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SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES IN GRAPHIC DESIGN: SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVES ON ADVERTISING VISUALS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how consumer culture is reproduced through advertising visuals in the context of graphic design. Three different advertisements were selected, and the graphic design elements used in these visuals (such as color, composition, and symbols) were analyzed in terms of their impact on consumer perception. Employing the semiotic analysis method, the study reveals that advertising visuals are not merely aesthetic tools but also carriers of ideological and social meanings. The findings indicate that graphic design elements effectively convey the ideological messages of consumer culture and establish profound symbolic connections between brands and consumers. Additionally, the role of graphic design has become more prominent in the digital era, evolving into an interactive and multi-layered structure within modern consumer culture. This study underscores the critical function of graphic design as a communication tool that not only creates visual aesthetics but also shapes social values and consumer behaviors. In conclusion, advertising visuals are evaluated as strategic tools in the reproduction of consumer culture, contributing to theoretical and applied studies in this field.

Keywords: Graphic Design, Semiotics, Communication, Consumer Culture, Advertising Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The culture of consumption emerges as a critical component of the socio-economic structure in modern societies. This culture transcends the realm of mere economic activity, transforming consumption into an ideological system that influences various domains, from individuals' daily lives to the construction of social status (Featherstone, 2007). At this juncture, graphic design stands out as a pivotal tool that shapes the visual language of consumer culture and reproduces societal meanings. In advertising visuals, the elements of graphic design go beyond merely promoting a product; they become symbols imbued with ideological and cultural significance, shaping consumer perception (Miles, 2012: 45). Graphic design elements such as color, composition, and symbols used in advertising visuals bestow a multilayered structure of meaning upon visual messages. These elements not only showcase the features or appeal of a product but also make social norms and ideological messages visible (Dyer, 1982).

Semiotic theories help elucidate the transformative role of graphic design within consumer culture. Roland Barthes' myth-making theory reveals that advertising visuals convey seemingly simple messages on the surface while embedding ideological codes in deeper layers of meaning (Barthes, 2009). Similarly, Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of sign systems provides a foundation for understanding the multidimensional functions of graphic design elements in meaning-making processes. As Chandler (2017) notes, elements such as color, form, and typography in advertising visuals serve as both signifiers and signifieds, directing consumer perception. In this context, graphic design acts as a mediator, facilitating individuals' connections not only with products but also with ideological and social values. Digital transformation has rendered graphic design more intricate and interactive, enabling advertising visuals to deliver personalized and engagement-focused messages. Particularly through social media and digital platforms, graphic design elements can convey the ideological dimensions of consumer culture to broader audiences (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009: 66). These platforms foster multi-layered meaning-making processes, promoting deeper and more meaningful connections between brands and consumers. The interactive dimension of graphic design empowers brands to communicate societal values and cultural messages effectively alongside promoting their products. This phenomenon underscores how digitalization has strengthened the interplay between graphic design and consumer culture.

This study aims to explore the role of graphic design in consumer culture through an analysis of three selected advertising visuals. Using the semiotic analysis method, the research examines not only the aesthetic components of these visuals but also how they convey social and ideological messages in detail. The study seeks to highlight the meaning-making potential of graphic design elements within the context of consumer culture and their critical role in shaping consumer perception. In this regard, the research provides a deeper understanding of how graphic design reproduces societal values and ideological norms through advertisements and influences consumer behavior.

THEORETICAL BASIS

The Role of Graphic Design in Consumer Culture

Graphic design stands out as one of the fundamental tools shaping the visual language of modern consumer culture. Consumer culture not only emphasizes the functional benefits of a product but also highlights its symbolic values. These values become visible through the aesthetic power and meaning-making capacity of graphic design. Advertisements serve as platforms that convey the cultural and ideological meanings of products through symbols and visual elements that shape consumer perception (Heller & Vienne, 2018: 112). Design elements such as color, typography, and composition play a critical role in defining a product's or brand's position in consumer perception. Color, far from being merely a visual preference, creates an emotional connection and an additional layer of meaning, strengthening the relationship between the consumer and the product. Typography sets the visual tone of the message, while composition unites

these elements into a cohesive narrative. Through the strategic use of these components, graphic design enables the decoding of the visual and ideological codes of consumer culture (Dyer, 1982). In this sense, graphic design is not only a form of aesthetic expression but also a discipline that provides insights into the intrinsic dynamics of cultural and economic systems. It reveals how design serves as a mediator in constructing and communicating the symbolic and ideological layers embedded within the framework of consumer culture.

