

2010

Save Africa: The commodification of (PRODUCT) RED campaign

Cindy N. Phu

California State University, Los Angeles, cindynphu@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope>

Recommended Citation

Phu, Cindy N. (2010) "Save Africa: The commodification of (PRODUCT) RED campaign," *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research*: Vol. 9 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope/vol9/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Save Africa: The commodification of (PRODUCT) RED campaign

Cindy N. Phu

California State University, Los Angeles

cindynphu@gmail.com

Through messages of romanticized consumption, consumers are encouraged to buy into the (PRODUCT) RED Campaign to help stop the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa. This research examines the (PRODUCT) RED campaign through a critical rhetorical analysis that questions whether (PRODUCT) RED substitutes consumerism for social activism. Simultaneously, it explores the resistance waged by Buyllesscrap.com, and challenges the subversion tactics to hegemonic corporations taking advantage of the maker/buyer disjunction. John Fiske's ideologies of consumerism and Stuart Hall's theories of negotiation reveals that capitalizing on humanitarian efforts further marginalizes communities that are already disparaged by increasing the "GAP" between consumer mentality and campaign strategies.



"We can make a difference. You can help" is the slogan that is used on Gap's (PRODUCT) RED campaign and can be found on their website and stores nationwide. They claim that "Gap (PRODUCT) REDTM is about great products that can help make a difference for Africa. As a global partner of (PRODUCT) RED, we're contributing half the profits from Gap (PRODUCT) RED sales to the Global Fund to help women and children affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa." The notion that

individuals must become consumers of their Gap (PRODUCT) RED in order for them to help make a social difference contains many social implications that need to be explored further. Also, the impacts of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign warrant a more in depth investigation. The (PRODUCT) RED campaign, according to the New York Times of February 6, 2008 was started by rock star Bono and has changed the Treatment and Research AIDS Center in Rwanda, Africa. The revenue generated from the (PRODUCT) RED campaign has allowed doctors to spend more time on research to slow down the HIV transmission. Before the campaign, doctors were faced with a lack of resources in dealing with these issues.

In addition, The Sunday Times (London) of March 11, 2007, announced that "Like it or not, people, and companies, find it easier to spend money on themselves than on charity and Bono has found a way to combine the two."

However, Ben Davis, founder of the San Francisco based website, Buylescrap.com, explores the option of excluding the capitalistic consumption ideology that is marketed in our society. They proclaim on their website “Join us in rejecting the ti(red) notion that shopping is a reasonable response to human suffering. We invite you to donate directly to the (RED) campaign’s beneficiary The Global Fund and to these other charitable causes... without consuming.” Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the (PRODUCT) RED campaign through a critical rhetorical analysis. To understand the impacts of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, it is equally significant to examine the relationship between the (PRODUCT) RED campaign and the resistance (Buylescrap.com) to the commodification of the ideology for charity or social responsibilities.



Research Questions

- 1) *Does the Product RED campaign substitute consumerism for social activism?*
- 2) *How does Buylescrap.com resist the Product RED campaign?*

Literature Review

Critical Rhetoric

Zompetti (1997) explains that there is a difference between rhetoric and critical rhetoric. Rhetoric allows a critic to “shed insight into the particular meanings of a given artifact, the critique of domination/freedom fails to account for the motivation of groups to struggle against hegemonic forces. Furthermore, such a critique does not offer a means towards transformative activity.” (Zompetti, 1997, p. 71). However, Zompetti (1997) contends that critical rhetoric is unique because it “asks the critic to take an interpretive position for the purpose of both understanding and political change... Critical rhetoric permits the critic—while engaged in constant self-reflexivity—a voice for sustained political action that is guided by telos. In this way, the critic can join others in the pursuit of liberation and/or resistance” (p. 7). Whereas rhetorical analysis critiques the artifact and informs the public of the potential hegemonic powers and the existence of marginalization; critical rhetoric allows the critic to engage in political actions for emancipation. A critical rhetorical analysis is required to analyze the Product Red Campaign because there needs to be a re-examination of consumerism as a means of social activism or social responsibilities.

