

You Look "Mahvelous": The Pursuit of Beauty and the Marketing Concept

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ABSTRACT

Research has repeatedly shown that substantial benefits accrue to those who are attractive. Knowledge of such benefits seems to be shared by the general public, and billions of dollars annually are spent on appearance-enhancing products. This article examines the functions of adornments and their linkage to attractiveness assessments. In addition, a number of influences on level of adornment usage are described. Finally, consequences for marketers are discussed along with a proposed research agenda.

Tattoos, stretched lips, the bound feet of Chinese women, eyeshadow, rouge, hair removal, mascara, or bracelets, collars, objects, jewelry, accessories: anything will serve to rewrite the cultural order on the body; and it is this that takes on the effect of beauty. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 87)

Physical attractiveness is an attribute of inherent value to mankind. Decades of research have confirmed that physical attractiveness is positively related to social power, self-esteem, and the receipt of positive responses from others (Adams, 1977; Adams & Read, 1983; Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981; Goldman & Lewis, 1977). Physically attractive individuals are in love more often and are better liked than are unattractive persons (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Edmonds & Cahoon, 1984). Preference for physically attractive

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faces has even been observed among infants (Dion, 1977; Langlois, Roggman, & Casey, 1987).

It is not surprising, then, that bodily adornment has been used in the pursuit of beauty throughout the centuries and in many cultures. As in Egypt's New Kingdom, Minoan Crete, 11th century Japan, pre-revolutionary France, and New York in the 1920's, today's consumers can choose from a large array of beauty-enhancing products. The marketplace abounds in fashion apparel, jewelry, cosmetics, hair-care items, and other grooming products. Millions of promotion dollars are spent each year to persuade consumers that each of the myriad of adornment goods will fulfill their needs for attractiveness and enhance feelings of well-being.

It is clear that consumers connect the use of adornments with desirable outcomes. In just one year, American women leave more than \$13 billion at retail cosmetics departments (Commerce Department, 1986). In addition to financial commitment, some individuals are even willing to experience physical pain in order to receive the social and self-related benefits associated with attractiveness. Members of Africa's Dinka tribe endure numerous cuts in the face and torso in the pursuit of beautifying scars (Brain, 1979). Victorian women seeking a socially desirable tiny waist were cinched into corsets so tight that they frequently fainted. Today, many women choose to wear uncomfortable high heels in the pursuit of socially defined standards of attractiveness (Solomon & Schopler, 1982).

This article addresses several issues concerning the use and marketing of adornments. The article first discusses adornment functions and the relationship of adornments to physical attractiveness characteristics. Possible influences on the extent of adornment use are then described. Finally, implications pertaining to the marketing of adornments and future research questions are discussed.

THE FUNCTION OF ADORNMENTS IN ENHANCING ATTRACTIVENESS

Adornments are used to increase attractiveness and to obtain accompanying social benefits; empirical tests have demonstrated that they are effective for these purposes. Several studies have shown that makeup use by women is associated with stronger attributions of attractiveness and femininity (Cash, 1988; Cash & Cash, 1982; Cash, Rissi, & Chapman, 1985; Cox & Glick, 1986; Graham & Jouhar, 1981; Hout, 1954; Hamid, 1972). Attire can also influence attractiveness impressions (Hamid, 1968; Hewitt & German, 1987; Solomon & Douglas, 1985; Solomon & Schopler, 1982).

Holman (1981) has described several functions of adornments. Although her work was focused on the role of adornments in communi-

cation, some of the adornment functions mentioned by Holman may also influence attractiveness evaluations: first, by enhancing the attractiveness of individual characteristics that contribute to the overall appraisal of attractiveness (parasomatic functions), and second by imparting the attractiveness of the adornment itself to the user (intrinsic aesthetic functions). These two classes of adornment functions are discussed below.

Parasomatic Functions

In some cases, adornments affect attractiveness perceptions by influencing the attractiveness of particular physical characteristics. The assumption is that if someone's hair, for instance, is made to appear more attractive, the impression of that person's overall attractiveness will improve. Adornments used in these ways are performing a parasomatic function (Holman, 1981).

