

The Analysis of Perfume Advertisements

Sabrina Phillips

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Oakland University

Advertisements are in our everyday lives, and each advertisement is representative of a variety of different products that are available. Food, drinks, clothes, accessories, makeup, cars, shoes — there is an endless list of products that are advertised to us day to day. However, when we look at ads, we just focus on the product itself and not what it's trying to tell us. We never really take the time to focus and really study what the ad is saying and what it is subconsciously trying to convince us to do. Specific advertisements for specific products will send a specific message to their target audience. One specific product advertisement that is interesting to analyze for its meaning is perfume ads. Perfume ads have a variety of different themes, looks, and messages that are within the ads themselves that help sell their product. An analysis of the ideology of a Givenchy perfume advertisement and a Beyoncé perfume advertisement will help us understand and reveal the social norms on the topic of gender and sexuality when it comes to advertisements.

There are a variety of different ads that all have different contexts to it. The advertisements range in tones when it comes to the content of the advertisement. One perfume ad may have bright colors, flowers and the main model smiling in it, making her look like she's happy and having fun. While another advertisement may have darker tones, the models in a dark area with red lighting, the model having a smoldering look, making her look mysterious. Even though both these advertisements are widely different in tones and content, they still are selling the same product: perfume. Though they may be targeting different audiences, they both are designed to convince their audience that if they use their perfume, they will be like the woman pictured in the ads: that being either happy and bubbly or edgy and mysterious. Either way, the

end goal of the audience seeing these ads is to buy their product to be like the woman they see in the ads. To really see how each of these different tones of advertisement affect different audience types, I decided to pick two examples of advertisements that are completely opposite ends of the spectrum and analyze what they are trying to say to the target audience of women.

The first perfume advertisement that I looked at was Givenchy. When just looking at the advertisement without taking too deep into the analysis, you can quickly get a feel of what's going on. The first thing you see is a very beautiful woman who is actually the actress Amanda Seyfried. You see Amanda dressed up in a pink dress, high heels, makeup and hair done and sitting in a chair looking off the balcony of what you can assume is a very nice scenic city, like Paris. Lastly, you see Amanda holding a flower and peeling the petals from the flower. You then see the picture of the perfume in the bottom corner with the saying "Live Irrésistible" right next to the bottle. Now that I have pointed out the obvious things that are shown on the ad, I'm now going to analyze and decode the message that this ad is trying to send. When it comes to decoding, there are three different methods you can use to read and analyze said advertisement: dominant-hegemonic, oppositional, and negotiated. To begin, I'm going to start off by using the dominant-hegemonic position. Castleberry (2013) explains dominant-hegemonic position as the preferred meaning of the advertisement. In other words, it's what the advertisers intended message that they are sending across within their ad. In this ad, we see a famous actress sitting in a very beautiful city, picking rose petals from a flower. When focusing on the flower, roses usually symbolize the feeling of love. And also within the topic of love and flowers, it is a very common thing for people to pick petals off a flower and do the 'they love me, they love me not' trope seen in mainstream media. And assuming from the background of the city and seeing the word 'Irrésistible', we can assume that this specific ad takes place in Paris, France; also known

as the city of love. So, you can assume that this woman on the cover is in love with someone within the city of love. Now when piecing all those different aspects together and using the dominant-hegemonic position to analyze this ad, we can figure out the preferred meaning of this ad is saying that if you use this Givenchy perfume, you too can feel beautiful and also be in love in a city that is known for love. That this beautiful, famous actress, who you can see is in love, can be you if you buy and use this Givenchy perfume. With this message being delivered to their targeted audience, this will convince them to go buy this perfume so that they can live in that fantasy shown in the ad. We can also touch on the fact that since the advertiser's used Amanda Seyfried to help promote their product, fans of the actress will have the realization that if I use this perfume, I can just be like her, thus leading them to go buy the perfume.

