

CHAPTER I

Introduction

A. Research Background

As a powerful marketing device, nowadays, advertising is inarguably an inseparable part of people's daily life. As Brassington & Pettitt (2000) have said, advertising invades people in daily basis "whether on television, radio, print or posters." Among all popular media in which products are advertised, television is probably the most popular one. Television enables a seller to communicate to a broad range of potentially large audiences (Brassington & Pettitt, 1999). Tv is probably the most popular one. Television enables a seller to communicate to a broad range of potentially large audiences (Brassington & Pettitt, 1999). It is averagely estimated that Americans are exposed to over 40,000 television commercials per year (de Jong, 2009). Thus, it is not outrageous to say that advertisements have "bombarded" people's life. "More than 90% of Americans own televisions and the average American views approximately 714 advertisements each week" (Brentl & Cantor, 1988 as cited in Lavine et al, 1999). Thus, advertising undeniably is also a powerful social tool.

Critical views on TV advertisements, however, have uncovered that they not only sell products but also values, images, and concept of love, sexuality, success, and normalcy. Advertisements may affect their viewers' "beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors" (Condry & Pollay,

1986, 1989 as cited in Lavine et al, 1999). Advertisement designers want to make their work meaningful to their viewers so that they can relate to these ads and purchase the items they are trying to sell. “This works best when people in their advertisements are relatable such as celebrities, athletes, politicians, etc” (Cuneen et al., 2007 in DiSalvatore, 2010). Moreover, companies also tend to use images they believe will help to make their product sell. These images tend to include things such as making the product look like it works far better than its competitors and everyone being happy about using whatever the product may be. However, along with these images come images that reinforce stereotypes such as those about women. Studies of advertisements have categorized women in various roles: housewife, decorative element, sex object, and dependent on men; (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 71). Along with it, the objectification of women has for the most part always existed in advertisement. Berberick (2010) in her paper “*The Objectification of Women in Mass Media*”, states that women have always been objectified in advertisement and entertainment throughout the years and it is accepted in American patriarchal society. The sexual exploitation of women is predominant in advertising, which is impossible to escape.

The mechanism used in these ads is quite simple: Attractive bodies are employed to grab attention and simulate desire, which advertisers hope will then be transferred to the product. Buy the beer, get the girl. In this way, women’s bodies are equated with commodities, presented as rewards of consumption. By instructing men to regard women’s bodies as objects, ads help create an atmosphere that devalues women as people, encourages sexual harassment, and worse (Jacobson and Mazur, 1995 in Berberick, 2010)

commit to user

During the past 60 years, when television ads have been broadcasting, many scholarly articles have been published and many documentaries made, claiming on the unfair portrayal of women and men in advertising. Many women are exploited and used as objects to sell and endorse products. Recent study by Ellen DiSalvatore in her research paper “*Portrayal of Women in Advertising*” (2010), presents an analysis of the evolution of advertising’s portrayal of women focusing on print and television media. The study includes the history of women in advertisement, some of the most influential women, and how they have been portrayed for the past 50 or more years. In her study, DiSalvatore states that women in advertising have still portrayed the same way in the past.

The most common setting for women in television advertisements is in the domestic residence. Commercials continue to show women only in their own private homes. When consumers see these images of women they assume that women are only limited to their homes while men are able to have a variety of many places they can be. (Stern & Mastro, 2004 in DiSalvatore, 2010)

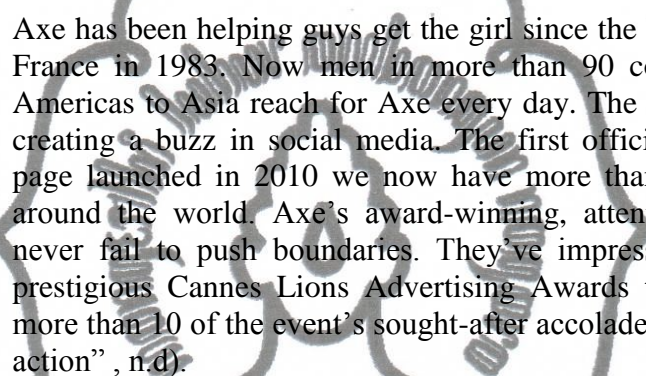
DiSalvatore’s argument has inspired this research to investigate how contemporary television ads portray women in their works.

