Emerging Elitism on Facebook

An Ethnographic Field-Study on Social Distinction among the Young

Abstract:
The research paper at hand presents a web-ethnographic field-study on mechanisms of social distinction among young individuals on Facebook. This includes an investigation of Pierre Bourdieu's main thesis outlined in *La distinction* and its applicability for contemporary times. Recent research in the field of *cultural class analysis* debates the applicability of Bourdieu's thesis in view of increasingly diversified taste preferences. This paper investigates taste practices on Facebook and discusses to what extend those practices can be understood as mechanisms of social distinction. The argument is developed that decisive indications for mechanisms of social distinction can be found among Facebook profiles of the younger generation. In this way, this paper argues that mechanisms of legitimacy, convertibility and domination were identified during the field-observation, supporting the contemporariness of Bourdieu's thesis of social distinction.

1. Introduction

The development of the welfare state since the end of WWII has silenced debates about social classes and inequality in Western societies. In particular increased access to higher education is seen as a victory over structural social inequality (Piketty 41).

In the early seventies French scholar Pierre Bourdieu (1979) disrupted the narrative of social equality with his book *Distinction*. Bourdieu introduced a cultural dimension into conceptions of social class by arguing that inherited *cultural capital* is decisive for an individual's social position in society. Cultural capital thereby is described as 'legitimate' taste practices serving as indicators for higher 'personalities'. According to Bourdieu, these legitimate taste practices are promoted by educational institutions, privileging those who acquired cultural capital through their socioeconomic background. Bourdieu's thesis of cultural privileges and social distinction promoted questions about elitism and equality of opportunities to return into public debates at the time.

Towards the end of the 20th century, however, *Distinction* has increasingly been “criticised for being historically outdated” (Hjellbrekke et al. 187). The function of taste was seen as too exclusively linked to mechanisms of social elitism and challenged for portraying a “sociological reductionism” (Goblot and Halbwachs qtd. in Coulangeon and Duval 3). Thereby, it is argued that Bourdieu is unable to sufficiently address influences from recent social changes in the sphere of education, globalization and digitization on culture (Holt 103 qtd. in Prieur and Savage 308). Culture, is the
overarching argument, has emancipated itself from its functionalist role for creating social classes and has increasingly come to reflect diversified and individualistic lifestyles. This notion of culture is often argued to apply particularly to the lifestyles of younger generations, who have benefited from the expansion of the education system and grew up with culturally egalitarian technologies of the internet (Duval 106). At times when economic inequality in Western societies has regained proportions of the late 19th century (Piketty, 418), the question appears whether culture in the form of taste practices has indeed emancipated itself sufficiently from its elitist character, to justifiably be discarded from playing a role in mechanisms of social hierarchization. The goal of this paper is to attend to this question. Therefore, my research questions is, to which extent can taste practices of young adults on Facebook be understood to perpetuate mechanisms of social distinction in a Bourdieusian sense? To attend to that question, I will analyze compositions of Facebook-profiles from individuals with different degrees of education in order to investigate an interconnection between education, taste preferences and cultural capital as described by Bourdieu.

As I will present in this paper, the compositions of Facebook-profiles from presumed higher educated individuals differ significantly from profiles from presumed lower educated individuals. On this spectrum, my observations have lead to a differentiation between displays of abstract connectedness and pragmatic belongingness. As I will argue, this opposition correlates with existing research which identified a division among young adults between cosmopolitan vs. local taste preferences with regards to their levels of education. In this, the scholars Price and Savage argue to have identified mechanisms of social distinction similar to those described by Bourdieu. Further, I will argue that taste practices from highly educated individuals stand in conformity with a Kantian aesthetic which is described by Bourdieu as a guiding principle for social distinction. I will conclude that my observations support understanding taste practices on Facebook as stocks of cultural capital due to their conformity to characteristics of legitimacy and convertibility.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Dimension of Culture

Bourdieu's conception of social class builds fundamentally on an autonomous quality of culture for the constitution of the social world. Bourdieu challenges the secondary role of culture in the traditional Marxist base- superstructure model, with which culture ceases to be “a product of class relations […] [and becomes] itself a field in which class relations operate” (Savage, “Class Analysis” 106). Bourdieu however is materialist enough to acknowledge that “the objectively given distributions of capitals form the possible basis for the formation of classes as social collectives” (Flemmen 328). This objective basis is what Bourdieu refers to as social space. The “structure of social space is continuous; it has no pre-defined sharp breaks or clear internal boundaries. […] [Therefore, social classes] do not emerge ‘automatically’ from this space […] [but] have to be made, they have to be constructed as social groups” (id.). In this sense Bourdieu acknowledges material conditions for structural inequality but argues that what is further needed are cultural practices of entitlement, establishing the social domination of certain groups over others (Savage, “Social
2.2. Cultural Capital

Bourdieu describes these practices of entitlement most famously in his book *Distinction*. “The book has been considered the authoritative work in sociological studies of the relationship between class and lifestyle differentiation” by introducing “the role of cultural capital as a different axis for class formation” (Hjellbrekke et al. 187; Savage, “Class Analysis” 106). The term *cultural capital* is instructive as it describes mechanisms of domination and convertibility traditionally reserved for economic capital. These forms of domination result from the circumstance that “people […] who occupy the same position in social space tend to share the same tastes across all forms of symbolic practice” (Bennett xxiii). The correlation between tastes and locality in the *social space* points to different “conditions in which […] [individuals] acquired their cultural capital” (Bourdieu 4; publ. 2010). Accordingly, these conditions are decided by the “family and the school [which] function as […] markets which, by their positive or negative sanctions, evaluate performance, reinforcing what is acceptable, discouraging what is not” (Bourdieu 85; publ. 2002). Bourdieu therewith points to “the very close relationship linking cultural practices [...] to educational capital [...] and [...] social origin” and develops the argument that the success of children in school and university depends significantly on the stock of cultural capital of their parents (Bourdieu 5; publ. 2010). In this way, cultural capital reproduces social hierarchies by providing “preemptive rights over the future” (Bourdieu qtd. in Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 46).

Bourdieu emphasizes that the reason for cultural capital to be effective is its “function[ing] below the level of consciousness” (74; publ. 2002; 468; publ. 2010). The “minute it is actually seen as a form of overt privilege, [...] its power can be challenged” (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 50). Only if taste is attributed to the intrinsic characteristics of personality, can it support the legitimizing mechanisms of distinction and domination. The “sense of limits implies forgetting the limits” and taste begins to “function[... as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place']” (Bourdieu 473; 469; publ. 2010). In this invisible manner mechanisms of cultural capital create social hierarchies as they set “the aesthete apart from the common herd [...]”, promoting an “opposition between the 'elite' of the dominant and the 'mass' of the dominated” (31; 471).

