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Benetton's (In)Equality: A Semiotic Reading

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BENETTON'S (IN)EQUALITY: A SEMIOTIC READING

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ABSTRACT

United Colors of Benetton, or UCB, has been using its advertisements to deliver positive messages and values that the clothing company represents. This article analyzes one of the photographs in Benetton's campaign for their Spring Summer Collection of 2018. The campaign, which consists of some photographs by Oliviero Toscani, raises the theme of equality of gender and ethnicity. It shows various photographs of both female and male models from different ethnicities. However, it is found that there is one photograph that shows inconsistency with the very value that Benetton wants to convey through their campaign. Based on the semiotic analysis, the study shows that the photograph can be read as having an entirely different message that the company intends to voice. This article proves that multiple interpretations can be applied to a text, and a text can betray itself.

KEYWORDS

Advertisement; equality; inequality; multi-interpretations; semiotics

ABSTRAK

United Colors of Benetton atau UCB sejak lama menggunakan iklan-iklan mereka untuk menyampaikan pesan dan nilai-nilai positif yang didukung oleh perusahaan. Penelitian ini menganalisis salah satu foto dari iklan Benetton untuk koleksi musim panas dan musim semi 2018 mereka. Iklan untuk koleksi itu terdiri atas beberapa foto karya Oliviero Toscani yang menampilkan model laki-laki dan perempuan dari latar belakang etnis yang berbeda-beda dan mengusung tema kesetaraan gender dan ras. Dari analisis ini ditemukan satu foto yang justru menunjukkan pesan berbeda dari keinginan Benetton untuk menyampaikan pesan mereka melalui iklan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotik, ditemukan bahwa sebuah foto dapat diinterpretasikan dengan berbagai cara, bahkan mungkin bertolak belakang dengan maksud oleh pembuatnya. Dari penelitian ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa sebuah teks bisa memiliki multitafsir dan justru dapat mengkhianati pesan yang dikehendaki pengubahnya.

KATA KUNCI

Iklan; kesetaraan; ketidaksetaraan; multitafsir; semiotik

1. INTRODUCTION

Benetton is a fashion company with an international reputation based in Ponzano Veneto, Italy. The company was established in 1965 by the Benetton brothers and initially produced colorful knitwear before expanding to produce other fashion items. Nowadays, Benetton Group has been a household word with a wide range of products and about 5000 stores worldwide. Its products range from clothing, bags, shoes, glasses, hats, even umbrellas, and perfumes both for adults and children. The core business of the group is the clothing brands United Colors of Benetton and Sisley.

Besides its reputation and high-quality products, United Colors of Benetton, or UCB, has also been famous for its often-controversial advertising techniques. The brand has used advertisements depicting wars, AIDS victims, real human organs, and world leaders kissing, such as Barack Obama, Hu Jintao, Pope Benedict XVI, etc., in pictures produced clearly using digital manipulation. Although those controversial advertisements have sparked debate in society, the same advertisements are praised for raising awareness about the social and political situations in the world. However, UCB has made it really clear that the company itself supports many movements and activities for the betterment of the world and the human race. "Benetton, independently and in conjunction with other groups and organizations, contributed to many initiatives aimed at addressing social problems" (Benetton Facts 2019).

UCB, as the name indicates, also actively advocates gender and ethnic equality. Some of its advertisements have clearly shown this vision by depicting models from different ethnic backgrounds and different genres. This has been their trademark from the 1980s and 1990s until today. The brand claims itself to be always supportive of differences that exist among people in the world and that it will remain respectful of them. "When companies export around the world, they normally adapt their advertising to suit different areas. [However,] Benetton chooses a single, universal message that is valid for all consumers: wherever they may live, whatever the color of their skin and whichever language they may speak" (Profile 2019).

