Treatise

Title: Stereotypes, advertising and social identity: A theoretical study with reference to the university as a space of cultural negotiation

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ABSTRACT

This study is an investigation into the stereotypes used in advertisements designed to appeal to university students’ sense of having a social identity, taking the situation at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) as being representative of university campuses as, among other things, social and cultural space. The study assumes that a university is a site of cultural negotiation, and as such may be viewed as a place where identities are formed and readjusted to conform to stereotypes popularised by influential social models as portrayed in the media. Moreover, with the process of globalization, which distributes stereotypical images globally, one would assume that advertising at NMMU functions in a similar way to its mode of functioning in most parts of the world. Although such media (advertisements) exist in various forms, the scope of the research for this study was limited to print advertisements.

Advertisements relevant to the concerns of this study are found everywhere at South African universities. Today, the latest trend for companies like Mr. Price, Standard Bank, Truworths, Red Bull, and Axe, among others, is to sponsor university events, that way creating the opportunity to advertise their products or services to students. Moreover, the notice boards of South African universities are filled with posters advertising new products in the market. In addition to all this, the general South African goods and services market is flooded with magazines that contain stereotype-promoting advertisements targeting students or, in general, young adults. For the purposes of this study, a ‘stereotype’ is understood as an iconic site of identification which functions as a generalized model for social behaviour. In this sense, a ‘stereotype’ may also be understood as a representation of an ‘ideal self’.

The purpose of this study is threefold: firstly, to show how and why students may be vulnerable to the stereotypes identified in terms of Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’; secondly, to identify and categorize the various stereotypes used in advertising to appeal to the student’s sense of social identity, and thirdly, to show that advertisements can be misleading in so far as stereotyping ignores the specificity of every student’s personal social situation and creates false expectations on the part of the target students.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Preliminary Remarks

Advertising is a way in which new products or services are brought to the attention of the consumers. In the article “What is advertising” (Hornor, 1998:1), advertising is defined as “the action of calling something to the attention of the public…by emphasising desirable qualities so as to arouse a desire to buy”.

Naomi Klein talks of “companies…soliciting students from the moment they receive their orientation week information kit” (2001:92) and of “scholastic marketing battles [that] are being fought over gyms...and university athletics” (Klein 2001:93). Two good examples of this are the Bio-kinetics Gymnasium and the Indoor Sports Centre at NMMU that are both sponsored by Puma and Mr Price among many others.

1.1 The Context of Research

Over the years advertising has changed from simply selling a product to also informing and guiding the target audience. As Berger (2004:10) says, advertising influences “many of the important decisions we make not just the cars we drive but whether we take entrepreneurial risks or lead a healthy lifestyle....” Berger further remarks that “the way in which adverts are affecting and shaping our attitudes, lifestyles and culture are too numerous to tally” (2004:10).

Lacan’s theory of the Mirror Stage (the formation of a sense of self in relation to the mirror-image) can explain why Berger states that adverts are affecting and shaping our lifestyles. Lacan
states that at the mirror stage, “the infant recognizes himself or herself in the mirror as a whole entity... the infant has the desire to see himself or herself as an ‘I’. The vision in the mirror...gives that image of the ‘I’ as a ‘mirage’ of control and ‘perfect self’ (Misty Anderson, Internet overview; no date; see also Lacan 1977: 3). Image is seen as being that perfect something the child desires; it creates a permanent sense of being imperfect, but looking forward to perfection”. In other words, advertisements are presented as a mirror through which we view ourselves. This is done through images (and eventually also words that draw on the image) that all-together represent a certain type of ‘perfection’ that appeals to us as that which we desire, and we respond to this desire by buying the product, hoping that this desire will be fulfilled. Precisely how this happens as theorised by Lacan will be explored at length in the theoretical section of this treatise. Where necessary, other related aspects of Lacan’s as well as other thinkers’ work will be addressed. Cultural negotiation can then be understood as the process of articulating a social and cultural identity by means of appropriating ‘suitable’ iconic markers from a range of social stereotypes available to students in advertisements.

As will be argued in the section on the mirror stage, the image we look at in the mirror to us functions like the ideal that we would want to become. This forms the basis of images in cultural space that subsequently function in a similar way. In his work on the image, Boorstin states that today’s generation has been “[t]empted, like no generation before [it] to believe we can fabricate our experiences – our news, our celebrities...we can make our very own ideals” (1963: 186). As far as one can discern in images found in advertisements, it can be argued that they play an important role in this process.
Michael Herbst talks about ideal art, as “an art that represents the ideal [which] strives to represent a beauty beyond the compare of nature” (2005:17). Advertising can be looked at as a popular art of the ‘ideal’. Through advertising we are presented with ideal images of perfection, be it flawless skin that brightens our day, the perfect body size, a spray that will turn us into a ‘girl magnet’ or jeans of a particular brand that will make one a person of “class”. These are images of which the most effective are “those which have been especially doctored for believability...an ideal which becomes real only when it has become public” (Boorstin 1963: 192-193).

Advertisers realise that, as humans (that is, as social beings) we all have a need to fit in, to be liked, to feel important or to have some kind of self-worth, something that ultimately goes back to the desirable mirror stage as explained by Lacan. My question then becomes: “What types (categories) of ideal selves (or stereotypes) do advertisements in the South African market present to the university student”? It looks reasonable to imagine that since the university is a place of diverse cultural identities and aspirations, students would be given a heterogeneous menu of ideal selves from which individual members of the student population may make choices according to personal temptations (rooted in personal desires and needs) by advertisers attempting to accommodate students from as many cultural backgrounds as possible. Moreover, those selling the different goods and services promoted by advertisements would benefit materially (that is, financially) from the role of self-images in the process of identification with stereotypes, rather than people’s self-images benefitting decisively from the goods (as something indispensable).
Drawing on Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’, this study seeks to expose the theoretical underpinnings of the subtle strategies used by commercial advertisements to appeal to students’ sense of identity. Issues like the place of desire in identity, ornamental culture, youth culture, social identity, globalization, stereotypes and language, as distinguished from (but related to) the image, are looked at in the context of the identified advertising strategies.

1.2 The Objectives of the Research

1.2.1 The main research question

The main question in this study is: What types (categories) of stereotypes or ideal selves do advertisements in the South African market present to the university student as someone assumed (with good reason) to be seeking approval and acceptance through social identity in an institution which is a site of cultural negotiation?

1.2.2 Secondary questions

In order to clarify the issues around the main research question, this study attempts to answer the following secondary research questions about advertising, stereotypes and social identity in relation to advertisements.

a) What is advertising?

b) If one considers students as participating in the process of finding a place in society in the adoption or practice of a certain kind of a culture, what may one expect to find in the values, behaviour, and so on, which are embodied and projected by advertisements?
c) To what extent are body image, fashion and social status connected to values found in the culture with which students identify (which probably overlaps with what is referred to as ‘youth culture’)?

d) Is body image, fashion or status treated by the advertisers concerned as a significant cultural qualifier of some kind in society?

e) Are there reasonable grounds to believe that students are vulnerable to such advertisements?

1.3 Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is threefold as it intends: firstly, to show how and why students may be vulnerable to the stereotypes identified in terms of Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’; secondly, to identify and categorize the various stereotypes used in advertising to appeal to the student’s sense of social identity; and thirdly, to show that advertisements can be misleading in so far as stereotyping ignores the specificity of every student’s personal social situation and creates false expectations on the part of the target students.

This is a qualitative study, based on a conceptual analysis of advertising texts (as explained below), rather than a quantitative analysis of survey data. More specifically, the main method employed in the research for this study was a conceptual analysis of the language and images used in specific contexts of different print advertisements. The theory that guides the analysis is primarily Lacan’s theory of the Mirror Stage as amplified by the work of other theorists, like Boorstin’s on ‘pseudo-events’ (in relation to the image), as well as theoretical perspectives found in Faludi’s work on ornamental culture and Klein’s on consumerism and capitalism. In addition
to these major sources of theoretical insight, relevant works of other theorists will be used when necessary.

Conceptual analysis is “an approach for content analysis where implicit or explicit concepts are chosen for examination and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying the concepts’ presence within content” (http://www.utexas.edu/academic/diia/assessment/jar/glossary.php, 2007). Hence, the analysis of the advertisements used in this study focuses on the concepts detected in the ‘contents’ of the advertisements. This is the essence of content analysis, described as “a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. Texts can be defined broadly...as advertising, theatre, informal conversation, or really any occurrence of communicative language.” (Palmquist, 2005: 1). This description of content analysis is an adequate explanation of what has been done in this study. However, as already pointed out above, no quantifying has been done as this is a qualitative study.

The advertisements that were used in this research were selected from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University notice boards as well as South African magazines that NMMU students were seen to be in the habit of reading. These magazines include True Love Babe, Elle, True Love and Glamour. The used advertisements (9 in total) are a sample of the type of advertisements that university students are exposed to. Du Plooy comments that, “a sample is a subset of the population that is drawn to be representative of the whole population in a research
project because it reflects characteristics of the entire population” (2001:101). He continues to say that “before taking a sample, a researcher must identify the target population according to research objectives” (2001:101-102).

In the case of this study, the main objective is to determine the types (categories) of stereotypes or ideal selves that advertisements in the South African market present to the university student as someone assumed (with good reason) to be seeking approval and acceptance through social identity in an institution which is a site of cultural negotiation. In this case cultural negotiation means the process of engaging in cultural practices in such a way that agents (i.e. students) reinforce or modify their cultural identities. Having this in mind the advertisements that have been used had to be advertisements found within the vicinity of the campus or in magazines that were being read by students in the university. With regard to the objective of this study, there was no reason to believe that NMMU students were significantly different from students in other South African universities.

The advertisements used in this research run between 2007 and 2008. These advertisements have been grouped into three categories: fashion – with an emphasis on brands and how they improve one’s image; status – looking at what causes one to be ‘respected’ among their peers; and finally, body image – the ideal for beauty. As already mentioned, the analysis of these advertisements was based on the use of language and images, guided by Lacan’s theory of the Mirror Stage and other relevant theoretical perspectives.
Advertising is a form of communication in which the most important elements are images and language. An essential aspect of this study involved analysing the images and the language used in each of the chosen advertisements in order to decode the message that is being conveyed to consumers or the target market by the advertisement.

An image is a sign used to communicate. A good example of this would be the images that were drawn in caves long before writing was discovered. This is a form of communication that is established before one is able to speak or write – as will be seen in the discussion of Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ theory. It is only later in life that one begins to associate images with words. For example, a child first sees the image of the mother and is later taught how to refer to the mother as ‘Mum’ or ‘Mother’. So the child learns to associate the image of the mother with the word ‘mother’, which can be referred to as a (linguistic) sign. When a child learns how to use a linguistic sign, it is a matter of being taught (or discovering) something that already exists as an independent system of language, that is, a vocabulary of words and the grammatical rules governing their use for communication. Hence Olivier’s comment that “all the links and lengths of the chain that comprises language are interconnected and pre-exist individual subjects – there is no link or length of the chain that can be said to be ‘unconnected’, and the subject acquires the ability to speak or write by ‘entering’ language” (2005:75).

A sign can be a word or a picture, among other things, that refers to an individual thing, concept or idea (Olivier, 2005:76). According to Saussure a sign can be divided into “two inseparable components, namely the ‘signifier’ (a spoken or written word, a gesture, a picture or image: anything that ‘signifies’) and the ‘signified’ (the abstract concept which is the flip-side of any
signifier)” (in Olivier, 2005:78). This is understood to mean that “language as a system ... consists of a chain of signs (signifiers with their signifieds), regardless of the metaphysical or ontological value that anyone may attribute to these, and instead of retaining a referential relationship of meaning, Saussure showed that meaning is a function of differences: in language there are no positive terms, only differences (‘cat’ differs in meaning from ‘rat’, ‘sat’ and mat’, not because of what it refers to, but because of the transposition of phonemes or graphemes [r, s, m and c] depending on whether these are spoken or written signifiers)...” (Olivier, 2005:78-79). This makes communication possible.¹ It can then be said that communication is possible because of signifiers which ‘stand for’ different signifieds (their conceptual meanings) and of which the meaning can be derived by following the directions in which the signifiers point. This would be what a ‘conceptual analysis’ amounts to, whether it is of an image-signifier or a linguistic signifier (as these are found in advertisements).

Since signs (signifiers and their signifieds or conceptual meanings) are used to communicate, the sign obviously must be something that the person being addressed understands for the communication to be effective. It is therefore possible for an advertiser to create an advertisement by putting signs together in a specific way, and if the signs are used properly (in a way with which the potential audience is familiar) then the audience will be able to understand

¹ Just how complex this process is, becomes clear from the following explanation: “... the linguistic paradigm of the signifying chain (of signifiers) enables one to think in terms of contexts of signification, or frameworks of meaning, none of which have any grounds for claiming absolute, inherently permanent meaning, while at the same time not representing complete semantic or epistemic flux either – every relational context or framework of ‘relative signification’ lends itself to being understood, and even when signifiers are removed from certain contexts and re-inscribed in others, they do not thereby lose meaning, but become enriched (or impoverished) by means of new connections in the signifying chain – eventualities that sometimes give rise to ironic twists in the signifying history of words. Despite the unstoppable, diversifying and yet systematically coherent unfolding of the traceable historical path of the signifier, that which remains ‘constant’ (but flexible) is the signifying model of signifier/signified as related to the ‘chain of signification’”. (Olivier, 2005:80).
because of the human ability to decode or interpret signs. Olivier comments that “If there is one thing that humans do incessantly (at least in waking life), it is to interpret or decode their surroundings.” (2005:83).