Researchers agree that attractiveness evaluations are based on an appraisal of several physical characteristics (Brown, Cash, & Noles, 1986; Franzoi & Herzog, 1987). Although there is no consensus among researchers as to which characteristics are most important in attractiveness evaluations, face and body weight are the two characteristics most often studied (Franzoi & Herzog, 1987). Recently, Cash (1988) and Solomon (1983) have criticized attractiveness studies for their focus on these two features, to the exclusion of adornments.

Brown et al. (1986) and Patzer (1985) argue that attractiveness cues or characteristics fall into two categories based on degree of permanence. Adopting this perspective, we have here termed these categories *innate* and *mutable* characteristics. Innate characteristics reflect enduring, essentially unchangeable traits such as height, facial bone structure, and body proportions (Franzoi & Herzog, 1987; Schulman & Hoskins, 1986). Mutable characteristics serving as attractiveness cues are somewhat controllable by the individual and include posture, body weight, grooming, and facial expression (Cash & Cash, 1982).* The types of adornments consumers use to improve the attractiveness of innate characteristics are likely to differ from those used to change or enhance more volatile characteristics.

Adapting Holman's taxonomy, there appear to be three ways in which adornments may affect attractiveness of physical characteristics.

Remedies are adornments used to remove or significantly alter a mutable attribute that is thought to be unsatisfactory by others or the self. Here, adornments modify characteristics that are relatively con-

*Admittedly, almost any physical attribute is potentially alterable. In some African cultures, people lengthen their necks by wearing an increasing number of metal rings, and in modern society, cosmetic surgery has become commonplace. Eye color is even alterable through the use of tinted contact lenses. Nevertheless, we believe this distinction between relatively innate and mutable attributes to be appropriate for most individuals.

trollable by the individual. Examples include depilatories, appetite suppressants, and hair coloring.

Camouflages are adornments that conceal or downplay innate physical characteristics that the consumer is unable to change. For example, vertical stripes in clothing may make a short person appear taller, and skillful application of cosmetics can even out skin tones or make close-set eyes appear wider. Camouflage may also be used for mutable characteristics when the consumer considers modification too difficult or costly, such as weight loss.

Enhancers are adornments that enhance or draw attention to innate physical characteristics that are viewed positively. Examples include tight clothes that call attention to a masculine physique, makeup that accentuates a person's pleasing eye color, or combs that enhance one's flowing hair. In some non-Western cultures, the perceived beauty of particular bodily features is enhanced through alteration of their shape or by scarring (Brain, 1979).

Aesthetic Functions

Remedies, camouflages, and enhancers work in interaction with the physical characteristics of the user. They often have little or no inherent aesthetic value when considered in isolation. Aside from minor packaging aesthetics, a bottle of hair coloring or a tube of mascara provides little sensory pleasure. They have aesthetic meaning primarily when they are applied to the consumer.

Decorative adornments, on the other hand, influence physical attractiveness via the aesthetics of the products themselves. For example, a piece of jewelry, a colorful vest, or a pleasing perfume may delight the senses of both observers and the user and thus enhance one's physical attractiveness. In more extreme examples, members of certain Japanese and Polynesian subcultures use their bodies essentially as canvases for elaborate, artistic tattoos (Brain, 1979). In these cases, beauty is cultivated to the extent that the adornment's attractive design, color, texture, or smell is transferred to the user (Siry, 1982). Holman (1981) notes that some adornments valued for their aesthetic function also may serve a camouflage function. For example, an artistically designed scarf may be used to hide an unsatisfactory hairstyle. Aesthetically useful adornments also may be used to distract observers from innate features that are difficult to camouflage, such as a large nose.

INFLUENCES ON EXTENT OF ADORNMENT USE

Despite the possible benefits resulting from adornments, individuals differ in their reliance on such goods. Women use them more than men, and even among women there is great diversity in the amount of cos-

metics, jewelry, and fashion clothing worn. This section examines the factors that influence extent of adornment use.