Every year, UCB will launch some campaigns for its new collections in a series of photographs based on the seasons. Thus, UCB has winter, summer, spring, and autumn collections throughout the year. The 2018 Spring-Summer collection was launched in February 2018, and the photographs were captured by fashion photographer Oliviero Toscani. The photographs show models from many different ethnic backgrounds, such as Jae Kim, J. Moon, Kathia Nseke, Lydia Barnett, Matthijs van Dommelen, Sethu Ncise, Tuur Sikkink, and Zuoye among others (Discover United Colors of Benetton Spring-Summer 2018 Collection 2018). The following are some examples of the photographs in the campaign (see figure 1).

As stated in the press release from the company for the collection:

United Colors of Benetton's Spring-Summer 2018 campaign abounds with daisies, roses, carnations and sunflowers. Worn by men, women and children – on their heads, in their hands, around their necks, in their breast pockets – the new collection speaks of the eternal dilemma of gender, which is not binary, but has infinite nuances.

.....

Different colours are paired with different fabrics in mix-and-match styling without any established rules. It is a strong, incisive image that calls out "we are all here, we are all equal, no matter what". It is a style that is simultaneously punk, chic, hippie, and casual. A way of dressing that is more than global, it is the ultimate in freedom and creativity, a message for the whole world, for everyone, regardless of religion, sexual orientation, or age. It is a genderless style that speaks, loudly and fearlessly, of slogans and manifesto ideas – peace, love, equality, and positivity – printed on t-shirts, sweatshirts, and accessories. (Benetton Group 2018).



Figure 1. Image Compilation of Benetton's Spring-Summer 2018 Campaign (Mitakos 2018)

Among the photographs of the collection, one particular photograph stands out and can be seen carrying a different tune from what the company and the ad itself have to offer. This research attempts to show the differences and, in order to do so, a semiotic approach will be used. Semiotics is “the field of study that is concerned with signs and/or signification (the process of creating meaning)” (Hebert 2006). As indicated by the definition, meaning is crucial in interpreting a sign. However, the meaning derived from a sign may vary as it is influenced by many factors outside the sign itself. By using semiotics, this research shows how the Benetton advertisement can be read as offering different meanings, and interestingly can even contradict one another.

In investigating Benetton and its controversial advertisement campaigns, it is important to examine the previous studies in order to get a clear idea of the possible similarities as well as the research gap that differentiates this research from the previous ones. There are numerous articles, research, and studies that have been conducted using various methods from many different disciplines and academic perspectives throughout the years. Some research investigates the contradiction and ambiguity contained in Benetton campaign; Antick (2002), for instance, uses photography and visual cultural studies theory to reveal Benetton's advertising identity, which often has contradictory meanings and messages. Meanwhile, Back et al. (1993) use a semantic dialogue to investigate the relationship between the producers, consumers, and the politics of whiteness behind the theme of multiracial and intercommunal harmonies in the United Colors campaign, which eventually reveals its ambiguity and contradiction.

Ganesan (2002) and Sugden (2012) chronologically recounted the Benetton group's unconventional advertising through a series of library research to investigate the motives behind its conception, and its development throughout the years. The authors mostly focused on providing the producers' perspectives, particularly from Luciano Benetton, the founder of the company, and Oliviero Toscani, the initiator of the

controversial ads campaigns. The article also touched upon the public responses towards the controversial ads campaign garnered throughout the years and the company's way of handling criticism.

From the marketing standpoint, Barela (2003) discusses the legal actions taken against Benetton by its own retailers, who claimed that the company's explicit advertising campaign was actually counterproductive as it hurt their sales. The author reviewed the consumers' responses towards the company's ads campaigns to offer suggestions on how the company's ads could have a better reach by adjusting its marketing strategy to the ever-changing global political climate, as well as the increasing threat of terrorism.