However, one thing that should not be forgotten is that:

all meaning (and therefore any knowledge-claim) is generated (or is to be assessed) within and has to be understood relative to the counterparts of ‘inertial frames of reference’, namely specific linguistic chains, semantic or conceptual frames or contexts… [M]eaning, ‘reality’ and knowledge, instead of being absolute, depend on how and where a perceiving or interpreting subject is situated relative to (‘open’) contexts or signifying chains. By means of the model of the signifying chain, meaning may be traced along the defiles and rhizomatic networks of signifiers, in this way enabling one to assess the status of meaning- and ‘knowledge’-claims (Olivier,2005:83).

For example a ‘star’ could mean the tiny light that we see from the sky, or alternatively someone that shines and stands out – in other words, a ‘celebrity’, as such people are referred to nowadays. This means that, depending on the context in which images and words are being used in advertisements, their conceptual analysis would show that viewers may attach different meanings to them. How this works in practice is demonstrated in Chapter Four.

Given the above explanation of the use of language and images in interpreting communication by means of signs, it looks reasonable to use the method of conceptual analysis to conduct a study of this nature.
CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY

2.0 Preliminary Remarks

“Identity” is a term that is not new to us; in fact, one would say that “it is the new black”. Bookstores are filled with books on discovering yourself, finding yourself, knowing who you are; magazines have articles of the same nature. Television stations have programmes and talk shows echoing the same theme, e.g. the Oprah show, where the audience have been advised to read books like “The Secret”, “Eat, Pray and Love” and “A New Earth”, not to mention the extensive talks that have been given to the audience of this show by the authors of these books, about the journeys they have gone through that have helped them “discover themselves” and have led them to write these books. Baumeister comments that, “the search for identity is a pervasive theme in our society” (1986:3).

Despite all the hype and talk on identity, there seems not be one definite description of this term (which is not really surprising if one remembers that it is an ambiguous concept that raises all kinds of theoretical questions). Identity has been defined as “an interpretation, of the self” (Baumeister, 1986: 5), as “unconscious and conscious strivings for continuity of personality, a tendency towards synthesis beyond even unconscious striving for continuity of personality, a criterion for the outcome of this striving and this tendency, a maintenance of congruence with the ideals and identity of one’s social group, a conscious awareness of who one is” (Erikson in Lynd, 1961: 204). In another definition of identity Baumeister suggests that “identity is not based on the physical self but depends on meaning. Because meaning occurs only within a contextual network of relationships, it seems safe to conclude that identity is a linguistic construction”
Lastly identity is “all things a person may legitimately and reliably say about himself – his status, his name, his personality, his past life” (Klapp, 1969: 5). From all these definitions one idea that comes out clearly is that identity is related to how one carries oneself, thinks, behaves, or does anything that would be connected to how one defines one’s “self”. This study shows that these different conceptions of identity are fundamentally related to what Lacan theorises as the founding event in the development of identity, namely one’s mirror image at a very young age.

There are different types of identity. For example, one can have personal, social, cultural and national identities among many others. For the purpose of this study only two types of identity have been looked at, namely personal identity and social identity.

Identity is not something that one is born with but is developed over time. According to Lynd “a child is born without an identity; he achieves one through his contact with the world around him” (1961:15). This statement suggests that as we grow up we develop opinions and attitudes towards certain things that happen around us. We can regard what is happening around us either as the acceptable way of doing things or a way of thinking, among other possibilities. However, the way we do something, our response or approach to things or situations, though partly shaped by our surroundings, is unique to the individual. A good example of this is a mother having children brought up in the same house forming subtle perceptions of each child’s way of doing things. If she gave instructions for the house to be cleaned, she would know who did it from the way the house would be cleaned. For example, if one of her children was a perfectionist he or she would clean and arrange things in a certain fussy way that reflects what one calls
‘perfectionism’. The reason why she would know this is because one of her children would have portrayed tendencies of being a perfectionist. The child would be looked at as a perfectionist, which would contribute to the makeup of his or her identity, because one could anticipate that he or she would continue doing things in that particular way. From this example it is evident that identity “generally focuses on unity, especially in the sense of unity over time or ‘continuity’... Unity over time (continuity) means that today you are the same person as the person who existed last week. Continuity over time is a main criterion of identity” (Broad, 1925; Erikson, 1968; Shoemaker, 1963 in Baumeister, 1986: 15).

The physical body, too, contributes to the formation of one’s identity. Shoemaker comments that “the body helps to define identity as a self that is continuous over time…. Identity only starts with the physical body” (in Baumeister, 1986: 16). As will be seen, this is another way of saying what Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’ means for the question of identity.

Despite identity being made up of things like the characteristics of the physical body as well as one’s personal characteristics such as perfectionism, Lynd comments that “who am I? depends in part upon how one answers the question, what is this society – and this world – in which I live?” (1961: 15). This means that things like technology can shape one’s identity. This can be seen by

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2 It seems as if one just cannot escape from the effects of the media and communications (and archiving) technology – wherever you go, they seem to infiltrate your personality. If this seems far-fetched, think of the way in which teenagers’ behaviour has been affected by the use of cell-phones: it is nothing unusual to see them ‘acting’ for the benefit of being cell-phone photographed by their friends, and similarly ‘recording’ (that is, simultaneously structuring) the behaviour of others whenever it seems warranted, something that is, in its turn, determined by what the media has established (‘structured’) as being worthy of ‘recording’ by means of a video camera or a cell-phone. And, as argued, such ‘recording’, determined by certain changing technical possibilities of capturing, archiving and reproducing texts and images, provides the structural conditions for the kind of identities contemporary subjects tend to have, especially as far as glamorized images are concerned.
the development of social sites, for example facebook, chat sites and mixit. These sites give you the opportunity to take up a character of your choice; for example on facebook you can become a mob leader, a vampire or even find out which celebrity you look like. On mixit and different chat sites you can choose what you want people to call you. The names could range from ‘Jazzy G’, ‘Sweet lips’, ‘Player’, you name it. Most of the time you find that these names portray something that the person want to tell the other people about themselves. Since the people are not able to see them the use of language enables one to create a mental image of what the other person could look like. Olivier comments that

the function of images at the level of what Lacan calls the ‘imaginary register’ is amplified and qualitatively transformed by the infant subject’s acquisition of language (at the level of the Lacanian ‘symbolic register’). Instead of simply providing assurances of particularistic iconic wholeness (which, because the imaginary imbricates the symbolic, does function in language through metaphor and metonymy), language, through the universalistic implications of concepts, allows the subject for the first time to become what humans are in a certain sense destined to be, namely ‘subjects’ in the true sense. Only someone capable of language in the broad sense of conceptual signification and communication can transcend what would otherwise be the prison of iconicity – the word as signifier always has a signified attached to it in the guise of a conceptual meaning: the word ‘tiger’ thus signifies something like ‘large, mammalian, striped, carnivorous quadruped’. An individual’s name – Petro Anderson, for example – inserts her or him into the conceptual kinship and other social relations constitutive of the social bond. (Before an individual has a name, it is difficult, if not impossible, to relate him or her to social and cultural laws, customs or practices.) Through language the subject not only enters the world of conceptual meaning, but – significantly – ‘subjects herself’ to the values and normativity inherent in language (2007:48).
This brings up the idea of social identity. Social identity can be defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981: 254).

This means that the individual shares the same values, needs and wants with the other members of the group, for example a religious group, or people who follow fashion, or share a passion (e.g. for Hip hop, skate boarding, surfing etc.).

Tajfel states that joining a group or being part of a group is necessary as “it is a system of orientation which helps define the individual’s place in the society” (1981: 255). A person’s affiliation to a group will depend upon the group contributing to the person’s identity. However if the group does not meet his or her expectations, the person may opt to leave the group, although this may not always be the case. In some instances an individual may have trouble leaving the group and in such an instance may have no other choice but to conform to the group. A good example of this would be what could be termed as “peer pressure” whereby one conforms to a particular lifestyle or agrees with an idea simply because of fear of rejection. Lynd explains this by stating that “if one rejects the role prescribed by one’s immediate culture in favour of more individual or more widely human values one tends to be alone” (1961:186).

3 “It can be assumed that an individual will tend to remain a member of a group and seek membership of new groups if these groups have some contribution to make to the positive aspect of his social identity” (Tajfel 1981: 256).

4 “If leaving the group presents difficulties [this would lead to one changing their] interpretation of the attributes of the group so that its unwelcome features (e.g. low status) are either justified or made acceptable through reinterpretation” (Tajfel 1981: 256).
The question would then become: why are there groups? Apart from the fact that the people who group together have something in common, there is also the issue of comparison or competition – the belief that one group is better than another and hence the idea of stereotypes, in the sense of a generalized view of what a certain kind of person is, or group of people are (supposed to be) like.

2.1 Stereotypes

It is common to hear people say things like “Xhosa people are loud” or “black people are lazy”. People always have a certain perception of other people or groups of people. Such perceptions are at best based on shared character traits, e.g. the trait of speaking loudly. In such circumstances, the relevant trait is an aspect of the personality of the group in question. However, in most cases, stereotypes are based on generalizations which may not be attributable to the character traits of encountered group members.

There is evidence that, in South Africa, things like crime and poverty are associated with black people whereas white people are arguably still generally seen as the people in authority. An example of this can be seen in the Nescafé advertisement where a white lady is walking towards her car and there is a black man standing next to the car asking her if she is the owner of the car. Her automatic reaction is fear, yet the man is not aggressive in his asking if the car belongs to her. After having repeated his question the white lady eventually responds by nodding her head in confirmation that the car belongs to her. The man then hands her the key that she had left hanging on the door of the car. Although she does not say it, the audience’s way of thinking is
inclined to the assumption that the black man is a criminal. Simultaneously, however, the advertisement undermines this assumption.

A good example of white people being in authority is seen in the program ‘Madam and Eve’ where the black lady is the maid to a white lady, or ‘Football Stars’ where, despite the team managers being black, the owners of these football clubs are white. As for the idea of black people being poor, all one needs to do is simply look at the news to see how Africa is always portrayed as a place of poverty and suffering. Constantly, for every group of people, there are certain perceptions, mannerisms, lifestyles or even body features that they are associated with. The association of certain people with certain objects or traits can be referred to as stereotyping, and it should be clear, in the light of what was said earlier, that this amounts to the attribution of a kind of ‘group identity’ to certain groups of people.

Stereotypes are a salient part of our culture. We see them exemplified on the television and in the movies, and sometimes parents, teachers, and other social agents deliberately or inadvertently preach them under guise of conveying the wisdom of age. They are part of the cultural air that we breathe (Schneider, 2004: 321).

A stereotype can be defined as a “belief that is simple, inadequately grounded or at least partially inaccurate and held with considerable assurance by many people” (Schneider, 2004:16). According to Stallybrass the term stereotype refers to “an over-simplified mental image of (usually) some category of person, institution or event which is shared, in essential features, by large numbers of people” (in Tajfel, 1981:143). From both definitions one can conclude that stereotypes are about categorisation, and it is important to note that Stallybrass writes about a
“mental image” – something that will be seen to be of crucial importance for identity when Lacan’s theory is discussed.

The ability to categorise and evaluate is an important part of the human intelligence (Banaji in Paul, 1998:3). Tajfel explains that for the human being categorization is necessary as it helps in quick identification and relation to objects (1981:147). Categorization usually comes about by people sharing a particular habit, nature, look, etc. Paul adds to this idea by stating that “[h]umans, like other species, need to feel that they are part of a group, and as villages, clans, and other traditional groupings have broken down, our identities have attached themselves to more ambiguous classifications, such as race and class. We want to feel good about the group we belong to – and one way of doing so is to denigrate all those who aren’t in it. And while we tend to see members of our own group as individuals, we view those in out-groups as an undifferentiated – stereotyped – mass.” (1998:1). When we categorise others, we tend to use references that may be a negative or positive feature of the other group. For example when categorising people in terms of race we can have “the black people” and “the white people” and there would be nothing wrong with that. However, the problem comes in when these groups are associated with negative stereotypes, for example “black people are poor” or “black people are criminals”.

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5 Perceived similarity of opinions with another person has been demonstrated to be a powerful determinant of attraction.... In typical similarity-attraction experiments, the subject makes judgments about a stranger (stimulus person) after having seen a sample of the stranger's responses to a series of opinion questions. Surreptitiously, the stranger's opinion responses have been constructed so as to define varying levels of similarity to the subject's own previously recorded opinion responses. The measure of attraction consists of summed responses to two judgment items, one indicating liking and the other a judgment of how enjoyable it would be to work together with the stranger (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995:11).
This would be a feeling that could be shared by one group against the other. Greenwald and Banaji explain this by stating that people have a “tendency to judge members of one’s own group (in-group) more favorably than comparable persons who are members of another group (out-group)” (1995:11). Greenwald and Banji bring about the issue of competition, something that is seen as part of the formation of identity (being seen as better than others and in return one would get favoritism or love), an idea which is addressed in this study as part of Lacan’s theory.