Personality Traits

Because adornments serve to enhance one's appearance, it follows that heavy users of adornments place greater importance on physical appearance than do light users. Certain personality traits may be associated with a greater emphasis on appearance, and thus on adornment use.

People high in public self-consciousness care a great deal about what others think of them. Because appearance is a key element in impression formation, people who pay greater attention to their appearance are more likely to use adornments to enhance it. Studies have demonstrated empirically that public self-consciousness is associated with extent of cosmetic use (Cash & Cash, 1982; Miller & Cox, 1982) and place more emphasis on clothing adornments (Gould & Barak, 1988).

In a study emphasizing self-esteem, Humphrey, Klaasen, and Creekmore (1971) found that among adolescent girls, this trait was positively associated with use of attention-generating clothes, interest in clothes, and willingness to experiment with clothes. Adornments and their camouflage benefits may be used, however, as a means to increase a currently low level of self-esteem. For instance, Wright et al. (1970) reported an increase in self-esteem among females with facial blemishes after usage of cosmetics that help conceal the problem. Newton (1976) found a similar result in the case of clothing as a self-esteem enhancer. This variance in findings suggests that the relationship between self-esteem and adornment use may be curvilinear. People very low in self-esteem may feel that adornments would be useless in enhancing their appearance, whereas those on the high end of the scale may see no need to adorn themselves.

Role Requirements

Several researchers have suggested that the success of social role performance is affected by the products used during that performance (Kerran & Sommers, 1968; Solomon, 1983; Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1983). Products act as symbols to influence the attributions made by others and the self concerning the success of role fulfillment. Thus, adornment use should be high when adornment products are strongly associated with a central role.

Sex roles are central roles to most people in most cultures, and sex-role prescriptions influence extent of adornment use (Solomon, 1983). Because attractiveness is an important element of femininity (Freedman, 1986; Gould & Stern, 1989) adornment use among females is expected to mirror the adoption of traditional sex-role orientations. For

males, the opposite is true. Traditionally, men are supposed to be rugged and not concerned with feminine concerns such as appearance. Thus, men with strong traditional sex-role orientations should be less inclined to use adornments than those who hew less strenuously to tradition.

Relatively little research has addressed adornment usage in relation to sex roles. Cash and his colleagues (Cash & Cash, 1982; Cash, Rissi, & Chapman, 1985) have found mixed results in the case of cosmetic use as a function of sex-role orientation among college women, perhaps because there is little variation in sex-role orientation and in adornment use in this population. Additional study of a wider population of females and among males is needed to clarify these presumed relationships.

Other roles: Adornment use also may be associated with desires to succeed in the performance of other roles (Solomon, 1983; Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1983). Such roles can be either persistent or situational. As an example of a persistent role, some jobs have important requirements for appearance. The career path of a television news anchor depends to a large degree on his or her appearance before the camera, thus leading to a high reliance on adornments. In fact, professional role demands have caused "dressing for success" to become a cliché in modern society (Solomon & Douglas, 1985).

Short-run, situational role demands also may affect adornment use. For example, a woman who typically uses few adornments may be motivated by a special party to significantly increase her usage level. Schenk and Holman (1980) discuss short-term role demands in the context of situational self-image. These authors posit that a consumer has a repertoire of self-images from which to choose. The choice of image is based on role demands and determines which products are used in this situation.

It should be noted that the use of adornments to complete a salient role does not require an audience. Role requirements may be internalized and adornment use may accompany the performance of a role to satisfy the self (Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983). Thus, a person may preen alone in front of a mirror using various adornments in fulfilling internalized standards regarding role performance and attractiveness.

Individuals with a greater sense of independence (lower role commitment) may or may not use fewer adornments, but the adornments they do use would be less oriented toward achieving a group ideal and more oriented toward achieving a personal ideal.

Level of Self-Perceived Attractiveness

A person's self-assessments of attractiveness independent of adornments also may influence the use of such goods. It is possible that consumers who perceive themselves to be inherently unattractive will rely heavily on adornments as compensatory tools. This relationship is suggested by Zaltman and Wallendorf (1983) and by Wicklund and

Gollwitzer (1982). Under this perspective, the use of symbolic products (such as adornments) will be high when three conditions occur: (a) role performance is important and desirable, (b) successful role performance includes the display and use of certain products, and (c) the individual has doubts about his or her ability to successfully occupy the role.

