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Introduction

- Definition of “Consumer Culture”

“Consumer culture” generally refers to the way in which consumption is organized within modern capitalist societies over the modern period, gathering social weight and importance from the eighteenth century onwards, with periods of huge transformation in the twentieth century. To use the term “consumer culture” is to emphasize that the word of goods and their principles of structuration are central to understanding of contemporary society. This involves a dual focus: firstly, on the cultural dimension of the economy, the symbolization and use of material goods as “communicators” not just utilities; and secondly, on the economy of cultural goods, the market principles of supply, demand, capital, accumulation, competition, and monopolization which operate within the sphere of lifestyles, cultural goods and commodities.

In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu seeks to map out the social field of the different tastes in legitimated “high” cultural practices, as well as taste in lifestyles and consumption preferences. Both culture in “high” sense and culture in the anthropological sense are therefore inscribed on the same social space. The oppositions and relational determination of taste, however, become clearer when the space of lifestyle is superimposed onto the map of class structure whose basic structuring principle is the volume and composition (economic or cultural) of capital that groups possess. Thus, Consumption can be seen as a set of social and cultural practices that serve as a way of establishing differences between social groups, not merely as a way of expressing differences. Lifestyle is an outcome of both economic and cultural capitals.

Quotations

-- *Slater*

- Consumer culture is a culture of consumption

Core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption rather than to other social dimensions such as work or citizenship, religion or military: a culture of consumption.

Dominant values of a society not only organized through consumption practices but also in some sense derive from them. Thus, contemporary society is described as materialistic, as more concerned with 'having' to the exclusion of 'being', as commodified, as hedonistic, or more positively, as a society of choice and consumer sovereignty.

The values from the realm of consumption spill over into other domains of social action - consumption becomes a central focus of social life, values of consumer culture acquire a prestige that encourages their extension to other social domains.

- Consumer culture is the culture of a market society

Modern consumption is mediated by market relations and takes the form of the consumption of commodities. The consumer's access to consumption is largely structured by the distribution of material and cultural resources, which itself is determined in crucial ways by market relations – above all the wage relation and social class.

From a Marxist perspective, it is the wage-relation, it is capitalist relations of production that produce the consumer.

Consumer culture is incompatible with the political regulation of consumption that suppresses the market. It does not arise in non-capitalist societies.

- Consumer culture is, in principle, universal and impersonal

Consumer culture is often identified with the idea of mass consumption. Market relations are anonymous and in principle universal.

The idea that consumer culture serves a general public also promotes a more positive idea that it embraces 'everyone'. We are all formally free and equal, unconstrained in our choices by legally fixed status or cultural prohibitions. Yet, it is also felt to be universal because everyone must be a consumer and this particular freedom is compulsory.

If there is no principle restricting who can consume what, there is no principled constraint on what can be consumed: all social relations, activities and objects can in principle be exchanged as commodities.

- Consumer culture identifies freedom with private choice and private life

To be a consumer is to make choices and this exercise of choice is in principle unconstrained. The freedom of consumer culture is defined in a modern and liberal way - consumer choice is a private act. Two senses of meaning of this, and they are – firstly, in the positive sense, it occurs within a domain of the private, which is ideologically declared out of bounds to public intervention, social and political authority. Secondly, in the negative sense, it is restricted to the household, mundane domesticity, the world of private relationships.

A critical remark is that in becoming ‘free’ as consumer we barter away power and freedom in the workplace or in the political arena in exchange for more private contentment.

- Consumer needs are in principle unlimited and insatiable

The idea of insatiable need is bound up with notions of cultural modernization: the increased productivity of modern industry is a response and a spur to the capacity of people's desires to become increasingly sophisticated, refined, and personal, as well as people's desire to advance themselves socially and economically.

On the other hand, commercial society is systematically dependent on the insatiability of needs. Therefore, the market society fears the possibility that needs might be satisfied. To counter these fears, society develops demand management strategies and advertising, marketing and promotion.

A cultural contradiction arises and that is economic modernization underpinned by regime of rational planning and discipline and a work ethic, yet it depends upon fostering irrational desires and passions and a hedonistic ethic.

