

CONCEPT AND PHENOMENON: A METROSEXUAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *This paper intends (1) to know the metrosexual consumer characteristics that could affect their intentional or unintentional behavior as a consumer, (2) to explore metrosexual consumers' leisure symbolic consumption, and five hundred seventy-seven males above 18 in Southern Taiwan participated in this research. Quantitative method was employed to collect data and descriptive analysis to analyze the data. The results of this study show that the males in Taiwan are prudential and authentic consumers. They cared about their appearance and spent time and money to take care of their appearance. The metrosexual could be regarded more authentic consumers than superficially-valued consumers. Thus, the new phrase for the Taiwan metrosexual icon can be denominated as "Authentic chic."*

KEYWORDS: Metrosexual, Taiwan, Leisure symbolic consumption

INTRODUCTION

Physical appearance is the way to show individuality, independence, value and confidence in this modern life. Each culture has determined how gender should appear. The traditional image for men is macho, heavy body, tough, drinking beer or vodka, strong, powerful, and aggressive; enjoy sports, rebellion, and adventurer. But the fact is that the lifestyle is changing and so does the male lifestyle. The reason for this change can lie behind the influence of advertisement which has targeted the "male-market." Shugart (2008) explored the crisis in masculinity made by commercials in US society. An example is the idea of masculinity was influenced by advertisement Winston (the cigarette) whose famous icon was John Wayne riding a horse with a cowboy hat which represent a ragged and harsh man.

Metropolitan young males have shown great interests on fashion, cosmetic products, beauty

care and spent good money on appearance in recent years. The 'metrosexual' trait became more popular in 21st century because of different changes in lifestyle and employment. Males basically tend to show their identity by power and physical look. The link between attraction and looking smart with competency and making better income has made men to consume more cosmetic products to improve their look.

It seems that men also like to experience the so-called feminine characteristic instead of 'macho' behavior. They would like to fulfill the expectations of the society over their appearance with the notion and expectation of masculinity in behavior but looking good in appearance. Men tried to show their self-image, self-conscious and social expectation (Cheng, Ooi and Ting, 2010) or self-presentation and self-expression, or even showing superiority (Ricciardeli and Clow, 2013). By consuming cleanser, moisturizing, sunscreen, body spray, skincare, facial, hair grooming, men's perception of their own body and body shape get closer to their ideal self. Segal (1993) cited in Ricciardeli and Clow (2013) called them 'the new man'.

This paper has the following specific aims:

1. To investigate the metrosexual consumer characteristics that could affect their intentional or unintentional behavior as a consumer.
2. To explore metrosexual consumers' leisure symbolic consumption.

LITERATURE

The idea of metrosexuality, dandyism at the time, started in late 18th in London and Paris. A dandy was a middle-class man who imitated aristocratic lifestyle (i.e. well-dressed and refined language) with leisurely hobbies. The term 'metrosexual', coined by Mark Simposon in 1994, first appeared in 1990 to describe city young, narcissistic, dressed up men interested in beauty and fashion (Ervin, 2011:58). It is the combination of the two words of 'metropolis' and 'sexual' to describe metropolitan young men who were narcissistic, fashionable, aesthetic-oriented, interested in beauty and fashion. They love shopping that they can afford. They like to spend time and money on their appearance and have better lifestyle. This is the start of metrosexualism.

Ricciardeli and Clow (2013) asserted that 'gender' is constructed and impacted by social, political, historical and class structure. Gee and Jackson (2012) stated the struggle between rural and the urban masculinity and the transforming the society from production to consumption have changed the concept of masculinity. Ricciardeli and Clow (2013) divided

masculinity into metrosexual and lads and exhibited three males' stereotypes as sports, cars and strength. Studies of cultural behavior in Brazil (Tuftte 1999), Sweden (Jansson 1999), China (Lull 1991), and Finland (Liikkanen 1996) all indicate that men tend to choose action, and sports-oriented activities (Lull, 2001)

The emergence of the 'new man' has changed the traditional image of men ascribed as masculine, rough, dirty, unshaved to a soft man whose appearance is appealing. Metrosexual comes to understand the importance of appearance in labor market. Janowska (2008) described metrosexual men who are aware about fashion, care about their appearance, live in small cities and travels to other bigger cities to purchase desirable clothing and brand. Metrosexuals choose the products to impress others to show off.

