

University of Tampa

Advertising Critical Analysis Final Paper:

Gucci; not so “Gucci” after all

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Sex sells. Cheap labor works. And the desecration exerted upon animals is okay for the sake of human's health. This seems to be the logic behind global high-end proprietary names such as Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, and the primary brand in focus, Gucci. In 2015 the U.S. spent an estimated \$187 billion on advertising, and globally, with a worldwide increase of 6% in the last year, spent \$592.43 billion. The U.S., China, Japan, Germany, and the UK lead as the top five global ad markets.ⁱ Gucci, similar to other global high-end product based brands, gains its profit through the bypass and exploitation of humanitarian efforts and social rights. Gucci is “a multinational company with over 270 directly operated stores worldwide, serving customers of elite goods, and generating billions of dollars in revenue per year.”ⁱⁱ Gucci builds its wealth on the hypersexualization of their products, the expenditure of cheap labor, and the inadvertence to its impact on both the environment and society as a whole. But, are we putting too much social responsibility on Gucci? Should we as society be the one held responsible instead to change, before we demand change from who we allocate our money to? The power of affluence and social bias will be two major factors in this exploration of the infamous brand Gucci.

The images I chose representing the brand Gucci share many similar ideologies. The similarities across these first two images, as well as many other advertisements that Gucci produces, all generate the same projection of the brand's identity. The first image depicts a blonde, thin, tan woman. The women pictured seem almost intangible; the pinnacle of perfection under the American standard. The image also has the inclusion of a male figure; muscular, tall and also tan; the parallel image of perfection by American standards. Having both figures so tan only perpetuates this unrealistic ideal of being “golden” that many exposed adolescents try to achieve; whether it be extensively basking under the sun or even turning to artificial sun in a tanning bed. In fact, “each year there are more new cases of skin cancer than the combined

incidence of cancers of the breast, prostate, lung and colon.”ⁱⁱⁱ To keep in mind these messages that perforate our daily lives are not just seen once; reinforced by the fact, “Americans are exposed to 61 minutes of ads per day or 5,000 ads in total.”^{iv} You think such a prominent health epidemic, regarding skin cancer, would cause advertisers to grow wary; maybe change their ideals for the better of humanity. Sadly, this is not the case and the destruction to society’s values does not end here. The fact that these two women are so petite does not help young teen’s body images either. As if the constant media was not enough, this ad pushes again for perfect unattainable body goals. It is no wonder, “about 65% of American women and girls have an eating disorder.”^v

Aside from the obvious two “sun-kissed,” petite female figures, there is much more to these visuals. The ad has these characters unclothed. The woman in the ad is of subordination in comparison to the male. The women are objectified in the underlying sexual undertones each ad carries. The male in the first ad has his hand in domination over the women’s breast. In the second, the same sexual undertone is carried. By hypersexualizing the men and women in these ads, Gucci is clearly saying something about their products; this perfume will make you sexually irresistible to whomever you please. The advertising undertones Gucci uses are not of recent news, “sex is a powerful and easy method of getting male attention and making a product desirable.”^{vi} These tactics have been used since the beginning of advertising and are reiterated by the media day in and day out. However, as aesthetically appealing these images are, they have dire consequences to society. In align to these selected ads, “the media provides a disproportionate number of images of women as young, white, heterosexual, and underweight.”^{vii} These two images illustrate exactly this; a heterosexual couple and more importantly, a young white petite female. With perpetuated messages like these, it is not hard to see how American

culture is so inaccurately portrayed in the media. It is also almost an attack on adolescent consumers because, “an individual’s brain does not fully develop until the age of 24, which means our children and young adults are our most vulnerable class of citizens to the proliferation of the media’s messages.”^{viii} By having such a sex focused ad, promiscuity is encouraged as a society value. The U.S. known for its large advertising platform consequentially also “has the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world – twice as high as the UK, four times as high as Germany, and eight times as high as Japan.”^{ix} With such sexual messages always in the mainstream of our culture, we find it hard to believe, “one in six women are survivors of rape or attempted rape.”^x But if you really analyze ads like these two or even more in depth any ad focusing on women, we see this constant objectification of the female body. Shall we reminisce to last week’s Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show?