Graphic design, as emphasized in Barthes' (2009) concept of mythology, serves as a communication tool carrying profound cultural and ideological meanings. Elements such as color, composition, and symbolic meanings play a central role in the multilayered nature of graphic design. Visual elements used in advertisements strategically communicate the values and identity of brands by appealing to consumers' subconscious (Uçar, 2004: 45). For instance, a brand's color palette is not merely a visual preference but also a symbolic tool that reinforces the brand's ability to establish emotional connections and influence consumer perception. In this context, the harmony of colors and forms within a composition enables the brand to convey its message consistently and effectively.

As stated by Becer (2015: 56), design principles and elements -such as line, tone, color, texture, form, size, and direction- come together in a composition to reveal key attributes like visual appeal, coherence, and originality. The correct integration of these elements not only guides visual perception but also strengthens the symbolic meanings embedded in the design. For instance, a strong composition serves as an effective tool to direct the viewer's gaze and highlight the central point of the message, while the use of colors and symbols enhances the depth of meaning conveyed. The multilayered nature of graphic design creates a system that strengthens the relationship between brands and consumers not only on an aesthetic level but also within a cultural and emotional context. The deliberate use of color, composition, and symbolic meanings transforms design from merely a visual tool into a dynamic form of communication enriched with societal codes. In this sense, graphic design transcends aesthetic boundaries, playing an indispensable role in the meaning-making processes of brands.

The impact of colors on consumer psychology plays a central role in the processes of meaning creation and perception management in graphic design. The emotional connection a consumer establishes with a brand or product largely depends on the psychological and emotional responses evoked by colors. For instance, red evokes strong emotions such as excitement, energy, and passion, whereas blue conveys feelings of trust, loyalty, and calmness. Graphic designers utilize color theories not merely as aesthetic tools but also as critical components of advertising strategies, consciously shaping the perceptions of their target audience (Bican Şen & Özdemir, 2017; Yüksel, 2023; Singh, 2006). In this context, colors should be regarded not only as visual design elements but also as powerful communication tools that form the symbolic codes of consumer culture. For example, a brand's choice of a red logo is a deliberate strategy aimed not only at drawing attention but also at creating a dynamic and passionate brand image. Similarly, designs dominated by pastel tones convey messages of warmth and sincerity, offering a more personal connection to the consumer. Thus, it is fair to say that colors have become one of the most effective tools designers employ when structuring brand messages and play a pivotal role in constructing the visual codes of consumer culture.

The physical component of graphic design, form, constitutes a fundamental building block of visual composition. Elements such as shapes, textures, spatial arrangements, and dimensions enable graphic design to convey its message within an aesthetic framework. Balance, hierarchy, and rhythm in design ensure the harmonious presentation of visual elements. For instance, a minimalist design approach evokes simplicity and elegance, whereas complex arrangements symbolize dynamism and motion (Wong, 1993). These visual principles play a critical role in helping brands effectively convey their intended messages to consumers. The role of graphic design elements within the context of consumer

culture extends far beyond creating visual aesthetics. Through graphic design, brands offer consumers a lifestyle, identity, and even an ideology. Luxury brands, for instance, encode concepts of "elegance" and "status" through simple and minimalist designs, whereas brands targeting a young and dynamic audience employ vibrant colors and striking visual elements to convey messages of "energy" and "innovation." This demonstrates that graphic design is not merely a communication tool but also an instrument for producing and reshaping societal meanings.

The impact of digitalization has further amplified the role of graphic design in consumer culture. Brands shifting from traditional media to digital platforms now reach consumers through interactive and personalized advertisements. Digital environments, such as social media, enable the multilayered use of graphic design elements, facilitating the reproduction of consumer culture on a broader scale. In this context, graphic design emerges as one of the most powerful tools of modern consumer culture.

