Decoding visuals: The social semiotics of Make Love Not Walls

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An abstract

Fashion is an industry that reflects on society and comments on it through advertisement campaigns. Besides increasing brand awareness and growing sales, some fashion brands create campaigns for e.g. protesting and voicing out socio-cultural and political statements. The Italian fashion brand Diesel has taken part in discussions related to civil, social and political issues that touch upon certain issues apparent in our society. This thesis aims to investigate how Diesel's Make Love Not Walls campaign visual images construct meanings and also explore what kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the images.

The methodological foundation and approach of the study are exemplified by complementing cognitive theories that attribute the construction of images from the audience perspective and understanding of visual metaphors in certain cultural contexts. When formulating the theoretical framework for the social semiotic analysis, the concept of socio-cultural and political participation is taken into consideration. This study adopts a visual social semiotic perspective to investigate how visual images themselves are constructed to cue culturally coded metaphors. The visual realization of metaphors is elucidated based on Barthes’ theory of Myths. It is found that most types of visual myths identified by visual social semiotics can be explained within the framework. Myths in the campaign are analyzed in terms of their persuasive effects. Finally, it can be concluded that the social semiotic framework is able to provide a comprehensive account of the visual realization in the construction of meanings, and in addition, the study offers a cognitive explanation of how resources like framing, composition and image angles acquire meanings.

Keywords: fashion advertising, political participation, cultural meaning, fashion campaign, myth, narrative,
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Acronyms

- **CSR** corporate social responsibility
- **LGBTQ** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer
- **POV** point of view
1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Fashion brands observe and reflect what is happening in society and then tries to give their comments and statements through advertisement campaigns, which correspond with their brand values, mission, and vision. The advertisement campaigns consist of visual material to communicate the messages, which are meant to build and strengthen the fashion brand.

In February 2017 Diesel published an advertisement campaign called Make Love Not Walls, which was created to promote universal love and racial injustice by illustrating the metaphor of breaking down the barriers that separate people. The campaign was quickly interpreted as an obvious commentary on President Trump’s plan to erect a border wall between Mexico and the US. On January 25th, 2017, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order for Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements where he planned to start building a wall between the US and Mexico. 20 days after, the campaign was published across the world through various media outlets. After the release of the campaign popular magazines including Forbes, Adweek and Business Insider wrote articles discussing Diesel’s participation in the political discussion through the campaign. However, those popular magazines only describe the campaign from the journalist's perspective, without speculating its broader meanings. This study looks beyond the obvious by decoding polysemic meanings and exploring how the culturally coded messages can be interpreted by different people across cultures.

Fashion brands’ participation in political and socio-cultural discussions through advertisement campaigns is an interesting phenomenon as it has the potential to influence consumers’ life views and ways of thinking. Such campaigns based on digital means of representation have become more popular and can be powerful tools to increase consumers' awareness and critical thinking both individual and peer group levels.
Make Love Not Walls was quickly spread across the world, which also means that it's being interpreted by people from various socio-cultural backgrounds. This thesis takes a visual social semiotic perspective to understand how the images are constructed and Barthes' theory of Myths is used to elucidate the visual realization of metaphors.

1.2 Societal Relevance

As for the societal relevance of the study, the global exposure of such campaigns must be highlighted. In a short period of time, the number of Internet users and social media platforms has grown exponentially all over the world, and it's making the Internet the fastest growing advertising tool of all time (Ha, 2008). Internet and new technological advances are revolutionizing the way brands do business and consumers live their lives (Dickey and William, 2012). The popularity of social media has made it the most essential form of communication also in the fashion industry (Wheeler, 2006). Consumers are agile and quick at sharing and tagging content, which means that such campaigns spread across multiple online platforms and communities quicker than ever before. Brands capitalize on visual digital material as that is the most effective way to connect with a global audience. When Diesel released the Make Love Not Walls campaign they were also well aware that it would be interpreted by audiences across the world. Due to the global exposure, the campaign has touched people from different e.g socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, which makes its culturally coded meanings well worth investigating.

1.4 Problem statements

The research questions are developed by using Johans Farka’s (2019) pyramid model (see fig.1 below). The research questions are the basics of research as they make the research problem researchable (Blaikie, 2000). When formulating the research question, a specific focus within the given resources and knowledge must be identified. First, a social phenomenon of fashion brands’ participation in political and socio-cultural discussions through advertisement campaigns is included. The societally relevant phenomenon is of interest as it has the potential to influence consumers’ political and socio-cultural views. Secondly, still, images were chosen as a tool for sending out the communication messages that
communicate meanings. Thirdly, the still images were represented in a digital format, which affects the ways the images were created and perceived by the consumers. Subsequently, the campaign images were published to communicate meaningful messages to consumers (a specific group).

![Fashion brands’ participation in political and socio-cultural discussions through advertisement campaigns.](image)

Fig. 1. Farka’s (2019) pyramid model for developing a research question.

The motivation for choosing the digital still images of Diesel’s Make Love Not Walls campaign and the phenomenon of political and socio-cultural participation through fashion advertising campaigns leads to the following two problem statements that will be investigated within this study:

1. **How do the images visually construct meanings?**
2. **What kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the Make Love Not Walls campaign images?**
1.5 Outline

This paper is divided into nine main parts. The overview of the structure is presented as following: Introduction (chapter 1) presents the societal relevance and motivation of the topic in the context for the work to be carried out. The aim of the study and the problem statements are introduced, as they will be the foundation for the whole paper and this thesis will aim to answer the questions. Background of the phenomenon under study (chapter 2) provides the reader with some introductory level information on the reasons brands participate in political and socio-cultural communication through fashion. Previous research (chapter 3) consists of an overview of the literature that is directly relevant to the topic of the thesis. The theoretical framework (chapter 4) focuses on introducing the main theoretical discussions surrounding the problem area and presents the theoretical perspectives that will guide the analysis, more precisely, the social semiotic theory. Methodology (chapter 5) presents the research aims and methods. The ethics and delimitation of social semiotics are also discussed. Analysis of images (chapter 6) presents the results of the image analysis where the research methods are utilized. Analysis of results (chapter 7) discusses the results in relation to the literature references. Finally, Conclusions & discussion (chapter 8) summarises the study as a whole, and discusses the main conclusions of the study in relation to the research aims and questions is broader relevance key findings and remarks. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study and possible future agendas to explore or deepen research in this area.

2. Background of the phenomenon under study

Amongst seven other fashion brands Diesel belongs to the OTB not-for-profit foundation that reinforces social change, sustainability, and innovation. “Its mission is to rebalance social inequality and contribute to the sustainable development of less advantaged communities around the world.” (OTB foundation) Diesel capitalizes on social change through the OTB foundation initiatives that communicate meaningful messages about certain values and beliefs they find important. Diesel is often described as a rebellion brand, as they are brave reflecting on social and political injustice. Make Love Not Walls is a
communications campaign aiming to combat hate. Diesel wants its consumers across the world to understand the values they promote:

“At Diesel, we have a strong position against hate and more than ever we want the world to know that to use our voice for good, love, and togetherness is crucial in creating a society we all want to live in, and the future we all deserve.”

Nicola Formichetti (2017) – Diesel Artistic Director

The reason for fashion brands participating in political and socio-cultural discussions through fashion campaigns is rooted in the motivation to appear socially and/or politically accountable to the consumers. Several fashion brands including Diesel participate in corporate social responsibility (CSR). This means they have started practicing on improving and impacting the social, and environmental aspects of our society. When companies participate in CSR it means that alongside their regular course of business they contribute to enhancing the society and the environment we live in, instead of contributing negatively to them (Chen, J., 2019).

Some scholars suggest participating in CSR activities doesn’t help companies to appear more positive (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). While others claim that CSR communication will help companies to be perceived as more positive and trustworthy (Swaen and Vanhamme, 2004). Despite the contradictory opinions on whether CSR helps companies to appear more positive or not, Diesel has decided to participate in CSR. Make Love Not Walls is created to convey meaningful messages of certain values and beliefs that correspond with Diesel’s values, mission, and vision.