Tajfel makes it clear that whatever ideas one group has about another “are the results of an interaction between the information obtained from the outside and its active internal organisation by human beings” (1981:76). This idea may be true to some extent; however, it may not be completely justifiable, given that a certain group may have interacted with a small group of people of a certain kind (race, culture, and so on) and come up with a conclusion as to how they view the other, as a whole group, no matter how scanty the obtained information might have been. For example in South Africa, simply because someone is black does not mean he or she is a thief, or simply because someone is white does not mean they played a part in the apartheid regime, condoned it or have a hatred towards black people.6

Categorization, as mentioned above, helps to place people into groups which are “known for” or associated with certain things. These things could be behavioural patterns, physical features or even attitudes. Such associated behavioural patterns, like the example given above about the way

6 "Even if there is a kernel of truth in the stereotype, you're still applying a generalization about a group to an individual, which is always incorrect" (Bargh in Paul, 1998:1). Accuracy aside, some believe that the use of stereotypes is simply unjust. "In a democratic society, people should be judged as individuals and not as members of a group, stereotyping flies in the face of that ideal", Banaji argues (in Paul, 1998:1).
black and white people are perceived, can be regarded as stereotypes. This would then lead to the question: why do stereotypes or labelling of people have to be there? According to Dyer (1999:2-4) the functions of stereotypes are:

- (serving as) an ordering process
- “Short-cut” (representation)
- Reference
- The expression of values

### 2.1.1 An Ordering process

Stereotypes can be looked at as an ordering process, as they can easily give one a “clear” picture or an overview of a group of people. People are grouped according to what they are known for or their similarity in features. For example, asked to describe Chinese people, one might paint a picture of people who know martial arts, do not speak English and are short. This picture may be accurate or real for a number of people in China, but it would be wrong to assume that everybody in China is like this. Dyer states that “the need to order 'the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality' is liable to be accompanied by a belief in the absoluteness and certainty of any particular order, a refusal to recognize its limitations and partiality, its relativity and changeability, and a corresponding incapacity to deal with the fact and experience of blooming and buzzing” (1999:1). Apart from the merely descriptive aspect, this idea of Chinese people could be one of malicious intent (Chinese people’s inability to speak English, is used to make fun of them). This can be seen especially in movies where the Chinese tourists go around in groups and all they do is take pictures of everything, or in the way African people in Western movies are portrayed as diseased - or poverty-stricken and always in need of help. On this Dyer
comments that “on the 'social construction of reality' stresses, not only is any given society's ordering of reality an historical product but it is also necessarily implicated in the power relations in that society... he who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality” (1999:2).

2.1.2 A short-cut

A short-cut here would mean that stereotypes are an easy way of defining the other person. The person is 'packaged' and given a term that would describe them- the same way one would say Pizza or Cake, not defining what type of cake it is or mentioning the different ingredients used to make it. In the same way Dyer states that “stereotypes are a very simple, striking, easily-grasped form of representation but none the less capable of condensing a great deal of complex information and a host of connotations” (1999:2).

2.1.3 Reference

“Lippmann refers to stereotypes as a projection on to the 'world'” (Dyer, 1999:3). Stereotypes can be looked at as characters like those found in a script; the only problem is that those character traits never change\(^7\). It is like watching a Superman movie. Even though the person playing Superman changes he still is a super hero (Superman). In the same way so long as you have been categorized in a particular group the same stereotype will be used to identify or define who you are or how you are. You are not given a chance to express your individuality.

\(^7\) “Whereas stereotypes are essentially defined, as in Lippmann, by their social function, types, at this level of generality, are primarily defined by their aesthetic function, namely, as a mode of characterization in fiction. The type is any character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or ‘develop' through the course of the narrative and which point to general, recurrent features of the human world (whether these features are conceptualized as universal and eternal, the 'archetype', or historically and culturally specific, 'social types' and 'stereotypes'” (Dyer, 1999:3).
2.1.4 The expression of values

What is commonly referred to as the realm of ‘values’ represents the normative sphere of expectations of the society in which one lives, with regard to the way a certain group and the individuals belonging to it may be identified\(^8\). Take the example of Zulus being known as warriors. It might have been based on the historical reference to the days of Shaka Zulu, when the general description of Zulu men was that of ‘warriors’ – a word that reflects the values attached to a specific way of living. Because of this, the Zulu people are ‘known’ to be fighters, always willing to fight. Although at present all Zulu men may not be violent, since they are ‘known’ – that is, believed – to have that characteristic they would, in all likelihood, try and fit into the described stereotype. Tajfel (1981:159) explains that the reason why people take up these values or behave according to the way society dictates that they should is because it “...helps the individual to stick out, to seek for special attention, to exaggerate, and if necessary, to create those similarities and differences which fit in with the general consensus about what matters and what does not matter in the potentially infinite number of possible structures of social divisions and social equivalence.”

Stereotypes can be good or bad depending on the context in which they are used. However, Schneider (2004:16) comments that “stereotypes are one way which we differentiate our group

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\(^8\) “This is what everyone -- you, me and us -- thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like’, as if these concepts of these social groups were spontaneously arrived at by all members of society independently and in isolation. The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is from stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups. The consensus invoked by stereotypes is more apparent than real; rather, stereotypes express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society” (Dyer, 1999: 3).
from another grouping in such a way that is flattering to ourselves.” This is a principle that seems to be used in the creation of advertisements, as is demonstrated in chapter 4.

In advertising the (stereotypical) target market is usually identified according to the product that is being sold. The target market (consumers) is divided into groups according to their “status, age, values, sex and so forth” (Hattori, 1997:5). After identifying a target market, a product is produced that is assumed to be suitable for the group chosen. To sell the product to the targeted group, the product or brand is “developed in a way that is geared to the idiosyncrasy of the intended consumer, the consumer can then internalize the symbolic identity into their identities without much hesitation” (Hattori, 1997:11). For example, a Volvo may be advertised as being stylish, luxurious and appealing to the elite. The target market for this car would be people who are assumed (usually on the basis of ‘market research’) to have the same values or characteristics as those given to the car. By doing so this advertisement would restrict its focus to the people – by way of stereotyping them – who would presumably buy the Volvo. Thus, the people who would buy the car would consider themselves as a prestigious group. It should be clear from this that certain brands or products are associated with certain people; hence, that a stereotype is created.

Stereotypes with regard to status, body type and fashion among other things have always been part of our society. For example “generally in economically developed countries people of higher socioeconomic status are thinner, but the reverse is true in the underdeveloped countries” (Schneider, 2004:16). Advertisers, on the other hand, have taken this idea, among many others,
and used this type of iconography in a way that has imposed the ideas embodied in them on people through the use of images.

2.2 Image

Tempted, like the generation before us, to believe we can fabricate our experience – our news, our celebrities, our adventures, and our art forms – we finally believe we can make the very yardstick by which all these are to be measured. That we can make our very ideals. This is the climax of our extravagant expectations. It is expressed in a universal shift in our American way of speaking: from talks about ‘Ideals’ to talks about the ‘image’ (Boorstin, 1961:187).

In the present society, we are bombarded with videos, advertisements, and magazines, all presenting to us the ‘ideal’ image (of how to live, how to dress, relax, go on holiday, how and where to shop, and so on endlessly). The radio is not left out either: through the use of language and the careful play of words we are presented with a mental picture of the ‘ideal’ image. This has in turn created an image-obsessed society – a society where, to be a success, you have to portray a particular image, or be seen to be affiliated with a certain group or company, or at least have (that is, project) an image that is suited to that group or represents your affiliation with it appropriately. It has reached a point where, as Boorstin (1961: 189) puts it, the right image will get a president elected, sell an automobile, religion, a cigarette, or a suit of clothes. We discuss ourselves, our communities, corporations, nations and leaders using the language of image. Even universities are judged by whether they fit into a well-tailored ‘image’ of themselves (1961:189).
According to the Oxford Dictionary (2005:743) an image can be described as a picture in your mind or an idea of how someone or something is; or the impression that a person, an organization or a product, etc. gives the public. Boorstin describes an image as “an artificial imitation or representation of the external form of any object, especially of a person” (1961:201). Thus, in short, an image can be looked at as a form of ‘representation’ and not the ‘real’ thing.

According to Thomas and Silver in the article *Today’s Image Culture and Why Media Literacy Matters* (2002:2) the emphasis on image is a new thing and seems to have come with the introduction of photography and shortly after that of television⁹. She expands on this statement by talking of how the television has sold us images of consumer culture and with that, we have learned to measure the value and values of our lives against the sensuous images of “the good life” as shown on television (2002:3). This, however, is a statement that could be debated. This is because even before the invention of photography there were artistic forms of expression, such as painting, in which artists would represent other people, objects, and landscapes, among other things, in the form of images. Moreover, in some of the pre-photography paintings, one can see that the model is posing and from this, one could conclude that the aim of the artist or of the model was to have a good portrait rendered of them. Herbst states that

Art through the centuries has been viewed as playing a singular role in such “inspiration” to perfection, for artists have been credited with the power to create... what nature cannot do, art supposedly can... art made between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries – especially images of celestial beauty (e.g.

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⁹ “The transition from a culture based on images instead of words began, in some ways, with the invention of photography, or maybe even engraving reproduction. But the constant repetition of television's endless images — and technical improvements such as digital image masters that make it possible to invisibly doctor photographs — have accelerated the process. Now it is moving at warp speed” (Silver and Thomas, 2002:2).
Sandro Botticelli’s Birth of Venus, c. 1484-1486) – one should remember that it was often created according to idealising principles, and was meant to be seen as better and truer than reality. Much of this art was made for aristocratic and clerical patrons and aimed at inciting the people to self-improving behaviour. It therefore acted as an agent of quiet social transformation (2005:17-18).

From this statement it is evident that the use of images is something that has been there as a means of communication long before the invention of photography, even if one has to grant Rosalind Silver her claim, that it has accelerated significantly since the invention of photography and television. Even back then it was used as a means to show an ‘ideal’ that people should live up to. Given that we are not passive receptors of media messages, we at one point or another connect with the image and unknowingly get involved with it (Silver, 2002: 4). How this happens, will become clearer when Lacan’s theory of identification is discussed at a later stage, in this chapter.

The image has different characteristics. According to Boorstin these characteristics are: the image as something synthetic, believable, passive, vivid and concrete, simplified, and lastly the image as something ambiguous (1961:190-199).

2.2.1 An image is synthetic

Boorstin talks of the image as something that is planned and created to serve a specific purpose or to make a particular kind of impression (1961:190). To illustrate this he uses the example of the trademark.10 A trademark can be looked at as a representation of a company that makes

10 A trademark... is a legally protected set of letters, a picture, or a design, identifying a particular product. Because trademarks and many other images flooding our experiences are, like most other pseudo events, expensive to
identifying the company simple. In other words, it gives you a very quick overview of the company. For example, on seeing the letters IBM one is normally reminded of a computer company, the tick of Nike and one instantly associates it with sportswear, the bitten apple and one thinks of the company Apple that manufactures computers and iPods, Coca Cola and one thinks of the soda or soft drink, Coke.

In the same way an image can be looked at as a representation of someone or something. Boorstin states that “[the] image in this sense is not simply a trademark, design, a slogan, or an easily remembered picture. It is a studiously crafted personality profile of an individual, institution, corporation, product, or services. It is a value-caricature, shaped in three dimensions, of synthetic materials” (1961:191). This means that for the image to be created, there are a lot of things that are taken into consideration before the image can be put together. Take for example the logo of Mercedes Benz. It not only stands for a company that manufactures vehicles, but it stands for quality, prestige, and dependability. The term image can be described as a “visible public ‘personality’ as distinguished from an inward private ‘character’” (Boorstin, 1961:191). One could deduce that, in the case of Mercedes Benz, this is the image that the public has been shown or trained to associate Mercedes with. However, there may be some negative qualities of the company that the trademark may not necessarily represent.11

produce, someone always has an interest in disseminating, reinforcing and exploiting them. Unlike other standards, they can be owned. To keep them legally valid as trademarks, the owner must constantly reassert his ownership (Boorstin, 1961:190).

11 The image can always be more or less synthesized... (Boorstin, 1961:191).
Nevertheless, this is not to say that the image is entirely independent of the character of the owner i.e. the company that it represents. The owner may have some of her or his characteristics portrayed in the image, but not necessarily as they exist in social reality. Take for example a picture of a beautiful lady that is being used to advertise a facial wash. By using the product, the lady may indeed end up having a clear skin but not as clear as is suggested by the advertiser. So after taking the picture they may touch up her skin and take off all the unwanted marks on her face. As a consumer, and without the knowledge of what was done to the lady’s face, one may go out there and purchase this product with the belief that one will get the results the advertiser claims the product will give its user, and that the user’s face will end up looking like that of the image seen in the advertisement. The company may be trying to project an image of how effective the product is, yet one that they themselves are not able to achieve.

2.2.2 An image is believable

For an image to sell it has to be convincing. Boorstin argues that “it serves no purpose if the people do not believe it. In their minds they must make it stand for the institution or the person imaged” (1961:192). The image that is shown should not be artificial to the point that it causes doubt in the viewer’s mind. A good example of this would be the images of models used in the magazine spreads. Though “their beauty” is enhanced in the images, it is still believable. This is not to say that there cannot be women who are “really” beautiful; there are, but what the photographer (or the advertiser) may be looking for is an ‘ideal’. Boorstin states that, “[a] prudent advertiser or master of public relations takes advantage of the increasingly reckless use of superlatives to make his hyperbole seem a conservative truth” (1961:193).
2.2.3 An image is passive

According to Boorstin, “Since the image is already supposed to be congruent with reality, the producer of the image (namely the corporation) is expected to fit into the image – rather than strive towards it. The consumer of the image (namely the viewer of the corporate image: a potential client or consumer) is also supposed somehow to fit into it” (1961: 193).

One would assume that Boorstin is suggesting that the image is supposed to represent reality but this is not the case. Image in this case, is an idealized version of what the company should be, but the impression created, is that the company is already like that. This basically means that because an image only becomes “real” when shown in public\(^{12}\), the image that is shown in public should be a true reflection of what the company “really” is (supposed to be) – that is, it represents the ideal, but “passively”. Take for example companies that like to portray themselves as being top of the class, or better yet, the common phrases that companies use when selling their products, for example, they include claims such as: they are “the best you will ever find”, “top class”, or “reliable”.