METROSEXUALITY IN TAIWAN

The majority of Taiwanese men are soft in personality, responsible for the family and relatively well-educated. In Eastern culture and the Confucius philosophy 'face' is very important. To keep the face, people try to hold the best attributes with best values. Therefore, apart from being good inside, they try to demonstrate the best in their appearance to influence the others' perception. The promotion and advertisement have helped the Taiwanese men to have the ideal self. It affected their self- concept and self-esteem to show in different social roles respectively. From the perspective of male traits and leisure consumption analysis of Taiwan men 'male culture' characteristics, Taiwan 'casual metrosexual' features, looking for pronouns.

THE LEISURE SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION

During a conference in Taiwan (iSURVEY, 2009) the proposed proceedings emphasized on consumers' experiences of reality, value and authenticity. In cultural perspectives there should be a connection between culture, consumer and the product. If the consumer can connect these three elements as his mindset, he can enjoy his consumption as a way of fulfilling his needs and not a way to show off his wealth.

It has been a global trend that people have the tendency to purchase goods as a lifestyle instead of enjoying their leisure time. Kroker (1986) pointed out that consumption refers to the value of the product itself. Shipman (2004) redefined consuming symbol as 'value' and 'exchange value'. Based on Baudrillard (1981,1988) theory of 'symbolic consumption', Liu

(2001) believed that what consumer culture is seeking for is neither the exchange value of commodities (exchange value) nor its use value (use value). In fact, apart from product authenticity, people like to have what the product stands for the sake of symbolic meaning. In other words, it is the community made around a commodity that makes the value and not the commodity by itself.

Lai (2005) and Ritzer & Stillman (2001) argued that people consume those products that are related to their culture and this cultural behavior will open up a new phase between consumption and leisure. Leisure service and experience can be offered in a package for the current businesses. For instance, most of the people go to Starbucks to get the identity and belonging status and not for the quality of its coffee (Hsu, et al. 2006). This is what Liu (2001) calls 'consumer's symbols'. In this case the leisure product becomes a symbol that can display the social rank and purchasing power. The fashion industry provides such an atmosphere in which the consumer sees consumption as a necessary part to his life.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part aimed to understand the 'metrosexual behavior' modified from ESPN (2003) by asking habits, factors affecting consumption and reading preferences. Part two was about the leisure symbolic consumption modified from Pan and Hsu (2009). In this section, the variables were measured by five point Likert scale strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, no opinion=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5. The last part measured the demographic data in order to know metrosexual population, and place of residence, marital status, age, education, occupation and income.

To gather the information, 600 questionnaires were distributed to males over 18 years old in Kaohsiung (Southern Taiwan) at the entrance of 3 department stores for a month. Five hundred seventy-seven questionnaires were returned and the response rate was 96 percent. The data was analyzed by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0. Descriptive statistics helped analysis of frequency distribution and percentage of sample. Metrosexual characteristics, structure and distribution of demographic variables were analyzed by descriptive statistics as well.

FINDINGS

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented as follows. From the

sample of 577 respondents, single accounted for 56.3% of the total respondents, ranged in age from 21~30 years old for 42.0%, 35% with university degree, post-secondary education for 29.8% diploma. Primarily, most of the participants were civilian servants (43.6%, civil service workers); with monthly income of the 501~1,000US\$ (25.3%). Monthly income of more than 1,500US\$ accounted for nearly 50% of the respondents. They spent 31~100US\$ (35.3%) and 101~167US\$ (23.6%) monthly on the dressing.