It’s very important for CSR campaigns to be truthful, so consumers are able to gain trust in the brand (McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright, 2006). McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright (2006) argue that there are two ways of communication CSR; either, persuasive or informative. In persuasive communication, brands are aiming to influence consumers to purchase their products that follow the traits of their CSR initiative. E.g. If Diesel would support a certain CSR issue, for example, child labor, and they would promote their consumers to purchase jeans that are not made by children. In informative CSR communication, fashion
brands aim to improve their brand reputation without pushing consumers to buy their products (Podnar, 2008). E.g If Diesel would create a campaign against child labor where no clothes are advertised then the entire campaign would be purely informative and not pushing the consumers to buy their products. Persuasive CSR communication can make the brand seem self-serving, as it can easily look like they would seek to grow sales and make a profit. On the other hand, when brands are not promoting that they are being socially or environmentally responsible, they get criticized for being disinterested and avaricious (Argenti, 2007).

3. Previous Research

3.1 What is culture?

The word ‘culture’ is repeatedly mentioned in this paper and as it refers to a relatively large concept it will be discussed here in more detail. The concept of culture often brings up contradictory meanings. In science the term refers to the process and product of making microscopic organisms that can be grown to a culture (Hebdig, 1979). Culture can also refer to the idea of “a hierarchically ordered community that[...]represented culture as a standard of aesthetic excellence[...]and it is derived from an appreciation of ‘classic’ aesthetic form (opera, ballet, drama, literature, art)”(p.6) Arnold (2018) emphasizes that culture is the best that has ever been thought and said in the world. Williams (1965) defines culture as a “particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.” In order to get to the closest definition of culture, we must mention Barthes’ (1972) concept of culture. For him, culture is something that is connected to everyday life rather than something derived from the appreciation of ‘classic’ aesthetic forms. Barthes saw culture as something that shows “all the apparently spontaneous forms and rituals of contemporary bourgeois societies, which are subject to a systematic distortion, liable at any moment to be dehistoricized, ‘naturalized’, converted into myth.”(p.9)
Cole (2019) explains in her article that from a sociologist's perspective, culture can be both non-material and material. From the non-material point of view, culture is constituted by shared values and beliefs, language, communication, and practices within a group of people. Culture is constructed of “knowledge, sense, assumptions, and expectations.” (Cole, 2019) She defines that there are certain rules, norms, laws, and morals, which rule our society; Those rules can be e.g. the ways we utilize the written and spoken language, and the ways we express meaning, ideas, and concepts through symbols. Culture also defines certain behavioral patterns. E.g it defines how we “walk, sit, carries our bodies, and interact with others.” (Cole, 2019) Amongst many others, it also includes the idea of e.g. ethnicity, social class, and sex. Additionally, people that attend e.g religious ceremonies, belong to a certain club are part of a cultural group.

Culture provides guidelines for the actions and interactions in society. Culture shares four common traits that bind people together. First, all people share culture with others in the same society. From birth, we learn our patterns of behavior that are acceptable in our society. Secondly, culture evolves and it’s adaptive, the creation of culture is an ongoing process. Thirdly, our behavior is shaped by culture. E.g in some cultures people eat with fork and knife, when in another culture people use chopsticks. Fourthly, culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture is something that keeps living and it’s transmitted to future generations. (“overview-of-culture”(video))

Culture can also be categorized into three different types: Subculture, microculture, and counterculture (“Subculture vs counterculture”(video)). Subculture is a culture of a meso level sub-community. Subculture means “a group within society whose behaviors, norms, and values differ in some distinct ways from the dominant culture”(subculture, 2013). Subculture refers to the rules and ideas of a medium-sized community. “Subcultures express forbidden contents (consciousness of class, consciousness of difference) in forbidden forms (transgressions of sartorial and behavioral codes, law-breaking, etc.). They are profane articulations, and they are often and significantly defined as ‘unnatural’”(Hebdig, 1979, pp.91-92). Subcultures are apparent in different e.g cities and regions within a country and they may last for the entire period of a person's life. Microculture is “a distinctive culture shared by a small group that is often based
on location or within an organization.” (microculture, 2014) Microcultures don’t affect people for a long period, their influence limited. E.g sports clubs, or school clubs. Countercultures are “cultures within a larger culture that deliberately challenges or rejects the dominant culture’s behaviors, beliefs, lifestyle, norms, and values.” (counterculture, 2013) Countercultures are born when laws of bigger culture are violated.

It’s vital to understand the importance and meaning of culture, as it is something that is shaping people’s “social relationships and sustaining and demanding order within the society, helping to understand how the world works and what is our function here. Additionally, culture is also shaping people’s daily actions and experiences within the society” (Cole, 2019)

In brand communication, culture also plays an important role. In the discussion on the notion of meaning, brand campaigns include meanings that reflect upon e.g. cultural, social or political phenomenon. Brand communication is closely related to cultural structures and individual agency, and therefore the meaning of communication messages can be better understood through the beliefs, ideas, and values of individuals and/or cultural groups. Gonsalves (2015) writes that while most denotations work on the “natural, objective level at which certain signs (like the Morse code) are understood, most signs require inputs from culture to help readers grasp their meaning.” (p. 49) Meaning that denotations almost always need to find cultural associations in order to connote meanings.

3.2 Dialogical process

Thompson and Haytko (1997) introduce a term called “dialogical process”, which refers to the dialogical interplay between the members of the brand, consumers and the social system. Brands create meaningful communication messages by observing what is happening in society and reflecting upon the subject position, which signifies the values, mission the brand obtains. This study refers to the dialogical process that occurs between consumers, Diesel, and the media (see fig.1 below). Diesel’s creative minds(1) perceive the outside world in a certain way(2). They create a campaign where they express(3) certain issues they find
important and relevant. Once the campaign is perceived by the media (4) multiple discourses(5) are formed. The consumer(6) makes his/her own interpretation(7) of the perceived story. (8)

Fig 2. Illustrating the dialogical process between Diesel’s creative minds, media, and consumers. The image was published by Bae (2014) and edited by the author of this paper.

Jeff B. Murray (2002) suggests that the plurality of discourses results in multiple different interpretations. He explains that communication messages are polysemous and the ways consumers understand media discourses are dependent on the beliefs, ideas, and values of the cultural group the consumer belongs to. Each consumer has his/her own understanding of the world, which creates diversity in the ways the communication messages are interpreted. Gonsalves (2015) writes about Barthes thoughts on polysemous meanings and he suggests that the ideal communication message “is one that is reversible, non-linear and open to a number of interpretations, allowing the reader the freedom of analysis and the joy of participating in the creative process. It is somewhat like modern art or trick paintings that enable the reader to discover meaning in the course of whichever direction he/she wishes to proceed.” (p.49) He refers to the idea that polysemy makes the process of perceiving and conceiving stories much more interesting as people have a free flow of imagination when interpreting content.
3.3 Narratives in advertising

Narratives used in advertising have an important role in leveraging consumer’s purchase decisions and to differentiate themselves from other brands (Peyton, 2013). Many consumers purchase items because of the brand name, and therefore the meanings conveyed through communication messages play a vital role. “A brand is ultimately a perceptual entity, a host of associations, feelings, imagery, symbolism, etc. that exists in the mind and hearts of consumers.” (Randazzo, 2006, p. 12).

Advertisements are carefully planned to create meaning for the brand and to establish a brand identity. Strong brand identity makes it easier for brands to stand out from their competitors (Padgett & Allen, 2013). Brand narratives are not only created to entertain and persuade but to strengthen the emotional bonds between consumers and brands (Randazzo, 2006). Advertisements that evoke emotional connections are found to reinforce the relationship between consumers and the brand (Micu & Plumer, 2010).

Brands create meaningful statements by observing what is happening in the society and reflecting upon the subject position, which signifies certain values and beliefs that are aligned with their brand mission, vision, and values (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). “A Mission Statement defines the company’s business, its objectives, and its approach to reach those objectives. A Vision Statement describes the desired future position of the company. The elements of mission and vision statements are often combined to provide a statement of the company’s purposes, goals, and values.” (The brain and company, 2015)

Barthes (1965) clarifies, “In advertising, the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed prior by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible. If the image contains signs, we can be sure that in advertising these signs are full, formed with a view to the optimum reading; the advertising image is frank, or at least emphatic.” (p.152-153) Meaning that when the campaign is created for advertisement purposes each detail is a conscious decision by the creators of the communication messages. Brand narrative and
myths are also interlinked with each other. A myth is part of a narrative that is often connected to certain historical events or cultural phenomenon (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Brands create mythic images that consumers can emotionally and culturally relate to in order to enhance their own brand image (Randazzo, 2006).