Among many television ads that use women as models in their works, AXE, the most popular male grooming brand in the world, according to Author Martin Lindstrom in his book *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy*, surely stands from the rest. Out of 10 television commercials, 9 depict if not objectify women. Thanks to that, AXE (and its advertisements) has

commit to user

become a treasure for those who wish to study women's depiction in media.

Since its launching in 1983 in France by Unilever, AXE has expanded to be a multinational company, expanding to [Asia](#) and [Africa](#). In this new millennium, the brand has launched with great success in the [United States](#) and [Canada](#).



Axe has been helping guys get the girl since the brand launched in France in 1983. Now men in more than 90 countries from the Americas to Asia reach for Axe every day. The Axe effect is also creating a buzz in social media. The first official Axe Facebook page launched in 2010 we now have more than 25 million fans around the world. Axe's award-winning, attention-grabbing ads never fail to push boundaries. They've impressed judges at the prestigious Cannes Lions Advertising Awards too – we've won more than 10 of the event's sought-after accolades (“Axe Brands in action”, n.d).

AXE leads the men's grooming products market almost in all countries in the world. It offers guys a range of body sprays, deodorants, antiperspirants, shower gels and hair products, all designed to help them look, smell, and feel their best. Unilever practically invented the body spray category in 2002. It has helped fuel an enormous boom in men's grooming products, which is expected to balloon to a \$33.2 billion-a-year industry by 2015 (Global Industry Analysts, Inc.). Unilever's research and development teams work with a panel of 'expert noses' to create AXE products, and come up with fragrances that help men smell and feel their best. Every aroma is tested on the target audience – real women. Every year, a new AXE deodorant fragrance is launched, combining seductive scents with the latest technology. (“Axe Brands in action”, n.d).

In order to appeal to its consumers, the AXE brand needs to create a personality which will represent their product, “just like people, all brands have a personality” (Dorresteijn, n.d). In promoting its product, they produce advertisement that should be made as interesting as possible in order to get the interest of the audience and sometimes it highlights certain aspects such as the effect of the product by positioning the female character as the teaser. “If you spray yourself with AXE, women will come to you right away”. This is the main message that this commercial transmits. This theme has been coined “The AXE effect” and has become the main slogan for all of the brand’s products. The idea of this slogan is that once the man applies or uses an AXE product, he will be the object of desire of any attractive women he passes. AXE has bent its marketing toward women exploitation which presents women as anxious sexual pets who seemly distinguish only by smell. There have always been aspects of sexism in advertising, however, Dorsam (n.d) states that, “the sexism coming from AXE is of a different breed, it is direct, honest and intentional in its misogyny, because apparently sex still sells, and when it is paired with sexism, its market power increases”.

As mentioned earlier, AXE is a treasure for those who want to study women’s portrayal in media. Its advertisements have got some academic attention in the past decade, either positive or negative. M. Alyse Craig analyzed the AXE advertisements in an article entitled “*Old Spice versus Axe: Exploring the role of commercials in viewers’ live*”(n.d). In her work, she states that if AXE had established a female model who was

not highly sexualized and “skanky,” they may have received more positive responses from viewers. Along with her, [Julie Zeilinger](#), in an article entitled: *Axe Commercial Suggests That Women's Increasing Hotness Is A Danger To Men* (2006) argues that AXE's ad is not only bad for women. It also insults and undermines men. The ad promotes the belief that all men are incapable of controlling themselves when women are nearby. By this logic, men are no longer capable of being respectful friends, students, colleagues or strangers, that they need an actual product to manage their own behavioral problems and that is simply not true. Juli Parker in her article “*The Feminist Critics*” (2013) provides critiques of AXE Black Chill Tv commercials from a feminist perspective. In her article, she states that this AXE commercial constructs sexist theme toward women explicitly, “it explains that women are getting hotter and hotter, which according to AXE is a world crisis, also not only is this advertisement sexist but that they make men look like idiots and bumbling fools”.