Moving away from Gucci’s impact on the perpetuated unrealistic ideology of a women’s body, sexual orientation, and other physical attributes, let us examine more behind the scenes. How does Gucci make their products? The third image I included, after discussion with my professor, depicts the sweatshop “behind the scenes” perspective of Gucci. This image, similar to the other two photos, also exploits women. Except this time, women are exploited by their working conditions in sweatshops rather than their bodies. But first, what is a sweatshop?

A "sweatshop" is defined by the US Department of Labor as a factory that violates 2 or more labor laws. Sweatshops often have poor working conditions, unfair wages, unreasonable hours, child labor, and a lack of benefits for workers...In developing countries, an estimated 168 million children ages 5 to 14 are forced to work.^{xi}

One would think Gucci's luxurious handbags stamped with "Made in Italy," must certainly have been made in Italy by happily treated employees? For many generations Gucci has prided itself again on its ability to brand itself as "Made in Italy," where it meant just that; "the chicest handbags from Milan, heels from Rome and gowns from Florence, handcrafted by Italian craftsmen."^{xii} However in today's recent global economy, "Italy's finest fashion houses are leaning increasingly on an army of cheap Chinese immigrants who have turned Tuscany's textile powerhouse into Italy's Little China. But this isn't China. This is Via Pistoiese in the Tuscan city of Prato - Italy's luxury goods capital, home to all the big names. Almost 10 per cent of all the luxury goods produced here are imported directly to the UK."^{xiii} And working conditions are not much more ideal than the sweatshops in Indonesia. In one case study a worker describes his day in the shop for Gucci as following:

"Life is hard," he says. "I caught my fingers in one of the machines six months ago. The boss was furious. He had to pay fifty dollars for me to see a doctor. The pain is incredible still. He says I have to work day and night to pay him back. But what choice do I have? At least I have food and shelter. In China, I had nothing."^{xiv}

Gucci was again under fire in 2011 when accused of another incident with the maltreatment of their employees. In another legal case study in Gucci's flagship store in Shenzhen. According to the study:

A Public Letter to the Top Management of Gucci from Former Employees who resigned collectively was spread on the Internet. This letter was written by five former employees of the Gucci Shenzhen Flagship Store. In the letter, they alleged that employees caught an occupational disease, that there was one miscarriage attributable to excessive working hours and that there

was no compensation for these hardships. Moreover, they stated that there were excessive restrictions on employees' behavior, including the need to obtain permission before getting a drink or a snack, and strict limitations on toilet time. They stated that, while the restrictions were applied strictly to all frontline employees, including one who was pregnant, they were not applied to the managers. The letter also claimed that the employees had to pay compensation for any product that was stolen or went missing, even though these luxury products had already been insured. They also criticized Gucci's goods exchange policies which appeared to be arbitrary and dependent on the manager's mood. All in all, they accused Gucci of lacking systematic and humane management and complained that their rights and dignity were under violation. Further information emerged, suggesting that the case also involved falsification of records about working hours, and the imposition of forced, unpaid overtime work. Gucci implemented a system of working one full day, followed by a day off. Officially, 1 day's work was about 10 h. But the workers complained that, on their working days, they were required to clock off at a certain time to establish a false electronic record, and then continue their work, counting goods until two or three o'clock in the morning without compensation^{xv}

The unfair treatment presented by Gucci towards their employees is extremely unethical. As a result of this poor exposure you would think Gucci would compensate their employees, but like many big corporations they are not willingly to go the extra mile. However, a study showed that "doubling the salary of sweatshop workers would only increase the consumer cost of an item by 1.8%, while consumers would be willing to pay 15% more to know a product did not come from a sweatshop."^{xvi} If companies realized we as consumers would be more inclined to buy brands from non-sweatshop origination; maybe, just maybe they would change their line of thinking.

