

Happiness in the Hyper-Consumer Society between Pleasure and Illusion Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Baudrillard as Models

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Received: 03-02-2025 ; Accepted: 23-04-2025 ; Published: 10-05-2025

Abstract

In this research paper, we will attempt to shed light on the essence of the relationship between happiness and consumption in current philosophical thought through a comparative analytical approach between Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Baudrillard.

Considering that consumer society no longer merely satisfies material needs, but has become producing new patterns of happiness based on symbols, pleasure, and desire.

Whereas Gilles Lipovetsky believes that consumer happiness in the time of hypermodernity as an individual experience is temporary and fragile, while Jean Baudrillard believes that happiness is merely an ideological illusion resulting from the logic of simulation and the consumption of signs.

The importance of our research is manifested in the fact that it highlights the transformation of values in contemporary philosophy by connecting philosophy to everyday issues, and it opens the horizon of thinking about the possibility of building happiness that transcends market logic.

The research concludes that happiness in contemporary and current societies is a complex phenomenon in whose embodiment several factors overlap, which calls for rethinking the possibilities of building happiness that transcends market logic.

Keywords: Happiness - Consumption - Hypermodernity - Illusion - Instantaneous Pleasure.

Introduction:

Hypermodern societies have witnessed a radical transformation in lifestyles, where consumption is no longer merely an economic activity aimed at meeting basic needs, but has become a lifestyle and a cultural and social phenomenon that reshapes values, the self, identity, and social relationships, and in this context the problem of happiness has emerged as one of the central values that are being reformulated within the consumer system in the age of excessive modernity. Happiness has constituted throughout history a supreme moral goal, and has been transformed in contemporary and current societies into a consumer product that raises deep philosophical questions about its meaning, value, and limits:

Does happiness actually achieve the human self in the society of hypermodernity and excessive consumption? Or is it merely a symbolic and ideological construction imposed by the mechanisms of the market and consumption? And therefore, does contemporary consumption grant humans real happiness or fleeting pleasure?

1. **Excessive Consumption and the Market between Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Baudrillard:**

"Lipovetsky" questions whether narcissistic gatherings based solely on consumption are capable of creating a democratic society and enhancing the sense of values¹, where he says: The call of the sense of duty no longer tears one apart in the society of excessive modernity, but moral behavior has not reached the point of chaos, and although pleasure and happiness are the most important and most widespread, civil society still yearns for order, and while subjective rights govern our culture, there are still restrictions, not everything is permitted and allowed.²

Just as the loss of traditional references did not lead to comprehensive social chaos, and therefore the increase in hedonism led to increased individual responsibility.³

Lipovetsky adds that awareness of the approaching end led to the reckless rush of unbridled modernity forward toward accelerated commodification and the lifting of economic restrictions, and technical and scientific developments that unleashed promising effects and as much as they are promising they are dangerous⁴.

As for the society that is now taking shape, it is a consumer society⁵, the latter which refers in the philosophical dictionary to: "spending goods and commodities, and the consumer is the party that spends goods"⁶, while Lalande in his dictionary refers to the consumption of wealth by

¹ Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le Crépuscule du devoir: L'éthique indolore des nouveaux temps démocratiques*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p 19.

² Gilles Lipovetsky, *Le Crépuscule du devoir: L'éthique indolore des nouveaux temps démocratiques*, *Ibid.*, p 21.

³ Gilles Lipovetsky et Sébastien Charles, *Les Temps hypermodernes*, Grasset, 2006, P 21.

⁴ Gilles Lipovetsky, *Les Temps hypermodernes*, *Op Cit*, P 3.

