of Horkheimer, *The Latest Attacks on Metaphysics*. Here he asserts that ‘the complexity of the connection between the world of perception and the world of physics does not preclude that such a connection can be shown to exist at any time’ (first published in 1937, cf. Horkheimer, 1982, pp. 133).

The second ‘researchscape’ might be considered to emerge as an antithesis to the positivistic objectivity. In the interpretative/hermeneutic social science, central is the subjective experience of how reality is viewed as opposed to external objective reality. Interpretivism assumes that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them, and the role of the research is to attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them (Edirisingha, 2012). Contrary to the opinions that interpretive consumer research emerged in the mid-1980s, Tadajewski (2008) demonstrates clear and distinct parallels regarding the ontology, axiology, epistemology and view of human nature between motivation research in the 1930s, interpretative research and, to a limited extent, critical theory. Among those shared qualities between interpretivism and critical theory is, for example, the standard data-gathering technique, which involves in-depth interviews rather than laboratory experiments or large scale surveys (Tadajewski, 2008, pp. 112).

Nevertheless, even interpretivist research has been criticised for its tendency to reinforce the power structure mainly because of its provision of pure description and no basis for evaluation (e.g. Dholakia, 2012, pp. 221). According to Murray, Ozanne (1991, pp. 134), ‘they take a non-judgmental stance, which assumes that all groups and cultures are equal.’

The third ‘researchscape’ includes studies conducted with a critical approach, which usually (though they need not) lie outside the mainstream. An example of a categorical call for recognition of critical theory and its employment by critical marketing researchers is an already reported study by Murray and Ozanne (1991). They present critical theory as an interdisciplinary approach to seeking knowledge about consumers and provide a more systematic presentation of its ideas. Furthermore, they argue that critical research involves grasping both the intersubjective understandings of the groups involved and the historical-empirical understanding of the potentially constraining objective social conditions (pp. 129). Even though Murray and Ozanne admit certain limitations of critical theory, for instance, its requirement of deep involvement in the

consumer research, they view critical theory valuable mainly for its explicit acknowledgement of its emancipatory interest in facilitating the development of human potential free from constraints (pp. 142).

In a contrary manner to the interdisciplinarity paradigm shift proposed by Kahneman, who looked for answers in psychology, there are studies of consumption choices adopting a cultural view. This brand of research was described by Arnould and Thompson (2005) who call it Consumer Culture Theory (often abbreviated as CCT). The CCT does not offer a grand unifying theory but refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions and cultural meanings (pp. 868). The theory explores ‘the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historical frame of globalisation’ (pp. 869).

What is the role of critical theory within the field of CCT? Earley (2015) organised a roundtable at the 10th annual Consumer Culture Theory conference and asked the academics<sup>18</sup> to discuss what critical theory means to them; what theorists they have used, and what their visions for critical theory influencing consumer research would be. While the roundtable identified central moments of productive application of critical theory in consumer research, they also realised that with expansion over time a great deal of critical theory is not recognized as such (pp. 80). Overall, the conclusion was the felicitous discovery that critical traditions are still engaged in Consumer Culture Theory and that there are many pathways by which to pursue critical consumer research in the future (pp. 85).

To sum up the main points, this chapter briefly described three ‘researchscapes’ into which may be the consumer and marketing research imperfectly categorised. The majority of present-day research is recognised as positivist, taking into account only objective and ahistorical facts. Second and smaller one is the interpretivist approach towards marketing research, who, although it shares some common traits with critical theory, was also doubted for its lack of exposure of the power relations. The third one adopts critical theory and takes the work of Frankfurt School as a premise. Lastly, this chapter presented Consumer Culture Theory, as a cultural attitude towards consumer research. A recorded discussion among critical marketing scholars at a CCT

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<sup>18</sup> The academics present were: Shona Bettany, David Crockett, Andrea Davies, Paul Henry, Andrea Lucarelli, Lisa Peñaloza, Craig Thompson and Alladi Venkatesh.

conference suggests that critical theory also has its place in this stream of studies on consumer behaviour.

## 4. Discussion

It is probably fair to say that marketing is generally considered the least self-critical of all the disciplines in the business school. However, this accusation is not completely accurate. A secondary objective of this thesis then might have been to redress the lack of critical discourse and support the claim that ‘marketing thought does have a rich vein of critique threading through it’ (Tadajewski, 2010, pp. 805).