From the ethical standpoint, Borgerson et al. (2009) used the Benetton ads campaign as a case study to investigate the strategic and conceptual relationship between corporate and organizational identities from the ethical perspective. By interviewing stakeholders, such as the retail managers and contract employees within the company, it is revealed that Benetton has failed to effectively communicate the company's own ethical identity to the employees resulting in the failure to capitalize on the positive aspect of its organizational identity to the customers due to the neglect in building its operational identity. In other words, the research shows the 'hollowness' of Benetton's advertising campaign that focuses on using social issues only from its mere visual aspect for the customers but the people within the company itself may not really understand or even be aware of the ethical values behind those campaigns.

From the communication perspective, Tinic (1997) provided insight regarding the various social issues tackled by Benetton's United Colors ad campaign. She argued that, from the outset, those advertisements may look like nothing more than an inauthentic form of social discourses, which masks the consumerism ideology. However, she also questioned the notion of authentic-inauthentic social discourses, which is often used by the critics of Benetton, as unrealistic because, according to her, there was no such thing as a pure cultural discourse that is truly free from commercialization. Thus, she considered the case of Benetton ads as a transformative process of advertisement into a form of public communication because it has a unique position as it will always have an inherent commodification aspect but, at the same time, it cannot be denied that it is also an effective way to communicate a social issue to the public.

Both Hubbard (1993) and Javed et al. (2011) focused on the shocking value of Benetton ads. Benetton's shocking campaigns may be offensive for some and are essentially another strategy to build a positive image to sell products. However, it is also undeniably true that the ads open up room for discussion and provide awareness regarding the social issues that are raised to the general public, as well as possibility to reduce harmful practices such as smoking, the death penalty, child labor, and an environmental issue, specifically on the oil spill, in the long term. A similar sentiment regarding the shock value of Benetton ads appears in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention. Dahl et al. (2003) investigated the effectiveness of the shocking advertisement by analyzing the responses from university students towards both shocking and non-shocking ads. One of the ads that was used in the research is Benetton's shocking ad that shows a priest and a nun kissing. The findings of this research stated that shocking content can significantly increase people's attention, benefit memory, and provide a positive behavioral influence towards the HIV/AIDS issue among university students.

Seppanen's (2001) research was conducted by analyzing the interpretation of several Benetton ads by a number of university students and comparing them with the interpretation offered by Back et al. (1993). From this research, the authors found two common strands among the students' interpretations, namely race and gender. At the same time, the authors criticized Back et al.'s interpretation by arguing that they gave too much focus on the 'grammar of race' while completely ignoring the issue of gender, which is obviously present in the ads.

Girling (2004) and Kraidy et al. (2003) focused only on Benetton's 'We on death row' ads campaign launched in January 2000. The research found that, beneath all the controversies surrounding it, the campaign

actually managed to open up what she calls 'community of sentiment' towards the death penalty, which may result in the resistance of the normalization of the current policy on the death penalty, particularly in the American society, while at the same time exposing the fragility of the hegemonic ideology regarding capital punishment in the United States. Meanwhile, Kaptan (2016) only focused on the Turkish 'United Condom of Benetton' campaign launched in 2000, which is mainly concerned with the issue of HIV/AIDS disease in the country. By interviewing the company's employees and advertising agency, the author argued that the advertisement actually becomes the reflection as well as the construction of the emerging Global Turkishness, which constitutes key aspects such as race, sexuality, and global disease.

Thus, this research may be similar in comparison with some of the previous research summarized above as it also discusses and focuses on the advertisements that Benetton launched, particularly on the messages and the values that a particular advertisement reveals, both consciously done by the photographer and the company and unconsciously seen by the viewers of the advertisement.

However, this research may be able to provide some new insights compared to the previous research as it focuses on a new campaign by Benetton in 2018. Thus, this research can be seen as a new way of looking at Benetton's advertisements, whether the ads stay within the same area of discussion, and whether there are new findings that can be further discussed by researchers in the future.

