

Signifying Process in Fashion Magazine Advertisements

- Centering on Advertisements Expressing Eroticism -

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Abstract

The object of this study is to reach a semiotics access in a specialized magazine advertisement, by emphasizing the advertisement, which uses eroticism.

The main components of eroticism are voyeurism, narcissism, fetishism, masochism, and sadism. From the results of analyzing their impact on fashion magazine advertisements, which is limited in erotic expression, 'the women's gender role ideology' is mainstream. Especially, this is joined with a 'patriarch ideology' and the 'women's role ideology' on the view of feminism. It can be expressed erotic with 'traditional women's roles', 'rebellious against tradition', and a 'leading women role on sexuality'.

I. Introduction

In the early stage of advertisement, clear language message in text was the main means of reflecting what one wanted to express. Especially from the 1920's, visual messages, which have an internal meaning rather than denotation, become the essential way of expression increasing the ambiguity of the meaning.¹⁾ This change in advertisement has brought about a change in the way of studying and analyzing this phenomenon.

The expression of a message or the measurement of meaning that is objective and a systemic quantitative analysis, is limited to an explicitly or certainty that can be found in any group. This type of analytical method can not and is limited in its ability to realize the true meaning of today's ambiguous advertisement.

After realizing the critical limits of an existing advertisement study, the new trend of study is to overcome what appeared in the 1970's. One of these trends is the semiotic advertisement study. From a semiotic view point advertisement is a symbolic system. The advertisers try to create a friendly attitude towards their products. Therefore all semiotic acts have an intent and with this intent process many semiotics have the same connotation.²⁾ That is to say, symbolic acts such as "communication" includes not only an economical symbolic act, but also the cultural symbolic act that delivers the cultural image of the society of that time.³⁾

From a marketing point of view, the product or service implies a meaning, which is expressed by the consumers or marketers. Also, from the marketers point of view, his or her efforts are

necessary to express the needs and sensibility of the consumer. With the present market research process it is difficult to find the correct sensitivity, social, and cultural attributes that cannot be expressed by statistics or a set of models. The semiotic marketing study is therefore imported to overcome this kind of limitation.

Clothing advertisement also has a combined cultural relation and is composed of a combination of symbols, so that it must be studied from a mutual relation between culture as a whole or as a portion. Especially, the clothing advertisements use of sex appeal on T.V. as well as in the printed press was a drastic reflection of post-modernism of the 80's. Advertisers and the owners of the product, whether knowingly or unknowingly, increased the ambiguity and confusion between truth and fiction by the use of parodies and fetish expressions and by the destruction of the narrative structure.

Prior studies have been tried to conduct a semiotic approach. Park kil-soon and Lee Su-in⁴⁾ focused on semiotic significance of clothing, showed in visual mass media. This study looked into what general public understand from clothing and what influences clothing on visual mass media exert in fashion. The outcomes of the study are followings. Clothing's signifying process has two dimensions: linguistic dimension and mythological dimension. Linguistic dimension which is regarded as general and invariable and is related to the reproductive signifying operation, contributes to the creation of the characters including the character's social activities, professions, social or economic position. Mythological dimension which is related to the cultural and implicative signifying operation, played an important role in the development of the drama. Thus, it operates to create and deliver

images including the atmosphere of the drama and the development of the story. La su-im⁵⁾ adopted to analyse the components of fashion ads and objectified their image using advertisement-semiological method to make clear the signifying processes. The results are as follow. Fashion ad, one of visual symbols to transfer brand image, conveys the image with which various components are combined like model, clothes, setting and description as signs. On the other hand, key referent systems are fashion phenomena, contemporary role image, social psychology, common morality, and social, economical and milieu.

