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DISCUSSION

Perceptions and Attitudes of University-Going Young Adult Males about Metrosexuality: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The present research explores the awareness, acceptability, perceptions and attitudes of university going students towards Metrosexuality. The participants were university-going young adult males residing in Karachi. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that though awareness is high, acceptability is relatively low. Metrosexuals are perceived as being professionally successful. Main factors influencing perceptions and attitudes were Media, Peer, Work Associates and Culture. Work associates were important in developing attitudes where as cultural norms acted as major deterrent in changing attitudes towards metrosexuality. Opening up of attitudes towards metrosexuality has provided an opportunity for marketers.

Introduction

Metrosexuality, a term coined in 1994 by British journalist Mark Simpson, is a state of self-consciousness and concern of a man about his appearance and looks so much so that he uses means traditionally associated and used by women. Such men have a higher degree of concern about their physical appearance and need to look attractive.

Metrosexuals are generally urban males in touch with their feminine side. They have a strong aesthetic sense and spend a great deal of time and money on their appearance and lifestyle.

The authors developed an interest in this topic as they observed a growing trend towards personal grooming and fashion consciousness in the men of Karachi, along with considerable investment of time, effort and money in this. Introductions of men's fashion magazines and opening of exclusive men salons in recent times in the city is an indication of the increased attention men now pay to their grooming and appearance. (Dawood, n.d.)

The aim of this research is to provide an insight to the perceptions and attitudes of university going young adult males, between the ages of 18 to 25, about the personal grooming practices adopted by metrosexual males. This study is restricted to the urban Karachi population.

CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

Being a relatively new phenomenon, this topic does not have much research done on it. In order to develop a better understanding of the topic a conceptual map was developed. In this section we have discussed previous research related to the area of Grooming procedures and perceptions, perceived reasons for metrosexuality, and the channels of influence.

GROOMING PROCEDURES AND PERCEPTIONS

Grooming behavior is a form of body language. Hair care occupies an important place in the routine morning grooming activities of young people (Rook, 1985). Hair care results in most happiness but it also causes frustration, when the effort put in does not result in satisfactory results. This frustration goes beyond just a mood change due to an activity's unsatisfactory performance.

Perception depends on three things – the idea of self-control as to the better a person looks and maintains their appearance the more control they have over life, the idea of a normatively acceptable body and thus the problematization of deviating conditions and finally the idea of the disciplinary eye of society that continually evaluates a person's appearance. The disciplinary gaze tends to focus individual's attention to aspects of their appearances that do not conform to the cultural and societal standards. Individuals monitor themselves by undertaking impression management to enhance their self-image. Fashion apparel and self-care practices are self-directed consumer choices that enable them to feel more contented with their lives (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995).

For the literature review, two broad categories were considered i.e., the perceived reasons for metrosexual tendencies and the channels through which these are communicated.

PERCEIVED REASONS FOR METROSEXUALITY

Review of literature revealed the following possible reasons for metrosexuality which are pertinent to our study. "Work and success themes, deficiency in grooming leading to failure in job interviews, professional humiliation, and preparation for dating and sexual interactions, mechanism for overcoming introversion." (Rook, 1985).

Self Concept and Body Image

Research suggests that "outward physical appearance is important for establishing and maintaining one's self concept. Cosmetic surgery, public body appearance and clothing concern were more highly correlated with the physical vanity trait" (Netemeyer, Burton & Lichtenstien, 1995).

Recent evidence indicates that body image is not only a concern for women; men too can be dissatisfied and preoccupied with their bodies (Choi & Pitts, 2003).

The body image of men has evolved over time. From era of the ancient Greeks to the modern day man the concern for appearance has changed. Previously it centered on Hair loss but today it encompasses the entire being of the metrosexual. The metamorphosis may be attributed in part to the mixing of the gay and straight culture (Luciano, 2001).

