

**The Role of Consumerism in Addressing Cultural Trauma: A Philosophical and Anthropological Approach**Ruslan Grechkosii<sup>1\*</sup>, Dmytro Tovmash<sup>2</sup>, Viktoriia Cherniakhivska<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Dragomanov Ukrainian State University, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: 0009-0000-9022-7046<sup>2</sup> Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: 0000-0002-4576-0703<sup>3</sup> Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: 0000-0003-4135-7770\*Correspondence: Ruslan Grechkosii [grechkosii\\_ruslan@ujis.in.ua](mailto:grechkosii_ruslan@ujis.in.ua)**Abstract**

In contemporary society, consumption functions not only as an economic activity but also as a significant cultural mechanism for interpreting social change. In conditions of global crises, social instability, and rapid cultural transformation, consumption practices are increasingly integrated into digital media narratives that construct and mediate collective experiences of uncertainty. The growing symbolic role of consumption in the media space requires philosophical and anthropological analysis, since consumerism has become a central framework for understanding modern social reality. The purpose of this research is to conceptualize consumerism as a socio-cultural phenomenon and to determine its function in forming symbolic models for interpreting social crises within the digital media environment. The study demonstrates that consumerism reflects a profound transformation of the human condition associated with the transition from a culture of production to a culture of consumption. This shift marks the gradual displacement of the model of the “person-creator,” whose identity is grounded in productive labor and transformative activity, and the rise of the “person-consumer,” whose existence is increasingly structured around continuous acquisition, symbolic exchange, and mediated representation. In this context, consumerism is interpreted not merely as a system of market practices but as a comprehensive anthropological paradigm that shapes new modes of perceiving reality, identity, the body, time, and interpersonal relations. The results indicate that in the modern digital media space, consumerism performs the function of a cultural mechanism for the symbolic comprehension of crisis experience. The findings provide a basis for further interdisciplinary research in philosophy of culture, social anthropology, and media studies.

**Keywords:** happiness, globalisation, consumer culture, traumatic experience, success, gender, well-being**Introduction**

In the modern sociocultural environment, societies are increasingly faced with phenomena of deep collective upheavals that cause the transformation of cultural values, models of social interaction and ideas about individual identity. Such processes form a state of cultural trauma, which manifests itself in the loss of a sense of stability, the destruction of familiar symbolic structures and the search for new ways of understanding social reality. In such conditions, everyday cultural practices, in particular, consumption, which increasingly performs not only an economic function but also serves as a means of symbolic compensation for experienced crisis states, acquire special importance. Through consumer practices, individuals try to regain a sense of control over their own lives, form new forms of self-expression, and integrate into a changed social environment (Rudenko & Tasenko, 2025). At the same time, the phenomenon of consumerism as a possible mechanism for compensating for cultural trauma remains insufficiently understood in a philosophical and anthropological dimension.

The issue of cultural trauma and its impact on social practices is actively examined in modern social and cultural theory. Abrutyn (2023) considers cultural trauma as a complex social process in which collective shocks transform cultural narratives, the system of symbolic meanings and society’s perception of its own identity. At the same time, Arnould and Thompson (2005), within the concept of consumer culture theory, argue that consumption is an important sociocultural practice through which individuals interpret social reality and form their own identity, which makes it possible to consider consumerism not only as an economic phenomenon but also as a mechanism of symbolic adaptation to cultural changes. Modern studies also emphasize that consumer practices can perform the function of overcoming collective traumatic experiences. Thus, Fehl et al. (2025) show that shared forms of consumption can contribute to the restoration of social solidarity and the formation of new cultural narratives after crisis events that affect collective memory and social interactions. In turn, Fuschillo et al. (2022) emphasize that symbolic interaction with brands and consumer objects can help individuals reconstruct their own identity and rethink life experiences after traumatic situations, which indicates a significant anthropological potential of consumerism as a tool of cultural compensation. Emotional and identification aspects of consumption in the context of cultural transformations are considered in modern studies of digital and post-industrial society. In particular, Bulboacă et al. (2025) prove that modern consumer practices are increasingly focused on obtaining emotional experience and forming personal identity, which is of particular importance in conditions of social instability and cultural changes. The authors note that in periods of social transformations, consumption can perform a compensatory function, helping individuals restore psychological balance and form new forms of social self-realization. Recent studies also emphasize the growing influence of digital communication environments on the transformation of consumer practices. In particular, research shows that social media platforms increasingly stimulate forms of demonstrative and symbolic consumption, where users construct social status and identity through the public display of consumer goods and lifestyles (Wai & Osman, 2022). Empirical studies further demonstrate that browsing social networking sites can intensify conspicuous consumption due to mechanisms of social comparison, relative deprivation and perceived socioeconomic positioning within online communities (Yang et al., 2025).

