

Metrosexual Men in Advertisements: a Contrastive Study

ผู้ชายแบบเมโทรเซ็กชวลในงานโฆษณา: การศึกษาความแตกต่าง

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore and analyze the identity of metrosexual men whose certain characteristics are different from normative males', using three categories of advertisements: male skin-care products, men's sportswear and credit cards. Analysis will rely on three main metrosexual concepts: perfect beauty, unique appearance through clothing and financial privilege, as defined by Mark Simpson in his innovative article, "Meet the Metrosexual", published on-line in 2002. The analysis of the data is 2 folds: one concerning the linguistic mechanism and another the paralinguistic device, particularly images or pictures presented in adverts. This contrastive study will provide understanding and insight not only on the influence of advertising but also on the new gender of modern men who are different from the normative ones.

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มุ่งวิเคราะห์อัตลักษณ์ของผู้ชายแบบเมโทรเซ็กชวลที่มีคุณลักษณะบางประการแตกต่างไปจากผู้ชายทั่วไป ด้วยการศึกษากา โฆษณา ๓ ประเภท ได้แก่ เครื่องสำอาง , เครื่องแต่งกาย และบัตรเครดิต โดยอาศัยกระบวนการหลัก ๓ ประการเกี่ยวกับลักษณะสำคัญของผู้ชายแบบเมโทรเซ็กชวลในบทความเรื่อง Meet the Metrosexual ของ มาร์ค ซิมป์สัน นั่นคือ คุณลักษณะด้านความงามและการดูแลตนเอง ด้านเครื่องแต่งกาย และด้านการจับจ่ายใช้สอย ตัวอย่างโฆษณาทั้งหมดมาจากเว็บไซต์ของเจ้าของผลิตภัณฑ์โดยตรง วิธีการวิเคราะห์โฆษณาที่ได้มานั้นแบ่งเป็น ๒ ประเด็น ได้แก่ ประเด็นที่เกี่ยวกับวัจนภาษาและอวัจนภาษา ในที่นี้คือ ภาษารูปภาพ ผลจากการ ศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบดังกล่าว จะทำให้เกิดความเข้าใจมากขึ้นเกี่ยวกับอิทธิพล ของสื่อโฆษณาและตัวตนของผู้ชายยุคใหม่ที่มีความแตกต่างจากผู้ชายทั่วไป

Key Words : Metrosexual men, Advertising language, Language and identity

คำสำคัญ : ผู้ชายแบบเมโทรเซ็กชวล ภาษาโฆษณา ภาษาและอัตลักษณ์

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Introduction

Metrosexuality: the Definition

Metrosexual is a neologism generally applied to heterosexual men who possess a strong concern for their appearance, and display many of the lifestyle tendencies of stereotypical gay men. A portmanteau derived from the words, “metro (in ‘metropolitan’)” and “sexual”, the term first appeared in the on-line article, “Meet the Metrosexual,” by Mark Simpson in 2002. Since then, the image of taciturn, stoic and self-denying men has been challenged by a new type of men who enjoy “preening, ... perming, plucking and powdering ... to perfection (Liu, n.d.)” But enormous popularity grows when David Beckham, the globally famous British footballer and the so-called metrosexual icon, posts on the cover of fashion magazines.

Despite many famous metrosexual models, most of whom are Hollywood actors, namely Brad Pitt, Dominic Monaghan from the Lord of the Ring trilogy and the *bon vivant* George Clooney, David Beckham seems to be the most frequently referred to as a metrosexual icon. The reason for this is 3 folds. First and foremost, Beckham’s harmonious *alter ego* as a man having both the skill of playing football, which is the best-loved sport for males, and as a man appearing fashionable and handsomely dressed on the cover of the magazine is flawlessly blended. Secondly, his presentation of narcissism is perfectly manifested because he is a presenter of male cosmetic products, clothes and even his own Beckham perfume. Finally, thanks to his proficient skill on football playing, his financial status is extremely firm, thus enabling him to spend as much as he wants.