Based on the elaboration above, this research aims to discuss and elaborate the answers to these following questions, namely what values that one of the photographs in Benetton's Spring Summer ad 2018 promotes, and how the very photograph contradicts the values that the ad and the company would like to convey in the first place.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semiotics refers to "a 'system of principles' for the study of sign-based behaviour" (Danesi 2002, 28). In other words, semiotics is "the field of study that is concerned with signs and/or signification (the process of creating meaning)" (Hebert 2006). A sign itself is defined as "anything ... that stands for something other than itself" (Danesi 2004, 4).

According to de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, a sign is a "binary phenomenon" (Danesi 2002, 31), which means that it consists of two parts: signifier and signified. Signifier refers to the "sound-image" (Berger 2010, 5) or "the perceivable part of the sign" (Hebert 2006), while signified is the concept or "the semantic content associated with the signifier" (Hebert 2006). The word 'dog', for example, consists of the signifier in the form of the sound-image *d-o-g* and the signified in the form of a mental image of an animal with fur and four legs that can bark.

According to de Saussure the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and very much based on conventions. People with different languages will have different terms for the same mental image 'dog', and they will also associate it with different meanings based on their cultures. This means that the creation of meaning from a sign is influenced by various factors in a particular culture and that the meaning of a sign may change over time. De Saussure also stated that meanings or concepts are "defined differentially, that is, in terms of what they aren't" (Berger 2010, 6) because of the binary nature of language. For example, people tend to think that black is black because it is not white, or that someone is happy because he/she is not sad. De Saussure explained that people tend to think in terms of this kind of polar opposition.

In his book titled *The Objects of Affection: Semiotics and Consumer Culture* (2010), Arthur Asa Berger showed how signs are pervasive in people's daily life. He stated that signs are everywhere, including in the media that people consume, and that it is undeniable that marketers/advertisers use advertisements that are full of signs to convey their messages to the consumers. The theory of semiotics, which deals with signs, can

therefore be used to explain how consumers might interpret those signs sent by the marketers/advertisers through their advertisement – whether or not the consumers receive the meaning of the signs correctly according to the marketers/advertisers' intention.

Using this concept as a framework, this research aims to show how one of Benetton's – a famous Italy-based global fashion brand – advertisements might be interpreted differently from what the company originally intends to convey. In the campaign for their Spring Summer 2018 collection, Benetton claims to show that there is no gender in color and that there is equality among the races, as can be seen from the way the photographs depict models from many different ethnic backgrounds. However, as a sign can be interpreted in many ways, one particular photograph from the campaign can be seen as having a different meaning from what Benetton intends to deliver. As a matter of fact, the photograph expresses a message that there is inequality among races, especially between white and non-white.

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

As qualitative research, library research was conducted in this study, beginning by researching for some information regarding Benetton Group, UCB, and its 2018 Spring-Summer Campaign as the primary texts. The references collected were then read and internet browsing was done to find more information that can help enrich the analysis. Then, the ad was analyzed using the semiotic approach, and the research ended with some conclusions derived from the findings.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION



Figure 2. A White Man Carrying a Black Baby Girl in One of Benetton's 2018 Spring-Summer Campaign Ads. (Source: Mitakos 2018)

Benetton is famous for its controversies regarding its campaign and advertisements because the company often uses unusual objects or people that some people may find shocking and different. However, Benetton manages to keep the viewpoint of its advertisements clear. The company supports positive movements for

humanity and encourages the betterment of the human race, which includes social awareness of the equality of gender and race, supports for the marginalized, and many others. The company has made sure that its vision stays clearly visible within the advertisements and campaigns they published. The Spring-Summer Campaign 2018 from Benetton, which consists of a series of photographs, is no exception. The campaign is said to show support for equality between races and gender. However, this research shows how one particular photograph in the campaign shows inconsistencies towards the very message. Using semiotics as the analytical tool, this research focuses on three signifiers as indicated by the numbers in the very photograph (see Figure 2).