Popular Culture

Culture, according to John Fiske (1989), is the “constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved” (p. 1). He further explains that culture making is never accomplished because it will always be a social process and is defined as a “constant succession of social practices” (p. 1). However, in reference to popular culture, Fiske (1989) believes that popular culture is created out of numerous “subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant” (p. 2). The belief that popular culture is about the constant struggles to make social meanings is crucial because it demonstrates the resistance of the subordinate group to redefine dominant ideologies to their own best interests.

Moreover, Stuart Hall argues that “containment and resistance” (Guins & Cruz, 2007, p. 65) is unavoidable and that Culture is connected to the popular and what it means to talk about popular culture. When referencing “popular,” he is referring to the excluded classes and oppressed culture. He claims that “basically what is wrong with it is that it neglects the absolutely essential relations of cultural power—of domination and subordination—which is an intrinsic feature of cultural relations” (Guins & Cruz, 2007, p. 67). Furthermore, he believes that interlinking culture and popular culture is what makes it meaningful. Hall contends that individuals should not leave the dominant ideologies uncontested. By challenging and dissecting its meaning, this may bring about new meanings, allowing us to resist the current social status. Essentially, having a new set of representations can redefine the politics that lies within the current representations. This will help prevent the commercial culture from maintaining the dominant ideologies of culture. Yet in terms of hegemony, Hall believes the battle is never won. There will always be dominant forces and classes trying to get subordinate groups to follow the culture leadership. However, the establishment is never final—the cultural leadership will always be contested, whether it is a dominant ethnicity or gender within the subordinate groups. Dominant groups will always attempt to control and negotiate to maintain the social power. Hall explains that the examination of the negotiation and influx between the dominant culture and the subordinated is essential and demands more attention.

Consumerism

Fiske (1989) explores the cultural impacts of how commodities are designed for the economic profit of their creator, which can potentially exploit the consumers. Yet it is revealed that despite all of the marketing tactics and strategies of their creator, it is still up to the consumers to choose which commodities they will employ in their culture (Fiske, 1989, p. 5). Within the economic power, there lies the existence of the social and hegemonic hierarchy

which dominates over the subordinate. Fiske examines the “attempts to control meanings, pleasures, and behaviors of the subordinate... popular culture has to accommodate them in a constant interplay of power and resistance, discipline and indiscipline, order and disorder” (Fiske, 1989, p. 5). It is the flux between the dominant power and subordinate power within the world of consumerism that warrants our attention—whether it is the commodities on display in shopping malls or the reflections of our cultural values displayed by the circulations of these commodities in our society.

Davis (2001) explains that “shopping now reaches into every corner of life, connecting people to the culture of capitalism in repetitive and daily ways. It not only offers things for us to buy, it teaches us how to imagine ourselves buying, owning, and being transformed by goods” (p. 163). It is this ideology that allows consumers to continue their consumption and major corporations to stay in the dominant realms of the hegemonic powers. Fiske (1987) explains that hegemony is when “one nation could exert ideological and social, rather than military or coercive, power over another” whereas other cultural theorists would define hegemony as the “process by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination” (p. 291). Shopping was not always a part of everyday life as it is today; major corporations had to create a need for their products and persuade consumers to want to purchase. Davis (2001) continues to explain that “Manufacturers and retailers responded to the need to capture new markets by inventing new needs for goods, by developing outlets on a vast scale, and by working hard to create new attitudes towards consumption” (p. 166). Furthermore, because of the new attitudes, “a new material and psychological world of consumer capitalism had arrived, wrapped in what were at first unfamiliar ideas” (p. 166).

Background of (PRODUCT) RED Campaign

According to their main website, joinred.com, there is a particular image that demonstrates the complexities of how the (PRODUCT) RED works in simplified form. The website flash contains a universal symbol of a man (color filled in black) with an arrow to a product indicating the first step. The first step requires the consumer to purchase (PRODUCT) RED, as the example illustration of a Dell laptop exemplifies. The second step shows the money going to The Global Fund, indicated by the red arrow with a dollar sign above pointing from the laptop to the words in red “The Global Fund.” This connection between the laptop, red arrow, and The Global Fund suggests that the proceedings (\$) from the purchase of the Product Red laptop will go to the nonprofit organization. The third step shows an identical arrow with a dollar sign above it directed towards two red and white medicinal pills. These pills represent the treatment, also known as the “Lazarus effect of anti-retroviral therapy” needed to help those suffering from HIV and AIDS. The

transparency. Such tensions are not uncommon within the rapidly growing business of cause-related marketing, which puts a corporation's advertising dollars behind a nonprofit's cause."

