

Symbolic Meanings in Postmodern Fashion Advertisements

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(Received December 11, 2003 ; Accepted April 30, 2004)

Abstract

Using semiotic analysis, visual images in selected postmodern fashion advertisements were analyzed. Semiotics is the study of the structure of the meanings of signs¹⁾. Semiotic analysis involves deconstruction, and thus draws on the researcher's value-mediated introspection and subjective interpretation of texts (i.e., ads). Through deconstruction, culturally assigned meanings, which represent consumers and culture, were revealed. Postmodern characteristics including open interpretation, use of the human body as an object, multi page format, new mood, black and white scenes, use of real people, and new ideology were identified in the ads. The importance of analyzing visual images in fashion ads was stressed in the findings of the study, as was the importance of educating consumers on how to read the visual images.

Key words : Consumer culture, Postmodern, Fashion advertisements, Symbolic meanings, Semiotics.

I. Introduction

Through ads consumers seek to understand themselves^{2,3)}. Through the process of reading ads, consumers obtain product and cultural knowledge, as well as internalize meanings related to the product or image which is being created or transferred by the advertisers. Culture is an

essential part of understanding advertisements. Images in advertising are carriers of culturally assigned meanings which reflect consumers and their culture⁴⁻⁷⁾.

A semiotic analysis of ad images can provide a key to understand relationships between society and consumer culture. Leiss, Klein, and Jhally⁸⁾ investigated the close relationship between images in advertising and social influen-

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¹ G. McCracken, *Culture and consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

² L. M. Scott, "The bridge from text to mind: Adapting reader-response theory to consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21, (1994): 461-480.

³ J. Williamson, *Decoding advertisements* (New York: Boyars, 1978).

⁴ J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulations*, ed. M. Poster, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 185-206.

⁵ W. Leiss, S. Klein, and S. Jhally, *Social communication in advertising* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁶ C. Lury, *Consumer culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

⁷ J. Baudrillard, *Op. cit.*

⁸ W. Leiss, S. Klein and S. Jhally, *Op. cit.*

ces; in particular, how ad images reflect social as well as cultural characteristics. This study is founded on their assertion that there is an essential link between images and culture; advertising is a "privileged form of discourse (p.1)" about a given culture.

The main purpose of this study was to illuminate the symbolic characteristics of visual images contained in selected fashion ads. Through the process of interpreting postmodern fashion ads, culturally assigned symbolic meanings and postmodern characteristics representing the reality of postmodern consumer culture were revealed.

II. Review of Literature

1. Postmodernism

The real origin of the term "postmodern" is uncertain, although we do know that the word was first used in 1934 by Federico de Onis in Madrid. In 1942, Dudley Fitts used the term again in his *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry* and Arnold Toynbee picked up the term in 1947⁹.

The term "postmodernism" is based on a strong negation or opposition to the modern, expressing a perceived abandonment and break with, or shift away from, the definitive features of the modern era¹⁰. Its ubiquitous characteristics of irony, ephemerality, fragmentation, and paradox clearly contrast with "modernity".

Featherstone, one of the prestigious scholars of postmodernism, writes the following about modernism:

The basic features of modernism can be summarized as: an aesthetic self-consciousness and reflexiveness; a rejection of narrative structure in favour of simultaneousness and montage; an exploration of the paradoxical, ambiguous and uncertain open-ended nature of reality; and a rejection of the notion of an integrated personality in favour of an emphasis upon the destructed, de-humanized subject (p.7).

He also writes the following about postmodernism:

Amongst the central features associated with postmodernism in the arts are: the effacement of the boundary between art and everyday life; the collapse of the hierarchical distinction between high and mass/popular culture; a stylistic promiscuity favoring eclecticism and the mixing of codes; parody, pastiche, irony, playfulness and the celebration of the surface 'depthlessness' of culture; the decline of the originality/genius of the artistic producer; and the assumption that art can only be repetition (p.7-8).