These are the ways in which they sell and portray themselves, but one wonders whether they really are what they claim to be, or they are simply striving to show some semblance of it. The same would apply to the consumer who will buy certain clothing or a specific car so as to look or fit into a certain role, such as buying the latest model BMW so as to be seen as stylish, or buying a Mini so that you could be different from the rest of the people. The question to be asked is, do such consumers really become stylish or different, given that they are not the only ones who will be driving that kind of BMW or Mini, or is it that they would like to be seen among the people

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\(^{12}\) An image is the kind of ideal which becomes real only when it has become public (Boorstin, 1961: 193).
who are considered as stylish or different? One could assume that the only reason why someone would want to be seen to be stylish or different is because of the very desire of the person (which is of course very human) to fit in or to identify with a particular group. As Boorstin comments, “Image building is the building of a reputation and not characters” (1961:194). If people have the commodity that builds their image then they are satisfied (Jhally, 1987:4).

The idea of building a reputation is an idea that advertising has been able to tap into, and through which advertisers have managed to lure people to conform to the ideals that they have created. Take for example the latest advertisement for Michel Herbelin watches. The tag line for that advertisement is “for the individual”. It is quite obvious that whoever created this advert knows that people have the desire to be seen “as an individual”. Boorstin states that “[s]ince the Graphic Revolution we think of him as a ‘conformist’ – one who tries to fit into the images found vividly all around him. In our world of pseudo-events, synthesized images take the place of external standards” (1961:197).

2.2.4 An image is vivid and concrete

There is an old saying that goes: “seeing is believing”. For advertisers to convince the consumer that a particular product is worth buying, they would definitely show them an image that is expected to appeal to their (consumers) emotions, one that convinces the audience to buy the product. The image has to be clear and “real”, that is, concrete. Boorstin states that “it must be more graspable than any specific list of objectives” (1961:197).
2.2.5 An image is simplified

An image should be simplified, that is, one would have to take away all the things that may make it undesired and undesirable (Boorstin, 1961:197). The aim of simplifying the image would be to make it easy for people to identify it. As Boorstin comments “[t]he maker of an image wishes to hear it on every tongue” (1961:197). A good example of this would be a company manufacturing toothpaste – you would want that, every time someone mentions toothpaste, it would be your product, for example Colgate. But at the same time Boorstin emphasises that, although the image should be distinct enough to remember, what it should not do, is to be so handy and to seem the natural symbol for similar products in its group (1961:197). For example, someone may go to the shop to buy washing powder and ask for Omo, meaning washing powder, or Cutex to mean nail polish, or Colgate to mean toothpaste. It does not necessarily mean that they want these specific brands but to them these brand names represent the very generic product they belong to.

2.2.6 An image is ambiguous

The image here seems to float somewhere between the imagination and the senses, between expectation and reality. “The reason for its ambiguity is so that it may not be offensive. It must suit unpredictable future purposes, and unpredicted changes in taste. Many such changes may have taken place before the image can be remade to contain them” (Boorstin, 1961:198). The viewers seem to enjoy the intricate process of actually creating the product.¹³ This is evident in the way advertisements are usually made; for example, the MTN advert for the 2010 soccer world cup, where they show the journey of a man when collecting the ‘soccer spirit’ throughout

¹³ We are all interested in watching a skilful feat of magic; we are still more interested in looking behind the scenes and seeing precisely how it was made.... (Boorstin, 1961:1999).
Africa; or the advertisement for Castle Lager [Larger] that shows the delicate, fine process that takes place to brew the quality beer. In doing this, the image replaces the ideal,\textsuperscript{14} that is, there is more to the image that just the ideal. Even so, the image still represents a type of ideal in that it shows a ‘perfection’ of some sort.

Boorstin talks about a change in thinking coming after the Graphic Revolution, which can be seen when talking about the difference between ‘ideal thinking’ and ‘image thinking’. He talks of “an ideal, contrasted to an image is not synthetic. Furthermore an ideal is something that is already there, something that has been created by tradition, history or God; it is perfect and not simplified, ambiguous, and its implications are not to induce passivity, like an image. In other words, an ideal is what we strive for and do not fit into” (1961:201-202).

An image on the other hand is something that we have a claim on. It is designed to fit the organisation (the company manufacturing the goods). An ideal unlike an image has a claim over us. We have to strive to achieve it. However, he states that an “image is a kind of ideal” (1961:193). So despite there being a change of influence or “effect” from ideals to images, one could argue that the ‘ideal’ has just moved from a concept which induces striving into an image that can actually be seen as something to identify with.

The idea of having an image for a product and making it distinct from the images of other products was an idea that arose due to the need for differentiation of products in America. So while advertising flourished on one side there was also the build-up of brand names to

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Ideal’ is related somehow to an ‘idea’… it [is]a conception of something in its most excellent or perfect form…(Boorstin, 1961:201).
accompany that process. But after some time this changed, where “the name and not the product [became] the centre of attention” (Boorstin, 1961:203). This is something that we see and even know that when celebrities are attending a function it is not enough to compliment them on wearing a nice dress; it matters who designed the dress. Among the youth it is the same: it is not just a matter of wearing the latest fashion, but it matters if it is Gucci, Levi or Nike. One could say that because of our obsession with brand names, people spend incredible amounts of money on a product, just because of the brand name.

This led to what Boorstin calls the creation of impressive and attractive images (1961:203). He continues to say that this was a time when there was a buzz on how to create the most memorable image, even if it was only going to be seen fleetingly as one leafed through the pages of a magazine (1961:203).

To broadcast and receive these images, devices multiplied: high-speed presses, photography, vast-circulation magazines, movies, radio, [and] television. In everybody’s consciousness, images became important as never before. Man’s power to produce graven images exceeded the most diabolical imagination of Biblical times (Boorstin, 1961:204).

The statement above is true even to this day, where different ways are being exploited to sell products by means of constructed images purporting to coincide with the product in some way.

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15 “The American system of manufacturing, mass production, which originated about a century and a half ago, was based on the revolutionary idea of interchangeable parts... Advertising flourished from the effort to produce apparent distinctions. Competing products were now more precisely similar and more unnoticeably different. Different brands of these commodities could not readily be distinguished from one another by actual shape or function. Each had to be distinguished, therefore, by being attached to, or rather ‘fitted into’ a distinctive image. The masters of advertising, men like Albert Lasker, were adept at this. At the same time came the build-up of brand names” (Boorstin, 1961:203).
Naomi Klein talks of how “Scholastic marketing battles are fought over high-school gym and class and university athletics” (2001:92). It has reached a point where even the learning spaces have not been left out either, to the point where learning institutions are also advertising themselves and promoting different courses through image-constructions. A good example of this would be the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) campaign that is titled “Be a Star in your Future Career”. The term ‘star’ could be looked at as positing an ideal. Considering Boorstin’s observation, that an image, although not the same as an ideal, is related to it, automatically the image that would come into your mind when you see “star”, is that of a celebrity.

Boorstin blames the social scientists for not focusing on unique events that fascinated the old humanist-historian, but instead building up images from “modal forms”. Sociologists were able to describe the villager, the suburban housewife, the scientist, the small businessman or the junior executive in distinctive terms (1961:205). Today’s society operates in the same way: the difference is, it happens on the basis of image-identification, and no longer via conceptual-linguistic understanding, where people are categorised in terms of images: according to what clothes they wear (the brand of clothing they wear, or if it is fashionable or out of fashion), their body sizes, and in terms of status amongst other groups. The question becomes: are you ‘cool’ or not, are you ‘with it’ or not? “These wide-appealing ‘modes’, expressed in our dominating notions of norms and averages, led us unwittingly to try to imitate ourselves” (Boorstin, 1961:206). This statement reveals that there are those groups of people who may behave in a certain way, and because they are looked up to as being the ‘cool’ group, everybody else who would like to get the same attention would imitate them in order to get the same attention.
Related to the above, Goffman (in Jhally, 1987:5) gives an example of how advertising works:

\[\text{Ads draw heavily upon the domain of gender display - not the way that men and women actually behave but the ways in which we think men and women behave. It is because these conventions of gender display are so easily recognized by the audience that they figure so prominently in the image system.}\]

For advertisers to do this they would have to have a group in mind that they would be “observing” through what is known as “market research” (concerning buying patterns, and so on), and according to them this would be the group that would be worth imitating by consumers who aspire to belong to this group – one that the others would perhaps look up to. And in so doing the consumer tries to fit into the image\(^{16}\). Advertisers emphasize the image not only because the image sells, but because the image is in a fundamental sense what people want to buy; for we live in a world where people do not only talk of the materials of consumption but of their images (Boorstin, 1961:208). This insight would explain why someone would prefer to buy an “image-enhanced” item or a cell phone that would cost a fortune, and yet they can buy a cheaper phone with the same features as the expensive one, but minus the link with the desirable image.

Advertising has helped us create illusions of ourselves and in line with this, has also reshaped the concept of truth (Boorstin, 1961:208-209). This statement is justified, given that advertising draws information from a specific section of society and makes it seem as if that is the standard by which everyone should live up to. Take for example the issue of beauty. In advertising what is

\(^{16}\)“Naïve emphasis on ideals had at worst tempted men to unrealistic pursuit of an abstract standard of perfection; emphasis on modes and images now tempts us to pursue the phantoms of ourselves” (Boorstin, 1961:206)
beautiful is a skinny, young woman. However, the attribution of this quality to beautiful women may not be universally true, especially in Africa where women are more full-figured. But due to things like globalization, advertising in Africa uses the standards of the West; hence using the western standards of beauty in an African situation. The reason why this type of advertising would work in an African urban context, for example, is because of the “Americanisation” of university students. Evidence of the homogenization of global culture according to American cultural forms, sometimes referred to as the ‘McDonaldization’ of the world (Steger 2003: 5), suggests that students have accepted the globally disseminated American way of life, and it follows from this that it would be easy for them to accept this sort of West-orientated advertising. In this way people have given advertising the loophole that it operates in\(^\text{17}\).

Our society has shifted from an emphasis on ‘truth’ to emphasis on credibility – we have moved towards looking at things in terms of convenience (Boorstin, 1961:215). Hence the reason why an advertisement can make a call like: “[b]eing a man would be going for an Aids test”, and people would actually go for it to be seen as “men”. Knowing one’s status is necessary, but it should be apparent that it does not determine “what makes one a man”. Thus the falsification of advertising could be undertaken along these lines.

Again, today advertisers may say that to be a man you have to go for an Aids test; tomorrow, eating a Bar-One chocolate supposedly makes you not just a man, but a ‘macho’ man. Boorstin refers to advertising as a “pseudo event”, and outlines its four key characteristics:

\(^\text{17}\) “Much of the appeal of advertising has actually consisted in its effort, which we all appreciate, to satisfy our extravagant expectations. The deeper problems connected with advertising come less from the unscrupulousness of our ‘deceivers’ than the pleasure in being deceived, less from the desire to seduce than from the desire to be seduced. The graphic revolution has produced new categories of experience “(Boorstin, 1961:214).
I. The appeal of neither-truth-nor-falsehood

Boorstin explains how advertisers do not tell lies but evade the truth. He justifies this statement by giving the example of how some advertisers emphasise the process of making a particular product. What they do not tell you is that this is the process that is used by all manufactures. He gives the example of Lucky Strike’s emphasis on the tobacco being roasted (1961:218). This is true, although not the whole truth. By them emphasising a particular feature of the product they make it look like this is the only product with this sort of treatment, making it superior to the rest. Yet it is a mere procedure that has to be followed when making cigarettes.

II. The appeal of self-fulfilling prophecy

Here advertisers use people for endorsement purposes – celebrities or other professionally or socially respected people – in certain areas to talk of the credibility of specific products (for example using a dentist to approve a particular brand of toothpaste). Boorstin states that “[s]o straightforward a statement as one that someone approves or uses a product has become one of the most interesting of the pseudo-events. From a most simple declaration of fact, it has become a formula of compound ambiguity” (1961:220). This is a common way of advertising, especially in our time and age. We always associate a face with a product. For example, Connie Ferguson, from the South African soap opera Generations, is the face of L’oréal; Beyonce, an R & B musician, was the face of Samsung when they launched their new phone (the F300); and Eva Longoria, from the soap opera Desperate housewives, the face of Magnum chocolate ice-cream, among many others. The latest trend is for a product to be associated with a movie, for example Smirnoff Vodka is now being advertised using clips from the new (2008) James Bond movie, Quantum of Solace.
III. The appeal of the half-intelligible

In this case advertisers could be said to lure the consumer by bringing in a new product and, in explaining how advanced the product is, using terms that the consumer may not exactly understand, but is likely to be wooed into believing that this product is really advanced, and that all the rest in its category are inferior. A good example of this would be things like washing powders, for example OMO or Sunlight, which are always showing how the stains are removed\(^\text{18}\). So the consumer is fascinated by his or her partial understanding the process being described yet does not fully comprehend in what way the product really works. Ironically, this partial understanding leads the consumer to the conclusion that the product must be really advanced.

IV. The appeal of the contrived

We enjoy being courted and like a little girl pleased to see her best beau stand on his head for her sake, we delight in headstands and handsprings of advertisers. Not necessarily because we especially enjoy acrobatics, or even because the acrobatics were done so well, but because we are flattered that anyone would go through so much trouble for us (Boorstin, 1961:227).

With the above statement in mind it would be right to assume that, as humans, we love things that are out of the ordinary, and especially if it is specially done for us. This provides a strategy

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\(^{18}\) "If [the consumer] could completely understand advertising jargon he would be badly disappointed. The half-intelligibility which we expect, or even hope, to find in the latest-product language personally reassures each of us that progress is being made; that the pace exceeds our ability to follow" (Boorstin, 1961:226).
that advertisers frequently make use of; we enjoy the fact that the advertisement entertains us and at the same time speaks to us individually.  