This marketing tactic is based on a win-win mentality for the producer (corporation), consumers, and the cause (in this case, Africa). First, the producers of this product will gain more revenues by making these "for a cause" commodities, marketed at a higher cost to guarantee their own profits. Second, the consumers will also gain self satisfaction with their purchases because they will be a part of the "help" to Africa. According to Fiske, consumers do not purchase for the sake of the dominant (corporations) power but as a means of personal choice and now with this campaign, it allows consumers to empower themselves through the means of consuming commodities to save lives in Africa. It is this ideology that allows the (PRODUCT) RED campaign to be so successful. With this in mind, (PRODUCT) RED campaign has increased the public's awareness of Africa's needs for assistance and allowed consumers to be a part of the help. Lastly, individuals in Africa will also gain by having more funding for medication to save more lives.

According to the Advertising Age of March 12, 2007, the (PRODUCT) RED campaign allows profits from the campaigns and partners to donate the money directly to the Global Fund to allow individuals "suffering from AIDS in Africa who count on the lifesaving medicine" a chance of surviving. Furthermore, this same article notes that "our partners have donated \$25 million directly to the Global Fund. That money goes straight to the Global Fund; it does not get funneled in any way through RED. It represents fully five times what the Global Fund was able to raise on its own in five years.



It is twice the amount Australia gave to the Fund in 2006 and 12 times the sum of China's contribution." However, Advertising Age still stood by their contradicting story that questions the actual allocation of the funds and profits of this campaign. They explain that through calculation and research of the marketing-spending numbers of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign (i.e. TV,

billboards, internet ads, in-store marketing materials, etc.), there was an estimated \$100 million spent on advertisements and about \$18 million in revenues.

Their slogan is "Buy (RED) Save Lives." According to the official (PRODUCT) RED website joinred.com, "In Year 2, (PRODUCT) RED passes the \$100 million mark for funds generated for The Global Fund." The companies that have joined the (PRODUCT) RED campaign and are recognized on their website as "brands that do the (RED) thing" are American Express, Apple, Converse, Dell, Emporio Armani, Gap, Hallmark, and Windows. Furthermore, on October 29, 2008, Starbucks joined the (PRODUCT)

RED campaign. Each partner of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign dedicates a different amount or percentages towards The Global Fund. For instance, American Express became one of the founding partners of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign in 2006. They have the (RED) credit card (only available in the UK), which gives 1% of the total spent directly to The Global Fund. With Gap, they contribute up to 50% of their profits on any Gap (PRODUCT) RED item. Furthermore, the official (PRODUCT) RED website states that “One (RED) PC purchase with windows vista ultimate could provide up to 6 months of life savings ARV medication for a person living with AIDS in Africa.”

The Independent (London) of March 9, 2007, has noted that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is too large of a problem to be solved on the individual level and that consumers would more likely opt to choose a (RED) Ipod rather than donate the price of an Ipod. This ideology has allowed consumers the choice of consuming for both themselves as well as saving Africa. The (PRODUCT) RED campaign has proven through numbers and results in Africa to be successful in generating profits (through consumer consumption) as well as upholding their social corporate responsibility. Furthermore, the article explains that (PRODUCT) RED has been a success since the dated article in 2007. They stated that:



The money **RED** has raised means that some 160,000 Africans will be put on life-saving anti-retrovirals in the coming months, orphans are being fed and kept in school in Swaziland and a national HIV treatment and prevention programme has begun in Rwanda. Some 99 per cent of funds raised go directly to life-saving schemes.

The United States anti-AIDS strategy, with strong personal backing from President George Bush, is now funded to the tune of \$15bn a year. The US Congress has just agreed a record \$724m donation to the Global Fund for 2007. It is all the result of concerted political pressure of which **Red**, with its constant advertising exposure of the message that “6,500 Africans died needlessly yesterday of a preventable and treatable disease” has been a key part.

The likelihood of consumers opting for a red product is higher, not only because the consumption is based on their own needs and values, but also is a means of social activism for change.