4.1. Analysis of the 1st Signifier: A White Man Carrying a Black Baby Girl

The first signifier that is discussed is the image of a white man carrying a black baby girl. As can be seen in the picture, the man is positioned in the middle. According to an article that discusses the common visual techniques used in advertisements, placing an object at the center of a picture indicates that the object is important: "Centrality refers to placing of the main object or figure in the center of the image or close to the center of the image. Images in the center are the nucleus information, the margin images are subservient" (Visual Techniques n.d.). Thus, the central position of the man indicates that he is an important element or the focus of the picture.

Other than being positioned in the middle, the man also occupies a huge space in the picture. Similar to the concept of centrality, the size of an object placed in a picture shows its level of importance. Kimbarovsky (2020) stated that "size denotes importance. The larger an object is, the more focus it draws and the more important it seems." Thus, the fact that the man takes up a huge space of the picture reinforces his importance.

The next detail that can be seen from the man is the fact that he is an adult male. An adult is "a mature, fully developed person ... [who] has reached the age when they are legally responsible for their actions" (Collins 2020). Pappas (2013) stated that an adult is usually "characterized by maturity, self-confidence, autonomy, solid decision-making, and is generally more practical, multi-tasking, purposeful, self-directed, experienced, and less open-minded and receptive to change." As an adult, the man in the picture is, therefore, associated with – most of all – maturity, responsibility, and independence. This can be interpreted that the man no longer needs any support from anyone; instead, he should be the one that provides support and is responsible for others.

Meanwhile, as a male person, the man belongs to the dominant sex group. Cuddy et al. (2010, 4) asserted that males are usually perceived as possessing a "higher status in virtually every nation in the world" and having "more of whatever skills their society most values." They are also seen as "powerful (outspoken, in control, able to impose his will)", in contrast with females who are generally perceived "to be powerless (quiet, obedient, accommodating)" (Koester 2015). Being a male, it can be assumed that the man in the picture also possesses such a dominant status and qualities that are universally associated with that particular sex group.

Besides being depicted as an adult male, the man is also shown to have white skin, light brown hair, and blue eyes. These physical attributes are a clear indication that the man belongs to the white race (Internet Looks 2017; Tiwari n.d.). Meanwhile, the white race itself has long been considered the dominant racial group throughout history as suggested by the well-known term 'white supremacy', which refers to the "beliefs and ideas purporting natural superiority of the lighter-skinned, or 'white', human races over other racial groups" (Jenkins 2016). The fact that the man in the picture belongs to the white race thus signifies his superior status.

The next detail that can be analyzed from the man is his clothing. In a book entitled *Fashion as Communication*, Malcolm (2002) explained that "clothing can function as a communication tool for the identity,

customs, and individual nature of its use" (in Tajuddin 2018, 20). This means that clothing conveys various information about the individual who wears it. The idea is also re-emphasized by Tajuddin (2018, 22) who mentions that "the clothes worn by someone have hidden meanings and messages, even clothes no longer only function as protectors but also to show their social status in society". In the picture, the man is depicted to wear a white shirt. This article of clothing itself has been perceived as "an important symbol of wealth and class distinction" since the Victorian era (Brough 2014). Brough also mentioned that "the pure white color of the cloth fulfilled masculine ideals of resolute austerity, and only a person of substantial prosperity could afford to have their shirts washed frequently and to own enough of them to wear." By wearing a white shirt, the man in the picture can thus be further interpreted to show his identity as someone who has a higher social status in society.

Other than wearing a white shirt, the man is also shown to tuck a dark red rose on his right ear. In many cultures throughout the world, a dark red rose is not only associated with beauty and perfection (Daniels 2020) but also seen as "a symbol of endless love and passion, of giving without expecting anything in return" (Ollero 2019). The fact that the man wears a dark red rose thus signifies how he also possesses such qualities. The man is shown as someone who has endless love and passion – an individual who is capable of giving and nurturing. This interpretation is in line with the fact that he is an adult who is expected to be able to provide support and be responsible for others.