From all the above characteristics of how advertising works and manages to sell us a product to construct – and by implication already constructing – our image, one thing arises over and over, and that is desire – desire to know that something is specially made, that it has been approved of by a respected individual in society, that it is advanced and that the product or service caters specially for you. Herbst states that,

Desire is one of the most palpable human drives.... Having desire already, what we then need is something that will make it meaningful to us. If I have an object to desire, I give myself reason for my desire and hence reassure myself that my wants and compulsions are not random, fruitless or mindless, but substantive components of myself. Advertising may well exacerbate the need for this kind of assurance, but it does not create it. Moreover, even though what it offers as compensation for desire is not fulfilling in a conclusive sense, it is by no means as superfluous as some believed. Advertising may not give us what we need – that is, the indeterminable – but it can point to what we either consciously or subliminally ask for (2005:15).

At the end of the day, the object we desire adds to our image, and thus explains why advertising has been so successful in selling us products that we do not even need.

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19 “When we see a man hunting, fishing, or playing poker while chained to a large egg... we are pleased. Not so much because we know what is happening or what it all means but because we cannot help being pleased that so elaborate a pseudo-event should be made especially for us” (Boorstin, 1961:228).
2.3 The Mirror Stage

As human beings we all have points of reference – things that we look up to or admire, and hope or aspire to match up to and even surpass. In the present society, image has become everything and with that, the media now bombard us with images that we have been trained to look at as our points of reference. To portray this, the best group to look at would be the youth; who dress, act and talk like figures – celebrities, politicians, business leaders – whose compelling images we see in the media. It would be no surprise to find the new ‘lingo’ being used to have been taken from an advertisement, for example ‘yebo, yes’ is taken from a Vodacom advertisement, not to mention someone wearing the same glasses that they saw Paris Hilton wearing, having a hairstyle similar to that of Pink or wearing bling-bling on their neck, similar to that which 50 Cents was wearing in his latest Hip-Hop music video. To explain why people imitate what they see in the media (with a focus on advertising); this study draws on Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’. At the same time, it benefits from the theories of identity that have been discussed earlier, complementing Lacan’s theory, which focuses on the ‘origin’ of human beings’ sense of identity, or of having a ‘self’, rooted in a formative ‘identification’ with one’s mirror image (or, correspondingly, with ‘fraternal’ images), and therefore suggesting that all the other theories necessarily have to assume that a certain developmental stage (Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’) in the individual’s life lays the basis for all subsequent shifts, reinforcements or transformations of identity.

Lacan uses a child’s experience in front of the mirror to explain the mirror stage, viewing it as a formative event that happens in the development of a subject (infant); an event that takes place when the infant begins to recognise her or his image in the mirror (Benvenuto & Kennedy,
The infant, fascinated by the image and its (the infant’s) ability to recognise the image, experiences pleasure and tries to play with the image and control it (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986:52). According to Lacan “…the mirror image of ‘itself’, beheld by the infant in the mirror, functions in an ambivalent…manner to impart to him or her both a sense of unity and wholeness that it still lacks at the level of motor-movement” (Olivier, 2007: 47). This means that the child’s ‘recognition’ of its own image is (what Lacan calls) a kind of ‘misrecognition’, because the image, although resembling the child’s appearance, is not the child – it fascinates the child because it seems whole, unified, coordinated, and so on (which the child is not at this stage, between six and eighteen months of age). In other words, the infant ‘identifies’ with its own image, something that is related to itself, but is not ‘really’ itself. Lacan also indicates that this formative experience lays the foundation for all subsequent cases of identification (Olivier, 2007:47).

In the same way, when a consumer looks at an advert, he or she may identify with the image and in so doing may imagine him- or herself looking like what they see, or see the image as a solution to attaining ‘wholeness’ (fame or status) that they may not have at that moment. Lacan emphasises that the “mirror stage [is a stage] of identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago ”(Lacan in Sheridan, 1977:2).

The term ‘imago’ can be explained by looking at the meaning of the ‘maternal imago’, ‘fraternal imago’ and ‘paternal imago’ in Lacan’s work. The maternal imago “is spurious or illusory, and
at an unconscious level, the subject is aware of this. Lacan stresses that this (‘maternal’) imago – which, together with the image encountered in the ‘mirror stage’, is…important…– also comprises the structural counterpart of all ideological (including religious) psychical commitments on the part of the individual” (Olivier, 2007: 44). This imago is formed from the infant’s need for things like shelter, warmth and other things for which she/he is dependent on the mother. So unconsciously the maternal imago functions as a condition for the recognition and desire of something modeled on this imago – something that is experienced as a source of security for the individual (Olivier, 2007: 43).

This theory can be used to explain why consumers may conform to buying things that are advertised. They are seduced not by the product ‘itself’ so much as by being offered a lifestyle or something that appeals to them, through the images or language in which the product is ‘framed’ – so they buy the product with the perception that it will satisfy their desire for security, which is rooted in the ‘maternal imago’. Olivier states that the “mirror-image as privileged site of identification solidifies what started at an earlier stage with the ‘maternal imago’, similarly proffering to the subject the spurious promise of a plenum or fullness which would compensate for its congenital lack and deficiency” (2007: 48).

The ‘fraternal imago’, in turn, is linked to the ‘mirror stage’ “through the element of rivalry which ensues on the realization that socially, one is always, unavoidably, in competition with others20” (Olivier, 2007: 48). The ‘fraternal imago’ is embedded in the infant unconscious when

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20 Lacan reminds one that the mirror-image itself (one’s ‘own’ image) elicits rivalry and aggression on the part of the subject towards it, given the comparative unity and wholeness that it displays. This reinforces the aggressivity and rivalry that, for the rest of the subject’s life, she or he will display towards others” (Olivier, 2007: 48)
the subject realizes that he/she shares a world with other siblings or other people and has to compete for affection from the parents or other authority figures (Lee in Olivier, 2007:48). The kind of social phenomenon that can be traced back to the functioning of the ‘fraternal imago’ in terms of competition is quite evident in our society. Olivier states that “the role of the media in promoting such rivalry, and concomitantly, consumer spending, in relation to the ubiquitous iconic representations of celebrities (with which consumers identify in ‘wannabe’-fashion), should be obvious here” (2007: 12).

The last type of imago is the ‘paternal imago’. It is “is related to what Freud calls the Oedipus complex – the psychic mechanism for the child’s entry into the world via submission to parental authority, and identification with the parent of the same sex.” (Olivier, 2007: 47). According to Lacan this imago is a precondition for the child’s development of a sexual identity, but also ineluctably the potential source of all kinds of complicating problems in this area of experience, including the possibility of rebellion against the established social order represented by this imago (Olivier, 2007: 47). At this stage we see that, because of the way that the ‘paternal imago’ works in a person’s psyche from the time of its formation, a person has got the capability of going against the conventional images that are ‘prescribed’ by advertising, in so far as it makes use of images and language which offer individuals the opportunity to identify with lifestyles or positions of power and authority presented as being desirable. This would explain the reason why we have witnessed the rise of subcultures like the hippies or the ‘gothic people’, who go against the image of what is considered ‘cool’ or conventionally acceptable.
The mirror stage, which corresponds roughly to the ‘fraternal imago’, could then be considered as a phase when the basis is established for the desire to attain or conform to that which he/she considers as an ideal, with the hope of attaining what Lacan refers to as the “ideal-I” (Lacan in Sheridan, 1977:2) – in other words, with the hope that this will give them the ‘wholeness’ that they lack. This, in turn, will help ‘boost their ego’.

According to Lacan, the ego is formed at the point where there is alienation as well as fascination with one’s own image – that is, during the fraternal imago’s formation, to which the mirror stage corresponds. The image (whether the one in the mirror, or that of one’s sibling) is the first organized form with which the individual identifies. So the ego takes its form from the organizing and constitutive qualities of this image (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986:55). To elaborate on Lacan’s insight: “…the ego is formed on the basis of an imaginary relationship between the subject with his own body. The ego has the illusion of autonomy, but it is only an illusion, and the subject moves from fragmentation and insufficiency to illusory unity” (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986:56).

If one applies this to the situation in which consumers find themselves, it appears that, once they have bought the product that they implicitly believe will give them the self-image they desire, they will feel complete or whole, but in an important sense (as one can infer from Lacan’s work) this ‘wholeness’ is not actually there. Hence the reason why, after some time, one may find that the fulfillment that they thought they actually had achieved through buying a certain product, they don’t have any more, and hence they would move on to the next image-framed product that they think will give them the fulfillment they require. Lacan explains this by observing that “the
ego’s mastery of the environment is always an illusory mastery, as a result of the way it is formed at the mirror stage, and the human subject will continue throughout life looking for imaginary ‘wholeness’ and ‘unity’. He will want to master his environment, feel unified and a total person” (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986:61).
CHAPTER THREE

ADVERTISING

3.0 Preliminary Remarks

Advertisements are a way of making the general public aware of a new product on the market. In the article *What is Advertising*, (Hornor, 1998), advertising is defined as “the action of calling something to the attention of the public…by emphasising desirable qualities so as to arouse a desire to buy or patronize: promote”. Fowles, on the other hand, states that advertisements are “paid for messages that attempt to transfer symbols on to commodities to increase the likelihood that the commodities will be found appealing and be purchased ” (1996:13). From the above definitions it can be deduced that advertising is a form of communication that informs with a view to inducing a certain mode of economic behaviour. Berger (2004:10) comments that advertising “could be the most powerful art form on earth”, and justifies this statement by saying that “because advertising deals with the minutiae of everyday life, any art that comes from it is going to be particularly powerful and relevant”. Advertising greatly influences our lives and mostly, manages to capture the attention of the viewer.

3.1 The Seducer-‘Sedupee’ Analogy in Advertising

The reason why advertising is able to influence the lives or capture the attention of the viewer is because it “is a tool whereby consumers are controlled and manipulated by producers of goods (on whose behalf advertising is waged) to desire things for which they have no real need” (Jhally, 1987:2). This is done by giving a symbolic meaning to the goods. For example if a

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21 “If goods have a symbolic aspect it is largely because advertising gives them one. They plainly do not spring from the factory fully possessed of their ability to communicate. It is advertising that enables them to assume this ability... it is part of the process with which we endow with certain meaningful properties. It is advertising that make goods’ communicators,” (McCracken and Pollay in Jhally, 1987:11).
person has an Iphone it tends to symbolise the person’s being stylish, fashionable and rich as well as giving the person status. Since consumers would want to be seen in a certain light or manner by society or their peers, they usually fall into the trap of buying such goods. In this case advertising can be looked at as a form of seduction, or the advertiser as a kind of seducer. In seduction, the seducer “has to get his or her intention across to the ‘seducer’, even if it is in devious ways” (Olivier 2006: 210); the same thing happens in advertising. There are instances where advertisements may challenge us, for example to be proud of who we are, and to do this we are invited, for example, to drink Hansa Pilsener, to achieve what we want, or we are exhorted to wear Nike and ‘Just do it’. Or, if you have a desire for liquid, you should drink Sprite and ‘Obey your thirst’. Again, there is the Mini advertisement where, to be different, you would have to own a Mini. All in all these advertisements promise us something that the product would not be able to give to us. Take the example of the Mini advert, where we are told we will be different if we drive the Mini. This advert is certainly unlikely to deliver on its promise, because the individual who responds positively to it will not be the only consumer who would want to be different and therefore go out and buy the Mini. Hence, what the advert would have done is play with the consumer’s desires or seduce the consumer into buying the car. At the end of the day the advertiser has achieved his/her mission to get the consumer to think that, by buying the product, she or he would be different. Thus the consumer gets fooled into buying the product because of her or his desire to be different. Olivier explains that “a seducer could achieve her or his goal of ‘winning’ the object of their seductive conquest without the other being aware that this process is occurring” (2006: 211). The seduced person is completely paralysed (Olivier 2006: 212).
The advertiser is out on a mission and his or her mission is to sell. Advertisements are used to advance or perpetuate ideas and values which are indispensable to a particular economic system (Dyer, 1982: 1). How the advertiser does this may be explained by comparing the advertiser to the seducer who, with a certain amount of reflection, crafts his plans (Olivier 2006: 213). As soon as she or he has managed to seduce the seducee (consumer) to buy the product, the seducer looks for a new challenge; in this case, convincing the consumer that there is a better product than that which he/she bought earlier. Dyer comments that “advertising wants us to buy products, use them, throw them away and buy replacements in a cycle of continuous and conspicuous consumption” (1982:1). The advertiser does not stop to look back at the implications of his or her action.

To be able to sell a product the advertiser identifies what can be referred to as a target group. The identified target group has desires that the advertiser has identified and can use to ‘manipulate’ members of the group into buying a product. Herbst states that:

…desire is one of the most palpable human drives... Having desire already, what we then need is something that will make it meaningful to us. If I have an object to desire, I give myself a reason for my desire, and hence reassure myself that my wants and compulsions are not random, fruitless or mindless, but substantive components of myself. Advertising may well exacerbate the need for this kind of assurance... (2005:13).

From this statement one can conclude that advertisers take advantage of our ‘weaknesses’ without our knowledge. We are made to feel that we are the ones that are deciding for ourselves. Olivier talks of the seducer as having “planned things carefully, leading an unsuspecting [victim]
into ambush by cultivating the appearance of someone who is simultaneously irresistibly interesting and aloof, in this way attracting the ‘chosen’ victim’s interest and slowly but surely enticing it until it reaches a veritable summit of desire for the seducer” (2006: 213). In other words, the advertiser attempts to make the product so enticing that the consumer will not be able to resist it, and eventually will go out and buy it.

One may ask, how is advertising able to do this? The advertiser’s key strategy is in the use of words and symbolic imagery. Jhally explains the development of advertising from the use of text in the early 1900s, to the introduction of visual imagery later on, which came with the development of technology.