That women are still stereotyped despite the continuing activism of the women's liberation movement is clearly demonstrated in the following study of a sample of the last decade AXE TV ads. Dominick and Rauch in an article entitled *The image of women in network TV commercials* (2009) state that focusing on the advertising viewed in millions of homes during prime-time, he concludes that women are most often seen as decorative (sex objects) or useful (housewives and mothers), but hardly ever as professionals or working wives.

The works above, however, still fail to provide a sequential description about women's representation in AXE as they only analyzed one advertisement in a designated year. Thus, to fill the blank, this research offers a more detailed and comprehensive scrutiny over AXE television advertisements over the most recent years. Moreover, while nearly all literatures used in this research argue that axe commercials objectify women, this research though, will try to find the positive values embraced by the women in the commercials as the researcher will analyze the commercials from a different point of view.

So many questions arise after watching several AXE advertisements. Greg Stine in his book entitled *The Nine Principles of Branding* states that branding is more than just marketing; it is the entire effect that creates a memorable identity. "In other words, your "brand" is your image as seen from the outside. Your brand is who you are — your strength, your integrity and your reputation. It's not simply how your logo is displayed, but rather the emotional and intellectual response your logo elicits from your target audience" (Stine, n.d, p. 2). So, why does AXE, as explained previously that many researchers believe, depict women under the glorification of male sexual desire as their memorable identity Or, contrary to the almost of all literatures used in this research that consider AXE commercials objectify women, is it some kind of Girl Power of freedom in expressing their sexuality? These questions lead me to conduct a research on this brand's advertisement.

This research focuses on the latest 3 of AXE's official commercials which are produced and aired from 2010-2013. They are: AXE Twist (2010), Even Angels Will Fall (2011), and AXE Black Chill (2013). The characters and the social and cultural condition in the videos will also be involved for providing information and justification related to the analysis.

C. Research Question

Concerning the significant issue about the women image in AXE as a popular product in America, this thesis is carried out to answer:

How does AXE construct women's images in their commercials and how it represents postfeminist women in America?

D. Objective of the Study

Based on the research question, the objective of this thesis is:

To explain how the commercials construct women's images and how the construction of women in the commercials represents postfeminist women in America.

E. Benefits of the Study

The research is conducted in the substances of:

1. The students of English Department

To provide comprehensive information about women's image in America through AXE Tv commercials.

2. Other researchers

To give contribution for other researchers who want to do a research on the related field.

F. Research Methodology

1. Type of Research

The research is in the form of descriptive qualitative research. “Qualitative research is all about exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions” (Ereaut, 2007). As the research is qualitative research, the data collected are in the form of words and pictures, not statistics or numbers as what are in quantitative research. The research seeks out to answer the problems of the research by employing the question of ‘how’ of the topic, not just ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘when’.

2. Source of Data

The sources of data in the thesis is 3 of AXE’s official video commercials which are produced and aired from 2010-2013. They are: AXE Twist (2010), AXE: Even Angels Will Fall (2011) and AXE Black Chill (2013). All of the videos are downloaded from the AXE official account in internet video sharing site, www.YouTube.com/user/AXE in january 27, 2013.

3. Data

Data consist of primary data and secondary data. The primary data is collected from the sources of data which are 3 of AXE’s commercials.

The primary data consist of characters and characterization, sounds, and the cinematographic elements such as camera angle, camera distance, lighting, etc. The secondary data is proposed to support the primary data of the research. The secondary data are collected from written materials like books, articles, reviews, and journals related to the study. The secondary data, both hard file and soft file, are taken from the internet and by doing library studies.