3.4 Construction of narratives

Most brand narratives usually include either, or both of the two elements: lecture and drama (Ching et al., 2012). Ching et al. (2012) explain that lecture is recognized in argumentative advertising and it aims to pursue logical thinking to attract consumers. Lectures can be e.g. serious instructions given verbally by a speaker that presents evidence in the form of an argument. Lectures are usually efficient as they present several key points that can be easily understood by logical thinking. Brand narratives that contain drama and storytelling give the viewer more freedom to draw own conclusions. Drama includes stories where the actors are interacting with each other and the viewers are involved in learning from the stories between the actors. Drama allows the viewer to draw own conclusions of how she/he wants to interpret the story. Drama is often used for telling about the products or services the brand is advertising (Randazzo, 2006). Regarding Randazzo (2006), narrative advertising is often more effective, as they describe experiences consumers would achieve by using their products. Narrative advertisements help consumers to associate their past experiences with the brand. A well designed narrative advertisement that associate to the consumption of the brand product and services can make the brand experience more realistic (Ching et al., 2012).

Narratives are constructed from an actor and plot (Chang, 2008). The actors are normally doing something to achieve goals and the plot tells the story of the actor and other elements. Chronology and causality also play a vital role in narratives. Chronology defines the sequence of events when causality refers to the relationship between the cause and the effect (Chang, 2009). Narratives also use symbols and imagery to evoke mental associations within the consumers (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). Brands create meaningful advertisements to persuade long-lasting effects within consumers. Brands plan their narratives in detail.
Each metaphor, symbol, imagery, actor, plot, drama are strategically planned to suit the brand’s image and to create efficient communication (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995).

3.5 Constituting and constituted signs

According to Tompson and Haytko (1997), consumers are either constituting or constituted. This study discusses the issue in a brand level, rather than the consumer level. Tompson and Haytko’s concept is discussed from a brand’s perspective instead. When brands are constituting they have “free reign in the play of signs”, which sees the use of signs as an “expressive movement” (Levy 1981, p. 51). In this case, the brands are expressing their values and beliefs through style, which are decided and created by the fashion brands themselves. This kind of action can be associated with brand identity politics (Hetherington, 1998). Meaning that when brands want to participate in the political discussion on E.g. feminism, gay and lesbian act, peace and environmental groups, vegetarianism, voluntary simplicity, animal rights, race and ethnicity (Best and Kellner, 1997). Brands use signs in their communication messages that are constituted by their own will. The signs are often used to express ‘symbolic statements of membership and demarcation’ assumes that semantic codes are open discursive systems” (Tompson and Haytko, 1997, p.428)

In the second scenario, brands are constituted. Meaning that the signs are dominating and brands would be “imprisoned by the signs and codes” (p.427). In this case, the emphasis is on a historical event where the structural processes are given priority. Tompson and Haytko suggest that all societies around the globe at any time of human history have had an existing system of signs that is over the years constructed by the participants of the society. This second scenario seems rarer in the use of signs within brand communication. However, it could be prevalent in societies with strict ethical codes. Some brands give priority to certain structural codes by following the historical etiquette. E.g. At the end of 2018, H&M released a wedding advertisement campaign where all their dresses followed the historical etiquette of a long white wedding dress in their advertisements. Brands that are constituting would break the historical etiquette by deciding on their own style and colors.
3.6 Visual language

Visual language is becoming an essential form of communication in the fashion industry. It's often trying to understand and reflect the world through what is seen with eyes, which engages the mind in a very powerful manner. To better understand visual communication messages we must have a profound understanding of different codes and symbols (Arnheim, 1974). Each person has his/her own understanding of the world, which creates plurality in the ways visual language is created and understood. Aiello (2006) suggests that when we analyze images, it’s “necessary to account not only for their cultural norms but also for their perceptual qualities. Visual texts differ from verbal texts because they are communicative across cultural codes while also carrying culturally specific meanings.” (pp. 89-90) Meaning that images contain cultural codes that must be understood before we can fully understand the real meanings they contain.

The growing popularity of digital and social media allows brands to create new innovative ways to communicate with their consumers (Ching et al., 2012). The ways we produce and understand visual language has changed due to globalization and digitalization. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, p. 4) “the dominant visual language is now controlled by the global cultural/technological empires of the mass media, which disseminate the examples set by exemplary designers, and, through the spread of image banks and computer-imaging technology, exert a ‘normalizing’ rather than explicitly ‘normative’ influence on visual communication across the world.” The growing demand for visual material forces media producers to work in a fast-paced environment where visual material must be produced in no time. This results in the increasing use of digital tools and image banks that help media producers to meet the demand.

Boorstin (1963) expresses that “images have become more interesting than the original and in fact have become the original: ‘the shadow becomes the substance’. Advertisements, he argues, encourage extravagant expectations because they are more dramatic and vivid than the reality – reality cannot match up to the image.” (cited in Dyer, 1982, p. 82) As Boorstin says ‘the shadow becomes the substance’, he
means that the media images are the shadows ‘decoded copies’ from the original. The original is transformed into e.g. words and images and decoded for targeted receivers by media producers.

4. Theoretical framework

At first, the concept of semiotics is introduced. Secondly, the main theoretical discussions surrounding social semiotics is discussed and the theoretical perspectives of Iedema (2001) & Jewitt & Oyama (2001) that will guide the analysis are presented. The distinctive nature of the Saussurean concept of a signifier (as the vehicle for the meaning) and the signified (as the meaning being conveyed are discussed. Finally, I explain how the visual material can be analyzed through Barthes Mythologies (1970/1990) where another layer of meaning is introduced to the system of signs.

4.1 Semiotics

Semiotics has two fundamental founders: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Semiotics was originally found by Saussure, a Swiss linguist. Saussure began semiotic studies by analyzing the life of signs within society. The word semiotic draws its origins from the Greek word semion, which means sign and sign-using behavior (Irvine, 2004-2005). Semiotics is defined by a variety of theorists. Moriarty (1995) describes semiotics as ‘a philosophical approach that seeks to interpret [visual] messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism. Kress (2003) states semiotics is the “science of the sign, a fusion of form/signifier and meaning/signified” (p.41). Charles Sanders Peirce (1931-1961, p.228) described semiotics as “something, which stands to somebody for something”. The three above definitions draw upon the core concept of semiotics, which can also be called the study of the sign process (semiosis).

4.2 Social semiotics

Social semiotics investigate the meaning-making process called semiosis, which is regarded as more important than the system of meanings amongst signs (Baudrillard & Poster, 1988). When general semiotics help to analyze single semiotic elements visible to the viewer, social semiotics sees visual
language as something that is constructed in a certain way to deliver actions or semiotic acts (Jewitt & Oyama 2001). Social semiotics has evolved from the combination of structuralist semiotics and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) by Michael Halliday. The structuralist semiotic approach has been developed to construct language (in this case visual language) to recognize codes and rules, which appear within certain cultural groups and where the members of that cultural group understand others by connection the same meanings to signs. Theo Van Leeuwen (2005) sees social semiotics as something that “carries cultural value and significance” (p.1). He explains social semiotics is based on observation, it allows the researcher to compare, reflect and contrast a variety of semiotic methods, to study the similarities and differences. He doesn’t see social semiotics as ‘pure’ theory. It requires to be connected to certain contexts and specific issues, and it always submerged with semiotic methods and concepts or combined with other fields of study. Social semiotics often offer subjective findings.

Aiello (2006) adds social semiotics help the researcher to better understand why certain visual blueprints are established to mediate meanings and what is the meaning in relation to cultural context. The reason for choosing the social semiotic approach for the study of this research was based on the observation that Make Love Not Walls images include layered meanings. In order to decode the layered meanings, it’s important to understand the relationships between signs, signifiers, signified, objects and those who interpret them (Eco, 1975). Social semiotic methods provide the researcher with a structure for the research of the visual material. When applying social semiotics to this study, a variety of semiotic practices specific to a certain culture and/or community are examined. The study looks into construction and meanings in four campaign images in relation to cultural contexts. When applying social semiotics to this study, a variety of semiotic practices specific to a certain culture and/or community are examined. Different from Paris school semiotics, social semiotics replace the concept of ‘code’ with ‘semiotic resources’. The term was first defined created by Halliday (1978, p.192) who stated: “the grammar of a language is not a code, not a set of rules for producing correct sentences, but a ‘resource for making meaning.”
4.3 Mythicization in images

To decode the cultural meanings and ideology in images, it's important to understand the concept of myth. The theory of myth will help to decode any “hidden set of rules, codes, and conventions through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and ‘given’ for the whole of society.”(Hebdige, 1979, p.9). This theory is used to answer the second research question: What kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the Make Love Not Walls campaign images? Semiology is used for exploring myths by analyzing signs and their relation to other signs and the social system. This chapter discusses the concept of myth in relation to the research question and additionally, it examines how the meanings found in the visual material support the mythicization of the campaigns.