Aside from all these atrocities against society in the U.S. as well as globally, what else has Gucci dismantled in the world? Not only have they not made changes to move to a sustainable Earth, they have endangered millions of animals at the expense to their products. Gucci being such a globally present brand has taken no actions to decrease their carbon emissions and ecological footprint left on the Earth. According to *Racing Extinction*, “80% of greenhouse gas emissions are from commercial buildings.”^{xvii} Making a number of their buildings or production sites “green,” so to speak, would speak volume on behalf of their brand and would entice many millennial consumers. Making commercial buildings energy efficient is not the last concern on consumer’s minds. Gucci still remains prominently the list of companies that test on animals, and for good reason. According to PETA, “cosmetics brands Benefit, Bliss, Caudalie, Clarins, Clinique, Dior, Estée Lauder and Gucci all sell their products in China, where the law requires pre-market animal testing for all imported cosmetics. There are also reports of Chinese authorities carrying out post-market animal testing on cosmetics already approved for sale, and also requiring companies to carry out additional animal testing for cosmetic ingredients that have not previously been approved for use in China.”^{xviii}

It is important to note that Gucci has taken a few steps in the right direction. Gucci has made a ten-million-dollar contribution to UNICEF, proving they are charitable in some extent to society. Gucci has also crafted “a small collection of sustainable accessories, which confirm to the brand that sustainability is indeed possible within their business.”^{xix} This is definitely a step forward in the right direction, but still there is much more room for improvement as they have only produced 250 of these sustainable bags. Gucci, just like many other high-end designer brands, does not advertise their move towards sustainability to the public. The impact and power that Gucci has in controlling the movement towards sustainable fashion is as following:

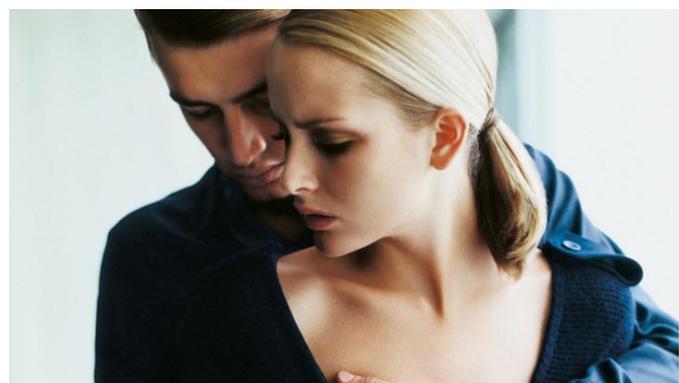
If top-tier brands buffed, glossed and shared the story of how they responsibly manufacture products, they could even make eco-friendly as covetable as a designer logo — and transform the culture’s entire view of manufacturing that is good for the environment. These companies have natural eco-advantages over their mass-market rivals. They control more of their supply chain, such as tanneries. They have the resources to develop new production techniques. They tout the heirloom nature of their products, not their disposability. And their customers are less price-sensitive: Who’s counting pennies when spending thousands of dollars on a handbag?^{xx}

Examining the power of affluence Gucci has on the rest of the world is an eye opener. However, it is easy to point fingers. We as consumers have the bigger power. We have the power to change the market. We have the power to change the dynamics of supply and demand itself. In order to do this, we need to separate ourselves from our inherently learned social biases.

For me to sit here and point fingers at Gucci really would only be a reflection of myself. In accordance to the social bias, illusion of transparency, I am overestimating my ability to know Gucci and the strategic reasoning behind their business models and executive decisions. They may very well be just as concerned about the environment, however just fail to express this due to burdening economic restraints. I may as well be guilty of the other social bias, projection bias. This bias is the “tendency to unconsciously assume that others share the same or similar thoughts, beliefs, values, or positions.” Maybe society does not actually care about the limits and restraints the media staples onto women. Maybe they could be bothered less by animal cruelty and the increase in carbon emissions worldwide. If that is true, then the world has a rather depressing future. Whatever society thinks though will ultimately shape the behavior for future generations to come. Also known as the self-fulfilling prophecy social bias, society will enable this “tendency to engage in behaviors that elicit results which will (consciously or not) confirm

existing attitudes.” By truly believing these lies the media pushes on society, consciously or not, will determine the future ahead of us.