The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) in 1974 by Bem measures the degree of an individual's femininity or masculinity. Focusing more on gender schema than on the gender role behaviors themselves, it's seen that individuals acquire and display traits, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with their gender identity. There are individual differences in the use of gender as an organizing principle. Gender identity serves as an organizing principle through which individuals process information about themselves and the world around them, although the ability of gender identity to have such an effect varies depending on whether or not an individual is sex-typed. A sex-typed person would be more likely to be influenced by their gender identity (Bem 1981, as cited in Smith, Noll & Bryant, 1999) Hence sex-typed individuals (as indicated by scores on the BSRI) were more likely to use gender as an organized principle than were androgynous individuals (Smith et al., 1999).

Individuals can be categorized into four gender role orientation groups on the basis of their self perception of traditionally masculine or feminine traits viz-a-viz sex-typed, androgynous, undifferentiated and cross sex-typed (Bern 1974, 1981 as in Lobel, Rothman, Abramovitz & Maayan, 1999). Compared to other gender orientation groups, feminine males have received relatively very little attention (e.g., Bem, 1981; Frable, 1987, 1989; Lobel, 1994; Miller, 1984, as cited in Lobel et al., 1999). This may partly because feminine males are relatively rare in the population, though that seems to be changing now. Women are considered to have higher clarity in their self concepts i.e. the extent to which an individual's self concept is clearly and confidently defined (Csank & Conway, 2004).

Conformity with Cultural Norms

Body modification procedures (which may be seen as an extension of grooming) such as piercing and tattooing may either be seen as a return to tribalism or a transitory inscription of an ever-changing cultural journey on the human body (Featherstone, 2000). Body modification is not only related to this era, neither does it belong to any gender. People through out history have modified their body so as to fit into the prevailing era's ideal (Gilman, 1999).

Economic Variables

Attractive appearances (basically the weight) also have a positive bearing on how one stands in their career life including how their income is influenced and how well

sought-after they are in terms of marriage (Averett & Korenman, 1995). Overweight women were more likely than overweight men to be underpaid or have more difficulty in getting a good position. Also in terms of life partners, such women were likely to have more difficulty in getting good partners. For men, there is less evidence of body mass (either underweight or overweight) on family incomes or marriage market outcomes. This highlights one aspect of appearance perceptions, that it does make a difference to look attractive and as close as possible to the ideal image created by media and society. It has no doubt been more pronounced for women than for men but this seems to be changing.

Attractiveness for the Opposite Gender

In terms of female facial features, shorter lower jaws proportions, full lips and wide eyes are considered attractive (Johnston & Oliver-Rodriguez, 1997). This is similar across cultures. These observations are consistent with a sexual selection viewpoint on female facial beauty (based on fertility). A similar study of the sort can shed light into attractiveness of various masculine features in men and their contradiction or coherence with metrosexual tendencies. Men tend to report their ideal body shapes as more muscular than their current shapes and they believed that women would find a more muscular shape more attractive than women actually do (Grieve, Newton, LeVaun, Miller Jr., & Kerr, 2005).

A further concern is that of muscle dysmorphia in men. Muscle dysmorphia is a condition whereby the person wrongly thinks he has very little muscle mass and therefore tries to build it up by excessively working out and lifting weights. Male body image problems include muscle dysmorphia, eating disorders, and steroid abuse. It is a hidden syndrome that affects men and makes them obsess about their bodies (Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000).

Personality and Psychological Inferences

“Human grooming behavior is a form of body language communicating specific messages about an individual’s social status, maturity, aspiration and conformity.” (Rook, 1985).

A person’s perception of beauty seems to depend on their attitude towards life, thus beauty lying in the eyes of the beholder (Weller, 1987). Physically attractive individuals are assumed to have relatively more socially desirable attributes, but these apply only to the peripheral characteristics that are due to environmental impact. Such attractive people maybe considered having ego identity, egoistic behavior and the like all of which are core characteristics of personality.