Despite the significant development of studies in the field of cultural trauma, identity and consumer culture, the scientific literature still lacks a coherent theoretical understanding of the relationship between traumatic sociocultural experiences and the transformation of consumer practices. Most of the existing scientific works focus either on the sociological analysis of cultural trauma or on the marketing and economic aspects of consumerism, while the philosophical and anthropological dimension of this phenomenon remains insufficiently explored. In particular, insufficient attention has been paid to the issues of how consumption can perform a compensatory function in the processes of overcoming cultural trauma, how the symbolic meanings of consumer practices are transformed in periods of social crises, and what mechanisms for the formation of new identity models arise in such conditions. Furthermore, a thorough examination of consumerism as a cultural phenomenon that integrates psychological, social, and anthropological facets of human adaptability to traumatic social changes is lacking in modern studies. This necessitates an in-depth theoretical analysis of the role of consumer practices in the processes of symbolic compensation for cultural trauma. The purpose of the research is to theoretically understand consumerism as a sociocultural phenomenon and determine its role as a mechanism for symbolic compensation for cultural trauma in the philosophical and anthropological dimensions.

For the purpose of achieving the goal outlined, the following research tasks were defined: to analyze theoretical approaches to understanding cultural trauma and its impact on the formation of collective and individual identity; to investigate the sociocultural nature of consumerism as a form of symbolic interaction of a person with the cultural environment; to determine the features of the transformation of consumer practices in periods of social crises and cultural changes; to substantiate the role of consumption as a mechanism of symbolic compensation for cultural trauma; and to formulate a philosophical and anthropological interpretation of the relationship between traumatic social experience and the processes of constructing identity through consumer practices.

**Literature Review**

In contemporary English-language academic literature, consumerism is increasingly understood not as an isolated economic behavior but as a complex cultural mechanism through which the individual constructs himself, experiences instability, and symbolically organizes his own experience. A strong theoretical foundation for this approach has been formed in works that link consumption with modernity, cultural codes, and processes of identification. In particular, Mathur (2015) interprets consumer culture as one of the defining forms of modern sociality, within which things, lifestyles and symbolic differences become means of structuring individual experience. In a similar vein, Firat et al. (2013) consider consumerism as a systemic phenomenon of consumer society, in which the acts of purchasing, displaying and using goods acquire a normative, status and culturally regulated character.

Further development of this theoretical line is related to the study of consumption as a process of value creation and everyday experience. Schau and Akaka (2021) convincingly show that consumption is not a one-time act but a long-term practice embedded in life routes, social interactions and everyday scenarios through which a person gives meaning to his own experience. At the same time, Illouz (2009) shifts the analytical emphasis to the emotional dimension of this process, arguing that consumption is associated not only with material choices but also with imagination, affects, desires, and the pursuit of symbolic self-affirmation. Taken together, these approaches create an important basis for considering consumer practices as an environment in which not only market interests but also compensatory mechanisms for overcoming internal instability can be realized. A number of scientific works focus on how consumerism functions in conditions of instability, ambivalence and cultural discomfort. Cova (2020) draws attention to the fact that modern consumer experience is increasingly associated with a desire for borderline experiences, in which pain, risk or discomfort paradoxically become resources for escape from everyday life and a sense of inner emptiness. A similar, but more critically oriented, optics is offered by Cronin and James (2024), who demonstrate that consumer culture can produce not only comfort and self-expression but also anxiety, uncertainty, a sense of splitting and symbolic destabilization of the subject. Such a vision is fundamentally important

