

Wegerer_ Masterarbeitsthemen SS 2016

The Visual Construction of Gender in Advertising: The Case of American Apparel

Similar to language, visual artefacts are more than mere transmitters of information. Scholars agree that images have become an elementary mode in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social reality (Meyer et al .2013). Despite the overwhelming dominance of visual imagery in contemporary society there is scant research examining the role of images in the construction of brand discourses. We are interested how visual images of fashion brands frame social categories such as gender.

A particular interesting case for examining the visual mode of meaning construction is the case of the US fashion brand 'American Apparel'. The American Apparel brand image is mainly built upon the use of controversial imagery. We are looking for a student who wants to analyse how the American Apparel brand presents gender and gender relations, and why this narrative is so appealing for the brand audience.

Research questions that could be addressed are:

- What gender reality is produced by the visual images of American Apparel?
- What is the visual rhetoric of the American Apparel brand?
- What are the visual and aesthetic codes employed by the American Apparel brand?
- How do customers make sense of, process and organize American Apparels visual information into social categories?

Following Meyer et al. (2013) we suggest two methodological options for approaching the case: a Strategic/Dialogical Approach and an Archaeological Approach.

1) Visual Analysis: Interpreting visual imagery of American Apparel using Semiology or Discourse Analysis

2) Qualitative Interviews asking the brand audience how they interpret American Apparel Adds using photo- elicitation.

Literature

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Vegetarians as anti- consumers: Examining justification strategies

An increasing number of consumers voluntarily constrain their food consumption to vegetables. This trend marks a significant shift in consumer culture from hedonistic food consumption to voluntary ascetics.

This research project is interested in the ethics of vegetarians. It asks: How do vegetarians justify their anti- consumption practices? In terms of theory one approach would be to draw on Richard Rorty's notion of final vocabularies and to describe which linguistic resources are used by consumers to justify their behaviour. A second option would be to employ Foucault's ethics of 'care of the self' as 'an active aesthetic practice' in order to better understand the phenomenon.

Literature

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THE VW BUS – A CULTURAL ICON?

Since the late 60's the VW Bus is popular among students and young families. This popularity can be observed in various outdoor sports and lifestyle communities such as campers, climbers, mountain bikers and surfers.

This phenomenon can be approached from various theoretical perspectives. The VW bus legacy has of course many connections to brand communities but also draws on a long cultural tradition (e.g., Holt, 2010). The respective candidate could also try to approach this phenomenon from the psychoanalytical concepts of delegation and interpassive enjoyment, a concept that was recently transferred into brand research by Walz et al. (2014) and Böhm and Batta (2010).

Method

Qualitative (Interviews, Photo Elicitation Techniques)

Literature

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