Descriptive statistics subject to the actual condition of daily life and feelings were utilized to analyze metrosexual characteristics (As shown in the table 4-1). The respondents use the mirror as frequent as they may (43.7%); twice, morning and evening (28.8%). The respondents consider setting their hair as part of their life (62.0%, and 35.1%). The respondents also consider moisturizer and sunblock as daily necessity (43.0%). Most of the respondents own more than 4 pair of shoes (37.4%). And more than 50% men once shaved the eyebrows, waxed legs, chest or back (41.8%, and 15.1%). Although up to 70% respondents chose haircut price of 17US\$, there are still 30% of them more likely to spend above 17US\$ on their haircut. Assorted boxer shorts are the clothing that most respondents put in their top drawer (53.6%), The last book that most male picked up is a current best seller (63.9%), Going shopping is only they do when it is needed(80.1%). However, there were 20% men thought of shopping as the most important thing in their life, The Best way to spend a Friday night is to have dinner at T.G.I.Friday's and ninth viewing of Lord of the Rings (63.8%). Most the respondents regarded themselves comfy and casual (50.4%).

Table 1 Analysis on Metrosexual Characteristics

Items	Number	Percentage
1 How many times do you look in a mirror each day?		
Once - when I wake up.	78	13.5
Twice - morning, evening.	167	28.9
Three times - a little mid-day peek.	80	13.9
Four times - I have uncooperative hair.	252	43.7
2 Can you leave the house without putting product in your hair?	358	62.0
No way	182	31.5
Yes, I do it all the time	37	6.4
Uhh, is a baseball hat a product?		
3 Do you moisturize daily?	211	36.6
No -- lotion is for girls.	248	43.0

Occasionally, if I have a sunburn or something.	118	20.5
Always -- it's a necessity!		
4 Not counting sneakers, how many pairs of shoes do you own?	43	7.5
One	171	29.6
Two	147	25.5
Three	216	37.4
Four	249	43.2
5 Have you ever tweezed, waxed or trimmed your eyebrows?	241	41.8
No, never	87	15.1
A couple times, for special occasions	280	48.5
I firmly believe eyebrows should be two distinct entities.	217	37.6
6 Have you ever shaved/waxed your legs, chest or back?	80	13.9
Yes, I do regular maintenance	35	6.1
Yes, a few times	414	71.8
No, never	107	18.5
7 How much do you spend on a haircut?	16	2.8
My buddy does it for nothing	5	9.0
The barber school down the street will do it for 5 bucks	224	38.8
\$10-\$20	309	53.6
\$20-30	44	7.6
\$40 or more		
8 Your top drawer consists mostly of ...	63	10.9
Good old Hanes tightsy-whities	367	63.9
Assorted boxer shorts	147	25.5
Designer boxer briefs		
9 What's the last book you picked up?	98	17.0
Previously read classic novels	462	80.1
Best sellers	17	2.9
Go to pick up a magazine		
10 Going shopping is ...	144	25.0
The most important thing in life	368	63.8
When there is a need to be able to	65	11.3

Don't like things		
11 Best way to spend a Friday night?	202	35.0
At home House	291	50.4
To the restaurant for dinner and see a late movie	69	12.0
Club orgy	15	2.0
12 How would you describe your sense of style?		
Ordinary people		
Easy to get along with people		
Decent educated people		
Swinger		

To generate metrosexual index, the researchers conducted descriptive statistical analysis to transfer data into different categories. The data released at these points in the 0~120, 6 categories are provided below. Answers of respondents were calculated from each multiple-choice (A, 0 point ; B, 5 points ; C, 10 points ; D, 15 points ; E, 20 points). According to Table 4-2, Category 1 stands for the respondents are definitely not a metro. Category 2 pertains to the respondents who have somewhat metro tendencies. While the participants` score falls into category 3, it means that they are truly happy metro people. In the last two categories, the participants might get 15 and 20 points by choosing Answer D and Answer E showing that they are more in a sense homosexual. In table 3-2, up to 61.9% males in Taiwan proved that they are metrosexual followed by those who (35%) have somewhat metro tendencies.

