

UNDERSTAND MEDIA LITERACY AND REGAIN POWER

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Was That an Ad? Understanding advertising Today.

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Throughout history, the human race has been influenced by various obstacles, leading it to utilize new innovative tools that are developed continuously. The vast discoveries and explorations achieved have granted humans the feeling of empowerment and control. Freedom has been the greatest achievement of many societies, yet freedom of speech has been privileged to few. In the new world where we are all connected by the internet, everyone has a profile. In this exact “*Small World*” as called by many, a person is being alienated by the pressure of certain ideologies. Every individual is a consumer that is dragged into the cycle of what you “*resist will persist*”. The spectacle implements highly persuasive repetitive messages to entice the feeling of antiquity, diverting individual freedom into unconscious consent. Today, the consumer cannot reclaim freedom of choice in the absence of understanding the power of media. This can be achieved through recognition of the spectacle, critical media literacy, and participatory democracy interaction.

The interaction between individuals is part of human nature that serves the need to belong. This need is translated into multi-platforms, where sharing ideas, views, and desires are part of life. While the people are unaware, the spectacle interferes claiming that its ideas are the truth and its symbols are the nature of life. According to Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle*, “*The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated and precisely for that reason this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalized separation.*”¹ The spectacle’s ability to influence emotions grants it with the strength to manipulate decisions and camouflage its own benefits as the people's own benefits.

The spectacle's narcissism operates aiming for financial gain, production effectiveness, and self-f, with a lack of consideration of values, morals, or desire to help humankind, even if it may seem to be so. The digital world has produced three cultural shifts as explained by Kit Yarrow in her book *Decoding the new consumer mind (2014)*; the first shift is the "rewired brains" in which technology has become an inseparable part of lives and "changed our relationships and created a whole set of emotional needs."² Envy is intrigued by the constant exposure to the spectacle's digital propaganda. The second shift is "isolation and individualism"², which translates into the a sense of alienation and entitlement, hence empowering the spectacle in dictating the new acceptable norms. The third shift is "intensified emotions. Research shows that although we're still optimistic by nature, we're all a bit crankier, edgier, and more anxious today."³ This is another great opportunity for the spectacle to portray itself as the trustworthy positive liberator. The spectacle accomplishes its goals by exploiting the science of imagery in its numerous rhetoric.

Since "the brain still functions faster, more fluently, and with less effort when processing images"³, the spectacle optimization for imagery is justified. In the digital world, individuals convey who they are, and what they stand for, through the language of imagery. As stated by Roland Barthes, in *The Rhetoric of the Image (1964)*, the rhetoric of an image holds three different levels of messages, the *linguistic* message, the *coded iconic* message, and the *non-coded message*.⁴ The linguistic message is when the name or text takes the role of a symbol that repetitively manifests itself to obtain acceptance and to resonate as the primary amplification of a certain meaning. The coded iconic message has a direct clear representation of the message that the image captivates. On the contrary, the non-coded message may or

may not have a subtle ambiguous symbolism that communicates a different idea or definition. As the spectacle only depicts appearances, narcissism, and affirmation from others, the significance of the imagery is crucial to its immortality. Thus, as Barthes concludes the visual, can hold codes that are detected easily or have subliminal codes that need a deeper comprehension: “*Denoted message, which is the analogon itself, and a connoted message, which is the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it.*”⁵ Decoding these images empowers the individual or the consumer to utilize the same codes and messages to create new meanings that contribute to the change needed to regain the consciousness of choice.

Understanding different codes and symbolism, and becoming inspired by the significant meanings that they hold is an effective skill to enhance critical thinking to recognize and decode brands. Bruce Philp, the author of the book *Consumer Republic* (2012), has reinforced the idea that brands are starting to accept the concept of being held accountable for what they deliver.⁶ The spectacle efforts lay in maintaining their financial profit, where the brand is willing to invest its efforts to earn the trust of the public. Philp suggests that the consumer, while alienated, can influence these corporations by communicating the values that matter to the individual in specific and the environment in general. This process of interaction also requests the involvement of more individuals that share the same values, which gradually will isolate the feeling of alienation. The choice to demand quality and authenticity is not only to satisfy one's self but to practice democracy at its best. Society can implement the power of hegemony towards freedom of choice rather than being pressured to consent by default. Construct an objective opinion will prevent the individual from being captured by the destructive generic

brand's social meaning, which requires the courage to bear the risk of committing "consumerism and social crime" according to a certain society, and developing trust with the brand itself and other consumers. "*Multiple studies show an irrefutable connection between high levels of social trust and social support and happiness.*"⁷, thus optimistic ethical interactions will guide both consumers and brands to positive perspectives starting the change in the media long awaited. "*Meanwhile, it's become very easy for corporations to keep track of those reputations, and to do it in real-time. There are so many ways for us to be heard, so many more forums in which we can talk about what we like and don't, and about who has disappointed us,*"⁸ and keep on expressing ideas in order to engage with brands.

Interaction versus passiveness is an argument between being controlled and becoming in control. We need to be empowered and provide future generations with tools to practice participatory democracy and "*move the discourse beyond the stage of debating whether or not critical media literacy should be taught, and instead focus energy and resources on exploring the best ways for implementing it.*"⁹ Today's digital world became the best example of hegemony in action. What we ask for is what we will get. It is up to the individual's conscious mind. "*Choice is the very centre of our power as consumers*"¹⁰ and we can "*make brands behave, and maybe save the world.*"¹¹

Notes

1. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Section 1
2. Kit Yarrow, *Decoding the new consumer mind* (2014), p.6
3. Dr. David Lewis, *The Brain Sell: When Science Meets Shopping* (2013), p.151
4. Roalnd Barthes, *Image Music Text: The Rhetoric Of The Image* (1964).
5. Roalnd Barthes, *Image Music Text: The Rhetoric Of The Image* (1964), p.17
6. Bruce Philip, “*Consumer Republic: Using Brands to Get What You Want, Make Corporations Behave, and Maybe Even Save the World*” (2012), p.217-247
7. Kit Yarrow, *Decoding the new consumer mind* (2014), p.60
8. Bruce Philip, “*Consumer Republic: Using Brands to Get What You Want, Make Corporations Behave, and Maybe Even Save the World*” (2012), p.236
9. Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, “*Critical Media Literacy Is Not an Option.*” *Learning Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (2007), p.1
10. Bruce Philip, “*Consumer Republic: Using Brands to Get What You Want, Make Corporations Behave, and Maybe Even Save the World*” (2012), p.22
11. Bruce Philip, “*Consumer Republic: Using Brands to Get What You Want, Make Corporations Behave, and Maybe Even Save the World*” (2012). Title

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Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) Section 1.

Kit Yarrow, *Decoding the new consumer mind* (2014)

Roland Barthes, "*The Rhetoric of the Image*", Hill & Wang, 1964: 151-155.