

# Brand Image and Consumers: A Case Study of Ray-Ban

Zecheng Huang<sup>1, †</sup>, Siqing Weng<sup>2, \*, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Shanghai for Science and Technology Shanghai China

<sup>2</sup> Gezhi High School Shanghai China

\* Corresponding author Email: guanghua.ren@gecacademy.cn

†These authors contributed equally.

**Abstract.** This paper examines consumerism, consumer psychology, using Ray-Ban as an example.

**Keywords:** Ray-Ban, consumerism, consumer psychology, media.

## 1. Introduction

Firstly, I believe that the history of a brand is inextricably linked to the creation and connotation of its advertising, and as a brand with a rich history, all the advertising campaigns that have come after it have been polished and refined over time. So here I would like to start with a brief history of Ray-Ban eyewear.

Ray-Ban is the English word for glare, and Ban is the essence of sunglasses that block the glare. In 1936, Dr. Bennett introduced these sunglasses to the market, renaming them "Ray-Ban" in 1937. The Ray-Ban brand was then officially launched. During the Second World War, American aviators in leather jackets wore the new Ray-Ban sunglasses all over the world, and their dashing and heroic image greatly enhanced the popularity of Ray-Ban sunglasses around the world. At the time, even the sunglasses often worn by five-star General MacArthur were Ray-Ban products. Like the ZIPPO lighter, Ray-Ban sunglasses, which survived World War II, became one of the icons of the American military and quickly became popular worldwide as a fashion product after the war ended. As time went on, sunglasses became more and more popular and gradually transformed from a fashion accessory to an everyday necessity. So not only was it a fashion brand, but its great functionality was of considerable help to the military. By the mid-1980s, Tom Cruise's classic Ray-Ban aviator sunglasses in *Top Gun* took the world by storm, sparking another wave of Ray-Ban sunglasses. Since then, the Pop Society of America has awarded Ray-Ban a prestigious design award for its contribution to fashion.

### Ray-Ban's Background

Since its inception, Ray-Ban has been the world's best-selling sunglasses brand. This success is backed up by Ray-Ban's consistent high quality and elegant design. The continuous innovation of optical technology by Dr. Bohlen has made high quality lenses one of the biggest selling points of Ray-Ban sunglasses. II. Ray-Ban's earliest advertising and marketing theme was 'Never Hide - Never Hide', which emphasized the importance of young people speaking up, not hiding their individuality, and being brave enough to try. In 2012, the 75th anniversary of Ray-Ban, a Never Hide campaign was launched to celebrate the anniversary, using 'fake' imagery to illustrate the history of the brand. The campaign features images of the World War II draft, the gay movement, the rock 'n' roll era, the mini-skirt era and the rise of hip hop street culture, all signs of Ray-Ban's hip and permanent spirit. The campaign also won both Gold in Print and Gold in Outdoor at the 2013 New York Advertising Festival. Ray-Ban's biggest media campaign is "Never Hide". The campaign began in March 2007 and covers 20 countries. The target audience is the young, brave, non-conformist consumer. The campaign has a complete and innovative media mix: from cinema to print, posters, outdoor, online, consumer-produced viral elements and PR. Based around the concept of 'Never Hide', Ray-Ban calls you to show your true self, your ideas and your personality, encouraging you to be true to your values of authenticity and uniqueness. The campaign is aimed at 100 million people worldwide, with Times Square in New York as the main battleground. An interactive way to give people the experience of

participating directly in the 'Never Hide' campaign. Consumers produce the content. They submit their photos to rayban's official website. If the photo is chosen to be displayed on a billboard in Times Square, then you can experience the thrill of 15 seconds of fame.

Of course, there's nothing new about displaying consumer photos in Times Square. But the most striking thing about this campaign is the sheer scale of it. There are 12 screens in Times Square ready to show your face to the world. Of course, the sine qua non was that you had to be wearing Ray-Bans.

"Never pretend, never be timid, never give up, never hide." That's the theme of the Ray-Ban ad campaign. And according to Ray-Ban advertising executives, these traits have actually been written into the brand's DNA since 1937, when it was born. And they are the personalities of true leaders, which makes them particularly inspiring.

The creative director of the campaign says: "The brand aspires to be a global icon. It has an authentic identity, and only this sunglass is best suited to proclaiming, 'never hide'. And the slogan is particularly in tune with today's trends. It's a modern slogan with plenty of room for creativity, exploration and experimentation.