Application Analysis

Asongu (2007) explains that the RED campaign was designed to produce money through consumerism for the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria in Africa. Asongu further explains that there is a

correlation between branding and profits because the most accomplished companies have a strong “brand name” (p. 5). In the case of (PRODUCT) RED, there is an identity association between purchasing a product and helping people suffering in Africa. The brand and their concept are simple and obvious. If individuals were to purchase (PRODUCT) RED, then they are relying on the belief that they are doing a good deed for people in Africa rather than just falling into the materialistic consumerism culture. “All commodities are consumed as much for their meanings, identities, and pleasures as they are for their material function” (Fiske, 1989, p. 4). Furthermore, the identities of these products are recognized by other members of society as evidence that the consumer cares about the people suffering in Africa. It is also a representation of one’s character because the consumer may have opted to purchase a more expensive item knowing that some of the proceeds will benefit others. Davis (2001) explains that ideologies behind shopping and consumerism have been constructed to be interrelated. She states that “critical to the transition from self-restraint in an ethic of production to self-expression through consumption was the creation of new spaces of material and symbolic exchange, the modern institution of retailing.” (p. 166).

The Independent (London) of December 1, 2006, paints a happy ending of an eight-year-old child, Denyse Mushimiyimana. Denyse was diagnosed with HIV and fell into a comatose state. However, in three months time, she was back in her Rwandan school laughing and enjoying life with her friends. The article goes on to explain that with two pills a day, worth less than one US Dollar, AIDS does not have to be a “death sentence.” Denyse was an example of the “Lazarus effect of anti-retroviral therapy.” This is the result of rock star Bono and Bobby Shriver launching the RED Campaign that brought together companies to help fight the war against HIV and AIDS.

This begs the question, is it possible to support the war against HIV/AIDS without consumption of products sold by major corporations? Can individuals just donate money and time to this epidemic? The answer is “Yes.” Buyllesscrap.com announces on their webpage that “Shopping in not the solution. Buy (Less). Give more.” In the context of their announcement, the rhetorical choice of “Buy (Less)” is a direct confrontation of the Gap’s (PRODUCT) RED ads and campaigns. The website has numerous links to nonprofit organizations dedicated to various social issues and causes (including the Global Fund that the Product RED campaign generates funds for). Their mission statement is:

The mission of BUY (LESS) on an individual level is to provide a means for people to donate directly to charity, to remind them that this is the most efficient way to support a cause, and to inspire less consumption overall. On a policy level, our mission is to raise consumer awareness and provoke public discussion—resulting in explicit transparency standards, the adoption of best practices for

all cause-related marketing efforts, and leading to greater consumer confidence and more assured revenues streams for charity.

Furthermore, there are several images on the website that directly mock and critique the Gap's (PRODUCT) RED campaign. The Gap's (PRODUCT) RED campaign has many red shirts with white text including empowering positive words. These empowering words include the word RED in the word – however Gap made it an aesthetically purposeful choice in putting the word RED in parenthesis indicating its relations to the Product RED campaign. Examples of these words are “INSPI(RED),” “ADO(RED),” “ADMI(RED),” and many others that include the word “RED” in parenthesis. Gap has gathered many famous celebrities to help market their (PRODUCT) RED line by wearing Gap's (RED) products. These images of celebrities wearing the (PRODUCT) RED are displayed on commercials, on their website, in their stores, and many other marketing locations. The performance of this concept is to allow consumers to understand the greatness of this issue by involving celebrities. It rests on the notion that if famous celebrities are concerned, then as consumers, one should feel obligated to purchase a (RED) product because it is going to a good cause.

Furthermore, Fiske (1989) believes that “Shopping is the crisis of consumerism: it is where the art and tricks of the weak can inflict most damage on, and exert most power over, the strategic interests of the powerful” (p. 14). In relation to the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, this is a reflection of the social status of the consumers who are able to purchase these higher marked prices on Gap's (PRODUCT) RED clothing. These consumers then would wear these products to show the world that they identify with this issue and support the cause. If the message is that individuals need to become consumers in order to save Africa, then individuals that may not be able to afford these products may opt to purchase them anyway in order to represent the charitable trend. If the mentality is that charity is fashionable and trendy at a price, then individuals of low socio-economic status will be most impacted. However, in the case with Gap's (PRODUCT) RED, only 50 percent of the profits of Product RED items will go directly to The Global Fund. The rest of the money will still go to Gap because they are a corporation out to make a profit in our capitalistic society. It is imperative to note that although “profits” may have negative connotations; profits are a necessary part of any entrepreneurship as corporations need money to maintain their business.