Whereas the initial period of national advertising (from approximately the 1880s to the 1920s) had focused largely in a celebratory manner on the products themselves and had used text for "reason why" advertising (even if making the most outrageous claims), the 1920s saw the progressive integration of people (via visual representation) into the messages. Interestingly, in this stage we do not see representations of "real" people in advertisements, but rather we see representations22 of people who "stand for" reigning social values such as family structure, status differentiation, and hierarchical authority (1987:1).

22 “Representation refers to the way in which images and language actively ‘construct’ meanings according to sets of conventions that are shared by and are familiar to its producers and target market. ‘To represent’ means to ‘stand’ for, ‘states’, ‘announces’, ‘symbolizes’, as well as ‘suggests illusionistically’, or gives a ‘snapshot impression of’” (King, 1992:131).
When imagery was introduced in advertising, the audience had to be taught how to read the images. Jhally explains that advertising does not merely show us imagery (that tells us about goods) but shows us how these goods connect to the particular domains of our life (1987:3). Kellner and Harms expand on this by stating that “symbolic images in advertising attempt to create an association between products offered and socially desirable, and meaningful traits in order to produce the impression that if you want to be a certain person, for instance, to be a “real man,” then one should buy Marlboro cigarettes” (1997:127). Given that our era is one in which individuals get their very identification from images, advertising becomes an important and overlooked mechanism of socialization as well as being the manager of consumer demand (Jhally, 1987:127).

Consuming of goods is not based on ‘really’ wanting the goods but on the association of the goods with what one requires in life. Jhally states that people are in need of personal autonomy and control of their lives, self-esteem, a happy family life, loving relations, a relaxed, tension free leisure time, and good friendships (1987:2) – things that advertising ‘offers’. One example of this is the Redds premium dry beer where a group of lady friends get together after a day of hard work, each describing what happened during the day, and the point is made that, at the end of the day what brings them together for a good rest, is drinking Redds. The advert ends with the words “just phola” which means take a rest or relax. relaxation, in this context, refers not only to

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23 “There was no guarantee that the audience was sufficiently literate in visual imagery to properly decode the evermore complex messages. Thus, the advertising industry had to educate as well as sell, and many of the ads of this period were a fascinating combination where the written (textual) material explained the visual material. The consumer society was literally being taught how to read the commercial messages. By the postwar period the education was complete and the function of written text moved away from explaining the visual and toward a more cryptic form where it appears as a “key” to the visual ‘puzzle’ “ (Jhally, 1987:2).
the atmosphere that is created when one is with friends but it would also refer to the feeling that
the drink would give you. In other words in advertising “the images [used] associate products
advertised with certain socially desirable traits and convey messages concerning the symbolic
benefits accrued to those who consume the product…” (Kellner and Harms, 1997:130); hence
the ease with which the consumer tends to be ‘seduced’ into buying a product. Add to this what
was pointed out earlier (via a discussion of Boorstin’s ideas) regarding images, as well as what
was established concerning the role of images in identification (via an examination of Lacan’s
‘mirror stage’), and it appears hardly surprising that the use of images in advertising, such as the
ones referred to here, would offer consumers ‘sites’ of identification with specific social
behaviour. And this is what ultimately sells the product.

Apart from influencing or having an effect on the people, advertising affects the economy and
also contributes to shaping popular culture.

3.2 Economic Growth

“Those who defend advertising say that it is economically necessary and has brought many
benefits to society. It contributes to society’s well being and raises people’s standards of living
by encouraging the sales of mass-produced goods, thus stimulating production and creating
employment and prosperity” (Dyer, 1982:4). From this statement we can see that advertising
constantly encourages consumerism while also contributing to the creation of employment and
‘prosperity’. Khan, (2004:2) defines consumerism as the “belief that the society or individual
benefits from using a larger quantity of goods and services.” Berger (2004:10) tells us that,

24 “It is primarily "social" life and not "material" life that seems to be the locus of perceived happiness. Commodities are only weakly related to these sources of satisfaction” (Jhally, 1987:3).
“more than $400 billion a year is spent on advertising worldwide.” Such money would only be injected into advertising if the advertisers were getting a recognizable profit by doing it. So the question becomes “who ultimately benefits from advertising of consumer goods – society as a whole (as it is claimed), or a few powerful commodity manufacturers and business corporations?” (Dyer, 1982:4).

Capitalism is the economic system that characterizes our way of life today. Big businesses or corporations in contrast to small businesses, such as the café on the street corner, which could also, in principle, become a big business, are owned by a relatively small group of people who are out to make money from the rest of the society. For them to make the profits that they want, the goods that they produce (and the services they offer) have to be sold. Dyer comments that

The sheer volume of goods or commodities which flow from modern factories would cause serious problems for the manufactures unless they are quickly consumed and unless the general ideology of the society was tuned with acquisitiveness and the ‘way of life’ associated with consumer society. Advertising is one of the means used by manufacturing and service industries to ensure the distribution of commodities to people in the society at large and is designed to create demands for such goods and services. It helps the manufacturer or business to secure a section of the market by organising and controlling people’s tastes and behaviour in the interests of company profit and capital growth. Advertising... tries to manipulate people into buying a way of life as well as goods” (1982:5).

25 “Capitalism is a socio-economic system in which private ownership means profit to the owner. The owner controls the means of production, so the profit belongs to the private business owner. In capitalism, the free market determines the production, distribution and price of goods and services” (Cyprus, 2003:1).
From the above statement we see that advertising is a means by which capitalism as an economic system manipulates the consumer into buying goods. “Our desires are aroused and shaped by the demands of the system of production, not by the needs of society or of the individual” (Dyer, 1982:5). This suggests that advertising is one one-sided; that is, it is there for the benefit of the capitalists and though it started off as a means to inform the consumer of products in the market, one could argue that, ultimately, it does more harm than good. This is because advertising drives society into mindless materialism, where people are persuaded that they can achieve nearly all their desires through possession of things, in a cycle of ‘continuous and conspicuous consumption’ (Dyer, 1982:7). All in all advertising does build the economy but at the same time and by the same means destroys the individual, replacing him or her with ‘the consumer’ in the process.

### 3.3 Shaping Popular Culture

Let us start by explaining what is meant by popular culture before we look at how advertising shapes it. Popular culture can be described as “beliefs and practices, and the objects through which they are organised that are widely shared among a population” (Mukerji et al in Fowles, 1996:10). Fowles adds that “popular culture is what we make out of the products and practices of mass-produced culture” (1996:10). Given that culture is “an invisible construct made visible in symbols, objects and practices” (Fowles, 1996: 22), one would conclude that popular culture can be defined simply as the practices that are common among the people, for example music, movies, clothes, books (including comic books), or even the (regionally specific) use of language.
Today, with the development of technology, the mass media have become one of the ways in which popular culture spreads. One of the ways of spreading these ways of life, kinds of ideas or cultures, is advertising.

Advertising influences people’s thoughts and behaviour. “Advertising tells people what they are to consume and how they should look, talk and what they should drive” (Berger, 2004:245). One may argue that this is not true, given that “advertising…does not work by creating values and attitudes out of nothing but by drawing upon and rechanneling concerns that the target audience (and the culture) already shares” (Jhally, 1987:3). However, this argument is not justified, as Jhally continues by stating that advertising does not mirror how people act, but rather their dreams (1987: 3) or what one would refer to as people’s desires. It would be wrong to say that advertising mirrors people’s dreams because that would mean that everyone has the same dreams. This would completely contradict the notion that we are individuals and we are each unique in our own way. Of course, those talking of the ‘people’s dreams’ could still defend their position by relating their argument to the dreams of the mythical average person. Whichever way one looks at it what is less controversial is that advertising has a homogenizing effect26.

26 “An increasingly homogenized popular culture’ is emerging, one that is fired by the western, mainly American, ‘culture industry’ (a concept forged by Adorno and Horkheimer in their critique of ‘instrumental reason’) – so much so that the process of cultural colonization of the globe is also nicknamed the ‘Americanization of the world’, hinting at the vulnerability of less powerful cultures to what sociologist George Ritzer also labels ‘McDonaldization’… In the long run, the McDonaldization of the world amounts to the imposition of uniform standards that eclipse human creativity and dehumanize social relations” (Steger, 2003:70-71). What Steger is talking of her can be seen in the way advertising promotes ‘ideals’ in fashion, beauty among other things. And in so doing promote a type of uniformity among the people. For example if being stylish means wearing Nike clothes then all who want to be stylish will wear Nike and this means uniformity. Olivier comments that “The political theorist Benjamin Barber (Steger 2003: 71-73) goes as far as warning against the spectre of what he calls ‘McWorld’, which, like a global virus, is transforming the diversity of world cultures into ‘a blandly uniform market’. It is unnecessary to stress the implications of this for the question of identity – if Barber and other ‘pessimistic hyperglobalizers’ are right, postmodern identities are becoming more homogeneous or uniform” (2007:39).
Advertising portrays images used in advertisements as the ‘ideal’ or the latest trend, and in so doing creates a situation where, to use our earlier metaphor, people are ‘seduced’ and end up conforming to the ideals used in advertising; hence popular culture.

One may mention, for example, the advertisements in magazines that continually emphasise that to be beautiful, you have to be a certain body size, to be classified as rich or sophisticated, you have to own or drive a particular car, or to be fashionable, you have to wear certain clothes, which have to be trendy. A good example of how society adopts certain things from advertisements, is the catch phrase “yebo, yes” – the catch phrase for the Vodacom advertisement. Although the word “yebo” is the Zulu word for “yes”, the way the word has been used in the Vodacom advertisement has made it popular among the South African youth, and it has become part of South African slang. It has become a way of responding when answering the telephone or cell phone, agreeing to something or as a greeting. In England, a commercial for a soft drink called Tango, features an orange-painted man who slaps everyone’s ears; so people on the streets of London “started slapping one another’s ears, like the orange ‘Tango man’” (Berger 2004:17). Similarly, the Zambuk ointment advertisement has the exclamation “aish” repeated over and over, which has resulted in it becoming a common way of exclaiming.

Because of how consumers imitate what happens in advertisements, or their reactions to things through advertising, Berger (2004:17) states that “advertising today isn’t just influencing the culture, it is programming.”
The use of things like catch phrases in advertising to promote a certain product, is part of the creation of a brand. Branding can be described as the process of making a brand or “the creation and development of a specific identity for a company, product, commodity, group or person” (Davis 2003:5). In branding the company, product, commodity, group or person is carefully portrayed to the consumers in a manner that the advertisers think would be attractive to them. Branding also helps the consumer know the difference between one product/company and another. A good example is the difference between how cars are portrayed. For example, the “Chevy is described as being reliable and comfortable, while BMW will be described as exciting, luxurious and brilliantly engineered” (Davis, 2003:5). The consumer would have gained this information about these cars from the way they are advertised. For this reason people generally assume that the person driving one of these cars, for example the BMW, would be rich, stylish and accustomed to luxury. This assumption would probably be true, most of the time. However, inherent in it are the dangers of what we have earlier referred to as stereotyping, the association (rightly or wrongly) of certain people with certain objects or traits, e.g. being wealthy, stylish, and accustomed to luxury, among other things.

3.4 Capitalism, Consumerism and Ornamental Culture

Capitalism constantly renews itself through the advertising and branding of images that bombard audiences worldwide on a daily basis in all forms of popular (mass-consumption) communication-practices and art, from which one should not exclude advertising and branding, given the creativity that often goes into the production of advertisements and branding campaigns (Olivier, 2006:1).
As Olivier suggests in the statement above, capitalism is ever changing. There is always a tactic that is used to capture viewers’ attention in the financial interest of the capitalist (in this case the firm, company or corporation). The reason for this can be best understood by exploring the concept of capitalism.

Capitalism, according to the Oxford Dictionary, can be described as “an economic system in which a country’s businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit by private owners rather than the government”. According to Olivier, “Capitalism is the mode of social being, or kind of society which is established through the economic functioning of capital, that is, a society which values everything reductively in terms of money as principle of exchange” (2005:124). Screpanti also describes it as “an economic system in which control of production and the allocation of real and financial resources are based on private ownership of the means of production” (1999:2). Ferrell, on the other hand, portrays “contemporary capitalism as [a] system of domination whose economic and political viability… rest precisely on its cultural accomplishments” (2007:92). According to Olivier, in his article *The Excesses of Capitalism*, he comments that

Capitalism is driven by the profit motive and by nothing else. If, in the course of doing business with this in mind, managers also, incidentally, show in concrete terms that they care for people — not just their own staff, but the public as well — it is a rare bonus, and does not derive from the nature of the beast (capital), but rather from the (well-nigh futile) attempt on the part of the individuals in decision-making positions, to ‘give capitalism a heart’ (2008:1).
The owners of the businesses purposefully manufacture goods and offer services with the main aim of making profit. Ferrell refers to capitalism as a contemporary form of economic exploitation (2007:92). He explains the previous statement by stating that “global capitalism or [capitalism] now contaminates one community after another, shaping social life into a series of privatized encounters and saturating everyday existence with expectations of material convenience. All along this global trajectory, collectivities are converted into markets, people into consumers, and experiences and emotions into products. So steady is this seepage that capitalist dynamics now seem to pervade most every situation” (2007:92).

Capitalism is essentially a cultural enterprise these days; its economics are decisively cultural in nature. Perhaps more to the point for criminology, contemporary capitalism is a system of domination whose economic and political viability, and its crimes and transgressions rest precisely on its cultural accomplishments (Ferrell 2007:93).