The last detail that can be seen from the man is his gesture. In the picture, he is shown to carry a black baby girl in his right hand and hold the baby's hand using his left hand. The word 'carry' means "to support the weight of someone or something and take them or it from place to place; to take someone or something from one place to another" (Carry 2020) while the word 'hold' means "to support something" (Hold 2020). The fact that the man carries a baby means that he supports the baby. This can happen as the man is an adult who is perceived to be more capable of providing support for others. The gesture of the man in the picture thus shows that he is the more powerful and dominant of the two.

Overall, based on the analysis above, it can be seen how the man in the picture is constantly depicted as important, superior, and dominant. This is very much different from the second signifier – the black baby girl – that is discussed in the next section.

4.2. Analysis of 2nd Signifier: A Black Baby Girl Carried by a White Man

In this section, a semiotic analysis is conducted on the 2nd signifier, which is the black baby girl on the ad. The first thing that is discussed is the information value or the placement of the black baby girl. Information value is a concept specifying that "the role of any particular element in the whole will depend on whether it is placed on the left or on the right, in the centre or the margin, or in the upper or the lower part of the picture space or page" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996, 177). Horizontally, the baby girl's position is on the right side of the man or the left side frame of the ad. Vertically, the baby is also positioned at the central part, similar to the man's position, on the ad. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), there are different cultural meanings when an object is being placed on the right or the left sides, which is called the 'given-new' structure. The elements that are placed on the left are called "given", which represents the elements that are familiar and agreed upon by the readers. Meanwhile, the elements that are placed on the right side represent something new that is not yet known, of which the readers or the viewers need to pay special attention. Furthermore, the elements put on the top and at the center also have their signification. The top, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), refers to 'the ideal', while the central to 'the marginal'. The ideal is the elements that are

presented as idealized or essential information representing the most noticeable ideologies of the ads, while the central position represents the elements that belong or are subservient to the other elements.

Based on that structure, the position of the baby on the left side of the ad thus signifies a familiar element of which presence is no longer questioned, is taken for granted, and does not need any special attention from the readers. Moreover, the central position of the baby means that it signifies the marginal position that it 'belongs to' or is 'subservient' to the other elements of the ad, which, in this case, is none other than the white man carrying the baby. Furthermore, the black baby girl only takes a small portion of the ad, which demonstrates a sense of insignificance, and that is in line with how she is being positioned in the ad. Thus, based on the information values of the ad, the black baby girl's position signifies the insignificant, subservient, and marginalized part of the ad as if she is a mere object without any agency.

The fact that the 2nd signifier is a baby can also be read semiotically. Using babies or children is a common practice in advertising as they are considered to be a useful "vehicle to create both rational and emotional appeal for different target audience" (Kinsey 1987, 169–170). According to Tian (2017), children or babies are generally recognized as the personification of innocence or purity in cultures across the world. However, according to Goffman (1985), in a family unit, mothers and children belong to the subordinate role within a family unit under the father figure. Thus, the fact that the ad uses a baby carried by an adult signifies a sense of subordination and high dependence on the man that carries her as he is more mature and knowledgeable.

The third detail about the baby is her physical attributes. The baby, with her dark skin, hair, and eyes, indicates that, in terms of ethnicity, she is of African descent. African descent or blacks are often associated with negativity. Media and history have long recorded how blacks often receive negative stereotypes. They are called mentally inferior or stupid, physically and culturally unevolved, described as savages and compared to an ape, are common practices (Green n.d.). Although these negative stereotypes have been challenged many times, still they have been taken as the truth by many, and they have been rooted so long that these negative images about the blacks linger until today.

The next thing about the baby to be discussed is her gender. It is clear that the sex of the baby is female, which is explicitly shown from the absence of a penis. Zotos and Tsihla (2014, 450) posited that, typically in advertising, "women have been more frequently shown in sexualized ways or as adopting body postures that suggest the need for protection." However, in this ad, the fact that the baby is shown as female and naked does not mean that she is represented as a sexual object, but it indeed illustrates a sense of dependency and the need for protection from the male figure that carries her. In a larger social context, such a display may signify the inability of females to function without males and the subordinate position of being female in a society that showcases "non-egalitarian attitudes and hierarchical patterns in the relationship between males and females" (Zotos et al. 2014, 447).

