CultureCase

The social and political profile of ‘cultural omnivores’

This research was conducted by **Tak Wing Chan** at **University College London**

Summary

This research found that British people were either univores (who tend to only engage with apparently ‘lowbrow’ genres in music and visual arts), paucivores (who engage very little with music and visual arts) or omnivores (who are more likely to consume all kinds of music and visual arts – highbrow and lowbrow). The paper reveals that these groups did not just differ in their cultural behaviours but also in social and political attitudes. Omnivores were more trusting and risk-taking, more extrovert and open to new experiences. They were politically more engaged and more favourable towards the European Union, however they were not particularly left-wing or right-wing when it came to taxation and redistribution. All of this remained true when controlling for variables like age, ethnicity, education, income and social class.

The study used data from 2005-2011 from a combination of two large surveys (the British Household Panel Survey and Understanding Society)

Specifically, the cultural omnivores were identified by their survey responses to questions about the sorts of musical events they had attended and visual arts excursions they had made in the previous year. These covered things like classical music concerts, or rock, pop and jazz performances, as well as visits to a museum or gallery, and attending a carnival or cultural specific festival like Mela.

Omnivores were open-minded rather than snobbish

The academic literature has tended to think of cultural omnivores in one of two ways: as ‘tolerant, cosmopolitan individuals who are generally open to different cultural styles’ or, by contrast, as a snobbish bunch who use their eclectic pursuits ‘to demonstrate cultural and social superiority’ in their role as a new elite replacing an old aristocratic class. This paper suggests the first of these two explanations is the correct one.

Keywords

UK **segmentation** **survey**

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