If charity is fashionable then individuals that buy into this notion would wear these (PRODUCT) RED items as a means of sending the nonverbal message: “Look at me. I'm a good person because I purchased a (PRODUCT) RED item. I am saving Africa.” However, individuals may not be aware that The Global Fund specifically invests their resources in only a few countries in Africa, and not the entire continent of Africa. This becomes problematic because consumers may feel that Africa is saved because of their purchase, yet

in reality, only a limited number of countries are impacted by their purchase. The remainder of the countries in Africa remain invisible and do not receive the needed assistance.

Buylesscrap.com expresses their discontent with (PRODUCT) RED by mocking their advertisements. To demonstrate the meaninglessness in the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, buylesscrap.com used the (LESS) in meaningless to counter the (RED) in the (PRODUCT) RED campaign. The choice of using the word (LESS) has many connotations. First, (LESS) is derived from the word “meaningless,” which takes away the meaning and value of the issue. It focuses more of the attention on the consumption of the product rather than on saving lives in Africa. Second, (LESS) refers to The Global Fund receiving less in comparison to individual directly contributing funds to this organization. Purchasing to save lives only allots a certain percentage to The Global Fund (the percentage and actual amounts are ambiguous according to the major corporations). Third, the connotations of (LESS) can make the corporations appear to be lacking and even inferior because their good intentions are still lined with motives to make profits from these products.



In the counter-ads by Buylesscrap.com, the use of the parenthetical (RED) is framed in a negative way. Their catchphrases include “(RED)ICU(LESS),” “MEANING(LESS),” and “POINT(LESS).” These words are displayed, not on red shirts or celebrities, but on nude bodies of average people. The first image is of a naked woman standing and looking downwards with her eyes closed as if in shame. It is a black and white photo with a similar typography and layout as Gap’s Product RED campaign ads. The background is completely white and it almost appears as if she is suspended a mist of whiteness. Her arms cover her breasts and her hands cover her private area. The word in red “(RED)ICU(LESS)” is stamped across the ad just underneath her chest. The text “(RED)ICU(LESS)” appears in a faded, almost splotchy red tone. At the bottom right corner of the image is a red-color filled box with the word “CRAP” in white. This logo can be recognized as Gap’s logo with the difference in color and words. Despite everything, the woman in the ad is still very sexualized because of the outlines of her breasts and hips.

The second image is of a teenage African American male. This image only frames his upper body with his eyes directed straight into the camera. He is seen nude with an Afro. Furthermore, on the lower right hand corner, the same logo that imitates and ridicules the Gap's logo is present in the same red color tone as the word "MEANING(LESS)" is slapped across his chest. The background of the image is white which gives a nice contrast to the black and white image of the model. The distinct choice of choosing an African American model for this image is ironic since the Product RED campaign's beneficiary is Africa. Yet, here is an image of a youth healthy African American model on an Ad that counters the campaign. The irony of this juxtaposition of the healthy African American and the supposedly unhealthy Africa reveals a flux within the system.

The last image on the website is of a nude male. His ethnic background is unclear because he is facing away from the camera. His hair is clean cut and his body appears to be in shape and fit. The audience has the view of the male in a sitting position with his back facing the camera. His legs are crossed and his arms are rested on his knees – it almost looks like a meditative position. The background is dark and splotchy. The light source is coming from the top left which puts an emphasis on his left shoulder. This leads the viewer's eyes to the red words stating "POINT(LESS)" directly across his back. In the same red tone on the bottom right corner is the satirizing Gap/Crap logo. This male body is attractive because everything is symmetrical and his upper body muscles are obvious.

