

**POSTMODERN ADVERTISING:  
NEW ADVERTISING APPROACHES in the POSTMODERN ERA<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article investigates postmodern advertising in a critical way. In this context, firstly the term of postmodernism is discussed and tried to be explained. The article argues that, new postmodern era affects advertising industry and new advertising approaches are taken into consideration in this process. This study can be defined as a descriptive study which tries to explain postmodern advertising and its relation with consumerism and consumer culture by giving examples of new advertising approaches. The study emphasizes that the evident area of advertising can be shown in TV commercials but in postmodern era, new advertising approaches like viral advertising, social media advertising and neuromarketing become one of the main advertising areas. In this study, the literature review of the concept of postmodern advertising is done and the new advertising approaches are discussed.

**Keywords:** Postmodernism, Advertising, Consumerism and Consumer Culture, TV Commercials, New Advertising Approaches.

**ÖZET**

Makale, postmodern reklam olgusunu eleştirel bir tarzda incelemektedir. Bu kapsamda öncelikle postmodernizm kavramı tartışılarak açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Makale, yeni postmodern dönemin reklamcılık endüstrisini etkilediğini ve bu süreçte yeni reklam yaklaşımlarının dikkat çekmeye başladığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu çalışma, postmodern reklamı açıklamaya çalışan ve postmodern reklamın tüketimcilik ve tüketim kültürü ile bağlantısını açıklamaya çalışarak; yeni reklam yaklaşımları ile ilgili örnekler vermeyi amaçlayan tanımlayıcı-betimleyici bir çalışma olarak nitelendirilebilmektedir. Makale, reklamın belirgin bir şekilde TV reklamları üzerinden görülebileceğini, ancak postmodern dönemde viral reklam ve sosyal medya reklamcılığı ve nöropazarlama gibi yeni reklam yaklaşımlarının ana reklam alanlarından biri haline gelmeye başladığına dikkat çekmektedir. Bu çalışmada, postmodern reklam olgusuna yönelik literatür araştırması yapılarak yeni reklam yaklaşımları tartışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Postmodernizm, Reklam, Tüketimcilik Ve Tüketim Kültürü, TV Reklamları, Yeni Reklam Yaklaşımları.

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*'Barnum's genius lay not in discovering how easy it is to fool the public,  
but rather in how much the public loved to be fooled.'*

*Daniel Boorstin (Baudrillard, 1999:93)*

## **INTRODUCTION: THE FEATURES OF POSTMODERNISM**

This research which is examining postmodern advertising, consists of four basic parts. In this context, firstly postmodernism and postmodern advertising terms will be discussed. Secondly, advertising and its relation with consumerism and consumer culture theme will be investigated. Then, TV commercials and new advertising approaches will be mentioned in details. In new advertising approaches part of the article; viral advertising, social media advertising and neuromarketing applications will be examined by giving specific examples on the subject. This study mainly emphasizes on that; in postmodern era, both consumers and advertising methods have been changed.

In order to understand these new methods, postmodernism should be analyzed at first. The idea of postmodernism could be described in different ways. Postmodernism could be defined both as a new dimension of modernity or defined as some kind of a break and new period. Postmodernity is a term/concept where there are no rules only choices, no fashion only fashions. This new period can be defined as a place where someone *"listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and retro clothes in Hong Kong."* (Lyotard, 1984: 76).

Postmodern marketing could be characterized by five main themes: hyper reality, fragmentation, reversed production and consumption, decentered subjects and the juxtaposition of opposites. Hyper reality involves the creation of marketing environments that are "more real than real". The distinction between reality and fantasy is blurred. As fragmentation theme of postmodern marketing, consumption in postmodernity could be defined as fast, fleeting, hyperactive. This circumstance is partly attribute to the activities of marketers with their brands, ever-burgeoning channels of distribution, commercial breaks and make use of every available surface as an advertising space. The prototypical "postmodern consumer" performs a host of roles; wife and mother, career woman, sports enthusiast, fashion victim, internet avatar and many more. Postmodern consumers, could be thought as active players in the production of meaning, of marketing, of consumption. As we think reversal of production and consumption theme of postmodern marketing; postmodernism is basically a culture of consumption, while modernism represents a culture of production. Also in postmodernism, consumers are active producers of symbols and signs of consumption, as marketers are (Brown, 2008: 22-24).