2.3. Social Distinction

The way cultural capital perpetuates mechanisms of social reproduction is by means of social distinction. Cultural capital is understood as “distinctive forms of knowledge and ability” which are considered as “legitimate ways” of practice (Bennett xviii). In consequence, central for mechanisms of social distinction is the power to define what constitutes legitimate taste and what not. Essential for this “power over the classificatory schemes and systems” is not its unifying potential, but its “separative power, a distinction, *diacrasis, discretio*, drawing discrete unit out of invisible continuity, difference out of the undifferentiated” (Bourdieu 479; publ. 2002). This power is confined only to a privileged minority of people at the top end of the social spectrum. Therefore Bourdieu writes:
It goes without saying that the social classes are not equally inclined and prepared to enter this game of refusal and counter-refusal; and that the strategies aimed at transforming the basic dispositions of a life-style into a system of aesthetic principles [...] are in fact reserved for members of the dominant class, indeed the very top bourgeoisie (57).

In this way, the dominant class defines legitimate practices of taste according to characteristics which only the most privileged group of individuals possess the means to fulfill (258). By pointing to structurally unequal conditions for conforming to legitimate practices of taste, Bourdieu describes cultural capital as integral to social mechanisms of domination.

2.4. The Kantian Aesthetic

According to Bourdieu, characteristics of legitimate taste follow a common principle and resemble the ideal of Kantian aesthetic. This ideal is characterized by the linking of a lack of necessity with higher morality. Accordingly, legitimate taste practices stand in opposition to characteristics of “ordinary urgencies” (Bourdieu 54; publ. 2002). “The pure aesthetic is rooted in an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world” (5). Detachment receives the quality of virtue and is synonymously understood with the capacity of the “pure gaze” (21). The 'pure gaze' according to Kant, describes an “acquired disposition” to differentiate and appreciate “that which pleases' from 'that which gratifies', and, more generally, [...] to separate [...] 'the interest of the senses', which defines the 'agreeable', [...] from 'the interest of Reason', which defines 'the Good'” (466; 41). Hence, “Kant's principle of pure taste is nothing other than a refusal, a disgust - a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment” (488). This disgust is directed at “popular taste [...]. [Accordingly, taste] 'that requires an added element of charm and emotion for its delight [...], has not yet emerged from barbarism’” (Kant 65 qtd. in 42).

In this way, legitimate taste “is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence and a measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man” (6). It is by connecting this moral dimension of taste preferences with the “conditioning by negative economic necessities – a life of ease” – that cultural capital supports social hierarchization and mechanisms of social domination (5). “The aesthetic disposition [...] can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves” (54). Therewith, legitimate taste practices are defined along characteristics of privileged circumstances while simultaneously being seen as expressing higher forms of personality, legitimizing the hierarchical positioning in social space.

2.5. Appreciating Content vs. Form

Bourdieu argues that this contrasting principle of aesthetic unfolds most prominently in the appreciation of paintings and photographs. He describes how people from the higher social spectrum, when observing pieces of art, “introduce [...] a distance, a gap – the measure of this distant distinction – vis-à-vis 'first-degree' perception, by displacing the interest from the content [...] to the form” (34; publ. 2002). Consequently, Bourdieu claims that “one finds that the higher the level of education [...] the greater is the
proportion of respondents who assert the autonomy of the representation with respect to the thing represented” (35). By contrast, the judgements of “working-class people, who expect every image to fulfill a function, [...] are always responses to the reality of the thing represented or to the functions the representation could serve” (41). In this way the judgement from socially lower positioned people gives content priority over form, reflecting a “certain 'aesthetic', which maintains that a photograph is justified by the object photographed or by the possible use of the photographic image” (41). With regard to the Kantian aesthetic, this is seen as confirming a lower degree of personality due to its “form of investment, a sort of deliberate 'naivety', ingenuousness, good-natured credulity” (33). In this way difference between object- and form-oriented appreciation reaches conformity with the polarity between pragmatic necessity and seamless detachment in the Kantian aesthetic.

3. Literature Review

3.1. The Challenge of Diversified Taste Preferences

Bourdieu's thesis has increasingly been criticized as historically outdated. Recent research in the field revolves around a debate of how to understand diversifying taste practices, in view of influences from globalization and digitization. Significant for this trend has been the work of Richard Peterson (1992). Peterson introduced the concept of “cultural 'omnivorousness'” in which he describes how “traditional patterns of cultural distinction fragment as people sample different cultural styles with greater readiness” (243; Savage, “Class Analysis” 117). The basis for this argument has been the observation that “the occupational groups at the top are [...] likely to be high on liking [...] non elite forms” of music taste (Peterson 249). This finding has been interpreted as a challenge to the work in Distinction, as accordingly “the high status groups should be exclusive in their taste and not even like the non-elite music forms” (248). Accordingly, the description of the bottom of the social spectrum to possess a “mass taste” is also challenged (253). Peterson's findings indicate a lower variety of music tastes among respective individuals, so that the term “univore” is suggested to replace the notion of a mass audience (254). In this way Peterson's work has intensified the debate about Bourdieu's work, as the role of taste appears to have lost in importance for mechanisms of social distinction. (Hjellbrekke et al. 189; Flemmen 325).

3.2. Cultural Class Analysis

Recent research in the field of cultural class analysis is distinguished by a shift away from a focus on objects of taste preferences towards a focus on modes of relating to such objects. The scholars Prieur and Savage (2015) argue for the contemporariness of Bourdieu's work and propose the concept of 'emerging cultural capital'. Thereby, the concept of emerging cultural capital describes “a link between this kind of 'knowing' appropriation of culture and a certain 'cosmopolitan' orientation” (310). They claim to “witness [...] a sophisticated use of what Bourdieu [...] named strategies of condescension”, thereby opposing Peterson's thesis of omnivorousness “as there is absolutely not an 'anything goes attitude about [...] cultural choices” (310; 309). The concept of emerging cultural capital is understood as “an alternative to the
omnivore hypothesis, which fixates on the apparently plural choice of cultural objects [...], not on the mode in which these objects are consumed” (310).

