

## Review

# Youth Culture and literature: Understanding Everyday life of Cosmopolitan Women

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**Abstract:** Consumer research is a vital maturing field of inquiry in the present academic circle. It can generate and sustain multiple theoretical conversations. This type of study can be energizing, thought provoking and inspiring for the budding scholars from every nook and corner of the world. It also provides an intellectual ground for theoretical innovations and advancements. Thinking across the boundaries, all realms of research have been re-constructed as a single entity called Interdisciplinarity which is always observed as a solution for all sorts of specializations. Being a twentieth century philosophical approach, it aims at the awakening of neglected schools of thought like Cultural Studies. In addressing a new dilemma of the academics, traditional disciplines may often fail or show their inadequacy. No discipline can at any point of time evaluate and analyze technology of the twenty first century except various theories and formulations of Cultural Studies clubbing scientific notions with social and cultural anthropological dimensions. Cultural Studies are interested in lifestyles because lifestyle is about day to day life. Lifestyle helps people to define identity. And it also influences social relations and bestows meaning and value to artifacts in a culture. Consumption now turned as a marker of identity. Commodities are signs of Empire and lifestyle also turned to be as a way of becoming empire. Consumption begins before the actual act of shopping. It begins with the consumption of the signs of the commodity. The notion of life style indicates individuality and self-expression. Life style connotes self-consciousness and it enables people to enjoy different levels of consumption. This paper entitled “Youth Culture and Literature: Understanding Everyday Life of Cosmopolitan Women” discusses different aspects of cosmopolitanism by focusing certain genres of fiction.

**Key words:** Cosmopolitanism, Consumer culture, Identity, Life style

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## INTRODUCTION

When the attention of the world has changed from production to consumption, it was a sudden cultural change. As the study of consumption choices, Consumer Culture refers to the actions in the market place and the

cultural meanings of the behaviours of post-modernist society in the system of commerce. In a global village consumers are growing and they adopt consumption symbols like brand names for each and every product they use. In the convergence of technology, people are brought together through the increased trade and global

media. Life styles and values are becoming universally similar in many aspects. The Americanizing mode of consumerism is, to a great extent, a matter of interest in this field. Following the unsatisfied needs, people necessarily arrange to attain every product to live a comfortable life:

There is no support for the argument that increased global mobility for business and vacations will cause people to homogenize. People do not travel to an extent that they are frequently confronted with other cultures. Even if all people were to have enough money to travel abroad, they would not all travel to some extent. Across European countries, the degree to which people travel varies widely. (Mooij 6)

The literature which makes use of youth culture points out the question of fashion. It seriously undertakes the responsibility of reading different sorts of works, connecting them with the wider social and historical matters. It is this analyzing power that frames all expressions of the youth culture. There are black cultural forms for the young black people to reflect the historical process of marginalization and exclusion from a dominant mainstream culture. In consumer cultures, people are always convinced to consume much more than what they absolutely need.

Consumption has got three levels of perspectives in its nature. It can be economical, sociological and psychological. Among these, the economic level of consumption is related to the way by which economy is used in purchasing products and attaining comforts. It is a post modern capitalist approach. In the sociological aspect, consumption is all about the social relations and bonds which are formed by the choices of the customer. So consuming has become a part of social status. The final aspect is that of psychological where all consumers experience a kind of emotional pleasure of consumption. When a product is being purchased, it is actually a dream or desire that has been fulfilled. Thus it is psychological too. Advertisements of various products manipulate and control these three aspects of an individual successfully. It is interesting to analyze how advertisements exploit the individual pleasures of consumption in the post modern market place. They make the consumer feel that commodities have got some cultural association and illusion:

Advertising in particular is able to exploit this and attach images of romance, exotica, desire, beauty, fulfillment, communality, scientific progress and the good life to mundane consumer goods such as soap, washing machines, motor cars and alcoholic drinks. (Featherstone 14)

The relevance of Consumer culture can be traced only when it is read along with globalization and industries like beauty, art, education, health etc. One has to explore this particular area of cultural studies to contextualize the role of commercialization during the period of globalization. The concepts of all industries have changed extremely with the advent of mass productions and distributions. Media has made consumers passive in their social roles, but active in the selection procedures of any product.

There are many stages in the evolution of consumer culture. In the first stage, there had been cultural festivals in the pre-industrial society which consist of carnivals. It is absolutely true that the products which had been sold from these carnivals were the first products of consumerism. The second stage was that of industrialization where real markets appeared. It was the beginning of globalization where advertisements and media began to show their full strength. The third and running stage of it is the 'depthless consumer culture' (Jean Baudrillard) of postmodernism. In the present trans-cultural scenario, consumers have been vibrantly confused by media and advertisements. They have become much more expressive and explosive. As Raymond Williams suggests, the meaning of the term 'consume' is to be 'to destroy' or 'to waste' in this new context of post modernism. Cultural Studies view everyday life as fragmented, multiple where meanings are hybridized and contested. Identities that were more or less homogenous in terms of ethnicities and patterns of consumption are now completely hybrid, especially in the metropolises.

