



Coffee Culture in Turkey: Hedonic Consumption and Everyday Identity

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Abstract

This study looks at coffee culture in Turkey through a sociological lens, with particular attention to everyday life, pleasure, enjoyment, and hedonic consumption. In the Turkish context, coffee is more than a beverage: it operates as a social practice woven into rituals, social relations, and cultural continuity. Global consumer culture has, in recent years, reworked this practice around individual pleasure, experience, and personalization.

Drawing on a qualitative desk research approach, the study offers an interpretive reading of national and international literature. The findings suggest that Turkish coffee continues to sustain collective forms of shared pleasure, even as modern coffee practices push individualized hedonic experience to the fore. The contrast between in-home and out-of-home consumption further shows how pleasure and enjoyment shift according to spatial context.

The study's contribution lies in offering a culturally grounded perspective on hedonic consumption, one that treats coffee as a central social practice in how everyday life in Turkey is organized affectively.

Keywords: coffee culture, everyday life, hedonic consumption, identity, pleasure

JEL Classification: Z13

1. Introduction

Coffee today is far more than something to drink. It organizes the rhythm of everyday life, shapes social relations, and lends meaning to individual experience as a cultural practice in its own right. As the sociology of consumption has long argued, late modern societies cannot treat consumption as need-based activity alone; its symbolic, emotional, and cultural dimensions demand equal attention (Bauman, 2007; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Featherstone, 1991; Warde, 2016).

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Ritzer's (1998) notion of "McDonaldization" captures how standardization and speed have remade everyday practice under modern consumer culture. Simmel (2003) puts the tension between individual pleasure and social norms at the heart of modern culture; Sombart (1998) draws out the cultural and emotional stakes of consumption through the relationship between luxury and capitalism. Shaughnessy and Shaughnessy (2002), for their part, trace how marketing strategies turn consumer society into a series of hedonic experiences. Read together, these perspectives point to coffee culture, in both its traditional and modern forms, as a distinctive site within the hedonic consumption literature.

Hedonic consumption is not reducible to the pursuit of individual pleasure; it is also bound up with social relations and cultural values. Work conducted in the Turkish context shows that Simmel, Veblen, and Sombart's perspectives on the sociology of consumption supply an important theoretical foundation for understanding hedonic practices (Hürmeriç & Baban, 2012). Slater (1997), writing within the international literature, links modern consumer culture to individual identity, social visibility, and cultural modernity. Within this framework, coffee consumption reflects social identities and cultural belonging well beyond its status as a daily habit, so that coffee culture comes to occupy both the individual and collective registers of hedonic consumption.

Coffee culture in Turkey carries a layered historical continuity that stretches back to the Ottoman period. Coffee reached Istanbul in the sixteenth century and rapidly took hold at the center of social life through the coffeehouse, becoming a marker of conversation, hospitality, and cultural exchange. UNESCO's 2013 inscription of the practice on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2013) speaks to the international recognition this historical continuity has earned. Coffee culture today, however, is being reworked by popular culture and global consumption trends. Qualitative field research suggests that Turkish coffee remains a strong symbol of identity and belonging, even as the third-wave coffee movement has pushed individual pleasure, aesthetics, and experience into view (İnce, 2018; Alyakut, 2023; Yiğit, 2023).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Consumption, Everyday Life, and the Production of Meaning

In modern societies, consumption has become one of the chief means by which individuals relate to the social world. Late modernity, in particular, has consumption producing symbolic meanings, cultural codes, and emotional experience well beyond what the satisfaction of

material needs alone could explain (Bauman, 2007). Everyday life, on this view, is structured around the repeated, learned, and socially shared meanings that consumption practices generate (Lefebvre, 1991; Miller, 1998; Gronow & Warde, 2001).

Eating and drinking practices count among the clearest examples of this meaning-making dimension of everyday life. Warde (2016) argues that consumption practices are best understood not as the product of individual preference but as practices shaped by, and sustained within, particular social contexts. Coffee consumption fits this picture: rather than a simple outcome of personal taste, it is a practice woven through cultural learning, social interaction, and affective experience.

2.2. Hedonic Consumption, Enjoyment, and Affective Experience

Hedonic consumption looks past the functional side of consumption toward the pleasure, enjoyment, and emotional experience that accompany it (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Campbell, 1987; Illouz, 2007). On this account, consumption is not simply a rational act of choice but a domain shaped by the senses, emotion, and lived experience. Even so, the hedonic consumption literature remains largely anchored in Western, individual-pleasure narratives.

Enjoyment, at this point, offers an analytical category distinct from pleasure. Rather than individual satisfaction alone, it takes shape as an experience that is socially learned, shared, and culturally passed down. Coffee consumption in Turkey illustrates particularly well how enjoyment is produced and shared within everyday life, suggesting that hedonic consumption itself needs rethinking in culturally specific terms.

