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CONSUMER CULTURE AND MODERNITY

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Introduction

The consumer theory in economics defines the relationship between the income and his purchasing power. There are many internal and external factors which influence the buying decisions of consumers and it makes consumer buying process a complex matter. The low value products are bought by consumers on impulse without pondering much. The company focuses mainly on attracting consumers of their competitors and winning the competition. According to Don Slater, a customer does not act rationally, nor acts like a vulnerable dupe. Instead, the consumer acts as a self-conscious manipulator of meaning behind symbols which are attached to the consumer goods and a consumer acts like a person who chooses products in order to retain or create a standard impression, identity or lifestyle. In contemporary society, the image of such a consumer may be well-known as “craft consumer” as it is a guide in comprehending the behaviour practiced by the consumer (Janneke , 2009). Don Slater has tried to place consumer culture of today in the modern context and has remarked as to how the consumer and consumer sovereignty is developed in terms of modernization.

The Act of Consumption:

The Act of consumption indicates a strong link between ritual behaviour, consumption and modernity which shows the significance of objects and images in social construction (Thomas, 2011).

These days, consumer owners and brand managers try to absorb cultural ideas and iconography which helps the consumer brands to reflect by projecting the ideas and pictures reverting it into a culture as “extensions” for brands (Klein, 2000).

The media today plays an important role in the act of consumption as the endorsements and iconography influences greatly on the buying choices that the consumers make. These reasons have made manufacturers to make products which are aesthetically creative and designed attractively which makes it more geographically cultural and adds to the system of trade (Slater, 1997).

In the olden days, the act of consumption was usually based upon pictorial prints used by the early modern era people (Thomas, 2011). It was believed that the images carry practical information, such as engineering restructuring and steps in furniture making. The expressive ones were used in the representation of culture and the economic value of the product was determined. Therefore it is for sure that printing and images in consumption act dates back to early modern period and the production procedures used printing as a cultural heritage. Ever since the development of printing trend, a lot of marketing and advertising techniques were introduced which increased the sales in the market substantially. The consumer culture is said to have formed a scope of consumer choices (Janneke , 2009).

The consumers are the leaders in the scope of market. They calculate their self-interest rationally and connect their humane desires and social institutions with them so that the market demands can respond to it. All these behaviours give a rise to coordinating social action and extracts law, policies, and practices from the consumers. Hence a social compromise occurs between the identification of consumer desires as well as its linkage to the utility. Hence, this

way the resources are allocated through an efficient mechanism with regards to the consumer's desire. Slater is of the view that the cost that the culture has to pay for consumerism is the same as it has to pay for modernity to culture.

The Act of Consumption changed its meaning when a shift in the thinking of consumers took place and they put forward their notions as to why the youth used the products of mass marketing without criticizing. It also suggested that the pressures of the advertisers and marketers were resisted. Miller suggested that the transformation of object should take place and this is possible if the object is recontextualized and the transformation of consumer goods can take place into "potentially inalienable culture (Janneke , 2009)." When these activities like collecting, gifting, refurbishing of a product would take place, the product would become a crafted good or a consumer good rather than a commodity.

"Craft consumption" is an activity in which not just practice control over the process of consumption but also bring about a set of creativity which includes skills, knowledge, judgement, love and an overwhelming passion to their consuming which would be similar to the way that the craftsmen and craftswomen deal with their task (Thomas, 2011).

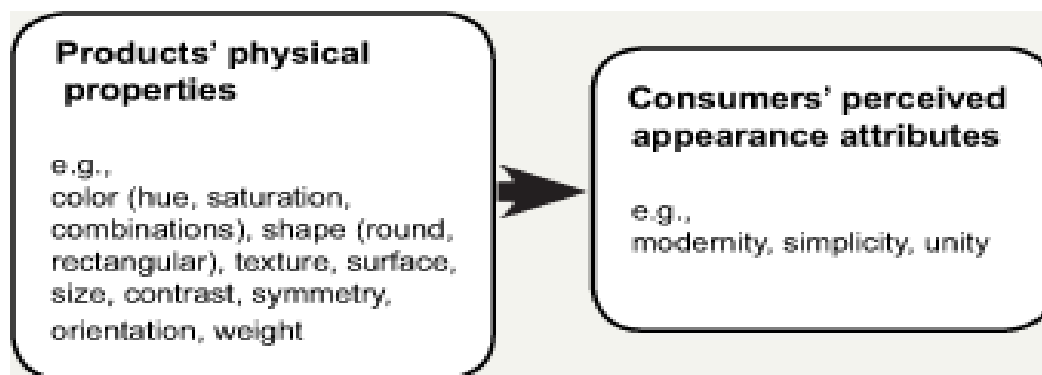
There is no limitation involved between the wants and desires of a modern consumer and the making of the producer. Hence consumption this way is not regarded and treated as a waste or a deficit from the economy but rather makes economic production a focal point. It makes consumption as systematic needs of expansion and a crisis-free capitalist economy instead of the preservation of cultural social order.

Since culture is a vast ethnicity encompassing a lot of people, therefore it keeps changing and dividing there is a multiplicity of cultures which include high culture, consumer culture, sub

culture, lifestyle culture and so on. When we look at consumption as a different perspective contributing to a broaden reproduction of an economic system, we connected it with an ethical framework which targets the private needs of a consumer which makes them liberal to own it (Thomas, 2011).