The term “mythicization” describes the creation of a myth or myths. More precisely, the transformation process into the subject of myth. Mythicization is used for creating recognizable associations through visual narratives to appear as part of a certain culture or to promote an ideology (Barthes, 1970/1990). Barthes is one of the leading theorists who tried to understand the deeper cultural and political meanings embedded in media images that were created through the mythicization process. Barthes transformed the concept of semiotic into a full-blown semiotic system by including the theory of myths to the study of semiotics. Myths originate from Barthes’ book called Mythologies published in 1957. The book consists of a collection of essays that discuss the contemporary social value systems in connection to myth creation. Barthes’ study of fashion leads to the analysis of myths, as it adds a second level in the system of signs, where the signs are elevated to the level of myth. The theory of Myths can be described as the end-product of his complex system of signs (Padgett & Allen, 2013). Myths have a pedagogical function as they evoke narratives to the viewer. The study of myths explore meanings that create strong associations within the e.g. socio-cultural and political context in Diesel’s Make Love Not Walls campaign. Myths reveal illusory social and political realities that are represented in the images.

Flood (2002) discusses Barthes’ theory of myth by explaining that it’s a theory, which works as a vehicle of ideology that decodes visual material. Myths are not rare, “any social practice, artifact, any natural object
which has been worked by a man has the potential to become a myth if it’s used as a sign to convey meaning.” (p.161) To Barthes, myths are not understood by solely looking into the content, but rather decoding why it’s communicated. “Myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message but by the way in which it utters its message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no ‘substantial’ ones” (p.109) In this study the theory of myths will help to decode certain socio-cultural and political messages that are linked to historical events.

5. Methodology

The aim of this study is to find out how the Make Love Not Walls campaign images visually construct meanings that are culturally coded and what kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the images. The two research questions are solved by using two different qualitative methodological approaches. The first approach uses visual social semiotics to decode how the images visually construct meanings and the second approach uses Barthes’ theory of myths to reveal the culturally coded myths are evoked in the images. This methodology chapter prepares the researcher for visual analysis by defining the chosen research approach. First, the method of visual social semiotics is explained. Second, the construction of a myth is defined. Third, the researcher describes how the data is collected, findings reported and what kind of ethical considerations are taken into account. Lastly, the delimitations of the approach are discussed.

5.1 Visual Social Semiotics method

Visual social semiotics is functionalist in the sense that it sees visual resources as having been developed to do specific kinds of semiotic work. From a methodological point of view, social semiotic theorists analyze images according to three main metafunctions: representational, interactive, and compositional functions, (Aiello 2006; Iedema 2001; Jewitt and Oyama 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen 1996 ) where each image includes all three metafunctions. The three metafunctions are used in order to analyze the visual images in the most systematic manner. The systematic analysis of images “provides the possibility for renegotiating the meanings inherent in such constructs rather than seeing these fixed, irrevocable and natural” (Iedema,
The aim of using the visual social semiotic theory is to answer the first research question: How do the images visually construct meanings?

Fig. 3 My own framework for the visual social semiotics, based on Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) text on visual social semiotics.
**Representational (Fig. 3 above)**

The first representational metafunction help to analyze how images are encoded visually, which can be done by using narrative and/or conceptual structures. can appear individually or together.

**Narrative** looks into the representational meanings in images. Narrative structures represent actions, events, and processes where the actor(s) are active participants. Narratives include elements that ‘form oblique lines (vectors) that indicate directionality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p.59). Narratives can be either transactive or non-transactive. When images are transactive they contain narratives represent an actor(s) (a person(s)) who is interacting with someone else in the image. In non-transactive images, the actors are looking out from the frame and not interacting with any other actors in the image. (Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, 2004, p.10) Narrative structures represent ‘actions, events.

**Conceptual structures** don’t represent actor(s) doings, but instead beings and meanings. They tell whether the actor(s) belong to some category, class, or has some characteristics or components. (Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt, 2004, p.11)

**Interactive Meaning (Fig. 3 above)**

Interactive meanings tell “the way the image interacts with the viewer and defines the relations between the world inside the frame and the outside world.” (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001, pp. 17-18). Interactive meanings in images are categorized as follows: contact, distance, and point of view.

**Contact** is defined by looking at whether the actor is looking at the viewer (demand) or at something within the image (offer).

**Distance** determines whether the image is shot from close, medium or long distance.

**Point of view** defines directions the actors are looking at. The different angles can be defined as horizontal or vertical. Certain angles can translate e.g. symbolic power or dejection.
**Compositional (Fig. 3 above)**

**Information Value** explains how the information in the image is spread out. Information value is dependent on how the different elements in the images are placed. Information value guides the layout of the image and it’s associated with three visual areas: left & right, top & bottom, and center & margin. When an image contains the left & right information value, the image composition is spread out on following the horizontal axis. Images that contain top & bottom information value, the information is composition along the vertical axis. The top of the image presents the essential or ideal information that illustrates a ‘promise’ and the bottom signify the product presented, by offering certain practical information to the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, pp.186-194). In the case of center & margin, the information value is scattered along the center-margin where the margins contain very little information compared to the center (pp. 194-200).

**Framing** explains the compositional meanings and connections in the image. Frame lines, discontinuity of certain shapes, the rhythm of color and empty space determines whether the viewer feels connected or disconnected.

**Salience** is the elements that stand out and are obvious to the eye define the most salient aspects in images.

**Modality** defines how real the image appears. Modality defines what counts toward determining how realistic the image is. Modality is measured by color saturation, color differentiation, color modulation, contextualization, representation (from abstract to detailed images), depth, illumination, brightness (black and white, or brightness values of one color). Images are naturalistic when they appear real and scientific when they appear unrealistic.
5.2 Myths in Visual Communication

In order to understand how myths can be detected in images the construction of a myth is explained:

5.2.1 1st order signification

As the basis of myth, it’s vital to understand the concept of Signifier and signified. It explores what happens when objects find meaning through the use of signs. The concept is based on an idea (see fig. 4 below) where we connect objects/signifier(1) to meanings/signified(2) and the relationship/semiology(3) between objects and meanings is dependent on how we interpret the combination of meanings and objects that form a sign(4). Barthes took Saussure’s approach a little further by suggesting the semiotic analysis could be applied to other than textual language. His study puts emphasis on the application of semiology in non-verbal communication, more precisely media images, which is relevant for the analysis of the visual material in this study.

Fig.4 My own illustration demonstrating first order signification.
Regarding Barthes’ ([1964]1967) theory, a sign can be pretty much anything that allows us to create meaning. In the analysis, signs can be anything where meanings are found e.g a naked woman, pink dust, text that says “Make Love Not Walls” etc. Pierce (1991) also notes that signs are polysemic, meaning that they have more than one correct meaning. The concept of polysemy is rooted in the analysis of the visual material used in this research. The interpreted images can be understood from several different perspectives within different people from a variety of sociological and cultural backgrounds.

**Denotation and Connotation**

Denotation and connotation are terms that explain the relationships between the signifier and signified. Barthes developed the study of denotation and connotation used in the analysis of photographs as a system of signs. Regarding Barthes, denotation is connected to signifier and connotation to signified. (See fig.4 below).

Denotation (Fig.4, (point 5)) refers to concrete concepts of what we see, they are completely non-subjective. It’s neither associated with cultural, or societal thinking. Barthes’ theory defines, the denoted message includes mostly analogical features and they are related to connotation in the process of signification. Thus, they are independent of any context and prone to the viewer's own interpretation as in connotation. Denotations can be described to evoke 'literal' meanings, and therefore they don’t suit so well in the social semiotic ideology. Social semiotics put more emphasis on connotation as it highlights the diversity of representation and values cultural and historical concepts. (Barnard 1996, p.83)

Connotation (Fig.4, (point 6)) is the opposite of denotation, it refers to more complex and abstract concepts. Feyrouz Bouzida Ms (2014, p.1003) explains signified, are not objects, but mental representations of things associated with objects and the outside world. Connotation gives signified psychological and abstract nature. Barthes’ connotation is subjective and it’s open for interpretation. He explains that connotation alone has the potential to be a system, as it consists of all three: signifier signified
and the process of signification. Connotation refers to the symbolic meanings of what we see that equal to the variety of potential meanings constructed by a range of cultural codes.