for the topic of the research, since it allows us to consider consumerism as an ambivalent mechanism that can simultaneously compensate for cultural trauma and deepen its internal contradictions. A separate strand of scientific literature is devoted to the relationship between consumption and various forms of identity, which is particularly significant for philosophical and anthropological analysis. Carvalho et al. (2019) propose an integrative framework within which national identity is considered as one of the key factors in consumer behavior, thus, making consumption appear not as a private matter but as a way of symbolically experiencing belonging. Dong and Li (2025) reach a similar conclusion, but based on the content of cultural products. They demonstrate that cultural identity and the product's perceived value directly affect the intention to buy, meaning that the thing's semantic content is more significant than its utilitarian features. In such a perspective, consumerism appears as a mechanism for reproducing identity, which is especially exacerbated in situations of cultural loss, fracture or symbolic deficit. The issue of the restructuring of consumer identity under the influence of change also occupies a prominent place in modern studies. Callmer and Boström (2024) argue that even in the processes of conscious reduction of consumption, a new type of consumer identity is formed, that is, the rejection of excessive consumerism does not abolish the logic of consumer self-construction itself but only changes its normative content. In the context of globalization, Hwang et al. (2021) show that susceptibility to global consumer culture influences brand commitment and loyalty, demonstrating that the modern consumer is increasingly socialized through transnational symbolic systems. Such findings indicate that consumerism is a dynamic space of self-redefinition, where local, national, and global meanings enter into complex interactions.

For the topic of cultural trauma, studies in which identity is analyzed in situations of social transition, the destruction of habitual norms and attempts to restore semantic integrity, are especially important. Kalmus et al. (2009), using the material of transitional culture, show that consumer types differ significantly depending on generational and ethnocultural differences; consequently, consumerism cannot be interpreted as a homogeneous reaction to social changes. Małecka and Pfajfar (2025) continue this line of critical inquiry by emphasizing that global consumer culture produces a form of resistance, alienation, and reevaluation of its normative norms in addition to involvement. Thus, the scientific literature increasingly clearly traces the idea that consumption can be both a mechanism of adaptation and a field of conflict in which the subject builds own strategy of interaction with a traumatically changed reality.

Recent studies increasingly link symbolic practices, digital environments, and recovery from traumatic experiences. Kumar et al. (2025) show that artistic and digital platforms can create safe spaces for the expression of traumatic experiences and the formation of supportive forms of communication among youth who have experienced psycho-emotional damage. In a related vein, Randazzo and Ammari (2025) argue that online design and communication tools can facilitate identity reconstruction after trauma, when the subject assembles fragmented experiences into a new symbolic whole. The totality of the reviewed works demonstrates that the world English-language literature has already described the connections between consumption, emotions, cultural identity, global codes and recovery practices; however, a holistic philosophical and anthropological explanation of consumerism as a mechanism for compensating for cultural trauma remains insufficiently developed, which determines the research expediency of this study.

### Materials and Methods

The research was conducted in 2024–2025 as a philosophical and anthropological study of the phenomenon of consumerism in the context of cultural trauma and social transformations of modern society. The methodological basis of the scientific work is a theoretical analysis of philosophical concepts of the consumer society, combined with the interpretation of modern media narratives as an empirical illustration of the relevant cultural processes. This approach makes it possible to consider consumer practices not only as economic or social behavior but also as a cultural mechanism for understanding social instability and the collective experience of crises.

The main research methods were historical-philosophical and comparative analysis, which made it possible to systematize key theoretical approaches to the interpretation of consumerism in the works of J. Baudrillard, G. Marcuse, E. Fromm, Z. Bauman and other researchers of modern consumer culture. The use of these methods allowed us to trace the evolution of the philosophical understanding of consumption – from critical theories of industrial society to modern interpretations of consumer culture as a symbolic system of identity formation and social integration. Within the framework of the research, consumerism was considered as a cultural phenomenon through which societies interpret the experience of instability, social change and collective crises.

For the purpose of illustrating philosophical interpretations of consumerism, a discursive analysis of cultural texts in digital communications of international brands was used. The empirical material consisted of a corpus of 72 cultural texts published in the period 2020–2025 on the official websites of the companies, on social networks and in materials of global advertising campaigns. The formation of the corpus was carried out according to the principle of purposeful non-random sampling. The sample included communication materials, in which consumer practices were integrated into broader cultural narratives, related to the themes of social stability, collective experience of crises or reconstruction of identity.

The criteria for inclusion in the corpus were as follows: the presence of a symbolic appeal to themes of recovery from social crises, the use of images of security, home or social interaction, as well as the representation of consumption in the context of cultural change. The corpus did not include texts that were exclusively informational or technical in nature and did not contain meaningful narratives related to the experience of social transformations.

Thematic coding was used in the analysis process, which made it possible to systematize key narrative models in the corpus of texts under study. As a result, four main analytical categories were identified: consumption as a form of emotional stabilization; consumption as a symbol of a return to social normality; consumption as a mechanism for the formation of individual and cultural identity; consumption as a practice of cultural solidarity. A single communication may fall under more than one analytical category because individual texts may contain several narrative patterns.