In an interview (interview on the internet the Corporation), Joel Bakan terms capitalism as “organised greed”. Since their aim is to make a profit. According to Bakan the managers of businesses would put their interest above those of the people who are working for them or even the public (interview on the internet the Corporation). The only interest they have is their own. At this juncture one may ask: What is wrong with making a profit? After all, the business may be one’s means of survival; which is indeed true. The negative side to this is that the people involved in this system could be said to be faced with the constant temptation to become greedy; with the result that monopolization (or outright exploitation, or barefaced profiteering) occurs and small businesses are bought out by bigger businesses in the same line of business, so that in the end the big businesses in power are in a position to perform economic injustices like price-
fixing and exploitation of the public (Olivier, 2008:1). A good example of this is the recent scam here in South Africa that was revealed in the media, of certain pharmaceutical companies which had colluded with each other during tenders to avoid competition and to manipulate prices.

Capitalists tend to put on a façade that they actually care for the public or environment by doing things like donating items like computers to schools, helping charity organizations, or maybe starting a tree project, and so forth. Naomi Klein alludes to this when she talks of “scholastic marketing battles [that] are being fought over gyms...and university athletics” (Klein 2001:93). A good example of this would be the Bio-kinetics gymnasium and the Indoor Sports Centre at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) that are both sponsored by Puma. Its sponsorship of the gym would be Puma’s way of advertising, and signifies a large gain that they are getting from the sponsorship. For example, at NMMU you find that most sportswear on campus worn by the student leaders are branded Puma –the reason they buy from Puma would probably be because of the ‘good relationship’ they have with the company. Olivier says that “when corporations profess social and environmental responsibility, it is not because of a genuine concern, but because it amounts to a PR exercise which is ultimately aimed at netting them more profits” (2008:3).

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, the promotion and reinforcement of capitalism takes all kinds of forms, such as advertising and branding. The PR (public relations) exercise that has been mentioned above is one of the strategies that it tends to use to gain favour with the public, and in so doing defeat the competition. It should be apparent from what has been said so far, that another method that is quite vibrant due to competing for the market is advertising.
Through advertising capitalists are able to capture the attention of the consumer and, depending on how well they do, gain control of the market. According to Bakan,

Over the last 150 years the corporation has risen from relative obscurity to become the world’s dominant economic institution. Today, corporations govern our lives. They determine what we eat, what we watch, what we wear, where we work, and what we do. We are inescapably surrounded by their culture, iconography, and ideology. And, like the church and monarchy in other times, they posture as infallible and omnipotent, glorifying themselves in imposing buildings and elaborate displays. Increasingly, corporations dictate the decisions of their supposed overseers in government and control domains of society once firmly embedded within the public sphere (quoted in Olivier, 2008: 2).

It is evident that the corporations control ‘domains of society’ through advertising, among other things. Through advertising the consumer is advised on what to buy, what not to buy, eat, wear and what places to go to. In other words, advertising is the means by which the capitalist conveys to consumers what they should be consuming. Advertising is not the only way in which the consumer is given advice on what they should buy, and so forth, however, capitalists also do this through the endorsing of products used in particular movies, music videos or any means through which they are able to get the information out to the public and be sure of getting a good response (this can be looked at as another form of advertising). Owing to the concerns of this study, the only method for furthering capitalist aims that will be looked at is advertising.

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27 Late capitalism markets lifestyles, employing advertising machinery that sells need, affect and imagined affiliation more than material products themselves. It runs on service economies, economies that package privilege and manufacture experiences of imagined indulgence. Even the material fodder for all this, the flesh for the consumer’s fantasy – the cheap appliances and seasonal fashions – emerge from a global gulag of factories kept well hidden behind ideologies of free trade and economic opportunity (Ferrell 2007:93).
Advertising is just but one of the ways by which consumerism is encouraged. The reason for this is because the advertisements are not just straightforward, but are associated with things that may lure one into buying a product. For example in the new advertisement for the latest range of Nokia phones the tag line for the advert is “what defines you?” These are the type of statements that are used to lure the consumer. Olivier states that

…images present themselves as sites for consumer identification – not with the product as such, but primarily with the ‘lifestyle’ or social context projected by the situation in which the product in question is seen (or heard, in the case of radio) as being used by certain individuals. This is all that is required for the product to be perceived as desirable, by association with the lifestyle or privileged activities depicted in the advertisements or commercials concerned (2006:16).

Joy Honea further comments that:

…those with power and influence in society (in this case, large corporations) have the ability to control cultural messages. Through ownership of the means of communication and control of vast amounts of capital, corporate culture-producers have the ability to disseminate carefully chosen ideological messages. Critical theorists contend that these ideologies are ones that promote consumption, competition and individual freedom— values central to the capitalist mode of production (2003:2).

Consumerism has become a way of life. Cronk observes that consumerism is [a] myth that the individual will be gratified and integrated by consuming (1996:1). This would mean that what
one has, actually defines a person and may not mean as much as the brand of the product. A fictional example of this can be seen in the movie *Fight Club*, when Jack mentions what he had in his bag, and instead of merely mentioning that he had a shirt, pants and shoes, he says he had “CK shirts, DNKY shoes...” – mentioning the brand of clothing and shoes that he had. The brands that he mentions are those that are generally associated with quality, style and conspicuous consumption, which explains why he mentions them. It could then be said that consumerism has become a way of ego gratification. Economic worth has displaced traditional cultural values defining self-worth. Your self-worth is determined by what you can afford. The acts of buying and owning reinforce self-worth within consumer society (Cronk, 1996:1). Jack in *Fight Club* illustrates this in the opening scene when he says “I flip through the catalogue wondering what type of dining set defines me as a person”. Jack’s speech brings to mind an advertisement of a product where the capitalist agent (the advertiser) will tell you that the product you are about to buy has a particular characteristic that matches you, or can add to who you want to be. Once consumers start thinking this way it is reasonable to conclude that capitalism has got control of its buying public (Cronk, 1996:3). And if the capitalists have managed to take control of the consumer, the consumer becomes their ‘puppet’. The capitalists through advertising tell consumers what to buy by making them feel like they need the product being advertised, though at the end of the day the capitalist is the one who benefits by being able to sell his product; whereas the consumers will by buying the product fulfil their ‘need’ for a while before there is yet another product in the market that is better than what they bought before.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28} Olivier writes that, “Kovel focuses on a crucial aspect of capital fostering capitalism as a state of being by invading life-worlds, when he remarks (2002: 52) that it introduces ‘...a sense of dissatisfaction or lack – so that it can truly be said that happiness is forbidden under capitalism, being replaced by sensation and craving’. The
According to Stuart Ewen, in the 1920’s children were taught to consume as a way of promoting patriotism and economic well-being (Klein, 2000:95). The same could be said about what capitalists are doing today, when they use advertising to encourage consumption, while one may assume that, in so doing, they are improving their economic well-being. Thus, it is true that capitalism leads to an improvement in economic well-being – that of the capitalist. The economic well-being of the consumer may be improving as well, but only in terms of the image, and not exactly their financial status. This is evident in how the media are filled with reports of how bad the debt situation is in South Africa, where consumers incur big debts by buying clothes, cars and other consumer goods on credit. In a recent advertisement Absa Bank encourages students to have credit cards, and informs the consumers that one could also take a loan from the bank to go on holiday. Here we see that, at the end of the day, with the amount of interest that one has to pay, the true beneficiaries in these transactions are the people who offer credit. This line of argument demonstrates that the corporations are interested in themselves, not the people.

The reason why consumers subscribe to these facilities that are made available by capitalists is because through advertising, consumerism is intended to be beneficial. However, critics tend to point out the fallacy in this view – arguing that consumerism, apart from bringing ‘prosperity’ and ‘freedom’, has also contributed to the growing social and economic problems (Honea, 2003:3). The economic problem appears to be that people end up being in so much debt that they cannot repay. Socially, “[a]s we become acclimated to life around the television set, collectively craving, needless to say, is for commodities that temporarily satisfy the needs – themselves systematically cultivated by the vast machinery of capitalism, such as advertising – on the part of ‘consumers’” (2005: 128).
striving for a media-produced image, our choices are made for us. Choice is reduced to brand name. We sacrifice self-knowledge for consumerism” (Cronk, 1996:3). Moreover, the “corporations who stand to benefit from increased consumption rates obscure the damage being done through mass consumption and use their influence to support forms of popular culture (including music, film, fashion and sport) that contain messages that reinforce the values of consumerism” (Artz and Murphy in Honea, 2003:4). Apart from this, “advertising associates symbols with the product rather than letting it exist as the signifier of its framing experiences – advertising thus robs the symbol of meaning and sense of truth. The commercial exploitation of culture widens the rift between ideal and being, between word and truth” (Cronk, 1996:3). Hence the problem of people building their identity by consuming products that would ‘define’ them.

The building of our identity with products is what Susan Faludi refers to as ‘ornamental culture’. Faludi talks of ornamental culture as being one structured around people not playing a functional social or public role but a decorative or consumer one (2000:35). This is where being masculine requires one to have a particular car, wear certain clothes, have a toned body, and drink a particular brand of beer. To be a woman means, being a certain size and dressing in a particular way. With regard to students in the university, being ‘hip’ would require one to dress in a particular way, and with that make sure that the clothes are of a certain brand as well. All this is done so that one can be distinguished from the rest of the ‘crowd’ or to be associated with people of a certain caliber. Faludi states that ornamental culture is “[c]onstructed around celebrity and image, glamour and entertainment, marketing and consumerism…its essence is not just the selling but the act of selling the self and in this quest every man is [his own] sales representative marketing his own image” (2000:35). It is for this reason that young people tend to imitate
celebrities and are quite proud to be seen to have a product similar to the one used or owned by a celebrity. For example, even by a casual look around South African universities, it would not be hard to notice that what the students are wearing is the same as what one sees the celebrities wearing on the MTV music videos. Not only that, the hip hop culture could be used to find good examples to illustrate the way students imitate what they see on television. Most of the television celebrities wear clothes that have been given to them by sponsors so that they can promote their products as a way of advertising.

Olivier explains that the reason why the consumer/student follows how celebrities dress keenly and mimics it is because to him or her, the celebrity is like a god. He clarifies this concept by explaining totemism, saying that totemism:

the practice, in primitive, hunter-gatherer communities, of investing the image of a totem (an animal like a tiger, a lion, an antelope, a mammoth or an elephant, or a tree) with magical qualities, like the ability to protect and promote the interests of the totem-adherent in the face of hostile forces – Freud showed so clearly, the totem represents the moment of fullness or being that has been lost forever, and that is perpetually re-invested with the value of and desire for this mythical plenum by every successive generation...In contemporary consumer society the archaic returns in the postmodern capitalistic iconography pervading the popular art of the culture industry, as critical theory might put it. Whether it is a certain make of cellular phone used by a film icon like Keanu Reeves, or a luxury Italian or German marque sedan driven by Halle Berry or Pierce Brosnan in a popular movie, for the consumer consumed by brand-loyalty the act of identification with these icons is essentially the same as the primitive’s ‘identification’ with his or her totem. It promises a plenum that is metonymically connected with prehistoric, animist beliefs in the capacity of the
totem to protect, and the corresponding monotheistic beliefs in God and the celestial realm as the source of salvation (2006:4).

The same interpretation can be used to explain the reason why people would fall for advertisements. Given that we are living in an era where seeing oneself in the media, or at least imitating the lifestyles of media celebrities, is something prestigious, one could infer that this same process of identification would also invite consumers to copy what they see in print advertisements. Since, as previously pointed out, human beings have the desire to be like the images they identify with, it would not be a surprise that they would subscribe to the sort of desirable lifestyle represented in media of all kinds.

The poignant thing about this lifestyle that people subscribe to, that is, the way that they form their identity, is that consumers are probably aware that what they are doing is misguided, but they still do it anyway. Gunster explains that

…most people suspect that it is a lie (at the very least thoroughly instrumentalized and subordinated to business interests), and yet they still take part in it...We continue to believe because it is the only thing that makes our lives bearable: people know that success and survival demand self-deception in an irrational world beyond human control (in Honea, 2003:6).

It has become a way of life that society seems to accept and so it is easier to conform and be accepted than to reject it and to be looked at as an outcast.

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29 With the advancement of technology now more than era we have interactive sites like blog sites, facebook were you are able to share information about yourself with other people put up your picture and even have funs.
CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE ADVERTISEMENTS

4.0 Preliminary Remarks

The remaining part of this study will look at three areas in advertising that may be assumed to influence the average South African university student, given his/her exposure to these areas through advertising aimed at students, among others. These areas are fashion, body image and status.

4.1 Fashion

According to the Oxford dictionary ‘fashion’ includes popular styles of clothing, hair styles and shoes, among many other things at a particular time or place. Simmel, on the other hand, defines it as “a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others” (1957:541). For the purpose of this study the issue of fashion will be looked at with regard to clothing only.

As mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, fashion is something that changes from time to time. The most obvious and most noticeable change in fashion is when the weather or climate changes (seasonally, for example). Okelly (2008:1) explains that “Clothing tells the story of an individual faster than any other object”. Sometimes clothes provide a great deal of information about the wearer’s culture. Since clothes, when worn, seem to tell or signal something about the person who is wearing them, it can be said that fashion, especially as it is portrayed to the consumer
through advertising, enables the consumer to assume a role and to engage in the presentation of his or her ‘self’ in everyday life (Goffman in Smith, n.d.:121). Considering the fact that for one to perform one needs an audience and a stage, the streets become a stage-substitute – a place where people can parade themselves portraying different identities and having the society as their audience (Smith, n.d.:121).