Neither critical theory, nor critical marketing, remains an *ex-cathedra* statement of its principles. On the contrary, its existence depends solely on the reifying orthodoxies with which it enters a meaningful dialogue. Both demonstrate a quality of unmasking and re-examining. The four writings presented, Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* and Fromm’s *Escape from Freedom and To Have or To Be?*, all embody denaturalisation of societal order, regardless the diversity of topics explored. While critical theory’s emancipatory impulse serves as an agent of social awareness, change, and discovering alternatives (Ozanne, Murray, 1991, pp. 129), critical marketing should in a similar vein encourage theoretical pluralism (Brownlie, Hewer, 2007, pp. 46; Dholakia, 2012, pp. 222).

Still, the mainstream marketing scholarship mirrors a reconstructionist theory presented by Kotler and Levy (1969). They argued that marketing is a mere technology in the hands of marketing managers and therefore cannot be blamed for social ills. Oppositely, there is a decent number of scholars taking radical stances; aiming at stepping out of the prevailing paradigm to address hidden gimmicks enduring the asymmetries of power in the economic system (Firat, 1977, Dholakia, 1982; Brownlie, Hewer, 2007; Gould, 2008). Similarly, there are critical marketers insisting on marketing only selling those goods for which an innate and/or latent demand already exists (Belk, 1985; O’Shaughnessy, O’Shaughnessy, 2002), whilst some scholars take the Marxist dogma, that regards marketing-directed hedonism as having been created by power structures, as a premise (Firat, 1985; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Cluley, Dunne, 2012).

Taking into account the aspects of critical marketing discussed, a brief look into the debates on what are the negative impacts of widespread penetration of marketing

into collective social life follows. Critics suggest that the imbalance of market exchanges create inequities and unethical practices in the relationship between marketers and disadvantaged consumers, forming a hierarchical status quo in which ‘wealth and poverty seem [to be] naturally determined’ (Horkheimer, 1972, pp. 101). Critical marketing research implies the direct and indirect role media play in reinforcing power structures (Hill, 2002; Hamilton, 2007; Hamilton *et al.*, 2014). The dominance of market economy poses a clash between individual’s belief system and the *hau* of capitalism, representing values such as profit, greed, intolerance and possessiveness. Taking the Marxian notions on commodity fetishism as a premise, some critical marketing scholars explore the solvability of global problems of insecurity, risk and inequality, solely by the preference of an ethical consumer (Cluley, Dunne, 2012; Carrington *et al.*, 2015). Pensive by the morality of exchange, some consumers might even choose to reduce their consumption or pursue escaping the market altogether (e.g. Arnould, 2007; Tadajewski, Brownlie, 2008b; Nixon, Gabriel, 2015).

These topics suggest that perhaps consumer is not as sovereign as Friedmanian doctrine would want the general public to believe. The Frankfurt Circle is considered a significant critic of the concept of *homo economicus* (see Tadajewski, 2018) and has influenced many debates on that topic within critical marketing scholarship (O’Donohoe, 1994; Murray, Ozanne, 1995; Bradshaw, Firat, 2007; Wensley, 2007; Schwarzkopf, 2011). Tadajewski (2010, pp. 806) notes that even the actions that seem to be beneficial to the consumer should be looked at sceptically; in other words, critical scholars require that we ask whose interests were served by particular consumption practices. Correspondingly, Arnould and Thompson (2005, pp. 871) are critical of the idea that market produces ‘certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit.’

To provide the reader with an overview of this thesis, let a revisit of the three questions posed in the introduction serve as a summary. Firstly, do the critical marketing scholars refer to the work of Frankfurt School? Critical theory comprises an important, but by no means a single, dominant strand in critical marketing studies that continue to be inclusive and pluralistic and where a diversity of critical approaches, such as feminism, environmentalism, postcolonialism, etc., is accommodated (Bradshaw, Firat, 2007, pp. 36). The literature review of this thesis has correspondingly identified several research strands within critical marketing studies that not only

proactively cite their work, but use their ideas as fundamental concepts upon which they ground their subsequent research.

Secondly, how do they view their theory, do they take it as a basis for their work or do they contest it instead? As was emphasised several times, critical theory urges to revisit the framework to ‘expose how the structures of domination and exploitation shape and mediate [exchange] relationships’ (Brownlie, Hewer, 2007). Following this line of thinking, this thesis presented critical marketing papers that challenge certain ideas of Frankfurt School (e.g. O’Shaughnessy, O’Shaughnessy, 2002); papers that ground their theories in Frankfurt School’s work (e.g. Murray, Ozanne, 1991); but also papers that consider their concepts and beliefs and at the same time, view them from a new perspective (e.g. Carrington *et al.*, 2015).