Furthermore, the next detail about the baby girl is that she is naked. The baby's nakedness exposes her dark skin, which relates to the negative associations mentioned earlier. According to Davis (1984), the clothing worn by a person signifies a personal choice of an individual that also serves as the index of sex, age, social status, occupation, group membership, personality, interests, values, and behavioral expectations. In other words, the purpose of wearing clothes is not merely to cover body parts but also to signify a certain position, value, and recognition in the society. Thus, for the black baby girl that is completely naked, the absence of clothing may signify the absence of social position, value, and recognition as an individual in society. A naked body, according to Case (2002), is showcasing "a demand for a change and an appeal to a given condition that social structures oppressed."

The black baby girl is also depicted as having a little white daisy placed on the side of her head. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2002), in the medieval period, the color white represented innocence and purity. It is in line with the symbolic meaning of the white daisy with a yellow center, which also symbolizes innocence and purity (FTD by Design 2016). The placement of such a small flower on the baby's head could signify her purity as a baby. However, at the same time, its small size may also signify the insignificance of her innocence and pure qualities.

In the ad, the baby girl is carried by the man. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, to carry somebody or something means "to support the weight of someone or something and take them or it from place to place; to take someone or something from one place to another" (Oxford University Press 2020). Thus, by definition, the black baby girl, who is being carried by the man, signifies the inability of a person to support oneself as she would be helpless without the man that carries her around.

Lastly, the focus is on the gesture that the baby makes. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), gestures and facial expressions are how the people in a picture make contact and create an imaginary relationship with the viewers. In the ad, the baby girl is shown to make a gesture of scratching the right side of her head using her right hand. According to Parvez (2015), the act of scratching the head with one or more fingers may indicate an emotional state of confusion. Thus, making such a gesture may signify her emotional confusion or lack of knowledge and understanding of the circumstances surrounding her.

4.3. Analysis of the 3rd Signifier: The White Background

In the ad, signifier no. 3 is the background that acts as some kind of canvas or backdrop for the models, especially the man, because the baby is positioned in such a way that it barely makes contact with the background except for one of her legs. The man's central position in the picture and his size, in comparison to the part of the visible background that frames his body, show that the man is the focus of attention of the ad as he occupies most of the background.

The color of the background is white, which is the same as the color of the man's shirt and skin. Owing to that, there is an impression that the man takes a larger space in the picture, which makes him even more significant. Furthermore, the fact that the color of the background is the same as the man's shirt and skin color also makes his existence seem more profound because white becomes the dominant color of the ad. The use of the white color in advertising is said to be associated with cleanliness and purity (Kramer 2019) and, as the dominating figure in this ad, the man becomes the embodiment of the two characteristics: clean and pure.

4.4. Comparing and Contrasting the Signifiers

Having analyzed all the signifiers of the advertisement, a striking contrast is apparent between signifiers 1 and 2. The first contrast can be seen from the position and the size of the man and the baby in the ad. It can be concluded that the man occupies a larger area of the picture and is positioned at the center, while the baby is obviously smaller in comparison to the man and positioned on the left side of the picture. This indicates a level of importance as the man is considered a more prominent figure in the ad, while the baby is insignificant and marginalized. This leads to the idea that the man is more dominant and superior than the baby.

The next contrast can be derived from the race, age, and gender of the two models in the ad. The first is a male, Caucasian adult, while the second is a female, African descent baby. Based on the analysis of the detail in the previous section, these contrasts create the binary opposition of male vs female, white vs

black, and adult vs baby. History, social construction, and hierarchy have a role in determining the meaning of each attribute of the binary opposition. Thus, the result of this opposition is the idea of male superiority and domination, embodied by the white adult in contrast with the female inferiority and subservience of the black baby. Moreover, the idea of dependency and subordination of the female, black baby to the male, and the white adult can also be concluded from this contrast.