### Results and Discussion

#### Philosophical interpretations of consumerism as a cultural mechanism of social compensation

The philosophical understanding of consumer culture makes it possible to view contemporary media narratives of brands as manifestations of deeper cultural transformations of late-modern society. In digital brand communications, consumer practices are regularly associated with images of emotional stability, the restoration of social normality, the formation of identity, and symbolic solidarity. Such a communication logic reflects a broader cultural trend within which consumerism performs not only an economic but also an important compensatory function, helping society interpret the experience of instability and social change. In philosophical anthropology, this transformation is associated with the historical transition from a culture of production to a culture of consumption. In this transition, the very structure of human self-determination changes: the traditional model of *Homo Faber*, focused on work and the transformation of the world, gradually gives way to the model of *Homo Consumens*, within which identity is increasingly formed through acts of consumption and symbolic possession. In modern studies of consumer culture, this anthropological transformation is described as a transition to a society in which consumption becomes a way of overcoming existential anxiety and social uncertainty (Bajda, 2020; Levcheniuk et al., 2021).

Jean Baudrillard's concept that the consumer society is essential to the philosophical study of consumerism. According to his theory, contemporary consumer behaviour is more about interacting with a system of indicators than it is about using tangible goods. Goods acquire the status of symbolic markers of social meaning through which individuals construct perceptions of status, belonging and cultural identity. In this sense, consumption becomes an element of a sign economy in which social reality is increasingly reproduced through a system of symbols, media images and simulacra. It is within this symbolic logic that brands form communicative images of harmony, stability and well-being that compensate for experiences of instability or crisis changes (Barroso, 2022).

The critical social philosophy of Herbert Marcuse offers a different perspective on this transformation. In his theory, advanced industrial society supports social integration through the formation of so-called "false needs" produced by the system of production, advertising, and mass media. The satisfaction of such needs creates a sense of well-being and social stability, while integrating the individual into the structure of the existing social order. In this context, consumption is not only an economic activity but a mechanism for the symbolic integration of the individual into the system of social relations.

A summary of key philosophical approaches to interpreting consumerism as a mechanism of social compensation is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Philosophical and anthropological model of consumption transformation in late modern society

Theoretical approach	Key concept	Anthropological condition of a person	Social function of consumption	Compensatory effect
J. Baudrillard	The transition from use value to symbolic value and simulacra	A person as a constructor of identity through a system of signs and symbols	Formation of status and cultural identity through brands and media images	Symbolic replacement of reality and creation of a hyperreal world of stability
H. Marcuse	Manipulation of needs and technological rationality	A person as an integrated element of the production and consumption system	Social integration through the satisfaction of "false needs"	Maintaining social stability through desire control

<b>E. Fromm</b>	The dichotomy of the modes of “having” and “being”	A person as a subject who compensates for anxiety through possession of things	Consumption as a way of psychological stabilization and self-affirmation	Temporary reduction of existential anxiety
<b>Z. Bauman</b>	The transition from “solid” to “fluid” modernity	A person with an unstable identity that is constantly being reconstructed	Consumption as a cultural ritual of social integration	Restoring a sense of normality in a changing world
<b>Philosophical Anthropology (Homo Consumens – Homo Patiens)</b>	The confrontation between the hedonistic and existential models of the person	Homo Consumens – orientation towards comfort and pleasure	Consumption as a mechanism for avoiding suffering	Compensation for social and cultural trauma through symbolic practices

Source: summarized by the author based on Baudrillard (1998), Marcuse (1964), Fromm (1976), Bauman (2007)

A deeper anthropological dimension of this problem is revealed in the scientific works of Erich Fromm, who described the culture of consumption through the dichotomy of two modes of existence – “having” and “being”. In the mode of “having”, a person’s identity is determined by the extent of possession of things, status symbols and cultural attributes of prestige. In such a system, consumption performs a compensatory function, allowing the individual to temporarily neutralize feelings of inner anxiety, emptiness or social insecurity. Thus, consumer practices act as a mechanism of psychological adaptation to the instability of the modern social environment (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Comparative analysis of modes of existence (according to E. Fromm)

Comparison parameter	Mode of “having”	Mode of “being”
The essence of identity	It is based on possession of things and status.	It is based on internal activity and authenticity.
Leading emotion	Anxiety of loss, greed, envy.	The joy of self-expression, love, solidarity.
Attitude towards the world	Subject-object (the world as a resource).	Subject-subjective (the world as coexistence).
Nature of activity	Busyness, striving for results.	Internal activity, the process of awareness.
Social consequences	Competition, wars, social inequality.	Community, sharing, respect for life.