Lastly, are they exploring similar topics? As was demonstrated throughout this paper, there are distinct analogies between Frankfurt School and critical marketing studies in themes discussed. Though there are some topics, like the term culture industry, that has not been utilised by marketing scholarship. To unfold the evident parallels, examples of writings will be listed, omitting other papers mentioned throughout this thesis that may also cover the given issue. The overlapping topics include: the endeavour for adopting a radical stance (Horkheimer, 1947/2004; Brownlie, Hewer, 2007); commodity fetishism as a coping mechanism to amorality of market exchange (Adorno, 1938/2004; Cluley, Dunne, 2012); legitimization of status-quo (Marcuse, 1964/2002; Hill, 2002); materialism (Fromm, 1941/2013; Belk, 1985) or consumer sovereignty (Fromm, 1955/2013; Arnould, 2007). In addition, there are corresponding features in the ways how marketing knowledge is produced (Horkheimer, 1947/2004; Murray, Ozanne, 1991).

Even though this thesis has uncovered an adequate amount of both explicit and indirect parallels between critical marketing studies and theory coined by Frankfurt School, it still constitutes only a limited output. While a discussion serves the purpose of mentioning what the thesis is about, it is equally salutary to mention, what the work has failed to cover. The article by Tadjewski (2010), for instance, also alludes to the issue of ostentative consumption, which can be considered deserving of further research. By referring to Horkheimer and Adorno’s culture industry, he suggests that the Realpolitik of business enterprise is ‘ready to exploit the consumer’s insecurities’ and thus opposes the postmodernist debates on the liberating character of money. Overall, this thesis encourages the embodiment of a Critical Theory informed approach.

Giving the reason that it has much to contribute to marketing, as was confirmed in this literature review.

## 5. Conclusion

The immanent critique proposes a mobilisation of critical reason to diagnose prevailing conditions. For Frankfurt School it equated a de-naturalisation of the aspects enduring the status quo in advanced industrial societies, for critical marketing studies it means challenging marketing concepts that have assumed a taken-for-granted status. Both refuse the legitimization of what is already known, instead they both call for re-examination of seeming reality.

This paper has unfolded what Frankfurt School and critical theory has brought (and can bring) to the discipline of critical marketing studies. As a footing for this literature review served a summarizing article by Tadajewski (2010) *Towards a History of Critical Marketing Studies*, mainly for its outline of genealogies and central topics within critical marketing. Subsequently, the literature review has detected several parallels in themes that are embedded both in the work of Frankfurt School and critical marketing studies. Among these was the intention to adopt a radical stance; commodity fetishism; legitimization of status quo; materialism or consumer sovereignty. Furthermore, this paper has presented corresponding features in the ways how marketing knowledge is produced.

While some critical marketers envisage the endeavour of employment of Frankfurt School's ideas as a 'recipe', some prefer to practise it as if it was a mere type of cuisine, and some scholars favour challenging their cooking techniques altogether.

A re-examination of the organization of social structure is central when embracing a critical edge, and for marketing that is being stigmatized for lack of substantive critique, even more so.

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**Institut komunikačních studií a žurnalistiky FSV UK**  
**Teze BAKALÁŘSKÉ diplomové práce**

**TUTO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE STUDENT/KA:**

**Příjmení a jméno diplomantky/diplomanta:**

Plíhalová Eliška

**Razítko podatelny:**

**Imatrikulační ročník diplomantky/diplomanta:**

2015/2016

**E-mail diplomantky/diplomanta:**

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**Studijní obor/forma studia:**

Marketingová komunikace a PR, prezenční

**Předpokládaný název práce v češtině:** Odkaz Frankfurtské školy v současné kritice marketingové komunikace

**Předpokládaný název práce v angličtině:**

Contribution of Frankfurt School to Critical Marketing Studies

**Předpokládaný termín dokončení** (semestr, akademický rok – vzor: ZS 2012/2013):

(diplomovou práci je možné odevzdat nejdříve po dvou semestrech od schválení tezi) LS 2017/2018

**Základní charakteristika tématu a předpokládaný cíl práce** (max. 1000 znaků):

Předpokládaným cílem práce je analyzovat teoretické zázemí oboru kritiky marketingové komunikace poskytnuté zástupci Frankfurtské školy, konkrétně těmito sociology a filosofy: Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer a Erich Fromm. V teoretické části budou představeny hlavní myšlenky teorií autorů Frankfurtské školy, kteří se zabývali kritikou kultury, konzumu a masové společnosti. Praktická část pak bude analyzovat interpretaci děl Frankfurtské školy současnými autory kritiky marketingové komunikace a syntézou předložených informací odkryje vliv děl těchto autorů na současné myšlení kritických studií marketingu.