Researchers argue that postmodernism is a problematic and confusing concept¹¹⁻¹³. Because some of the features of modernism in the arts are similar to those found in postmodern works of art, it is hard to distinguish the modern from the postmodern in some cases. Morgado¹⁴ pointed out that the confusion is generated not only by an inconsistency in the application of the term "postmodern" to various areas, but also by the general lack of agreement regarding

⁹ I. Hassan, *The postmodern turn: Essays in postmodern theory and culture* (Columbus: Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ M. Featherstone, *Consumer culture and postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 1991).

¹¹ M. Featherstone, *Op. cit.*

¹² I. Hassan, *Op. cit.*

¹³ M. A. Morgado, "Coming to terms with postmodern: Theories and concepts of contemporary culture and their implications for apparel scholars", *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 14 (1), (1996): 41-53.

¹⁴ M. A. Morgado, *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ A. F. Firat and A. Venkatesh, "Liberatory postmodernism and the reentrenchment of consumption", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22, (1995): 239-267.

postmodern theory itself. Firat and Venkatesh¹⁵⁾ suggest that it is more appropriate to call the term "postmodernisms" (plural) than "postmodernism" (singular) to identify various postmodern themes. In this light, it is appropriate to accept various definitions of postmodernism. Therefore, any definition of postmodernism calls for a dialectical and plural vision¹⁶⁾.

2. Advertising and Semiotics

A sign is something which stands for something else. Saussure¹⁷⁾ explained that the first something (signifier) is the object and the other something (signified) is its concept, and both are united into the form of one word (sign). Sign is therefore constituted as a double structure of signifier and signified. Barthes¹⁸⁾ similarly explained the relationship between signifier and signified as an interior relationship because both are unseen and united as a sign, a "concrete entity"¹⁹⁾.

People within a context of time and space share meanings with each other. Communication, the activity of sharing one's meaning with others, is the prime element in distinguishing a group of people or a culture. As members of a culture engaged in social interaction, people reciprocally affect each other. People in the same context of time and space have the same shared cultural knowledge upon which meanings are established. Meaning is given to objects and is communicated and transferred in the process of social interaction between members in the given time and space context.

Likewise, consumers in the same culture share the same cultural knowledge, and they

interpret advertisements in light of that cultural knowledge. Despite this phenomenon of shared cultural knowledge and the fact that language always has a variety of possible meanings,²⁰⁾ the one who decides the final meaning of the ad is the consumer. Consumers are the ones who assemble the pieces of the puzzle to make one coherent story. Once consumers infer the meanings, they freely combine them and process them to reach a holistic understanding of the ad.

Most of the interpretive studies on the analysis of visual ads have been grounded in semiotics theory²¹⁾. Semiotics is a primary heuristic tool for uncovering the sophistication and richness of ads in a given culture. By analyzing an ad, in this manner, one might learn how it is constructed and discover its underlying message. One might also find the way in which words and pictures work together to reinforce the message.

Ads display symbolic meanings through their verbal and nonverbal elements. Visual images in ads function as rhetorical devices with figurative meanings through which multiple meanings can be communicated to consumers. A semiotic analysis of ad images can therefore provide a guideline for understanding relationships between society and consumer culture²²⁾.

III. The Research Paradigm

1. Paradigm

The theoretical foundation for this study is constructivism, one of the interpretive research approaches. The aim of constructivism is to reconstruct a reality based on one's understanding²³⁾.

¹⁶⁾ M. Featherstone, *Op. cit.*

¹⁷⁾ F. Saussure, *A course in general linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

¹⁸⁾ R. Barthes, *A Barthes reader* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982): 113.

¹⁹⁾ R. Barthes, *Mythologie* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

²⁰⁾ R. Barthes, *Op. cit.*

²¹⁾ L. M. Scott, "The bridge from text to mind: Adapting reader-response theory to consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1994): 461-480.

²²⁾ W. Leiss, S. Klein and S. Jhally, *Op. cit.*

²³⁾ T. A. Schwandt, "Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry", ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research methods* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 118-137.

It is a paradigm that focuses on how people understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives²⁴. According to the interpretivist paradigm, the nature of reality is assumed to be made up of multiple and intangible constructions, which are socially and experientially based, and local and specific in nature. The form and content of realities are dependent upon the individual person or group sharing the construction. The construction is assumed to be alterable and is associated with different realities²⁶.