Fiske (1992) talks about connotation as something where signs create emotions and feelings in the viewer that are connected to the values and beliefs appear in the viewer's culture. He also suggests that depending on the cultural context communication messages are made and understood similar denotative meanings can be associated with different connotative meanings (Aiello, 2006, p. 94). In practice: when some viewers see diesel jeans, they might think of sweatshops, when others think of fashion.

Fiske (1982) gives a great example of how connotation and denotation can be identified in an image. “Denotation is what is photographed, the connotation is how it is photographed” (p. 91). For example, the image of a pink shirt is denoted as a piece of garment, while in connotation the pink shirt can be described as feminine clothing, something that confident women wear.

5.2.2 2nd order signification

Myth is a second-order semiological system. In the second-order, the sign holds cultural meaning rather than a representational one. The 2nd order signification takes over the sign of the first order and makes it the signifier (1) of a secondary system, where the sign is paired with the mythic content of a signified (2).

“The essential point is that the form does not suppress the meaning, it only impoverishes it, it puts it at a distance, it holds it at one’s disposal. One believes that the meaning is going to die, but it is a death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keep sits life from which... the myth will draw its nourishment” (Griffin. 1994, p. 103-104).

While explaining how the 2nd order signification works in practice, I use my own example (Fig 5. below). In the 1st order signification, the picture of Make Love Not Walls is the signifier (1) that is connected to its signified (2), which connotes the meaning for the signifier. The word “Make” is a very direct and strong doing word. It suggests definite outputs of making things happen. The word “Love” connotes the practice of lovemaking and the word “Walls” connote to barriers that separate people. When the first order
signifier and signified become to signify, the ‘literal’ words “Make Love Not Walls” and the meaning of the words are brought together to create a sign(3). In the 2nd level of signification, the sign becomes part of the signifier of the 2nd level(A). The 2n level signifier is linked to the 2nd level signified(B), which becomes a sign in the second level signification(C). In this case the 1st level sign “Make Love Not Walls ” gets connotated with cultural codes that refer to the anti-war slogan “Make love no war”. Thereafter, the 1st level sign & 2nd level signifier “Make love not walls” gets the 2nd meaning. It’s important to remember that in Barthes’ theory the signifier is open for multiple meanings. In the concept of a myth, the “Make Love Not Walls ” signifier could have been given any other meanings, which would’ve changed the message of the myth.

Fig.5 My own illustration demonstrating the process of myth.
5.3 Data Collection

People have short attention spans when skimming through digital content, and therefore there is a need for quick gratification (Barbara Rigoni, 2017). Due to the short attention spans, brands have begun to create video content and still images are often presented alongside the film to highlight the best memories (Neikova, 2010). The still images analyzed in this study are captured as the best moments of what is seen in their short film. Make Love Not Walls campaign consists of four officially still images, which all are studied in this paper.

The digital still images used in this study are collected from Clio Awards, LLC's website, which is a digital content platform representing successful brand advertisements across the globe. Clio Awards LLC was founded in 1959 to recognize creative advertising talent in the following areas: sports, fashion, music, entertainment, and health.

The same campaign ads are spread across the Internet on various web pages. Thus, Clio Awards, LLC's website was chosen as it's known to be a legitimate platform with a comprehensive collection of high-quality advertisement images. The biggest advantage of Internet data collection is that it allows the researcher to collect data anywhere in the world at any time possible.

5.4 Reporting the Findings

I will report the results of the visual social semiotic analysis and the study of myths in one descriptive text. I have chosen this strategy because the images contain layered meanings. Each representational, interactive and compositional meaning affects the ways we interpret the signs.

5.5 Ethics

The study has minimal ethical considerations. However, Clio Awards, LLC claims that the images and text used in their webpage might have technical, typographical, or photographic errors. This means that the
authenticity of the images is not guaranteed. Clio Awards, LLC's website has set terms of service for its visitors, which they must be agreeing on while accessing the website: https://clios.com. The website itself is protected by copyright and trademark laws of New York, NY.

Clio sets the rules for the visitor’s use of image and text content. They require the content to be used for personal and non-commercial use only. In order to follow the ethical considerations of Clio, users are not allowed to modify or copy any of the downloaded materials or remove any copyright or other proprietary notations from the materials. (Clio Awards, LLC Terms of Service)

As the data collected is used for an academic study the researcher is following the ethical considerations set by Clio Awards, LLC.

5.6 Limitations of Social Semiotic Approach

Like in most methods, social semiotics also have certain limitations and drawbacks that must be discussed. Amongst other qualitative methods, social semiotic methods cannot be scientifically proven (Impara, 2018). The approach presents a few challenges for the interpretation of connotative data in order to explain empirically how media generate meanings from the sign system. This is because the same image can create many meanings that communicate the patterns of existence. Social semiotics leave space for the viewer’s own interpretation, which means they are not universal. Visual material is not universally understood in the same way and is understood in a culturally specific way (Kress, & van Leeuwen, 2006)

Social semiotic methods provide the researcher with a structure for the research of the visual material. However, the structure doesn’t prevent the images to be misinterpreted. Rastier (1998) talks about the limitations by emphasizing that even if the researcher creates a structure for his/her analysis to limit interpretative actions, he/she will anyhow follow his own modes and interpretative regimes. Even if the researcher attempts to understand the images from the transnational and cross-cultural perspective the interpretative actions are influenced by the researcher's socio-cultural background, experience, and
knowledge. The researcher of this study has her own principles and ways of interpretation, which impact the results of this research.

Another limitation of the social semiotic approach is that it’s time-consuming and technical (Rastier, 1998). Meaning that the same images need to be examined several times from different interpretative perspectives and meta-functions. While social semiotics is not unerring, they make it possible for the researcher to form an analytical framework that allows him/her to decode images at an intuitive level.

6. Analysis of images

**Contextual information**

Title of the campaign: Make Love Not Walls  
Type: Digital advertisement  
Directed by: David LaChapelle & Anomaly Amsterdam  
Photographer: David LaChapelle  
Year of creation: 2017  
Technique: A photograph & collage  
Image URL / origin: https://clios.com/fashion-beauty/winner/19972  
Retrieved: 10th October 2019
6.1 Image no.1: Make Love Not Walls - Heart

Fig 6. In the appendices Make Love Not Walls (Find fig.6 also in the appendices )

1. **Representational**

   A vector can be seen through the movement of the woman’s legs and arms, and the men’s arms when lifting up the woman. As this movement occurs within the image, it is transactive (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). However, the participant’s eyes are looking outside the screen; this creates a non-transactive action. The action of the three people lifting up the woman on a higher level than themselves, holding her on their arms, prompts the woman’s posture of sitting in the air. In this image, the woman is the main focus.
2. **Interactive Meaning**

   The woman is a demand, as she is the center of attention. The three men’s contact is an offer. The image is a medium shot and has a close social distance to the woman as the three men are inclined towards the woman and holding her tightly.

3. **Compositional**

   Several vectors are present, there is an absence of empty space. There are no frame lines. The men, in a way, frame the woman as the vectors of their arms enclose and direct attention toward the woman. The most salient objects are the heart-shaped hole in the wall, the pink dust and the group of people. The image has a center composition as the information value is scattered along the center of the image. This image is special in a way, that the margins are rich in information. Normally images that have centered information value, contain very little information along the margins (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, pp. 194-200). The photograph is a highly edited photograph with collage-style frames. The image appears realistic as it’s a photograph. The image has a horizontal POV and the photograph is taken from a slightly left down corner. The bright thick pink dust cloud, the woman’s lifted arm, and the man’s thick black hair is the most salient objects.