In short, according to David Beckham’s image on metrosexuality and the claim made by Simpson (2002) which was later reiterated by Liu (n.d.) and O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005), metrosexual men are those who possess three main physical characteristics. The first one lies in unique appearance through clothing. Secondly, the metrosexual are not at all bothered by spending money for anything they want. Finally and most importantly, their extreme concern over appearance often makes them narcissistic. Consequently, they attempt to make themselves both different from and attractive to others by loving what they have and how they look, on the one hand, and yearning for becoming a person whom fashion and lifestyle adverts and magazines idealize, on the other.

Language and Paralanguage in Advertising

With regards to the linguistic device used in advertisements, conversationalization (Fairclough, 1995) is usually employed to create an effectively appealing piece of advertising discourse. Conversationalization can be defined as the combination of public and private talk and the use of sensationalist and adversarial language (Fairclough, 1995 and Litosseliti, 2006). It can be subtle, presenting a topic like sciences in another style using different linguistic devices with colloquial and idiomatic lexical choices. Otherwise, conversationalization can appear more pronounced, capturing attention of readers with “melodramatic vocabulary, sensational disclosures as headlines, metaphors, direct questions, personal narratives and dramatic stories (Litosseliti, 2006)”.

Not only is such linguistic device as conversationalization used in advertisements but also paralinguistic mechanisms are employed by

advertisers. Paralanguage, non-verbal elements of communication used to modified meaning and convey emotion (“Paralanguage”, n.d., Bussmann, 1996 and Crystal, 2003). In writing and in printed adverts, selection of typeface and letter sizes is paralinguistic in general (Cook, 1992).

Nevertheless, graphology is not only paralanguage in adverts. According to Goddard (1998) and Cook (1992), body posture, eye contact and facial expression are paralinguistic as well. Hence, such aspects of communication are expressed through the use of illustrations and images in advertising. Because one picture means a thousand words, the visual status of the illustrations in advertisements can even more effectively enhance the persuasive procedure (Smith, 1996). As stated by Goddard, image representation in advertising is not accidental, but is used to either feature people in relation to saying something *about* them or to present them as a symbol since, once people are pictured, they will be considered as the representative of the world advertised (Goddard, 1998).

Some good examples of the use of language and paralanguage in advertisements are found in Vestergard’s and Schroder’s (1985), Cook’s (1992), Litosseliti’s (2006), Goddard’s (1998) and O’Shaughnessy’s and Stadler’s (2005).

The topics of metrosexual men and their presentation in adverts have been extensively studied and analyzed in various researches, namely O’Shaughnessy’s and Stadler’s and Liu’s. Nevertheless, to date, there has not been much work on the issue. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate and answer the question on *how is metrosexuality emerged out of masculinity via language and paralanguage in advertising*, employing

some English advertisements for men as a principal tool of study. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the three main characteristics of the metrosexual as mentioned and defined by Liu and Simpson above because it attempts to find out the difference between this kind of modern male as opposed to the normative one we are familiar with.

Materials and methods

This section will incorporate the concept stated earlier to both analyze and answer the research question: *how does the advertisement create metrosexuality out of masculinity via its language and paralanguage?*

The data collected as case examples here are obtained in accordance with the three principal metrosexual concepts proposed by Simpson (2002). The first metrosexual concept: desire for perfect beauty, is explored through men advertising skin-care products. The second one: unique self-manifestation through clothing, is analyzed via the advertisement of men’s sportswear. Finally, the third: possession of financial privilege, is exemplified in men advertising a credit card. There are 6 advertisements to be discussed here in total, 2 of which will be analyzed comparatively under the same topic.

Concerning the source of the data to be analyzed, all of them are selected from the on-line website of the product manufacturer because the Internet is now a resource that can provide updated information rather quickly. However, although the data comes from the publicly accessible site which is convenient for either researchers or general visitors, the names of the product and the company are quoted herewith.

