

Title: Commodity Fetishism and the Meat Market: A Radical Reading on the Gay Tourist
Subject

Author:

Can-Seng Ooi
University of Tasmania, Australia

Abstract:

This presentation intends to situate identity politics in tourism practice and research. As part of the current state of understanding consumer markets, the tourism industry has similarly segmented tourists into groups. The gay tourist is an example.

The gay man tourist segment reflects a particular meta-governance logic of market management. First it requires the flattening and homogenizing a diverse and huge group of travelers (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). Such an essentialist approach seeks the lowest common denominators in its understanding of human beings, often devoid of contexts and situation.

Second, in what Marx termed as commodity fetishism, the tourism industry seeks ways to commodify sexuality and sexual identity. Being a gay person who travels is seen as a lucrative unit of consumption. The lure of the pink dollar is an example.

Third, gay neighbourhoods are framed as tolerant places. Richard Florida (2002) uses the density of gay persons in a city as an index to measure social tolerance. And through a complicated series of arguments, it is said that tolerant cities are competing for creative workers, and are also culturally vibrant and economically promising. Subsequently, members of the LGBTI community, creative individuals, progressive persons are ingredients behind a vibrant, rich and dynamic city, and are the energy of a city destination.

Fourth, the gay identity has been “globalized”, and their consumption needs have been defined, marketed and entrenched. For gay men for instance, the market perpetuates the idea of the meat market, and many gay men are seen to be obsessed with their physical appearances, like being “fashionable”. They love Julie Garland, the TV series *Will and Grace*, and dance to YMCA. Cultural icons are created and promoted, ignoring the fact that gay persons from different countries would have different popular culture experiences. A global gay identity is insidiously forged, indoctrinated and social engineered through consumption activities, presented as common if not universal, while ignoring the fact that a gay person in Pakistan would have very contrasting experiences (and struggles) to one in the UK.

This presentation takes a radical-turn on gay tourism. It addresses the ties between tourism and other economic activities in contemporary society. This presentation locates gay identity politics in contemporary consumption, and throw light on the political economy of the gay subject in tourism, and in contemporary consumer society.

Vorobjovas-Pinta, O. & Hardy, A., 2016. The Evolution of Gay Travel Research. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(4), pp.409–416. Available at:
<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/jtr.2059>.