The object of this study is to examine the type and reason of eroticism found in clothing and advertisement. And to try to conduct a semiotic approach, focusing on the advertisement of clothing in magazines, which has seen an increase in eroticism that appeals to the memory, imagination and experience of the target. This has been found to be a successful strategy. These magazine advertisements were analyzed with the use of semiotic analysis of Barthes and structural semiotics of Saussure. First, we tried to objectively analyze subjective matters in clothing, advertisement, advertising psychology and semiotics, which form advertisement. Also I applied advertising semiotics method to examine the meaning process to the clothing advertisements with eroticism.

The objects were collected from clothing advertisements in 1999 issues of CeCi which was identified as the most popular women's monthly magazines for the ladies under 25 and over 40 respectively through telephone interviews with the bookstores located in Seoul.⁶⁾ In this study, representative advertisements expressing eroticism which were selected by two experts

were analysed on the basis of advertisement-semiological method.

II. Clothing and Eroticism.

Eroticism is an enlarged sexual desire, on a consciousness or unconsciousness level. It is a strong impulsive desire, which is structured on the senses in relationship to the world. This desire overcomes gender and improves on sensitivity, reality, and exciting delight.⁷⁾ Clothes, one of the areas of erotic expression, are a little different for each of the human emotions and cultures that it was applied to. After the Renaissance period, Clothes did not only expose but, expresses the females beauty.⁸⁾

The main object of Eroticism in modern women's fashion designs is not just an expression of sexual instinct but making a satisfactory design, which has beauty and individual characteristics. So the fashion design can exist alone in the area of the art field while giving the article life. That is to say, the expression of style and eroticism on fashion, according to the human senses, is more necessary than any other of the basic human instincts.⁹⁾

One of the clear and intended objectives for clothing is the added sexual attraction to the customer who is wearing them. It is emphasized in the Flugel's fashion eroticism, which is a theory that people wear clothes to show off sexual attraction. It is aroused by sexual desire on an unconscious level of the human being. That is the desire of emphasizing sexual desire as a necessity through clothing.¹⁰⁾

Humans tend to express their sexual attraction through the clothing they like to wear; short skirts or skimpy clothes. This is an expression of what

others consider sexy. As a motive, the exposure of sexuality attracts or stimulates sexual desire. This is one of the important elements for fashion design. Sexual advertisements using eroticism is another important element to reaching human subconscious and this type of advertising can satisfy a human's sexual desire.

Historical motivates for humans to need erotic clothes can be summarized into two parts.

First, humans have expressed sexual interests to keep the human race, interchanged and to win the struggle for existence. Human have pursued eroticism with beauty in order to breed and win in the struggle for existence. Human interest in sex is a biological instinct but people have artificially controlled their desire because of cultural limitations. However, even though cultures have developed and advanced, the human race cannot escape completely from its biological instinct. This human instinctive desire came to be prohibited. This prohibition is a decisive key to understanding human behavior. When we break this prohibition we experience guilt. Ironically, the willingness of Wills tries to continue this prohibition to enjoy the feeling of breaking the rules. The eroticism as an instinctive desire, in portion to prohibition, is reflected in human action. A general tendency on fashion is the straightforward example of a traditional repulsion or a sanction under a law forbidding mini-skirts, sumptuous moods, and exposure of the Goegori(a Korean jacket).

Second, historically in many countries, which are male oriented cultures, have repeated endless changes on women's rights. From a man's point of view, they create a history of concealment and exposure of women's clothes and enjoy breaking the rules. A reform or changing women's consciousness, contributes to

an extension of the education of the women and an improvement of a woman's social standing, This has had a large affect on both internal and external motivation of eroticism in fashion. The eroticism, when expressed with quietness or implicitness in the past, has appeared more directly outspoken, and broad in expression.¹¹⁾

Erotic fashion is intended to stimulate the person wearing the clothes or those who see such people. Clothes reflect human beauty, and are used to express a human's internal desire. People pursue a basic desire from sexual clothes. In the view of eroticism, the main object is that people wear the clothes to add to their sexual attraction; at the same time the opposite gender feel sexual stimulation from it. It has caused competition and envy from people of the same gender.