In the context of attractiveness, adornment usage would be highest among persons with strong desires to be attractive coupled with a sense that adornments are part of being attractive and self-doubts concerning current attractiveness. For these people, an important part of self-definition rests on being attractive, and adornments are believed to be helpful in reaching that goal. On the other hand, persons who perceive themselves as inherently attractive are thus expected to have less motivation to use adornments because these products add little to attractiveness at the margin. Support for this model is provided by Cash and Cash (1982) who found negative correlations between body satisfaction and cosmetics use.

Although Zaltman and Wallendorf (1983) and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) suggest that inherently attractive individuals will use fewer adornments, some writers have argued otherwise. Several authors (Brown, Cash, & Noles, 1986; Theberge & Kernaleguen, 1979) posit that cosmetics have an expressive function and thus are more important for those who are attractive. Roock (1985) obtained positive correlations between use of 10 grooming aids and satisfaction with particular body and face parts (body cathexis). He suggests that a high grooming level may be "a refinement of and reward for one's achieved perfection" of the body (p. 239). Indeed, appearance enhancement available through products such as cosmetics and fashion clothing may be more rewarding for persons who would be considered innately attractive. For the unattractive, consumer products may be insufficient to make a noticeable improvement in attractiveness evaluations. Consequently, adornment usage by less attractive persons may go unrewarded and tend to diminish over time. In addition, persons who perceive themselves as unattractive despite adornment efforts may wish to avoid the continued opportunity for self-appraisal that typically follows extensive adornment efforts. For these people, the daily ritual of grooming and dressing may simply be a negative reminder of their perceived imperfections.

In trying to resolve these contradictions, additional empirical investigation seems desirable. Such work might determine if there is a curvilinear relationship between adornment use and innate attractiveness and explore the relationship of instrumentality and adornment use.

Hedonic Motives

Desires to improve one's appearance and thus provide greater self-esteem and superior role performance represent an obvious motivator of

adornment use. It is also likely that levels of adornment use are affected by the extent to which hedonic motives are relevant. In addition to fulfilling goals of improved attractiveness, adornments may be used because of pleasures inherent in their usage (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Wilson, 1985). Hedonic motives for adornment have not been explicitly examined, and the suggestions that follow require empirical verification.

Hedonic motives for adornment use could include a desire for selfish pampering. Devoting time to one's grooming may be viewed as a self-centered respite from job and family demands. For example, shopping for clothes or having a facial allows one to focus on the self rather than on others. Many beauty salons promote their services as a self-indulgence earned as a reward for many hours devoted to family needs.

Adornment use also may be motivated by desires to attract attention. Adornments may be employed to fulfill needs for attention with attractiveness gains serving as a side issue. In fact, adornments chosen to gain attention may sometimes be detrimental to one's attractiveness as judged by most observers. Williamson and Hewitt (1986) found that blatantly alluring attire was effective in drawing attention but was judged as less attractive than were more modest outfits.

Hedonic motives also may include a desire for novelty and to relieve boredom with oneself. Fashion marketers have long recognized this need and provided frequent changes in clothing styles and cosmetic colors (Wilson, 1985). Copywriters for adornment advertisements frequently suggest that their products will provide a "New You." Consumers are expected to differ in the salience of novelty needs, perhaps based on variations in optimal stimulation level (Raju, 1980).

