

Abstract

Personal grooming has become an increasing social phenomenon in both global and local contexts and status consumption is one of the popular forms that explain how people consume. The researchers observed a relationship between the status and grooming among the youth segment of 18-30 years in a pilot study and found that youth are engaging in grooming mainly to get highlighted among the peers, get acceptance in the social groups and to project their identity in the society to obtain status.

Although status consumption is a key area of this study, it has not been discussed in the domain of grooming in previous studies; therefore this study is aimed at identifying whether people consume status through the groomed body and if so, how do they engage in such behaviour.

In exploring this phenomenon, researchers divided the study into three main objectives. First, to examine the behaviour of youth in using grooming products to develop their groomed bodies, and second, to explore the role of the groomed body in projecting the desired social status. From the findings of the pilot study, the researchers identified noticeable differences among social classes and the genders in terms of their grooming behaviour, thus the third objective was to identify the differences in projecting the groomed body across different social strata; upper class (SEC A) and lower class (SEC C) and also among males and females.

The researchers followed a social constructivist qualitative research approach utilizing a mix of data collection methods, including focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations at grooming consumption sites. Sri Lankan youth between age 18-30 years, living in both urban and semi-urban areas of Colombo, who were grooming conscious, were selected as the sample for the study. Based on these criteria, the researchers conducted two focus group discussions, twenty depth interviews and two beauty expert interviews with observations in salons within the period of one month. The researchers used the thematic analysis approach to conduct the analysis of the study.

The study revealed that Sri Lankan youth uses the groomed body as an object to project their social status; however, the way the groomed body is used for this purpose is different among the upper class and the lower class. The upper class uses the groomed body as a symbolic consumption site to express their uniqueness and exclusivity by possessing the subtle aspects of perfect grooming while the lower class also attempts to gain social acceptance through their groomed body by following the prevailing trend. This process helps them to be part of the common trend and to survive in the grooming conscious society. In this matter, the lower class continuously engages in emulating the upper class for social adaptation while the upper class constantly differentiates themselves by forming social demarcations and abandoning the aspects of the groomed body that were emulated by the lower class. The lower class will not find easy to emulate the upper class because of the consumption knowledge related to the upper class status connotations of the groomed body which the lower class does not possess. Notably, gender differences were not identified in the seeking of status through the groomed body, although there were differences in grooming practices.

The differences noted among the classes in terms of using the groomed body to acquire social status, and the gender based differences identified in the grooming behaviour are valuable implications to marketers in considering status and gender as a vital dimension when designing customized strategies to serve different social classes and genders in their target group of the grooming market.