The trend of commercially well-designed good to attract consumers started from Europe, when the consumers were given new kind of pictures to give expression to the product, thus contributing in increasing the value of the product. This task was assigned to artists and commercial printmakers to design goods which would attract masses. Today, the consumer culture is lavishly designed with signs, images and publicity and displays aesthetic richness of commodities and their atmosphere which includes advertisement, packaging, shop display, point of sale material and product furnishing. The ordering principle of everyday modernity entails all these principles which are quite evident and discussed in the initiation of commerce. An adaptive ability in the consumption, communication and meaning outlines dilemmas of status and identity

A two-step model of product appearance perception



Hence the role that modernization plays in consumer good purchasing cannot be overlooked.

The design of the product which includes its logos, packaging, typefaces etc gives the product a strong image which includes harmony, symmetry, unity, massiveness, naturalness, delicacy etc.

In this process, the designer needs to be objective and should consider more the perception of the consumers and mainly should draw aesthetic and industrial design concepts. It is wrong to consider consumers to be amateurs in designing and the designers to be the best judges of art.

However, according to the research there is a wide range of differences which exists between the choice of designers and the consumer's preferences. When Hsu et al. (2000) rated a number of products on qualities like mature, emotional and soft consumers scored them in a different way as compared to designers and thus they were unable to comprehend the differences between facades. When the designer works on the appearance of products, they try to make it meaningful whereas consumers are unable to look for the hidden meaning behind and so the consumers have to generate the appearance attributes which overall assists to develop a different perceived opinion of the product (Janneke Blijlevens *, 2009).

The concept of the Act of Consumption entails that our needs and desires as consumers are unlimited insatiable and needs to meet the sense of fulfilment. According to Don Slater, the consumer himself become the focus of social life as the idea "Consumer culture is a culture of consumption" and gains a lot of strength in the process due to which he is able to expand the consumer goods line socially and this keeps on giving him a sense of satisfaction. A point comes when the consumer has expanded the concept so much that the whole cultural change takes place and the culture becomes the consumption culture. The second concept views consumer culture as the culture of market society in which anonymous consumers demands goods which

are placed in the market. This can be phrased into “consumer culture is capitalist culture”. The third concept entails that consumption as an impersonal and universal phenomenon. This principle also promotes the fact that the universe consist of a number of things and ideas which can take the form of various products and can be a part of marketplace (Janneke , 2009). Some of the modernized products available in the market which have gone through restructuring and redesigning in order to attract and satisfy consumers better are given as follows. The new design has added to the value of the products by making it look elite and classic.

1. A modernized pool chair to enhance the look of the area. This chair looks comfortable and inviting.



2. A modernized and newly designed back pack. This bag pack is compact and can be carried easily.



3. A new design of USB. It will help the user to keep it with him all day by pinning it in his attire.



4. A modernized baby bed. The idea has been derived from a bird nest. It looks appealing and cosy and adds to the look of the room.



5. A headphone holder. The user need not worry about folding and adjusting the wires of the headphones.



6. A modern sofa design specifically designed to add to the decor of the room and looks inviting and appealing especially for all the interior designers.



7. A stand for fixing the wires of a laptop or any other electrical appliance. This would protect the wires from being damaged which they usually do. Also, this is a safer means for protection against electrical currents.



8. A hands-free liquid soap. Its function does not require to be pressed by the hand to use it. It contains sensors which detect a hand underneath it and gives soap itself.



9. An elegant modernized women bracelet in the shape of a nail. This bracelet stands out among other jewellery pieces because of the uniqueness in its design.



10. A copco bag cap. This cap can be fixed in the mouth of chips easily the cap can be tightened to preserve the chips when not been eaten. This will help the packaged food from being stale.



11. A modernized electrical switch which can control the switches so there is no need for getting up and turning on or off manually. Apart from that, this modernized product has added to the splendour of the house.



12. A medical bracelet which detects any abnormality in heart beat and shows the pulse of the person wearing it.



Hence, when we talk about modernity of consumer consumption, we keep in mind the rationalization, digitalization and mechanization of the consumer goods to redesign it. The added digitalization not only affects the outlook of the place but also helps save time and provides ease of usage (Janneke , 2009). Such exemplary consumer goods which are

modernized digitally the introduction of automatic restaurants, self-serving shops and restaurants, ATMs, vending machines and vending machine streets, labelling, bar codes as well as GPS and RFID. These innovations not only strengthen the relationships between production, consumption and consumers but also attract consumers and make them increase their purchasing power. (Thomas., 2011)

A study conducted with a number of consumers helped to identify the producers some attributes which should be compulsorily be made a part of modernity of consumption goods. These attributes include Modernity, Simplicity and Playfulness. This study also highlights how consumers produce durable product appearances and draw a line between different product outlooks. These attributes play a vital role in shaping the product in the demand of the consumers. Not only the final consumers, but also certain designers are of the same opinion that these attributes should be made a part of their product modernity. However, after the result of the study was displayed the designers were of the opinion that they use a mix of simplicity, complexity and modernity to enhance the value of the product.

Consumers always go for products whose appearance is unified, synchronized and harmonized. These qualities while designing the product should be kept in mind and never ignored. (Janneke Blijlevens *, 2009)

Conclusion

This essay was all about the contemporary traits existing in the consumer's mind related to the changing cultures. Modernity today has reduced everyone to consumers whereas post-

modernity which is a rebellious activity has made consumers more intense in consuming such goods. When we talk about modernity consumption, we always quote words from Don Salter who had gained a reputation by writing a book on consumer culture which talks so much about the reality of perceptions existing today in the minds of the consumers and how they should be met. This has given an edge to nearly all producers to come up with scientific approaches in order to trace the roots of consumer culture and crafting objects in such a way that it symbolizes a good taste and a sensible, educated discernment. Modernity of consumption goods today can be seen as a prospering part of everyday life as consumer's culture gets evolved as new after once a while.

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