Also, the centeredness that is characteristic of modernity, where individuals are defined by their occupation, social class, demographics, personalities and so on changed in postmodern era. In postmodern marketing approach, radical juxtaposition of the mixing and matching of opposites, by combinations of contradictory styles, motifs and allusions (Brown, 2008: 24). As a result of decentered subjects theme of postmodern marketing, subject oriented theme affects every area. Postmodern individual finds himself/herself as a subject rather than an object. New postmodern consumer can also be defined as someone who gains identity through consumption.

In contemporary era of marketing, the other remarkable changes are defined as “co-creation of meaning” and “retrospective view”. As retrospective view; retro goods and services and old fashioned brands are all around, ancient commercials are re-broadcast and so on. As a result of this, another contemporary theme is ‘retro’ advertising- which could be defined as the re-hashing, re-contextualization of old ads and old cultural representations.

Nostalgia is one of the features of postmodern styles. Earlier genres and styles have been recycling in new contexts such as in film-TV genres, clothing and hairstyles. History is represented by nostalgic images of pop culture and fantasies of the past. Historical representations have combined with nostalgia and history has become one of the main features.

Another feature of postmodernism is the disappearance of the sense of history and the people of new era is living in an eternal present time. Furthermore, in this period, culture changes quickly, so as a result of this, time and history replaced by speed, futureless and accelerated old styles. This endless change results in such a process that not only it wipes out the traditions but also it becomes the reason for the media serving as a mechanism to make us forget our historical values. Although our sense of history destroyed in postmodern era, we also became more interested in nostalgia and older styles rather than in previous times. These circumstance could be thought as a result of emotion oriented postmodern adverts.

## **1. A POSTMODERN VIEW of ADVERTISING**

To understand the nature of contemporary society and examine the changes in our culture in postmodern world, advertisements play a significant role in the market. In postmodern marketing, pleasures and desires become important instead of requirements. So, postmodern advertisements mostly promote images rather than products. It can be asserted that we face with the transformation of reality into images. We live in an age that the real and the represented are getting unclear and mostly advertisements reflect this confusion. Although in modernity, certain borders between the subjectivity and the real world were one of the main features, this border falls apart in postmodernity. De-differentiation has become the regulatory rule of the contemporary world.

Also contrary to modernity, postmodernism takes its roots from figural meanings that “the image” has a priority and spectators deeply involve in objects, examine them with desire and enjoying this condition. Moreover, it is important to note that the term postmodern has become a cliché. It is now beyond the academic discourses and has turned into a new theme as in postmodern marketing (Richards, MacRury and Botteril, 2000: 101). Especially, advertising is seen as the center of social change in postmodern theme because of its effects on everyday life.

The postmodern advertising tries to provide illusions of individualism through images. Furthermore, it defines possible subject positions and creates desired positions. Many people try to become the cool, sexy or desired person. Baudrillard claims that, not only our world is confused but also the signs have become our reality. More importantly signs are more real than the reality itself because images no longer have any connection with they are actually supposed to represent (Downing and Bazargan, 1991: 30).

As an influential factor on everyday culture, postmodern centers suggest that shopping is a pleasure, not an obligational experience. In advertising, the classical marketing approach has changed and “this product is good, buy it”- is almost unheard of these days. Contemporary commercials are invariable sly, allusive, indirect, clever, parodic, self-referential (ads about ads), cross referential (ads that cite other cultural forms-soap operas, movies etc.) and made with expensive, semi-cinematic production values. In addition to the change of advertising process, in new postmodern era, consumer and advertising approaches also changed and emphasized on individuality more than ever (Brown, 2008: 21).

In postmodern advertising, messages from the adverts are almost unclear and they mostly emphasize on emotions and symbolic meanings.

## **2. ADVERTISING and ITS RELATION WITH CONSUMERISM and CONSUMER CULTURE**

The 20th century provided the basis for the rediscovery of the consumer and the emergence of the concept of mass consumption. The 19th century was the age of the producers, and the 20th century and beyond is the age of the consumers; everyone is involved in this process as a consumer.

