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Postmodernist Identity Construction and Consumption

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Abstract: With the transition from modernism to postmodernism, identity as a concept has started to become redefined in sociology literature. The aim of this study is to show that postmodernism and symbolic interactionism are fused together to determine both the scene as well as an actor's identity. In that way, the interaction of a social structure with a culture won't be completely ignored, and, with the opinion that the categorized roles can skillfully be shaped and diversified by actors, they are then able to move away from a pure determinism. However, individuals pay more attention to their appearance more than who they are in order to be accepted by each group. In this manner, a metaphysical shell game begins. In the following study, the "Social Appearance Anxiety" is used as an indicator of this game.

This study was based on the analysis of the data collected through a questionnaire given to 181 students studying at Hitit University. The INDCOL [Singelis et al., 1995] was used to determine the cultural values of students in four dimensions; namely, vertical individualism-collectivism, and, horizontal individualism-collectivism. To measure the "Social Appearance Anxiety", the validity of the Turkish version of the scale developed by Hart et al. in 2008 [Doğan, 2010] was used. The findings show that individuals having greater vertical individualistic value are more malleable to have social appearance anxiety. The findings also indicate that individuals having more collectivist value are not affected by this kind of anxiety. Also, the new generation of advertisements especially emphasizes the importance of appearance. Due to this trend, a person's Social Appearance Anxiety can result in excessive consumption for the more individualistic individual.

Keywords: Post Modernism, Identity, Cultural Values, Social Appearance Anxiety, Consumption.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, in the social sciences, the ideas of identity and character continue to be located at the center of the debate. This emphasis on self-concept has led to the emergence of interdisciplinary science as an adopted eclectic method and postmodern trend. These new sciences have not been affected by symbolic interactionism, which is the dominant theory found in sociology dealing with identity. According to Lemert, symbolic interactionism has found an irrelevant place to postmodernism, as pragmatism. The reasons for this can be searched on the symbolic interactionism approach to pragmatism, while postmodernism stays away from pragmatism. However, due to the structural loyalty of symbolic interactionism to the real world, it seems to be a relative of postmodern theory (Callero, 2003). Symbolic interactionists maintain that social order occurs as a result of meaning being attributed to objects, events, and actions. Therefore, in the study, the symbolic interactionism approach has been used to understand individual consumption orientation. The individualistic individual of today loads a lot of meaning into the clothes they wear and the products they use and the belief that their appearance provides them with more power than who they actually are. This may lead to an excessive social appearance anxiety. To manage this process, they can tend to indulge in over-consumption. And this trend provides advertisers with new tools.

The main effort of this study makes clear the degree to which the postmodern consumer, taking an individualistic value in the center, is affected by the external reference locus and this orientation can lead any person to have a social appearance anxiety.

In the marketing field, concrete examples of this can be seen clearly in the new generation of advertisements. For example, a man using a roll-on deodorant belonging to an X mark can increase his attractiveness in the eyes of women, while a woman using toothpaste belonging to Y mark can become the focus of attention in a party. In this regard, brands present their products as a magical power making people more attractive and heroic.

2. Research Methodology

This study was based on the analysis of the data collected through a questionnaire given to 181 students studying at Hitit University. The INDCOL measure of individualism and collectivism [Singelis et al., 1995] was used to measure cultural values in four dimensions; namely, vertical individualism and collectivism, and horizontal individualism and collectivism. This measure is used to define the independent variables describing cultural values as four concepts. The Social Appearance Anxiety was measured by using the Turkish version of Hart's (et al.) scale (2008) that has been validated by [Doğan 2010]. The main hypothesis examined in the study is that there is a significant relationship between "Social Appearance Anxiety" and the dominant concern of individualism which emerged with post modernism.

3. The Analysis

First, the descriptive statistics of the cultural values and the Social Appearance Anxiety were given for the sample. Then, to measure the scales' reliability, they were evaluated using Cronbach alpha coefficients. This co-efficient is usually used in social sciences and in literature, with 0.70 and above being acceptable. For the sample which was studied, the

value for both of the scales was about 0.90. Finally, both regression and correlation analysis were used to examine the effects of cultural values on social appearance anxiety.

4. Results

The results of the analysis are supported by literature. The relationship between the collectivist dimension and the social appearance anxiety is negative. In other words, the social appearance anxiety decreases for individuals with a more collectivist value. The findings also show that individuals with a greater vertical individualistic value are more malleable to have social appearance anxiety. Also, horizontal individualism, not including status difference and competition, has a negative relation with social appearance anxiety too. However, there is a positive relation between vertical individualism emphasizing competition and social appearance anxiety.

Table 1: Correlation Results

		social appearance anxiety	Horizontal Collectivism	Dikey Toplulukçuluk
social appearance anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-,213**	-,164*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,004	,027
	N	181	181	181
Horizontal Collectivism	Pearson Correlation	-,213**	1	,691**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004		,000
	N	181	181	181
Vertical Collectivism	Pearson Correlation	-,164*	,691**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,027	,000	
	N	181	181	181
Horizontal Individualism	Pearson Correlation	-,280**	,622**	,664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,000
	N	181	181	181
Vertical Individualism	Pearson Correlation	,632**	,097	,172*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,195	,021
	N	181	181	181

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors' Research

In a nutshell, in the regression analysis, it is found that the social appearance anxiety is significantly influenced positively by vertical individualism. Therefore, individuals tend to have more anxiety when they are more vertically individualistic.

Table 2: ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40,638	1	40,638	143,969	,000 ^a
	Residual	50,527	179	,282		

Total	91,165	180			
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a. Predictors: (Constant), dikeyBireycilik

b. Dependent Variable: sosyalGörünüşKaygısı

Conclusion

In our world, which is changing and developing faster every day, culture has a tendency to lean towards polymorphism rather than simplicity. In the process of modernization, this can be seen to have universal values with different local forces or cultural patterns coming together. This situation may cause an individual to reach a synthesis rather than choosing one for themselves. The emergence of different and hybrid cultures in the same context can be an indicator of that. On one hand, symbolic interactionism has evolved as approaching an interpretation and that enabled it to find its place in a postmodern world. Therefore, culture can be used as a medium to reach the meaning of our world. On the other hand, symbolic interactionism is not denying the collective identity, in the micro-level, which can suppress the diversity concerns of postmodernism. In the study, the use of two approaches combined in the same body can be more descriptive to help explain identity. The purpose of this study, in the modern world, shows that common features and certain variables shared by individuals will shed light on both business and marketing policies. Indeed, the emergence of solipsism with postmodernism manifests that appearance is power. Using this motivation, we can see that individuals tend to indulge in over- consumption.

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