For Fromm, the way out of the consumerist impasse lies in moving to a mode of “being”, which means developing human capacities for love, reason, and creative work. He calls for “humanistic planning” and the creation of a society where the economy serves the needs of human development, not the other way around<sup>13</sup>. A person can only discover actual freedom to be himself by giving up the false freedom of consuming.

The sociological perspective of this transformation is developed by Zygmunt Bauman in the concept of “fluid modernity”. In modern society, traditional institutions of stability – profession, social status or long-term social roles – gradually lose their defining function. Identity ceases to be a stable characteristic of a person and turns into a continuous process of self-construction. In such conditions, consumption becomes one of the key tools for the formation of social belonging and cultural visibility. That is why brands and digital media play an important role in creating symbolic scenarios through which individuals can interpret their own place in an unstable social environment (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Socio-anthropological transformations (according to Z. Bauman)

Feature	Solid modernity (Fordism)	Fluid modernity (Post-Fordism)
Leading model	Production and accumulation.	Consumption and disposal.
Identity type	Stable, defined by profession and class.	Fluid, constructed through brands and the body.
Social connection	Groups with long-term commitments.	Swarms with instantaneous and fragmentary contacts.
Attitude towards the body	A tool of labor and endurance.	An object of manipulation, plastic surgery, and marketing.
Success criterion	Security through compliance with rules.	Flexibility and constant change of oneself.

According to the viewpoint of Z. Bauman, in a fluid society, a person is seen primarily as a consumer, not as a producer. The right to belong to society now depends on competence in acts of consumption<sup>17</sup>. Those who are unable to meet the standards of the consumer market – “flawed consumers” or the poor – become objects of social exclusion, they are branded as abnormal. Bauman introduces the metaphor of a “swarm” as opposed to the traditional “group”. The difference is that swarms have no leaders, hierarchy or permanent commitments; they gather around tempting objects of consumption and just as quickly disperse, leaving the individual in a state of deep loneliness and anxiety. In the digital media space, this logic takes on new forms. Studies on digital media practices show that demonstrative consumption on social networks is associated with processes of social comparison, relative deprivation, and the desire for symbolic confirmation of one’s own status (Zhang et al., 2025). In such conditions, consumption becomes an important element of social communication and a way of constructing individual identity in the digital environment. From the standpoint of philosophical anthropology, these processes can be interpreted as a manifestation of a deeper tension between two models of human existence – *Homo Consumens* and *Homo Patiens*. If a *Homo Consumens* is oriented towards comfort, pleasure and avoidance of discomfort, then a *Homo Patiens* recognizes limitation and suffering as an integral part of human experience. Consumer culture seeks to minimize the experience of suffering, offering instead symbolic scenarios of well-being and harmony. That is why brand media communications often form narratives that present consumption as a way to overcome crisis experiences and restore emotional balance.

Thus, the philosophical analysis of consumerism makes it possible to consider the modern culture of consumption as a symbolic mechanism of social compensation. Through a system of signs, images and media narratives, consumerism forms cultural scenarios that help society interpret the experience of instability, crises and social transformations. In this context, consumption appears not only as an economic practice but also as an important cultural mechanism through which modern societies seek to restore a sense of social order and symbolic equilibrium.

**Representation of consumption as a mechanism of emotional stabilization in cultural narratives**

Philosophical analysis of modern consumer culture shows that in late modern society, consumer practices increasingly serve as symbolic compensation for social instability and psychological tension. In the works of J. Baudrillard, consumption is viewed not as the satisfaction of material needs but as a system of signs through which individuals construct meanings of social reality and their own identity. In this interpretation, consumer objects function as elements of symbolic communication, and the logic of consumption acquires the character of a cultural code that structures social interaction in late capitalism (Baudrillard, 1998). In such a context, things cease to be only utilitarian objects and turn into signs of social status, lifestyle and cultural belonging.