In terms of the research methodology, this paper uses the contrastive analysis as suggested by Meyerhoff (2006) to find the differences between metrosexuality and masculinity in adverts. How to successfully analyze such differences relies mainly on the language and paralinguistic found in the advertisements selected as case examples here. Generalization from the analysis will be talked about in another section so that more understanding on the difference between metrosexual and normative males will be gained.

Metrosexual and Normative Males Advertising Skin-Care Products

As asserted by Cook (1992), and O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005), use of cosmetics and skin-care products is a feminine activity and a *faux pas* for real men. So, in beauty adverts, men were formerly ignored. Besides, prejudice against homosexuality and homophobia belief lead male cosmetics to be described euphemistically and with a false functionalism as 'after-shave' and 'anti-perspirant' (Cook, 1992).

The advertising poster of L'Oreal Men Expert Anti-Fatigue Daily Moisturizing Lotion is a good example that reflects the fact that normative men are less narcissistic than metrosexual ones in terms of facial appearance. In terms of linguistic mechanisms used here, the conversationalization includes a question, *He thinks he looks damn good?* In the zoomed out picture, and a statement, *You think he looks damn tired.* Used with the pictures of a man's face, this linguistic mechanism, particularly the first interrogative, confirms the image of typical men who, as stated above, does not care much for their facial beauty. And, realizing that the use of skin-care

products is somewhat feminine, this advert, in elaborating its conversationalization, maintains masculinity through the use of the swear word, *damn*, which is often said among men. Also, as claimed by Kirkham and Weller (2003) that, as men are not used to cosmetics, the product will be instead targeted for women who buy it for their male partner (269). Besides, as asserted by Vestergard (1985), females are considered beauty lovers whose status is inferior, dependent, domestic and normally ready to serve men. Consequently, the directive speech act, *Help him!*, and the second person pronoun, *you*, are used throughout in the text to call for action of the female, especially those who have a boyfriend or a husband, to buy this product. In so doing, the skin-care advertisement apparently protects the traditional male image against the use of cosmetics even though, ironically, the product is aimed for them. Additionally, the claim, *Use after shaving, to help sooth razor burn*, in the last line, not only indicates that this product is aimed for men, but also emphasizes both the assertion of O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) that men and shaving are indispensable, and the statement made by Cook (1992) as mentioned earlier that male skin-care products are often described euphemistically and with a false functionalism as 'after-shave' and 'anti-perspirant'. Moreover, the word, *burn*, is used synaesthetically (Cook, 1992) here because it implies physical danger that males often experience in terms of another explicit or typical meaning – cuts caused in shaving.

Moreover, to emphasize this masculine concept, the paralinguistic is also used with the two images of a man's face – one zoomed out and another zoomed in. The zoomed out picture has the overall face of the male presenter whereas the zoomed in one

gives detailed information on a part of his face. Both images imply different ideas about how normative males view their facial beauty. The zoomed out picture symbolizes how typical men think about themselves while the zoomed in picture one reflects what others, especially their girlfriends, think about how he looks. In this regard, it may be said that a normative man, like the zoomed out image, will appear as naturally as he is regardless of other people's opinion and what actually occurs to him: facial fatigue, natural aging or wrinkles, as suggested by the zoomed in image.



Advertisement for L'Oréal Men Expert

The on-line advertisement of Male Species, a dealer of male cosmetics and skin-care products, is, on the contrary, aimed at metrosexual men since it clearly promotes the image of a modern man who is very aware of his physical beauty to gain attention from others.