- Consumer culture is the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post- traditional society

Modern concepts of individualism sweep away the possibility and desirability of fixed status order, characteristic of feudal times. In a post-traditional society, social identity must be constructed by individuals because it is no longer given or ascribed.

Goods can always signify social identity, but in the fluid processes of a post-traditional society, identity seems to be more a function of consumption rather than as in the feudal society where social order and identity dictate consumption patterns.

Consumer culture is crucially about the negotiation of status and identity. Regulation of these issues by tradition is replaced by negotiation and construction, and consumer goods are crucial to the way in which we make up our social appearance, our social networks, our structure of social values.

- Consumer culture represents the increasing importance of culture in the modern exercise of power

Consumer culture is awash with signs, images, publicity. This involves an *aestheticisation* of commodities and their environment. Consumption becomes a privileged site of autonomy, meanings, subjectivity, privacy and freedom.

Yet, all these meanings around consumption become crucial to economic competition and rational organization, become the objects of strategic action by dominating institutions. The sense of autonomy and identity comes under threat. Hence the controversy over whether consumption is a sphere of manipulation or freedom.

How is magazine publishing part of “Consumer Culture”

Magazine publishing is both a cultural activities and a business. Magazine are vehicles of new idea and sources of entertainment. But the task of bring them into existence and of purveying them to their readers is a commercial one requiring all the resources and skills of the manager and entrepreneur.

In this essay I will analyze the teen girls magazines to demonstrate how is magazine publishing part of “consumer culture”.

- Magazine is a culture of consumption

When a reader is consuming a magazine, she is consuming the culture values, ideas, aspirations and identities provided by it.

Girls’ magazines, such as: “Bliss”, “J-17”, “Sugar”, “Cosmo girl”, “Elle girl”, are filled with fashion, beauty, styles, music, celebrities, boys and advice. Some of them also campaign on issues and provide a platform for the teen generation to shout from. Since they are popular mainstream magazines that are available in most newsagents, and therefore arguably represent to the readers what constitutes the modern teenage girl. Through reading a magazine aimed at her demographic group, an adolescent girl will gain an insight into the world of the girls and will be taught what are the cultural expectations made of them as girls, she will therefore come to learn that society expects her to be more concerned with her appearance, her relations with other people, and her ability to win approval from boys than with her own ideas or expectations for herself, so magazines are central to society as they create a culture, a

culture of femininity, they define and shape the girls' world, we can see that it becomes a familiar friend for girls- it advises her, and provides entertainment, amusement and escapism for her and speaks to her in a language she understands. These magazines therefore symbolize a lifestyle, a life of luxury and pleasure. They are not only just a teen magazine, but they also represent a brand name in the teen market. They build up new trends, ideas, lifestyle and attitude, they are the new primary producers in our so called knowledge economy. For example: Sugar magazine was a dazzling success, it launched its own brand extension - its own line of clothing a couple of years ago.

- Magazine is the culture of market society

Magazine publishing is aware of the demands of the market, their competition and advertisers. Consumers represent a diverse set of groups, each possessing a distinct lifestyle and a consumption pattern. Therefore, there are different types of magazines in the market targeted for different groups of people, and the articles in these magazines are primarily written with their audience in mind. For example: some teen magazines, like: “Mizz”, “Shout” are geared toward pre-teens and early teenagers, aged 10 -14. The content of these magazines is mainly about beauty and celebrities. But other teen magazines, like: “Bliss”, “Sugar”, “J-17”, “Cosmo girl”, “Seventeen”, “19”, etc. are aimed at 15 – 19 years old, or at least who think they are as mature as a 15 – 19 year old. Beside the regular content in every teen girls magazine, these magazines are also laced with much sexual dimorphism, or the definition of particular attitudes, actions, and objects as feminine or masculine.

- Magazine is, in principal, universal and impersonal

Though the Association for Teachers and Lecturers voted to campaign for age restrictions to be placed on teen magazines at their annual conference in April, the UK Government say no to age restrictions on teen magazines. And since there is no age restriction on teen magazines, they can easily be purchased by everyone in nearly every newsagent, most shops and supermarkets. Thus, it is a kind of mass consumption. The more widespread the teen magazines become, the bigger audience they can penetrate and the more people they can bring new ideas to. With more people sharing the values, ideas, aspirations, and identities provided by these teen magazines, they are able to set the norms for the culture. For example: these magazines reflect images of thinness and beauty, and link them to other symbols of happiness, love and success for girls. And the same message is repeated over and over again in the magazines. The repeated exposure to thin bodies and perfect faces eventually sticks and becomes the ideal image of the majority of young girls.