On the other hand, erotic advertising is an effective marketing tool since it satisfies the human's unconscious desire by buying the product. The effective use of eroticism endures the customer's buying action.¹²⁾

The expression of eroticism in advertisements is very often used to increase the advertisement effect. On the point of psychoanalysis: the expression of eroticism is so extensive that the division of eroticism in advertising is difficult to have a unified form. Eroticism in advertising, can take on three main forms in a modern society.

Firstly, advertisement can give a hint of sexual intercourse. Secondly, eroticism can be indirectly conveyed as in a dream. Thirdly, the advertisement may have body parts or sexual acts associated with it.¹³⁾ The expression of eroticism in advertising reflects the real world that has cultural character, basic instincts, sexual and complex of desires. And then it helps the eroticism effect on advertisement that is related

with advertisement method, physical or mental, body and soul.¹⁴⁾

III. Forming Factors of Eroticisim

1. Voyeurism

Freud thought that one of the basic instincts is to see a certain point of another's sexual character, of their sexuality, as applied to the passive and active forms.

A recurrent or persistent tendency is to look at a woman engaging in sexual or intimate behavior, such as undressing. This is carried out without the observed person being aware, and usually leads to sexual excitement and masturbation.

A psychological tendency to look through peepholes of others while they are engaging in sexual intercourse is not just limited to children or sexual perversion patients but also normal adults. Many normal adults enjoy this type of stimulus. For example they talk about sex, read books, and use the mass media such as T.V, radio, plays, novel, and so to involve this stimulus. Magazines and advertisements also contribute to this tendency.¹⁵⁾

2. Fetishism

Fetishism is when a person derives sexual satisfaction through clothes or personal items of the opposite genders. They do not get satisfaction from people themselves but, material things of people as the sexual target.

These people prefer material things to sexual intercourse with a person. For example, the man who collects underwear, only has interest in the material item instead of genitalia. His true

objective is masturbation rather than sexual intercourse with a woman. Although the main cause of this disorder is not clear, doctors think that an obsession during childhood is a cause of this disorder. The fashion historian who is interested on psychoanalysis, insist that the change of fashion is an aspect of cultural obsession as a side effect of relationship with normal sexual attraction to fashion.¹⁶⁾

Wihelm stekel focused on fetishism with the view of a psycho-pathologist. Such as, a fetishism involving uniforms is related to criminal behavior and homosexual tendencies, underwear like petticoats or chemises related to an incest tendency. A corset fetish lends to a sadistic sexual imagination of an ascetic, and a fur related fetish relates to frigidity or men's impotence. Buttons suggest suppression of oral sex, and a foot fetish linked to masochism. Nowadays, the understanding of fetishism is widening because even ordinary people are attracted to others appearances such as, clothes, voice, and smell.

3. Narcissism

Narcissism, is the term used by Paul Nacke in 1899, an act of reaching a perfect orgasm after petting, looking and touching ones body. So, Narcissism is a kind of perversion, because it involves the whole of ones sexual life.¹⁷⁾

Narcissism and vanity occur as a result of a lack of maturity. Vanity traditionally known as a women's main characteristic. In this view, women are dressed up as a result of sexual jealousy, social envy or competition. Several psychologists interpreted women's narcissism: to be the result of 'penis envy', and that the reason women's clothes are more erotic than men's is because women do not have a penis. So women are more

narcissistic.

However, the narcissi woman is interested not in her appearance or her body but in clothes. On the other hand, men are generally not narcissi. It can be said that the reason men have less interest in beauty is because of the penis cultural obsession. Narcissi women are not only in a self-love state and are in love with ones body but with what one is wearing. Many anthropologists and psychologists have concluded that clothes have developed to make people' s bodies to appear more beautiful.

4. Sadism and Masochism

Sadism is a preference of sexual activity, which involves the infliction of pain, humiliation or bondage. If the subject prefers to be the recipient of such stimulation this is called masochism; if the provider, sadism. Often an individual obtains sexual excitement from both sadistic and masochistic activities. Masochism is a kind of an abnormal sexuality. These terms are derived from the books written by French novelist Sade and the austrian novelist Masoch sacher.

