

### **Dialectics of the Trio - Media, Consumer and Metrosexuality**

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There exists an unquestionably inextricable association between market and media. Both perform the function of being tools for enriching social experiences through constantly engaging in the production and negotiation of things and ideas. This liaison between market and media is powerful enough to dictate the norms of consumer culture. They become the authority negotiating lived culture and meaningful ways of life. The booming foray of internet and social media in the last decade has enhanced the already powerful nexus of media and market making the sole dictators managing the consumer world.

Social theorists like Mike Featherstone have argued that contemporary culture is driven by the need and desire to consume. This desire is further fostered by media which has the advantage of mass appeal. It unwittingly forces the consumers to construct their identity and orient their relationship with others through commercially produced products. In addition to its utility services consumer goods have a symbolic value which is impossible to measure in any concrete scale. Media plays a larger role in problematizing this symbolic importance of consumer products and there by inculcate into the popular psyche a desire to possess certain goods and to attain new social identities. The teeming millions of consumers cutting across age try to emulate the type of culture these media propagate for their own advantage. It has started affecting all walks of ordinary life right from the time we get up from bed to each and every minutiae of human life –the why, what and how of everything

This paper intends to focus on one particular area which has undergone tremendous transformation due to this consumer culture; lifestyle. When two extremely powerful components like media and consumer culture join hands, it invariably results in the emergence of entirely new patterns of lifestyle. Pramod Nayar in his work *An Introduction to Cultural Studies* defines life style when he says:

Lifestyle is an individual's preference in clothing, food, leisure activities, automobile and housing. The individual's choice of clothing, food or leisure activity is taken to be expressions of his or her individual taste and sense of style. That is, the choice asserted by an individual is a symbol of her or his individual identity. (121)

In an increasingly visually aesthetized world, creating one's own space has become extremely difficult. Media plays a pivotal role in feeding the common man with idolized and idealized pictures of sports persons, film stars and even politicians. The last decade has witnessed that both male and female lifestyles were equally treated by the media. It has more or less single handedly defined social masculine roles. It has become all the more powerful with countries which has opened their skies to satellites. This dictator devises latest trends according to its whims and fancies.

Metrosexuality is a comparatively new phenomenon, a portmanteau word derived from *metropolitan* and *heterosexual*. This neologism de-emphasizes the conventional gender constructs. Women were always stigmatized for being vociferous consumers of grooming products. In order to widen the consumer market men were targeted by the decision makers in the consumer world and were nabbed easily into their fold by popularizing an altogether new male image. Hence Metrosexuality can be considered as a direct product of global capitalist market. It was Mark Simpson who first coined the term *Metrosexual* in his online article "Meet the Metrosexual" in 2002. He says, "The typical metrosexual is a young man with money to spend, living in or within easy reach of a metropolis -- because that's where all the best shops, clubs, gyms and hairdressers are." Simpson uses this term while referring to the extremely unconventional masculine appearance of Britain's soccer player David Beckham. He has been a favorite among the media- newspapers, men's magazines, TV advertising, billboards, etc. and has amassed around \$8 million for sponsoring various male fashion accessories.

Since then, the image of a reticent, stoic and altruistic man has been challenged by a new type of men who enjoy "preening, ... perming, plucking and powdering ... to perfection (Liu, n.d.)." As the very term denotes he is a product of a metropolitan area. A metrosexual should live in a liberal environment which is statistically most often found in metropolitan areas. The essential concepts of metrosexuality are- perfect beauty, unique appearance through clothing and financial freedom. Consumer culture promoted this notion of a sensitive man who frequented malls with cosmetically clean face and manicured hands. He takes utmost care in his clothing. He will be having financial privilege and is ready to spend money on anything he wants. Finally he possesses a burning narcissistic mentality and would go to any extent for his appearances. He tries to emulate the idealized portrayals of men in the fashion magazines and other advertisements. Simpson further clarifies his concept:

Any discussion in the style pages of the media about what is desirable and attractive in men and what is 'manly' and what isn't, is simply more metrosexualization., Metrosexuality is not about going to spas and wearing flip flops, nor is it essentially 'girly' and 'feminine' unless you think that narcissism and self-centeredness are essentially feminine qualities. Metrosexuality is mediated masculinity. Mediated masculinity that has replaced the 'real' thing. This is why I described the metrosexual as a collector of fantasies about the male sold to him by the media.

Simpson in his another article, "Narcissus goes Shopping" substantiates the close relation between consumer culture and narcissism which results in metrosexuality. As the definition implies narcissism is excessive preoccupation with one self. By instilling narcissist mentality and thereby commercializing metrosexuality media too become instrumental in spreading consumer culture. Simpson originally used this term in a satirical way to denote the toll of consumerism on masculinity.

The target group of consumerism does not confine to young group alone. It does not matter whether this is the 21 to 48 year-olds or the younger 14 to 21 year-old as long as they possess the buying power. Traditional masculinity has been tampered by the proliferation of media and consumer culture. Due to this commodification of male physicality, male

wardrobes have completely been revamped. Accessories which were early the sole prerogative of feminine beauty culture have made forays into the male beauty world.

There are two sides to this concept of metrosexuality- the commercial side where media plays the pivotal role and the other of sociological and psychological side. Commercialization of male body is nothing but the capital mentality of consumerism. From a sociological point, metrosexuality is something more than men doing pedicure or manicure. It could be considered as a trans-gender migration, transgressing the conventional boundaries on the part of the male.

It is curious to note that the term metrosexual has recently been ousted from power by the very forces that gave it the crown and is getting replaced by a more sober, socially acceptable term ubersexual. It is nothing but old wine in new, lesser flamboyant bottles. Yet another term gaining momentum again thanks to media is female metrosexuality. It has two realms-the socially acceptable aesthetic side of feminine beauty and the not so popular side of educated, intelligent, articulate and highly ambitious ladies. This biologically and intellectually blossomed female metrosexuals requires similarly evolved male counterparts. This has in a way popularized the concept of single mothers. It is a sign of the emerging counter culture. Some social critics point out a long term negative cultural impact since it may disrupt the very family system in India.

The ideal image projected by the media has deep rooted ramifications in the psyche of young generation. They become easy victims to the media projected consumerist culture. The discerning youth should be cautious enough to be not to fall into this vicious circle. The combined strength of both media and consumer culture is potentially powerful to threaten the very foundation of our age old traditional and social institutions.

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