- Magazine identifies freedom with private choice and private life

There are varieties of teen girls' magazines in the market, from very "girly bubbly" Bliss, J-17, Sugar to more "elegant" Teen Vogue, Elle girl, etc. Both local and imported foreign magazines are also available in newsagents, bookshops, convenient stores, supermarkets, hotel lobby shops, and malls. Since most of us are living in a free world, the free market permits individuals to make choices for themselves, and prohibits them from forcing those choices onto others. Therefore, people from almost everywhere around the world can choose to consume these teen girls magazines according to their preferences.

- Consumer needs are in principle unlimited and insatiable

Since there are many different teen girls magazines available in the market, readers are spoiled for choices. Thus, readers may easily shift from one magazine to another magazine. In order to maintain the sales and to increase the demand, advertising, marketing and promotion are widely used among these teen magazines. For examples: Bliss, Sugar, J-17 magazines have all put advertisements on some other teenage pop magazines, offered subscription discounts and free gifts to their readers. With more advertisements and promotion sales, these magazines can increase their competitive power and attract their potential readers.

- Magazine is the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society

If you break down a typical teen magazine, you will notice that is almost fifty percent advertisements. Advertisements seen in those teen magazines, and the imagery such advertising campaigns put forward can also be seen in influence a young person constructing their identity. Through the visual codes of these advertisements, they work to signify a particular set of cultural values and meanings. This can be anything from the latest labeled trainers to buy to which mobile phone is the smallest and therefore most popular to which beauty treatment to use. The list is endless.

Sometimes these advertisements evince the excesses of materialism. A great many young girls would look at these advertisements as a source of inspiration as to what to have and would think that they were inadequate to some extent if they could not have those “cool” images or products, therefore advertising screams the values of popular culture today, and every young girl reading teen magazines wants to look like the images portrayed throughout the magazine. For example: the present Love Kylie lingerie advertisement or the Maybelline make-up advertisements found in Bliss and other teen magazine, these advertisements promise to transform the girls’ appearances into something that they have always dreamed of. Girls look up to the images they see day after day, and the familiar thin, flawless figure becomes a role model. These advertisements are designed to encourage girls to use make up and to diet, and

advertisers make this image acceptable.

- Magazine represents the increasing importance of culture in the modern exercises of power

A decade ago teen magazines focused on just makeup tips and fashion. However, in 1988, the launch of “Sassy”, (it had a new, different, “cool”, and straight forward approach. It took a more modern tone in fashion and issues. The main issue being, you guessed it, sex.) has been attributed as the cause for this sexier content. The trend has continued with the recent introductions of “Bliss”, “Sugar”, “Cosmo girl” and “Teen Vogue”, etc. Teen magazines nowadays are filled with images of sex and sexuality as well as information about sexual health. Now you can open up any teen magazine and notice the sexual influences. They not only appear in the articles, whose subjects can range from what sex is like, unwed pregnancy, abortion, or how to be sexy, but also in the advertisements placed throughout the magazines. Since teenagers are curious about sex and these magazines seem to be the only way for them to obtain information about it. Therefore, many teen magazines have increased the amount of space focused on sexual-related issues in order to follow what their competitors do, so as to attract more readers. Sex has been packaged as a "commodity" by these magazines in recent years, it marks a new moment in the construction of female sexual identities.

Conclusion

According to Slater, “consumer culture is a culture of consumption”, “consumer culture is a culture of a market society”, “consumer culture is, in principle, universal and impersonal”, “consumer culture identifies freedom with private choice and private life”, “consumer needs are in principle unlimited and insatiable”, “consumer culture is the privileged medium for negotiating identity and status within a post-traditional society” and “consume culture represents the increasing importance of culture in the modern exercise of power”.

From the above analysis, magazine publishing can fit into Slater’s descriptions of consumer culture. Therefore, magazine publishing is part of consumer culture.

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