There are some interesting linguistic presentations that construct metrosexuality in this advert. For instance, the range of various skin-care products available on the top and the left menu bars of this website: *skin care, cosmetics, no shine, no hair*, imply how painstakingly narcissistic it is to become metrosexual. Also, the linguistic device – the rhyme –

used in the slogan, *skin that wins!*, emphasizes that, to become a perfect metrosexual man, he needs to appear both well-dressed and well-groomed, because, as said in the first conversationalization passage, *[h]ow you look is important in defining who you are*. In addition, the conversationalization presented later in the advert sounds a bit subtle because it combines a scientific style with beautiful and attention-grabbing linguistic devices. For example, the personified image of skin as a human being who lives, dies and needs protection e.g. *skin's vitality, skin health* or *rejuvenate skin*, is presented along with scientific information, such as how skin can be damaged, how the damaged skin looks like and how to preserve good skin. Moreover, unlike the advertisement of L'Oréal, Male Species products directly aim at and appeal to the main target group. Although this advertisement uses the same pronoun, *you*, as does the L'Oréal Men Expert advertisement above, the implication of *you* here is different. In L'Oréal advertisement above, *you* is aimed at female buyers to purchase the product but not use it whereas *you* in Male Species' advertisement directly calls for men, particularly the metrosexual, to immediately own the product and use it by themselves. In terms of paralanguage found from this advert, what is shown in the pictures create the typical metrosexual men as opposed to the normative ones. The image of a man in L'Oréal Men Expert advert looks more manly, more natural and more rugged than the presenters in Male Species. For instance, the one in the upper right picture, in particular, appears facially well-tended, well-shaved, well-trimmed and with make-up. As a result, not only does this image persuade the metrosexual buyer to own the product advertised but it also promotes metrosexual narcissism.



Advertisement for Male Species

Metrosexual and Normative Males Advertising Clothes

The advertisement of AussieBum Legend below clearly shows the image of masculinity which is strong, tough, aggressive and sportive. The following pictures show a strong well-built man, wearing this AussieBum product, engage in a fierce outdoor game with his peer. This emphasizes typical and conventional males whose “body is disciplined and controlled (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005).” According to O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005), adverts of men’s wear usually present an image of good physique males exposed to outdoor activities because this is the way to promote male body attractiveness which is connected with developed masculinity (351). In response to this claim, the AussieBum advertisement presents men with good physique engaging in a rough game on the beach. And, as claimed by Vestergard (1985), clothes for men are merely meant to enhance the natural body features, not to transform them (75). Thus, in an attempt to promote masculinity, the AussieBum advert responds to such claim by depicting the male presenter who represents the cloth, while, at the same time, shows his real natural body as well.

To describe the product advertised, the conversationalization of AussieBum advert is

straightforward as it directly talks about how and why the product is designed. Regarding the linguistic technique used in this conversationalization, the product title, *Legend*, itself is used supernymically because it refers to the product and a legend that share the same immediate quality of being classic and memorable (Cook, 1992). Also, the parallelism (Vestergard, 1985) is used in the sentence, *Bold is back*, of which the [b] sound is alliterated. The word, *bold*, not only signifies the design of the quality but also implies the masculine characteristic of being physically strong. Additionally, usual customers of AussieBum will know that its slogan is so catching that it effectively draws attention and calls for action of prospective buyers. The slogan, *If you doubt yourself, wear something else* (“AussieBum”, n.d.), which integrates rhyming and direct speech act (Vestergard, 1985) not only well captures the buyer attention but also implies the characteristic of normative males who are undoubtedly firm in their sexual identity as reflected in what they are wearing.



Advertisement for AussieBum, of which the conversationalization below the image is read,

“The Legend continues with the 80’s retro-inspired cut and design. Bold is back and so is wearing your swimwear under your shorts. A true classic - be seen, be remembered as a Legend. These surf shorts with icy blue trim are made or the sand or surf.”