This argument is further developed in a later work of Savage (2016), in which findings suggest that young adults from privileged backgrounds are likely to adopt a “certain detached, knowing orientation to popular culture that demonstrates [...] an eclectic knowledge and a privileged understanding” (“Social Class 21st Cent.” 118). When not conforming to this ideal of detachment, the consumption of popular culture was “framed as 'guilty pleasures’”, which in turn were associated with the lower social spectrum, where the desire prevailed “to be completely and unapologetically immersed in” the consumption of cultural goods (119). Savage's work thus concludes that mechanisms of social class do not follow “clear categorical divides” as they might have done at times of Bourdieu's works and instead present a “much more fuzzy and complex” picture (401). The argument however persists that cultural “modes of classification are inherently hierarchical and thus generate categories which are necessarily morally loaded“ (402), underlining the principle of social distinction.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Ethnographic Fieldwork

I choose to adopt an ethnographic approach for my study due to its suitability for describing implicit behaviors. Ethnography as a method “does not speak to individual traits or beliefs but to the complexity and interconnectedness of culturally driven practices and norms” (Boyd 46). The reason for choosing field-observation as an approach regards the salient nature of aspects of social class (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 369; Schröder 112). As “the very notion of class poses a fundamental threat to one's sense of self, one's individuality” and stands further in conflict with an “increasingly democratic ethos, [...] the cultural dimension of class [...] went underground” (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 372; 36). Therefore, the “very salience of class struggles over distinction [...] explains why it is so difficult to [...] be explicitly named” (Savage, “Class Analysis” 107). This makes approaches that draw on subjects testimonies, such as qualitative interview analysis, problematic. A web-ethnographic field-observation in contrast poses an advantage, as it implies an unmediated confrontation with cultural practices of taste.

4.2. Ethical Challenges

Anonymously conducting field-observation of personal profiles on the internet gives rise to ethical concerns of privacy. Boyd writes that “one of the core concerns underlying Internet ethnography [...] [regards] methodological questions about boundaries, privacy, and ethics” (49). While in “unmediated context, observing typically makes a researcher visible to those being observed”, this is not the case online, as one is practically invisible to the subjects one observes (70). While this aspect depicts a major advantage for studying the “very salience of class struggles over distinction” (Savage, “Class Analysis” 107), it simultaneously poses ethical challenges of privacy. Those derive from the “persistent and searchable nature of networked publics [...] [allowing] to trace a digital conversation back to its source”. As a consequence, I
decide to follow Boyd's example and treat all collected data “as sensitive material” by anonymizing “all identifying information” (Boyd 86).

In addition to concerns of privacy, the potential reinforcement of social hierarchies through descriptions of cultural distinctions is a general ethical issue in social class analyses. Savage points out that conceptual knowledge about social hierarchization “is not a neutral tool which unravels the social structure, but in fact is bound up with the very construction of class categories and the 'symbolic' violence which is done in their name” (“Social Class 21st Cent.” 362). Especially describing cultural practices related to people at the lower spectrum, threatens to support forms of stigmatization and to reinforce those hierarchies in even subtler forms (388). While there is no simple solution to this problem, I deem it important to be sensitive to those issues in the process of conducting research.

4.3. Developed Procedure

My procedure for selecting individual profiles is characterized by a reversed approach for investigating structural differences related to cultural practices. Instead of departing from data on structural inequalities, moving towards correlating forms of taste practices, I depart from taste practices and move towards the identification of structural differences in education. For doing so I rely on indicators for levels of education, which I identify as markers for educational capital. This approach contains a threat of circular reasoning and requires a reflection about the value of significance derived from the chosen markers, which will be offered in chapter 5.3.

Markers for educational capital consist of Facebook pages which are 'Liked' or 'Followed' and allow me to reason with probabilistic significance about the level of education of an individual from an associated profile. Through investigating the stated taste preferences from profiles from my own list of “Friends” their “Friends” and “Friends” of their “Friends”, I identified the page “Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes” as the most suited marker for higher education. It provides a large number of associated profiles, and by promoting “die Hochschulbildung junger Menschen, deren hohe wissenschaftliche oder künstlerische Begabung und deren Persönlichkeit besondere Leistungen im Dienste der Allgemeinheit erwarten lassen” (info1), an explicit connection is drawn between educational capital, aesthetics and virtue of personality.

Facebook does not provide a list of profiles who “Liked” and thereby affiliate with a page. However, it does provide a list of profiles which associate with specific posts by clicking on “Like”, “Love”, “Haha”, “Wow”, “Sad” or “Angry” underneath. My sample for investigation derives from three posts on the page that document participatory activities. From this information I assume a close association of selected profiles with the foundation Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes. The three chosen posts combined, list 121 profiles who did either “Like”, “Love” or “Wow” one of the posts. The investigation of a profile requires low privacy settings for unassociated observation. From the 121 profiles, I identified 9 (5 female and 4 male displayed) profiles with low privacy settings that conform to my other criteria, presented in the following.

As Facebook does not provide reliable information of people's age, I rely on my judgement of profile pictures and overall profile compositions for assessing users age. I excluded teenagers from my
field-observation and thereby focused on an estimated age range between early 20s and early 30s. In addition, I confined my interest of subjects to a German context. In order to minimize the influence of additional determinants, I discarded profiles from individuals with indications of recent migration background.

Another difficulty which appears is that markers for lower educational capital can not be identified with the same degree of logical inference as for higher educational capital. Drawing on Bourdieu's principle of distinction, I therefore identified markers of lower educational capital on the basis of opposing characteristics to my findings from profiles with high educational capital. These markers consist of three statement pictures, which will be presented in chapter 5.2. From these statement pictures I chose 14 (7 female and 7 male displayed) profiles which hold valid biographical displays of lower education, such as statements about attended schools, pictures of school graduations or job engagements. These characteristics need to be seen as indications only and present no claim of actuality.

5. Presentation and Analysis of Research Findings

5.1. Cosmopolitan Aesthetics of Connectedness

The observed 9 profiles associated to the page “Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes” depict decisive conformity in their overall composition. While the main theme of content varies slightly among individual profiles, the general use follows a common principle of abstract connectedness. The portrayal of these qualities is complemented by a distinct emphasis on easiness and effortlessness, which underlines a sense of naturalness in a cosmopolitan world. In this way political information, opinions and personal achievements are presented and portrayed to coincide with one another.