Footballers and fashion models consider a good physical appearance (be it muscular physique or a slim beautiful figure and face) an important aspect. Models also relate their physical appearance as an achievement as is required in their profession. Physical vanity, clothing concerns and cosmetic attitudes are closely linked (Netemeyer et al., 1995).

PERCEIVED CHANNELS

Work Place, Acquaintances and Colleagues

Young adult grooming is motivated by a variety of forces such as individual identity and interpersonal intimacy, group narcissism and vocational pressure to look good. Appearance conscious men are seen as role models such as managers or sophisticated bachelors, even professional sports superstars. Women are described mostly as housewives, executives or college students. Further grooming has an important psychosocial function. It give the idea of a well-groomed man, as being one who made things happen, was powerful and proactive. Similar is the perceptions about women. Work and success were highly related to grooming practices as were aspirations for intimacy and preparation for romance and dating. Grooming is valued as a mechanism to overcome introversion (Rook, 1985).

Media

Television has an influence on adolescents' body image and it contributes in similar ways to the minds of teenagers of both genders (Tiggemann, 2005). Girls tend to be more dissatisfied with their body image than boys, though boys are more conscious on drive for muscularity. A person's weight and shape related attitudes are established by early adolescence. The time spent watching TV is not relevant but the time watching particular genres is of critical relation. The watching of soap operas is correlated with the internationalization of cultural beauty ideals and drive for thinness in both girls and boys and a further drive for muscularity for the boys only. The impact of the media extends beyond adolescence and is most apparent in young adults. It is well known that mass media has had a huge influence on shaping the physical appearance ideals for females and having a negative influence on women's body image. The effect of such media exposure of male ideals does have a negative effect on males too (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004). Images on TV of lean and muscular men lead to changes in mood and body disturbance. Males regardless of schematicity, do react to cues that relate to appearance. A cause of concern arising from this study is that in reality, people are exposed to media images over 150% more than what was used in the experiment; chances are the impact would be much bigger in reality.

The presence of women writers in primetime TV has increased the appearance comments made overall and in particular directed towards females (Lauzen & Dozier, 2002). Men are increasingly subject to similar appearance standards as women (Pope et al., 2000), but it does not apply to prime time TV in America specially season 1999-2000 which seemed had singled out women characters as targets of comments on physical appearance.

Gaps

While developing the conceptual context it was found that not much research had been done on this particular research topic of metrosexuality. Most literature in this area pertains to body image of males and perceptions regarding them. The focus of these studies is usually on muscularity and physique. Metrosexuality is an entire philosophy. Self grooming is one aspect of it. In this study our focus is more towards the psychological aspects. Literature ignores the perceptions and attitudes of men regarding metrosexuality. It is important to explore how men, in general perceive metrosexuality and to gauge their attitudes.

There is little research conducted on metrosexuals and specifically Pakistani metrosexuals.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to explore the topic, research questions were formulated which are as follows:

- Are participants aware of metrosexuality?
- What is their understanding of metrosexuality?
- What is the level of acceptability of the phenomenon among participants?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes of the participants regarding metrosexuality?
- Why do people view metrosexuality the way they do?

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

The participant population consisted of young adult males between the ages of 17 and 25, who are university-going students and who reside in Karachi. Four participants were interviewed for the research. The criterion for limiting the research to four participants was based on sufficiency and saturation of information (Seidman, 1998).

Purposive sampling was used to draw samples. It was felt that in a closed society like Pakistan it may be difficult for just any participant to discuss metrosexuality. A research conducted by Sohail and Kaazi (2004) suggested that participants had a negative association with the term as it rhymes with homosexuality. Homosexuality is disallowed in Islam. According to the international religious freedom report, 96% of Pakistanis are Muslims. We felt that it would be difficult for participants to discuss a topic in the open, which had negative connotations. It is with this intention that purposive sampling was chosen, since it allows the researcher to make judgments about the suitability of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). We chose participants who would feel comfortable discussing the subject. An assessment was made during the process of drawing informed consent. Participants who were hesitant about discussing grooming practices in men were not selected. The reason for this is that a participant who was uncomfortable in discussing grooming trends amongst men would find it even more difficult to discuss metrosexuality.