The third world was considered just as a market for western goods in modernity. The expectation from the third world people was only to buy goods: fast foods, high technology, professional aid and services. They were encouraged to change their lifestyle by gaining the understanding of buying more. However, the requirement has shifted in postmodern era. Emphasis is on the abandonment of all the things which give meaning to people’s lives. The expectation is different now; it’s not enough to throw away just values but also their identity, attachment to history, families and people have to be given up (Sardar, 1998: 140).

It could be said that consumer culture is produced by agents who work directly in the corporate economy as managers, marketers and advertising creatives, by independent brokers who analyze and criticize consumer products; and by dissidents who initiate alternative responses to the mass consumption system (Zukin and Maguire, 2004: 175). If we try to understand new consumerism idea, these two questions could be useful to understand new situation: “How do consumers begin to desire new consumer goods or fashions?” and “when do they stop desiring them and replace them with others?” At this point advertising takes an important role to change the understanding of people by using its effects on the production and especially consumerism. Also, advertising plays a significant role in the production of the symbols and images. The promotion and marketing of goods have also become an essential part other than the four factors of the profit –generation labor, capital, technology and resource-, because the symbols and images dominate the social life recently (Richards, MacRury and Botteril, 2000: 102).

Moreover, advertising can be defined as product promoting process or as a service to the audiences with the help of prepared sales messages. In the process of globalization, consumers could make choice from different options in their decision process. So, it can be said that in contemporary postmodern world, differences became so important and advertisements emphasize on “differences” more in nowadays. In order to disclose these differences, advertisements mostly emphasize on people’s *emotions* rather than giving information about the product or service.

The purpose of the advertisements can be defined as a phase that improve, modificate or reinforce the attitudes towards purchasing behavior. From a different perspective, advertising can also be defined as a process for creating needs for certain products or services. Important elements of a successful advert can be described as; repeating visual messages, creating interest for a specific brand for purchasing behavior and influencing people by emphasizing on their emotions. So, because of these reasons, advertisements promise great things and give big words to their audiences.

The change in the 1900s and 2000s can be defined that people become dependent on credits to get what they do not need. “Buy now pay later” approach or shopping with credit cards, changed the consumer behavior and its scale. The term of consumption changed and has new meanings in postmodern era. Towards the end of the 20th century, in addition to products and services; feelings and experiences also started to be included in the field of consumption. In this new kind of society, properties or things became important, not in the scope of what they work, but in how they make us feel (Trentmann, 2016: 405, 424, 2-3, 320-321).

Postmodern marketplace is not only connected with producing goods but also producing consumers. Therefore, the need for more specialized information about the consumer is demanded by the producers.

In new contemporary postmodern era, identities and lifestyle theme became important in consumer behavior. Issues of identity and consumption converge in the concepts of “taste” and “lifestyle”, that is systems of practices through which individuals categorize themselves by their classification of consumer goods as more or less desirable, acceptable, or valuable (Bourdieu: 1984: 169-175). Bourdieu’s work could remain useful for its emphasis on the role of “cultural intermediaries”-which can be represented in media, marketing, advertising, tourism, fashion and other forms of providing symbolic goods or services.

Furthermore, history, tradition and community are the main determinants that shape the identity in traditional societies. All of these are tried to be changed by postmodernism with a new source: consumer products. Shopping has become a cultural experience. People go out and buy things in order to form their identities and it is considered as to complete the self. Consumer objects gain their meaning according to the way of their advertising in the market. More importantly postmodern consumerism transfers the meaning of old sources such as history, tradition and community to consumer products (Sardar, 1998: 138).

Baudrillard maintained that, in contemporary societies consumption has triumphed over production. Post-industrial societies are different from preceding ones because in new contemporary world, it can be said that meanings gained autonomy through the manipulation of mass media and advertising campaigns. Baudrillard (2015: 15) also argues that in postmodern era humans are “surrounded not by people but by objects”. According to Baudrillard’s consumption analysis, material culture could be defined as a system of signs which refers to each other and gain their meanings only in relation to each other, and which must be used by consumers, even involuntarily.

Today’s consumption society is connected with the culture of throwing away instead of repairing and saving. Baudrillard (2015: 40) identified this situation with this quotation: “tell me what you throw away and I will tell you who you are!”