These three images on Buyllesscrap.com represent the micro resistance that Stuart Hall mentions in terms of opposing the hegemonic powers of consumerism. Hall developed his "preferred reading" theory that contains three social positions that individuals may consider to take in terms of reading the dominant text. These three social positions are dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Fiske (1987) explains that the dominant reading is for the viewer that agrees and accepts the dominant ideology and its subjectivity. A negotiated reading is used by the viewer who fits into the dominant ideology but who wants to resist the ideology based on the conflicts of the construction of the dominant ideology and their social experience. However, oppositional readings are when the readings are produced by someone whose "social situation places them in the direct opposition with the dominant ideology" (Fiske, p. 292). With this in mind, Buyllesscrap.com represents an oppositional reading. The hegemonic power in this case is (PRODUCT) RED and its major partnered corporations. Buyllesscrap.com is the micro resistance to the hegemonic power of capitalist consumerism because they refuse to integrate consumerism as a means of saving lives. Their argument is that instead of allowing only a percentage of the profits made by (PRODUCT) RED to go to The Global Fund, individuals can and should donate their money directly to these charities without having to consume and allowing major corporations to make a profit off of a social need. On their website, Buyllesscrap.com has an extended list of nonprofit organizations with a summary of their causes and

a direct link to their website. They encourage viewers to resist the hegemonic notion of consumerism as a means of charity and to take out the major corporations so that more money will go directly to the nonprofit organization and the people that they serve. Their list includes The Global Fund as well as Lowernine.org (which is focused on rebuilding homes in New Orleans caused by hurricane Katrina), Women for Women, Youth AIDS Coalition, African Peoples Education and Defense Fund, etc. The list on this website contains 15 pages of nonprofit organizations that consumers can donate directly to without purchasing a (PRODUCT) RED item. The search bar on this website allows individuals to search for a particular nonprofit organization, or the viewer can also recommend a charity if not already listed. Lastly, there is a tan price tag image on the webpage that states "TELL A FRIEND" in white text. There are white boxes within the tag that states "your email" and "friend's email." This empowers the viewers of the website to become advocates of this issue by allowing them to use their personal agency to pass the message along to friends. Davis (2001) contends that consumers are the receivers of decisions made by major corporations, and should take the first step in understanding the political process of the shopping world. By understanding the political process and agendas, individuals can be the advocates for change in making their own decisions.

A common response to the view of shopping as an experience directed from outside ourselves goes like this: because shopping offers so much pleasure, it must be offering us what we want, and further explorations are only sour and fruitless exercises that insult all of us by treating consumers as dupes. In fact, the counterargument goes, people exercise choice, and they even exercise cultural resistance, because they actively make meaning when they shop. (Davis, 2001, p. 187)

Beyond Buyllesscrap.com, many nonprofit organizations are outraged because they claimed that they did not ask for rock star Bono to be at the head of the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa. Because of the (PRODUCT) RED Campaign, many nonprofit organizations dedicated to the HIV/AIDS Crisis in Africa have not been able to receive grants or funding through donations. Since the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, many of these nonprofits have received less grants and donations because of the misconception that Africa is saved. Consumers of the (PRODUCT) RED Campaign have opted to use consumerism as a method of fulfilling social responsibilities. Granted that the (PRODUCT) RED Campaign has generated more money for The Global Fund organization, it has neglected the other nonprofit organizations that serve similar purposes. The Mirror of August 9, 2008, announced that there is a petition on The Point website to retire rock star Bono and that "Organisers claim the singer has hijacked poverty causes and turned people off donating because of his involvement." Furthermore, the article continues to explain that

grassroots leaders of the fight against AIDS are willing to donate all of their pledge donations to The Global Fund if Bono is willing to retire. They believe that (PRODUCT) RED is doing more harm (because of Bono) than good on a global scale. Because of this mentality, grassroots leaders are willing to fight against the (PRODUCT) RED campaign and blame Bono for all the harms.

This is also detrimental to the individuals in Africa because The Global Fund focuses their resources only in certain areas of Africa and the money has gone to further develop only these locations. There are still numerous parts of Africa that do not have the facilities to accommodate the HIV/AIDS population. The article concludes with “In the last ten years Bono has used his profile as a rock star to draw attention to AIDS in Africa, global poverty, and debt relief for developing nations. But many of his opponents claim that despite campaigns going back to AIDS nearly 24 years ago, the situation is now worse than ever in Africa and Ethiopia is facing a new famine.”