Semiotic Theory and Advertisement Analysis

Semiotic analysis provides a comprehensive framework for interpreting the symbolic meanings and communicative functions of visual images. Centering on the relationships between signs, this approach examines the dynamics of cultural meaning-making, encompassing not only linguistic expressions but also all forms of visual and cultural imagery (Toker, 2022: Ö338). In this context, Saussure's theoretical perspective on meaning-making processes offers a critical foundation for understanding how signs function not only in linguistic domains but also within visual and cultural contexts. Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) semiotic theory presents a fundamental theoretical structure for explaining the processes of meaning production. According to this theory, every sign consists of two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier represents the tangible and physical form of the sign, while the signified conveys the cultural and ideological meanings associated with this form. For example, the simple geometric shape used in a brand's logo may appear as minimal design at first glance, but it carries powerful messages about the brand's identity and values.

This theoretical framework demonstrates that graphic design is not merely about visual arrangements but also serves as a tool for shaping social norms, identities, and ideologies. Saussure's concepts provide a robust analytical foundation for understanding the relationship between the physical elements of an image and its cultural codes, particularly within the context of advertising and graphic design. Consequently, graphic design elements, in a semiotic context, are not merely aesthetic components but also producers of social meaning. Advertisements function as dynamic systems of signs, where visual and textual elements converge to form complex networks of meaning that go beyond simple communication with the consumer. The semiotic approach offers an effective method for deciphering the ideological and cultural codes underlying this multilayered structure. For instance, in cosmetic advertisements, the visual representation of a young and healthy model establishes a signifier-signified relationship that underscores societal values such as beauty and youth, transcending the surface message. In this context, the strategic functionality of advertisements becomes evident as they draw the consumer's attention not only to the physical benefits of the product but also to the allure of aesthetic and social acceptance. As Kükrer (2010: 30) points out, such forms of representation mediate the reproduction of cultural norms by influencing individuals' consumption decisions on not only a rational basis but also an emotional and symbolic level.

The use of signifier, signified, and sign in semiotics

Charles Sanders Peirce's (1991) semiotic distinctions provide a valuable framework for deconstructing layers of meaning in advertising analysis. The icon represents its object through physical resemblance; for instance, an image of an apple directly evokes the idea of a real apple. The index relies on a physical connection, such as smoke indicating fire. The symbol, on the other hand, is

shaped by social convention; the dove symbolizing peace is a striking example of this. In advertisements, these three types of signs are skillfully employed to convey multilayered messages to consumers. For instance, in a car advertisement, a speedometer functions as an index to define the vehicle's physical attributes, while an eagle symbolizes power and freedom. These symbols communicate not only the product's physical benefits but also its societal and emotional connotations. Such symbolic communication creates a deeper and more lasting impression in the consumer's mind (Tuncer, 2020: 75-76). Graphic design transcends aesthetic elements to become a carrier of cultural and ideological messages in the construction of visual codes in advertisements. These codes, as Chandler (2017) highlights, reveal that advertisements are not merely visual tools but also reflectors of social values and ideological frameworks. Decoding these codes in advertisement analysis enables an understanding of the cultural meanings underlying the messages conveyed to consumers and their connections to societal values. In this context, semiotic theory demonstrates that advertisements are not purely commercial instruments but integral components of meaning-making processes. This underscores how advertisements shape not only consumer behavior but also ideological orientation within society.

METHODOLOGY

This study was structured within a qualitative framework and conducted using the semiotic analysis method. Semiotics is an interdisciplinary approach that examines the ideological and cultural meanings of graphic design elements within the context of consumer culture (Chandler, 2017). The essence of this method lies in analyzing how signs and visual elements acquire meaning in a social context and influence consumer perception. By analyzing symbols, colors, and visual compositions in advertisements, this research reveals how the ideological codes of consumer culture are produced and perceived by consumers.

The study is grounded in Barthes' (2009) mythology theory, which explores not only the surface meanings of signs but also the deeper cultural and ideological messages they convey. Barthes' semiotic framework serves as a critical tool for understanding how advertisements function not only as commercial mechanisms but also as systems of societal meaning-making. Signs were examined in terms of their signifier and signified components, and their roles within cultural contexts were evaluated. In communication processes, signs are employed not as direct representations of tangible objects but as symbolic representations. This analysis draws upon Barthes' concepts of denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the immediate, literal meanings represented by a sign, while connotation examines how these meanings are recontextualized within cultural and ideological frameworks (Gümüř & Kaya, 2022: 509-510). By analyzing the effects of signs at both surface and deeper levels, the study provides a multidimensional perspective on their impact.