4. Technique of Collecting Data

The primary data, which are 3 AXE Tv commercials are selected by purposive sampling. Arikunto (2000), states that the main goal of purposive sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest, which will best enable researcher to answer research questions. The 3 commercials are selected because of some characteristics. They are aired during the most recent years in America and also they are suspected constructing the theme of this research.

To find out messages conveyed by the data, firstly the commercials will be observed through several steps. First, each of the commercial is watched repeatedly to find the object of analysis. After that, the commercial containing preferred object of analysis are cut and grouped to reflect the same issue. It means not all part of the commercial will be analyzed, only some parts that are considered relevant to the problem statements. When the parts of commercial containing information are

found, they will be broken down into frames of still pictures. These frames of still pictures will be analyzed in this research.

5. Technique of Analyzing Data

The data are firstly collected and classified in order to answer the problem statement. The analysis will be conducted using interdisciplinary approaches to explore the main data then the supporting data is scrutinized to support the main data. Last step is taking conclusion to find the obvious explanation for the problem statement



G. Theoretical Approach

This research is conducted in American Studies framework. Thus, in analyzing the data, it incorporates various disciplines in the forms of theory and approach. To answer the research question, it incorporates semiotics theory, socio-cultural approach and also postfeminism theory.

Since its inception in 1950s, American Studies has become a device to learn about all issues related to the United States (Spiller, 1973, p. 611). Robert E. In his article *Unity and Diversity in the Study of American Culture: the American Studies Association in Perspective*, Spiller has stated:

This was a time when the United States was emerging into the role of a world power and the stirrings of cultural nationalism were beginning to be felt in the universities in practically all of the

academic disciplines except perhaps those in pure science; and even there, American technology gave to scientific disciplines something of a nationalistic flavor. (1973, p. 611)

United States is a superpower nation that makes the country significant to study its culture and all issues in it. American culture “has been characteristically heterogeneous rather than homogenous” (Spiller, 1973, p.613) as its people come from different cultural background, ethnics, social, religion, etc. The culture develops and builds its identity throughout the history of the United States from the past until present.

American identity is characterized by re-vision as a process of renewal: ‘Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction’ (Rich 1993:167). The voices of people of colour, feminists, and radicals coming from the margins of American culture have caused the ‘assumptions’ that Adrienne Rich refers to, to be examined and reviewed, but this is a process inherent in a radical interpretation of the myth of new beginnings. (Campbell and Kean, 1997, p. 33)

That is why American culture can be understood as complex culture as it is multifaceted and encompasses a vast range of time. Because of its complexity of the culture, the study of the country needs various disciplines and approaches. The purpose of relating various disciplines in studying American cultural products is to find the context behind it as it has been widely recognized that the central to any interdisciplinary enterprise is the relationship between text to be studied and the contexts from which they come (Campbell and Kean, 1997, p. 4). Therefore, several approaches are applied in this research to reveal the context behind the data as the products of American culture being analyzed.

American cultural product can be used as an instrument in understanding America because culture reflects a particular way of life, whether a people, a period or a group (Williams in Storey, 2009, p. 2). Culture that is widely favored or well liked by many people is simply called as popular culture (ibid: 5). In the modern era, the social signification of popular culture can be mapped based on how the culture is identified with mass culture. It can be said that mass culture is popular culture which is produced through industrial technique of mass production and marketed to mass consumers to get profits (Strinati, 2003, p. 2). MacDonald has stated (as cited in Strinati, 2003, p. 11) that mass culture is created by experts who are recruited by capitalists. These experts adopt the dominant culture of society, shape it with certain techniques, then produce it in large quantity and finally bring the new culture to mass consumers. The new culture is created in such a manner so it can be accepted by high and low class society so it can collapse the gap between high and low culture.