⁵ It indicates a type of removal, and various forms of dispensation. As for the English language, since the 14th century, the verb "to consume" was used to denote: to destroy, to perish, to waste, to wear out completely, and two nouns were generated from it, which are destruction and the destroyer, both carrying the meaning of ruin, and pulmonary tuberculosis was described as destruction, and the word "consumer" was used in bourgeois political economy in the eighteenth century to describe market relations, and the consumer came to correspond to the producer, and the term consumption and consumer indicate acts of trading goods in the market, and the calculations related to some of their financial results, and the meaning of consumption as the satisfaction of human needs by economic means appeared in the 20th century, and thus consumption came to carry a positive meaning. See: Tony Bennett and Lawrence Grossberg and others, *Dictionary of Culture and Society Terms: New Conceptual Terms*, trans. Said Al-Ghanimi, Arab Organization for Translation, 1st ed., 2010, p. 74.

⁶ Abduh Al-Helou, *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms: French-Arabic*, Riad Al-Solh Library, Beirut, 1st ed., 1994, p. 32.

saying: "the reality of their destruction as wealth, and it is not just their use, but their loss"⁷, but under the imperialist capitalist system the system shifted from utility to pleasure, and consumption not production became the goal of society, just as the basic competition is no longer between producers, but between consumers, and the pattern of consumption and the satisfaction of pleasure became an indicator of his position in society⁸, and this is the idea that "Abdul Wahab Al-Messiri" alluded to, as he emphasized that capitalism⁹ is responsible for the emergence of consumer man, and it is what determines his taste, for he is afflicted with rabies before huge and distinguished products and acquires them despite their high price and even if he does not need them, and he likened him to a vacuum cleaner, saying in this regard about the consumer in Western capitalist society: "He is afflicted with rabies and becomes like a vacuum cleaner that wants to swallow everything, big in size and expensive in price".¹⁰

Just as capitalism prohibits permanent ownership and encourages consumption, from the point of view of "Pascal Bruckner" who says: "The goal of capitalism is to produce wealth, and no other goal, and as if frenzied consumption has become the ultimate goal of Western civilization"¹¹, the latter which depends on "suggestion, creativity, and simulation to arouse appetites, and transform the desires of some into the necessity of all"¹², and here we find that Bruckner sees in frenzied consumption a constraint that drags everyone toward the desire of some against their will.

In his book "The Consumer Society," "Jean Baudrillard" goes on to say that what surrounds us today is a huge wave of consumption, and the abundance composed of the multiplication of

⁷ André Lalande, *The Philosophical Encyclopedia*, previous reference, pp. 215-216.

⁸ Abdul Wahab Al-Messiri, *Epistemological Studies in Western Modernity*, Al-Shorouk International Library, Cairo, 1st ed., 2006, p. 106.

⁹ An economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and the creation of goods and services for profit. The main characteristics of capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, wage labor, and competitive markets. In a capitalist market economy, decision-making and investment processes are determined by each owner of wealth, or property or means of production in economic markets or capital markets, while prices and the distribution of goods and services are determined according to competition in goods and services markets. See the *Free Encyclopedia*, and see: Mustafa Husayba, *Philosophical Dictionary*, previous reference, pp. 228-231.

¹⁰ Abdul Wahab Al-Messiri, *Earthly Paradise: Studies and Impressions about Modern American Civilization*, Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 1979, p. 134.

¹¹ Pascal Bruckner, *The Misery of Prosperity: The Religion of the Market and its Enemies*, trans. Al-Sayed Ould Abah, Al-Obeikan Library, 1st ed., 2006, p. 14.

¹² Pascal Bruckner, *The Misery of Prosperity: The Religion of the Market and its Enemies*, same reference, p. 67.

objects, services, and material goods"¹³, and therefore the consumer society according to Baudrillard creates recreational, luxury, and secondary things that do not possess real benefit, but are consumed for what they add to the individual in terms of status and social value in order to keep pace with the rapid development and change in production, "and thus become synonymous with waste and squandering, which makes consumer society characterized by superficiality."¹⁴, In this context, Baudrillard formulated for us a new cogito in which he believes that "all people are equal before need, and before the principle of satisfaction, and equal before the use value of objects, goods, and property, for this reason the political game of consumer society focuses on overcoming its contradictions by increasing the volume of goods, and providing equality for all in achieving comprehensive welfare before it"¹⁵.