In light of the recent federal election in Germany, the most prevalent topic in recent posts consists of a strong commitment to democratic values. This is communicated via personal statements such as “Heute ist Bundestagswahl - geht wählen! Es ist nämlich bei weitem keine Selbstverständlichkeit und jede Stimme zählt!”, “VOTE!”, “Sexismus und Xenophobie auf nur einem Poster vereint? Das schafft nur die AfD. Traut euch, geht wählen! #Bundestagswahl #btw17”, “Sogar das Faultier sagt: Geh' wählen! #fdgo #Demokratie #FaultieregegendieAfD #done” and “Demokratie ist ein Privileg, keine Selbstverständlichkeit. Wenn man nicht für sie kämpft und sich um sie kümmert, verliert man sie.”. These quotes articulate a concern for democratic values in view of the success of the right-wing populist party AFD. After the federal election individual statements of frustration and ambitions for actions were expressed with statements such as “Fuck this shit. Fuck Populism” and comments such as “Da ist das Signal an alle jungen Menschen die halbwegs geradeaus gucken können sich politisch zu engagieren” (ibid.). In accordance with a stance against the AFD, a frequent stance for the European Union was articulated and against other isolating political movements, such as Brexit and Trump's nationalistic policy. This becomes apparent from posts of links that state “Trump is even bigger than Brexit, according to our author and Mexico expert Sebastian Haug” and quotes from pro European politicians such as Macron, stating: “Ich überlasse Europa nicht denen, die Hass, Spaltung oder nationale Interessen predigen...”. Whilst some variations with respect to political opinions
can be observed, these profiles all depict an explicit commitment to democratic ideals. In doing so, they communicate a necessity for accepting responsibility for these ideals, which in turn they present as their duty. Exemplary for this activism is one post in which an individual requests to participate in a survey they assisted to conduct, in order to “Help crowdsource optimism [...] for The European idea” as they “refuse[s] to watch the ship go down without a fight”. Conforming to ideals of democracy is understood as participating in, and thereby connecting with, a greater cause.

Although my focus does not lie on political orientations, the fact that all profiles articulate political concerns and engagement in the first place, is predicated for other practices. Besides displaying particular political viewpoints, the observed individuals use their profiles as a means to distribute a variety of information with respect to societal and political coherences. These can range from ‘informing content of federal bills aiming to increase network regulations’, coverage of ‘insights into the life and motives of members of IS’, the ‘violation of European law in Poland regarding the deforestation of national parks’, to calling attention to ‘endangered bumblebees’ and ‘animal abuse in German Zoos’. Besides strict informative content, articles are posted which discuss ‘sexism at work’, ‘gun ownership in the U.S.’, or ‘innovative technology that can solve traffic pollution’. These examples show an awareness of, and concern for, a variety of social issues not immediately connected to the individual’s range of experience and national or cultural context. This interest for societal developments resonates with the Kantian aesthetic when he praises “‘the interest indirectly attached to the beautiful by the inclination towards society’ that is produced by the process of Civilization, although this ‘refined inclination’ giving no satisfaction of enjoyment is as close as possible to pure pleasure.” (21 qtd. in Bourdieu 492; publ. 2002).

Next to a common “‘inclination towards society’” (ibid.), the interest to inform others is telling, as it requires the competence to assess the informative and educative value of a source. This competence is often established by attached comments explaining the relevance of the post. Thereby, statements such as “Sehr sehenswert”, “Eine absolut hervorragende Sendung:”, “Verschiedene Volksgruppen, verschiedene Religionen, ein Krieg, eine Botschaft. - Mostar, Bosnien-Herzegowina”, “Heute das worum ich mir am meisten Gedanken gemacht hab, denn Beleidigungen stimmen immer nachdenklich...” are common practices among these profiles, which indicates a reflexive exercise over the educative value of the material. In one case the competence of sharing information and opinions finds expression in the form of a personal blog. “I’ve been silent for quite some time with my thoughts, now I created space to let them out and share them with you.”. These observations resonate with the findings of scholar Mike Savage who identified demonstrations of discernment among young, well-educated people, to serve as legitimation for sharing their opinions and taste preferences and “inflict them upon others” (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 116; 108). Furthermore, this competence of discernment requires, and thereby communicates, a sense of awareness of and knowledge about contemporary developments. To know about relevant developments and to be able to talk about them, implies a connectedness with the world which predominantly correlates with the individual’s interest for the common good.

This sense of intellectual connectedness in relation to personal activity, is further endorsed by a geographical mobility. It is common to observe pictures from places abroad with statements such as “How much I have missed this place! Photo credits: The amazing [...]”, “Impressions from the beautiful four
months I spent on Cuba.”, “Auf gehts nach New York - dort werde ich dann auch endlich wieder ausgiebig fotografieren! 😊 : [ ... ]” and “Heute Dracula Castle, dann nach Bukarest und dann 'into the wild' 😎”. These comments not only reveal information about the variety of geographical locations visited, but they also highlight the fact that the representative individual has no touristic ambitions in those locations. Instead, a more meaningful and active-orientated motivation is presented to explain the affinity to those places: ranging from memories of the study time abroad, working opportunities, to personally set challenges. It appears relevant to accentuate this principle, as no profile depicts touristic pictures or motives of simple leisure. This observation conflicts a traditional Bourdieusian practice of display according to which “the scholastic point of view stands in opposition to the hurly burly of daily life and allows distance and abstraction from it” (Prieur and Savage 315). The authors Prieur and Savage argue that a reversal of this opposition is indicative for contemporary times so that “Substantial 'leisure' is now embedded in mundane practices” and associated “with the world of manual, physical work” (315). Consequently, they argue that in order to “claim distinction, one needs to be able to differentiate oneself not only from the daily grind of physical labour [...], but also from the 'undiscriminating' use of leisure pursuits [...] by those with too much time on their hands”, so that “today being busy, as opposed to idle, appears as more characteristic of the classes rich in cultural and economic capital” (Prieur and Savage 316; 315). My observations indicate further, that highlighting one's personal motivation is a means to attribute this sense of busyness to notions of geographical connectedness. In the same way as the intellectual connectedness revolves around aspects of meaningfulness, so does geographical connectedness. This principle is carried on to aspects of personal engagement.

