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Since its introduction into the world in the mid-19th century, advertising has come to be considered a major institution within capitalist economies in society. The first recognizable signs of advertising appeared in magazines and newspapers and now manifests in new technologies such as radio, television, the Internet, and smartphones. Neil Postman estimates that the average American will have seen well over one million commercials by the age of forty and will have "close to another million to go before his first social security check" (Frith 1997: 1). Individuals in society are embedded in a culture of consumption, one in which advertising has increasingly defined our collective consciousness (Frith 1997). Advertising has been considered by many who experience it as the simple conveying of information about goods and services, however, it is much more than that. Advertisements – through their constant repetition of images that become subconsciously ingrained in our minds – reinforce particular social attitudes, display idealized figures to be emulated, and communicate cultural values (Bogart 1988: 76).

With the development of new media such as social networking sites and online streaming platforms, the role that advertising currently plays in these spaces is worthy of a critical analysis. YouTube, for example, serves as a relevant point of analysis. Created in 2005, YouTube is a video-sharing website that allows billions of people to

"discover, watch and share originally-created videos" and serves as a distribution platform for content creators and advertisers (Google 2016). Shortly after its creation, YouTube became an independent subsidiary of Google through the company's efforts to integrate search engines with content, social networking, and advertising (van Dijck 2009: 42). In January 2007, YouTube's CEO announced that the website would begin to incorporate short commercial clips, commonly known as video ads, produced by advertisers. A video ad appears before other videos on YouTube, beside playing videos, and in search results (Google 2016). This served as the first sign towards the accommodation of advertisers and the commercialization of a small start-up site that was previously driven by users and content creators. With the addition of video ads, YouTube has transformed into a commercial platform that now works as a significant component of the evolving network of media businesses that are dominated by Google (van Dijck 2009: 48).

Previous research on advertising has explored media such as print, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and most recently, Internet. However, little (if any) research has used video ads as a point of discussion or investigation. Video ads can be thought of as having similar characteristics to television advertisements and commercials. Commercials come in a range of styles and formats – some tell a story or offer brief bits of imagery while others make a demonstration or offer a testimonial. But almost all of them rely on the protagonists to make the point, and the protagonist serves as a stand-in for the consumer

(Bogart 1988: 77).

With the emergence of technology like smartphones and video-sharing sites like YouTube where the user has a more control over the content that they view, advertisers and media companies alike are adjusting their strategies to reach consumers. Henry Jenkins (2006) notes that this shift in the way that media content is produced and circulated results in a participatory culture in which ordinary citizens are able to wield media technologies, technologies that were once controlled by what van Dijck (2009) calls "capitalist-intensive industries" (van Dijck 2009: 42). With this, there are important power agendas that arise in advertising, as noted by Firth (1997). Jenkins (2006) argues that new media offers users and consumers leverage to negotiate their relationships with media companies. Previte (1999) similarly claims that individuals' ability to self-select which advertising messages to view shifts the power from the advertiser to the consumer (Previte 1999: 207). Van Dijck (2009) contends, though, that with the increasing commercialization of the Internet (such as the introduction of video ads on YouTube), the pre-existing power structure and relationship between media companies, advertisers, and users has been restored, and that users and consumers have a very limited potential to take back that power from advertisers (van Dijck 2009: 42). We see evidence of this by the fact that companies are now able to track online social behavior and activities, making the relationship between advertisers and consumers more intimate than ever (van Dijck 2009: 47). With the increasing commercialization of the Internet, a concern of many is that advertising will drown out public speech and limit the social benefits of much needed public forums, such as user-generated platforms like YouTube (Previte 1999: 199). As a part of my examination of Spelman students' attitudes towards video advertising, I was interested in further exploring this notion of power in Internet commercialization by seeing how students perceive the power dynamics involved in video advertising. Specifically, who do students think holds the power in this new media landscape?

Bogart (1988) notes that the media context in which advertising appears influences how messages are perceived by individuals (Bogart 1988: 76). In measuring attitudes towards advertising in a particular medium, it is important to distinguish between advertising as an instrument and advertising as an institution, as well as between personalized and generalized attitudes. With this in mind, Pollay and Mittal (1993) developed a comprehensive model to measure these attitudes that includes micro-level beliefs about advertising and macro-level societal beliefs about advertising. The dimensions of the model consist of three personal utility factors – product information, social image information and hedonic amusements – and four socio-economic factors – good for the economy, fostering materialism, corrupting values and falsity/nosense (Pollay and Mittal 1993: 104). Previous studies have found that consumers' attitudes toward individual advertisements are influenced by their attitudes toward advertising in general. In particular, people who have more favorable feelings about advertising in general have found specific advertisements more acceptable, informative, and enjoyable. Furthermore, the more alienated consumers felt, the more they criticized advertising (Bush, Smith and Martin 1999: 15).