The research was conducted on three distinct advertising visuals selected through purposive sampling by two field experts. During the selection process, the advertisements' reach to a broad consumer audience and the diversity of graphic design elements used were prioritized. The primary criteria for selection included the prominent incorporation of graphic design elements and the symbolic representation of consumer culture. These advertisements, published on social media and digital platforms, are among the strongest representations of modern consumer culture (Yıldız & Kırmızıbiber, 2020: 758). Additionally, these visuals were deemed significant for understanding how graphic design has evolved with digitalization, providing a valuable sample for analysis. During the data collection process, each advertisement was first systematically described, followed by a detailed examination of the graphic design elements within the visuals. The analysis focused on the impact of these design elements on consumer perception and their contribution to the formation of symbolic meanings in consumer culture. As part of this analysis, the emotional and cognitive connections consumers establish with the brand through the symbols in the advertisements and how they internalize the values embedded in the product were assessed.

FINDINGS

Semiotic Analysis of Advertising Visuals

Audiobooks advertisement (headphones featuring Shakespeare's figure)



Figure 1. McCann Worldgroup Agency, *Penguin Books Audiobooks*, 2013, Digital Advertisement

Signifier: Two figures of Shakespeare depicted in classic theatrical costumes are transformed into the shape of headphones through a curved form. At the bottom of the visual, the Penguin Books logo is positioned in a minimalist style. The design's focal point is the presentation of Shakespeare's figures as a modern headphone form.

Signified: The headphone shape symbolizes the Audiobooks platform. The connection between a cultural icon like Shakespeare and audiobooks signifies the quality and value of the platform's content. Shakespeare represents the classics, conveying the message that listening to audiobooks is associated with works of high literary value.

Connotation/Sign: As one of the greatest representatives of English literature, Shakespeare is a global cultural icon. His figure in this context implies that Audiobooks offers not only entertainment but also intellectual and cultural depth. This visual suggests to the consumer that listening is not just a "convenience" but also a form of cultural "engagement" and "value." The use of Shakespeare's heads as headphones carries an unconventional and ironic sense of humor. This humorous approach reflects the brand's dual focus on offering serious content while maintaining a modern and innovative perspective. Transforming such a traditional figure into a modern technology, the headphone form unites the past and the future, showcasing how technology intersects with classical culture. The adaptation of Shakespeare's figures into a headphone shape playfully highlights the difference between traditional reading culture and modern auditory experiences. Audiobooks are portrayed as a "modern" alternative to reading, while this choice is culturally validated. The message emphasizes that listening to audiobooks, as the modern form of reading, retains "intellectual depth" without compromise.

Analysis of Graphic Design Elements (Color, Composition, and Symbols): The color palette is deliberately muted, dominated by neutral tones like beige and the soft blues and reds of the costumes. This choice emphasizes a sense of timelessness and cultural heritage, aligning with Shakespeare's classical image. The subtle contrasts draw attention to the figures without overwhelming the viewer, allowing the visual to maintain elegance while keeping the Penguin Books logo prominent as a branding element. The gold and red hues in the costumes suggest

royalty and intellectual refinement, further reinforcing the high literary value associated with the audiobooks. The symmetrical composition, with the two Shakespeare heads mirroring each other in a curved formation, creates a visually balanced and harmonious layout. This curved form not only mimics the physical design of headphones but also creates a sense of connection between the two figures, symbolizing the bridge between the past (classical literature) and the present (modern technology). The central positioning of the figures ensures that they remain the focal point, while the Penguin Books logo, subtly placed at the bottom, completes the visual narrative without detracting from the central theme. Shakespeare himself is the primary symbol, representing classical literature and intellectual depth. The transformation of his figures into a headphone shape symbolizes the blending of tradition with innovation, suggesting that audiobooks make timeless works accessible in a contemporary format. The Penguin Books logo, a minimalist yet recognizable symbol, reinforces the brand's identity as a trusted source of quality literature. The headphones as a symbol of modern technology underline the convenience and accessibility of audiobooks, while the inclusion of Shakespeare's heads ensures that this modernity does not compromise cultural sophistication.

Coca-Cola light lemon advertisement



Figure 2. Publicis Agency, Coca-Cola Light Lemon, 2010, Digital Advertisement

Signifier: At the center of the visual, a lemon peel forms an elegant spiral, serving as an eye-catching aesthetic element. Positioned minimally in the corner is the Coca-Cola Light Lemon can. The design establishes a subtle balance between the curves of the peel and the product's logo.