Metrosexual men, not the normative ones, are depicted in the Speedo swimwear advert below. In terms of paralanguage indicating metrosexuality, it reflects what Simpson mentioned about one of the main characteristics of metrosexual men: narcissism (2002). Unlike the AussieBum advert, the Speedo one has all presenters – well-built and good physique males in Speedo swimwears – not engage in any sport competition but only pose by a pool. This responds to the metrosexual appearance in which those men need to look ‘just gay enough’ to attract attention of both men and women (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005). Moreover, to differentiate the normative males from the metrosexual, this advert promotes the idea of homoeroticism as proposed by O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005). In the picture, one of the male models is having eye contact with another instead of actively taking part in a game like the one in the earlier AussieBum advert. His act challenges the masculine identity in which violence and pain are preferred as it is superseded by the pleasure in gazing at the attractive same-sex.

There are also some linguistic devices incorporated in the conversationalization of Speedo’s advert that define metrosexual favor of appearance. The words, “prints” and “splices”, not only indicate the beautiful and intricate design of the product advertised, but also respond to the metrosexual preference of being ‘just gay enough’ to attract attention of both men and women (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005). Those words, when incorporated with the word, “solids”, implies the masculine gender that subtly coexists with the metrosexual characteristic.



Advertisement for Speedo Swimwear

Metrosexual and Normative Men

Advertising Credit Cards

Not only do normative and metrosexual men differ in terms of both facial and apparel attentions but they can also be distinguished with regard to how they carry out their financial management. From the advertisement of Diners Club below, the image of masculinity is illustrated through the systematic management of money spent. The one-sentence conversationalization as heading: *Easy to use, easy to manage*, of which the parallelism (Vestergard, 1985) alliterating the vowel sound [i] and the consonant sound [z] is the word *easy* is employed, implies how males view financial matters as things that must be managed without any problem or difficulty. That financial matters can be handled as suggested by the slogan in the last line, *Where purchasing power meets spend control*, the words, *power* and *control*, reflect that men are those who not only take control to others (O’Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005) but can manipulate his their own money as well.

In terms of paralanguage that defines masculinity in this advertisement, the male presenter in this advert has professional clothes with a posture indicating deep thought. According to O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005), such clothes and posture reflect

how careful normative men are when it comes to financial matters.



Advertisement for Diners Club

In another advert of the same company below, the different type of men: the metrosexual, is strongly defined. In terms of linguistic devices used in this advertisement, the conversationalization that comes in the form of three bullet points focuses mainly on the benefit and the advantage the buyer will gain upon using this card. Moreover, the slogan, *Where Cardmembers get their just rewards*, is not only the hyperbole that promise free gifts for customers (Vestergard, 1985) but also highlights to a financial persona of the metrosexual, the people who like spending money for things they want.

Concerning the paralanguage, the facial expression of the male presenter and how he dresses, in this advert, are different from the earlier one. This presenter looks less businesslike but well dressed and more relaxed than the above presenter. Judged by how the presenter dresses and how he looks in the picture, the implication about financial awareness of metrosexual men can be differentiated. While the normative male views that spending should be managed and systematized, the metrosexual views that spending is enjoyable and relaxing.



Advertisement for Diners Club

Results and Discussion

From the analysis of the 6 adverts above, there are 3 issues of concern worth taking about in relation to advertisements and the metrosexual.

First and foremost, the influence of advertisements in constructing the metrosexual, a new gender of men, is an issue that should be discussed from the above analysis. Vestergard and Schroder (1985), Litosseliti (2006) and O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) mutually claim that normative males share some characteristics in common: aggression, power dominance and independence. These characteristics are well-known among men themselves and socially accepted. Advertisements targeting normative men will mirror those characteristics with 'honesty', 'naturalness' and 'openness' (Stevenson, Jackson and Brooks, 2003) as a result. However, to present the metrosexual characteristics in adverts is more complicated because, as claimed by O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) and even by Simpson (2002), who introduces this term himself, metrosexual men may look like gay men, but they are not really gays. They are urban, open-minded and quite narcissistic males who like fashion and care for their appearance, which is partly claimed to belong to the typical gay personality. Unlike the above-