Also the sample size was chosen keeping in mind that in qualitative research the richness of data or quality relates to representativeness rather than quantity. (Sarankantos, 1994).

RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. We have chosen the qualitative paradigm since it offers a margin of flexibility, which is a requirement of this research, as this phenomenon is relatively recent and little research has been conducted on the topic (Maxwell, 1996).

The instrument used was in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were chosen as we were interested in exploring meaning making in participants. In-depth interviews allowed us explore rather than probe (Seidman, 1998).

The interview schedule used consisted of five sections. The format recommended by Seidman (1998) was modified to fit our constraints. We conducted all three interviews at a stretch due to time constraints. The structure of the interview however was followed.

During the interview participants were also asked to comment on three pictures of men grooming themselves. This was done so as to get non-verbal cues from our participants. At the end the non-verbal cues were compared to the verbal output to develop a complete understanding of each participant.

The term 'metrosexuality' was used at the end of the interview and was elsewhere referred to by phrases such as 'extra grooming habits' and the like. This was done so as to avoid the problem faced by Sohail and Kazi (2004).

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected over a period of two months. Informed consent was taken verbally after informing the participants about the researchers, research use and their rights. The interviews were conducted at a business school

We chose to conduct the interviews within the premises of a business school since it is a neutral location. Also since the students were studying at the same university, it may have provided them with a sense of comfort.

Validity Threats

A number of steps were taken to ensure validity and minimize the chances of misinterpretation of the findings. Validity was ensured by conducting member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also data triangulation was used by incorporating the use of projective techniques (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

DATA ANALYSIS

At first, data was transcribed after which it was open coded. This was done in order to help in the categorization of data. The main findings have been presented under the research questions.

Are participants aware of metrosexuality?

The question aims to find out how well-aware the participants are of the phenomenon. It was found that all the participants were well-aware of metrosexuality in Karachi and grooming practices of metrosexuals.

What is their understanding of metrosexuality?

Participants had a very clear understanding of metrosexuality Their concept was an approximation of the actual definition:

They are concerned about their appearance .A bit too far though. It is not good or bad. You can do it if you want to feel good. (Participant No. 3)

Metrosexuals don't call themselves metrosexuals. It's just a new idea that's come in... metrosexuals are just people who just take care of themselves... [They think] There's nothing feminine about getting a manicure, pedicure, a facial or wearing bright colors. (Participant No. 1)

What is the level of acceptability of the phenomenon among participants?

This was assessed through direct answers and through comfort level with associates and friends of the participants and their degree of grooming practices.

It was found that the participants are not very comfortable with anything way out of the usual. The usual or normal includes shaving, showering and working out. Manicures and pedicures are slightly acceptable. Doing the eyebrows is considered unacceptable.

Waxing all over, I think that would be excessive. And plucking eyebrows, that one also. I have a couple of friends who thread themselves. (Participant No. 2)

All participants consider grooming a personal aspect of a person and say they are okay with it, as long as its not 'overdone'. According to Participant No. 1:

Overdone would be... going to the salon maybe more than once a week. Getting eyebrows done. Proper hygiene is one thing, but excessively doing something which has female connotations.

I think that would be overdone... shaving your chest. Those things are pushing it. (Participant No. 1)

As the interview progressed, participants revealed that concern for appearance depends on individual needs. They felt that men should take care of themselves for strong reasons. Reasons were either emotional or physical. Men having no strong reason for indulging in extra grooming were perceived negatively.

I think... umm... I really don't have an opinion because its up to them. What I said about plucking eyebrows before... if a guy thinks he needs it.... go ahead, get it done. If it makes you look good, if it makes you more confident and you are happy with yourself. (Participant No. 2)

Getting eyebrows done... THEEK HAI you have a uni-brow and you want to separate them that's something. But actually shaving them and arching them... shaving your chest. Those things are pushing it. (Participant No. 1)

I don't mind someone doing something for feeling good. Feeling good is important. (Participant No. 3)

Level of acceptance rises slightly if the metrosexual is from a different cultural setting and not in the immediate circle of the person.