A similar interpretation is offered by E. Fromm, who linked the spread of consumer culture with a person’s desire to compensate for feelings of anxiety and social uncertainty through practices of possession and symbolic self-affirmation. In his opinion, the dominance of the “having” model over the “being” model leads to the fact that social identity is increasingly determined by the volume and nature of consumed objects, which act as instruments of psychological stabilization in a situation of existential uncertainty (Fromm, 1976). In this sense, consumerism appears not only as an economic system but also as a cultural mechanism that allows individuals to symbolically organize their own experience in a complex social environment. In modern theories of consumer culture, this logic has been further developed. In particular, Bauman considers consumerism as a social mechanism of adaptation to the conditions of “liquid modernity”, where stable social structures gradually lose their certainty, and the individual is forced to constantly reconstruct his own identity in a dynamic and fragmented social space (Bauman, 2007). Under such conditions, consumption ceases to be only economic behavior and acquires the meaning of a cultural instrument of social integration and psychological balance. Thus, in the philosophical and anthropological dimension, consumerism can be interpreted as one of the ways of symbolic ordering of social reality and overcoming the experience of cultural trauma. The results of a discursive analysis of a corpus of 72 cultural texts of digital communications of international brands showed that the above-mentioned philosophical interpretations are reflected in contemporary media narratives. One of the most common motifs in the materials under study is the representation of consumer practices as a means of emotional stabilization in periods of social tension. In many communications, consumption is integrated into narratives of safety, psychological comfort, and mutual support that shape the image of everyday self-care practices. The corpus analysis showed that 31 out of 72 materials (43.1%) contain direct or indirect narratives related to the themes of emotional recovery and psychological support. In these texts, brand products or services are included in broader cultural scenarios of experiencing crisis situations, where consumption is associated with images of domestic space, social closeness, and self-care. The generalization of the results of thematic coding made it possible to determine the structure of the main types of emotionally stabilizing narratives used in digital brand communications (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Types of emotional stabilization narratives in digital brand communications

Narrative type	Number of texts	Share of the corpus, %	Campaign examples
Care and social support	12	16.7	Dove “Courage Is Beautiful”
Collective resilience and overcoming difficulties	9	12.5	Nike “You Can’t Stop Us”
Shared moments of joy and social interaction	6	8.3	Coca-Cola “Real Magic”
Home comfort and everyday stability	4	5.6	IKEA “The Wonderful Everyday”

Source: compiled by the authors based on the analysis of international brand advertising campaigns, including *Dove – Courage Is Beautiful* (2020), *IKEA – The Wonderful Everyday* (2021), and *Google – Year in Search* (2024).

Note: the share is determined from a total corpus of 72 cultural texts

Communications that appeal to themes of care and social support are the most prevalent kind of emotionally stabilizing narratives, as the table’s data demonstrate. These narratives, which account for 16.7% of the entire corpus of texts, are distinguished by their employment of images of cooperation, thankfulness, and group unity. Articles about overcoming obstacles and collective perseverance make up the second most prevalent category. The findings allow for the conclusion that consuming is methodically included into cultural contexts of emotional stabilization in contemporary digital brand marketing.

**Constructing narratives of a return to social normality through consumption practices**

In the philosophy of consumer culture, one of the key issues is the interpretation of how consumer practices are integrated into the symbolic structures of the social order. In the scientific works of Baudrillard, consumption is viewed as a complex system of signs, within which objects of consumption function not only as material things, but also as carriers of social meanings and cultural codes. Through this sign system, society reproduces notions of social normality, status, and cultural hierarchy, while consumer practices become a means of symbolic communication between individuals and social groups (Baudrillard, 1998; Storozhuk et al., 2023). In this perspective, consumer objects serve as markers of social life, allowing individuals to interpret their own place in social space and feel a sense of belonging to a particular cultural order. A similar interpretation is offered by Bauman, who links the development of consumer culture with the desire of modern societies to maintain a sense of social continuity in a situation of constant transformations. In his concept of “liquid modernity”, stable social structures gradually lose their certainty, and the individual is forced to continuously reconstruct his own identity in a changing social environment (Bauman, 2007). Under such conditions, everyday consumer practices acquire the significance of peculiar cultural rituals that help maintain a sense of stability and orderliness of social reality. That is why consumer rituals can perform the function of symbolic restoration of social order, forming an idea of normality and predictability of everyday life even in periods of profound social change. The results of the discursive analysis of a corpus of 72 cultural texts of digital communications of international brands showed that a similar logic is reflected in the modern media space. One of the common semantic models in the materials under study is the representation of consumer practices as a symbol of a return to the usual social order. In such narratives, consumption is integrated into scenarios of the restoration of everyday social interactions and the stability of social roles after periods of instability. Thematic coding showed that 24 of the 72 texts (33.3%) contain semantic constructions in which consumption is directly or indirectly associated with the restoration of everyday social order. In these communications, brands actively use images of familiar life situations – family leisure, friendly meetings and everyday communication. Such scenes create an effect of normalization of social reality, within which consumer practices are integrated into the structure of everyday social rituals. From a philosophical perspective, such narratives can be interpreted as a manifestation of the integration of mass culture into the mechanisms of social stabilization, as Marcuse wrote about when analyzing the role of consumer practices in maintaining social order (Marcuse, 1964). A prime example is Coca-Cola’s global Real Magic campaign, where the drink is a symbol of social interaction in everyday life situations. Through images of shared leisure, the brand’s communication shapes a narrative of a return to social normality, in which consumption is integrated into the structure of everyday social rituals (The Coca-Cola Company, 2021). From a philosophical perspective, such practices confirm the thesis that consumer signs function as symbolic elements of the reproduction of social order (Baudrillard, 1998).