A sexual desire controls a great deal of human action. Instinctively, humans naturally have a sadistic tendency. This aggressive desire wants to express to the outside. Masochism occurs when the strong fear of death is overcome by an intense sexual desire. So, sadism is the beginning form of the death instinct. And masochism, as the secondary form of sadism, continues the S&M cycle.

These mental phenomenon are reflected in fashion. Punks have chains on their arms, legs, ears and other parts of their bodies. A couple connects with leather strips on the knee joint, to escape from each other. Also, they show sadistic

and masochistic tendencies from wearing clothes with many holes. The leather respects sexual, homosexual, or sadistic desires. So the designer consciously designs the clothes with leather, which is unconsciously favored by people with these inclinations. It can be said that people who like tight and stiff clothes have a tendency towards masochism.

IV. Access to Semiotics of advertisement

A Semiotic advertisement study is a form communication consisting of language signal and a variety of vision signals as well as a sound signal. Also, it shows how an advertisement is composed and what kind of structure is needed to join it with real life. The conversation in the advertisement is creating meaning and that is the process of an analysis of image and its existence.

1. Signifier and Signified

Saussure¹⁸⁾ assumed that a symbol is a thinking expression and that things have arbitrariness as a combination of a signal expression or a signal plot. He divides the internal relationship of symbols for signifier and signified. Signifier is the signal image through senses.

A sound choice is not from meaning, so Saussure said that the relationship between signifier and the signified is arbitrariness.¹⁹⁾²⁰⁾

When the relationship between signifier and the signified is in general, it can be called arbitrariness.²¹⁾ So, the relationship between signifier and signified is decided, by a consensus within society.

2. Signifying process of Advertisement

1) Denotation

Generally, denotation in semiotic logic is just its meaning- an letter on symbols-like the dictionary definition, which is widely accepted by people. Denotation in advertisement is practical, technological and the real meaning of products. Especially, in fashion advertisement, denotation is meant where people know clothing color, material, design type, surrounding, model pose, the advertisement, and so on.

2) Connotation

It is a secondary semiotic meaning, which expresses denotation. That is the satisfied meaning by consumers as a non-material semiotic meaning, which is hidden in depths of the advertising products. Denotations also delivered clothing products, design, price, and image. A denotation has a connotation such as social class, occupation, statues, age and a life style for who is wearing the clothes.²²⁾

3) Referent system

Williamson called it the meaning system, which has existed, in a virtual world before being accepted by the advertised products. He also believes that the advertisement meaning is created by a cultural system that is an ideological system.

Especially, the fashion advertisement reflects the changeable vogue. Vogue is a kind of social phenomenon. It also affects this sources in habit, mind situation, degrees of cultural development and level of desire, etc. On a whole it affects social members in all its surroundings and situations.

V. Signifying process of fashion Magazine advertisement expressing eroticism

1. Direct symbol

<fig.1> is an erotic-expressed advertisement, which associates the sexual act directly from the models pose and images. Signifiers are divided into surrounding, color, position, facial expression, eye position, and hair style. This ignores the traditional gender roles and disregards the difference between genders and directly symbolizes the sexual act of a new generations identity.<index 1>



Fig 1. Advertisement expressing eroticism as a direct expression(Nov. 1999, Ceci)

2. Voyeurism Expression

One of the forms of voyeurism is visible skin between a gap in a skirt.