According to this paradigm, there is an epistemological assumption that both the researcher and the researched are interactively linked. The findings are literally created as a result of the investigation process²⁷. Individual constructions can be explained only by the interaction between "the researcher" and "the researched."

Analyzing ads is a way of seeing a reality, represented by a medium, which is linked to our lives as consumers. To understand the symbolic meanings of advertisements I invoked Saussure's dichotomous concept of signs, in which signs comprise both signifiers of meanings and the meanings signified. Through semiotic analysis, the researcher's value-mediated introspection and subjective interpretation of ads resulted.

2. Selection of Advertisements

In accordance with the theoretical framework of constructivism, the criteria for the ads were identified based on the researcher's understanding of realities of postmodern fashion ads. To select fashion ads representing postmodern consumer culture, seven major criteria were selected based on the researcher's value-mediated introspection for this study: (a) each ad chosen is for a fashion product (e.g., clothing);

(b) each brand represented sells both men's and women's products; (c) each brand represented has high consumer recognition; (d) both ads are from Vogue, one of the most well known and well read fashion magazines; (e) neither ad contains any explicitly stated product-related characteristics (i.e., utilitarian advantages such as quality and price); (f) each ad is visual (image-focused), having minimal written descriptions (i.e., only brand names and/or store locations); and (g) each ad consists of a two-page series. Criteria (a), (b), (c), and (d) were used to select ads which represent fashion-related qualities, and criteria (e), (f), and (g) were used to select ads which represent postmodern features.

To confirm that the selected ads were representative of postmodern consumer culture, three professional advertising producers working at the Resources Company in Columbus, Ohio were interviewed. The company is acknowledged by many consumers as one of the biggest technology-based marketing companies in the United States. These advertisers' insights and expertise were used to confirm that the selection criteria were appropriate. Based on the criteria, two fashion ads were selected for the study: the Calvin Klein Jeans ad (Fig. 1) which appeared in the March 1999 issue of Vogue magazine and the Banana Republic chino ad (Fig. 2) which appeared in the April 1999 issue of Vogue magazine. The fashion advertisers confirmed that the selected ads were decidedly postmodern ones. Their insightful comments were also used as guidelines in interpreting the ads.

IV. Symbolic Meanings

1. Calvin Klein Jeans Advertisement

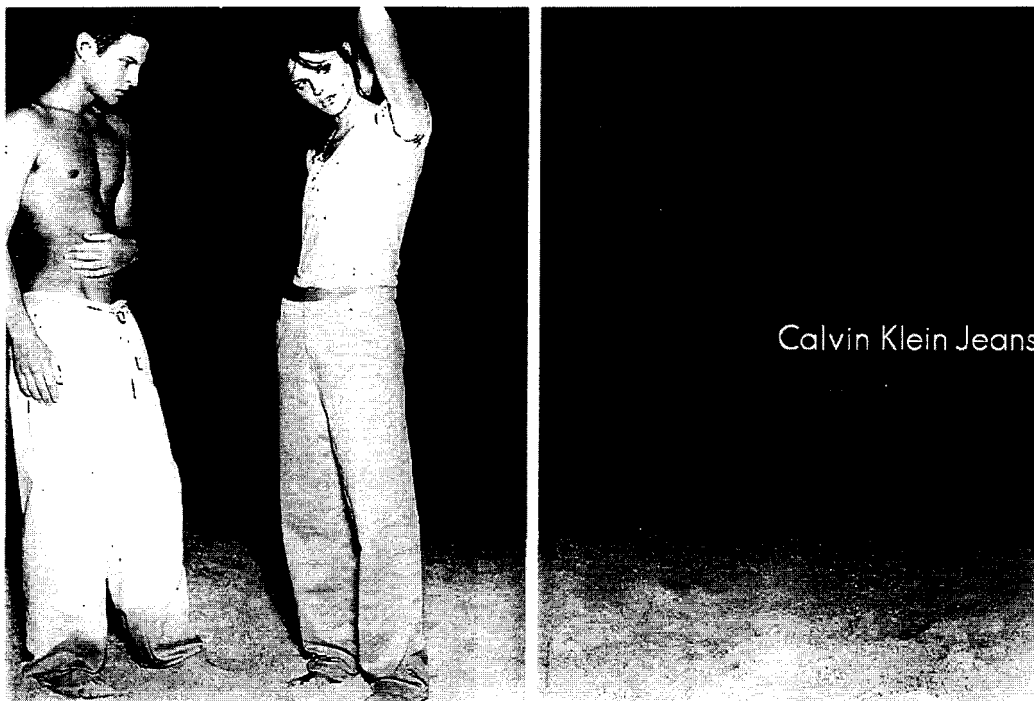
According to the market research firm Glad