These campaigners against (PRODUCT) RED and Bono also recommended that Bono should donate directly to the causes instead of selling t-shirts made in sweatshops. The UK Observer of October 28, 2007, has stated: “despite its charitable activities, Gap has been criticised for outsourcing large contracts to the developing world.... Child workers, some as young as 10, have been found working in a textile factory in conditions close to slavery to produce clothes that appear destined for Gap Kids, one of the most successful arms of the high street giant.” While this is idealistic, Bono’s individual contribution could not be compared to the funding generated from (PRODUCT) RED campaign. It is imperative to recognize that Bono is working in an imperfect system to generate funds for a social cause: the negotiation with the hegemonic system to compromised child labor with saving lives in Africa. This is reason for corporate accountability. Campaigners against (PRODUCT) RED also suggest that “Consumers of the West” must start demanding answers from corporations about the history of how the products are produced and self-reflect in terms the consequence of their purchases.

Discussion

Despite the critical rhetorical analysis of the impacts of the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, there are still limitations and areas for future research. The main limitation to this research is that there is limited accessible information regarding the exact usage of the funds generated by (PRODUCT) RED campaign. It is unclear in terms of how The Global Fund allocates the money and how much the major corporations are profiting from this social cause. The (PRODUCT) RED campaign should be perceived as a supplemental method in generating money and awareness in understanding the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the particular countries in Africa. Furthermore, there is limited research on this (PRODUCT) RED campaign. Most articles found were on the internet and in newspaper publications. In the area of communication studies, there was not a single article found regarding this campaign. Granted that there

have been many charity-based campaigns with other corporations such as with the Pink in Breast Cancer and the Lance Armstrong yellow bracelet, this campaign is most interesting because of the investment of funds and the huge publications and marketing of strategies.

There has been a debate in terms of whether this campaign has been a success or a failure and the answer varies depending on the definition of the word “success” and whose best interest is taken into account. This campaign warrants future areas of research because there are still many questions that pertain to the implications of Product Red. These questions are those such as: “What does the Product RED campaign do to alter our impression of Africans?”; “What impressions are the consumers of Product RED leaving to the people in Africa?”; “How are Africans impacted by this campaign?”; “How does the campaign alter our impression of consumers of this product?”; “What are the messages consumers are representing by wearing Product RED products?”; “What are the implications of these messages?”; “Is charity considered fashionable?”; and “How does society perceive individuals owning Product RED?”

In terms of critical rhetoric, the reader has the option of: 1) buying the (PRODUCT) RED item to save parts of Africa, 2) not buying the (PRODUCT) RED item and donating the same amount they would have spent on the products directly to The Global Fund and other nonprofit organizations, 3) buying the (PRODUCT) RED items with the understanding of where the product came from and where it is going. Simultaneously, the individual can donate to nonprofits that fight against the HIV/AIDS epidemic in other countries in Africa that The Global Fund does not partake in. With the understanding that the (PRODUCT) RED campaign can substitute consumerism for social activism, the reader can still purchase product red items and donate to one of the nonprofits lists on Buylsscrap.com. By taking this action, of changing a consumer’s habits, social change is only the first step of many to come.

Conclusion

According to The Sun (England) of March 8, 2007, Bono has announced that “Africa is sexy and people need to know that.” The (PRODUCT) RED campaign has been successful in promoting their products as a means of saving Africa. However, they are lacking in terms of educating the public about raising awareness to the issues of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa. (PRODUCT) RED needs to increase the awareness of the HIV/AIDS and advocate for a global concern rather than just in the several countries in Africa that The Global Fund supplies resources to. There are still multiple countries in Africa that are neglected and are still faced with the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

It is significant for the campaign to allow clarification of the impacts of (PRODUCT) RED so that people do not absolve their social responsibility for social consumerism. If individuals understand that (PRODUCT) RED only serves The Global Fund and a few countries, then consumers would

be aware of the fact that the campaign does not impact HIV/AIDS on the global level and that they still need to support other nonprofit organizations through donations. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the (PRODUCT) RED campaign through a critical rhetorical analysis because it allows the writer and the reader to take personal agency to solve for this issue in our society.

By understanding the impacts of the (PRODUCT) RED Campaign, it was equally significant to examine the relationship between the (PRODUCT) RED campaign and the resistance (Buylesscrap.com) to the commodification of the ideology that consumerism can substitute social activism. Despite the notion that major corporations are profiting from selling a social issue in terms of “We can make a difference. You can help,” making a difference and helping a social cause does not necessarily mean that one must consume a (PRODUCT) Red. Ultimately, it means that individuals need to start taking personal agency to advocate for social change and look into the how their consumption may impact others.