“All creatures are capable of deception...birds, insects, chimpanzees,” more so, “because if we can justify we are doing something for a good cause there’s no problem; no lie.”^{xxi} As said before it is easy to point fingers, and justify your own lies and wrongdoings. It is also just as easy to sit back and avoid the problems in the world; equivalent to simply lying to yourself. Eleanor Roosevelt famously said, “It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.”^{xxii} Sitting back and saying “oh well,” is just as bad as being the problem itself. If you are upset with how society is so sexualized and how women are excessively objectified in the media; speak out. We need “to challenge the media conglomerates to value women for more than their youth, beauty, and sexuality, and we must hold these companies accountable.”^{xxiii} I could have picked any other large corporate brand aside from Gucci and would have gotten the same findings of exploitation; that is not the point. The point is we need to use our buying power as consumers to invest into brands that support sustainability and an encouraging society for all genders. So many new brands get this. These new brands that are emerging use biotechnology to innovatively reuse plastic from the ocean into fabric that can be used in shoes, as well as clothing. Big brands are doing this right now, Adidas as an exemplary example. People give up so easily when they try to take on the challenges of the world; the film, *Miss Representation* captures this notion perfectly, “the most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”





ⁱ "Advertisers Will Spend Nearly \$600 Billion Worldwide in 2015 - EMarketer." EMarketer. N.p., 10 Dec. 2014. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

ⁱⁱ Wang, Li, and Robin Stanley Snell. "A case study of ethical issue at Gucci in Shenzhen, China." *Asian Journal of Business Ethics* (2013): 1-11.

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- iii "Skin Cancer Foundation." *Skin Cancer Facts & Statistics - SkinCancer.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Dec. 2016.
- iv *Art & Copy*. Dir. Doug Pray. Perf. Mary Wells, Dan Weiden, Hal Riney. 2009. DVD. Web.
- v *Miss Representation*. Dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Kimberlee Acquaro. Perf. Christina Aguilera, Michele Bachmann, Chris Baker. Virgil Films & Entertainment, 2011. Netflix.
- vi Blair, Jessica Dawn, et al. "Ethics in advertising: sex sells, but should it?." *Journal of Legal, Ethical and Regulatory Issues* 9.1/2 (2006): 109.
- vii *Ibid.*
- viii *Ibid.*
- ix *Ibid.*
- x *Ibid.*
- xi "11 Facts About Sweatshops." *DoSomething.org | Volunteer for Social Change*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.
- xii Wang, Li, and Robin Stanley Snell. "A case study of ethical issue at Gucci in Shenzhen, China." *Asian Journal of Business Ethics* (2013): 1-11.
- xiii *Ibid.*
- xiv Potter, Adam Lee. "Designer Labels' Sweatshop Scandal." *SweatFree Communities: Designer Labels' Sweatshop Scandal*. N.p., 2 Dec. 2007. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.
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- xx "Luxury Fashion Brands Are Going Green. But Why Are They Keeping It a Secret?" *The Washington Post*. WP Company, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.
- xxi *(Dis)honesty: The Truth About Lies*. Dir. Yael Melamede. Perf. Dan Ariely. 2015. Web.

^{xxii} Racing Extinction. Dir. Louie Psihoyos. Perf. Elon Musk, Joel Sartore, Louie Psihoyos. Oceanic Preservation Society, 2015.

^{xxiii} Miss Representation. Dir. Jennifer Siebel Newsom and Kimberlee Acquaro. Perf. Christina Aguilera, Michele Bachmann, Chris Baker. Virgil Films & Entertainment, 2011. Netflix.

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