Details about personal engagements are frequently presented among those profiles. In their portrayal they convey a sense of societal significance which further underlines the previously mentioned aspect of connectedness and meaningfulness. The significance of an individual's engagement is highlighted in different ways. One way is to build upon the association with influential organizations and/or individuals. One post depicts a newly received intern identification card at the World Health Organization. Another individual emphasizes his political engagement in the party FDP by posting profile pictures with its party leader Christian Lindner and the slogans “Ich wähle FDP” and “Denken wir neu”. Another way to highlight the significance of personal engagement is by referring to the degree of responsibility linked to it: “Guys, I need your help! For a seminar series on innovative / unconventional approaches to economic challenges I am looking for women and non-white or working class speakers. Please let me know all the brilliant female economists (professors, award-winners etc.) that you can think of!” A combination of these two ways is found by the post of an article who refers to an article, informing about the death of political expert Sylke Tempel with the attached comment: “Danke für viele eindrucksvolle Begegnungen!”. Upon request, the individual explains that they had written together “im Rahmen des Kollegs für die IP [...], ich hab sie noch vor ein paar Wochen in der Redaktion in Berlin gesehen. Beeindruckende Frau” (ibid.). In these examples the apparent functional motivation for sharing the information is telling. In the foreground stands an aspiration to communicate appreciation, pragmatic necessity or sympathy. The prestigious entity of the information is portrayed to have, if any, secondary priority. This casual revealing of the significance of one's personal activities is further exemplified by an individual who posts: “RIESENCHANCE! Unbedingt
bewerben - bis 20. Dezember! Bei Fragen stehe ich gerne zur Verfügung! 😊”. In this post, the individual offers guidance for interested applicants of a prestigious project. The information of her own engagement and experience in this project appears as a side note of necessity. The post is phrased in a casual way as to suggest that anyone can apply, thereby relativizing the selective requirements implied in an application. In none of these posts the prestigious element of information is highlighted explicitly, which allows to reason that doing so would be classified as inappropriate. This reasoning stands in line with Savage when he argues that “People in higher class positions usually distance themselves from any suspicion of snobbery” (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 121). In turn, it complements the notion that the “new currency of 'cool' is an explicit rejection of snobbery and a celebration of diversity.” (Savage 114 2016).

In this way diversity itself receives a prestigious quality, displayed with similar ease and casualty. An illustrative example for this is the casual portrayal of language competences. At times this competence is presented as a necessary mean for communication. One individual posts a comment in English, asking for contacts for finding accommodation: “Dear Berlin-people, I will be moving to Berlin and need accommodation as of June. Maybe until September, maybe longer. If you have any ideas, tipps, spare couches, please let me know. Appreciated!” This post reaffirms previously observed patterns. Besides the given, that the individual is mobile and fluent in English, the post makes clear, for one, that the individual knows people from different national backgrounds who do not speak German, and on the other hand, that the circle of friends who do speak German are also fluent in English. Another example for this cultural connectedness and ease of communication is a post in which an individual asks in the name of another friend for a potential accommodation: “Chers amis et habibdis du Maroc, une amie cherche une chambre à Rabat à partir de fin juin. Est-ce qu'il y a quelqu'un qui peut aider ? Qui connaît quelqu'un... 😊:-) Merci !”. Both examples illustrate marked language competences and the possession of extensive social networks across national boundaries in which the respective individual holds the capacity to communicate with ease. At other times, the ease of language competences is displayed in more casual contexts, as in the following short phrases or interjections: “Finally!” , “Porco demonio...”, “"Qu'est-ce qu'une Apfelschorle ?", “Flight booked!😊”, “à Londres!” and “Solidarité avec la France.”. In further cases, the earlier described explanatory comments of posted material are written in English: “Awesome! Both functional and aesthetic - that's how it should be done! Good job, Elon Musk.”, “A 20 year old movie (which is phantastic, by the way) - but the message couldn't be more current...” and “Enjoying beautiful fall with my partner in crime”. The latter quote was a description of a picture which displays the individual together with an elderly women, seemingly hers/his grandmother. The casual context of the use of different languages highlights the ease and naturalness with which they are spoken. At times it is considered as eloquent and funny and at other times as competent and necessary to communicate in a different language.

This aspect conveys an element of naturalness in moving in a diverse world and thereby complements the earlier described attributions of knowledgeability of, and connectedness to, spheres that extend traditional local boundaries. As “the capacity to stand outside one's own national frame of reference may itself be an important cultural marker”, these observations stand in agreement with Prieur and Savages when they argue for a “link between this kind of knowing appropriation of culture and a certain 'cosmopolitan' orientation” (Prieur and Savage 310). The term cosmopolitan thereby describes an abstracted
“belonging to all parts of the world, not restricted to any country or its inhabitants’ – and might be chosen by the elite to complacently designate themselves as more broad-minded than those without such an orientation” (313). Cosmopolitan taste preferences are also reflected in one's sense of humor. One individual added a description to a profile pictures of themself, in which they is depicted carrying a tightly strapped hiking bag and a rain cover over it, saying: “It's official, I really am German”. With this comment, the respective individual communicates their awareness of their national frame of reference, while simultaneously distancing themself from it in ironic fashion. This comment therefore exhibits a sense of self-irony and reflexivity which displays “the capacity to pass judgements on one's own national frame of reference […], rather than take that national frame as a cultural given” (Prieur and Savage 310). It accordingly underlines the individual's “ease and grace in moving between different genres, playing with classifications and typologies, which [is what] might count as cultural capital today” (Savage, “Social Class 21st Cent.” 52).

According to Savage, in nowadays particular preferences of taste are only as telling for cultural capital as the manner in which they are performed, so that he proposes the concept of “emerging cultural capital” to increasingly apply to younger generations with cosmopolitan taste orientations (93; 125). This reaffirmation of Bourdieu's original term is justified on the basis of its accordance to the principle of “relational oppositions” (314). Because in “matters of taste […] all determination is negation”, it is essential to identify the “negative reference point, in relation to which […] [cosmopolitan aesthetics] define themselves” in order to reach further conclusions (Bourdieu 56; 57; publ. 2002).

5.2. Negative Markers of Cosmopolitanism - Local Practices of Belongingness

As mentioned in chapter 4.3., markers for lower educational capital cannot be identified with the same degree of logical inference as for higher educational capital. Therefore, I identified markers for lower educational capital on the basis of opposing characteristics to the observed profiles with high educational capital. In doing so I identified the three following statement pictures as markers: “Wenn Du ein kostenloses Flugticket bekommen würdest, wohin würdest Du am liebsten Fliegen?”, written on top of an animated picture of an airplane flying above the clouds; “Eine gesunde Scheißegal-Haltung ist heutzutage sehr wichtig!”, placed over a picture of a young nurse from the 60s, innocently looking into the camera while giving the finger; “ICH SCHEIß DRAUFL WAS IHR DENKT, DENN ICH BIN STOLZ AUF DAS WAS ICH HABE! DENN ICH HABE DAFÜR HART GEACKERT UND Mich NICHT GEBÜCKT ODER ÄRSCHE GELECKT”, highlighting “Stolz” in red color, with a young, male cartoon figure coming forth from flames and black smoke. These three statements essentially conflict with the characteristics of geographical connectedness, meaningful engagement, and effortlessness in achieving success, observed in the previous group of highly educated individuals. Besides these opposing qualities towards the highly educated group, engaging in games of make-believe about airplane tickets and expressing pride in the amount of one's hard-earned possession, indicate precarious economic circumstances. The page where I derived these pictures from¹ posts a number of similar statements per day, in which the overarching theme revolves around a non-specific but explicit dissatisfaction with society as such. I identified 14 (7 male and 7

¹ not disclosed for privacy reasons and concerns about potential stigmatization
female portrayed) profiles from the equivalent lists of “Like”, “Love”, “Haha”, “Wow”, “Sad” or “Angry” which corresponded to my criteria, after having investigated 238 profiles from a list of 2739 potential profiles.