Signified: The spiral-shaped lemon peel symbolizes the light and refreshing aroma of Coca-Cola Light Lemon. This visual conveys not only the flavor of the product but also its elegance and natural appeal. The lemon peel functions as a symbol of the product's lightness and healthy ingredients while also delivering an aesthetic message through its minimalist approach.

Connotation/Sign: Lemon is universally associated with freshness and vitality. A peeled lemon spiral, in particular, suggests the product's natural and light qualities. It communicates to consumers that this beverage is not merely an artificial product but offers a sense of freshness derived from nature. Additionally, as a "light" product, it is positioned as a healthy alternative. The spiral of the lemon peel embodies a minimalist design philosophy. This minimalist approach aligns with modern consumer culture's associations of simplicity and elegance. Coca-Cola Light Lemon delivers a straightforward yet effective message: "Less is more." The product offers understated elegance without overindulgence. The

gentle curves of the lemon peel symbolize the product's lightness. These graceful spirals subtly imply the drink's refreshing and light taste. Additionally, the spiral, resembling the letter "C," not only evokes the brand's initials but also subtly reinforces the identity of Coca-Cola through its typographic association. Coca-Cola Light Lemon's identity in the diet beverage category is reinforced through this imagery, appealing to modern consumers. The thin, curving lemon peel elevates the concept of lightness into an aesthetic feature, integrating elegance as an intrinsic part of the product.

Analysis of Graphic Design Elements (Color, Composition, and Symbols): The visual employs a predominantly yellow and white color palette, emphasizing freshness, lightness, and vitality. The soft gradient background transitions from white to pale yellow, mirroring the lemon peel's natural tones. This subtle color choice not only highlights the lemon as a focal element but also aligns with the product's "light" and refreshing qualities. The Coca-Cola Light Lemon can feature consistent yellow accents, reinforcing the association with the lemon theme and creating harmony between the product and the visual. The composition is minimalist, with a spiral lemon peel as the central focal point. Positioned slightly off-center, the peel draws the viewer's attention through its dynamic, curving shape. The can of Coca-Cola Light Lemon is strategically placed in the lower right corner, maintaining a balance between the product and the visual narrative. The empty space around the lemon peel amplifies the minimalist aesthetic, creating a clean and uncluttered layout that reflects the product's "light" identity. The spiral shape leads the eye naturally across the visual, subtly guiding attention to the product in the corner. The lemon peel is the primary symbol, representing freshness, naturalness, and vitality. Its spiral shape conveys a sense of lightness and elegance, reinforcing the product's identity as a healthy and refreshing alternative. The Coca-Cola logo and can act as symbols of brand identity and trust, while the lemon motif connects the product to nature. The minimalist presentation of these symbols aligns with modern design trends, appealing to consumers seeking simplicity and sophistication in their choices.

LEGO advertisement

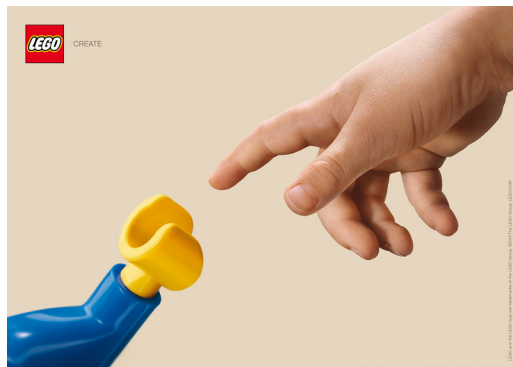


Figure 3. Jung von Matt Agency, LEGO, 2014, Digital Advertisement

Signifier: The visual features a composition in which a LEGO figure's yellow hand and a child's real hand are depicted as if they are about to touch. This arrangement directly references Michelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam*. The iconic yellow color of the LEGO figure emphasizes the brand's recognizable visual identity.

Signified: The composition, where the LEGO figure's hand nearly meets the child's hand, symbolizes the fusion of creativity and human touch. This visual conveys that LEGO toys are not merely playthings but also serve as a platform for imagination and creativity. The connection between the child's hand and the LEGO hand highlights the idea that, while playing with LEGO, children can create worlds as if they were artists or creators. LEGO is positioned as a tool that nurtures imagination and encourages personal creative expression.