The second perfume I will be analyzing is Beyoncé's perfume Heat. When looking at the advertisement, it's obvious that the first thing you see on there is Beyoncé. With Beyoncé being one of the most popular female singers, it's hard to ignore her when looking at the ad. We can also see that Beyoncé is standing in front of a dark wall with red lights shining on the wall as well as on her. When looking at Beyoncé herself, we can see that she is wearing a beautiful short red dress and she has her hair and makeup done. When looking at the text, we see the name 'heat' in big, red letters going across the top, as well as 'catch the fever' in smaller letters going across her body. Lastly, we see 'the first fragrance by Beyoncé' in the bottom right corner above a picture of the perfume bottle. After viewing the surface level, I then look at the deeper and more subconscious meaning of this advertisement. When looking at the colors of the ad itself, it mostly consists of red and black. Black is usually associated with being dark and mysterious while red is usually associated with love, lust and passion. The themes of lust and passion are even more enforced with the wording such as 'heat' and 'catch the fever' as well as Beyoncé

having a seductive look and a revealing dress. All these elements are supposed to satisfy the male gaze and are supposed to attract the male attention. Using the dominant-hegemonic position, this ad can be read as if we use this perfume, we too can experience the feeling of passion as well as attract men to us. On top of that, with this being Beyoncé branded perfume, it also is telling us that we too can be like Beyoncé if we use this perfume. We can also take a more negotiated approach to this. Castleberry(2013) explains the negotiated position of the decoding process as “individual modes of interpretation reflect views and beliefs often influenced by economic status, racial profile, and gender norms” (p. 90). In other words, the negotiated position is where the audience both accepts and rejects the intended message of the ad. So by using this approach, we know that we cannot be Beyoncé and this perfume won't help us be exactly like her, but we can surely feel like her if we use her perfume. And by Beyoncé being on the ad and this being her branded perfume, this helps bring in more sales because it's guaranteed that her fans will go out and buy this product because of the association with Beyoncé.

Looking at both of these ads, we can see how gender plays a huge role within these advertisements. Even though both of these advertisements have two totally different tones and messages to them, they still play the role of how women should be and what women should want to be. Jhally(1990) explains that “in advertising, gender (especially for women) is defined exclusively along the lines of sexuality”(p.82). Most ads that have women in it really play on the sexuality aspect of it, and you can really see that in the Beyoncé ad. The Beyoncé ad really plays on that sexuality theme as well as lust and passion, which “provides a resource that can be used to to get attention and communicate instantly” (Jhally, 1990, p.82). When looking at the Givenchy ad, though it is not as obvious, the ad also focuses a bit on sexuality but in a more PG way. The Givenchy ad has undertones of love. With the symbolism of the rose and being in the

city of love, it still focuses on pleasing men. The perfume ads message is saying that if you use this perfume, you can be able to attract attention from men and potentially fall in love, which can fall under what Jhally believes. Even though not all ads focus on the sexuality of women, the vast majority of them do and it is hard to ignore once you take notice of it.

By analyzing both the Givenchy perfume ad and the Beyoncé perfume ad, we were able to understand as well as reveal the social norms on the topic of gender and sexuality. Both of these ads focus on the sexuality of women and have undertones of being for the male gaze and pleasing men. But, these ads also have the subconscious message that you cannot feel beautiful unless you use these perfumes. Both ads contain a very beautiful celebrity and that can lead many women, if using the dominant-hegemonic position, to feel insecure about themselves and lead them to buying these perfumes so they can feel beautiful and appealing to those around them. Essentially, these types of perfume ads can be harmful for women for those precise reasons of insecurity. Women, when looking at these types of ads, will have to reject the intended message of the ad and understand that you do not need these perfumes to feel beautiful, but that these perfumes can help you feel good about yourself. And also that the women should be doing and buying these products for themselves and not for men. Because women do not need a man's approval to feel good about themselves and to know that they are beautiful.

References

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