Most telling for the selected group of profiles is their overall conformity with characteristics from the three statement pictures, which I identified as markers. All observed profiles indeed display characteristics of low geographical mobility, a local-centric constellation of social networking and effort in achieving success. Thereby, norms of behavior and an ideal of the common good underline taking responsibility for one’s immediate range of influence. Together, these characteristics form a guiding principle of pragmatic belongingness. The following observations give evidence of these characteristics.

An apparent observation is that most profiles which display hobbies or passions, revolve around one dominant, sometimes two or three additional themes. These range from hobbies such as ‘fishing’, ‘horse riding’ or ‘bodybuilding’ to fascinations for ‘luxurious cars’, ‘viking crafts’ and ‘cosplay’, ‘self-made garage tools’, to an identification with a particular ‘soccer club’. Such practices conform with Peterson’s concept of “univore” taste preferences, as people on the lower social spectrum “tend to be actively involved in just one [...] aesthetic tradition[...]” (254). However, more telling than a one-centric taste preference, is that aspects of personal leisure and interests are portrayed in the first place. This practice stands in opposition to the highly educated group, where no leisure activities or interests were displayed which did not relate to larger societal significance and meaningfulness. Profiles from the group of lower educational capital on the other hand frequently display private information in relation to the personal and daily sphere of significance. Therefore, posts often contain information of daily encounters or experiences such as a picture of an empty shopping mall stating “Nix los in Jena ist ja der Hammer 🖕”, a picture of an individual ruffling his/her cat’s commenting “Entspannt den Bauch kraulen lassen...”; a collection of photos with the comment “Eine schöne Runde mit lieben Menschen und süßen Hundis.”; or casual comments such as “Guten Morgen wünsche euch allen einen schönen Freitag und später ein schönes Wochenende” and “AUF DEM WEG ZUR ARBEIT”. Other posts contain more exceptional experiences such as: “[...]Schau nach oben und dann das !!!Hammer 🖕? Da willst ja noch hin! Mega kleine Sachen die ein verblüffen!?❓❓❓”, showing a photo of a REWE hot-air balloon and “Das war eine Nacht 😌? alle drei Wohnungkatzen abgehauen weil Ben unser Hund Durchfall hat und hat sich mal alle Türen aufgemacht zum Hof. Haben wir nicht gute Tiere. Alle wieder da ❤️❤️❤️”. These posts were considered to entail worthy information for disclosure, precisely because they captured personal matters of daily experiences. The purpose of posting thereby appears to follow the principle of relating to others by offering representative insights into one’s life.

Similar to profiles with high educational capital, informative posts are at regular display among profiles with lower educational capital. Thereby, relatability and confinement to the individual’s sphere of experience can be further observed as guiding principle for posting. In contrast to the highly educated group, the relevance of informative posts derives from its geographical and/or personal immediacy to an individual. One reads shared articles such as “Umweltblatt: Fahrverbot für Bielefeld unvermeidlich”, “Brand durch Blitzeinschlag – Blaulicht Report […] weitere Informationen aus deiner Region”, “Wetterdiens warnt: In diesen 52 Landkreisen kommt es heute noch dicke”, “[...] Ein schwerer Unfall hat sich gegen 20 Uhr auf der St2356 zwischen Mehring und Burgkirchen ereignet. [...]”, “Forshcer warnen:
Ibuprofen erhöht das Risiko für Herzstillstand – Millionen Deutsche betroffen”. Revealing for these articles is that they all contain potentially impactful information on the respective individual and or the respective social network which might also be affected by the information. Hence, a conformity with the modes of appreciation from working-class people as described by Bourdieu can be observed. It appears that informative posts are judged by the same principle as “the image [of art] is [...] judged by the reference to the function it fulfills for the person who looks at it or which he thinks it could fulfill for other [...] beholders” (Bourdieu 42; publ. 2002). The same way as the “value of a photograph is measured by the interest of the information it conveys” (43), so it appears, is the value of an informative post measured.

Apart from reaffirming the guiding principle of immediate relatability, this observation gives indications for a local-centric social network, in which the majority of Facebook-contacts is likely to share an interest for information of geographic proximity. This interpretation is reaffirmed by a pronounced frequency of posts with tracing information: “+++Zeugenauftrag+++Polizei bittet um Mithilfe nach zwei versuchten Sexualdelikten in Schwerin”; “Wettesingen – 15-jährige Lucy S. vermisst – Polizei bittet die Bevölkerung um Mithilfe” and “Meine Lieben..Mein schönstes und teuerstes Geburtstagsgeschenk überhaupt. Bitte teilen, so oft es geht!!! Vor dem Haus [...]. Muss heute, am 29.09.17, zwischen 9.45Uhr und 10.15Uhr passiert sein. Zeugen gesucht.. ganz dringend 😞? [...]”, depicting photos of a damaged car hood. Crucial for the latter post is that it depicts a shared post from a profile which the respective individual does not have in its friends-list. With these posts, a different perspective on responsibility emerges in comparison to profiles with high educational capital. Responsibility appears to revolve around a notion of immediate implication and thereby indicates an understanding of the common good to present action-taking within one's explicit range of influence. This perspective is further underlined by video posts which praise inspiring examples of people helping in one's immediate surrounding. These observations stand in agreement with Savage's findings of peoples cultural engagement on the lower social spectrum to “likely [...] be more informal, more neighborhood-and kinship-based” (“Social Class 21st Cent.”106).