The vast majority of research on attitudes towards advertising has focused on print, radio, and television advertising. Previte (1999) is one of the few researchers who has investigated attitudes towards advertising in new media. Her research examined "how consumers perceive the practice of traditional commercial techniques in electronic media" (Previte 1999: 199). Given the commercial free start of the Internet, Previte theorized that Internet users would have negative attitudes towards the institution of advertising. In surveying 256 electronic and student volunteers, she found relationships between Internet users' attitudes towards advertising and their online experience, as well as a strong negative attitude toward advertising in general and the societal effects of advertising. Additionally, she concluded that general attitudes to the institution of

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concluded that general attitudes to the institution of advertising were mostly negative, from both a societal and economic perspective (Previte 1999: 204).

Despite its immense potential, research on attitudes towards advertising has largely centered on Whites (Bush et al 1999: 13). Previous research in Black Studies specifically on African-Americans' attitudes towards advertising have indicated that African-Americans tended to be more receptive to advertising in general than Caucasians, that African-Americans were more satisfied with the informational value of advertising, and that they were somewhat more materialistic than Caucasians (Bauer and Greyser 1968; Duran, Teel, and Bearden 1979; Tolley and Goett 1971; Soley and Reid 1983; Yoon 1995). Bush et al (1999) also contributed to this research in this area through their comparison of African-Americans and Caucasians in the influence of consumer socialization variables on attitudes toward advertising. Given that college-educated African-Americans watched five more hours of television a week than Caucasians, Bush et al (1999) posited that the media's socializing effects would be greater for African-Americans than for their Caucasian counterparts. Using the theory of consumer socialization, the authors explored factors that might shape a consumer skill – attitudes toward advertising – for African-American and Caucasian young adults. Consumer socialization is the process by which young people develop consumer related skills, knowledge, and attitudes. According to this theory, young adults learn the rational aspects of consumption from their parents, the mass media teaches them to give social meaning to products, schools teach the importance of economic wisdom, and peers exercise varying social pressures. The theory is based on the cognitive development model and the social learning model (Bandura 1963). Similar to Previte (1999), Bush et al (1999) utilized Pollay and Mittal's attitudes towards advertising scale as a model for measuring African-American and Caucasians' attitudes. They found that socialization agents like parents, peers, mass

> For black women, seeing black women with natural hair in advertisements, also solidifies the social acceptability of natural black hair.

media, race, and gender play a major role in shaping individuals' general attitudes toward advertising. Specifically, African-Americans had more positive attitudes towards advertising than Caucasians, and women had more positive attitudes towards advertising than men. Ultimately, the African-American middle class found advertising to be an ally in product purchase (Bush et al 1999: 21).

Recently, some companies have devoted attention to understanding Black female consumers. The market research company Nielsen has called the African-American woman a "trendsetter, a social maven, the head of her household, a leader in business and community" and noted that she is "progressive with her thoughts on...entertainment and diversity in advertising" (Nielsen Reports 2014). Similarly, Feick and Price (1987) indicated that female African-Americans were more likely to be "market mavens," defined as "individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information" (Feick and Price 1987: 85). Given that Blacks are some of the most active video consumers online (76 percent of them said that they used video-sharing sites, and that they spend two and a half hours watching videos on their smartphones on a monthly basis) in comparison to Whites, investigating their attitudes towards video ads is worthy of research (The Washington Post 2011) (Nielsen 2015). Additionally, little empirical research has been devoted specifically to exploring young Black women's attitudes towards advertising.

Meaning Matters: Deconstructing Meaning in Advertisements

Advertisements are much more than messages aimed at relaying information about goods and services so that consumers can make brand choices. In addition to offering product information, advertisements serve as social and cultural texts about ourselves and are embedded with the cultural roles and values that define our everyday lives (Frith 1997: 1). Furthermore, William O'Barr (1994) asserts that all advertisements contain ideology. Ideology is defined as "ideas that buttress and

support a particular distribution of power in society" (Frith 1997: 9). With this, advertising manipulates symbols in order to create meaning for viewers, and the values that are conveyed in advertising mirror the dominant ideological themes within society (Frith 1997: 13). Consequently, these messages have broader social and cultural implications. In reading advertisements, we can even see how "the political, social, and cultural forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives" manifest (Frith 1997: 2). In this way, advertising simultaneously creates culture and reflects society.

In "Undressing the Ad: Reading Culture in Advertising," Frith (1997) offers a guide for analyzing meaning within advertisements. The first step involved looking at the surface meaning, or the overall impression that a reader might receive from briefly viewing the advertisement. Second is looking at the advertisers' intended meaning, or the sales message that they are trying to relay about the products, services, or even lifestyles represented in the ad. Lastly, the viewer may put forth theories about the cultural or ideological meaning of the ad, making sense of it by relating it to their culture and the shared belief systems present in society. This largely relies on their cultural knowledge and background (Frith 1997: 5). A second way that ads can be analyzed is through looking at the social relationships that are depicted between the people who are featured in them. Explaining what props and symbols may represent as well as power structures (i.e. how power is expressed, who appears to have the power or control in the story, and how power is exerted over another) in an ad stands as another important point of analysis (Frith 1997: 9). In analyzing the meaning behind advertisements, we engage in what Cornel West (1990) calls a process of demystification. Demystification is to seek the connotative meaning embedded in such myths and to historicize them or expose them" (Frith 1997: 11). In this way, "a deconstruction and political reading of promotional propaganda involved in the economic dynamics of the late twentieth century" becomes necessary (Frith 1997).