Portraying different identities in contemporary society does not happen by simply wearing the ‘right’ clothing for the part; one’s clothes or shoes have to belong to the right brand. As stated above clothes tell a story and reveal something about the wearer. Advertisements on the other hand do not just sell us a product but also attach meaning to it; hence Olivier’s statement that “images present themselves as sites for consumer identification – not with the product as such, but primarily with the ‘lifestyle’ or social context projected by the situation in which the product in question is seen (or heard, in the case of radio) as being used by certain individuals” (2006:16). This is evident in the advertisement for Nike, below. In the advert we see an image-configuration showing a group of athletes seated on a bench. The focus is on an athlete who seems very confident about herself, compared to the others, who look bored, and some others who are looking and smiling at her (which can be taken as admiration). Right above the athlete there is the phrase ‘Here I am’, which is finished off with the Nike logo. The symbolism of the images in this advertisement would lead the consumer to believe that if you want to be confident and admired by others, like a successful athlete (as portrayed in the advertisement), then you have to wear Nike clothes.
Levi’s also tries to use a similar theme in their advertisement with the tag line, ‘for life’ (fig. 2). In the advert we see a guy carrying a girl on his back. What is special about the girl is that her jeans are Levi’s. Hence, the meaning of this composite image is not difficult to decode. What this advert is trying to portray is that if you were wearing Levi’s jeans then you would have enough influence on other people to make them do things for you. The manner in which the boy is carrying the girl on his back is almost as if the boy is the girl’s servant. Hence the implied message that wearing the right brand of clothing will have people doing things for you. You’re the boss. Here one could say that this advertisement, being a site of identification, offers the consumer a “spurious promise of a plenum or fullness which would compensate for its congenital lack and deficiency” (Olivier, 2007: 48).
The other thing that one should take into consideration is that it is not just about wearing the right brand, but the attire must be the right type for a certain time (what is in or ‘hot’ at the time). Consumers have been quoted making statements like “Advertising can stimulate my desire to consume and gives me the latest information about products” (Smith, n.d.:128). Whilst another respondent added: “Advertising tells me which things are now popular and it gives me more choice” (Smith, n.d.:128). The likely reason why one would like to know what is popular at the moment would be to fit in, but it is not just about fitting in, but about fitting in ‘in style’, thus bringing together people of a certain group (stylish, fashionable people). The Foschini advertisement is a good example of this. The advert reads ‘Be a style star’. Clearly, the word ‘star’ does not call for an astronomy-context to be decoded here, but functions as a metaphor for something like ‘celebrity’. Therefore, as a ‘star’ who wears Foschini clothing, you are by
implication always in touch with the latest fashion or style, so that consumers can be expected to
desire such clothing. Besides, there are always entrepreneurs out there who would be willing to
give you their clothes as a way of advertising. In this case you would not be just a ‘star’, but a
‘style star’, which means that you would set the trends and people would follow. So you are in
the limelight and are admired by other people. This could be looked at as exemplifying the
fraternal stage where, as Lacan explains, it is a way of identifying with images of others (initially
of brothers and sisters) where one is competing for attention and love. In the same way, if you
are dressed in the latest attire (which you are invited to do through the images in the
advertisement), you are not an outsider; you are accepted (and by implication, admired).

Fig 3: Foschini advertisement
4.2 Status

When one is at university, this is the period when they are trying to find out who they are, what they want to do (profession); it is a time when we are just about to attain total dependency and face the world. Just like the infant in Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. It is a time when we are trying to learn the ins and outs of the world and with that we have a person(s) that we look up to or admire. Simpson states that as a young person at the university still developing an identity what you wear or what you have is very important in expressing who you are (2004:118). The reason for this would be to fit into a group or for social status. This phenomenon is found not only at the university but in the society at large, where people are judged not by what they can do but according to what they have (Faludi, 2000:12).

The desire for social status is perhaps the greatest reason for falling into stereotypical groups in any university. If a student has status (is highly ranked) it makes it much easier for him or her to get things done, and be regarded as one of the “hip” people. And since people have the desire for such acceptance, they will buy the products that advertising promises will make them who they want to be.

It is not just about being noticed, but being noticed as somebody engaged in what Klapp (1969:80) calls “ego-screaming look at me”. If successful, with that comes special treatment; the sort of treatment that a celebrity would get. The reason why one’s ego would ‘scream’ look at me is because of the boost in self confidence. The consumer buys a product believing that they will look like a certain celebrity or figure that they admire - hence the ego boost. Lacan says that “…the ego is formed on the basis of an imaginary relationship between the subject with his own
body. The ego has the illusion of autonomy, but it is only an illusion, and the subject moves from fragmentation and insufficiency to illusory unity” (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986:56). Advertisers are aware of this and take advantage of the consumer’s desire by advertising that their product will ‘Give your social life the red carpet treatment’ as seen in the advertisement below (Fig. 4). One could say that consumerism has become a way of ego gratification...Economic worth has displaced traditional cultural values defining self-worth. Self-worth is determined by what you can afford. The acts of buying and owning reinforce self-worth within a consumer society (Cronk, 1996:1). This explains why students would fall into the trap of buying products that would make them look like a certain celebrity or that they have seen a certain celebrity wearing – with the hope of being recognised and given ‘celebrity’ treatment, or that they could be looked at as a person of high calibre. This would also include exclusivity. One consumer is quoted as saying “I can’t afford to look bad in front of people who matter. My brands help me look good, no matter what” (Williams, 2004:51). Thus it is reasonable to conclude that using the right product, and especially the right brand, gives people the ‘status’ that they want.
People tend to want to be around a ‘high calibre’ person – take for example a celebrity; they want such a person to be their source of fun, or friend, seeking their opinion on certain matters. In short, someone like that would normally have a big following and ‘get’ people’s attention. That is supposedly what certain products, such as Ford Fiesta, are giving us. But in the case of Ford Fiesta (Fig. 5) the advertisers do not tell us what the car can give us but rather put the tag line (“Get out of my face”) in the form of what we would have to do if we were to drive this car. The sub-tagline, (“Can Linda handle the fame?”) is even more significant.
The sad thing though, is that the idea of being a person of ‘status’ in such iconic terms has been taken too far, even to educational institutions, where one might expect ‘status’ to be linked to intellectual achievement. It seems that these institutions are no longer looked at as places where one can get an education, places for imparting knowledge to students, so that they can be people who can make a positive contribution to our societies. It is all about titles and status. ‘Going up’ (advertisement for students to further their studies at NMMU) is a case in point, in so far as its use of images and writing associates postgraduate studies with rising in the corporate ladder and getting titles that supposedly give you status (Manager, Director or CEO).
Fig 6: NMMU postgraduate advertisement

Fig 7: NMMU undergraduate advertisement
In the case of the advertisement for NMMU recruiting students for undergraduate studies, it promises students the prospect of being ‘the star in your future career’. In this advertisement, the poster is designed like a movie poster, with words like ‘starring you as yourself’, ‘the student legend’ and ‘be the star in your future career’. The way the poster is designed and the use of the word ‘star’ highlight the idea of celebrity as being the centre of focus. In other words, just how desirable such ‘status’ should be, is brought across by means of images and words. It is not about what you can do for the society; it is about your status. Needless to say, the emphasis on just how desirable ‘star (or celebrity) status’ is, connects by association with all other advertisements that promote the desirability of such status through products like clothes and cars (such as the Fiesta advertisement discussed earlier).

4.3 Body Image

Status is not just a kind of honorary title; one has to have an image to go with it. This would mean having the right ‘body image’.

The issue of body image is an aspect of advertising that really affects especially young people. What advertising portrays as beautiful frequently addresses the issue of body image. As in the case of fashion, what is seen as beautiful has changed for some cultures. For example, in the West being thin is generally accepted as something good, and people with status generally are thin. If a celebrity or someone with status is seen as being plump, obese or corpulent it automatically becomes the kind of news on the basis of which they are generally criticized or stripped of their celebrity status. Recently, for example, Tyra Banks’ picture was all over You magazine for her having gained weight. Or, on the other hand, as soon as someone becomes
famous they (are expected to) lose weight – a case in point being Jennifer Hudson who, soon after the movie *Dream Girls*, lost weight as she has become more of a television figure and a famous R&B (Rhythm and Blues) star.

In contrast to this, in Africa being ‘big’ has generally been seen as a sign of wealth. However, because of advertising these ideas have changed. This may at least partially be attributed to advertisers’ emphasis on sexuality and attractiveness, which are associated with women being thin and having flawless skin, and with men being portrayed as ideally being muscular. It has been recorded that in the US “an estimated 80% of young ladies are dissatisfied with their bodies” (Dissatisfaction with our bodies and eating disorders, 2008:3). Often students, especially ladies, insist that their thighs, buttocks and tummies are "too fat." Moreover, tests have been done by “Stice and Shaw (1994) who presented women with pictures from magazines containing "ultra-thin models, average-sized models, or no models" (p. 288). The group exposed to the ultra-thin models experienced greater affective distress and body dissatisfaction than the others” (in Cusumano & Thompson, 1997:3). In terms of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, the ladies reacted this way because they identified with the image. That is to say, the images that they were shown would be having something that they lacked, for example beauty, status, and fame, among other things. Just like the baby in front of a mirror (in Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage), the image has all the things that would give them wholeness and coordination, things that would make them ‘better’ than they are at the time. They want these things, to make them look like

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With globalization Africans have adopted western ideologies – something that is quite evident in our cultures today. A good example would be the dressing styles, the languages we speak(some of the African children cannot speak their own language yet are very fluent with English), looking at things from the west as being superior to African things among many other things. A resent example is how South African movies e.g. *Tsotsi* was first shown in America before it was shown to South African viewers. Once it was approved of in America it became a big hit in South Africa.
what they see and, since they do not have them at the time, they get distressed. “In addition, they found that internalization levels, as measured with the Stice et al. (1994) ideal-body stereotype internalization scale, predicted bulimic symptoms” (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997:3).

These stereotypical images of thin women with flawless skin, or of muscular men, have been used not only to advertise beauty products but also clothes, cars and shoes, among many other things. As a result one may infer that the consumer is being bombarded with tantalizing images depicting ways and means of attaining this type of body. As a result there are now, apparently more than ever before, magazines filled with articles on how to achieve this ‘perfect’ body size. The consumer – in this case the university student – would tend to be influenced and encouraged, via the images comprising these advertisements, to conform to the standards used by advertising to portray a beautiful lady (see fig. 8, below). This is because the wider society has come to accept that these are the standards of beauty, and since, as humans, students have the desire to fit in or be accepted, they tend to conform to these standards.

![Fig 8: Johnson’s body lotion advertisement](image)
The other problem brought about by the stereotypical images is shown in the idea of perfection. Judging by what advertisements concentrate on, one finds that in the quest of young ladies trying to attain the look portrayed in the advertisements as beautiful, there are other things that ought to be rectified in their bodies or their faces. It does not end at having a smooth skin or being thin. For example in the advertisement for Rimmel (fig. 9), the catch phrase reads “lashes 15x sexier”. This is just one of the advertisements that offers a solution to attain perfection of beauty. One would then conclude that the advertisement is trying to promote the idea that ‘perfection’ is attainable through the use of a certain product.

Fig 9: Rimmel advertisement

In the struggle to ‘fit in’, having a good appearance would be one of those things that a student would work towards; hence the stereotypical image (no matter how unreal it is) is likely to go unchallenged. It is reasonable to expect the result of this to be that the stereotypical image of beauty would “become correct by default.” (Schneider, 2004:328). This means that society
would start using these standards to define beauty, that is, they would become conventional. This may further result in the consumer (in this case the university student) suffering from anxiety as, according to this pattern of image-identification, she or he keeps on seeking approval from the peers.
CONCLUSION

In broad terms, the purpose of this study was to conduct an investigation into the stereotypes used in advertisements which are designed to appeal to one’s sense of having a (desirable) social identity. The study focused on university students, taking the situation at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University as being representative of what one finds in university campuses regarded as being, among other things, a definable social and cultural space.

To accomplish this, I have looked at capitalism and how it uses advertising to promote consumer culture as well as the formation of so-called ‘ornamental culture’. I have also looked at identity (which includes social identity) and the formation of stereotypes, highlighting the major stereotypes used in advertising in the area of fashion, status and body image. This led to the discussion of the image and an explanation as to how people relate to images used in advertising, using Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage, as a conceptual framework for explaining why people conform to these stereotypes.

The discussion leads to the conclusion that, when looking at the areas of fashion, body image and social status, the stereotypes used in advertising have an effect on university students in a dual manner. Firstly, university students identify with these (desirable) images, and, secondly, at the same time such images of ‘perfection’ or celebrity status are likely to bring about feelings of imperfection and inferiority on the part of students. By identifying with the images the students develop a desire for social status and acceptance, that is, for being known as beautiful or for being of ‘high calibre’ and being fashionable. Advertisements such as those of Nike and Ford Fiesta often project images that deal with personal identity and social relationships. These are
issues that are of great concern to young adults, especially in university settings. This is because “part of our sense of self worth comes from our membership in valued groups” (Schneider, 2004:366).

More explicitly, this study had a threefold purpose. Firstly, it set out to show how and why students may be vulnerable to stereotypes identified in terms of Lacan’s theory of the ‘mirror stage’. In this regard, the study has shown that students, like other members of the larger society, seek to find their ideal selves in the mirror images projected by the advertisements through celebrities and other objects of public admiration.

Secondly, the study set out to identify and categorize the various stereotypes used in advertising to appeal to the student’s sense of social identity. In the discussion and analysis of the observed advertisements, the main categories identified comprise those in the areas of fashion, status and body image.

The third component of the study’s threefold purpose was to show that advertisements can be misleading in so far as stereotyping ignores the specificity of every student’s personal social situation and creates false expectations on the part of the target market (students).

From all that has been mentioned and discussed, it is clear that advertising “sells a philosophy, a belief system… a way of life” (Berger, 2004:328). Messages of what brands to wear, what products to use and how to look are constantly being thrown at us through advertising. This
affects how we view ourselves, and we are fooled into believing that buying products can help us build a specific, desirable social identity, effectively changing how people see us.
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