The importance of belongingness is highlighted in a number of different manners, which revolve around aspects of loyalty. This can either be seen by explicit posts of statement pictures such as: “ICH HABE KEINE FREUNDE, ICH HABE FAMILIE!”, “Ganz egal was auch passiert, wir geh'n durch dick & dünn…”, “PSYCHOLOGEN BEHAUPTEN: WENN EINE FREUNDSCHAFT LÄNGER ALS 7 JAHRE HÄLT, DANN HÄLT SIE EIN LEBEN LANG!” and “FREUNDE FRAGEN NICHT WARUM DU WEINST. Biste FREUNDE HABEN SCHON DIE SCHAFSEL PARAT, UM DEN PENNER DU BEGRABEN, DER DICH ZUM WEINEN GEBRACHT HAT!” These phrases communicate an ideal of community in which continuity and loyalty are valued. This aspect finds further expression in valuing close social relationships with posts such as: “Ich liebe dich [...] Danke für alles was du für mich tust [...] Danke für deine Bedingungslose Liebe”, “Das Supertalent' mit Schatz schauen :)”. Haben schon Bauchweh vom lachen. -Manche Leute dort bringen's echt knallhart :D”, “Schöne Erinnerungen! Schöne Zeiten! Schön! [...] Hoffe Ostern wird wie 09.12-18.02 Hab viel zu erzählen! 😁 Schwesterherz!”; “[...] Ihr seid mir die Besten Freunde im Leben und Familie und ich Liebe Euch einfach über alles 😍❤️ […]”. Next to posts valuing continuity and reliability in social relationships, one frequently finds posts of statement pictures implying a necessity for reassuring such values, such as “Vielleicht bin ich ja altmodisch, aber mir bedeutet
Treu noch was”, which in turn indicates a perceived concern for those values.

Discomfort about wider social dynamics is expressed frequently in political posts: “Wo ist diese Merkel...es REICHT jetzt”, depicting an elderly women crouched, with an axe in her hand, walking down the street; “Der Tag nach der Wahl!!! Millionen haben den Idiotentest am Sonntag NICHT BESTANDEN!”, showing the Joker from Batman in the background or a cartoon in which the driver of a tractor, discharging his dung on the field, drives by a pedestrian with a dog, commenting “Na, hoffentlich haben Sie auch 'ne Tüte dabei”. Telling for these posts is their expression of a wide dissatisfaction with current social affairs, without naming specific aspects of criticism. Other posts offer more targeted forms of criticism: “Angela Merkel sagte: 'Jeder Mensch in Deutschland, verdient im Durchschnitt 3.000€’” Da frag ich mich: 'Bin ich kein Mensch oder bin ich nicht in Deutschland?’”; “Rentnerin (76) sammelt Flaschen – Jetzt ist sie vorbestraft”, introduced by the comment “Tja, dass ist Deutschland!!!!!!!”; “Eins hat die Flüchtlingskrise deutlich gezeigt...ES WÄRE IMMER GELD FÜR DIE ÄRMSTEN BEI UNS DA GEWESEN!!!”. These posts address conditions of financial insecurity and express a frustration over the government's and society's endurance. Tolerating structurally precarious circumstances thereby disrupts the ideal of responsibility for the immediacy of social realities, which in turn explains the sense of frustration and injustice. While a correlation appears at hand between these forms of dissatisfaction and certain political orientations, which seems promising for investigating current political developments, my focus of interest is another. Telling for my research are the contained expressions of struggle and effort, which is a characteristic absent from highly educated individuals’ profiles.

It is common to find posts from individuals of lower education to express exortion from coping with life. The most explicit statement is contained in a post stating “ICH HASSE ES, WENN MENSCHEN ZU MIR SAGEN 'DU HAST ABER GLÜCK!' NEIN VERDAMMT, DAS HABE ICH NICHT’” ICH REIß MIR JEDEN TAG DEN ARSCH AUF UM DAS ZU ERREICHEN, WAS ICH WILL!”. Most of the posts expressing arduous aspects in life however are presented in a humorous way and thereby support the aspect of relatability. Posts are shared regularly with phrases such as: “IM NÄCHSTEN LEBEN MACH ICH WAS OHNE WECKER”, “Eltern: 'Na, wie lief die Klausur?' Ich: 'Wichtig ist doch, dass wir alle gesund sind’”, “DER MONTAG AN SICH IST HARMLOS. MAN DARF HALT NUR NICHT AUFSTEHEN!”’, or a video showing a movie scene were a person struggles with bewitched gravity, with the caption “Wenn mich jemand fragt, wie 2017 bisher läuft”. All these posts openly display notions of effort and struggle to be part in the lives of the respective individuals. Thereby, an attempt to relate to, and encourage others in their struggle can be observed, which further underlines the principle of responsibility, relatability and belongingness.

In complementation to displays of difficulties in life, portrayals of leisure activities can frequently be observed. The relation between leisure activities and arduous aspects of life is exemplified by a post depicting the face of an exited office employee with the caption: “Wenn die Arbeit fertig ist und du endlich saufen kannst”. Thereby a division of life into a sphere of duties and a sphere of free-time can be observed. Displays of leisure can range from casual comments such as “Mit Schatz in der Sonne liegen❤️“, “Iss grad Kratzeis mit ihrer Anna 😊❤️” or “Geht jetzt dann noch auf den Wochenmarkt und genießt dann die restlichen Sonnenstrahlen am Pool 😊❤️”, to the mentioning of holiday activities: “Morgen nochmal
Bananaboat fahren und den letzten Tag in Spanien genießen” and “Sind wieder daheim von Rhodos. Es war total schön”. The latter post is commented by “Ich hoff ihr habt euch gut erholt 😊”, whereupon the respective individual replies “Ja das haben wir und nächstes Jahr geht es wieder auf Rhodos”. Despite revealing the designated purpose of leisure activity, namely to generate restorative effects from the exertion of working-life, these observations further stand in conformity with Savage's findings. Savage observed in interviewing people from the lower social spectrum that “as they talked about these activities which they enjoyed, it was […] important to them to place them within a social context, in which they associated these cultural events with experiences with family or friends“ (348 2016).

These observations of profiles from individuals with lower educational capital describe an orientation of cultural practices along an immediacy of relevance, in terms of geographical and experiential proximity, and thereby express the ideal of belongingness to a local-centric social network. Compared with the observed practices from individuals with high educational capital, this description corresponds to the findings of Sjott-Larsen, who observed that when aspects of “life-style choices related to local versus international orientations […]], a clear opposition in attitudes and lifestyle appeared running along the opposition between high and low levels of cultural capital” (qtd. in Prieur and Savage 311). Considering the display of connectedness among profiles from highly educated individuals, “implicit oppositions drawn of […] the immobile against the mobile, with the association that geographical immobility is a form of cultural limitation” appear at play (qtd. in 311). It is in this sense, that a local-centric lifestyle can function as a “negative reference point, in relation to which […] [cosmopolitan aesthetics] define themselves”, indicating mechanisms of social distinction according to which people “with a high level of cultural capital understood their world as more expansive than those with a lower level.” (Bourdieu 57; publ. 2002; Hold 112 qtd. in Prieur and Savage 310). These interpretations support the statement by scholar Calhoun who argues that the “'Cosmopolitan discourse […] encourages the equation of the global with the modern and the national or local with the backwardly traditional’” (107 qtd. in 314). In light of the conformity of my findings with existing research, it is important however, to point at the challenge that it “is not given that the cultural specificities of the highly educated […]], enjoy any wider recognition as good taste, and it is not given that they may be converted to social or economic capital” (316).