If you are living abroad and you go to the beach often and if you are waxing your body fine, whatever. I mean that's up to you. (Participant No. 1)

This also indicates that cultural norms also play an important role in perception building and acceptance. This explores a reason as which affect perceptions.

Acceptability also rises if it is someone the person knows. Also as long as the procedures are done by the person themselves, participant 2 feels it's slightly acceptable. His tone of talking here (the way he tries to justify his friends actions) suggested that it was okay if the person did the grooming activities himself. Hence one can deduce that frequenting the salon is not something the respondent is comfortable with.

I have a friend who gives himself scrubs and manicures, but he does it himself. He doesn't go to salons or anything. (Participant No. 2)

What are the perceptions and attitudes of the participants regarding metrosexuality?

In this domain, participants were explored for their perceptions and attitudes about

metrosexuality. Participants perceived that people who groom a lot are successful in their professions, extroverted but maybe self-obsessed as well.

A corporate banker... depends on your personality, normally extroverted people, people who like to go out, like to be the centre of attention... because they are aware that they need to sell themselves... and some people are just narcissists. (Participant No. 1)

A clear line cannot be drawn as such regarding personality traits of different people who groom more because it is a highly subjective thing. It's a spectrum of varying degrees and almost everyone does groom to some extent or the other. However some qualities that are supposed to be present in people who groom themselves are confidence, security, success, wealth and extroversion. Such people are also thought to be in control and hence powerful or influential.

Definitely a corporate type... has a lot of time... could be a banker, corporate sort. People who take care of themselves generally have money. They are in an environment... they are going to parties, they are going out. Or they are in a job situation like that. You find more people like that in X (an art school) or Y (a business school). (Participant No. 1)

Another interesting aspect of not grooming would be that the person has the confidence to be who he is.

But someone who doesn't groom himself, you could also say he has a lot of confidence, because he doesn't really give a damn [short pause] what he looks like. He's fine the way he looks. (Participant No. 2)

Why do people view metrosexuality the way they do?

In this section, participants gave reasons why they had certain perceptions. This was done indirectly by using separate variables. These were media influence, peer group influence, work and acquaintances influence and culture. These were the factors identified as having had influence on attitude formation of the participants. The findings are as follows:

Media influence

Media is a variable that has influenced perceptions regarding metrosexuality. But it isn't as yet to the extent that models and media figures are imitated entirely on the basis of their looks.

I have become more conscious about myself... I'm more aware that I need to look good because I know people are watching me. And people do take this into account. Even guys now... even guys are scrutinized now. (Participant No. 2)

Definitely... you see so many beards after DIL CHAHTA HAI... the goatee is in... yeah of course people get influenced by TV dramas and movies. (Participant No. 1)

Imitating of ideals is only as far as copying personality traits are concerned. Neither of the participants themselves have copied anyone for looks merely.

No. that doesn't work for me. It definitely doesn't... not model and things like that. Because they are just out there in front of the cameras... they are not like that in real life. (Participant No. 1)

I don't remember copying any actor for his hairstyle. (Participant No. 4)

Peer group influence

Peer influence plays a major role in altering as well as controlling attitudes and behavior. One participant's idea about well-groomed men contradicted with how his friend is, which lead to him changing his view about others as well.

But the friend I mentioned is not at all like that. He's very humble and kind. He's just conscious about the way he looks. (Participant No. 2)

Friends also play a role in determining group norms within which the individuals develop their attitudes and perceptions.

I think they would be fine with it. I think, some of them would be ... they won't actually object but they would be a bit taken aback if they discover someone is waxing himself. (Participant No. 2)

Work and acquaintances influence

Work experience and interaction in the corporate world has effects on perception formation and in turn also induces the person to try and copy these ideals.