The same idea becomes apparent through the next contrast as the man is depicted as wearing clothes, while the baby is naked. The fact that the man is wearing a white shirt (which emphasizes his being white and cultured), while the baby is naked (which highlights her black skin and her being uncivilized) further emphasizes the contrast between them. The dark skin of the baby is more pronounced due to her proximity to the white man that carries her. The contrast in terms of black and white skin between the 1st and the 2nd signifiers is intentional, and it demonstrates a process that Franz Fanon (2008, 84) identifies as the 'White Gaze'. According to Fanon, the white gaze is a process where black people in media are weaved of their personal identity and being limitedly portrayed as 'the others' in relation to the white people. By being the receiving end of such gaze, the persons are subjected to the associations that come with the blackness of their skin, which "defined by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders..." (Fanon 2008). When such a concept is applied to this ad, it becomes apparent that the black baby is stripped of her individuality and, instead, is defined as 'the others' only by the display of her black skin. The dark skin, in this case, does not only define her outward appearance but also signifies the negative racial connotations between the Whites (the European) and the Blacks (the African), which historically revolves around "power struggles over political and social rights...a bitter legacy of lynching, discrimination, segregation, and other racial violence that the general population actively seeks to forget" (Wissinger 2012, 7). Again, the idea of inequality between the whites and the blacks can be concluded from this contrast. The man is superior and sophisticated in comparison with the baby, who is inferior and ignorant.

The ad then pictures the man wearing a red rose and carrying the baby in comparison with a white daisy on the baby and the fact that she is being carried by the man. These two are contradictory in meaning and implication. The man, wearing a red rose and carrying a baby, indicates loving, nurturing, and supporting characteristics, while the baby, wearing a white daisy and being carried by the man, indicates innocence and a need for support. In a stronger sense, these contrasts, again show the domination and supremacy of the white man over the black baby, who is dependent and helpless. All of these are strengthened with one last detail of the picture, which is the hand gesture of both models. The man is depicted holding the baby's hand, which indicates helping, supporting, and showing directions, while the baby's other hand is positioned as if she is scratching her head, a gesture universally accepted as indicating confusion and being in need for support.

While the 1st and 2nd signifiers need to be compared and contrasted to show the apparent idea of the supremacy of white over black, as well as male over female, the 3rd signifier simply strengthens the very ideas. The white background emphasizes the figure dominating the picture and, without a doubt, the white man is indeed the dominant and the central attention of the ad. This can be read as making the man's presence in the ad even more important and significant.

5. CONCLUSION

United Colors of Benetton or UCB has a long history of unique, one-of-a-kind advertisements. Famous for its controversial way of advertising its products, the company - through its ads - has made its standpoint very clear on some important issues, such as humanity, gender, and race equality, as well as other social political

issues in the world. The campaign of UCB Spring Summer 2018 collection is no exception. The ads for that particular collection are supposed to support equality between gender and among ethnic groups and races.

One particular image in the series of photographs used in the campaign stands out because it can be read as delivering an entirely different message. Based on the findings mentioned in the discussion above, it can be concluded that the particular photograph contains messages which indeed deny the very concept of the campaign and also the vision of Benetton as the company.

The three signifiers discussed from the photograph support the very message about the white dominance over the black, and also male domination over female, as can be seen from the position of the objects, the choice of race and gender of the adult and the baby, the color scheme, and other detail, such as the flower on their heads, their choice of attires, their hand gestures, etc. The word dominance itself definitely connects to the idea of the existence of inequality in terms of race and gender. It is clearly seen from what is signified that this photograph connotes and accentuates the idea of white and male supremacy. This is definitely against the message that the producers of the campaign would like to convey, and this shows how an object can convey a totally opposite meaning from what is intended.

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