According to the mass consumption goods market, consumer lose influence and become passive actors in the market. Hence the consumer is, without creating an impact over producers, exposed to the company policy. Because the consumer does not have an influence over the market decisions, the consumer has only one alternative to choose from predetermined products (Addis and Podesta, 2005: 391).

### **3. TV COMMERCIALS**

When television advertising is examined, we can easily realize the creation of new culture: the 20-second cinematic production and it is composed of dancing, singing and characters accomplish everything that they desire with the help of the product. Also the entire commercial is full of images, music and other dynamic elements.

Moreover, commercials contain digital images like talking cars, dancing credit cards, singing animals and so on. These can also be thought as a result of image creation process of postmodernism. In postmodern era not only brands and products, but also individuals are their own image makers and these digital images could be thought as a part of the illusion of image control. The sense of life as celebration is the most common version of the commercials. Consumer culture can offer the good life as an endless party by showing wonderful lives and its main aim is to show what life can be if we buy the product.

Commercials try to give an understanding to viewer that they can run away from the stresses of everyday life. But at the end; the ultimate aim of the commercials is about what the product will allow consumers to achieve. Therefore, fantastic and desired worlds are created in which everything turn into digitally manipulated images (Sanes, 2017).

TV advertisements mostly give us another variation of life by offering false promises that make everything seem better than it is. Also, TV advertising creates such a virtual world that everybody starts to think about the idea of “the products of technology can free us”. Postmodern advertisements separate all the cultural differences and release them in a floating place which Baudrillard calls that hyper reality, in which they are combined with the products. TV advertisements are still in a change and especially a crucial change occurred in the strategy of the advertisers over the years. As opposed to direct promotion of the products, advertisements in postmodern world involve more about the cultural representations and less about the product itself (Woods, 1999: 196).

About TV and TV commercials, Baudrillard (2014: 78) claimed that TV represents a model of daily life which destroys our linkage between reality and its representation. TV commercials especially in postmodern times, do not tell anything about the features of the products or services they promote. In order to do this, ads mostly emphasize on scares, dreams and desires of the consumers. The content in adverts mostly emphasizes on the features of the consumer and tries to represent them as more beautiful or successful than they actually are. For example, in a McDonald’s ad, content in the ad does not relies on a tested and logical arguments. Instead of that, good looking people buy and eat hamburgers. The distance between rationality and adverts are so far that it’s hard to remember at first there has been a linkage between them. In adverts, we could rarely see propositions about features of the product or service and we could not see ugly people either (Postman, 2010: 144-145). All of the people from adverts are confidential, good looking and successful. As we mentioned before, postmodern adverts mostly emphasize on the feelings and emotions of consumers.

## 4. NEW ADVERTISING APPROACHES

### 4.1. Viral Advertising and Social Media Advertising

New communication technologies and especially social media offers a different and new platform for the public relations and advertising industry. Nowadays, many companies communicate with their advertising and promotional campaigns through these tools. They sometimes provide social media integration in advertisements which they already published through traditional media channels.

New communication technologies offer the advertising industry opportunities to create consumer loyalty and to ensure that advertising is seen by more people at less cost. Social media advertising and viral marketing can be explained as one of the main differences in advertising in the postmodern era. User-generated content in social media which can be described as user participation in the professional content production process and / or user publication on various platforms on the internet by producing content, has been used intensively by the advertising industry in recent years. As part of this, viral advertising especially broadcasts on web and in video format.

Social media refers to internet based resources which allows user participation. In social media, users are also thought as content producers. (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, wiki, blogs etc...) Social media channels can be classified by 4 different categories. First category can be defined as social networking sites like Facebook or LinkedIn. Other category of social media can be defined as microblogging sites like Twitter. Another classification of social media can be named as photo sharing sites like Instagram or Pinterest. Last but not the least the other category of social media platform can be defined as video sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo. So, viral advertisements can have access to their audiences mostly from these platforms. Using social media could be useful for brands to reach their target group and promote their products or services.

