Vanity and Consumption: How Physical Vanity Influences the Consumer Behavior

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This research is an attempt to get a qualitative understanding of what makes women want to change their looks by consuming beauty products and services. It is the objective of this work to understand how the physical female vanity influences the consumption of beauty products and services. Using a qualitative methodology based on interviews, consumption motivations and strategies employed by women in the search for modifying and enhancing physical appearance were revealed. In terms of consumption, so far, the physical vanity turned up to be an ambiguous concept, originating a continuum ranging from a positive construct, balanced vanity, to a negative construct, extreme vanity.

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The computer is usually viewed as a tool for connecting the Internet, thanks to which they can study, have fun, and communicate. In those homes in which there are computers without Internet access, this single one has precise applications related to school and work activities. However, in those homes where there is a computer and come from not having Internet access to have it, an increase in the use frequency is observed, emphasizing that some of the members of the even single home show interest and use the computer after the acquisition of the service.

Among those that do not have home Internet access, getting online at an Internet-café is the usual thing, or even at friends’ homes. Then, an Internet-café is perceived like a social meeting point, where groups of children that participate in online games, young that are going to chat with friends who live in other places and adult people in search of useful information and news converge. Even though an Internet-café is a shared space, social or individual micro-nucleus are created.

The closest social network—conformed by relatives, friends, and workmates—propitiate the initial knowledge of Internet. People who work at Internet cafés (called cyber in Venezuela) play a very important role in the initial learning, as advanced.

References
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The vanity concept has been widely discussed by men since ancient times, present from the Narciss myth to the Snow White fairy tale, even though it has been almost entirely despised by the academy. Vanity has been generally seen as an exaggerated sense of self esteem, most of times related to the ostentation of physical beauty or an excessive pride concerning achievements. In the context of contemporary society, amused by the spectacular, the aesthetics, and the seduction, the logic of fashion is becoming the dominant way of life (Lipovetsky 2004). The consumption of products and services motivated by symbolic value transferences is more common then ever before, what is clearly seen by the nonstop growing of the beauty market and its plastic surgeries, cosmetics, adornments, and others. This context only reinforces the importance of the vanity concept, defined in the consumer research literature as a concern for physical appearance, a positive (and perhaps inflated) view of physical appearance, a concern for achievement and, a positive (perhaps inflated) view of achievement (Netemeyer, Burton, and Lichtenstein 1995). It is remarkable that the only three papers published in main consumer behavior journals about the vanity concept limited its scopes to the development and test of a valid scale to measure the presence of vanity on individuals (Durvasula, Lyonsky, and Watson 2001; Netemeyer, Burton, and Lichtenstein 1995; Wang and Waller 2006). We believe that due to the little scientific knowledge produced about the subject, especially when compared to its present social and commercial importance, a more careful study of the vanity in the market context is urgent and necessary. The focus chosen for this investigation is extreme, best type of research context for a considerable new academic topic: the study of the relations between the physical female vanity and consumption. So it is the objective of the current research to understand how the physical female vanity influences the consumption of beauty products and services, or more precisely, how women demonstrate and reinforce their vanity and their sense of self through consumption strategies (Askegaard 2002). The goal established takes the research toward an interpretative paradigm, one that tries to comprehend behaviors from a referential frame and a system of ideas, traditionally identified with relativistic methodologies (Calder and Tybout 1987). Following this orientation, a qualitative design able to understand the thoughts, feelings and behaviors from a phenomenological standpoint, and also capture the social and cultural context of the phenomenon under study, is required (Schouten 1991). The hermeneutical approach was the elected, based on the understanding that all consciousness is essentially linguistic (Arnould and Fischer 1994), being the human speech a reflection of the lived cultural experiences adapted to the unique context of one’s particular life (Thompson, Polio, and Locander 1994). So the research design proposed for the data collection is the long interview (Mc Cracken 1988), a qualitative interview that brings together a non directive perspective, identified with the phenomenology, and a cultural topic guide, useful for the hermeneutical analysis. This topic guide was taken from the reading of cultural texts, that is, advertisements of beauty products and services in women magazine. The sample consisted of eight young women ranging from 21 to 28 years old, all with similar economical and cultural backgrounds, in order to facilitate the interpretation of this relatively new consumer research phenomenon. The results point to a quite interesting direction, linking physical vanity and consumption to a social and cultural dimension. To begin explaining what that means we must have a look at Vacker and Key (1993) theory of the beauty in the market, in which beauty definition depends on a subject, an object, and someone to judge it. In other words, the definition of what is beautiful depends, at least to some degree, on a social dimension. This socially perceived beauty have personal consequences, demonstrated by the social psychology research tradition called psychology of beauty. Many studies showed that individuals considered prettier tend to be seen as more successful and better people than less attractive ones (Domzal and Kernan 1993).