As for Gilles Lipovetsky, he provides a definition of excessive (hyper) consumption as: "consumption that absorbs and completes more areas of social life and encourages individuals to pleasure not in order to improve their social life, the society of excessive modernity is a society characterized by movement, flow, flexibility, and unlimited consumption: consumption for the sake of pleasure, in addition to moving away from the great principles that structured modernity more than ever before"¹⁶. And Lipovetsky adds saying: "The world of consumption has invaded our lives and distorted our relationship with things and people, and there is no alternative model other than the model of excessive consumption today, as for rediscovering love, it requires a special innocence in a world controlled by rationality and efficiency, and therefore our most important duty today is not to lament or mourn the damage to society but to rethink social reality in the context of excessive modernity where there is no ideological discourse of any meaning at all, at a time when fragmentation has reached its end".¹⁷

Lipovetsky describes the period the world is living through as a new stage of capitalism, which is "the stage of financial consumption" or "societies of excessive consumption," and "paradoxical happiness," and is considered a new model for consumer individuals, where the basic united references of the sons of new consumer societies have become to search for "welfare" and "happiness" through purchases and major brands and access to direct communication science in light of the information revolution and internet networks, as "consumption mentality" has become one of the basic components in the field of culture, meaning that "the era of excessive

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: A Study in the Myths and Structures of the Consumer System*, trans. Khalil Ahmad Khalil, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Lubnani, 1st ed., 1995, p. 9.

¹⁴ Susan Abdullah Idris, *The Immorality of Violence in Jean Baudrillard: Violence of Technology, Violence of Media, Virtual Reality*, Difaf Publications, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2018, p. 79.

¹⁵ See: Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: A Study in the Myths and Structures of the Consumer System*, Arabization by Khalil Ahmad Khalil, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Lubnani, 1st ed., 1995.

¹⁶ Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'empire de l'éphémère: La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*, Op Cit, P 11.

¹⁷ Amani Abu Rahma, *Postmodern Endings*, previous reference, p. 146.

consumption has begun with the disappearance of cultural deterrents before new tastes and traded needs"¹⁸, this trading appears through the display, and the display is what becomes "marketing dominates social life in a total way"¹⁹, and that is through the spread and generalization of tempting the individual and creating desire in him, and thus placing him in the circle of consumption²⁰.

The consumer society according to Lipovetsky is distinguished by raising the standard of living through "the abundance of services and market products, and various material pleasures, and is based on abundance, seduction, and diversity"²¹, and it is the same idea that Baudrillard presented when he said: "Our contemporary world abounds with the diversity of production and devotion to it, and this has opened the field for the contemporary individual to express his choices regarding consumer products and the quality of services"²²

Just as new and diverse products allow consumers to enrich their lifestyle and multiply the identities to which they belong, especially since absorbing consumption standards has some positive aspects, humans have become more realistic and more aware of their responsibility toward their lives and destiny, even if they are less "romantic," unlike those who overindulge in their consumer appetite and constitute a fragile society that does not possess the possibilities of participating and engaging in the high consumer wave and everything proceeds as if consumption now works like an empire in which there is no wasted time as well as it does not possess any precisely drawn boundaries.²³

It has been lost between the goods necessary for the sustainability of life, and the luxury goods that are acquired either to prove class distinction, or to practice social prestige by the wealthy classes, or for blind imitation by the middle and poor classes, and thus sustainable development is lost between extravagance in spending on luxury goods, and restriction in spending on satisfying the basic needs of the masses.

Excessive modernity has led, according to Lipovetsky, to positive changes through the rapid expansion of wealth, improving living standards, medical progress...etc., so that individuals and cultures that directly benefit from these things can feel that they have transcended the natural

¹⁸ Gilles Lipovetsky, *De la quête du plaisir: Hédonisme et bonheur dans la société, plaisir-plaisir*, Besançon, 2007, p 21-22.

¹⁹ Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, édition Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p 39.

²⁰ See: Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Era of Emptiness: Contemporary Individualism and the Transformations of Postmodernity*, trans. Hafiz Idoukhraz, Nama Center for Research and Studies, Beirut, 1st ed., 2018, p. 19.