**Consumption as a mechanism for reconstructing individual and cultural identity**

One of the central tenets of the philosophy of consumer culture is the thesis that in modern society, consumer practices play an important role in the formation and reconstruction of individual identity. In the scientific works of Baudrillard, consumption is interpreted as a system of signs through which individuals not only satisfy material needs but also symbolically construct social differences and cultural belonging. Within the framework of this concept, objects of consumption act as carriers of social meanings that form a sign system of culture in which individuals determine their own position in social space (Baudrillard, 1998). Thus, consumer objects acquire the meaning of cultural symbols that allow individuals to form an idea of their own social position and cultural identity. A similar interpretation is revealed in the studies of Bauman, who considers consumer culture as a space of constant self-construction of the individual in conditions of unstable social reality. In the context of “liquid modernity”, individual identity is no longer based on stable social structures, but is formed through dynamic cultural practices, among which consumption occupies a particularly important place (Bauman, 2007). Under such conditions, the individual is forced to constantly reconstruct his own “self”, using the symbolic resources of consumer culture to confirm social belonging and self-expression. Illouz also emphasizes that modern consumer practices are increasingly integrated into the processes of emotional and cultural self-determination. Within the concept of emotional capitalism, the author shows that consumption is associated with the production and circulation of emotional meanings, as a result of which consumer objects are transformed into symbolic resources for the formation of individual identity and emotional experience (Illouz, 2009). In this sense, consumerism appears not only as an economic model of behavior but also as a cultural mechanism for the formation of the social “self” in the conditions of modern mediated culture. In many communication materials, brands use images of self-expression, creativity, and individual lifestyle. In such narratives, products are positioned as tools of symbolic self-construction through which consumers can emphasize their own values, life orientations, or cultural preferences. Such logic corresponds to the philosophical interpretation of consumption as a sign system within which individuals form social differences and cultural identity (Baudrillard, 1998). In particular, in the communications of the Apple brand’s *Shot on iPhone* campaign, users’ creative practices and individual visual stories are represented as a form of self-expression, where the technological product is integrated into narratives of personal creativity and individual lifestyle (Apple, 2022).

The generalization of the results of thematic coding made it possible to identify the main types of identity reconstruction narratives used in digital brand communications

(Table 5).

**Table 5.** Types of narratives of reconstruction of individual and cultural identity in brand communications

Narrative type	Number of texts	Share of the corpus, %	Campaign examples
Self-expression through creativity	7	9.7	Apple “Shot on iPhone”
Collective identity and social unity	5	6.9	Nike “You Can’t Stop Us”
Lifestyle and cultural practices	3	4.2	Airbnb “Made Possible by Hosts”
Daily rituals of social interaction	2	2.8	Coca-Cola “Real Magic”

Note: the share is determined from the total corpus of 72 cultural texts

**Consumption as a practice of cultural solidarity in digital media narratives**

In the modern philosophy of consumer culture, more and more attention is paid to the interpretation of consumerism as a social practice that can form new models of collective interaction. In the studies of Baudrillard, consumption is considered as a system of symbolic signs through which society constructs shared ideas about social reality. In this perspective, objects of consumption act as elements of the symbolic structure of culture, which allows individuals to interpret social differences, status and cultural belonging through the symbolic codes of everyday life (Baudrillard, 1998). In such a context, consumer objects and brands can act not only as economic resources but also as cultural markers of collective identity and social interaction. Bauman offers a similar perspective in his idea of “liquid modernity”, which highlights how people are compelled to look for new cultural mechanisms of integration in a changing social environment while conventional forms of social solidarity are constantly eroding in modern society (Bauman, 2007). Under such conditions, cultural practices, including consumption, increasingly perform the function of symbolic unification of individuals, forming new types of social interaction and cultural belonging.