²⁴ H. J. Rubin and I. S. Rubin, *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

²⁵ E. G. Guba and Y. S. Lincoln, "Competing paradigms in qualitative Research", ed. N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research method* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 105-117.

²⁶ E. G. Guba and Y. S. Lincoln, *Op. cit.*, 107.

²⁷ E. G. Guba and Y. S. Lincoln, *Op. cit.*, 107.



〈Fig. 1〉 Calvin Klein Advertisement



〈Fig. 2〉 Banana Republic Advertisement

Stone, "cK Calvin Klein Jeans controls the largest market share in department stores in both misses' and junior categories for jeans over \$40: about 40% of the market in misses,' and 34 % in juniors"²⁸⁾.

The Calvin Klein ad selected for the study is a two-page black and white photograph. There is a young male model in the center and a young female model on the right side with only the cK jeans brand logo on the right page. Both pages of the ad attract consumers' attention because of their layout and the black-and-white color scheme. The left page in particular catches consumers' attention for its young, attractive models and suggestive mood, while the brand logo on the right page also attracts consumers' attention for its conspicuous color (i.e., red and white on a black background) and its simplicity.

In the ad, the main themes are sex and youth. These themes are connoted by the signifiers in the ad. First, the theme of sex is reiterated by several signifiers: the background, the models' body poses, and their manner of wearing clothing. The repetition of the theme sex by the signifiers provides resonance in the ad. Although there is no written copy explaining the images in the ad, consumers easily decode the signified as sex. The background, a beach at night, is a signifier, which represents a romantic place where people might engage in sexual activity. The manner in which the clothing is worn also signifies sex. The male model's drawstring-pants are hung low on his hips while the upper part of the body is exposed. The female model's T-shirt is short, and her baggy pants are hung over her hips with her hipbone exposed. In addition, the female model seems not to be wearing any underwear which seems to be a signifier of her code of behavior? promiscuous and sexually alluring. It also suggests that she easily engages in sexual activity? "casual sex," which young people might choose as a lifestyle.

In addition, the bottoms of both model's pants are wet. The wet pants are signifiers of the models' intimate relationship. They suggest that the models may have spent some time together and had romantic relations on the beach in the past, and they stand on the beach together at night in the present.

The models' appearances and body poses are other signifiers of the signified, sex. The models are young and possess the cultural ideal of beauty. The male model has a good-looking and well-built body. The female model also has a good-looking and thin body which fits the contemporary ideal of beauty. The female model's hair is tousled and her mouth is open, suggesting sexuality. The male model's eyes are fixed on the female model's body, specifically on her breasts. He is touching his abdomen, which suggests that he is sexually interested in the female model's body.

The second theme of the ad is youth. The main sales pitch of the ad is not the products themselves but the image of a youthful lifestyle. The term "lifestyle" is used to refer to the "distinctive style of life of specific status groups"²⁹⁾. "Lifestyle" connotes "...individuality, self-expression, and stylistic self-consciousness"³⁰⁾. The lifestyle depicted in the ad is very casual, care-free, rebellious, and independent. The models stand together, but they are detached from each other because there is distance between them. Also, the models do not look into each other's faces. The male model is watching the female model's body. He is doing what he wants to do without regard for what she may think. The female model does not care what he is doing and is only staring at the camera. Their body poses and the focus of their eyes are signifiers of their "independence" and "lack of care" for one another. The only clue to their relationship is that both of their pants are wet. The pants signify that the models know each other and

²⁸ M. Socha, "Rebuilding Calvin Klein's Jeans", *Women's Wear Daily*, 175(42), (1998, March 5): 12.