Finally, adornments may be acquired to fulfill collecting or assorting motives. The acquisition and ownership of a desirable set of adornment goods may provide pleasure to the consumer apart from benefits derived from the use of those items. An example is Imelda Marcos and her infamous shoe collection. Similarly, a man may enjoy collecting a variety of neckties, or a woman may assemble a collection of cosmetics. In both cases, many of the adornments may be rarely, if ever, worn. In these instances, the adornments are valuable in and of themselves for what they mean to the individual or what they bring to an existing assortment (Belk, 1982).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The central objective of marketing is consumer satisfaction through product usage. From the preceding review, it can be seen that adornment usage can lead to satisfaction in at least three ways. First, when using adornments a person may feel more attractive and thus experience greater self-esteem or a more positive mood. Such effects have

been found for both clothing (Humphrey, Klaasen, & Creekmore, 1971) and cosmetics (Cash & Cash, 1982; Miller & Cox, 1982; Theberge & Kernaleguen, 1979). Second, when adornments are successful in improving the user's level of attractiveness, user satisfaction is increased because the reactions of others to the self are enhanced. People often feel a momentary lift, for example, when someone compliments an article of clothing, a new hairstyle, or a piece of jewelry. In addition, numerous studies show that more attractive people generally elicit more favorable responses from others (Adams, 1977; Adams & Read, 1983; Goldman & Lewis, 1977), and these responses will enhance satisfaction. Finally, the hedonic uses of adornment such as novelty seeking and collecting can create satisfaction outside the sphere of attractiveness. Thus, effectively marketed adornments can increase consumer satisfaction through several avenues.

There are ways, however, in which adornment marketing may serve to decrease consumer satisfaction. Adornment advertising often features models that approach some societal consensus of perfection. For example, YSL cosmetics, whose target market is affluent older women, uses a 16-year-old model to demonstrate a completely wrinkle-free ideal in its advertisements. Some have argued that repeated exposure to extremely attractive models in advertising and other media influences consumers' perceptions of what constitutes an acceptable physical appearance (Peterson, 1987; Tan, 1979; Wilson, 1985). The standard set by fashion models, rather than being attainable by typical consumers, is unattainable, highly unrealistic, and distant from the average person (Freedman, 1984, 1986; Garner et al., 1980), and comparison with this standard can lead to dissatisfaction. Richins (1991) has demonstrated that exposure to highly attractive models leads to lowered satisfaction with one's own attractiveness among some populations.

Research Directions

Despite the importance of adornments in consumers' lives and to the economy, relatively little is known about either marketer or consumer behavior with regard to adornments, and additional research is needed in both areas.

With respect to the marketing of adornments, it would be useful to examine the extent to which marketers recognize different types of adornments and adornment functions and whether they vary their marketing strategies accordingly. For instance, are the marketing strategies for products that serve parasomatic functions different from strategies used for aesthetic adornments? Further, within the class of parasomatic functions it might be argued that camouflaging products used to hide or alter unattractive traits may require very different promotional messages than do adornments designed to enhance positive features. Messages may differ in the mood of presentation, level of

information delivered, or strength of claims. A useful starting point for such research would be a content analysis of adornment advertisements to see if marketing strategies vary across adornment types and functions.

Looking at the consumer side, a potentially useful research direction would be to further study consumer responses to adornment advertising. Many advertisements for grooming products feature a beautiful woman, often with little verbal material besides the brand name. The cognitive and affective responses to such advertisements have not been studied. Do consumers assume that the model's attractiveness is partially due to his or her use of the product in question (Downs & Harrison, 1985) and thus react to the advertisement through some cognitive process, perhaps believing that product use will move the consumer to be more like the model? Or is the process primarily an affective one in which the beauty of the model is generalized to the product? Such research would need to consider the possibility that adornment functions and user motives interact in some way to influence ad processing.

In addition, research could determine whether the lowered satisfaction with self that some consumers feel when viewing attractive models generalizes to the brand displayed. Such research could usefully examine whether personal characteristics such as age, gender, and self-esteem moderate the affective reactions to these ads.

With respect to adornment use, studies of adornment strategies would improve understanding of the role adornments play in consumers' lives. Research can determine how consumers choose which adornments to use and which features to address with their adornments. For instance, do adornment users concentrate first on dealing with their worst features or their best features? Are they more concerned with managing mutable features or do they spend more adornment effort on the innate ones? Do some consumers give up on their appearance because of features they are unable or unwilling to change (e.g., "I'm so fat there's no use in trying . . .")? Changes in adornment use over the life span is also worthy of study. Research to address these issues can add significantly to our understanding of the relationships between consumption and the self.

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