

The cultural values of the future business elite

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This research was conducted by **Janna Michael** at the **Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands**.

Summary

How does culture factor into the work and social lives of young professionals today? Through a series of in-depth interviews conducted with young business professionals in northwest Europe, this research calls into question simplistic links between economic elites and highbrow cultural tastes. Instead, it found that cultural consumption (specifically music and the visual arts) plays a modest role in the lives of young professionals, and is secondary to sociability and the possession of a strong work ethic.

Highbrow art discourse appears somewhat irrelevant

In this study, the ‘young professionals’ interviewed were managers and business professionals in the early stages of their careers in multinational companies. The majority of interviewees described their cultural engagements as forms of social activity rather than carefully considered cultural choices. The researchers found that being open to new cultural experiences was seen as a valuable trait by interviewees, indicative of a cosmopolitan lifestyle, and so something that enabled bonding between peers and colleagues. However, the possession of specialist knowledge about the arts was not seen as important, with many nonchalant about their lack of understanding around ‘highbrow’ artforms. Many interviewees indicated their perception of value derived from their assumptions about the time taken to create a work of art, so a detailed oil painting was valued more highly than a contemporary abstract work.

Young professionals use art for relaxation, inspiration and entertainment

This suggests that culture forms one part of an overall 'approach' to the lives of the business elite, who value openness to new experiences and cosmopolitanism. Cultural engagement is perceived as one of the ways (alongside an interest in sport and humour) that useful social currency can be obtained in a work environment.

This summary is by **Alexandra Talbott, Projects Coordinator, Cultural Partnerships & Enquiry**

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