ANALYSIS ON LEISURE SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION

The Cronbach's α value of leisure symbolic consumption is 0.8047. Item 1, 2 and 3 pertaining to luxurious consumption (M = 3.34) whereas items 4-8 referring to consumer psychology (M = 3.88) reflected consuming mode of respondents (as shown in Table 4-3). The metrosexual cared about the store salesperson's attitude and etiquette (M = 4.08, SD = 0.82) followed by caring about cozy atmosphere and space in the store (M = 3.94, SD = 0.81) and considering the price equals to the value of goods (M = 3.19, SD = 0.93).

Table 2 Analysis on Metrosexual Index (characteristics)

Metrosexual Traits	Number	Percentage
0~ 10 You are definitely not a metro	1	0.2
11~ 50 , You have some metro tendencies & over time it will grow	202	35.0
50~90 You are happily metro!	357	61.9
90~110 You are the poster-boy for metrosexuality	16	2.8
110~120 Considering coming out	1	0.2
	0	0.0

Table 3 Descriptive Analysis on the Leisure Symbolic Consumption

Items	Mean	SD
I like to show my personality by dressing	3.56	0.95
Foreign product can give me a higher satisfaction	3.26	0.89
I think the price can tell the value of goods	3.19	0.93
I care about the store salesperson's attitude and etiquette	4.08	0.82
I cared about in-store furnishings and display	3.81	0.76
I care whether the music complies in the store style	3.73	0.79
I care about cozy atmosphere and space in the store	3.94	0.81
I care about whether the store design style is unique	3.84	0.81
Conspicuous consumption (Items : 1, 2, 3)		
Consumer psychology (Items : 4, 5, 6, 7, 8)		

Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.8047$

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

In responding to aims of the study, this paper describes the metrosexual characteristics and their leisure symbolic consumption. Based on the results of this study, the metrosexual index gives the readers a precise picture of the stereotype male in Taiwan. Undoubtedly, they are perfectly metro people, and they behaved just so metrosexual-like. For instance, the male in Taiwan spent one-tenth of their monthly income in magazines or books related to fashion, their expenditures on outfits or cosmetics and other elements. Nevertheless the males in Taiwan are prudential and authentic consumers in this regard. They cared about their appearance and would spent quite amount of time in taking care of their body and face.

During their leisure time, they would shop those stylistic stores that provide cozy atmosphere and space. The staff in the stores with professional attitude and etiquette mostly attracts the participants in this study. Apparently the respondents focused more on their inner satisfaction ($M = 3.88$) rather than luxurious atmosphere ($M = 3.34$). Thus, the metro people could be regarded as more authentic consumption driven than superficially-valued.

Based on the reflection from their life, preferences in reading different magazines or books related to fashion, their expenditures and other elements of Taiwanese male, the new phrase for the Taiwan metrosexual icon can be denominated as “Authentic chic.”

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH & PRACTICE

To the authors of this paper, metrosexuality is a matter of loving beauty. It might be naivety if we involve gender orientation in the discussion of metrosexuality. It can be interpreted as ‘sexism’ if we think metrosexuals are feminized males. Other studies have focused on metrosexuality as a gender, self- image, consumer behavior point of view but this paper explored the role of this phenomenon in the metrosexuals’ consuming context. In other words, this paper does not look at the metrosexuality as a ‘gender’ issue but ‘authentic’ taste.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper is a preliminary study of the metrosexual phenomenon in Taiwan. It is interestingly to uncover that Taiwan metro people are the doers after years infused with western influence and economic progress by the findings of this paper. Further research could be geared to the perceptions and expectations of what it meant to be a man in Taiwan.

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