²⁹ M. Featherstone, *Op. cit.*, 83.

³⁰ M. Featherstone, *Op. cit.*, 83.

that they have a certain relationship. They might be sexually interested in each other, but this does not mean that they are either really concerned about each other or that they know each other well. This pose is congruent with the popular description of the personal characteristics of Generation X'ers, who are the main actors of postmodern consumer culture.

The models' bodies are used as a communication tool. In the ad, the female model is placed in the center and is the one whose eyes make contact with the camera (or audience). This signifies dominance, confidence, and rebelliousness, because women are rarely photographed staring directly into the camera in ads. In contrast, the male model is looking at the female model's body and not the camera. The lowering of the male model's head signifies his efforts to withdraw attention from the scene and conceal his feelings. His body pose and eye focus are signifiers of a lack of confidence and objectification of the female body.

The models' body poses, fashion styles, background, and cK logo combine to form a single text that suggests, "if you want to be like these cool models who enjoy nights of romance at the beach and have a carefree, independent lifestyle, purchase these cK products and become a member of the cK community." Wearing a certain kind of garment may differentiate a person from others, but may also show one's affinity for a particular group. Consumers know that there are various choices of lifestyles represented in various styles of clothing, leisure activities, consumer goods, and bodily dispositions. Consumers depict their own lifestyles by consuming fashion goods with symbolic messages that express their self-identities. The advertisers and marketers continuously establish a monopoly in defining legitimate cK tastes within the cultural realm, and these created tastes become indicators to distinguish between what is tasteful and

what is not tasteful for young people. cK membership, therefore, acts as the logic in the symbolic system to produce distinctions in tastes which contribute to the reproduction of the existing relationship between the members (who purchase the product) and nonmembers (who do not purchase the product). Consumption now plays a central role in the life of people, as they use consumption patterns to define their sense of identity, self realization and group membership³¹. Consumption community is a new way of connecting people together as groups.

2. Banana Republic Advertisement

Banana Republic is a branch brand owned by the Gap Company. The brand has gained its popularity from male and female consumers in the 25 to 45 age group who like to wear comfortable clothing for home and work³². In the ad, the body poses of the models are set against a natural background and the chino products blend with the atmosphere to configure a harmonious sign: a free, casual style. The male model stands in the foreground with one hand opened and the female model lies on her back in a field with one leg stretched toward the sky. The models' body poses are natural and relaxed.

The background of the ad is a natural horizon and field which signify the signified, nature, which is related to the natural feeling of chinos. The background also signifies the models' relaxed lifestyle. The background is well coordinated with the product. The chino products signify a casual, comfortable, easy-to-wear style. The clothing items are signifiers of casual wear that further signify the feeling of nature and relaxation. In the ad, the products, chino pants and skirts, represent freedom and relaxation.

The theme of the ad is "nature." The signifiers, which are the body poses, the background, and the chino products create the resonance of the signified, "nature." First, the models' body

³¹ D. J. Boorstin, "The consumption community", ed. G. McClellan, *The consuming public* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1968), 9-35.

³² B. Lippert, "Soft focus cashmere: Life at its creamiest", *Ad week*, (1998, November 16), 33-34.

poses are different from those commonly represented in the modern era. The models' body poses signify the sign of "nature." In the modern era, the models' body poses in ads were limited in certain ways for example, putting one arm on the waist with one leg set one step forward. However, in the ad, the models' body poses are very natural and free, which characteristics were rarely seen in the modern era. Second, the background, a field, is another signifier expressing the theme of the ad, "nature." A field is not a studio setting but a natural place which is neither modified nor manipulated. Third, the product, Chino, is a signifier of the theme, "nature." Chinos are a comfortable, as well as casual, fashion item which consumers can wear in their daily lives.