When talking about consumer culture, its treatment on everyday life to make it aesthetic is to be discussed. The question is about the pseudo aesthetic attitude of the market to the consumers. In the case of food products, the consumer is guaranteed to have satisfaction for the time being. Food actually denotes the cultural pattern of any individual, but it serves itself as a label of class and social status. In the case of costumes, the consumer wants to please his/her own self as part of his/her purchase. Clothing registers how culture imprints itself on an individual from outside, shaping his/her style of costumes and inner identity. There are certain rules, conventions and expectations for any society which shape the identities of the people in it. They easily adapt themselves to all such external influences as they go on living in a particular society:

Our own modern societies are no different. Those of "high" rank, that is, those with access to more wealth than others, dress in a particular way that is reflexive of their greater power and status. Mostly men, they wear expensive suits made of the finest materials and crafted by expert tailors. Look at the news photo of the Davos gathering of world economic leaders, and you will see men of this rank and clothing style. (Ryan 95)

Cultural Studies are interested in lifestyles because lifestyle is about day to day life. Lifestyle helps people to define identity. And it also influences social relations and bestows meaning and value to artifacts in a culture. Consumption now turned as a marker of identity. Commodities are signs of identity and lifestyle, and consumption begins before the actual act of shopping. It begins with the consumption of the signs of the commodity. The notion of life style indicates individuality and self-expression. Life style connotes self-consciousness and it enables people to enjoy different levels of consumption.

The production techniques of the post modern world have been changed during the time of mass consumption of the post 1960s generation not only aiming at the youth, but also the middle aged and the elderly. It is related to one's body, clothes, eating and drinking preferences and his/her choices. Society is moving towards adaptation of different styles without having any fixed status groups. Consumer goods are cultural signs in a post modern situation where the concepts of social and real have gone and a nostalgic replacement of the real has been taking place. Life style reflects taste formation, and desire formation. It is the market which monopolizes within all fields like science, art, education, religion and marriage. Mike Featherstone's views of the process of marketing is case in point:

Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle. The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste. ( 86)

Brand is another concept like life style which is inevitable part of Consumer Culture studies. As we know brand is always associated with life style. It is the royal way of selecting products in the market place. Brand shows a dignified life style. From a psychological stand point, the use of branded products makes people believe that they are consuming something that are highly prestigious. They consider such consumption as an integral fragment of their constructed, but inevitable social identity. Branded products will be distinctive and expensive more over it confers identity. According to Pepe Martinez, a marketing researcher points out the features of brand in his work *The Consumer Mind*:

A brand is a living reality. It has to be dynamic. It has to be active. It has to be present in the mind of consumers. It has to stimulate their brain. It has to generate emotions and make them excited. It has to communicate passion and enthusiasm. A brand has to be genuine, faithful to its principles and values. (115)

Capitalism has re-defined the consumption choices and behaviours of post-modernist society based on the amalgamation of different groups and shared meanings rather than locating them only in an economic or psychological point of view. The fragmented cultural concepts are being reflected in the global marketplace and consumers use the commercially produced images to construct their identity. This construction of identity can formulate the criteria for establishing consumer's interaction status with others in the society. Identity, even ideology is influenced by the products in the market. So the role of a consumer in producing culture is not negligible. The worldwide reach of internet propagates consumption-related symbols which include product categories, brands and consumption activities like online shopping. Mass media plays a major role in the creation, learning and sharing of such consumption symbols. Let it be music, arts or sports, without homogenization of their own, people of various nations accepts what they wish to accommodate in their life. Thanks to globalization for reviving local culture identities in a vast panoramic canvas. With the globalization of urban spaces, local cultures are linked to global economies, markets and needs, and hence any research of contemporary culture has to examine the role of non-local market or money. Thus the process of globalization also has significant role in the study of consumer culture.

Shopping mall is another space of display where the commodities are displayed with the maximum visual presence. The way in which mall displays the fashion products ensure that they are attractive enough to instill the desire for consumption. Attention and desire are central elements of shopping experience in mall. Thus it can be considered as the site of shopping where people are treating it as the place of entertainment. It creates a fantasy world by the presence of models and posters added by the experience of being surrounded by attractive men and women in the shining light and vibrant music. Thus experience altogether forms a kind of entice to consume global brands and cosmopolitan fashion products. It really promotes the act of shopping. Mixing up of styles, products, brands are the central feature of the mall and consumer experience. Mall, shopping centers, theme parks and museums are the spaces in which consumption takes place at most level:

There are therefore common features emerging between shopping centers, malls, museums, theme parks and tourist experiences in the

contemporary city in which cultural disorder and stylistic eclecticism become common features of spaces in which consumption and leisure are meant to be constructed as 'experience'. (Featherstone 103)