<fig. 2> shows the patriarchic women's ideology from the models clothes and the line of vision. <index 2>

3. Narcissism Expression

The main object of sex is gaining pleasure from all the parts of the body. So, the sex not only reflects ones existence but is a strong and emotional expression of oneself. Especially, the pleasure from masturbation is a form of narcissism, which gives more satisfaction than any other. The women in <fig.3> exhibits herself and is alone and also reflects a narcissi

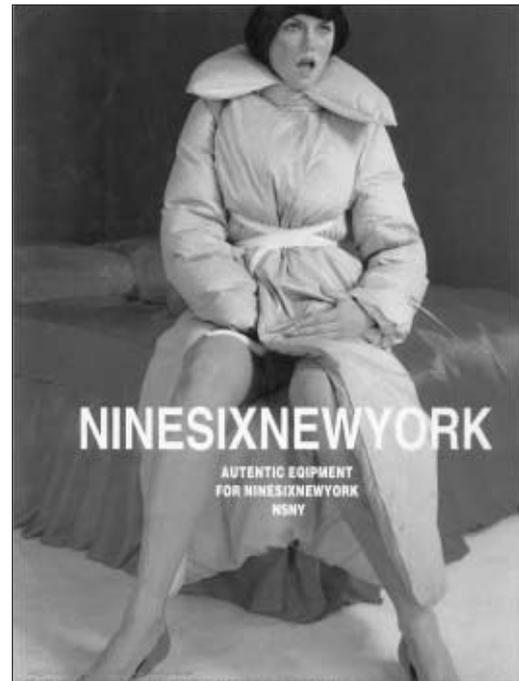


Fig 3. Advertisement expressing eroticism as a narcissism(Oct. 1999, Ceci)

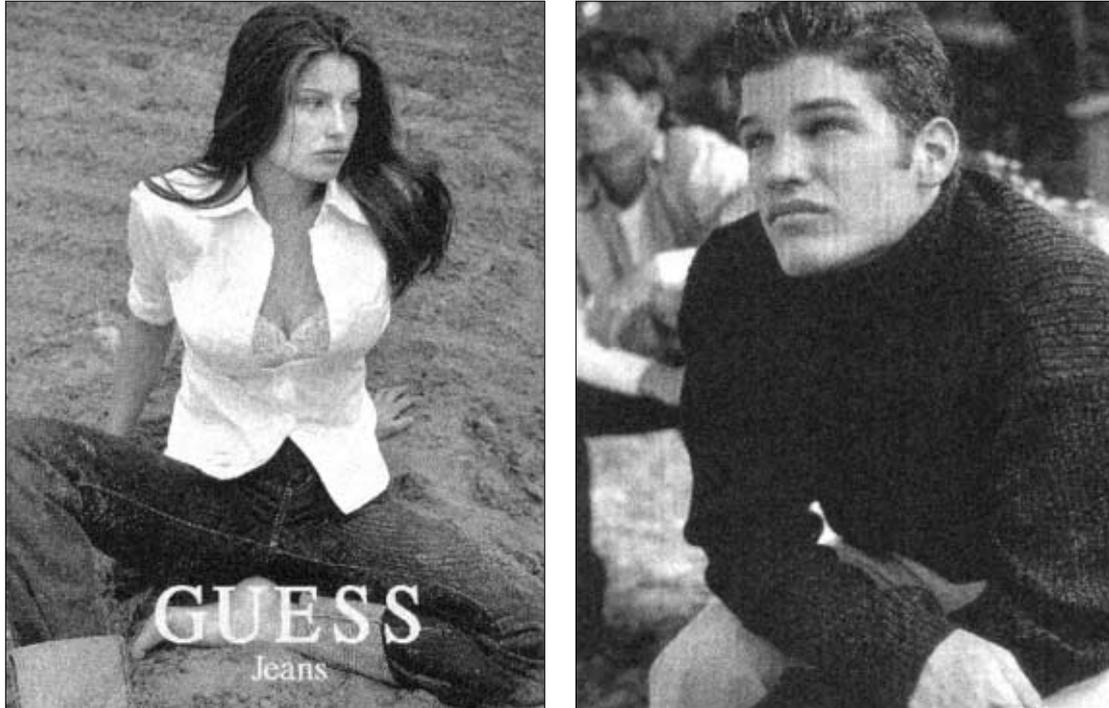


Fig 2. Advertisement expressing eroticism as a voyeurism(Sep. 1999, Ceci)