The female model lies in the field with one leg extending toward the sky, and the male model extends one arm with an open hand. This represents an important postmodern theme, which implies "do what your natural feelings say." Naturalism also signifies freedom and unrestraint and is related to the choices that postmodern consumers make. Due to the development of technology, materialization brought opportunities to postmodern consumers to experience various life choices. Postmodernists do not abide by rules, which modernists trusted and never doubted, but rely on choices they themselves make, which are based on their individual wills and desires. Featherstone³³ discusses this postmodern characteristic, which suggests that "there are no rules, just choices." The concept of naturalism is also closely related to the postmodern concept of "relativism." Relativists believe strongly that there is no one standard of reality upon which everyone must rely, but rather, that there exist different realities. In the ad, the field is a place in which "anything goes" because everything is based on ones' natural feelings and self will.

Color in the ad acts as a signifier of nature. The background color is very light and harmonizes with the color of the chinos worn by

the models. This natural background tone also signifies comfort and relaxation. The earth tone of the chinos is echoed in the natural background color, as well as the light beige color found in the dry field. The other color connection is the black of the male model's shirt and the female model's shoes. The color black signifies trendiness. The black shoes and shirt signify that Banana Republic clothing is also trendy. Thus, the color match of both earth tone chinos and black ones, and the female model's black shoes, signify that consumers can wear this style at the office as well as at home.

Other elements in the ad signify sex. First, the female wears a short mid-thigh length skirt while lying on her back in a field with one leg in the air. Considering social norms in the given culture, a woman wearing a short skirt does not lie in a field with one leg stretched toward the sky. Her way of posing is a signifier of the signified, her intention to sexually attract the man. Second, the ad signifies having sex in the open field. It insinuates the risk-taking and thrill-seeking which young postmodern consumers might seek.

The Banana Republic ad differentiates its chino products from other brands of chinos. The brand suggests to consumers that if they want to have free and relaxed lifestyles, and sex with their partners, they should buy these chinos. In the process of differentiation, image is most often manipulated by marketers. Therefore, consumers who have never tried Banana Republic chinos believe in the difference consciously and/or unconsciously. Actual product differences in quality, fabrication, and construction may not exist between this and other brands. The framing and structural devices which the advertisers use so well are established so that consumers read them unwittingly.

V. Postmodern Characteristics

Through the study, there were several post-

³³ M. Featherstone, *Op. cit.*

modern characteristics embodied in these ads. The first characteristic is open interpretation. There is not a single interpretation, but rather multiple interpretations of the visual images in the ads. Postmodern consumers create their own individual interpretations based on their individual tastes and cultural knowledge. The open interpretation of ads is aimed at Generation X consumers who are self-reliant as well as independent. Generation Xers respect their own unique personal characteristics and enjoy creating their own stories and actualizing themselves in their interpretation of ads.

Several devices promote consumers' open interpretations of the ads. The first is the cropping of images. In the Banana Republic ad, consumers can see only half of the male shirt and chino pants. In the modern era, the protagonist of the ad was the product being advertised and was therefore never cropped. Only models' faces and background that may distract the consumer from the products were cropped. However, in postmodern ads, even the image of the product is often cropped. It demonstrates that the focus of ad has shifted from the product to the consumers who read the advertisement. The lack of product information adds ambiguity, and consumers must rely on their imaginations to complete the message in the ad. The ambiguity encourages consumers' curiosity and multiple interpretations of the messages. Through the interpretation process, the ambiguity is transformed into consumers' own stories and they experience personal intimacy with the ad.

The second postmodern characteristic is that only the human bodies are used as a communication tool in the ads. The models' gestures and body poses are used to portray the models' identities, lifestyles, and the brand-image and brand logo.

Third, these ads occupy multiple pages, thus taking more space to attract more of the consumers' attention. In this postmodern era, multi-page ads allow consumers to create their own story plots as they flip to each successive page.

Fourth, postmodern moods are expressed by

the models' gestures and facial expressions. Unlike modern ads, which depicted only happiness, joy and love, moods illustrated in postmodern ads represent multifaceted ones ranging from apathy to violence.