6.3. Discussion of the Research Findings

Taking into account the just mentioned objection from Prieur and Savage of the necessity to show the wider recognition of taste practices from educated individuals, a conformity to the Kantian aesthetic is instructive. My observations demonstrated taste practices from the highly educated group of individuals to conform to notions of detachment, ease and societal meaningfulness. Especially informative posts from this group are telling, as they address wider social issues and lack immediate functional qualities. Informative posts are valued not by their function but by their form as an informative source in itself. This attribute correlates with Bourdieu's different modes of appreciating art, by which people from the lower social spectrum fail the Kantian ideal of aesthetic in being unable to value an art-work beyond its functionalist value.

Moreover, the relevance of the Kantian aesthetic as a guiding principle of judgment is indicated by
the portrayal of ease. By restraining from displays of effort, highly educated individuals demonstrate a lack of necessity and a consequential capacity of detachment, indicative of the 'pure gaze'. This form of detachment and ease was present in a variety of cultural practices, such as humor, communication competences and high forms of achievement. Both, the nature of informative posts and the display of ease suggest a correlation with the Kantian ideal of personality. By conforming to the Kantian aesthetic, I therefore argue taste practices from the observed individuals with higher educational capital to find wider recognition, thereby receiving the status of 'legitimate' taste.

However, Prieur and Savage further point out that for “an asset to serve as a capital in a Bourdieusian sense, it should be linked to legitimacy, convertibility and domination” (316). I already stressed the aspect of legitimacy. Hence, it remains to reflect on the convertibility of these taste preferences into other forms of capital. This aspect is implied in the structural significance of the German National Academic Foundation. Next to an ideational promotion, which includes a “gezielte Vernetzung der Stipendaten”, and thereby describes an explicit form of social capital, the foundation promotes students with economical capital of up to 945€ per month, plus the covering of tuition fees at universities abroad (studienstiftung.de). The German National Academic Foundation is by definition an elitist institution as it applies highly selective criteria for admission. Next to the criteria of high academic success, the foundation promotes explicitly “Persönlichkeit[en] [die] besondere Leistungen im Dienste der Allgemeinheit erwarten lassen.” (id.). As for matters of taste and cultural capital, what “is at stake is indeed 'personality’” (Bourdieu 281; publ. 2002) it appears at hand that taste practices from members of the foundation have been decisive for their access to it. This describes explicit mechanisms of convertibility, which is why my observations support an interpretation of taste practices from members of the foundation to serve as cultural capital. Thereby, the aspects of legitimacy and convertibility are supported, which in accordance to Bourdieu form mechanisms of domination.

At this point a reflection about the danger of circular reasoning is needed. As my observations lack external measures of validation about the actual amount of educational capital at play, my findings are confined to suggestive statements. It can be objected that it is not surprising, and therefore not informative, that one finds characteristics of high achievement and geographical and cultural mobility among profiles in association with the German National Academic Foundation, as by definition the foundation promotes precisely these elements. The consequence being, that my findings might be more indicative of taste practices from this particular group than of taste practices of highly educated individuals in general. Similarly, one might object that it is not significant to find statement pictures displaying frustration and effort among profiles which derive from a page that specifically offers such content. Such objections are integral to the confined approach adopted in this paper and require additional data with regard to people's levels of education.

A differentiation of my findings is instructive to evaluate their degree of significance. The differences in cultural practices, which I observed between the two groups, describes two distinct kinds of differences. One difference revolves around structurally related differences and the other around differences in modes of expression. Structurally related differences describe and reflect structural differences between the groups, such as language competences, mobility, forms of engagements, and are vulnerable to circular
reasoning by the method adopted. Therefore, I deem differences in the modes of presenting structurally related taste practices more significant to my research question. There is no preconceived reason to assume differences in the ways of relating to aspects of leisure and effort between the two groups, the same way as there is no reason to assume substantial differences in posting practices of informative content. My observations however, have indicated precisely such differences according to which the group with presumed high educational capital portrays easiness in the engagement with skill requiring forms of activities, while the group of individuals with presumed lower educational capital openly displays aspects of effort in processes of achievement. Further, while the former group evaluates informative posts via their value as an informational source in itself, the latter group evaluates informative posts with regard to their immediate functionality. My findings thus suggest that it is not only the engagement in specific activities which counts as cultural capital and as criterion for personality, but also the way they are practiced and displayed. It is this difference which I assess to be insightful for evaluating mechanisms of social distinction in a Bourdieusian sense, as judgements on personality “involve not only the virtues with which the different fractions of the dominant class identify [..], but, as the Chevalier de Mere so well puts it, ‘the manners of practising them, which are themselves kinds of virtues’” (Bourdieu 70; publ. 2002).

7. Conclusion and Outlook

Drawing from my observations, I argue for mechanisms of legitimacy, convertibility and domination, as described in its principles by Bourdieu, to be at play among well educated individuals in Germany. I thereby conclude that culture has not emancipated itself from its role in mechanisms of social distinction and continues to constitute forms of cultural capital by means of evaluating certain forms of taste practices as more legitimate as others.

However, my research approach has also shown to be incomplete which is why further research is required to gain certainty on the interconnection between the observed taste practices and forms of cultural capital. Nevertheless, I believe to have shown the potential of a web-ethnographic approach for contributing to debates in cultural class analysis. It appears suited for investigating implicit taste practices on a variety of research questions. Throughout my research, hints for patterns of taste practices in relation to gender and ethnicity emerged. Especially the latter aspect seems promising for investigation, as individuals with recent migration background appear to show deviations from common taste practices and demonstrate a more elaborate competence in standing outside their own national framework of reference. The question under which circumstances these competences are regarded as cosmopolitan taste preferences and be converted into cultural capital appears a promising question for future research.

My hope is that the reader uses the insights provided in this paper not to better distinct themselves from suspicions of snobbery; but instead to reflect about their own taste practices in relation to their inherited privileges. If done so properly, an empathetic understanding for the alien social group and their aesthetic choices can be achieved, which leaves no space for disgust and is able to contribute to converging social dynamics.
Works Cited