Throughout all of Ray-Ban's advertising campaigns, whether it be "SLASH IN THE STUDIO" or "PROUD TO BELONG" or any of the other styles, there is never much talk about the functionality of Ray-Ban eyewear. The brand's most important message is "never hide". It's a move that connects the brand with its audience and resonates strongly with them. This kind of advertising goes beyond selling goods to selling ideas and emotions, allowing the brand to stay in the minds of consumers for a long time.

Only a few companies have considered using their brand values as a selling point in their advertising, but only the latter can truly shock consumers and make them match their values and have an extremely loyal audience. Only the latter can truly touch the hearts and minds of consumers, allowing them to match their values with a loyal audience.

What is a brand? Gillian Rose wrote in her book that "A brand is the name of a company and the values and feelings attached to that name. From the 1970s onwards, the commercial importance of those values has increased dramatically." [1]. We are now living in a customer-oriented era, which means the ads and the visual material used by big corporations are now focusing on letting the consumers agree with their company values. Or in Rose's words: "Now the brand, or the 'brand image', began to refer instead to the significance that commodities acquired in the minds of consumers." [1] It is witnessed by us that ads simply circulating information of commodities are gradually replaced by a hidden form of advertising in which the companies translate their values into visual materials and show to the audience. This transformation makes the relationship between brand images and consumers more complicated.

In this paper, I would like to discuss how do the corporations shape their brand images by advertising, how do these brand images in the form of visual material attract consumers and how the consumers make sense of these visual materials. Apart from that, I choose Ray-Ban, the world's best-selling sunglasses company as a sample, videos and images of Ray-Ban ads are selected to analyze previous mentioned questions. In general, Ray-Ban is a well-known international corporation with a mature brand image, it has a long history and is regarded as the symbol of American culture along with Harley-Davidson motorcycles and ZIPPO lighters, so through analyzing said company's visual material of ads may give us a broader view and more systematic understanding on those questions.

In the book *Visual methodologies an introduction to researching with visual materials*, Gillian Rose introduced a number of suggested steps to start a semiological analysis: "Decide what the signs are. Decide what they signify 'in themselves'. Think about how they relate to other signs 'in themselves'. Then explore their connections (and the connections of the connections) to wider systems of meaning, from codes to ideologies. And finally return to the signs via their codes to explore the precise articulation of ideology and mythology." [1] This paper will use the same pattern to analyze selected ads, meanwhile, analysis of consumers' psychology will also be used to demonstrate how the consumers might make sense of those visual materials.

John Berger said that: “Publicity proposes to each of us in a consumer society that we change ourselves or our lives by buying something more. This “more”, publicity persuades us, will make us in some way richer, even though we will be poorer by spending our money ... and publicity is the process of manufacturing glamour.” So how does companies use said “glamour” to strengthen their brand image and persuade consumers? Just as ads analyzed in ways of seeing, episode 2 (figure 1-4), publicity actually creates an illusion and offers a fancy way of life that the audiences might never achieve for the consumers.



**Figure 1** The screenshots 1 of episode 2



**Figure 2** The screenshots 2 of episode 2



**Figure 3** The screenshots 3 of episode 2



**Figure 4** The screenshots 4 of episode 2

Ray-Ban uses the same pattern, however, it upgraded this “glamour” and illusion to a whole new level, they anonymously insert their sunglasses into dozens of films which consistent with their company values, and both the actors/actresses and the film itself create a lager glamour for the consumers. As it is demonstrated below, figure 5, figure 6 and figure 7 respectively presents Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany's, Will Smith in Men in Black and Arnold Schwarzenegger in The Terminator.



**Figure 5** Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany's



**Figure 6** Will Smith in Men in Black



**Figure 7** Arnold Schwarzenegger in The Terminator

Those young and beautiful actors/actresses were all wearing Ray-Ban sunglasses, and these films are all indicating a different and appealing way of life for the audiences. Georges Didi-Huberman talked about movies: “... projected and animated is not us and yet we recognize ourselves in it.” This echoes with mentioned Berger’s idea of we are surrounded by images of an alternation way of life and our imagination is stimulated by these images, even though there are no clear indications in the films that what brand of glasses are these actors wearing, however, when we are watching these films, we audiences recognize ourselves in these movies, and see another possibility of life we can approach in the films, we imagine us living a specific way of life created by the movie. These fantastic ways of lives are exactly the “glamour” created by the film and inserted by Ray-Ban. Letting the consumers subconsciously think that the glasses attached to these protagonists in the films are also indispensable to them and persuade the audience that put on the Ray-Ban sunglasses then you will be some way cooler and fancier [2].