Advertising is traditionally defined as “paid persuasive communication that uses non-personal mass media to reach broad audiences to connect an identified sponsor with a target audience” (Wells, Moriarty and Burnett: 2006). But when advertising becomes viral, it changes some of its traditional properties. While traditional advertising is non-personal, viral advertising is highly personal. The content of viral advertising is intended to be shared among trusted sources such as friends and family; so, viral advertising aims for personal recommendations. Viral advertising might use the elements of mass communication, however its main medium is the internet (Kurultay, 2012: 40).

Viral advertising is mainly applied in video format on the internet. In viral advertising, content usually created as user-generated. These advertisements reach their target audience through social networks and also give opportunity to share the content to their target group. With the help of this, advertisements can be displayed more than in mass media tools.

In viral ads, user generated content is shared voluntarily by its target audience. With the help of new communication technologies and especially social media channels, in postmodern ads, brands could interact with their target audience and take their attention more quickly and effectively. Advantages to use viral advertising could be specified by these main areas: a condition to create low costs for the market, a potential to reach large scale of target market and a process to help producers for building up their brand.

In contemporary world, advertising campaigns could be seen in both mass media channels and new advertising areas. Nowadays, adverts are everywhere and an advert campaign could be prepared by both for traditional mass media channels and new advertising platforms. For example, Nescafe's advertising campaign which published in 2015 in Turkey called #kahvenialgel, firstly published in traditional media channels as a TV commercial. This ad campaign started with the idea of "I have 500 friends in Facebook but how many of them are really friends?" In this context, face of the campaign visits his Facebook friends with two coffee mugs. He shares the responses of the visitors and videos related to the subject from the relevant social media accounts of the brand. At the same time, consumers are directed to the social media page of the campaign theme (#kahvenialgel) and consumers are kept interested in the issue. Another successful viral advertising example in Turkey is Turkish Airlines Miles and Smiles' Unbelievable Proposal (İnanılmaz Evlenme Teklifi) which published in 2011. This advert was about a young man who is travelling to 14 countries with his free miles and videotaping locals to say phrases in Turkish in order to give a message to his girlfriend, asking her to marry him. These examples can explain how advertising industry changed and was integrated with social media channels.

#### **4.2. Neuromarketing (Using Neuroscience in Advertising)**

For the first time word of "neuromarketing" was coined by Ale Smidts in 2002 (Lewis and Darren, 2005). But, the term "neuromarketing" cannot be attributed to a particular individual. Because basically what neuromarketing is to marketing is similar to what neuropsychology is to psychology. While neuropsychology studies the relationship between the brain and human cognitive and psychological functions, neuromarketing promotes the value of looking at consumer behavior from a brain perspective. Neuromarketing is an emerging field that bridges the study of consumer behavior and marketing with neuroscience. Neuromarketing offers cutting edge methods for directly probing minds without requiring demanding cognitive or conscious participation (Morin, 2011: 131-132). Neuroscience is used mostly in medicine, psychology, psychiatry and nowadays it can be used for social sciences especially in marketing. Neuromarketing is an emerging interdisciplinary field that combines psychology, neuroscience and economics. Neuromarketing could be defined as "the application of neuroscientific methods to analyze and understand human behavior in relation to markets and marketing exchanges".

The application of neuroscience can provide a basis of understanding how humans create, store, recall and relate information as they do with a mark in daily lives. It would also be possible to discover whether some aspects of marketing activities trigger negative effects such as consumerism (Campero and Hernandez, 2013: 524).

Neuromarketing is used for a better understanding and a measurement of consumer's preference about products. The knowledge of consumer's preference is needed because it affects the marketing campaigns focused more on the brain's response by creating product and services (Roebuck, 2012). However, customers do not always know what they want and the knowledge of consumer's preference is one of the most difficult situation to get by the marketers. Therefore, the process of transforming customers' needs into saleable products becomes more crucial in the market. In order to understand the consumers' decision making process, management in companies or public policy makers emerge as a necessity to develop strategies to maximize its effects on consumers (Mamaghani and Zong, 2013: 1245).

In order to develop a crucial strategy for the market, research methods turn into a providing information mechanisms from the human brain activity. This happened because people does not always know what they want exactly when they asked. However, the process operating below the level of conscious awareness directs and guides the human behavior. (Calvert and Brammer, 2012: 38-41). Therefore, different marketing strategies emerged to monitor brain activities of consumer.