**The system of Myth**

In the image, a colored smiling woman is lifted by three men through a heart-shaped hole with pink dust flying around a grey concrete wall. The woman is lifting up her right arm with an open palm. There are protruding metal sticks in the heart-shaped hole in the wall. In the second level of signification, the protruding metal sticks in the heart-shaped hole may connote that the wall is being destroyed. However, they can also connote obstacles that make the woman’s passage through the wall more complicated. Tearing down the wall can be seen as a semantic code for togetherness or alternatively, it can connote a riot. From one’s point of view, the grey concrete wall can be interpreted as mental and physical barrier that separate us, and from another point of view it can connote as something that divides space, or it may connote something that is used for trapping the enemies. The thick pink flying dust can connote an explosion, that has made the hole ripping through the wall. However, it can also connote The Holi festival


held in the Braj region in India where Hindus and non-religious people gather together to celebrate the beginning of springtime. In the festival pink dust is used to connote weddings, life, and celebration of festivals. Pink dust also connotes similar meanings for not only Hindus but also for Muslims, Buddhists, and Jains. (Victoria Finlay, 2016) The men lifting the woman through the wall can be interpreted as an action code for the woman to be freed. From another point of view, it can connote that the woman needs to be carried because she is more important than the men, or because she is considered inferior next to the men. One might also see it as a connotation to the tradition of grooms carrying their brides across the threshold, which dates back to the Roman mythology where sabine women were carried away and raped by men (Jacob Shamsian, 2017) The heart-shaped hole in the wall can possibly signify unity, love or valentines day. Lifting up the right arm with open palm can have a religious connotation as it symbolizes praying or worshiping. In Christianity, the lifted arm means praising and adoration of God and the release of the holy spirit. (Kathy and Lauren DeGraw, 2014) For a person of another culture, the same open palm sign can mean a simple honest greeting gesture (Call, n.d.).
6.2 Image no.2: Make Love Not Walls - Naked Tank

![Image](image-url)

1. **Representational**

   This image is a non-transactive photograph where there is simply an actor and vectors. It is unclear what the person is looking at; therefore this suggests a non-transactive action. As the actor doesn’t do anything to the tank, the image is reactive. The rainbow tank as a focal point as the rainbow lines stand out from the dark shadow. The image is narrative as it allows the audience to create a story that can be interpreted differently by viewers.
2. Interactive Meaning

There is no eye contact made with the viewer, therefore the image is an offer. In this type of ‘imaginary contact’, the viewer sees the image impersonal and feels detached from the narrative (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The image is a distant shot, as it has been taken from far distance viewing the whole body of the person in the image, this gives the audience the feeling of an impersonal relationship with the subjects of the image. As the audience’s relation to the size of the frame is distant, it makes the image appear less intimate. The viewer's perspective of the screen is at a horizontal angle.

3. Compositional

The image is connecting many vectors, there is lots of empty space, especially on the left side of the image. There are frames lines around the image and the thick shadows also frame the image. The most salient objects are the rainbow-colored tank and the naked person. After noticing the tank, we begin to unpack the background where we notice the heart-shaped hole on the concrete wall, the heart-shaped shadow, and the barbed wire and the rest of the shadows. The photograph is a highly edited photograph with collage style. The image appears realistic.

The system of Myth

In the image, a naked person is holding a backpack and standing and staring at an inflatable tank while standing in a heart-shaped reflection of the heart shaped hole in the concrete wall casted by the sun. Behind the tank we see that the grey wall is topped with barbed wire. In the second level of signification barbed wire may connote that no climbing over the wall is allowed, or perhaps it can tell the viewer that the wall can hurt you. The grey concrete wall itself may connote a border wall between countries. The rainbow multicolored inflatable tank may connote war, freedom or playfulness. Tanks are known to be associated with war, but since the tank is inflatable it can be seen as something playful. The multi-colored stripes connotate rainbow color, which symbolizes peace and serenity and it's also recognized as an LGBTQ symbol in the world. The nakedness of the person might connote him/her being bold and daring in sending a powerful confrontational message of defiance, or on the other hand, it can also be interpreted
that the person is poor, free-spirited or simply crazy. The backpack of the person may connote adventure or homelessness. The sun reflection of the heart-shaped hole in the concrete wall may connote opportunities or hope. The heart shape on the wall may symbolize love and the heart-shaped inverted shadow is an index that there is a hole in the wall. The heart-shaped hole in the concrete wall also tells the viewer that the person is free to move and she/he has an opportunity to cross the wall to the other side, which evokes a meaning that the border wall is powerless.

6.3 Image no. 3: Make Love Not Walls - Gay Wedding

Fig 8. Make Love Not Walls - Gay Wedding, (Find fig.8 also in the appendices)
1. **Representational**

A vector can be seen through the movement of the men kissing and the woman lifting up her arm and the flying roses. As this movement occurs within the image, it is transactive. Also, the direct eye contact between the kissing men makes the image transactive (Jewitt & Oyama 2004, 142) The action of the men kissing and holding each others prompts the man’s (left side) backward bending posture. In this image, kissing men is the main focus. However, the participant’s eyes are looking outside the screen; this creates a non-transactive action.

2. **Interactive Meaning**

There is no eye contact made to the viewer, therefore an offer is made and the viewer image might appear impersonal. In the image, the man on the left side appears as the offer due to his downward leaning position while the right male character seems more active. The image is a medium shot from the audience's perspective. There is a close social distance between men kissing and holding each other tightly. The viewer's perspective of the screen is at a horizontal angle.

3. **Compositional**

There are many vectors present and there an absence of empty space. The men are framed together. their arms enclose direct attention toward them. The most salient objects are the heart-shaped hole in the wall, the woman, and the kissing men. They catch the attention to the front-center of the composition. The image is a highly edited photograph with a collage style. The image appears realistic. Easy to read the representation of the image.

**The system of Myth**

In the image, a smiling brown woman is lifting up her left arm with an open palm. Two men with & without a headscarf are kissing while wearing jeans. They are also holding a "denim bouquet of flowers" and lots of white and red rose petals are flying in the air. A heart-shaped hole in the wall has been decorated with flowers. In the second level of signification the image may signify a romantic moment, happiness, multiculturality, breaking the norms, celebration of love and acceptance of same-sex
relationships. The romantic moment of the two men can connote a gay marriage. Red flowers may connote feelings of true love and passion, while white flowers connote purity. One of the men kissing is wearing a denim cloth over his head. From one perspective the headscarf is culturally coded to signify a keffiyeh, a traditional Arab headdress. Yet, the denim cloth can also connote the meaning of a wedding veil. The denim bouquet of flowers gives an association to a wedding bouquet. The letters “V” and “E” on the wall can be part of the word LOVE.

The use of celebrities adds another standpoint to the concept of myth within this image. This image features two transgender and queer models: RuPaul’s Drag Race\(^1\) winner Raja and Laith Ashley, who is representing the marrying couple. Knowing who the celebrities are might guide the viewer to succumb to the mythic appeal celebrities and the stories we come to associate with them. Raja and Laith Ashley are stripped out of their original context, which is RuPaul’s Drag Race competition to be placed in Diesel’s advertisement, which might change the way consumers interpret the meanings of the image. The ways of interpreting may vary depending on the cultural group. E.g. in transgender and queer communities the image can evoke different emotions than elsewhere.

\(^1\)https://vossevents.com/events/drag-race-uk/
6.4 Image no.4: Make Love Not Walls - Tank

Fig 9. Make Love Not Walls - Tank, (Find fig.9 also in the appendices)

1. Representational

The photograph is a narrative one, as it includes vectors and actors that create a story (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). The white vector lines seen are formed by the man’s kneeling down and lifting up the braid of flowers. direction arm, connecting with the male’s hand. The vector is bidirectionally formed by the male’s outstretched arm, however, his
action is more weakly articulated. The circled contact between the two hands is transactive, as you can see the action on the screen (Jewitt, Carey & Oyama, 2001).

2. Interactive Meaning

The man kneeling down is a demand, the people in the background are an offer. The demand from the man creates an imaginary with him being the center of attention. The image is taken from a medium shot and it has a close social distance to the man at the forefront of the image. The image has a horizontal POV. The kneeling man actor is angled towards the crowd of people, but his face is not looking at them directly. The crowd is angled towards the front left corner of the image are looking at. The location and the angle of the man symbolizes power.

3. Compositional

The information in the image is spread out towards the left and right corners. The most salient objects are the man kneeling and the tank. They catch the attention to the front-left and back-right of the composition. The image is a highly edited photograph with a collage style. The image appears realistic. Easy to read the representation of the image.