²¹ Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'empire de l'éphémère: La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*, Op Cit, P186.

²² Jean Baudrillard, 197, *société de consommation: ses mythes, ses structures*, édition Denoël, paris.

²³ Our first interview with Gilles Lipovetsky on April 10, 2016 at 10:00 am via Skype, not yet published.

obstacles that have always impeded the progress of life on earth, but the negative effects are tangible as well, as excessive modernity has led to soulless homogeneity and gaps that are widening steadily between different classes and groups.

Among the axioms included in excessive modernity: the market, the technocratic mechanism, and the individual, in each of these fields there is abundance and overflow that exceeds limits and breaks down barriers in the market and in excessive individualism, while bureaucratic efficiency is the hope of a bright future where administrative activity and reform that does not depend on grand visions.²⁴

Edgar Morin²⁵ goes on to say that consumption is one of the forms of enslavement and that the consumer imagines that he is free and has freedom of choice, but the truth is that those who control consumption plan and study the psychology of the consumer in advance, because "the consumption space is based on calculation, planning, and utility, and is not free, for it falls under quantitative accumulation that makes us enslaved".²⁶

While "Zygmunt Bauman" believes that consumption is not something new, all humans consume, and they have been consumers throughout time, and that we live in a globalized society of consumers, and that consumer behavior inevitably affects other corners of our lives, such as work life and family life, because consumption precedes modernity in the stage of liquidity, and the consumption space appears as empty of all meanings in which the consumer of liquid modernity is occupied with his individual elevation only, as the consumer market has taken on the task of stripping things of their value, especially weakening the culture of coexistence, and destroying the family because each individual revolves around himself, desiring to satisfy his needs and achieve pleasure and maximum happiness²⁷.

Talking about consumption is closely related to extravagance and squandering, which is what Bauman called the society of waste and garbage, where affluent consumers do not care about

²⁴ Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'empire de l'éphémère: La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*, Op Cit, p43.

²⁵ A contemporary French philosopher and sociologist from a Greek Jewish family, born in Paris on July 8, 1921, he defines himself as a constructivist and says: "He who thinks is a fool" among his most important works "The stupid fool is he who does not think" which is an encyclopedic work of 100 parts, "Cinema or the Imaginary Man" *Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire* and also among his most important works "The Unity of Man" and "Man and Death". See: Georges Tarabishi, *Dictionary of Philosophers*, Al-Tali'a, Beirut, 3rd ed., 2006, p. 645.

²⁶ Edgar Morin et Tariq Ramadan, *L'éthique aujourd'hui entre théorie et pratique: Arts et éthique et éthique de consommation*, Elborhan, 2004, p 74.

²⁷ See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life*, trans. Hajjaj Abu Jabr, Arab Network for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 2016, p. 116. And see, Zygmunt Bauman, *Ethics in the Age of Liquid Modernity*, trans. Suhail Al-Bazai and Buthaina Ibrahim, Kalima, 1st ed., n.d., pp. 81-86.

throwing away their things²⁸, and this is what Jean Baudrillard went to, who labels our civilization as the civilization of the garbage bin which reveals the attachment of prosperous and wealthy societies to squandering, to the extent that sociologists have begun to talk about the sociology of the trash bin: "Tell me what you throw away, I'll tell you who you are," as abundance and consumption have replaced wars and exploitation.²⁹

The most important characteristics of consumer societies is that their products are in fierce and continuous competition, where "every time new products replace the predecessors, and this contributes to creating abundance through the economy's pursuit to meet the needs and requirements of the contemporary individual"³⁰

In conclusion, the time of excessive consumption elevates the value of transience, renewal, and change, instead of the value of stability.