The first scholarly piece of neuromarketing research was performed by Read Montague, Professor of Neuroscience at Baylor College of Medicine in 2003 and his research was published in *Neuron* in 2004. The study asked a group of people to drink either Pepsi or Coca Cola while their brains were scanned in an fMRI machine. Dr. Montague failed to provide a rationale for how our brain handles brain choices. The study revealed that different parts of the brain light up if people are aware of or not aware of the brand they consume. The study suggested that a strong brand such as Coca Cola has the power to own a piece of our frontal cortex. So, according to the study, when people know they are drinking Coca Cola, they actually say they prefer the Coke brand over Pepsi. However, when they don't know which brand they are consuming, they report that they prefer Pepsi instead (Morin, 2011: 132). These research findings are still using in Pepsi advertisements even in local areas. So, it could be definitely said that consumers are not rational in their purchasing behavior. In this process, they are mostly influenced by their emotions and brand loyalty.

Advertising research suggests the use of four key constructs as indicators of ad message effectiveness: attention, emotion, memory and preference (Shapiro and Krishnan, 2001). To measure these key elements, using neuroscience facts such as eye tracking could be useful for advertising researchers.

Michel Foucault's comment about TV as a means of reprogramming popular memory explained the importance of memory and the consumers brain activity: "*people are shown what they were but what they must remember having been...since memory is a very important factor in struggle...if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles.*" (Foucault, 1996, p. 124).

## CONCLUSION

The world has entered a new, different, historical epoch. The traditional ways of working, producing and consumption have changed. Recently advertising has a strong and effective role in this new world. Also, postmodern cultural theory emphasizes that advertising has entered a new period. It is based on signs and symbols because rather than the object itself they had gained an importance in the creation of marketing environments. The reality based on simulation constructed by the human imagination. Aim of the advertising is no longer to hide the commodity aesthetic but rather aim is to change the object itself into a symbolic meaning. It can be seen that many advertisements no longer underline communication or information about the products; they have turned into a commodity themselves.

*"If politics is about the transformation of the nation to an ideal state, then advertising is about the transformation of you, offering the promise of prestige and self-esteem, control over your life, luxury and good times, and a work-free existence."* (Sanes, 2017)

Advertisements have a huge effect on human life and its effect can be seen all over the world. Although there are many cultures and values throughout the world, advertisements have almost the same effects in every culture. Furthermore, in postmodern advertising the impressions of the signs and symbols can be realized easily.

In today's consumer society, consumption is made on behalf of symbolic values such as gaining prestige, having difference, belonging to a group, identity and image acquisition. Also, consumers of the consumer society, consume not the products but the symbols and indicators. According to this perspective, each consumption object could be thought as an indicator or symbol. If we think the phenomenon of postmodernism; it can be described not only as a new dimension of modernity but also as a new period that begins with modernity. Postmodern consumption approach refers to an approach focused on consuming signs or images in the minds of consumers which can also be defined as symbolic consumption. In postmodern era, brand images and simulations rather than reality became the main idea in advertising process. So, in postmodernism advertising process and advertising channels are changed too. In postmodern period, consumers change and individualize. As a result of that, more detailed and differentiated target groups for the consumption objects have occurred in the market. In the new contemporary world, people are surrounded by objects rather than other people.

We live in a new, postmodern era. This new process can be defined as an age of simulacra and simulations. As Baudrillard (2014: 15, 37) claimed, in this new period, simulations can be defined as an approach which tries to enable the difference between “reality” and “fake”, or “reality” and “imagination”. So, as part of this, reality become blurred and everything seems like “a copy of a copy” and our relationship between reality and fake abolish. To explain this new period of time Baudrillard also claim that “there is not such a thing as an illusion because there is no more reality, reality disappear”.

As a quotation from Brecht “if everything is in a mess, there is an irregularity prevails over there, but if “things” are not in the place where they ought to be, there is an order”. The irregularity of postmodernism opens new approaches and new perspectives to advertising. As a result of this, not only TV commercials but also new advertising approaches such as viral advertising and social media advertising, neuromarketing become the main theme of new times. In postmodern times ads use more hidden ways and promote images rather than reality itself. But as we can see from the study, the ways or approaches of the adverts can change, however their all aim is, as a part of the consumerism and consumer culture, to sell more.

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