The system of Myth

In the image, a man is kneeling down with his left arm pointing towards the sky. The man is holding a garland in his hand. Behind the man, there is a crowd of people lifting a colorful inflatable tank, while there is a lot of pink dust flying in the air. The people in the crowd have bend arms, which is an index of the tank being lifted up at the moment the image was taken. Flower garland symbolizes purity, beauty, peace, love, and passion. The picture connotes that the crowd is working together to lift the tank. The rainbow-colored tank is a symbol of hope. In the second level of signification, the colorful tank being lifted up connotes that the machine that once divided people now unites them. The man kneeling down could connote that he is paying homage to the group of people lifting the tank. People lifting a tank could signify the power of comradery, unity and group effort.
This image has a celebrity in the forefront: Sergei Polunin, a Ukranian ballet who is also represented as the main characters in the image as the man kneeling down. Polunin’s body is positioned in a stretching ballet like position, which may also help the audience to draw association with Polunin in its original context. While the use of celebrities can help the audience to familiarize with the images, they may also give associations of the original context of the celebrities.

7. Analysis of results

In this section, the findings are discussed in relation to the literature references. Prior to starting this analysis, it's worth remembering this analysis is based on the researcher's personal interpretation. As Rastier (1998, p. 222) talks about the limitations of the method, he emphasizes despite any structure and the researcher's eagerness to understand the images from the transnational and cross-cultural perspective, the researcher will anyhow follow his own modes and interpretative regimes.

The analysis was undertaken to explore 1) how are the Make Love Not Walls images visually constructed? 2) what kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the Make Love Not Walls campaign images?

7.1 Discussing research question 1

How are the Make Love Not Walls images visually constructed?

7.1.1 Construction of narratives

All four images consist of stories where the actors are either interacting with each other or with some objects and the viewers are involved in learning from the stories between the actors and objects. Drama allows the viewer to draw his/her own conclusions of how she/he wants to interpret the story (Ching et al., 2012). In Make Love Not Walls images the brand narratives don’t contain drama that is telling about the products or services the brand is advertising (Randazzo, 2006). In this case, the consumers can't associate their experience with the brand through products, but rather with certain perceptual functions
that draw associations, emotions, imagery, and symbolism that are captured in the memories of consumers (Randazzo, 2006).

All the narratives apparent in the images are constructed from an actor and plot (Chang, 2008). E.g. in image no.1 the three men are representing the actors and the woman, who is being lifted up is representing the goal. Image no. 2 leaves more interpretive space for the viewer as the goal of the naked person(actor) is not clearly defined. We could suspect e.g that his/her goal is to look at the tank, but we could also interpret that his/her goal is to exit from the heart-shaped hole on the wall. In image no.3 the man on the left side is representing the actor, as he is kissing the other man, who represents the goal. In image no.4, the group of people are actors, and the tank is being represented as a goal. The actors and the goals together construct the plot, that narrates certain events.

Chang (2009) concept of causality refers to the relationship between the cause and the effect within the sequence of events. Understanding chronology in the series of still images is not as simplistic as if we would analyze video content. However, we can still suspect certain commonalities by looking at the relationships of the events in the four images. Image no.1 through image no.3 all share the distinctive heart in the wall. So by this, it can be assumed that it all took place at around the same location regardless of sequence and time. Image no.2 and image no.4 share the same colorful inflatable tank as the common element but the heart is nowhere to be seen in image no.4. From this, it can be drawn that the tank has traveled some distance to a new location hence displaying a sequence of events in time. For images no.1 through no.3, it can be concluded that the still images can be interpreted as something that still adds value to each other, despite the fact that there is no apparent chronological order, however in image no.2 and no.4 there is a distinction made with regards to distance and time, hence in this set there is this concept of chronology.

Narratives are constructed of symbolic meanings that evoke mental associations with the consumers. (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). In order to persuade a long-lasting effect to consumers, Diesel has used certain techniques to construct symbolic associations. E.g. image no 1. is a medium shot, where the picture is taken
from left down corner. The image angle makes the group of people carrying the woman seem powerful. In case the image was taken from far up, the people would look smaller, which would make them appear less captivating. All the four images take advantage of image angles that translate to certain symbolic power relations.

7.1.2 Informative and “truthful” narratives

The first observations made in the analysis in relation to the background of the phenomena is that the communication messages evoked are informative and truthful is some level. Diesel’s campaign doesn’t focus on pushing their customers to buy fashion items, therefore Make Love Not Walls can be regarded as an informative CSR communication campaign. In informative CSR campaigns brands improve their brand reputation without pushing consumers to buy their products (Podnar, 2008). Image no.2 contains no fashion items, and image no. 1, 3 & 4 contain fashion items, but they aren’t the most salient objects. The images do not make Diesel look self-serving, as it doesn’t directly push to grow sales and make a profit (Argenti, 2007). However, one could argue that the images drive sales in an indirect way. Diesel has a long history of selling denim and is recognized as one of the most iconic denim brands in the world (Green, 2016). Images no. 1, 3 & 4 contain several denim items that help the consumers to associate Diesel as a brand that sells denim.

McWilliams, Siegel, and Wright (2006) emphasize the importance of truthfulness in CSR campaigns. We can evaluate truthfulness by observing the image content. Visually, the inflatable rainbow-colored tank in images no. 2 and 4 is far from looking realistic. However, the multi-colored stripes connotate rainbow colors, which symbolizes peace and serenity and can also be seen as recognizing the LGBTQ community and their issues as well. These images touch upon subjects that emphasize the importance of real issues, which can make the images seem more truthful.

7.1.3 Technological advancement

Digitalization has affected the ways Make Love Not Walls was created. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) mentions, visual language is controlled by the global cultural and technological empires of the mass media.
Make Love Not Walls was created by Amsterdam based media agency Anomaly and photographed by David LaChapelle. The images are narrated and edited to represent the desired result. The use of technological tools is shown in the visual social semiotic analysis of the images. When looking at the composition in the images, it can be realized that certain elements are edited after the picture was taken. E.g. the frames, and the Make Love Not Walls slogan. The frames consist of cut and cropped images that are fragments of the campaign video.

Modality defines what counts toward determining how realistic the image is. It’s measuring e.g. color saturation, color differentiation, color modulation, contextualization, representation, depth, illumination, brightness. Those are elements that are certainly edited in the later stage. Editing can help the creators to highlight and/or fade certain elements in the images to achieve desired results. Overall, the images are very bright in color and they show high contrast. However, since we were not in the process of making the images we can’t know how much the editor has edited the original image.

As Wheeler (2006) suggests, due to the increased use of social media, the use of visual language is becoming an essential form of communication. Diesel also capitalizes on visual digital material as that is the best way to reach their global audience. However, it affects the possibilities and interpretation of the images. Make Love Not Walls is also made for digital use, which means the campaign has to be eligible in various digital formats. This campaign is also to be found on the Internet in various web pages, which some of them were represented without the collage frame. Leaving out certain visual elements due to the limitations of the Internet might send out wrong messages to the viewer.

7.2 Discussing research question 2

What kind of culturally coded myths are evoked in the Make Love Not Walls campaign images?
7.2.1 Culturally coded myths

In the discussion on the notion of meaning in the context of myth, it can be noted that myths consist of meanings that reflect upon certain cultural phenomena (Barthes, 1972). Make Love Not Walls campaign consists of several dominant ideologies that are being stripped out of their original context and repacked into myths. Due to the length of this study, I will only discuss a few prominent examples in this chapter.

In image no.3 we see a man wearing a cloth over his head, which can signify a keffiyeh. Keffiyeh is a traditional Arab headdress that is being deployed by Diesel. There are several concerns relating to the image as we see Keffiyeh being used for commercial purposes in such a context that has very little relation to the actual qualities of the real meaning of Keffiyeh.

Traditionally keffiyeh symbolises “dispossession, systematic displacement, extrajudicial killings [and] oppression” (“The Guardian view on Israel’s democracy, 2019). However, diesel is using it in the context of a wedding, which can be seen as extremely irresponsible and disrespectful amongst cultures that value the traditions of the headdress. Diesel’s campaign is supposed to promote diversity, however, when such elements are used the ideological thinking of helping the society is completely being destroyed by the lack of respect towards the Arab culture. Such actions may bring criticism, and affect negatively on diesel’s brand image.