The third-wave coffee movement treats coffee not simply as a drink but as an experience and a craft running from production through to brewing method. It aims to give coffee something like the “identity” of wine, built from the origin of high-quality beans, roasting profile, and brewing technique. In Turkey, this movement has spread quickly, especially among young people, reshaping coffee culture through boutique coffee shops and alternative brewing methods. Its rise in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir is redefining coffee consumption around individual pleasure, aesthetics, and experience (Sunar & Türkyılmaz, 2018).

2.3. Consumption, Identity, and Visibility

Consumption practices bear closely on how individuals build identities and render their social position visible. Bourdieu’s (1984) account of cultural capital links consumption preferences

to class position and habitus, drawing attention to how aesthetic taste and everyday practice can produce social distinction. Consumption, in this light, is not simply about acquiring material objects; it also expresses identity and belonging symbolically.

Conspicuous consumption once referred mainly to the display of economic status, but contemporary consumer culture has redefined it largely around modernity, aesthetic taste, and cultural awareness (Veblen, 1899; Bauman, 2007). Coffee consumption, especially in public and semi-public settings, opens a symbolic space where individuals present themselves as modern, self-aware subjects attached to a particular lifestyle, making coffee a practice in which individual experience and social visibility meet.

Taken together, the theoretical framework of this study draws on the literatures on consumption, hedonic experience, and identity production to analyze the layered structure of coffee culture within everyday life in Turkey, providing the main point of reference for the findings and discussion that follow.

3. Method(s) and Materials

This study rests on a qualitative desk research approach, widely used in sociological work that addresses the historical, symbolic, and social dimensions of cultural practice. The approach allows consumption practices to be read not simply as measurable behavior but alongside their meaning, experiential, and affective dimensions (Bryman, 2012; Warde, 2016).

The research process drew on national and international academic literature on coffee culture in Turkey, sociological theory, and previously published qualitative work. Coffee consumption was treated here not in terms of consumption frequency or market share but through the cultural meanings, practices of enjoyment, and experiential dimensions it generates in everyday life. The literature review settled on three main analytical axes: the historical continuity of coffee consumption, its spatial differentiation, and its relationship to modern consumer culture.

Desk research of this kind supplies a conceptual frame for analysis rather than empirical field data, so the findings below should be read as literature-based, interpretive, and analytical inferences rather than generalizable quantitative results. This methodological choice makes it possible to discuss coffee culture in Turkey as a layered social practice within everyday life and hedonic consumption. Because the study involves no human or animal participants and collects no primary data, it does not require ethics committee approval.

The chief limitation of this approach is that it does not draw on direct observation of individual experience. That limitation does not, however, diminish the study's theoretical contribution; if anything, linking the analytical findings to the theoretical framework lays solid conceptual groundwork for qualitative and quantitative field research to come.

4. Results

What follows presents the findings drawn from the literature review and theoretical framework. Rather than a matter of individual preference, coffee consumption is treated here as a practice that is repeated, learned, and socially shared within everyday life (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2016), one through which coffee consumption in Turkey takes shape as a layered social practice bound up with meaning, enjoyment, and identity.

4.1. Traditional Coffee Practices and Collective Enjoyment

Among the clearest features of coffee culture in Turkey are the traditional practices built around Turkish coffee. Far from a quickly consumed drink, coffee here takes on meaning through sharing, conversation, and time spent together, with enjoyment produced less by individual pleasure than by social bonds and shared experience. Turkish coffee functions as a key vehicle of hospitality and cultural continuity (Karhan, 2021), and this collective sense of enjoyment is carried forward through intergenerational transmission, becoming part of cultural continuity in its own right. A comparable pattern of intergenerational transmission and ritual continuity appears in other corners of everyday life in Turkey as well, birth practices among them (Okutan & Kahraman, 2019).

4.2. Modern Coffee Practices and Individual Hedonic Experience

The rise of the third-wave coffee movement has brought individual hedonic experience to the fore in modern coffee practices, through personalization, aesthetic presentation, and an emphasis on experience (Ritzer, 2015; Sunar & Türkyılmaz, 2018). Coffee consumption, in this setting, becomes part of how the individual relates to the self, tied to meanings such as “taking time for oneself,” “feeling good,” and “breaking from the daily routine.” Modern coffee consumption in Turkey, the findings suggest, is no passive echo of global trends; it is reworked through local cultural codes.

4.3. Visibility, Symbolic Capital, and Coffee Consumption

Beyond individual experience, modern coffee practices intersect with the production of social visibility and symbolic capital. In public and semi-public spaces especially, coffee

consumption becomes a practice through which individuals position themselves as modern, self-aware subjects tied to a particular lifestyle, suggesting that consumption is bound up with the display of identity and belonging as much as with the production of pleasure. Conspicuous consumption, once a matter of displaying economic status in its classical sense, is now redefined chiefly through aesthetic taste and cultural awareness (Veblen, 1899; Bourdieu, 1984).