**Předpokládaná struktura práce** (rozdělení do jednotlivých kapitol a podkapitol se stručnou charakteristikou jejich obsahu):

1. **Úvodní část** - seznámení s tématem a cílem práce, stanovení metodologie, argumentace výběru autorů
2. **Teoretická část**
  - 2.1. Frankfurtská škola – diskurz a společenský kontext dané doby
  - 2.2. Definice základních pojmů – kulturní průmysl, masová média, kritická teorie, critical marketing studies
  - 2.3. Max Horkheimer
    - 2.3.1.1. Život a dílo
    - 2.3.1.2. Shrnutí hlavních myšlenek – kritická teorie a kulturní průmysl
  - 2.4. Walter Benjamin
    - 2.4.1.1. Život a dílo
    - 2.4.1.2. Shrnutí hlavních myšlenek – umění v masové kultuře
  - 2.5. Erich Fromm
    - 2.5.1.1. Život a dílo
    - 2.5.1.2. Shrnutí hlavních myšlenek – materialismus postindustriální společnosti
3. **Praktická část** - interpretace a analýza textů současných autorů critical marketing studies
4. **Diskuze** - Jak Frankfurtská škola ovlivnila critical marketing studies?

## 5. Závěr

### Vymezení zpracovávaného materiálu (např. konkrétní titul periodika a období jeho analýzy):

Primární zdroje: díla představitelů Frankfurtské školy, konkrétně Benjamina, Horkheimera a Fromma, publikace teoretiků kritiky marketingové komunikace

Sekundární zdroje: publikace definující základní pojmy, publikace interpretující či parafrázující teorie z primárních zdrojů

### Postup (technika) při zpracování materiálu:

Dokumentografická literární rešerše

### Základní literatura (nejméně 5 nejdůležitějších titulů k tématu a způsobu jeho zpracování; u všech titulů je nutné uvést stručnou anotaci na 2-5 řádků):

ADORNO, Theodor W. a Max HORKHEIMER. *Dialektika osvícenství: filosofické fragmenty*. Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2009. Knihovna novověké tradice a současnosti. ISBN 978-80-7298-267-7.

- Jeden ze základních textů kritické teorie, který vznikl v době, kdy ideologie německého nacismu, stalinismu, kapitalismu, ale i masové kultury byly novými formami sociální dominance a soudobý diskurz je nedokázal vysvětlit dosavadní kritickou teorií. Na základě souboru esejí budou popsány hlavní myšlenky autorů polemizující se statem-quo kulturního průmyslu a masových médií.

BENJAMIN, Walter. *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*. 4. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970.

- Esej kulturní kritiky zabývající se dopadem nových médií na umění a potažmo změnu jeho postavení v éře masové komunikace. Na rozdíl od ostatních teoretiků Frankfurtské školy se Benjamin zaměřuje na podobu praxe. Rozebírá například problematiku otázky autorství, tzv. auru uměleckého díla, jeho emancipaci a také to, jak nová média mohou nejen napomáhat k udržení statu quo, ale že mohou být stejně dobře využita jako nástroje společenského pokroku.

BROWNLIE, Douglas T. a Mark TADAJEWSKI. *Critical marketing: contemporary issues in marketing*. Chichester, UK: Wiley, c2008. ISBN 978-0-470-51198-5.

- Soubor esejí poskytuje základní přehled rozvoje marketingových studií a formování kritiky marketingových studií. Pokrývá řadu témat důležitých pro kritický marketing a současnou debatu diskurzu, jako například problematika konzumní společnosti, udržitelnosti či postkolonialismu, který nebyl dřívějšími marketingovými texty do detailu zkoumán. Práce bude zkoumat, jakým způsobem autoři navazují na myšlenky Frankfurtské školy.

FROMM, Erich. *Mít, nebo být?*. Vyd. tohoto překladu 2. Praha: Aurora, 2014. ISBN 978-80-7299-106-8.