Connotation/Sign: Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* fresco associates humanity with divine creative power. By referencing this iconic artwork, LEGO

implies that a child's creativity can be unlocked through play, akin to an almost divine process. Playing with LEGO is portrayed as more than a mundane activity—it offers children the opportunity to build their own worlds, a process imbued with profound creativity. This design suggests that children's imagination knows no limits and that LEGO toys support their cognitive and creative development. The near-touch between the child's hand and the LEGO figure's hand symbolizes how toys contribute to the creative process, bridging the gap between the real world and the world of imagination. LEGO is presented not as a mere tool but as a gateway to a world brought to life by imagination. The LEGO figure's yellow hand reaching toward the human hand establishes a connection between the tangible and LEGO's imaginative universe, reinforcing the message that play is a creative act. This emphasizes that toys are not simply "helpers" or "tools" for children but extensions of their inner worlds. The creative process is depicted as a collaboration between the toy and the child, where the toy serves as a partner in the imaginative journey.

Analysis of Graphic Design Elements (Color, Composition, and Symbols): The advertisement employs a soft beige background, which creates a neutral and timeless canvas, allowing the vibrant primary colors of the LEGO figure (blue and yellow) to stand out prominently. The yellow of the LEGO hand symbolizes creativity, energy, and optimism, reflecting the playful nature of the brand. The child's natural skin tones contrast subtly with the LEGO hand, emphasizing the connection between the real and the imaginative worlds. The color palette effectively reinforces LEGO's identity as a creative and approachable brand.

The composition is centered around the near-touch of the two hands, directly drawing the viewer's attention to this interaction. The use of negative space amplifies the focus on the hands, echoing the iconic imagery of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*. The hands are deliberately placed on opposite sides of the visual, creating a sense of anticipation and bridging the gap between human creativity and the world of LEGO. The placement of the LEGO logo in the top-left corner ensures brand recognition while maintaining the minimalist and focused design.

The yellow LEGO hand is a symbol of creativity, imagination, and the iconic nature of the LEGO brand. It represents the bridge between the tangible and imaginative realms. The child's hand serves as a universal symbol of human potential and the innate desire to create. Together, these hands evoke the idea of co-creation, suggesting that LEGO toys empower children to become creators of their own worlds. By referencing Michelangelo's fresco, the advertisement elevates play to an almost divine creative act, positioning LEGO as not just a toy but a tool for nurturing imagination and intellectual growth.

Critical Interpretation in the Context of Graphic Design and Consumer Culture

Audiobooks advertisement (headphones featuring Shakespeare's figure)

One of the fundamental graphic design principles utilized in this advertisement (Figure 1) is the use of irony and metaphor. Shakespeare's cultural iconography is symbolically merged with headphones, creating both a humorous narrative and an aesthetic appeal. When analyzed through the lens of Barthes' myth-making theory, the headphones serve as the "signifier," representing a modern technological product on the surface, while the "signified" is the contemporary audiobook service offered by the Audiobooks platform (Barthes, 2009). However, this advertisement is not merely a product promotion but also a myth-making process that reshapes cultural values. This myth highlights the re-accessibility of classic literature through technology while simultaneously pointing to the commodification of these values within modern consumer culture. From the perspective of Saussure's semiotic theory, associating a classic literary figure like Shakespeare with an audiobook platform establishes a link between traditional and modern elements. Transforming Shakespeare's figures into the shape of headphones not only generates intellectual appeal but also conveys a message to consumers that the brand offers high cultural value. In this context, the minimal and clean design of the advertisement directs visual attention to the Shakespeare

figure, ensuring the message is easily perceived. The curvilinear forms not only create a dynamic composition but also merge modern technology with traditional culture, reshaping the consumer's cultural perception.

The inclusion of humor in the design makes this irony, which blends the past and the future, more accessible. Presenting the Shakespeare figure in the form of headphones concretizes the integration of traditional literary values with modern technology. However, this humorous representation also carries the risk of transforming Shakespeare's intellectual legacy into an object of popular consumption. In this context, the advertisement functions not merely as a product promotion but as a tool for shaping cultural discourse. The figurative use of Shakespeare reinforces the message that Audiobooks is not only a listening platform but also a cultural bridge providing modern access to literary classics.