Perceptions of Black Women in Advertising

Due to the increasingly rapid growth of the African-American population in the United States, advertisers are dedicating more effort to reaching minority women as potentially profitable consumers (Frith 1997: 86). Their purchasing power represents over 20% of the nation's total consumer spending, steadily rising at a faster rate than the non-minority population (Mastro & Stern 2003). Previous research has shown that African-Americans seem to spend more than the average U.S. citizen on products like jewelry, accessories, and personal care items. Additionally, they have been found to be more motivated than their White counterparts by quality and status. (Bush et al 1999: 15).

Because of the separation of the media, advertising targeting specific racial groups may look very different from one another (Bush et al 1999: 14). The ways in which African-American has been depicted in advertising has gone through many shifts and changes in years – historically, Blacks were repeatedly portrayed in subservient positions like porters, cooks, and maids. Advertisements today might show African-Americans in more dominant roles such as that of a business executive. Additionally, there has been an increase in beauty and cosmetic ads that target Black women (Frith 1997: 85). Recently, however, there has been an increase in the number of African-American models that are featured in advertisements. This increase has shown to be beneficial in some ways, as research on African-Americans has revealed that African Americans find commercials with models of the same race to be more meaningful than commercials with say, an all-White cast (Schlinger and Plummer 1972).

Because White men typically are the advertisers who control the images presented in the media, these images will often reflect their values and interests. As a result stereotypical images and expectations of Blacks are often perpetuated and reinforced, contributing to the dominant ideology of White supremacy. Once exposed to these texts and images, individuals within society begin to internalize these advertising messages and their attitudes towards Blacks become shaped and influenced by these dominant ideologies. In this way, many critics of advertising contend that it maintains a culture dominated by racism and White hegemony. Bristor et al (1995) notes that "the problem with stereotypical portrayals is not whether they are true or false but that they inhibit the production of other meanings or ideas" (Fuller 2001: 122). Given that media and advertising are oftentimes a primary source of socialization for many in society, these images have very powerful and long-lasting implications. Although the presence of Blacks in advertising is important, the ways in which they are portrayed in advertisements is equally, if not more, important. Using the social cognitive theory

(SCT) as a framework, Mastro and Stern (2003) evaluated depictions of Blacks and other racial groups in prime-time television commercials and identified the possible implications of exposure to these ads on minorities (Mastro and Stern 2003: 637). SCT posits that "under certain conditions, such as the repeated, simple, and rewarded messages that typify television ads, viewers can and do learn from what they see in the media." Furthermore, it theorizes that "the manner in which images are presented on television influence how viewers interpret and respond to the modeled acts" (Bandura 2002). In looking at 2,880 commercials over a 3-week period, Mastro and Stern (2003) found that Blacks were most commonly depicted as older adults and located outdoors. Even more, Black women tended to be portrayed as average in affability while White and Asian women were portrayed as highly affable. Additional research on the representations of Blacks in advertising by Bowen and Schmid (1997) indicated that Black people were commonly characterized as athletes, musicians, and in family settings (Hazell and Clarke 2008: 8). Bristor et al (1995) similarly content analyzed television commercials, noting that most of them conveyed the message that Blacks are still "in their place" (Fuller 2001: 121).

There also exists a historic tendency to present Blacks as links to product characteristics or as objects rather than as consumers like their White counterparts (Bush et al 1999: 17). Black models' roles in ads largely seem to be to entertain and serve (Fuller 2001: 123). Researchers have also explored persistent stereotypes of Black women that continue to plague advertising. The authoritative head of the household or single mother matriarch; the independent, headstrong, and overly expressive Sapphire; the seductive and sexually aggressive Jezebel; and the good-natured, loud, and often overweight Mammy (Hazell and Clarke 2008: 9). Through her two-pronged qualitative investigation of African-American male and female students, Fuller (2001) found that students perceived the popular Pine-Sol commercial as an attempt to revive the enduring Aunt Jemima or mammy caricature. With this, she argues that the mammy concept has been deeply ingrained into American culture and society that it continuously appears in ads that feature Black women (Fuller 2001: 123). Through this research, we see how gender and race interact in how individuals are portrayed in the advertising (Hazell and Clarke 2008: 9).

Considering that much of the previous research on Blacks' attitudes towards advertising and representations of Blacks has been conducted a decade or longer ago, a more contemporary analysis on this topic is needed. More importantly, examining the ways in which Spelman students as these so-called "market mavens" make meaning out of video ads that feature or target them is worthwhile.

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