This is just the first step for Ray-Ban to shape its brand image. To celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ray-Ban, the company post a short advertising video, which basically edit several fragments of different films and add many subtitles to demonstrate the company value as well as the anticipation for the future. (Video 1) These films are exactly the ones I have analyzed above, Ray-Ban glasses are “plugged” [3]. Into these films, and the number of said sort of films is very large. Figure 8-11 below

are the clips of subtitles from the short advertising video (video 1) and actually figure 5-7 are also fragments I screenshotted from the same video.



**Figure 8** Clip 1 of subtitles from the short advertising video



**Figure 9** Clip 2 of subtitles from the short advertising video



**Figure 10** Clip 3 of subtitles from the short advertising video



**Figure 11** Clip 4 of subtitles from the short advertising video

In this short video, these separate films are no longer individuals, Ray-Ban has connected all of them to demonstrate a value/desire and all these famous actors wearing Ray-Ban glasses have become a symbol of mavericks or legends. Apart from that, Ray-Ban has made these invisible “plugs” visible by telling the audience clearly that all these glasses worn on actors in all these classic films are the brand of Ray-Ban. So why does Ray-Ban want to use the classic appearance of famous stars in classic movies to strengthen its brand image? “... the celebrity is not an individual, but a social relation characterized by the accumulation of attention...” [4]. That is to say, these stars accumulate attention from audiences and in the same pattern, these classic movies actually accumulate a certain group of audiences’ feelings. That is exactly what Ray-Ban wants, it wants the audience autonomously to create an emotional link between the movie they saw and the brand. From the perspective of consumer psychology, “Authoritative psychology: When consumers purchase products, they choose products with authoritative certification or expert recommendations in more detail, and think that such products are more comfortable to use. Many advertisements will display relevant slogans when planning to gain the trust of consumers. In addition, some companies will invite celebrities to endorsements and influence consumer psychology through celebrity effects; Seeking differences: With the development and progress of society, consumers have become numb to traditional advertising, and they pay more attention to individualization and novelty when making consumer choices. Especially for young people, innovative things can attract their attention.” Ray-Ban combined all these elements to

interpellate its audiences, hailing to them that Ray-Ban is worn by legends and the people who are true to themselves, it is both certified by legends and different from others. In this process, Ray-Ban realized the diversity of its potential users, it wants both genders of audiences to be attracted by the brand image. Just as Pang pointed out that: “While male consumers can fetishize the seductive woman, the female consumer might also identify with the beautiful model.” [5]. Similarly in this situation, male consumers can both identify with the handsome actors and fetishize the graceful actresses, as for the female consumers, they can fetishize the muscular actors and identify with the beautiful actresses.

Since this ad is a short video (video 1) instead of a pure image, the soundtrack of it also plays an important role in analyzing how the consumers might make sense of said video and the brand image. Brain Imaging and Neuroadvertising study found that: “The Picture-Only stimuli also presented the loss of some of the effects found in the original ads, and the Sound-Only stimuli seemed to greatly disperse the attention of the subjects. It seems that these two elements amplified each other, as the combination of both did not just generate a superposition of their individual reactions, but also generated more constant emotional reactions and more attention peaks which, due to their larger average amplitudes, showed that these reactions occurred more consistently across subjects.” [5]. The sound track in this short video gives the audiences a feeling of hope, strength and inspiration, and it is coherent with the scenes and subtitles shown in the video. This consistency amplified the brand image and letting the audience emotionally link to the company value. Or it can be seen as an amplified interpellation, which empathize with the audience, consumers may decode the value that Ray-Ban convey in the video easily because of all these factors analyzed above.

Laikwan Pang wrote that: “Readers enjoy visual representation not simply because they desire the featured products or models. The key issue here is the potential of the representation to be a platform of fantasy so that the subject is given a space where desires can be fantasized.” So how do corporations use this “platform of fantasy” to create links between brand image and consumers? Although Pang mainly focused on the visual display of women, we can actually expand this category of visual representation. Ray-Ban created a set of commercials which build platforms of fantasy for many different kind groups of people. Figure 12-15 respectively demonstrate the gay movement, a kissing couple in the center of the protesting crowd, the only white boy rapping in front of all black candidates and a reporter bravely retrogrades from the running crowd. These ads have a theme called “Never Hide” and is created for Ray-Ban’s 75th anniversary, and these visual representations have given the audiences a space to fantasize, letting those consumers who are not brave enough to expose their true self have the platforms to fantasize that they can be the person inside the ad. According to Pang, “An advertisement works best as a fantasy, allowing multiple points of entrance into the visual narrative, and it can allow different viewers to stage their fantasy in different ways.” [6]. This is exactly what Ray-Ban does, these different images in the commercial give the consumers opportunity to fantasize in many different ways. It is the fantasy that links the brand image and consumers, for the audience may get that wearing Ray-Ban glasses enable them to get closer to become the person they fantasized themselves to be.