- Fromm uvádí empirickou, psychologickou a sociální analýzu dvou způsobů existence – v modu vlastnění a v modu bytí. Kniha poukazuje na krizi společnosti, nelimitovaný konzum rozvinutý v dobách průmyslové revoluce a navrhuje možnosti řešení, předkládá vizi nového člověka a nové společnosti.

MCQUAIL, Denis. Úvod do teorie masové komunikace. 4., rozš. a přeprac. vyd. Praha: Portál, 2009. ISBN 978-80-7367-574-5.

- Publikace je známou učebnicí teorie masové komunikace, fundovaně a přehledně probírá hlavní oblasti zkoumání masových médií. Pro účely mé práce bude přínosná především kapitola 5 zabývající se masovou komunikací a kulturou.

**Diplomové práce k tématu** (seznam bakalářských, magisterských a doktorských prací, které byly k tématu obhájeny na UK, případně dalších oborově blízkých fakultách či vysokých školách za posledních pět let)

- FLÍDROVÁ, Jana. *Teorie lásky a lidské existence u Ericha Fromma* [online]. 2016 [cit. 2017-05-02]. Vedoucí práce Daniela Stackeová.
- HORNEKOVÁ, Šárka. *Filosofie umění a masové kultury v pojetí T. W. Adorna, W. Benjamin a H.-G. Gadamera* [online]. 2015 [cit. 2017-05-02]. Vedoucí práce Aleš Novák.
- KUČEROVÁ, Nikola. *Vliv médií na veřejné mínění podle kritické teorie*. Plzeň, 2012. bakalářská práce (Bc.). ZÁPADOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V PLZNI. Fakulta filozofická

**Datum / Podpis studenta/ky**

11. May 2018

**TUTO ČÁST VYPLŇUJE PEDAGOG/PEDAGOŽKA:**

**Doporučení k tématu, struktuře a technice zpracování materiálu:**

**Případné doporučení dalších titulů literatury předepsané ke zpracování tématu:**

**Potvrzuji, že výše uvedené teze jsem s jejich autorem/kou konzultoval(a) a že téma odpovídá mému oborovému zaměření a oblasti odborné práce, kterou na FSV UK vykonávám.**

**Souhlasím s tím, že budu vedoucí(m) této práce.**

.....

**Příjmení a jméno pedagožky/pedagoga  
pedagožky/pedagoga**

**Datum / Podpis**

TEZE JE NUTNO ODEVZDAT VYTIŠTĚNÉ, PODEPSANÉ A VE DVOU VYHOTOVENÍCH DO TERMÍNU UVEDENÉHO V HARMONOGRAMU PŘÍSLUŠNÉHO AKADEMICKÉHO ROKU, A TO PROSTŘEDNICTVÍM PODATELNÝ FSV UK. PŘIJATÉ TEZE JE NUTNÉ SI VYZVEDNOUT V SEKRETARIÁTU PŘÍSLUŠNÉ KATEDRY A NECHAT VEVÁZAT DO OBOU VÝTIŠKU DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE.

**TEZE SCHVALUJE NA IKSŽ VEDOUcí PŘÍSLUŠNÉ KATEDRY.**

## 7. Appendix

A summary of positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and motivation research (adapted version cf. Tadajewski, 2008, pp. 101, originally in Murray and Ozanne, 1991, pp. 133)

	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>	<b>Critical Theory</b>	<b>Motivation research</b>
Ontological assumptions (nature of reality)	Objective; tangible; ahistorical; fragmentable divisible	Socially constructed; multiple; holistic; contextual	‘Force-field’ between subject and object; dynamic; historical totality	Historically and socially constructed; multiple; contextual
Nature of social being	Deterministic; reactive	Voluntaristic; proactive	Suspend judgement; emphasise human potential	Historically influenced, but voluntaristic emphasis
Axiological assumptions (overriding goal)	‘Explanation’ via subsumtion under general laws; prediction	‘Understanding’ via interpretation but not necessarily in order to confirm hypotheses	‘Emancipation’ via social organization that facilities reason, justice and freedom	Understanding; interpretation; understanding as prerequisite to explanation and prediction
Epistemological assumptions (knowledge generated)	Nomothetic; time-free; context-independent; value-free	Idiographic; time-bound; context-dependent; value-laden	Forward looking; imaginative; critical/unmasking; practical	Largely idiographic; time-bound; value-laden; forward-looking; critical
View of causality	Real causes exist	Multiple; simultaneous; shaping	Reflection; exposure of constraints through dialogue; reconstruction	Multiple; exposure of potential constraints