"Culture industry" is another term closely associated with consumer culture which is indebted to the Marxist term "ideology" and coined by Horkheimer and Adorno in his essay "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception". It refers to mass culture that "standardizes" pleasure and fun as market "products" and produces unthinking masses of people who accept commodified sentiments and entertainments as "natural" and consume them passively. "Industry" refers to the standardization of the cultural product, its meaning and value. The culture industry has converted the value, meaning and pleasure to be obtained from the use of the product, into the product and its elements. Culture industry refers to commercial and state-owned organizations in the arts and media committed to the direct production, sponsorship, display and distribution of cultural goods and services such as exhibitions, sports events, books, newspapers and films. Adorno points out that Enlightenment had proposed to bring pluralism and demystification by endorsing rationality, but instead society has suffered a major fall as it has been corrupted by capitalist industry with exploitative motives. The term "culture industry" readily captures the Marxist assumption that cultural forms like paintings, operas and films are no different from other consumer products such as cars or television sets, thus affirming the Marxist belief that culture is not an abstract thing produced by an individual genius but a product of social and economic conditions in society. Thus art is not a "pure" aesthetic realm but one which is produced and sold like any other consumer good. Likewise a novel can be read not only on the basis of generic conventions and history of the supposed fiction but also in terms of the publishing industry and its profits, its reviewers, the ideology which promotes by the novelists, academic field of criticism, the politics of awards, the hype of publicity machinery that sells the book.

Though, a product has got both functional and desired values in the market. More than a device of practical benefits, it shares a cultural value correlating product category data to cultural dimensions. Food consumption for example, varies with climate and taste, but it carries a cultural meaning. Multiple attitudes of people make them shop food in large supermarket only to satisfy their cultural practice or to highlight some alien culture which they consider better if possessed. Soft drinks and mineral water even create impression of an imagined entity of global water market. Wealth related usage of personal care products like creams and cosmetics has been now modified as part of individualism. Branded products which are more expensive psychologically colonizes people

demanding all social expectations by enhancing the physical attractiveness of both men and women. The way in which people spend money on clothing and footwear for means of self-esteem and self-enhancement is also branded as part of individualism. Grooming one's lifestyle is thus associated with creating her/ his own cultural pattern. Written for and marketed to young women, Chick Lit, a genre of fiction features stylish female protagonists and follows their romance lives and struggles for professional success. It often attempts to investigate the issues of modern womanhood with a fixation on consumerism of designer brands. This promotion of female self-enhancement is not meant to attract men and look young in the conventional sense, but to differentiate oneself from others. In high cultures, accepting artificiality turns to be a philosophic negation of purity. It may be observed that this new mode of writing came up during the time of late capitalism and consumerism. By the end of 1990s, the category and term Chick Lit had become established. Chick Lit can be thus seen as a genre in the context of production and consumption in the postmodern age. The common Chick Lit themes are dating, eating, shopping and the texts may be concerned with female sexuality. Chick Lit explores the female protagonist's self discovery, her dreams and desires. Sarah Gormely in a special issue of *Working Papers on the Web* (2009) proposed a detailed description of the genre Chick Lit and Gormley clearly explains that Chick Lit is a new form of contemporary popular fiction. The definition begins by saying that "By the 1990 s... had become established to describe the novels written by women largely for women, depicting the life, love, trials and tribulations of their predominantly young, single, urban, female protagonists". (Joanne Knowles 2004: 2). The second definition can be observed as more refined than the above mentioned. It refers to all aspects of the new genre of fiction that undertakes a major role in youth culture:

Whilst plotlines are variable, Chick Lit can be internally defined by the structure of a female central character "seeking personal fulfillment in a romance – consumer-comedic vein". ...By the end of the last decade of the twentieth century, the genre of Chick Lit was also identifiable by the establishment of "clearly marked jacket designs". Indeed, Chick Lit's bold, pink or pastel coloured covers with cursive fonts and line drawings of hand bags or shoes seem ubiquitous, at least in the U. K., gracing the shelves of the bookstores, supermarkets, railway station and airport shops. (Rosalind Gill, Elena Herdieckerhoff, 2006)

The definition which is given here incorporates the major themes of Chick Lit as well as characteristic features of Chick Lit novels. It can be undoubtedly said that Chick Lit is a form of fiction that can be placed in the section of popular fiction enabling to perceive this new genre in other slightly different perspective. As a genre of popular literature written for young urban middle class women, the tremendous commercial success of popular

Chick Lit fiction inevitably calls for a critical analysis by focusing on the process of production, consumption and reception. The stereotypical Chick Lit protagonist is seen to be interested. And it can be analyzed by emphasizing the consumption choices and behaviours in cultural practices and the narrative of Chick Lit generates a consumer identity by connecting it with the consumer culture, brand and lifestyle.

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