**Figure 12** The gay movement



**Figure 13** Kissing couple in the center of the protesting crowd



**Figure 14** The only white boy rapping in front of all black candidates



**Figure 15** Reporter bravely retrogrades from the running crowd

From another perspective, at the denotive level, these images are showing special groups of people confidently expressing themselves, and all these people are wearing Ray-Ban glasses. As Gillian wrote in her book: “The source of the movement of signifieds is not the advert itself, says Williamson, but the viewer of the advert. It is the viewer who makes sense of the advert, not the advert itself. Indeed, without a viewer to decode the advert, it would be, literally, meaningless.”<sup>1</sup> So Ray-Ban wants the audience not only see the denotation of its ads, but also wants to give the audience a simplest method to decode the connotation in these images. “Never Hide”, these two words in the lower right corner of all images link the value of the brand image to the picture itself. Consumers can have a very deep and direct impression that these people in the image are staying loyal to true and unique values, so is the brand image of Ray-Ban. This creates a feeling for all consumers that they are respected and their choices and unique values are deemed important. This kind of feeling is the key both to strengthen the brand image and for the consumers to make sense of it, “Advertisers are increasingly aiming for an emotive response from their target audience (Malefyt, 2010)”<sup>1</sup>, for this emotional link between the brand and the consumers may have effects on both ends [7].

Beller wrote in his book that: “This is the attention economy, built upon the premise becoming conviction, becoming fact, that human attention is productive of value.”<sup>5</sup> So how to use this “productive labor” to enhance the brand image? Ray-Ban launched the advertising program “Never Hide” in March 2007, covered over 20 countries. The target audience is young, courageous, and

unconventional consumers. Surrounding the concept of “Never Hide”, Ray-Ban calls on consumers to show their true self, thoughts and personality, and encourages them to be loyal to the true and unique value. This activity advocates the production of content by consumers, they can submit their photos or videos wearing Ray-Ban glasses to Ray-Ban’s official website. If the photo or the video is selected, it will be displayed on a billboard in Times Square, then the consumer can actually experience the thrill of fame for 15 seconds. Basically Ray-Ban started this program and gave power to its consumers to make advertisements by themselves, so the producer and the viewer become the same group of people. This means that the consumers are having a very deep experience with the brand. Just as Gillian pointed out that: “Back in 1999, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a book discussing ‘the experience economy’, arguing that what created the character of a brand and what helped potential customers to identify with it was, in part, the ‘feel’ of the brand’s shops. When you shop at the store of a major brand now, the idea is that you are buying not just a product with a specific functionality but also a whole experience that you like.”<sup>1</sup> However, with the progress of the times, the category of mentioned experience had expended and advanced, brands are actually letting their consumers to participate in the processes of shaping their brand image instead of just giving them shopping experience in stores. This makes the relationship between the consumers and the brand even stronger, for the “feelings” link to both ends are in a more intimate way [8].

In the whole event, it is particularly worth mentioning that the famous video "sunglass catch" with nearly 5 million views on YouTube. (Video 2) Figure 5.1 is a screenshot from the video.



**Figure 16** “Never Hide” is written by hand

The video shows two young men using all kinds of different difficult ways to catch the Ray-Ban sunglasses, for instance, drop the sunglass off the roof and the man on the ground catches it, throw the sunglass into the elevator when it is about to close and the other person inside the lift catches it, the man on a driving car catches the sunglass thrown by a standing man. At the last scene of the video, as the figure 16 has shown, on the back window of the car, “Never Hide” is written by hand. 5 million views mean this video had drawn a lot of attention from the audience, and this activity attracted many consumers to shape Ray-Ban’s brand image together with the company. Through this process, consumers can easily make sense of the company value, and at the moment they agree with said value, they have become part of the brand image. Beller wrote that: “The human has become the medium for information; put another way, the medium is human, despite the fact that human potential is foreclosed by its function.”<sup>5</sup> Ray-Ban uses this and let the consumers themselves to advertise the brand image.

In this whole paper, I discussed the questions raised at the beginning of the article: how do the corporations shape their brand images by advertising, how do these brand images in the form of visual material attract consumers and how the consumers make sense of these visual materials? Through analyzing, I found that the connection and relationship between brand images and consumers can be

mutual, and the visual materials are carefully designed to let the consumers make sense of the company value.

However, there is no necessary connection between these ads containing interpellation, neuroadvertising and whether the audience buys that product. The action of purchasing by consumers need further study to be discussed. Leo Burnett said that: "Good advertising does not just circulate information. It penetrates the public mind with desire and belief." However, in this capital society, only the increase in sales can prove the triumph of an advertisement. So, the ultimate question becomes: will the brand image affect consumers' actions on purchasing?