When I was interning at ABC Bank, I saw really well-groomed people. Anybody who works in a good place normally has more money to spend... specially in public areas like marketing and banking which you have more of a human contact... then you are

going to be more conscious... you are going to see more ties at multinational banks... I did see... more flashier or meticulous dressing... and yeah you get affected. The bold ties, the nice shirts, you look at them and you are like okay once I have this kind of money then even I can afford them. (Participant No. 1)

Culture

As discussed under the head of level of acceptability, cultural norms also play an important role in perception building and acceptance. Something that may be considered okay in another culture, may not be so readily acceptable in ones own culture. Also the environment and situation a person is in also affects their standards of grooming.

For myself, it depends on the environment... I do go out I do make it a point that clothes should be pressed and polished... it should be a complete package. (Participant No. 4)

Factors Motivating Grooming

Several factors are thought to drive grooming practices, which in turn determine a person's perceptions.

Attention from the other sex is definitely one thing. You do want to look good for somebody out there. Personal satisfaction, if you are working then it can be to look well-groomed, to give a sense of this person is more in control. This person is... generally more meticulous about details... has an eye for details. (Participant No. 1)

Confidence for the other person, for the other sex, AUR professionally... AUR how you separate yourself from the people around you. To kinda stand out. (Participant No. 1)

If you are expecting others to look good for you, the least you can do is give something by yourself. Put in a little bit of effort. Besides you are not doing it for other people, you are doing it for yourself. There's a mirror and if you look there and you feel that you are looking good, you feel more confident, you feel more assured... you feel good. It's a very relaxed feeling, if you are dressed well. (Participant No. 1)

These suggest that grooming practices are undertaken for be popular with the other gender, to look professional, to stress one's individuality and intrinsically feel good about oneself.

Regarding whether men should or should not groom themselves so much, both participants felt that it should be done to feel good but there should be a clear boundary between grooming rituals for women and men.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this investigation broaden the understanding of how young males view the new phenomenon of metrosexuality. It was seen that there is a fairly good awareness of the phenomenon amongst the participants. They however display a mixed attitude towards the phenomenon. This was evident from the slightly contradictory responses that were being given. Media has played an important role in forming attitudes and opening up the psyche to try and accept metrosexuality. This is still in the initial stage of the process as, though awareness level is high, comfort level is minimal. This further comes into conflict with the prevalent cultural (and religious) norms making the transition more slow as compared to other Asian countries. Nowadays (in Asia), the definition of masculinity is changing. Self-love or narcissism is growing owing to changing factors such as shifts in gender roles, economic growth, higher disposable incomes and efforts by the fashion and cosmetics industry to expand their market. Men can now longer demand to be accepted for who they are, as they are. Further influence from media and media figures such as David Beckham has made the Asian males more open to the idea of pampering themselves and feeding their self-esteem (Liu, 2005). However in Pakistan, there is a lag both due to cultural restraints as well as media influence.

The findings hold several implications for marketers and researchers in consumer behavior. It being a new and fairly untapped market in Pakistan, producers and marketers of cosmetics and fashion industry can use strategies that would change the attitudes of the potential consumers and also the masses. This also indicates that salons and gyms may be a lucrative investment if proper appeals are used.

Having identified the major factors that influence perception formation, targeting them and using appeals to cater to them will result in better marketing efforts. Stressing on professional success is the most interesting appeal that may be used. Individuality is also a good appeal.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

This study is very basic in nature and will provide a base for extensions in research in this area. Further studies that can be done on this topic can be exploring the motivation behind grooming habits of metrosexuals, their buying behaviour, affects of culture and societal norms on such traits and stability of this potential market to invite large-scale marketing efforts. This study was conducted on Karachi males, and maybe replicated in other cities in Pakistan to study the level of awareness and its perception there.

It should be kept in mind that being a qualitative research the results can not be generalized to others even with in the same population parameters.

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