In conclusion, this advertisement effectively illustrates how consumer culture intertwines with classical cultural values and highlights the role of technology in this process. Associating a literary icon like Shakespeare with modern technology serves as both a visual metaphor and a symbol of the reconstruction of cultural values in the contemporary world. However, this process also entails the reinterpretation of classical values through popular culture and commercial use. While this approach broadens the accessibility of literary heritage, it simultaneously carries the risk of superficializing these values.

Coca-Cola light lemon advertisement

In this advertisement (Figure 2), the fundamental principles of graphic design -minimalism and elegance- are brought together in an impactful way. The spiral-shaped lemon peel at the center of the visual serves as both an aesthetic element and a strong symbol of the product's natural and light characteristics. Within the framework of Barthes' mythology theory, the "signifier" in this visual is the striking spiral shape of the lemon peel, while the "signified" conveys the message that Coca-Cola Light Lemon is a light, refreshing, and healthy beverage. In this context, the lemon peel is not merely a symbol of naturalness but also a visual representation of modern consumer culture's inclination toward "lightness" and "simplicity."

The minimalist structure of the design stands out through the effective use of negative space. The elegant curves of the lemon peel are the sole focal point of the visual, drawing the viewer's attention directly to this element. The can's subtle placement in the bottom corner shifts the focus away from the product itself, emphasizing the values it represents instead. This design approach reflects the "less is more" principle, commonly employed in contemporary graphic design, highlighting the ideological and aesthetic connections the product establishes with the consumer rather than its physical attributes. As such, the product is presented not merely as a beverage but as a cultural symbol.

The expert use of color theory in this advertisement is particularly notable, with the bright yellow color delivering psychological effects. The psychological impact of colors is often employed in food and beverage advertisements to directly influence consumers (Güler & Tozlu, 2018: 89). Yellow evokes positive emotions such as energy, freshness, and vibrancy, reinforcing the message that Coca-Cola Light Lemon is a healthy and light alternative. Additionally, the aesthetic curves of the spiral peel visually metaphorize the product's lightness. These graceful curves symbolize not only the product's physical lightness but also the pursuit of refinement and simplicity in modern consumer habits.

A critical interpretation of the design reveals the deep connections between this visual and consumer culture. Global brands like Coca-Cola utilize aesthetic elements to shape consumer behavior, transforming healthy living trends into commercial opportunities. This advertisement ties the modern consumer's quest for a healthy lifestyle to aesthetic symbolism while simultaneously exposing how the concept of healthy living is commodified. This process is significant in demonstrating how consumer culture transforms and redefines values.

The spiral shape of the lemon peel represents both the aesthetic and functional qualities of the product, reinforcing the perception of an elegant lifestyle offered to the consumer. The minimalist composition conveys a message that the product offers not just physical attributes but a "way of life." This reflects modern consumer culture's tendency to place emotional and ideological values at the core of the consumer experience.

In conclusion, the Coca-Cola Light Lemon advertisement combines the aesthetic and symbolic values of consumer culture, establishing powerful communication through visual design. The use of the spiral lemon peel as both an aesthetic and symbolic tool demonstrates the capacity of modern graphic design to shape consumer perception. This advertisement aims to create a brand identity that offers not only a beverage but also a lifestyle to its consumers.

LEGO advertisement

LEGO's advertisement (Figure 3) is a remarkable example of graphic design showcasing creative freedom and the power of symbolic storytelling. The direct reference to Michelangelo's iconic fresco *The Creation of Adam* enhances the aesthetic and thematic depth of the ad. The nearly touching hands of the yellow LEGO figure and a child's real hand symbolize not only the union of human creativity with tactile play but also the transformation of the toy into a universal cultural symbol. This composition underscores that LEGO is not merely a toy but a platform for children to explore their creative potential. The moment where the child's hand almost connects with LEGO's hand symbolizes how playing with LEGO allows children to construct their own worlds, akin to artists or creators. This interpretation highlights that LEGO is not just a tool for play but a gateway to an unlimited realm of imagination and creativity.

A critical evaluation of the design suggests that consumer culture commodifies even creative freedom. The reference to Michelangelo's fresco emphasizes the sanctity of creative potential, while the idea of accessing this sanctity through a product becomes a central theme in its marketing strategy. Through this reference, LEGO conveys the message that its toys are not only entertaining but also tools for education and creativity (Barthes, 2012). However, this also illustrates how creative processes themselves can be transformed into consumer objects and used in marketing strategies. The ad offers a critical lens on how consumer culture acts as a hegemonic force over creative processes, raising the tension between the commercialization of creativity and individual freedom.