2. **Happiness:**

Lipovetsky presents us with a distinctive concept of happiness³¹ through his book: *Paradoxical Happiness (Le bonheur paradoxal)*, not in this work alone but he refers to it in many of his sources such as: *The Era of Emptiness L'ère du vide* and *The Twilight of Duty Le crépuscule du devoir* and *The Global Screen L'écran global*, *The Empire of the Ephemeral L'empire de l'éphémère* and others, where he believes that it happiness is based on the technical control of the world, and has not known a single formula but has been crystallizing gradually and through stages, where it was specific to the bourgeois class in what is called luxurious welfare, followed by liberating welfare, one of whose most important characteristics was the liberation of women, leading to democratic welfare whose most important features were development in various areas of life including the social generalization of everything related to cleanliness and the development of technology in the field of media and communication, and the individualization of lifestyles, and was characterized by excessive sensitivity and harsh reactions to natural disasters left by man as a result of his progress, from manifestations that are incompatible with humanity

²⁸ See: Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life*, previous reference, p. 118.

²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, previous reference, pp. 37-74.

³⁰ Jean Baudrillard, 1986, *le système des objets*, édition Gallimard, Paris.

³¹ It is the opposite of sadness without a doubt, it is probably difficult to find happiness but it is more difficult to define it, and despite that we can assume that happiness is the basic goal of all human beings, and philosophy has tried since ancient times to answer the following two questions: What is a happy life? And what is the best way to achieve it? Is it the search for virtue or power or pleasure? Is it finding psychological comfort or passion? The answers differ depending on the authors and systems, but without abandoning the question as unsolvable or because it is poorly posed see: (Hervé Boillot, *PETIT LAROUSSE De la Philosophie*, imprimé en France, Larousse 2007, p648)

to environmental and ecological pollution³². Just as happiness in the time of excessive modernity according to Lipovetsky is based on reviving the Dionysian heritage³³ which gives attention to the concept of community and escapes from the bonds of narcissistic individualism, and establishes collective happiness, and this is what is observed in the hyper-modern excessive consumer who constantly seeks gatherings whether in restaurants, bathrooms, swimming pools, or public places and others, and Lipovetsky describes the hyper-modern individual as constantly searching for "his pleasures, welfare, and happiness through consumption, and is based on the pleasurable moment freed from barriers"³⁴, and Lipovetsky ends up asserting that happiness is instantaneous and contains many contradictions and paradoxes, he says: "If hyper-modern culture relentlessly stimulates the diverse and renewed pleasures of consumption, it also shows tremendous admiration for the values of private happiness and private harmony (...) while the man of the present time invests in happiness, love, and the relationship with the other, he does not cease to be a prey to emotional tragedies, discord, and rupture of all kinds"³⁵, about the nature of happiness Lipovetsky says that it is "lightened happiness"³⁶ and it is: "not only consumerist, but of an active and constructive nature: improving our qualifications instead of the ideal control of subjective desires as in the past, the eternal youth of the body instead of the resigned acceptance of the passage of time, the achievement work of the self on the self instead of wisdom, the technological diversification of the requirements of protecting the body which is

³² Our second interview with philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky on: 04/28/2017 at 10 am Algeria time via Skype service, not yet published.

³³ In relation to Dionysus or Bacchus in Greek mythology, he is the god of wine among the ancient Greeks and the inspirer of rituals of jubilation and ecstasy, and spring is considered one of the best seasons of the year for Dionysus, he protects passing through it and throughout the year all crops, vegetables and fruits, and he has the merit of teaching man the cultivation of vines. Dionysus represents, in addition to the forces of good, the force of fertility upon which human reproduction is based, for this reason the Greeks sanctify him and classify him among the greatest benevolent forces; as he achieved for them what can be called the foundations of the security triangle: happiness, fertility, freedom. (See the Free Encyclopedia: <https://ar.wikipedia.org>)

³⁴ Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *The Global Screen: Culture of Media and Cinema in the Age of Hypermodernity*, translation and presentation, Rawya Sadiq, National Center for Translation, Cairo, 1st ed., 2012, p. 56.

³⁵ Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *The Global Screen: Culture of Media and Cinema in the Age of Hypermodernity*, previous reference, p. 212.