Objects taken to be part of popular culture are readable objects, written or visual materials for which there are available traditions of interpretation and criticism, but in recent years, the range of what is considered "readable" has expanded. Television and Advertisement are included to be products of popular culture which has been processed to be mass culture (Mukerji & Schudson, 2011)

Advertising in television is closely related to society. It conveys many ideas and meaning and represents what happen in reality as well as

beliefs and values embraced by society. In building and transferring its meaning, advertisement uses its particular way, in this case using signs and codes which often have deeper meaning than what its audience can figure out. To understand these signs and codes, concealed within the cinematic elements of television advertisements, this research employs the semiotics approach.

Semiotics is the science to study signs. “The study of semiotics, or semiology in France, originated in a literary or linguistic context and has been expanding in a number of directions since the early turn-of-the century work of C.S. Peirce in the U.S. and Levi Strauss and Ferdinand Saussure in France (Moriarty, 1995)”. Saussure defined ‘sign’ as the union of the ‘signifier’, a form which signifies, and the ‘signified’, an idea signified (Stam, 1992, p. 18). According to Saussure, sign, the relation between signifier and signified, is arbitrary (Storey, 1996, p. 55). The relation between the signifier and the signified is not constructed naturally but rather conventionally. A signifier opens many chances for various signified or meaning.

Roland Barthes then developed Saussure’s scheme that signifier + signified = sign and added to it a second level of signification which he called ‘two semiological systems’ (Barthes, 1999, p. 115). In Barthes’ system, there are two stages of signification which are denotation stage and connotation stage. The sign produced in the connotation stage is interpretative and depends upon one’s social and cultural experience (Turner, 1993, p. 46). To understand how a cultural product

communicates, it is needed to notice on the social context and an understanding of cultural codes. The content of a cultural product is mostly influenced by the social and cultural condition of a society where the text is presented. Therefore, sociocultural approach is important to assist semiotics approach in explaining the context of a cultural product in a certain society.

Specific communication processes, whether identified as rhetorical, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, or semiotic, can be fully understood only in relation to the primary axes of sociocultural meaning: the *historical*, that is, the body of cultural conventions that constitute historical traditions and trajectories; and the *social*, those contemporaneous contexts of human organization, social structure, and community life that give communication patterns and events shared significance within and across groups (Griffin, 2002, p. 30).

In analyzing women's image in AXE advertisements, it is not enough to simply notice on signs available in a advertisement. As a cultural product, those signs are influenced by the social context and cultural codes of a society where the text is taken. The understanding about American social and cultural condition at a specific time is needed to explain how an advertisement as text communicates and how the context behind the text is revealed. At this point, sociocultural approach is applied to give the clear explanation about the women's image in American popular brand's advertisement: AXE.

As the research focuses on the women's issues in the advertisements, feminist approach is needed as the framework of the research. Feminism has long journey to deal with sexism and objectification in media. Feminism rejects the idea that women are inferior

to men. Feminism claims that patriarchy, the rule of the fathers, is the basic cause of women's oppression (Murphy, 1995, p.1). Contemporary feminism today struggles for correcting the stereotypes and images of women in media. The struggle further is meant for preventing attitudes that support such biased practices.



H. Thesis Organization

This thesis is divided into four chapters and each chapter is divided into some subchapters. Those chapters are Chapter I Introduction, Chapter II Literature Review, Chapter III Analysis, and Chapter IV Conclusion and Recommendation.

The first chapter, Introduction is divided into eight subchapters. These are Research Background, Scope of Study, Research Question, Objective of the Study, Benefits of the Study, Research Methodology, Theoretical Approach, and Thesis Organization

The next chapter, Literature Review, explains about Postfeminism in America, Women In American Tv Commercial from 20th Century until present time, Semiotics Theory, and The basic terminology in Cinematography.

The third chapter, Analysis, consists of three subchapters. The first subchapter tells about Postfeminist women: promoting women's right on sexual pleasure and freedom of self expression in AXE TWIST

commercial, while the second subchapter discusses about Woman's freedom to control her body and sexuality in AXE Excite commercial. The last subchapter is about Individual Empowerment of Women in AXE Black Chill commercial.

The last chapter, Conclusion and Recommendation, provides explanation about the result and recommendation of the research.