4.4. In-Home and Out-of-Home Coffee Consumption

In-home coffee practices open a domain of enjoyment marked by continuity, resting on familiarity, calm, and emotional security, and serving a stabilizing, emotionally regulating function within the routines of daily life. Field research among young people finds in-home coffee consumption tied more closely to emotional security and routine, while out-of-home consumption connects to social visibility and experience (İnce, 2018). Out-of-home settings, by contrast, produce a more visible and performative form of enjoyment, shaped by experience, aesthetics, and social interaction, with cafés functioning as social stages where individuals express themselves and form ties with others.

5. Discussion

Read through the lenses of everyday life, enjoyment, pleasure, and hedonic consumption, coffee culture in Turkey turns out to be far more than a beverage: it is a practice bound up with social meaning, affective experience, and identity production. Coffee consumption in this context resists reduction either to traditional ritual alone or to modern consumption trends alone; instead, it shows a hybrid, layered structure at the meeting point of the two.

Traditional Turkish coffee practices rest on a collective sense of pleasure built from shared enjoyment, slowness, and social bonds, setting this case apart from the individual-pleasure narratives that dominate the Western-centered hedonic consumption literature. Enjoyment in Turkey takes shape mainly through togetherness, sharing, and continuity, a finding that argues for rethinking hedonic consumption in culturally specific terms.

Modern coffee practices, conversely, make individual hedonic experience increasingly visible. The third-wave coffee movement, with its stress on personalization, aesthetics, and experience, folds coffee into the individual's relationship with the self. Far from a straightforward reflection of global trends, these practices in Turkey are reinterpreted through local cultural

codes, so that modern coffee consumption ties together individual pleasure with the production of social visibility and symbolic capital.

Coffee consumption can also be tied to modern ways of existing and becoming visible in society. Conspicuous consumption, classically a matter of displaying economic status, is now redefined in contemporary consumer culture chiefly through the visibility of identity, modernity, and cultural belonging. In public and semi-public spaces, coffee consumption becomes a symbolic practice through which individuals position themselves as modern, self-aware subjects with refined aesthetic taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 1899; Bauman, 2007), suggesting that hedonic consumption is bound up not only with pleasure but with the pursuit of visibility and social approval.

The split between in-home and out-of-home coffee consumption reveals how enjoyment and pleasure shift across space. In-home practices offer a domain of enjoyment grounded in continuity, familiarity, calm, and emotional security; out-of-home practices, by contrast, generate a more visible and performative form of pleasure, shaped by experience, aesthetics, and social interaction. This spatial split shows that coffee produces different strategies of enjoyment depending on context.

Coffee consumption, finally, can be read as a layered social practice that regulates both the modern subject's emotional relationship to the self and how that subject appears to others, positioning coffee culture, within the sociology of consumption, as a domain continually reproduced through identity, norms, and visibility.

6. Conclusion

Read through everyday life, enjoyment, and hedonic consumption, coffee culture in Turkey turns out to be no ordinary habit but a dynamic social practice that produces meaning, identity, and emotional experience. Traditional and modern coffee practices, the analysis suggests, exist not in opposition but as intertwined structures continually reshaping one another.

Where the third-wave coffee movement foregrounds individual pleasure through personalization, aesthetics, and experience, the rituals built around Turkish coffee keep a collective sense of enjoyment alive through sharing and hospitality. This hybrid structure shows coffee culture in Turkey being reinterpreted through both local cultural codes and global consumption trends at once.

The study's main contribution is a culturally grounded perspective on the hedonic consumption literature. In the Turkish case, coffee consumption draws meaning not only from individual pleasure but from collective enjoyment, sharing, and continuity as well, a finding that resists reducing hedonic consumption to individual experience alone and points instead to its shaping through social relations and cultural codes.

Methodologically, the study shows that conceptual analysis grounded in desk research can sustain robust sociological argument without field data of its own, though the findings should be read as interpretive and theoretical inferences rather than generalizable empirical results.

Coffee culture in Turkey, in sum, can be understood as a layered social domain bound up with practices of modernity, visibility, and enjoyment, an approach that offers the sociology of consumption literature an original contribution drawn from the Turkish context.

7. Suggestions

Future research might deepen this framework through qualitative and quantitative field studies spanning different generations, spatial settings, and social groups. Comparative work on coffeehouses, cafés, and home settings within a single urban context could clarify further how enjoyment and pleasure vary across these spaces, and would let the culturally grounded account of hedonic consumption proposed here be tested against empirical field data.

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