#### Consumer Psychology

The 21st century has entered the Internet age, where information is readily available to the general public and we are no longer completely dependent on professional media and authority. It is very likely that consumers will become very smart in the future, because the internet has taught them a lot and they know a lot. It is not just the internet, but also the various social media platforms, where consumers are already learning a lot about products without any advertising or salespeople.

Generally speaking, consumer psychological activity consists of two parts: cognition, which is the initial impression and judgment of the consumer, and motivation, which is the direct factor motivating the consumer to make a purchase. Moreover, consumers are social beings and have social attributes. The complex cultural, social and customary environment is closely linked to the psychology of consumers and has a decisive influence on their desire to buy and their purchasing behavior.

The massive influx of information has led to considerable changes in the social environment, allowing for a highly subjective and personal evolution of the cognitive part of consumer psychology. Today's consumers prefer advertising products that are quick to catch the eye and have real substance. Only this type of advertising can deepen the consumer's perception of the product and create a quick memory, leading to a conversion of the purchase behavior.

In China, for example, consumers have three main psychological characteristics: the psychology of face, the psychology of the crowd and the psychology of seeking differences. Only by capturing these psychological characteristics of consumers in the process of advertising planning can advertisements be better disseminated.

**Face psychology:** Chinese consumers are more willing to choose beautifully packaged, high-end goods for consumption, especially when choosing gifts, such goods will make consumers feel more dignified.

**Crowd mentality:** Crowd mentality is a common characteristic of Chinese consumers, who are more willing to observe other people's consumption choices before making a purchase and will choose to follow them if they are cost-effective. For example, when shopping on the Internet, people usually choose goods with high sales prices, believing that they are more guaranteed.

**Differentiation:** With the development and progress of society, consumers have become numb to traditional advertising and are more interested in personal and novelty when making consumer choices. Especially for young people, innovative things attract more attention.

It is therefore extremely important for advertising to be in line with the psychological trajectory of consumers. It is necessary to make the consumer psychologically aware and interested, and to create the desire to continue to learn more about the product.

#### Value Proposition

For any advertising campaign, it is facing a wide range of consumers. The consumer behavior resulting from the psychological impact of advertising on consumers includes three dynamic processes. In the cognitive process stage, consumers' initial impression of the advertisement generates physiological activities, which include sensation, thinking, imagination, perception, etc. In the effective process stage, consumers have psychological reactions to the content and stimuli of the advertisements they watch, such as liking, disliking, satisfaction, disappointment, etc. In the stage of consciousness decision process, it is also the process of consumers to produce consumption behavior, and firm beliefs produce purchase behavior. Therefore, advertisers should consider that the consumer psychological process has different degrees of influence on the advertising effect in their creation.

Therefore, the first thing that enterprises should do is to manage the word of mouth of their products so that the fixed consumer base resonates with their product ideas. And for a company to have a good reputation, the brand must be attractive and have feelings in it. There may be many choices of products that consumers want to buy, and to get consumers to choose you, your brand must be able to resonate with them. When a good word of mouth is established, the content contained in your advertisement will be more accepted and recognized by the majority of consumers.

In fact, in layman's terms, a brand is usually a value proposition that expresses the value you create for your customers, and the value proposition is what your positioning is and what your key features are. Ray-Ban is constantly reinforcing its value proposition and defining its consumer base. "People who wear Ray-Bans are adventurers who dare to show their true selves, and those who want to be adventurers have the option to buy Ray-Bans." Almost all of the ads revolved around the core value of "never hide", never introducing the technical features that made it so special. The most profound value of the campaign, including the subsequent Aura series, is the need to be unique. It is this strong value proposition that ignites the fire in consumers' hearts and the desire to break free from the framework. The emotions it expresses resonate with the consumer base to a great extent. So no matter what new concept or format Ray-Ban's subsequent ads take, this value of "true self" will always be present.

To sum up, I believe that in this new information age, advertising agencies and companies should pay attention to the connotation of the advertisements produced and whether there are independent values added to them. I firmly believe that this will be the most important point for judging the advertisement or attracting consumers, only if it resonates with enough consumers will people buy your product, and only the increase of product sales will prove the success of an advertisement. Ray-Ban's success has been slowly proving the importance of word-of-mouth and internalization of product values, and he is moving forward, and other companies are following in his footsteps into this new era, so that companies and their advertising will continue to surprise people and improve to meet more consumer needs, thus producing better products and a better corporate culture.

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