Within this theoretical framework, consumerism can be considered as a cultural mechanism for the formation of new forms of social interaction. Illouz emphasizes that modern consumer practices are increasingly integrated into the sphere of emotional and social relations, forming specific cultural scenarios for experiencing events within the public culture of consumption. In such a perspective, objects of consumption become carriers of emotional meanings and symbolic associations through which individuals construct forms of social proximity and cultural community (Illouz, 2009). Thus, consumption can act as a tool for the symbolic integration of individuals into common cultural structures, which is especially noticeable in periods of social crises or large-scale social transformations. The role of the philosophy of consumption in the reconstruction of identity also correlates with the findings of Stephan et al. (2025), who showed that consumer practices can contribute to the restoration of individual identity after crisis social experiences. The results obtained confirm this thesis, demonstrating that in media communications of brands, consumption is often associated with self-expression and the formation of a lifestyle. The philosophical and anthropological significance of these processes is also emphasized by Tormakhova and Grechkosii (2025), who consider consumerism as a socio-cultural reaction to traumatic transformations of modern society. Similar trends were found in our research, where consumer practices are integrated into cultural scenarios of stabilizing social experience. A broader critical perspective on consumer culture is provided by Guy Debord, who interpreted modern society as a “society of the spectacle”, in which social relations are increasingly mediated by images and symbolic representations (Debord, 1994). In the digital media environment, these symbolic structures are reproduced through brand communications and social media narratives that shape collective perceptions of reality. Recent studies also show that digital platforms can function as spaces for interpreting and processing traumatic social experiences, facilitating forms of online solidarity and emotional support (Scott et al., 2023; Rudenko & Tasenko, 2024). At the same time, the concept of hyperreality associated with Baudrillard’s theory has been further developed in research on digital misinformation and media environments, where symbolic representations increasingly replace direct experience and influence the construction of social meanings in online communication (van Kessel et al., 2025). Empirical examples of such symbolic narratives can be observed in global brand campaigns, where consumer practices are integrated into discourses of social unity and community building, as illustrated by the Airbnb campaign *Made Possible by Hosts* (Airbnb, 2022). The obtained results also correlate with the conclusions of Trujillo Torres and DeBerry-Spence (2019) regarding the symbolic reevaluation of the philosophy of consumption in situations of traumatic events. At the same time, the philosophical concept of consumer belonging, proposed by Vargas-Bianchi (2021), explains the trend of using brands as a tool for forming a cultural community, identified in the research. It is worth mentioning the studies of Zhang et al. (2025), which showed that in the digital environment, consumption becomes an important means of cultural expression. Similar processes were recorded in the analyzed media narratives, where consumer practices are integrated into discourses of creativity, lifestyle and social interaction.

## Conclusions

The philosophical and anthropological aspects of consumerism imply that the concept of a person is undergoing a systemic crisis. Consumerism does not simply change our habits; it deconstructs the subject, transforming it into a market function devoid of internal dimension and historical memory. However, the awareness of this state as an “anthropological catastrophe” is the first step towards overcoming the crisis.

The path to restoring humanity lies through:

1. The transition from the mode of “having” to the mode of “being” through the development of critical thinking and creative activity.
2. Acceptance of the reality of suffering and finitude as a source of meaning and solidarity.
3. Development of practices of minimalism and conscious consumption as a form of resistance to hyperreality.
4. Restoration of the “symbolic exchange” of selfless relationships that do not succumb to the logic of the commodity.

A person may only return to authentic existence – where the value of life is decided by the depth of connection with others and the world rather than the quantity of accumulated simulacra – by breaking free from the cycle of sign consumption. This shift becomes not only a philosophical undertaking but also a prerequisite for maintaining a person’s humanity in the face of contemporary global issues like digital transformation and existential dangers. In general, in the modern digital media space, consumption performs an important cultural function of symbolic comprehension of social crises. The analysis of a corpus of cultural texts of international brands has shown that in communication strategies, consumer practices are systematically integrated into narratives of emotional stabilization, restoration of social normality, reconstruction of identity and formation of cultural solidarity. The obtained results confirm the assumption of the research that consumerism can function as a sociocultural mechanism of compensation for cultural trauma in modern societies. The scientific novelty of the research lies in the philosophical and anthropological interpretation of digital media communications of brands as a space for the formation of cultural models of experiencing crisis experience. The practical significance of the research lies in the possibility of using its results for further analysis of cultural transformations of the consumer society and the development of interdisciplinary studies in the field of philosophy of culture, media studies and social anthropology.

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