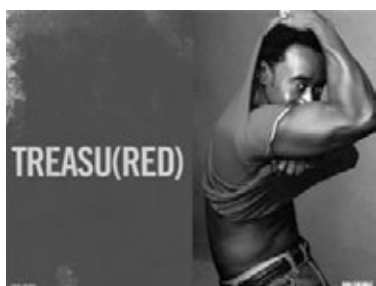
References

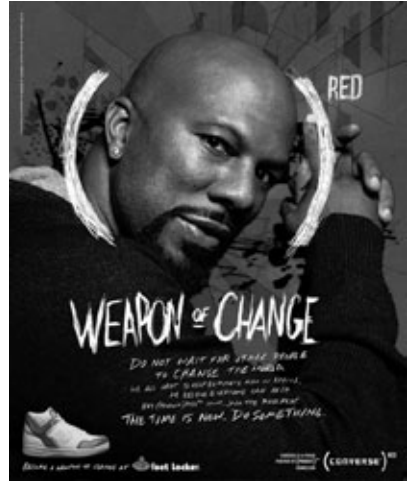
- (2006-2008). Product RED. The Persuaders, LLC. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from <http://Joinred.com>
- (2007, March 5). CNN mentions buy (less) crap. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSMwE--rT5c&eurl=http://www.joshspear.com/?s=\(red\)&x=0&y=0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSMwE--rT5c&eurl=http://www.joshspear.com/?s=(red)&x=0&y=0)
- Allen, R. C., (1987). *Channels of discourse, reassembled: Television and contemporary criticism*. Second edition. The University of Carolina Press, 284-321.
- Arnoldy, B. (2007, March 12). Buy a red T-shirt to fight AIDS. But does it really help? *Christian Science Monitor*.
- Asongu, J. J. (2007). The legitimacy of strategic corporate social responsibility as a marketing tool. *Journal of Business and Public Policy*, 1(1) 1-12.
- Asongu, J. J. (2007). Generating sustainable funds through branding: RED campaign introduces new business model for CSR. *Journal of Business and Public Policy*, 1(1) 1-15.
- Davis, B. Buy(Less)Crap. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from <http://buylesscrap.com>
- Davis, S. G. (2001). *Cultural works: The political economy of culture*. Regents of the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN, 163-169.
- Fiske, J. (1989). *Reading the popular*. Unwin Hyman, Inc.
- Flanagan, P. (2008, August 9). We'll donate to AIDS battle... if Bono quits: Website blasts start of 'hijacking poverty.' *The Mirror*.
- Guins, R. & Cruz, O. Z. (2005). *Popular Culture: A Reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McDougall, D. (2007, October 28). Indian 'slave' children found making low-cost clothes destined for Gap. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/28/ethicalbusiness.retail>
- Mumby, D. K. (1997). The problem of hegemony: Rereading Gramsci for organizational communication studies. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(4), 343-375.

- Murphy, E. (2007, March 8). Bono red-faced. *The Sun* (England).
- Nixon, R. (2008, February 6). Bottom line for (Red). *The New York Times*.
- Nixon, R. (2008). Fighting AIDS – by going shopping; RED raises 14 million, but critics object to the mix. *The International Herald Tribune*.
- Shriver, B. (2007, March 12). CEO: **Red**'s raised lots of green; VIEWPOINT: Brand chief says true ROI includes dollars and awareness. *Advertising Age*.
- Stewart, J. (2006). RED campaign offers thousands of AIDS sufferers the 'lazarus effect.' *The Independent* (London), Fourth Edition.
- Rushe, D. (2007, March 11). If Bono makes us see red, it's no bad thing. *The Sunday Times* (London).
- Valleyly, P. (2007). Does the RED campaign help big western brands more than Africa?; The big question. *The Independent* (London), First Edition, 50.
- Winfrey, O. Oprah. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from http://www.oprah.com/article/oprahshow/tows_past_20061013_b
- Winfrey, O. Oprah. Retrieved November 25, 2008, from http://www.oprah.com/slideshow/oprahshow/oprahshow3_ss_20061013
- Zompetti, J. P. (1997). Toward a Gramscian Critical Rhetoric. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 66-86.

Appendix: Images







PR Newswire Commercial Photo