<Index1> Signifying Process as a Direct Expression

SIGNIFYING PROCESS FORMING ELEMENT	Signifier	SIGNIFIED		IDEOLOGY (third meaning)
		DENOTATION (first meaning)	CONNOTATION (secondary meaning)	
SURROUND- INGS	SURROUND- ING	· inside room has a window can see outside	· a secret place	new generation ideology (deny the difference of generation or gender gap.)
	COLOR	· shading of bright tone	contrast with clothes	
MODEL	CLOTHING	· same style for a couple, blue jean, winter knitwears	· active and young image · expressing same statue between genders	
	POSITION	· female model lean against male model's legs and put her hand on it.	· describe sexual action ⇒ Escape from traditional women's image	
	FACIAL EXPRESSION, EYES, AND HAIR STYLE	· female model seductive sight	· confidence, pride, splendid ⇒ modern generation	
		· male model look up a female model with a seductive sight	· cold and resistance image	

<Index 2> Signifying Process as a Voyeurism Expression

SIGNIFYING PROCESS FORMING ELEMENT	Signifier	SIGNIFIED		IDEOLOGY (third meaning)
		DENOTATION (first meaning)	CONNOTATION (secondary meaning)	
SURROUND- INGS	SURROUNDING	• rough field		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • woman ideology as a patriarch (exposurer's role as target of Voyeurism) • woman as a subjective ego of sex
	COLOR/ TONE	• black		
MODEL	CLOTHING	• tight blue jean		
		• clear and white shirts (can be seen under ware and brest among that)		
	POSITION	• sitting with legs spread out		
		FACIAL EXPRESSION, EYES, AND HAIR STYLE	• female model	
	• male model		• sight to the female model	
	• looking at the female model form the male			

expression to transform the consumer to a new style and character.<index 3>

VI. Conclusion

The Semiotic study can be defined as interpreting the hidden meaning in a huge and complex text. A universal meaning structure is a basic rule of meaning phenomenon to be proven in a semiotic study.

The main components of eroticism are voyeurism, narcissism, fetishism, masochism, and sadism. From the results of this study, and after analyzing their impact on advertisement,

which is limited in erotic expression, 'the women's gender role ideology' is mainstream. Especially, this is joined with a 'patriarch ideology' and the 'women's role ideology' on the view of feminism. It can be an erotic expression with 'traditional women's roles', 'rebellling against tradition', and 'a leading women role on sexuality'.

In lady's clothing, the erotic expression shows the sexual ideology; centered on women and often shows the advantages, aggressiveness and tempting emotions. It can be the revolutionary woman's ideology (emphasized life as a independent subject) by expressing or intimating an advertisement that tempt a woman's homosexuality and masturbation activities.

<Index 3> Signifying Process as a Narcissism Expression

SIGNIFYING PROCESS FORMING ELEMENT	Signifier	SIGNIFIED		IDEOLOGY (third meaning)
		DENOTATION (first meaning)	CONNOTATION (secondary meaning)	
SURROUND- INGS	INDOOR'S SURROUNDINGS	shut places wall: bright blue tone	• man's symbol (passive sex role of male)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revolutionary women ideology • women's status in a view of feminism • new generation ideology
	COLOR & STFFS	bed: pink color tone	• women's symbol (active sex role of female)	
MODEL	CLOTHING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • causal clothes for winter (tightend waist with rope and uncomfortably hidden neck) • shoes given same color with bed cover 	• tight tie around waist(mas's surpression against woman from traditional man's sex role)	
	POSITION	• give a hint for a masturbation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing woman as the independable ego • free expression on sex and enjoying the sex 	
	FACIAL EXPRESSION, EYES, AND HAIR STYLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surprised • sight with out clear focus 	• expressing the satisfaction of masturbation	

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