In my second example, I will discuss the grey concrete wall in the context of myth. For some, the grey concrete wall can seem an obvious reference to the border wall that the US president Trump intended to build between Mexico and the US. However, for a person who doesn’t share the same cultural knowledge, the wall can project other meanings. Some people might connect the meanings of the wall to e.g The West Bank Wall in Israel that separates Israel's eastern border from Palestine. Despite many contradicting opinions, the Israeli government officially calls the wall a "safety fence" (Gilbert, 2018). People from different cultures have different connotations regarding the wall, which changes the ways the image can be understood across cultures. Walls represent importance for social processes as they are often seen as
geographically separating, connecting, controlling or resisting the people. (Brighenti and Kärholm, 2018) Multiple meanings of the wall can lead to the mythification of the subject matter represented in the images.

Kress, & Van Leeuwen (2006) argue visuals are culturally coded, and therefore they are not universally understood in the same ways. The viewer of the image determines the connoted meaning he/she wants to bring to the image. E.g. in image no.2 the rainbow color stripe coated tank can connote the LGBTQ community for someone who is familiar with the symbolic colors of the LGBTQ community. Someone who is not familiar with the same symbolic meaning, the rainbows might symbolize a new beginning. As we are familiar that rainbows often appear after a heavy storm, or a rain shower as the result of refracted sunlight hitting raindrops. Someone from a Buddhists culture might see the rainbow colors symbolizing the seven continents of the Earth, as that is how they have learned through their culture. From a non-material point of view, culture is constituted by shared values, beliefs and knowledge shared with a group of people (Cole, 2019).

7.2.2 Dialogical process repositioning meanings

Thompson and Haytko’s (1997) dialogical process helps to understand how certain dominant ideologies are repositioned by giving new meanings. Diesel’s creative minds, David LaChapelle & Anomaly Amsterdam perceive the world and its ideologies in certain ways and they adopt ideas from certain context by adding their own inspiration to them in the process of making the advertisement campaign. When the campaign was perceived by the media, it was interpreted by multiple journalists and fitted into certain digital formats to obey platform-specific regulations. Finally, the consumer made their own interpretation of the still images. This dialogical process has several stepping stones where meanings are close to being removed from their original context. The first repositioning can happen when Diesel’s creative minds, David LaChapelle & Anomaly Amsterdam created their own interpretations of the issues addressed in the campaign. The second repositioning happens, when the media perceived the story by creating multiple discourses. The third repositioning can happen when the consumers interpret the campaign. As Murray (2002) suggests that the plurality of discourses results in multiple different interpretations. The communication messages represented in Make Love Not Walls campaign are polysemous and the ways
consumers understand media discourses are dependent on the beliefs, ideas, and values of the cultural group the consumer belong to.

7.2.3 Constituting by pushing the limits

According to Tompson and Haytko’s (1997) concept on the use of signs Diesel is constituting as they are expressing their own brand values and beliefs through the campaign. Meaning that when they have decided to participate in the political and socio-cultural discussion through the campaign they created the signs following their own inspiration rather than giving priority to certain structural processes.

Thus, it could be noted that Diesel breaks the rules of traditional advertising by not caring much about any structural processes. They are using certain signs that are prevalent in societies with strict ethical codes and historical etiquettes. Image no. 3, which signifies a gay wedding consist of several signs that can be seen as extremely provocative within certain cultures. E.g in cultures where gay people are not allowed to marry. The wedding dress code also seems non-traditional, as the wedding couple is wearing denim, and the traditional wedding flower bouquet is replaced with a denim one. From such a perspective, the advertisement can seem offensive and therefore be culturally disrespectful.

8. Conclusion & Discussion

In this section, the researcher summarises her work as a whole. In addition to the summary, the researcher discusses and reflects on the main conclusions of the study in relation to the research questions and the research aim. This chapter also includes a discussion of the broader relevance of the study and its findings. Lastly, this section discusses future research agendas related to the topic.

In summary, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have provided a grammar for understanding how images are visually constructed. The construction of images consist of three metafunctions: representational, interactive and compositional meanings. These three meaning-making metafunctions are first observed, then described and discussed in relation to the previous research. The model proposed by Kress and van
Leeuwen is applicable to Diesel’s Make Love Not Walls campaign, which includes culturally coded aspects of non-verbal communication.

The campaign is filled with cultural codes that have polysemic meanings. The cultural codes are carefully planned and visually constructed to evoke meanings. The representational meanings of the images refer to the experiences that are encoded visually (Stoian, Claudia, 2015). All the four images are constructed of narratives that withhold cultural meanings and ideologies unfolding actions and events familiar within certain cultural groups. Interactive metafunctions reveal how the images are constructed to interact with consumers. Make Love Not Walls campaign images are rich in narrative storytelling, but the actors within the images are kept at medium-far distance from the viewer and any direct eye-contact with the audience is left out. The images focus on situational events, rather than creating intimate connections with the actors. Different photographic angles are utilized to assign power and dominance to represented participants, which guides how the power relations between the actors are divided. Lastly, the concept of modality is introduced in the model of visual design, which defines the reliability of the images (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Make Love Not Walls campaign images are highly edited, and they have collage style frames that include fragments of the full length campaign film. The images itself are easy to read, and the frames are rich in details. The presence of the frames gives the images slightly chaotic atmosphere, that does not let the viewer’s eye rest. The construction of such modality makes use of digital tools that gives its own nuances to the overall appearance of the images by making them look more dramatic and vivid in color.

The theory of myth was utilized to decode any hidden set of rules and cultural codes, which meanings are tied to specific social groups (Hebdige, 1979). Myths explore dominant ideologies that successfully represent themselves in the popular culture, but are stripped from their original meanings when moved from their proper context. Make Love Not Walls represents various culturally coded signs that have very little relation to the actual qualities of the real meanings. The campaign expands its intended meanings when being interpreted by a person that doesn’t hold the same values and beliefs than it’s target audience.
Those alternative meanings can only be encompassed once we understand the beliefs, ideas, and values of certain cultural groups.

We must note the campaign consists of informative messages that are not pushing consumers to buy any products. Thus, it can be concluded that Diesel, has created the campaign to enlighten people about societal and political issues. When looking at the larger societal effects of the campaign, it must be highlighted that the increasing use of the Internet and social media might affect the efficiency of the campaign. When people find the campaign intriguing and engaging, they might be more prone to share it on various online platforms. The vast spread of the campaign leads it to be interpreted by different people across cultures. This phenomena spreads diesel’s message to cultural groups that don’t necessarily share the same values with the campaign’s intended target audience. This can be somewhat problematic, as in some cases the communication messages can be interpreted as irreverent. From a more positive point of view, we can suspect that the societal issues addressed through the campaign get more attention, which might stimulate public discussion around the issue, that can promote the society to become more permissive. Thus, it can be suggested that such sharing of the images might give Diesel’s brand name more exposure, which helps people to familiarize positively with the brand.

**Limitations and Further Areas for Research**

As for the limitations of this study, there are two major limitations that must be noted: 1) the lack of different digital print ads/ campaigns included in the study. 2)the bias that comes from the researcher's own interpretation.

This study focuses on analysing four different print from Diesel’s Make Love Walls campaign, which gives a basic understanding of the phenomena. However, if we would like to extend the research, more similar campaigns across several fashion brands would need to be included in the study in order to get a more holistic understanding of the overall phenomena. The images analysed in this study looks at the phenomena from only one brand’s perspective from a single campaign, which doesn’t allow the researcher to draw any broader more impartial and encompassing conclusions. The second major drawback of this
study is related to the researcher’s own interpretation and perceptions when analyzing the visual material. Despite the given methodological structure, and the urge to analyse the images from a transnational and cross-cultural perspective, the analytical nature of the research doesn’t allow the researcher to draw any sort of scientifically proven conclusions.

If there was more time to continue the study, it would be interesting to examine the influence of the campaign within multiple audience groups. The research would deepen the understanding on the effects of the communication messages prevalent in the campaign. Such research would look at the effects within various cultural groups, which would help to understand how the communication messages were interpreted by people from different cultural backgrounds. This study would potentially include similar campaigns from different fashion brands and their effects in micro/subcultural level.
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10. Appendices

Fig. 6. Make Love Not Walls - Heart
Fig. 7 Make Love Not Walls - Naked Tank
Fig. 8: Make Love Not Walls - Gay Wedding
Fig. 9: Make Love Not Walls - Tank