mentioned characteristics commonly shared by normative men, the metrosexual characters are embraced only by a specific group of people although the concept of metrosexual is globalized. Therefore, products that aim for metrosexual males need to focus on those characteristics while maintaining some typical traits for heterosexual men at the same time. This results in advertisements targeting the metrosexual which look and sound subtle, complex and sometimes ambiguous. For instance, the advertisement for L'Oreal Men Expert, which apparently aims for normative men, consists of direct and straight-to-the-point presentation either linguistically or paralinguistically, whereas the one for Male Species and other advertisements for the metrosexual analyzed in this paper contains both linguistic and paralinguistic presentations that are indirect and sophisticated. This is because the advertisement for metrosexual males has to manifest unique characteristics of the metrosexual on the one hand and maintain typical personality of normative men at the similar time on the other.

The concept of practice (Eckert and MacConnell-Ginet, 1992) and the identity commodification for products advertised (Johnstone, 1999) are another issue for discussion from the above analysis on metrosexuality and adverts. The concept of practice, as derived from the community of practice, stipulates that a group of speakers who have direct personal contact and shared repertoire work together towards some mutual goals. Regarding the construction of metrosexuality in adverts, the advertiser may probably view metrosexual men as one target group different from normative males following the claim by Simpson (2002). The adverts for L'Oreal Men Expert and Male Species, for instance, imply that

masculinity is valued by action or what they do (Vestergard and Schroder, 1985) whereas metrosexuality is preferred by appearance or how they look (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler, 2005). Presentation of the male presenters in these two adverts is different as a result, particularly in terms of facial look and the description of the products that attempts to promote and maintain the unique feature of masculinity and metrosexuality. And, similar to the advertisement of a Detroit truck of which an identity of typical Texan people is employed (Johnstone, 1999), the identity of metrosexual men who appear facially unblemished and clean-shaven as opposed to normative males who look rough and unshaven is commodified through the products advertised as well.

Last but not least, the use of the audience design technique in advertising is also the issue that is worth mentioning here. Proposed by Allen Bell (1984), the general idea of audience design is that speakers should be concerned over whom they are addressing or who might be listening to or overhearing them so that their speech will be adjusted accordingly. From the adverts analyzed here, it is found that the different linguistic and paralinguistic devices are used exclusively to construct two kinds of men: the normative and the metrosexual, and serve the main target of the product advertised. So, following the audience design technique, the way advertisements for metrosexual men are created is different from the ones for normative males not only because the metrosexual concepts of Mark Simpson are followed but also because the advertiser has to realize how to properly respond to the need of each group of prospective buyers. A clear example for this is the credit card adverts for the Diners Club which are made in a different style to suit well with lifestyle, preference

and identity of the target group. For the metrosexual, “being a little swish is, in fact, a great way to stand apart from the rutting brown herd (Liu, n.d.)”, this kind of characteristic needs to be highlighted and emphasized in the advertisement. Additionally, despite the same product, the sportswear of AussieBum and Speedo are presented in different ways to serve different target groups: the normative and the metrosexual males. Hence, although belonging to the same company or being the same type of product, the advert does not necessarily present its product in the similar way if the target group is different.

Conclusion

The issue of how advertisements construct metrosexual men in a way different from normative males via the use of language and paralanguage is one of the very interesting topics under the study of sociolinguistics *vis-à-vis* gender construction. As the emergence of metrosexual males is increasingly challenging the long-cherished identity of normative males, further research can be done on the issue with more detailed analysis and more data. Recommendations for further research on this topic may concern socio-cultural implication towards metrosexual men shown in adverts, or how advertisements of other languages in eastern countries, such as Thai or Chinese, view or consider the new kind of modern men via language and paralanguage as compared and contrasted to English advertising since the metrosexual concept is now globally recognized and locally vernacularized in many countries. In doing so, we may gain more insight and understanding of not only metrosexual men but also metrosexual trend in this ever-changing world.

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