Fifth, black and white photography is used as an expression of nostalgia for the modern era in the cK ad. Postmodernists believe that history has ended and progress is not linear. Although developments in technology make it possible to reproduce a glossy, high color photograph, postmodern advertisers use black and white photography to appeal to postmodern consumers who enjoy symbolically revisiting the modern era.

The sixth characteristic is the concept of "real people" depicted in the ads. The models' body poses, and their style of dress and hair represent real young people in a real life situation. In the case of the Banana Republic ad, the background is a field (nature), and the models' body poses are informal and unrehearsed.

The seventh postmodern characteristic is related to new ideologies such as consumption community and naturalism. In a consumption community, a simulated kinship by consumption activity replaces the traditional concepts of kinship and common interest or concern. The consumption community coexists with traditional forms of community as a form of hyperreality (e.g., the cK family who wear cK products). Also, the postmodern ideology of naturalism is related to the choices consumers make based upon their free will. Naturalism is also related to relativism, which means that there is not one standard of reality, but rather different realities on which postmodern consumers rely.

VI. Summary, Conclusion, and Implication

Semiotic analysis reveals that visual images in ads are not accidental portrayals of culture, but representations of a cultural system which not only communicate symbolic meanings of objects, but also mirrors the main characteristics

of postmodern consumer culture.

In the case of the cK ad, the models' body poses, facial expressions, style of dress, and the background are used to communicate the main themes, sex and youth. The ad also signifies a youthful lifestyle, which is carefree, casual, rebellious, and independent. The models' bodies are also used as a communication tool in the ad, in which their poses and facial expressions are used to portray the models' identities and lifestyles, as well as the brand image and brand logo. The models' body poses are used as a signifier of the Calvin Klein's signature "c" and "K." The models' body poses, fashion styles, background and cK logo combines to form a single message that attempts to persuade consumers to buy the cK products in order to become a member of the "cK community."

In the case of the Banana Republic ad, the models' body poses, the articles of clothing, and background combine to confire a harmonious sign of casual freedom, youth, sex and consumerism. There are two themes in the ad. The first theme is "nature." Color in the ad, such as the earth tone and light beige, supports signs of nature. The theme, "nature," is also related to the postmodern ideology of "naturalism." "Naturalism" signifies freedom and unrestraint, wherein relativists believe "anything goes" because everything is based on one's own natural feelings and will. The second theme is "sex." The female model's body pose is a signifier of her sexual intentions.

Consumers in postmodern consumer culture are bombarded with many advertisements in their daily life, from billboards to magazines. Ads are used as a way of subliminally educating consumers and influencing their way of thinking. Postmodern ads contain strong visual images. Through ads, consumers learn the meanings and characteristics of the culture in which they live.

Postmodern consumers are familiar with visual images. More visual images with strong embodied messages are increasingly used in postmodern fashion ads. As popular culture fo-

cuses more and more on commercialism, sex, drugs, and violence, visual images in ads reflect that culture as a consequence and negatively influence consumers. Especially in the case of young consumers (i.e., adolescents and children), it is necessary to be aware of these issues. They are the generation which lives with video games, movies, DVDs, and the internet, and visual images are the one of the essential features advertisers use to draw their attention. Most young consumers who are influenced by strong visual images in ads do not clearly understand or recognize the embodied meanings in the images. Whether they know it or not, they are influenced and persuaded by the images in just the way advertisers intend.

Consumers especially young ones need to be taught how to read ads just as we are taught how to read by learning the alphabet at school, it is time to teach the younger generation how to read the powerful visual images of ads. Without any specific education, young consumers may not be able to decode the underlying message of ads and therefore be easily persuaded.

Fashion advertisers continuously create controversial ads which draw consumers' attention and negatively influence their perceptions. As consumers living in the postmodern era, it is essential that we analyze the meanings behind the scene to understand what the ads are really communicating. The findings from this research are a guideline for how to read visual images, and the findings of this research should be taken as an example of how fashion ads communicate with their viewers.

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