The composition of the advertisement relies on the principles of symmetry and balance. The yellow color of the LEGO figure reinforces the brand's recognizable visual identity while evoking feelings of joy and creativity in children (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009: 75). The symmetrical arrangement focuses the viewer's attention on the convergence point of the hands, effectively conveying the central message of the ad. This symmetry aligns with LEGO's effort to present the creative process as an "accessible aesthetic order." Moreover, the irony in referencing Michelangelo's fresco situates LEGO's theme of creative freedom within a broader artistic context, leaving a surprising yet thought-provoking impression on the audience. The ad symbolically illustrates how toys ignite children's imagination and support their cognitive creative processes. At the same time, it reveals how creative freedom is recontextualized within the aesthetic and commercial boundaries of consumer culture.

In conclusion, LEGO's advertisement strikingly captures the relationship between creative freedom and consumer culture through graphic design. The artistic reference to Michelangelo's fresco highlights both the significance of creative processes for children and the inevitability of their integration into commercial contexts. LEGO positions itself not just as a toy brand but as a creation platform that supports children's imagination. This advertisement demonstrates how the societal and cultural meanings of creative processes can be utilized as aesthetic tools, turning a consumer product into a cultural symbol.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the dynamic relationship between consumer culture and graphic design from a semiotic perspective through the analysis of advertising visuals. The findings demonstrate that advertisements are not merely commercial communication tools but also powerful signs that produce social and cultural meanings. Graphic design elements are revealed to be strategic tools that shape consumer perception and establish strong symbolic connections with brands. Among these elements, visual components such as color, typography, and composition play a crucial role in effectively conveying cultural and ideological messages on behalf of brands.

The aesthetic elements within advertising visuals go beyond the functionality of the products to provide strong indicators of their social meanings and cultural positioning. The analyzed advertisements illustrate how classical cultural imagery intertwines with modern consumer practices. For instance, the Audiobooks advertisement connects Shakespeare's figurative representation with modern auditory platforms, showcasing how classical literary values are reinterpreted. This advertisement positions the listening experience not merely as a technological convenience but as an act of cultural engagement. In this context, graphic design elements blend modern consumption practices with the cultural richness of the past, constructing an innovative world of meaning in the minds of consumers. The Coca-Cola Light Lemon advertisement demonstrates how aesthetic elegance and minimalism align with the health-focused values of modern consumer culture. The graceful curves of the spiral lemon peel clearly convey themes of freshness and naturalness, while showcasing how these themes are integrated with aesthetics. This advertisement goes beyond emphasizing the product's physical attributes, successfully presenting a healthy and light lifestyle to consumers through a visual metaphor. This reinforces the role of graphic design as a symbolic and ideological tool that shapes consumer behavior.

The LEGO advertisement, on the other hand, highlights the sanctity of the creative process and the boundless potential of imagination while critically addressing how consumer culture commodifies this creative process. The artistic reference to Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* implies that toys are not merely tools for entertainment but also platforms that foster children's creativity and individual expression. However, this advertisement also underscores the notion that even values such as creative freedom can be transformed into consumer objects. With the impact of digitalization, graphic design has evolved into an interactive and multi-layered structure, significantly enhancing advertisements' ability to reproduce social and cultural values. Advertising visuals have transformed into powerful communication tools that not only promote products but also encourage consumers to adopt specific lifestyles and cultural values. In this context, the analyzed examples vividly illustrate how graphic design is intertwined with modern consumer culture and contributes to it by generating symbolic meanings that influence consumer behavior. Advertising visuals possess the capacity to communicate the lifestyles, cultural codes, and ideological messages a product represents, going far beyond its physical benefits. Therefore, graphic design plays a critical role as both a carrier of consumer culture and a strategic tool that reshapes it.

In conclusion, the relationship between graphic design and consumer culture demonstrates how advertising strategies influence consumer behavior through subconscious symbols and signs, contributing to the reproduction of consumer culture. In the future, a deeper exploration of this relationship will be valuable for understanding the impact of visual communication processes within social and cultural contexts.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Committee Declaration

Ethics committee approval was not required for this study.

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