³⁶ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Twilight of Duty: The Painless Ethics of New Democratic Times*, translation by Dr. Al-Bashir Issam Al-Marrakchi, Nama Center for Research and Studies, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2017, p. 62.

like capital, and its maintenance and demonstration of its value"³⁷, and the same idea was indicated by the philosopher: "Zygmunt Bauman"³⁸ in his book *Liquid Evil*: he says: "More money for more purchases, it is the sacred secret prayer of escalating consumption that has become a universal recipe for happiness and satisfaction with life, and even the dominant philosophy of the current time, a tendency that enjoys the most abundant share of the broadest support across classes and cultures"³⁹.

Just as "Lipovetsky" believes that "the culture of lightened happiness leads to chronic anxiety among the masses in democratic societies"⁴⁰, for as much as they chase after happiness and try to obtain it, they live through suffocating crises, great disappointment, boredom, and constant anxiety about it, which prevents them from obtaining it, which is what made them in an endless whirlpool, which is what prompted Lipovetsky to liken happy existence to God, saying: "Happy existence has become a god, and consumption is its temple, and the body is its holy book".

We should not fail to point out that many philosophers throughout time have addressed the topic of happiness and each has his own position. We mention, for example but not limited to, the position of the philosopher "Luc Ferry" who points to the same idea as Lipovetsky, considering that "democratic societies consider that happiness is the new and only commander, which is not concerned with us being in shape and in good physical health only, but that we flourish and be happy in our work and personal life as well."

From here we find Gilles Lipovetsky believes that consumption in hyper-modern societies is no longer linked to need and survival, but has become seeking pleasure and immediate gratification, and has also become a means of self-expression and a tool for building individual identity, and therefore consumption is a psychological and symbolic phenomenon more than it is material, as the individual has become consuming to feel and not just to live.

Here we find the paradox where happiness is no longer a moral and spiritual value but has become a personal experience linked to the present moment and temporary satisfaction, and the individual has become feeling happiness through the new, buying, and quick pleasure.

But this happiness is short-lived and unstable, always needing to be fed with the new.

Although consumption grants the individual pleasure, comfort, and relative liberation from traditional constraints, at the same time it generates in humans a feeling of psychological fragility, anxiety, emptiness, and permanent dissatisfaction.

³⁷ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Twilight of Duty*: previous reference, p. 62.

³⁸ Zygmunt Bauman: Born on November 19, 1925 and died on January 9, 2017, a Polish sociologist, he is a professor of sociology at the University of Leeds (and since 1990 a retired professor). Bauman became known for his analyses of the relationship between modernity and the Holocaust, and also regarding the material doctrine (consumerism) of postmodernity.

³⁹ Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Donskis, *Liquid Evil: Living with the Alternative*, translation by Hajjaj Abu Jabr, introduction by Heba Raouf Ezzat, Arab Network for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 2017, p. 90.

⁴⁰ Same reference, p. 63.

And because each individual is responsible for his own happiness, which made him move away from religion, community, and traditions, which generates in him a sense of strength and independence, but at the same time he feels responsibility, pressure, and psychological burden.

Conclusion

In the end, we conclude that consumption is no longer merely an economic practice, but has become a cultural and symbolic structure that contributes to crystallizing and reshaping man's relationship with himself and with the world, and attempts to reformulate the definition of happiness and its limits.

Gilles Lipovetsky has shown us that happiness in the time of excessive modernity is realistic happiness in terms of experience, but it is fragile and temporary because it takes an individual character based on pleasure and choice and is subject to the logic of renewed desire, and in contrast Jean Baudrillard's critique has shown us the ideological face of consumer happiness, where happiness is transformed into an image that is consumed more than it is lived as a product of the system of signs and simulation, which leads to the alienation of the self and loss of meaning.

Between Lipovetsky's relative optimism and Baudrillard's radical pessimism, the need emerges to transcend them toward a deep philosophical conception that establishes the meaning of happiness, for it is not a ready-made product offered by the market, nor a pure illusion imposed by simulation, but rather an existential project based on critical awareness and the ability to create meaning without reducing it to consumption, and without completely negating it within hyper-consumer societies.

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